WILDER ESCOBAR (COMP.)

A Socio-cognitive Approach to English
Language Learning

Social Research
Applied to
English Language
Teaching in Colombian Contexts:

Theory and Methods

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Introduction

A Socio-cognitive Approach to English Language Learning

About the Editor/Author

Wilder Yesid Escobar Alméciga was born in Cundinamarca, Colombia and holds a B. A. in business administration from Simpson University, California and a master's degree in applied linguistics to TEFL from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá. His work experience includes teaching at all levels from elementary school, to postgraduate courses in both the United States of America and in Colombia. He is currently working as an assistant professor for the undergraduate Bilingual Education Program at Universidad El Bosque leading the research processes on Bilingual Education. His research publications address social issues through discourse analysis in English as a foreign language teaching and learning. For the last two years, he has been a member of the research group Educación Universitaria Unbosque.

A Socio-cognitive Approach to English Language Learning

Language Learning is a Social Practice

Traditionally, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been erroneously associated with mechanical procedures and misunderstood as a standardized practice which is homogeneously exercised in the language classroom (Ayala & Álvarez, 2005; Escobar & Gómez, 2010; Guerrero, 2008). However, Parodi (2005) demonstrates that language is always transforming and being transformed by social environments, drawing significant correlations between linguistic systems and social dynamics. In the same way, this work attempts to present social research projects applied to English language teaching practices, and highlight their contribution to the understanding of English learning as a social process which must be informed by its immediate and diverse social contexts.

On the one hand, Sapir (1970) makes a remarkable contribution to the conceptualization of language as a nonstandard, ever-evolving social phenomenon in which he moves from systemic explanations to cultural and identity-related descriptions of its characteristics. Initially, he introduces language as a system characterized by a structural organization that carries autonomous meaning. The fact that its written form has a predetermined fundamental direction from left to right and from top to bottom gives priority to its components, words, and concepts which follow a preestablished order. Furthermore, Sapir suggests that such preestablished order is culturally bound, i.e. that not all societies have identical language organization. In direct opposition to English writing, Hebrew, for example, organizes ideas from right to left and from top to bottom. In the same way, traditional Japanese text is written in columns from top to bottom and from right to left with

its first pages opposite of that which characterizes our writing system. To demonstrate the structural differences which characterize language, chapter one presents a theory-based analysis of the verb patterns of English and Spanish, specifically addressing motion event conflation in verb- and satellite-framed languages. Finally, after examining the influence that individuals exert on language production, the author attests that the social context, indeed, merits further investigation to determine its role in language acquisition and use.

Similarly, Fairclough (2003) examines the adverse and asymmetrical social conditions, e.g. exclusion, power, dominance, and control, which can be generated through the use of language in social practices such as speaking and writing. Through his research, Fairclough seeks to promote a social awareness that may potentially result in significant changes of such conditions. Since social research is concerned with "watching [...] people live their lives, asking people about their experiences, and using words to tell others' stories" (Tisdale, 2004, p. 13), chapters two and three of this text rely on social research to similarly explore the lives of students and understand their realities, raise awareness, and motivate change in the rigid social structures which disrupt knowledge constructions, marginalize individuals, and perpetuate unbalanced relations of power. To elaborate upon this concept, chapter two presents an ethnographic case study designed to unveil interactional dynamics among students from a class composed of 29 main-stream and six special-education students under the inclusion act in education. Subsequently, the case study discussed in chapter three seeks to analyze specific power relationships among teenagers, and proposes an effective approach to teaching based on emotional empowerment.

Essentially, there are two general misconceptions about knowledge. First, it is often perceived as a static rather than a dynamic entity. However, knowledge evolves through a dynamic social process, changing and being changed by individuals, groups, and contexts. Thus, knowledge presents new opportunities and challenges which require not only to be recognized, but to be comprehended, so as to be able to react and cope with the speed of such change (Gale, 1996). Having a static vision of knowledge could translate into implementing standardized teaching procedures which ignore contextual information. As a result, these teaching procedures may fail to identify our own shortcomings and strengths, thereby limiting our capacity for intellectual growth.

The second misconception of knowledge is that its components often exist in isolation rather than as an interdependent and systemic network of functional constituents. Learning which focuses on isolated facts learned out of context disregards the complex

interaction between learner and knowledge. In this way, consideration for the learner's self-conception is often overlooked and, as such, may hinder learning. To directly address this misconception, chapter three is devoted to developing a clear association between the emotional self and the learning process describing the emotional factors that could potentially limit student learning and performance in a foreign language. Undoubtedly, facts in and of themselves prove inadequate unless they are taught in consideration of the emotional and cognitive realities of the students.

Moreover, Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008) suggest that language is closely and directly linked to identity. They illustrate it as the sharing of historical, cultural, and socio-linguistic backgrounds that bind individuals or groups together. Such backgrounds concurrently embody the differences that allow us to be dissimilar to other individuals or groups. For example, the similarities that Mexicans share among themselves and which tie them together as a socio-political community are also the aspects that set them apart from other cultures. Individual, as well as social identities are constructed and expressed in many different ways: religion, nationality, ethnicity, gender, language, dialects and accents (Block, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Foucault, 1988; Lister, 2006). As such, chapter four presents an ethnographic analysis of English language teaching practices in light of the learners' socio-cultural backgrounds and contexts in order to modify a foreign-language teaching model which considers the social and learning needs of the students.

Furthermore, language has been suggested to mediate cognitive processes at both the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels (Well, 1995). The interpersonal level refers to the verbal interaction that takes place among two or more people, and which shapes and constructs knowledge in the learning context. At the intrapersonal level, speaking to oneself helps to simplify information, thus facilitating the process of understanding and knowledge construction. Nevertheless, both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication are considered social activities. When an individual speaks to himself or herself, the opinions of others bear greatly on the mind. Subsequently, when speaking with others, one's opinions are being built or modified by the interactions in which they take part. Thus, the role of language in the cognitive process is understood as a social aspect given that there is, at least, a two-way conduit of influence operating in the learning of individuals. Consideration of these two-way interactions is essential when attempting to establish the relationships between the language-learning process and the social environments in which it occurs.

Furthermore, language creates the conditions for learning and for social relations to take place. Norton (1997) suggests that language serves to express perceptions of the world; that it is through language that values, desires, and knowledge are conveyed. Language, therefore, is an expression of identity; it is the reflection of people's ideologies, as well as a manner in which people convey meaning and pass on knowledge. Furthermore, it is suggested that language is not only a means through which individuals express identity, but it is also a source through which identity is constructed. Language is an element capable of positioning individuals in a given social rank. Thus, language is both a source for identity constitution and the means by which one expresses that identity (Cameron, 1995, as cited in Pennycook, 2001). For this reason, chapter five represents an attempt to create safe learning environments that would nurture the self-confidence of young learners to enhance and express their understandings about their social world through narrative writing.

In light of the above, Hymes (1974) refers to two main characteristics that any approach to language should consider. The first consideration suggests that "one needs to investigate directly the use of language in contexts of situation, so as to discern patterns proper to speech activity and abstract them into some other frame of reference" (p.39). Language is not standard and it is not static; it varies depending on the context and its appropriateness is determined by the end results, such as achieving communication in a specific context and for a specific purpose. The second characteristic suggests that "one must take as context a community or network of persons, investigating its communicative activities as a whole, so that any use of channel and code takes its place as part of the resources upon which the members draw" (p. 39). In the realm of education and, more especially English teaching, there are particular conventions such as words, styles, genre, and social events which are to be analyzed in light of the surrounding settings, so as to give them a proper reading.

Understanding the relationships of knowledge, language, teaching, and learning could initiate the basis for recognizing EFL teaching as an opportunity for knowledge construction. This, in turn, could motivate reconsiderations about teaching policies and practices at the classroom level, as well as at the policy-making level. In other words, this work represents a proponent of a continuum of a 'renewal of understandings.' At a personal level, this collection of social research aided a reconsideration of methodology as to inspire teaching practices which better relate them to our own realities. At the collective level, the social research processes and experiences come together in a unified

text in order to share new understandings. These understandings become, in turn, available to others for the advancement of the socio-cultural English learning conditions in the heterogeneous EFL classrooms in the Colombian context.

Mckay and Wong (1996) suggest that learners are extremely complex social beings with ever-changing needs and desires. They inhabit complex, multidimensional social environments in which uneven power relations are exerted through various forms of discourse. School life entails far more than the apparent academic responsibilities. It also entails negotiating channels of power between the different entities of their social setting, as well as meeting the demands of parents, teachers and administrators, all while struggling for success in learning. Therefore, learning is a particularly intricate socio-cognitive endeavor affected by multiple factors which need to be taken into account when trying to create the conditions for it to prosper. Frequently, this meeting of demands is done without a personal or individual reflection, nor the due individual or collective appropriation process.

Apart from the notion of identity and language, but not extraneous to them, are the countless other concepts that are at the core of learning and teaching such as investment, agency, and discourse. Investment, as described by Norton (1997), "is the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target [object of study] and the sometimes ambivalent desire to learn it" (p. 19). Knowing which relationships between the learner and the English language are being motivated and promoted will help us to understand socio-cultural concerns. This idea used to be referred to as 'motivation;' however, much questioning about the term led to a relabeling of it as 'investment.' This individual-knowledge relationship can be influenced by how students perceive the world and how they perceive themselves in relation to it. The way in which an individual sees the target language can trigger an acceptance or resistance towards that language and culture or worse, a resistance to their own language and culture. Unconditionally adopting information from others without the proper analytical process leads to the replication of facts and not one's own appropriation and construction of knowledge.

Agency refers to the effort of positioning oneself in a favorable place in society. As such, "in any discourse, knowledge, social relations, and social identities are simultaneously being constituted" (Fairclough, 1992, as cited in McKay & Wong, 1996, p. 591). Subject positioning in society is achieved through discourse and this sheds light on the learning process in the sense that the learners' performance is contingent to the position they occupy within their particular social group. What is our position in relation-

20| ship to the language we are learning? How do we perceive ourselves, our own language, our own being in relationship to the ones we want to understand? Are we positioning ourselves in a favorable place when teaching and learning English? Whose interests do we perpetuate? What messages do we convey? What values do the stakeholders of education promote? In other words, the perception that a student may have regarding his or her upbringing can and will be influenced by the way they present someone else's.

Evidently, learning English not only entails the learning of the linguistic code, but comprehending a different approach to life in relation to one's own. An individual may take it as given —not questioning it whatsoever— or he or she may carry out an appropriation process which involves understanding the aspects of that approach. In this manner, the individual may be able to identify which aspects may be accepted and which must be rejected. By identifying interests and affiliations in the teaching and learning of English in the Colombian context, we can discern the existence or absence of collective goals as individual groups or as a nation. Beyond trying to reach accuracy and fluency as Tudor (2001) suggests, teaching and learning should seek a purposeful appropriation process of knowledge in which teachers and institutions consider social issues to favor the collective development of the individual or nation. This may mean favoring the learning and understanding of the collective values, objectives, and approaches to life over the content of the language itself.

In conclusion, the aforementioned attributes of knowledge, language, and learning posit that the teaching of English as a foreign language as a socio-cognitive process which must incessantly question social factors for its planning and implemen-tation. The forthcoming chapters are practical examples presenting theory and methods which profoundly study processes of culturally-mediated verb patterns, social dynamics, emotional barriers, socio-cultural backgrounds, and social sensitivity in regards to English language teaching and learning in the Colombian context.

Chapter One

The Linguistic Typology of Verb Structure: A Comparative Approach for the EFL Classroom

About the Author

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The Linguistic Typology of Verb Structure: A Comparative Approach for the EFL Classroom

Introduction

Any teacher of English as a foreign language will attest that English verb construction in colloquial speech presents, quite possibly, one of the largest obstacles in L2 English language acquisition. The difficulty related to the comprehension of the syntactic and semantic properties of English phrasal verbs[1], particularly those expressing events of motion, has been indicated by numerous researchers (Ganji, 2011; Ibarretxe-Antuaño, 2004; Ionin & Zubizarreta, 2010; White, B. J., 2012). In their examination of English verb construction, they have pointed directly to the specific linguistic phenomena that make English structurally different from Spanish. These differences, it has been argued, often transfer from the learner's L1 and hinder the development of L2 English ability (Almeida, 2002; Brown & Gullberg, 2010; Cadierno, 2004; Casado Antoniazzi, 2010; Slobin, 1987).

In accordance with the aforementioned research findings, there exist abundant resources for phrasal verb teaching designs and classroom practices aimed at increasing EFL students' comprehension and production within this capacity (Alejo González, R., Piquer Píriz, A. & Reveriego Sierra, G., 2010; White, B. J., 2012). However, much of the previous research, as well as the bulk of the proposed instructional design, fail to elucidate the specific syntactic dissimilarities that exist between English and Spanish verb structure. Researchers merely acknowledge such a linguistic dichotomy, yet rarely attempt to develop didactic knowledge in this area (Alejo González et al., 2010; Casado Antoniazzi,

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[1]   Note on phrasal verbs: The definitions of phrasal verbs that can be found in various sources are not always consistent. The term phrasal verbs, in the capacity of this chapter, will include both prepositional and particle verbs, and will generally be defined as any verb/satellite combination that is unique to the English language and, conceivably, untranslatable to verb-framed languages (Talmy, 2000).

2010; Larrañaga, P., Treffers-Daller, J., Tidball, F. & Gil Ortega, M., 2011; Pozdnyakova & Gunina, 2011; Spring, 2010). As noted by White (2012), "teaching suggestions are often confined to brief pedagogical applications sections at the end of research articles" (p. 420) and, consequently, offer little in terms of instructional guidelines.

The goal of this chapter, however, is perhaps a bit more ambitious. There is a pressing need to recognize the difference in linguistic structuring, referred to henceforth as typology (Talmy, 2000), and to communicate this knowledge both to EFL teachers and their students alike. As such, this chapter carries two distinct objectives in relation to the English phrasal verb construction enigma. First, the typological differences which dictate Spanish and English verb construction will be interpreted within the realm of phrasal verbs, thus providing educators with the essential expertise to incorporate this knowledge into the EFL classroom. Secondly, didactic strategies for phrasal verb instruction grounded on the current research within the field of cognitive linguistics will be discussed as to provide novel approaches to EFL instruction. It is hoped that the EFL instructor will take away a new understanding of English verb construction so that a clearer picture may be delivered to L2 English learners.

Linguistic Typology and Verbs of Motion

To a native English speaker, the fabled lines *"Jack fell down and broke his crown/ And Jill came tumbling after,"* rarely evoke second thoughts as to the inherent structure of the English verb phrase in relation to the manner, motion, and path of movement. In fact, it undoubtedly requires minimal cognitive effort on behalf of the native English speaker to construct verb expressions of this nature as our lexicon is brimming with phrases such as *falling down, tumbling after, trudging along, drifting by,* and *dropping in*. Integral to these expressions is the element of path of motion, or trajectory, re-presented by an adverb or preposition and not directly encoded on the verb itself. Such a phenomenon has been the direct focus of the work of Leonard Talmy, in which he has set the guidelines for linguistic classifications within the realm of language typology. Talmy's (2000) designation of typology separates languages into two main categories, that of sat-ellite-framed and verb-framed languages, both of which are entirely dependent upon the conflation of manner, motion, and path in events of motion. Satellite-framed languages, including English, are defined by their reliance on satellites which are added to the verb to depict the path of motion (Larrañaga et al., 2011). *"Jack fell down,"* as the popular nursery rhyme suggests, requires the use of the preposition down to depict the path of

Jack's falling. In contrast, verb-framed languages, like Spanish, depict motion events in a different way, generally encoding the path of the motion directly on the verb (Spring, 2010; Ibarretxe-Antuaño, 2009). This becomes apparent in the Spanish translation of the aforementioned nursery rhyme: "*Jack se cayó.*" In this case, both the action of falling, as well as the movement of the figure in regards to the ground, are encoded on the verb itself. As such, these typologies as defined by Talmy (2000) make specific reference to the formation of events of motion within a particular language.

Path of Motion

As demonstrated above, such classifications of typology stress the importance of path of motion in the construction of motion events in verb– and satellite–framed languages. The satellite, although not a lexical category in its own right, represents a semantic function inherent in s-framed languages: that of displaying the path (p) or trajectory of the figure (f), or the locative element in a motion event. Note that, according to Talmy (2000), a motion event may be defined as "a situation containing motion, or the continuation of a stationary location alike" (p. 25); therefore, the figure may be considered to participate in a motion event that is either that of translational motion (1a), or simply that of maintaining a stationary position (1b). The following examples are provided to demonstrate the difference of the motion events described above:

(1a)   The boy $_{(f)}$ got out of $_{(p)}$ the chair.

(1b)   The boy $_{(f)}$ sat up $_{(p)}$ anxiously in the chair.

Both of these phrases demonstrate the completion of an action that is either translational in nature (1a), or that describes the perpetuation of a spatial position (1b). The action of getting out of a chair clearly delineates a change of location, while that of sitting up maintains the spatial position, albeit with a change of posture.

In verb-framed languages, however, such syntactic constructions are not possible. In her work on linguistic typology, Ibarretxe-Antuaño (2004, 2009, 2012) clearly establishes the elaboration of path in verb-framed languages. Whereas satellite-framed languages routinely express path via a satellite, in verb-framed languages "the core information is not expressed in a separate element, but usually conflated with the verb" (Ibarretxe-Antuaño, 2012, p. 6). This idea is clearly expressed in the following examples of grammatical phrases in Spanish:

(2a)   El alpinista $_{(f)}$ descendió la montaña.

(2b)   El bebé $_{(f)}$ se incorporó solo.

These examples clearly establish that the motion verbs (*descender*; *incorporarse*) inherently contain an element of path that their English counterparts do not (*to go down, to sit up*). Here, it becomes clear that the English verbs most frequently appear in a verb phrase to fully confer the semantic meaning of the motion event. Verb-framed languages, conversely, tend to conflate both motion and path within the verb itself.

The dichotomy of verb construction between verb- and satellite-framed languages becomes even more profound when considering sentences with multiple motion events. As established above, path of motion is most often encoded outside of the verb in a satellite in s-framed languages, therefore permitting multiple motion events to be associated with the same verb as demonstrated in (3a) and (3b):

(3a)   He $_{(f)}$ fell down$_{(p)}$ the hill and into$_{(p)}$ the river.

(3b)   She $_{(f)}$ ran down$_{(p)}$ the stairs and out$_{(p)}$ the door.

From the examples (3a) and (3b), we see that the verbs *to fall* and *to run* can take multiple satellites thus collocating separate motion events onto the same verb. To emphasize this notion, (3a) and (3b) could be written in the manner of (3c) and (3d):

(3c)   [He $_{(f)}$ fell down the hill] and [he $_{(f)}$ fell into the river]

(3d)   [She $_{(f)}$ ran down the stairs] and [she $_{(f)}$ ran out the door]

For the sake of brevity, native-like English discourse would never contain expressions of this style. Instead, the verbs *to fall* and *to run* are simply assigned multiple satellites that each represent the distinct events clarified in (3c) and (3d). As a result of this paradigm, infinite multiple satellite constructions are possible in English and are quite frequent in colloquial speech. Additional examples of grammatical English sentences that follow this model include:

(i)   He went in the main entrance and straight to the mayor's office.

(ii)   The children got out of the sun and into the shade.

(iii)   The bird flew out of the nest and over to the feeder.

(iv)   We walked up the hill and down the other side.

(v)   I went in the door, down the hallway, around the corner, and out the back.

The verb phrases present in these sentences denote more than one event of motion by the addition of multiple path satellites. From this model, it is not a stretch of the imagination to deduce the grammaticality of (v) which expresses four motion events on the verb *to go* solely via the addition of path satellites.

This multiple-event expression, however pervasive in the verb phrases of satellite-framed English, is grammatically impossible in languages with verb-framed motion event expression. As Brown and Gullberg (2010) explain, in verb-framed languages "comparable information is spread across [separate] clauses, each associated with different path verbs" (p. 266). As path is often conflated on the verb in verb-framed languages, the Spanish translation of (3a) and (3b) respectively must be written as follows in order to retain grammaticality:

(4a)   Él se cayó de la montaña y se sumergió en el río.

(4b)   Ella bajó la escalera corriendo y salió por la puerta.

As demonstrated by (4a) and (4b), the path of motion is distinctly encoded in each of the verbs and, therefore, motions following dissimilar paths must be expressed via separate clauses. The verbs *caerse* and *sumergirse* both inherently carry within the verb nucleus a path of motion, that of the figure falling downward toward the ground referent, or the figure entering the ground referent respectively. As such, verb-framed languages accomplish the task of communicating the previous event of a man *falling down the mountain and into the river* differently than would a satellite-framed language. Whereas Spanish requires the use of separate motion/path verbs, English permits the use of the aggregation of satellites to a verb phrase to express multiple paths of motion.

Manner of Motion

With the idea of path established as a determining factor in typological classification, it becomes necessary to examine the manner in which each of the motion events is depicted and the implications of such in verb- and satellite-framed languages. Talmy (2000) refers to the manner of motion as a co-event, or an associated motion that often expresses the manner in which the event occurred. This type of lexicalization, prevalent in satellite-framed languages, permits the verb to express not only motion, but the manner of the co-event as well. As Talmy (2000) indicates, "the relation that the co-event bears to the main motion event is then indicated by a form like WITH-THE-MANNER-OF or WITH-THE-CAUSE-OF" (p. 29). This idea is best expressed by first referring to the simple expression of motion in (5a):

(5a)   The man moved across the room.

In this example, we can infer that a man began on one side of the room and arrived to the opposing side, yet noting is mentioned about the manner in which he

completed the action. The verb *to move* used in (5a) is simply demonstrating movement, yet it does not convey the manner in which the movement occurred. However, in the following examples, English manner-of-motion verbs are used to elaborate not just the movement, but the manner in which the man moved across the room:

    (5b)   The man danced across the room.

    (5c)   The man ran across the room.

    (5d)   The man snuck across the room.

    (5e)   The man shuffled across the room.

As Talmy (2000) suggests, the idea that the man danced across the room can thus be interpreted as the following:

    (5f)   [The man MOVED across the room] WITH-THE-MANNER-OF [The man danced].

From this example, the conflation of both manner and motion on the verb root in satellite-framed languages becomes evident. This phenomenon allows the speaker of a satellite-framed language such as English to interpret an event in such a way that the motion event and the co-event essentially become inseparable.

The conflation of manner and motion evidenced in the previous examples (5b-e), however typical in satellite-framed languages, is a syntactic construct that is considerably less ubiquitous in their verb-framed counterparts. Attempts to directly translate the previous sentences would result in phrases perceived as markedly cacophonous in native speech. As such, the following examples are provided to convey the difference in manner encoding in verb-framed languages, such as Spanish. Note that the sentences marked with an asterisk (*), although perhaps direct translations, express dissimilar interpretations of movement.

    (6a)   El hombre atravesó la sala corriendo.

    (6b)   El hombre atravesó la sala sigilosamente.

    (6c)   El hombre atravesó la sala arrastrando los pies.

    (6d)   El hombre corrió por la sala.*

    (6e)   El hombre se arrastró por la sala.*

It is noted that the Spanish translations rely on an adverb or adverbial phrase to express the notion of WITH-THE-MANNER-OF. Furthermore, the sentences presented in (6d) and (6e), although grammatically correct, express a slightly different path of motion than their English counterparts. The motion expressed in (6d) is that of a man moving around within a room with the manner of running, not necessarily a completed

movement from one side to the other as in (5c). Likewise, the movement communicated in (6e) conveys a dissimilar action to a native speaker of Spanish than that of the English equivalent seen in (5e).

To express the same movement of a man crossing a room, the manner of motion in examples (6a) through (6c) cannot be contained within the verb itself and is placed outside of the nucleus in an adverb or adverbial phrase. The consequence of the typological paradigm, as Ibarretxe-Antuaño (2012) suggests, is such that speakers of verb- and satellite-framed languages are motivated to communicate motion events in certain predetermined ways. This concept becomes apparent when considering the conceptualizations of movement expressed in (6d) and (6e) as opposed to their English counterparts.

It is not to say, however, that verb- and satellite-framed languages cannot contain both manner-of-motion and path-of-motion verbs. This, of course, is evidenced in the numerous grammatically-appropriate constructions of English and Spanish. Rather it is the frequency and diversity that is representative of a language that determines its specific motion-event constructions (Lemmens, 2005). In fact, work on linguistic typology makes specific reference to the characteristic expressions of language, maintaining that classification must be based on colloquial expressions that are both frequent and pervasive within quotidian speech (Talmy, 2000). As such, the English language may permit the phrase *the mountain climber ascended the mountain and descended safely*, akin to the Spanish example in (2a), yet this manner of speaking is often reserved for literary or perhaps high-brow discourse. The English verbs which make this type of path construction possible (*e.g. to ascend, to descend*) are most frequently Latinate in nature and, therefore, their path-conferring structure is borrowed from another language (Brown & Gullberg, 2010; Spring, 2010). Consequently, the verb constructions that prove to be both the most frequent and the most pervasive in the English language are those that appear in the form of the phrasal verb, often designating motion and manner directly on the verb and leaving path to be expressed in a satellite.

Typology Implications in the EFL Classroom

As has been demonstrated in the prior examples, the typological structure of motion events often varies between languages and, as a consequence, may present specific challenges to the language learner within this realm. Students whose first language is verb-framed (e.g. Spanish) may have difficulty conceptualizing a motion

event in the manner of a satellite-framed language such as English (Ionin & Zubizarreta, 2010). The challenge, as a result, would be for L2 English learners to begin to think of verb constructions in a new way, a task which has been shown to increase the processing load of the mental faculty (Larrañaga et al., 2011). Thus, it can be assumed that miscues will be abundant, as the processing load will require a higher degree of cognitive dedication to the computation of learned rules and the production of grammatical sentences. This may be especially true for those learners who lack the understanding of language typology and the differences between languages. In a study designed to target the effects of L1 transfer, Cadierno (2004) sought to determine how second-language learners come to express motion events in an L2 with differing typology. Her results suggest that L2 learners often use knowledge from their L1 when they are confronted with situations in which they lack the knowledge to express themselves appropriately. Such findings support the concept of explicit instruction in the second-language classroom in order to minimize L1 transfer. The consequence of such transfer is non-native speech production, particularly evident within multi-motion event constructions requiring various satellites. In order to combat this non-native production, the importance of the direct instruction of satellite framing has been suggested so that the fossilization of the L1 structures can be avoided (Spring, 2010).

Unfortunately, many educators are unfamiliar with the linguistic typology paradigm and, therefore, often neglect any direct instruction in the syntactic constructs of English phrasal verbs. Formal instruction in this realm often affects performance in a second language as the comparison of linguistic forms may prove beneficial to the L2 learner. Such cross-linguistics inferencing is often ignored in the language classroom, yet the consideration of such syntactic differences may provide L2 English learners with the necessary tools for success (Kao, 2001).

Cognitive Linguistics and the Teaching of Phrasal Verbs

In an attempt to provide a more effective learning environment, the second-language educator must consider the recent work within the field of cognitive linguistics which has proposed many new approaches to the teaching of English phrasal verbs. The goal of any language classroom, of course, is to encourage speech that approximates native-like proficiency, thus providing the most benefit to the student. As such, many instructional suggestions have been offered so that an enlightened teacher-student team

may work together to overcome the typology paradigm. The current work in cognitive linguistics has demonstrated the need for both the explicit instruction of English phrasal verbs, as well as an approach that favors a conceptualization of meaning as opposed to rote memorization which now seems antiquated in the language classroom (Alejo González, et al., 2010; Camacho, 2010; Casado Antoniazzi, 2010; Ganji, 2011; Pozdnyakova & Gunina, 2011).

One of the most common misconceptions in EFL instruction is that the opacity of English phrasal verbs is somewhat insurmountable and, as such, rote memorization is essential to mastering these lexical elements. This type of instruction, however, often fails to provide the L2 English learner with the profound awareness that leads to native-like speech production. Explicit instruction of both syntax and semantics, conversely, has proven successful in the acquisition of phrasal verbs in a number of studies. Camacho (2010) tested such a hypothesis in a study of phrasal verb methodology in an attempt to discover the effectiveness of explicit instruction. She found that in the EFL classroom setting, students who were directly taught the role of the preposition, as well as general concepts of phrasal verbs, scored higher on their posttests than did students taught in the traditional way. Furthermore, Camacho included translation exercises in her methodology which focused on motion-event constructions to elucidate the typology differences between English and Spanish. The students were given Spanish phrases such as *cruzar nadando, huir corriendo, salir andando* with the task of translating them to encourage conceptualization in English (Camacho, 2010). Such phrases, due to typological differences, cannot be directly translated to English without some sense of ungrammaticality. The students were required to construct phrases utilizing English manner-of-motion verbs and, as a result, become cognitively aware of the contrasts between English and Spanish.

It has also been demonstrated that the use of negative evidence in the language classroom may prove advantageous to the second language learner. Larrañaga, et al. (2011) establish the value of negative evidence and suggest that students rarely have access to ungrammatical sentences in the second-language classroom. This approach is particularly important as it helps to expose the errors that may result from L1 transfer since, as the authors propose, some language structures exist that cannot be acquired without access to such negative evidence (Larrañaga, et al., 2011). Considering the sentences presented in Camacho (2010), it becomes necessary to demonstrate to the students that *to cross swimming,* and *to flee running* are expressions that do not sound particularly grammatical

to the native English speaker. Thus, the research suggests that explicitly disclosing the syntactic structures of the English language, paired with the presentation of negative evidence may greatly impact the L2 learner's capacity in the context of phrasal verbs.

In addition to the explicit instruction of syntax and semantics, several researchers have cited phrasal verb instruction via conceptualization and metaphor as convincing next steps in the language classroom. Discovery of meaning and logical analysis on the part of the student has been shown to encourage contextual reasoning, language competence, and a deeper understanding of semantic meaning (Casado Antoniazzi, 2010; Ganji, 2011; Pozdnyakova & Gunina, 2011). Teaching phrasal verbs according the metaphorical meaning of their satellites, as Ganji (2011) suggests, facilitates language comprehension as such an understanding "plays a much more active role… when students come across untaught idioms with the same particles as taught ones" (p. 1503). Simply memorizing a list of phrasal verbs with similar particles, therefore, is not as effective as encouraging the growth of mental representations of certain satellites. Prompting students to create a metaphorical concept of the preposition *off,* for example, as something that is no longer connected or attached will promote the comprehension of phrases such as: *to take off, to give off, to run off, to put off,* etc.

This type of study lends itself particularly well to the use of visual/spatial-type classroom exercises. When students are required to create visual representations of the metaphorical meaning behind opaque phrasal verbs, the product frequently leads to a mental representation which facilitates future understanding. This type of exercise would impart critical understanding of phrasal verbs with the English verb 'to get,' for example *(e.g. to get up, to get around, to get off, to get over, etc.).* Asking students to illustrate the meanings of these expressions, first in the literal sense, then through their metaphorical meaning, would encourage a more profound comprehension as the structure of the satellites would be compared through visual representation. Such a notion has been explored in a study conducted by Takahashi and Matsuya (2012) in which they tested visual aids on the retention of opaque English phrasal verbs. Their findings suggest that the use of cognitive-oriented learning devices, specifically visual images of phrasal verbs, is capable of promoting the uptake of phrasal verbs (p. 1298).

As such, the teaching of English phrasal verbs should be considered from a cognitive linguistics perspective as the "technique of making learners aware of the motivation underlying the figurative meanings of phrasal verbs is one potential tool for semantic elaboration" (Alejo González, et al., 2010, p. 62). Furthermore, various instruc-

tional techniques within the realm of phrasal verbs do exist which may ultimately facilitate the learning and incorporation of native-like expression in the English L2 classroom. Direct instruction of the role of English prepositions, the use of negative evidence in the EFL classroom, and instruction via conceptualization and metaphor have all been proven to support the effective instruction of English phrasal verbs. These techniques may be incorporated wholly or in part into any EFL classroom in which the goal is greater native-like capacity for L2 English speakers.

Implications for Future Research

While much research has been previously conducted in the area of linguistic typology and second-language acquisition, there is still much room for advancement to connect the findings of such research directly to classroom instruction. Instructional design which makes specific reference to typological classifications, and incorporates conceptualization and metaphor to enlighten and endow learners may prove particularly beneficial in the L2 classroom. It is further suggested by Yu and Pan (2012) that research must be done regarding the retention and comprehension of metaphorical phrasal verbs specifically within the framework of cognitive linguistics. In addition, examining the sociolinguistic limitations of second-language acquisition including cross-linguistic influences and pragmatic transfer may provide insight into the development of a non-native tongue.

As such, investigation which specifically highlights and explores these phenomena should be considered of significant importance in second-language acquisition research. Various researchers have hitherto begun to work within this realm, yet this previous investigation should be further explored so that research-based instruction can remain innovative for the second-language classroom.

Conclusion

As it has been demonstrated, the elaboration of manner and path is said to determine the paradigms of verb formation– paradigms which display distinct categorical variation between verb- and satellite-framed languages. The conceptualization of motion events, therefore, is said to be conceived differently by speakers of Spanish as by speakers of English as these two languages are typologically dissimilar (Spring, 2010). This notion expresses the urgency of the direct instruction of linguistic typology to L2 learners whose mother tongue and target language are typologically dissimilar. Native-like fluency in the EFL classroom, consequently, may be greatly hindered if the concept of verb construc-

tion is unknown to the L2 English learner. As such, the preponderance of the research within this field posits that second-language educators must learn and incorporate the concepts of linguistic typology to foster growth within the area of phrasal verbs.

Chapter Two
Social Dynamics Shaping English Learning Processes

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Social Dynamics Shaping English Learning Processes

Introduction

Currently, the trend in special education has focused on diversity in the class room via a variety of learning styles, multiculturalism, and inclusion (Devalle de Rendo & Vega, 2006; Echeita Sarrionandia, 2006). Educational stakeholders must provide for the academic as well as the social needs of all members of society. Students with disabilities cannot lawfully be denied the right to an education and, as such, dealing with a heterogeneous classroom dynamic of both mainstream and special education students has become a challenge for teachers and schools (Molina & Christou, 2009).

Research in this area has proposed numerous strategies to promote and maintain an inclusive classroom in which all learners are guaranteed the right to learn. However, such research has failed to elucidate the dynamics of inclusion in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Fandiño & José, 2010). In order to contribute to the discussion of how education can meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities in EFL, this chapter aims to investigate the social dynamics that affect the interactions of special-education students and their general-education peers in the EFL classroom. This chapter seeks to explore the effects that such dynamics have on the social relationships among students with and without disabilities.

To begin, this chapter seeks to make evident the negative effects that unbalanced social dynamics have on the relationships among students with and without disabilities. Next, relevant literature is presented to explore conceptions of inclusive education and

policy-related matters by which it is governed. In addition, methodologies are explored to asses the impact on this micro-environment of social relationships. As this investigation focuses on the examination of behaviors and social relationships, it falls within the boundaries of an ethnographic case study. Thus it provides a detailed description of the investigated population as well as background and contextual information that define teaching as a social act.

With the goal of making the teaching-learning process more beneficial to all learners, we share our findings regarding the importance of rethinking the current inclusive curriculum to close the achievement gap within classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

Foreign language teachers face problems every day, although some may be solved easily, others demand research and reflection. One such challenge is the successful inclusion of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms. Colombian law 2082 (1996) and 3020 (2002), along with resolution 2565 (2003), lawfully require such inclusion, but have raised problems of their own such as unequal social dynamics among students in EFL classes. Such social inequality among students leads to exclusion, compounded by the application of different syllabuses and others factors such as group size. The discrimination toward learners with disabilities that arises causes these students not only fail in their academic performance, but also causes problems in the way they perceive themselves as individuals. Through an evaluating all the factors influencing relations among students in EFL classroom, it becomes quite clear that educational institutions and teachers must rethink curriculum approaches in order to implement new and effective ways of dealing with today's diverse population of learners.

The school studied in this investigation, known henceforth as the H. B. School to protect its identity, is an educational institution that serves both a general-education and a special-education population. Some of those children are mainstreamed into general-education classes according to the inclusion policies in the aforementioned laws which demand curricular adaptation in order to include these learners. Although ideal in theory, in practice, negative effects can be and were observed among students in these classrooms as a result of these policies.

Human values such as equality and justice are inherent in the concept of inclusion. Ideally, inclusion leads to a system of education that does not exclude special needs groups; however, when it is not correctly interpreted and applied, grave problems may

arise. Special needs learners are those children with mild to severe cognitive impairments, many of whom suffer from disabilities such as Asperger's or Down's syndrome. For this population, teachers develop PEPS —*Planes de Estudio Personalizado*— in order to address the adaptations to curriculum as required by law. PEPS are personalized syllabi for each student in which their disabilities are taken into account when planning the instruction of academic content. For the general education population, a different program has been designed to match the standards of the Ministry of Education. Designing multiple syllabi implies that within the classroom as a whole, multiple levels of proficiency may result since learners from one group are not taught the same topics in the same way, at the same rate. Consequently, students with special needs are given very different material to work with in English classes —this material is significantly easier than that given to their peers. Because of this differentiated instruction, special needs students do not interact with their peers in the classroom and are perceived as different from the others as the topics taught to them and covered in their textbook are easier. As a consequence, students with special needs who are incorporated in mainstream classrooms are being isolated academically from the general English program. From this reality, poor relationships between students and teachers emerge, giving rise to dynamics such as social exclusion and rejection.

In addition to the effects of multiple English syllabi on class dynamics, other factors including teacher training, student group size, and learners' physical appearances also contribute to creating an environment of exclusion in EFL classrooms.

In the case of H. B. School, there are many factors that work together to hinder the progress of students with special needs. To begin, a lack of qualified special education teachers means that the problem of inclusion is not being professionally addressed by those who specialize in such complex issues. Most teachers in this institution have not received any specific instruction or training on how to address groups of students including learners with special needs. Furthermore, with large classes —typically exceeding 30 students— teachers must teach the whole group in the same space and at the same time, all while trying to accommodate students working with different textbooks, addressing typical classroom management problems, and addressing students' personal needs and learning styles. For this reason, teachers at this school struggle when they try to apply two programs for one group. As a result of time constraints combined with the impracticality of the task they have been given, they are forced to exclude the special needs population. Finally, some children with special needs look physically different from others and, subsequently, are even more vulnerable to exclusion, since they are isolated

and actually treated as dissimilar. Thus, the discrimination that students suffer in H. B. School stems from various factors that hinder their academic process.

Rationale

Despite new approaches to education in a heterogeneous society, traditional and less successful approaches used throughout history for the general education population continue to be applied regardless of efficacy or relevancy. Social interactions among students are affected by this decision on the part of educators. The aim of this research project is to contribute a reflection on the social dynamics that occur within today's classrooms with diverse learners with special needs. This research hopes to make a significant contribution to understanding the implementation of new methodologies and the benefit they might represent for the whole population. Furthermore, we hope to contribute to the acceptance and tolerance of students with special needs by promoting awareness on the part of teachers and learners. Contemporary diversity in EFL classrooms demands changes regarding many issues. It is hoped that such changes will be reflected in the adaptation of new methods to teach within our educational institutions. However, much research will be necessary to assure that diversity in education is properly addressed, avoiding inequality and discrimination.

The phenomena of growing classroom diversity and accompanying legislation demand the rethinking of curriculum planning, methodology, and all issues related to the classroom environment as a whole. This new paradigm suggests the need for research into teaching techniques that follow the general principles in curricula in order to modify the approaches that lead to inequality in the classroom. One of the factors that affect exclusion of learners is the designing of curriculum reflecting grammar topics. Orient and Longman (1994) argue that rather than simply listing grammar topics, the content of a program must be organized by communicative issues. Essentially, the language taught must focus on that which is needed to express certain notions/ideas and functions, and to contextualize it for non-school environments. Furthermore, contemporary English teaching philosophies demand methodologies in which the students have the opportunity to process, manipulate, and interact using the target language. The implementation of this methodology in H. B. School is suggested since through the implementation of this methodology, meaningful learning activities may be incorporated that do not negatively affect students' academic success and their social relations. These

activities follow the task-based methodological principles which, as its name suggests, seek the successful completion of tasks involving social relationships among students. Similarly, through the application of task-based principles in EFL classrooms, all learners may take part in academic activities to their particular capacity. Through the implementation of such strategies, learners may be successful not only academically, but also in the acquisition of the behaviors and attitudes that help to promote respect for differences. This investigation aims to explore this educational context from a social perspective, so that meaningful changes in curricula may be proposed that contribute to the understanding of how to address diverse needs in EFL classrooms.

Literature Review

In their book *Programas de Educación Especial* (Special Education Programs), Heward and Orlansky (2008) explain that disability refers to a limit of function in or the loss of a part of the body. A disability, therefore, can limit people's ability to carry out certain activities. Friend and Bursuck (1999) define special education as the specially–designed teaching provided by the school district or other local educational agency to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Implicit in this definition is the idea that special education is based on, and designed to best address, the learning processes of a child with physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities.

As such, it is useful to clarify that disabilities can be categorized in several ways. The first category includes those students with learning difficulties within the area of language. Such students may have average to above average intelligence, yet demonstrate trouble reading, writing, and speaking and/or narrating. In addition, these students need longer than others to process questions and statements, and may have problems organizing their time and work. Because of such needs, these students generally demonstrate low motivation and interest in their educational development.

The second category of disabilities refers to students with verbal and linguistic disabilities, a category which includes articulation or speech production problems. These are learners who communicate through sign language or images.

The third category of disability refers to students with an actual cognitive disability. Such students are limited in their cognitive abilities as they learn at a slower pace and their interaction is limited. This category can be broken down into four types of cognitive disabilities as measured according to the level of IQ (Battaglia & Carey, 2003; Comes, 1992):

TYPE	LEVEL
Low Mental Deficit	(IQ of 50 to 69)
Moderate	(IQ of 35 to 49)
Severe	(IQ of 20 to 34)
Deep	(IQ Below 20)

Emotional disorders which include social and emotional problems represent the fourth category of disability. These students are characterized as having difficulties establishing interpersonal relationships.

And the final category represents other disabilities which include auditory, visual, and motor impairments, as well as those students with multiple disabilities. An often forgotten group of special needs students within this category is that of gifted and talented students who have IQ's significantly higher than normal. These needs of these learners are also addressed by Colombia's special education laws. Affected people have normal and sometimes even above average intelligence, and often special abilities in restricted areas; however, their particular learning styles may be different than those of the general-education population.

Voltz (2004) suggests that modern schools should be organizations that promote learning for all students, and develop processes that tend to prevent and remove barriers that lead to educational and social exclusion of certain people. Colombia's laws have demanded that previously marginalized students be included in classrooms, and that educational institutions must promote equality and equity among students, finding ways to meet the needs of students with different characteristics. An education of quality that includes cognitive abilities and skills for daily life is deemed appropriate for all students.

Through the project Education for All proposed by UNESCO, Colombia has adopted clear goals for the educational policy of the country. The first goal includes expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most at-risk populations. The second goal seeks to ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality. As a third goal, the program attempts to guarantee that the learning needs

of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs. The fourth goal aims to achieve a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, particularly for women, and provide equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. The fifth goal in the UNESCO program seeks to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and to achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to, and achievement in basic education of good quality. Finally, the sixth goal of the program aims to improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence for all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all students, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills. Through these objectives, UNESCO intends to promote the idea of inclusionary education in which all children have the right to learn and develop skills for living and socializing with other people. At the Salamanca Conference, UNESCO (1994) discussed inclusionary education suggesting that every student has the fundamental right to education and should have the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of knowledge. Furthermore, each child has characteristics, interests, abilities and unique learning needs; thus, education systems should be designed and implemented to cover all of the unique needs of the students. Finally, regular schools with this guidance represent the most effective medium to fight discriminatory attitudes, create welcoming communities, build an inclusive society and achieve an education for all.

To this definition, we add the goal of providing effective education to most of the children to the definition of inclusionary education. With these commitments, UNESCO intends to ensure that all children have access to an education in which they can acquire new knowledge and tools to face daily life, as well as opportunities for schools to design innovative programs in which these students' needs will be covered. Education for All recognizes and attempts to guarantee the rights of students with disabilities.

In order to create an inclusionary education model, it is essential to understand the principles and intentions behind the inclusive education act. First, this model establishes inclusion as a human right, and one in which everyone has the right to be educated together, regardless of their socio-cultural context or individual characteristics (Wertheimer, 1997). Secondly, inclusion is intended to ensure equality in the education system (Lloyd, 2000). This is to say that through inclusionary education, students can understand, appreciate and share with children from different conditions and achieve equality and equity. Finally, inclusion is seen as a social situation in which society is

committed to guaranteeing peaceful coexistence, and where anyone can express opinions and participate in activities inside of a community. Villa and Thousand (2005) conceive of a way to create an inclusive school and list a number of important questions that are essential to answer when creating an inclusive school or inclusive classroom:

1. Why is change in organizations —schools included— so difficult and unwelcome, even with overwhelming evidence that the status quo does not work for many?

2. Why do expectations for achieving excellence and equity for all children in our public schools seem beyond reach or ridiculous?

3. Why do people in the midst of a change initiative experience confusion, anxiety, resistance, or frustration?

4. Why has teaching not achieved the desired results for many children?

Such questions have plagued the educational system for years as we have promoted more inclusive educational options for children with disabilities in Colombia. Addressing these questions could affect the development of new methodologies of inclusion in the classroom. One of the most significant findings concerns the course load of teachers which, at present, allows no time for them to reflect upon and transform their methodologies to achieve balanced social relations in education. With an overwhelming amount of responsibilities, and without adequate training and teaching conditions, this idea of inclusion in the classroom becomes a utopia which will only come true when all stakeholders become aware of their role in the process and are willing to put in what it takes.

The successful construction of an inclusive classroom not only depends on the initiative of teachers who act as building agents, but also on the support of institutions and the government. In answer to question four above, perhaps the reason for which the current educational system has not achieved the desired results is that the teaching methodologies are not always effective. It is not enough just to be clear about the guidelines that must be followed to achieve the inclusion of students with special needs, is important to ensure that teachers follow these guidelines and that this can be done in accordance with the needs of their own students.

A number of issues may interfere in the practice and execution of teaching students with disabilities. Villa and Thousand (2005) claim that in spite of two decades of the inclusive education movement, many general and special educators have had limited exposure to alternative ways of educating students with disabilities, aside from the traditional approach of having separate, self-contained classrooms. Classroom

teachers frequently hesitate to teach students with disabilities because they have not been exposed to successful inclusive education in practice and do not know where to locate resource materials or people. In addition, many people are unaware that current school reform practices in general education offer instructional approaches that support successful inclusion of children with disabilities (Villa & Thousand, 2005).

Besides knowing the conditions and disabilities of the students, understanding the guidelines for the creation of the inclusive classroom, and having the initiative to meet the objectives, it is equally important to understand how teachers can integrate their students with disabilities into mainstream education. Many stereotypes or misconceptions exert a negative influence on the practice of education. According to Ford, Davern, and Schnorr (1999), if teachers are not aware of the physical condition and mental health of their students with disabilities, or if they simply do not understand the nature of their disabilities, it is very difficult to build an inclusive classroom and they may not be equipped with the necessary facilitating strategies to achieve it. The optimal goal of the act is for teachers to help students with special needs, to create a classroom in which they are never excluded from the teaching and learning processes of mainstream teaching. If teachers do not recognize these conditions, or if they are not provided with training in an appropriate way to teach this type of population, they might inadvertently exclude students with disabilities, isolating and depriving them of quality education.

Understanding and incorporating special-education teaching methodologies may help the inclusion process while the use of new strategies can achieve better relations and improved social interactions between students with special needs and those of the general-education population. One of the most effective strategies stems from the presentation, practice and production theory. PPP theory has been developed as a model for the organization of language lessons. The presentation component represents the introduction to a lesson and requires the creation of a realistic situation in which the target language must be utilized for success. The practice factor generally begins with what is termed 'mechanical practice' by means of drills and repetitive exercises, and gradually advances to more demanding procedures like information gap activities, dialog, as well as creation and controlled role plays. Finally, production is seen as the culmination of the language-learning process, whereby the learners act upon their linguistic knowledge, demonstrate their competence, and become users of the target language (Knapp & Seidlhofer, 2009). This model is based on theoretical foundations which take into account the need for authentic communication.

Another strategy, Task-Based Learning (TBL) is typically based on three stages. The first is the pretask stage, during which the teacher introduces and defines the topic and the learners engage in activities that either help them to recall words and phrases that will be useful during the performance of the main task, or to acquire new words and phrases that are essential to the activity (Nunan, 2001). According to Willis, the task cycle can be performed by small groups and it focuses on how students can develop reading, listening, and problem-solving skills using reports or presentations. An English teacher working with special-needs learners may use this model in order to encourage the students to feel comfortable inside the classroom, and also to help them to build relationships with their classmates since all students will be immersed in activities that require constant participation. As such, students with special needs will have the opportunity to reinforce and improve their social interactions using the foreign language as a tool to communicate and share their ideas, feelings, thoughts and through such interaction, increase their self-esteem.

Bearing in mind the previous concepts Cedeño (n.d.) points out that the National Ministry of Education defines inclusion as an attitude which involves participation, dialogue, cooperation, listening, acceptance, confidence, and admitting the needs of diverse learners. "Inclusion implies allowing others who have not been taken into account to decide and participate" (Cedeño, n.d., 1). The Colombian government itself, through the Ministry of Education, established the policies for [giving] educational attention to at-risk populations. Furthermore, Article 67 of the Colombian Constitution declares that education is a right and a public service with a social function, which allows the access to the knowledge, science, technique, values and culture. Our Constitution itself declares that education is mandatory for all Colombians. Furthermore, this article make explicit that "the education of people with physical, cognitive, or exceptional talents are government obligations" (ibid.). Kids with special needs have to be immersed in an educational environment; they need to go to school in order to experience social interaction and to be exposed to new knowledge processes.

In conclusion, the educational system and educational institutions must provide quality, suitable education to help meet students' needs. This must be achieved through excellent classroom dynamics, strategies and methodologies, as well as teachers with enough preparation to teach students with special needs. The Colombian government has made policies which provide institutions with the basis for inclusive education, but it is equally necessary that schools comply with these policies with the clear purpose of

helping students with disabilities acquire social and academic skills in order to provide better education for all.

Research Design

In order to conduct our research into special education in the EFL classroom, it is necessary to understand the population that is the subject of this research and the reasons for which an ethnographic case study was chosen to carry out the research. Along these lines we organize the concepts around inclusionary education as well as the instruments comprising the study to be developed, so that the reader may clearly understand the population which was analyzed and with what tools. Understanding our study requires recognizing three components: first a description of the population and its individuals' characteristics; second, explaining our ethnographic study and why it is the most appropriate tool according to the characteristics of the population. Finally, an evaluation of the evidence to support the research is carried out, including appropriate ways to implement the instruments of analysis, drawing connections between the social dynamics and interaction in order to clarify our ideas and propose solutions to problems.

Population

In accordance with the national inclusion policy, H. B. School works with special needs students who are integrated into mainstream classrooms from pre-school to the high-school level. An average of three to six students are mainstreamed per group; these are children who may suffer from some type of condition such as Asperger's, Autism or Down's Syndrome, while others have cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Students who have severe health problems are not included in the mainstream setting; they are taught in a self-contained classroom and at another branch of the institution. Teachers provide for the needs of those students who are integrated into the mainstream classroom via a modified syllabus designed to meet the needs of each learner. In this manner, the H. B. School manages its population of special-needs students in applying its inclusion policy.

This research exclusively studies the case of the fifth-grade class at H. B. School in their implementations of special-education policy in their curriculum. This research is qualitative in nature, and intends to obtain culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviors, and the social context of this particular population in general. It does not, however, have the ability to generalize the work regarding the entire school population. Instead, the objective is to report and explain what is happening specifically

within the fifth-grade classroom. Therefore, while it does provide information about the wider research population, findings and results might not be transferable, taking into account the developmental differences present between grade levels.

One of the researchers teaches Basic English to other groups at this school; however, the fifth-grade classroom was chosen as it is one of the smallest classes in H. B. School. The group is comprised of twenty-five students whose ages range from nine to fourteen. Of these twenty five, twenty two are students without special needs. There is a twelve-year-old boy who suffers from Asperger's syndrome, an eleven-year-old boy who has a cognitive impairment, and a fourteen-year-old girl who has cognitive disability and very poor vision. Determined by the geographical location, the school mostly serves students from low socioeconomic households. They study in the morning from 6:30 am to 12:30 pm. The teachers have suggested that at home there is little family support to complete assignments and many students have to do work on their own. This group was chosen for this project in an attempt to create a learning dynamic in which children may develop social skills as well as increase their English levels.

The educational context in which these students and teachers learn and work is quite complex. Since this group encompasses several cognition levels, English teachers have to deal with multiple levels of proficiency. As these students are usually given personalized instruction, teachers have to spend time with each of them. In addition to their daily tasks, they must adapt materials, equipment, methodologies, and the entire academic environment in general for all students to promote learning. All are factors which have led us to reflect upon the difficult educational conditions surrounding this part of the student population and have guided this research. Accordingly, the educational context, Colombia's education laws, the interest in the characteristics of a quality education, and our role as teachers have led us to choose this population for study. The problems we face in our jobs as educators has motivated us to choose this population because it is both pragmatic and functional. In addition, we must recognize the context in which we are immersed and in which we need to seek solutions to the problems that hinder true high-quality education.

Type of Study

An ethnographic study has been deemed correct for this population as it provides the appropriate instruments that contribute to the analysis of human social behaviors. Creswell (1998) proposes an ethnographic case study as a means to describe and interpret a particular cultural or social group or system by means of examining behaviors,

customs, and lifestyles. The main purpose of an ethnographic study is to analyze two perspectives: the interpretation of a social situation and the meaning of the situation through real experiences. In the end, this is accomplished via a written description of the appropriate instruments to implement the analysis and determine which data are essential to collect for the research.

According to Macdonald and Walker (1977), a case study describes a specific structure in which the case to be studied may be a person, organization, training program, event, etc. In education, it can be a student, teacher, classroom, faculty, program, or an entire school and, as such, a case study proposes to characterize a specific, observable situation. Macdonald and Walker (1977) also define a case study as a particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive process. Hence, these qualities make a case study truly useful for tackling practical problems or situations. In accordance with the previous statement, this research intends to describe and analyze the impact of differences in EFL social interaction. Therefore, the character of our research will be an ethnographic case study. In keeping with this methodology, Creswell (1998) proposes five steps to organize an ethnographic study listed as: the introduction (based on problems and questions), data collection, analysis and outcomes, a description and analysis of the culture, and finally, interpretation and further questions.

Instruments

The sources of data in this research project consist of the documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation and physical artifacts collected during the research process. Considering these parameters, the instruments must be qualitative, and, as such, make it possible to analyze different situations, behaviors, and changes in the circumstances of the research. To begin, documentation is one of the most important instruments to corroborate evidence gathered from other sources. According to Yin (1994), documents consist of both formal and informal tests (a category which includes activities, surveys, and questionnaires). Along these lines, surveys and questionnaires are be conducted by mail, telephone, and via written response, at times in the presence of the researchers. As a first step, it is appropriate to implement written questionnaires in order to analyze the application of methods and approaches in the EFL classes in H. B. School. Additionally, oral surveys provide the opportunity for the students and teachers to share points of views regarding the methodology and social dynamics currently in place, and about their implementation in the class. Later, this information could be

compared with results or changes in attitudes to clarify whether or not an improvement was garnered taking into account the learning process. These surveys are conducted in the presence of the researchers.

The second set of instruments consists of archival records, self-reports, and interviews. The objective of these instruments are to focus on, and identify, the strengths of the application of the social dynamics, methodologies, and interaction activities. Through interviews, for example, instruments such as recording or narrative devices may be a good tool to analyze the progress or setbacks that our students might experience during the project.

Lastly, direct observation is a final method to collect data by observing the most important aspects during the implementation of activities involving social dynamics and peer interaction, coinciding with the main concerns of the research project. Besides this, the demand to use physical artifacts such as notebooks, videos, and diaries provides even more data that can be gathered and analyzed.

Data Analysis and Findings

The presented data analysis shows some distinctions regarding human relations and the reader must be reminded that this project is qualitative research, which means that observations have been the main data collecting instrument to approach the subjects who have been chosen as the population for study. The attitudes of the participants have been considered in order to examine and relate those to external factors to categorize information. The analysis of the collected data seeks to examine, in detail, the human behaviors around the subjects' social interactions. In order to carry out a proper analysis, the data is interpreted taking into account specific sections from the recorded video. The information gathered is compared to different theories and definitions regarding exclusion, rejection, and social interaction. The study of data collected has set three qualitative research categories. These categories have to do with pedagogical and sociocultural factors surrounding the EFL learning process as well as perceptions that have emerged from data collected, taking into account the research questions. In order to understand the presence of each category, these have been organized with exclusion as the category in which we examine the reasons that students exclude learners with cognitive disabilities. Next, we examine rejection as a type of exclusion, and it becomes evident that learners with cognitive disabilities have to face rejection every day inside mainstream EFL classrooms. The final category studied is

interaction. This category is examined critically using data, definitions, theories, and classification of factors, and takes the idea of interaction further by analyzing inclusionary policies in the world and the country to compare the information discovered by this study to reality. The three categories have been established as exclusion, rejection, and interaction, and have a distinct relationship. They are key aspects which help to generate an environment in which all students have the opportunity to create relationships that help them to increase their self-esteem and, at the same time, acquire knowledge in the foreign language.

A considerable amount of exclusion and rejection occurs in mainstream EFL classrooms directed at students with special needs. This matter is related to short-comings of the prepared syllabi, insufficient teacher training concerning inclusive strategies and methodologies, and to teachers and institutions not promoting the important values of respect and tolerance to difference.

Exclusion

Through the use of different research instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations, this population's behavior was examined, and it was found that students with special needs are immersed in an environment in which they experience a kind of discrimination and social exclusion. This exclusion was highlighted when they were denied the opportunity to participate in common classroom discussions and activities. Social exclusion can be briefly defined as the situation in which students do not have the same opportunity as their peers to access an education in which they can explore and acquire new skills to develop in society (Daniels, 2011; Echeita Sarrionandia, 2006; Hitti, Mulvey & Killen 2011; Molina & Christou, 2009). In this category the research examines exclusion and the analysis is based on the kind of syllabus that the school is applying. Besides general difficulties with group learning, this is one of the most important issues to investigate. The causes of this exclusive environment were found in the curriculum and the lack of proper training for teachers to deal with students with special needs. These learners' social skills are usually weak, and if the environment won't support them to acquire or develop these abilities, they will hardly perform at all in a foreign language. Their perception by others causes great harm to their self-esteem because of the way they are treated.

In one particular example, exclusion is often determined by the way students with disabilities are placed in the classroom and how the teacher addresses academic

issues for them. Consequently students without disabilities perceive them as dissimilar and weaker, as described from the observation below:

> The teacher started the lesson explaining high-frequency words. Then, she wrote some phrases on the board and said, "Take out your *Welcome to America* book", (which the three special needs students did not have). She explained the activity they were going to do. After that the teacher came close to the three special needs students, and spoke to them in Spanish unlike the others. She gave these three special needs students some instructions on a different topic and an activity to develop based on a different textbook.
>
> (Recording 001, February, 2012)

This example makes evident the way the EFL class is split into students with disabilities and those without. It is linguistically isolated as well, since the teacher gives them different instructions in Spanish. It is worth noting that in this case, the students with special needs are given instruction after the others, and based on a different text to develop the activities planned for their class. They are even studying different topics.

When these students are learning the foreign language, they are not given the chance to develop communicative skills such as listening and speaking due to the fact that their work in class is aimed only at learning basic vocabulary by means of association exercises that involve images, and iconic reading. Therefore, this type of low-expectation activity does not address the functional aspect of languages as it only teaches structure, but not communication. The conditions in this academic context not only contribute to decreasing students' academic progress, they also hinder improvement of their psychosocial skills, neglecting the development of social aptitudes necessary for success within society. This negative impact is greater with the rejection that these children experience from their classmates. This kind of rejection is visible in the following excerpt from an interview with general education students from the class:

> T: Would you invite one of these students to your home?
>
> S: No, porque no sé cómo actúan en sus casas.
>
> S: No, no sé qué pensarían mis papás.
>
> S: En este caso sería diferente porque mis papás y familia no lo aceptarían.
>
> T: Would you like to be friends with these children?
>
> S: No, porque son raros y huelen feo. (Interview 003; February, 2012)

In relation to the students' suggestions, many students without disabilities do not like, do not accept, and do not even talk to students with special needs. They are seen as 'special'

and underestimated by most of their peers. One of the causes for these students to be excluded is because they are put in a scenario in which they are seen as weaker and treated unequally. These individuals are physically positioned inside a society in which they cannot take part, and are clearly excluded. This exclusion arises from the way the academic needs of these students with disabilities are addressed.

Another problem of exclusion stems from syllabi which are design without taking into account the principles of inclusion and the special needs of the students.

> Researcher: as different textbooks are assigned for students, does it mean different syllabuses are created?
>
> Educator: Yes, the school demands the design of different syllabuses. Since this is taken as curriculum adaptations students need depending on the disability they have been diagnosed with.
>
> (Recording 006; March, 2012)

After the teacher interview, researchers examined the books used in the EFL classroom. It became clear that the school provides two different English syllabi for fifth grade: one for students with special needs, and the other for the general education population. Examining these syllabi revealed a large gap between the two. For students without disabilities, the syllabus is based on the standards proposed by the Ministry of Education and is applied using the text *Welcome to America 5,* which is quite advanced when compared with the textbook for students with special needs. This textbook provides many explanations of grammar structures. For instance, the first unit presents the simple present and present continuous tense, a conversation including these structures, some written exercises, and listening activities based on the same topic. In contrast, the students with special needs are given the *Cheito* textbook which does not take into account the four skills of language. Conversely, it is a very basic program whose contents are focused primarily on isolated vocabulary. This difference in content, i.e. more complex for students without learning problems, encourages inequality among students and makes individuals with special needs vulnerable to being seen as less capable. They are not given the same opportunities as the rest of the learners, a situation which results in de facto segregation.

Time is also a considerable factor when addressing the needs of the special education population. Combining the challenges of teaching a large number of students with the scarcity of time available for training results in teachers who are not sufficiently trained in how to properly teach EFL classes to heterogeneous groups.

> We have to manage large groups, for example, there is a 45 student group in which six students with limitations are included. Each of them demands time to teach almost individually, and, at the same time, we have to take care of the other thirty-nine 'regular learners,' so it is really hard. Besides, some of them do not even perform well even in their mother tongue; some of them have problems with vocalization. On the other I don't actually have the training to deal with specific population so, I have had to learn through practice; however, sometimes I feel that I am making mistakes. (Interview 003, February, 2012)

Educators must face the situation of teaching EFL to large groups of learners that often include students with special needs. These students frequently have problems with languages in general, tend to be isolated, and require almost complete individual attention. Teachers generally have not been trained to face this academic situation. When a professor is teaching a foreign language, this matter becomes more complex. Most students with disabilities have problems with vocalization and free interaction, which are essential factors in learning a language. Furthermore, teaching a foreign language through the communicative approach implies promoting the interaction between the teacher and all students in the target language. If this interaction does not occur, the probability of production is reduced; hence, educators tend to have negative thoughts when teaching a second language to this population. These negative thoughts lead to negative behaviors, which may be communicated to the learners, or perceived by the class. Additionally, these teachers are not given training to mitigate their inexperience and must learn through making mistakes. According to Decree 366 of MEN (2009), teachers should participate in the training proposals of flexible educational models and relevant teaching techniques to care for these students. Although this type of training is required by law, it is not generally followed in practice. Nevertheless, these teachers struggle to learn through practice and acquire abilities for managing their classes. Without proper training, it is difficult for these educators to be able to provide for the needs of everyone regardless of their capacity.

The inclusion policy in place at H. B. School would be better implemented if it were to consider the needs of all students.

> Based on the Personal Educative Program (PEP), the way we manage the inclusion process is basically dividing the groups, students with special educative needs work with a simple book and the rest of the students with the book that matches current standards. That's why we split the groups. (Interview 003; February, 2012).

Students are taught separately due to the misinterpretation of the principles for inclusive education. The PEP is a personalized syllabus designed for students diagnosed with low cognitive ability, or the presence of a specific syndrome. These syllabi are created for each of these students in every subject including EFL in order to comply with the policies stated in the Ministry of Education Decree 366 (2009). This inclusion policy states that, "in the framework of fundamental rights, the population that has barriers to learn and participate by their disability is entitled to receive relevant education without any discrimination" (article 4). According to this definition, 'relevance' lies in providing the support that individuals require to realize their rights to education and social participation. Furthermore, international organizations have joined to promote the goal of education for everyone, and the closure of schools that provide exclusive services for people with cognitive disabilities. The international conference organized by the Spanish government in cooperation with UNESCO in 1994 recognized educational inclusion as a human right, making it a matter of global politics. This position, adopted by the Colombian government, also refers to adaptability as the ability of schools to adapt their teaching to the needs of students, their families, and society. To return to the subject at hand, even though this institution, in theory, adheres to this policy as it is defined by the Ministry of Education, observing the data suggests that while students with special needs are being physically integrated into mainstream classrooms, there are other social factors that show that this policy is not being applied adequately. These children continue to be dissociated and isolated from others by the choice of curriculum, all while being grouped apart from their peers.

Additionally, Ministry of Education decree 366 (2009), states that, "educational institutions that report enrollment of students with cognitive, motor, Asperger's syndrome, or Autism, must be flexible and adapt the curriculum and assessment processes to these learners" (article 4). It may be argued that the application of the inclusion policy in the design of these academic programs show this institution is incorrectly implementing this mandate. When the school's policy leads to isolation, unrelated curriculum, physical separation, and differentiated treatment, these cannot be said to be the products of an inclusive educational environment.

On the other hand, as Garner (2000) states, the educational context is important as it plays a role in the motivation of the students. Educational context refers to the educational system, and specifically to the immediate classroom; thus, it is clear that the teacher, the class, the atmosphere, the course, the content, materials and facilities can

influence the student's level of motivation. Motivation is one of the key components in stimulating learners to become self-involved in the learning process. Nevertheless, the academic atmosphere in which these students are immersed does not offer the requisite support for them to enjoy learning and, consequently, to be motivated. This affects the attitude these children show toward the teaching of the foreign language and the process of acquiring it. As such, from analyzing the academic environment in which students are immersed, it can be inferred that the factors that Gardner mentions may be greatly influencing the lack of proficiency in the foreign language.

In conclusion, the curriculum seemingly creates a barrier that hinders the normal interaction between students building relationships between them. Instead, such a curriculum promotes and emphasizes the difference between students, leading to observable discrimination. Similarly, teaching practices tend to elicit behavior in students that reinforces the negative perception of their peers with special needs. This suggests that in addition to the physical features that may characterize some students with disabilities, in the school context there may be a tendency to create and reinforce discriminatory conduct through the application of erroneous pedagogical practices.

Rejection

Human beings are social by nature as people have the need to be accepted in groups, especially children and teenagers who are more vulnerable and in the earlier phases of forming their identities. When this necessity is not satisfied, they are not accepted by their peers, a concept known as 'social rejection'. This is defined by Leary (2001) as a state of low relational evaluation in which a person does not regard his or her relationship with another individual as valuable and important. In extreme cases, people may regard the relationship as worthless or even value it negatively, in which case they may exclude, ostracize, abandon, or banish the individual. When this happens, it is likely to cause emotional harm and have a great impact on how the excluded individual perceives him or herself. In this subcategory, this research analyzes the social rejection experienced by students with disabilities.

Rejection is derived from exclusion and an individual may be affected by both active and passive rejection. The latter was observed during this research and arose from the whole academic environment. The observers perceived a conscious rejection towards students with special needs which may affect them greatly as integral individuals.

To avoid this rejection, it is important to promote the values of respecting differences and understanding that each person is unique and has particular learning skills.

Children with health problems are affected not only by general exclusion but also by the specific ways they are rejected by their peers. Although the terms exclusion and rejection are frequently used interchangeably, their meanings are somewhat different.

> I would not like to be friends with them, as they have a bad smell...I do not want to work with him.
>
> (Recording 004; March, 2012)

According to this student's testimony, students without impairments are not interested in making any kind of relationships with classmates who have disabilities. Therefore, they choose not to interact with them both inside and outside the classroom. Some of the students have a very negative perception of the students with special needs, as may be seen in the student's observation that "they have a bad smell." Rejecting their special-needs classmates appears to be a deliberate, conscious act. Classroom arrangements may be encouraging them to think that their peers are actually different and, as a consequence, they tend to treat these students differently. What follows is one such normalized classroom arrangement:

> The teacher says to all her students: "children who work with Cheito book are going to sit down here (pointing out a specific table and speaking in Spanish), and the rest of the students, open your books."
>
> (Recording 002; February, 2012)

In this instance, the group is split and the students with special needs (identified by their different textbook) are asked, in Spanish, to sit down in a different place. While this program is theoretically inclusive as intended by the syllabus, the practices of the teacher are exclusionary and appear to promote rejection.

Rejection arises from exclusionary behavior since an individual may not be rejected without having been excluded. The cause for some students' lack of acceptance by their classmates in H. B. School seems to stem from exclusionary policies. This is supported by responses to the questionnaire given by students without special needs.

> Teacher: Do you think there are different students in your class? Why?
>
> Student 1: Yes, because they have different behaviors, they are special children
>
> Teacher: Do you think these students should be in a different place that this School?
>
> Yes, No. Where?

Student 2: Yes, at another place different from normal ones, because in normal places they can be treated badly and they may react aggressively.

Student 3: Yes, because they do not have the capacity to understand as we do.

Student 4: Yes, at specialized schools for them.

Student 5: Yes, in another classroom where teachers care more about each of them.

(001 Questionnaire; November, 2011)

As demonstrated by the students' responses to this questionnaire, mainstream students consider their classmates as having different behaviors, and they perceive them as abnormal and special. They think these students may have aggressive behavior at any given time. These students have come to believe that students with special needs have lower intelligence and capacities than their own. This situation calls for the development of differentiated instruction and materials. This is described by Gardner (2000) in his research. He suggests that the influence of classroom factors may have negative effects on learners' motivation, i.e. they are not only rejected because of their disability, rather because of the way they are perceived by their classmates. Moreover, as these learners are often ignored by teachers and are consistently isolated from the class, the last student's response shows exactly how exclusion is being transmitted.

During this investigation, students without disabilities refused to work with students with special needs in their English classes. This is a consequence of the limited resources to develop classes and academic dynamics that promote the development of more inclusive policies. The ways in which special needs learners are excluded is modeled by teachers and perceived by the rest of the students. This behavior, in turn, is transmitted and copied. Passive rejection results from the exclusion that occurs at H. B. School.

Another significant problem contributing to rejection is the failure to use appropriate methodologies to manage groups and include disabled students. This mismanagement causes harm by creating opportunities for rejection or exclusion that an appropriate methodology would not create. The following observation illustrates this phenomenon:

The teacher is practicing a short dialogue about some personal information, as is written on the board. The teacher reads a question out loud and students raise their hands to participate. Sometimes, the educator asks a question to a specific student; most of the learners give correct answers with a certain degree of fluency. Santiago [named changed], a learner who has a cognitive impairment is asked, "How old are you?" He makes a great effort to answer, but he cannot say it. The rest of the students put their eyes on him. After that, the teacher says: "You are going to talk to your friend"

and asks another student to work with Santiago. This student makes faces and refuses to do it by saying, "No, teacher! I do not want to work with him! He does not speak well. Let me work with María Paula (name changed)." (Recording 005; February, 2012)

In this example, a student with low cognitive ability is asked to produce an English utterance relating to personal information which he failed to do. His classmates, observing his failure, did not want to work with him. The teacher is trying to implement inclusive practices by including the special needs student in the mainstream lesson, but as it can be seen, the inadequate use of these practices can cause harm to the individual —who is rejected— and to the class, who are given the opportunity to reject him.

The general dynamic of the English classes are such that students with special needs are taught different topics and isolated from the general-education population. In an attempt to join both groups in a unified class, the differences of the students with special needs was highlighted rather than diminished. The way the differences are handled in the classroom by the teacher illustrates one of the main causes for which students with cognitive disabilities are rejected from their peers at school. This teacher, to avoid such an outcome, should have used appropriate methodologies to help teach cooperative learning and develop teamwork, providing the whole class with the opportunity to interact in the foreign language. Instead, this teacher's failure to do so led to the student's failure, and, ultimately, exclusion. The success or failure of students, made possible by the success or failure of the methodology and pedagogy, contributes to the formation of self-esteem and self-confidence. Without these, students may face emotional trouble, which added to their physical appearance, makes them even more vulnerable and subject to rejection.

In brief, students who have special needs are often ignored, excluded or not included by teachers, contributing to the lack of acceptance by their classmates. First, students without disabilities perceive special needs students as academically less able due to the material they are assigned and their separation in class. Second, most special needs students have some physical features which make them appear different from others. Finally, syllabus design creates and reinforces the exclusion of special needs students encouraging the rest of the students to reinforce their negative concepts about them.

Interaction

According to the dimensions of interaction proposed by Speedie (1996), interaction occurs when two or more people interrelate. The study focuses on how the action of in-

terrelating has an effect upon the participants. Therefore, considering the concept of communication as interrelational, such interaction becomes significant in this research, since one of its purposes is to achieve the integration of students with special needs into classrooms with other students. Human beings are social individuals and interaction and integration are necessary for survival and success in this context. As such, this investigation seeks to explore interaction as a way to improve the learning process. This category includes the connection between learning and interaction as a social procedure required in order to improve the learning processes of students. Speedie's theory suggests the following dimensions to interaction:

1. An action that influences communication.
2. An intrapersonal system (human information processing and psychological orientation).
3. An interpersonal system (verbal interaction, nonverbal interaction, and interpersonal contact).
4. A sociocultural system (situational geography and communication and social influence).

All of the previous dimensions consider interaction as being directed by conscious intent. Consequently, with these dimensions it is possible to recognize how each person is able to interact and perform as a social being where he or she learns to share ideas, thoughts, and knowledge with someone else. For instance, when a child interacts with another child, both develop ideas about working in groups when they do a specific task with responsibilities for each (Nunan, 2001). The idea of task-based learning suggests that through interacting to complete a task, students may discover how to build their own knowledge to mutual benefit. This is not always the way human beings act, however, because almost always some people are more individualistic and interact with different goals in mind. In a clear example at H. B. School, some students prefer to work alone rather than with students with special needs. They argue that these students need more time to do the activities and do not understand the instructions.

Interaction can become positive depending on the attitude and the willingness of students to perform with each other in class. This is demonstrated in the following example:

Teacher: "Students who work with Cheito book are going to sit down in this group so you can share with Santiago (named changed) who does not have the book yet."
Student: "I want to work alone teacher, because Santiago takes longer and he hits me with his elbow."

Promoting interaction should not be a methodology to solve a problem, it should be used as a teaching strategy for students to learn to live in a context with classmates who have disabilities– one in which they could practice intrapersonal and sociocultural dimensions of interaction. Teachers should identify the strengths and weaknesses in all students, and promote interaction, encourage the growth of both general education students, as well as students with special needs.

In his theory of human motivation, Maslow (1943) uses a pyramid to model the hierarchical nature of human needs with "basic needs" listed as fundamental for the development of human beings. However, some people tend to abandon higher-order needs in order to sufficiently address those which are more basic. In the case of interaction, human beings develop in different ways, depending on their context.

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Human needs
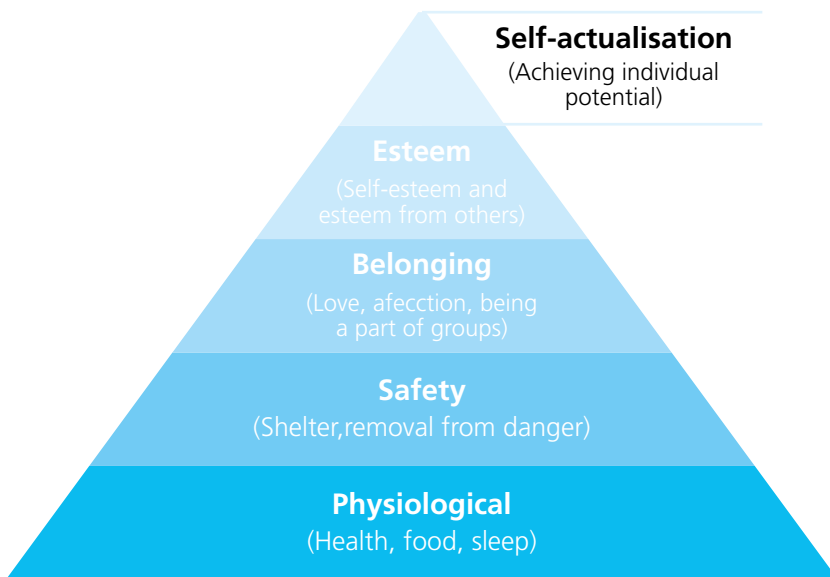
The problem, however, is that human beings do not recognize or know how to attain these needs, therefore, they do not know how to prioritize them. Interaction is flawed and cannot be carried out as a natural process in the classroom because these needs are not developed in any particular order. In the H. B. School study group, children with special needs have failed to perform as social beings in part because of the order

in which they classify their needs. When they put needs like safety (from bullying, from hurt feelings) before belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization, their ability to realize their potential is diminished. According to Maslow's theory, fulfilling lower-order needs is a prerequisite for fulfilling higher order needs.

As a personal requirement, basic needs should be fulfilled in order to achieve an adequate interaction process.

> When the teacher explains a specific topic, she decides to interact with her students; she makes some questions about the topic in order to know if they understand the topic. Then, she gives the possibility for students to participate in the discussion—but they do not want to. Then a girl with special needs raises her hand, and everybody puts their eyes on her. She says, "Teacher, can I go to the bathroom?" Everybody looked at her. They were upset and they said to her that she cannot participate if she does not know anything about the topic.
>
> (Video recorded 006; February, 2012)

It is possible to infer some important things from this encounter in terms of Maslow's hierarchy. For one, this student with special needs does not understand what is happening in the class because she must first address her basic needs –one of which is her need to go to the bathroom. Her action is a natural to achieve successful interaction according to Maslow's pyramid. She decided to raise her hand and ask permission to go to the bathroom in order to meet her physiological needs. She does not understand that the teacher is trying to give her the opportunity to interact with her classmates, she only responds to her immediate need. It is important to recognize that students with special needs do not always have the opportunity to interact in class because they do not have the habits or tools to participate in an appropriate way. In this case, interaction was not possible despite the teacher's intent to promote the interaction process, because of the social shortcomings of this special-needs student.

The interaction process could be successful depending directly on how many opportunities are provided that promote the participation of all members.

> Students: Because they don't understand the instruction, they cannot understand what we must do, so we would do it alone, and that is not the idea when we work in group. Teacher: They need a constant accompaniment that makes difficult the process with others students. I conclude that the "special students" need a totally different learning process. Interaction is a bad way, a bad strategy to try to help them, because the other students don't want to work with them. (Interview 004; March, 2012)

These responses show that in this group, students and teachers alike had no intention of achieving interaction between those learners with and those without special needs. While the regular students work in their own way to follow the instructions, students with disabilities simply do the work, and cannot follow instructions. As a result, the teachers in this case play a particular role in which they must enforce a process of interaction and integration with the students, because they will not do it for themselves. In this case, we see that teacher behavior represents an important factor into the creation of an inclusive classroom. The teacher, therefore, must take the initiative to promote and support student interaction, and encourage the acceptance of all students in the learning environment.

Consequently, it is important to understand the appropriate way to manage work dynamics in the classroom. Teachers are direct agents who encourage integration and promote collective relations in the classroom. It is important, then, to examine how students work together in groups, and the teacher-implemented strategies that promote such interaction. Below is one answer related to this issue that was uncovered during an interview:

> Researcher: Is there any time where the whole class works in groups together?
>
> Teacher: Well, it is difficult that we have any time to work in groups taking to account the differences into the learning process between the students, because the work is hard and some students delay their process trying to explain other children how to do the activity. Also special children do not have enough vocabulary to do an activity predesigned to work with regular students. This ends in fight, the special students could notice their disabilities, so I prefer them to work individually.
>
> (Interview 005; March, 2012)

This teacher prefers to avoid interaction because she identifies the students' differences as a problem in the learning process, and she does not have the appropriate training to confront this type of situation. In this way, the immediate solution is separating and isolating the students without disabilities from those with special needs. A better option would be for the teachers to carry out the class in a more simplistic way, taking into account the linguistic necessities of the students but also the social needs of the students to work together as a group. This is not only pedagogically sound, but it is developmentally important as well.

In addition, classroom activities should be an appropriate way to promote interaction, and to use strategies to improve knowledge in a foreign-language class with

special needs students. Teachers should employ methodologies that maximize opportunities for interaction and minimize opportunities for rejection and exclusion in order to improve the teaching and the learning.

Conclusions

Through this investigation, several uneven social dynamics that impact the daily learning environment in the fifth-grade EFL class at H. B. School were examined. These social dynamics were sorted into three main categories: exclusion, rejection, and interaction. Consequently, such social dynamics produce inequality between the mainstream students and children with special needs, giving de facto priority to the former over the latter.

Even though the inclusion policy in this school has been implemented in accordance with national law, through observation it is clear that different behaviors and attitudes on behalf of students generate exclusion. The most significant factor generating exclusion is the use of altered material which demonstrates a belief that students with special needs have diminished learning and social capacities. This belief creates an atmosphere that leads to discrimination within the class. Teachers are a primary model for student behavior. When students with cognitive disabilities or other special needs are first not included by teachers to participate, they later become explicitly rejected by their classmates.

Another important finding of this investigation is that the root of this academic and social situation is the elaboration and implementation of the individual pedagogical units through modified syllabi for each student with a disability. Through such modification, students with special needs do not participate in the class flow because they are put to work on special activities that actually prevent them from interacting with the rest of the group. It is clear that the exclusion of students with disabilities is one of the social dynamics that results from an unsuccessful attempt to implement inclusion policies that only consider education from an academic and/or legal perspective.

The data analyzed in this research also suggest that rejection of special needs students occurred both inside and outside of the classroom. Rejection and exclusion arise as consequences of a curriculum that demands the creation of separate lesson plans with different topics for special-needs students. Implementing these lesson plans gives rise to negative attitudes and perceptions by other students. As the year progresses, these perceptions are fossilized, and these students become falsely stigmatized by their classmates as having weaker abilities and lower capacities. This is a conscious process, as evidenced by interviews that confirm that children are aware that their classmates are

excluded as they refuse to work with or befriend them. As a consequence, children with special needs were rejected by their classmates for many reasons, particularly because their teachers' academic methodology and school policy fostered the exclusion that led to their rejection by the group.

This investigation illustrates that interaction between these groups is hardly achieved even though teachers make significant efforts to promote new and meaningful experiences among students while fulfilling national and international educational policy requirements. Other factors negatively affecting interaction include: the high number of students per class, the scarcity of resources to develop activities, non-implementation of inclusion training for teachers in schools with mainstreaming programs, and a general lack of projects and attempts at all educational grade-levels to promote understanding and awareness of differences among members of a society. Once students are diagnosed with impairments, or categorized as having special needs, their chances for academic achievement are greatly reduced. From this point forward, they are seen as different and less able by their peers, and this sets specific obstacles along their path to education, exacerbating the achievement gap between those with special needs, and those without.

The existing inclusion policies can be considered insufficient when it comes to achieving effective results. Although UNESCO has stated, and Colombia has adopted, an inclusion policy wherein education must be provided to every student in the same way and with the same appropriate resources for all treating students as equals turns out to be extremely difficult, and students with cognitive impairments and other special needs end up being discriminated against. New policies, amendments to the Colombian Political Constitution and National Education policy resolutions must be made to ensure enough resources are directed to overcoming the gap between what the law intends, and what is actually accomplished in the classroom. Teachers need proper training, and schools need proper policy.

Teachers' perception about the inclusion policy at this specific school varied, although many shared the same point of view. They have observed that learners with special needs usually have speech difficulties in their native tongue which makes it more complicated to include them in the mainstream class flow. These teachers also noted that students with special needs have limited social skills, and this characteristic makes it more complex to promote interaction between them and the rest of the class. One important problem they mentioned is that the average number of students is 35 with only one teacher in charge of the entire group. Due to differences in students' learning

styles, and teachers' methods for controlling behavior, finding the time to accommodate special needs students in this environment becomes a difficult task for teachers to manage. Teachers also notice that general-education learners exclude students with cognitive impairments due to their different learning processes. Consequently, teachers divide these students during the class. Instructors point out that the institution is very demanding with the implementation of the PEPS individual pedagogical units and the report cards must reflect the classwork according to the needs of each child. This means that teachers must guarantee the attainment of specific objectives in a subject even though this emphasis ignores emotional aspects of the development of students with special needs. The educators definitely work according to the institution's demands; however, they can understand and point out better than any the clear results of the misapplication of inclusion policies.

Special adjustments must be made to the English as a foreign language curriculum at this school in order to include all learners in a traditional educational system, and to improve the quality of education offered to all. Changes should be made assertively, and learning difficulties should be seen as an opportunity for all students benefit as learners and as human beings.

Chapter Three

Effects of Emotional Barriers and Disempowerment on Learning and Communicative Processes Present in EFL Students

About the Author

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Additionally, he has been a speaker at various symposiums in which he has shared his studies on empowerment and emotional barriers in foreign-language teaching. He is currently works as a mathematics teacher and curriculum designer at the Montessori British School in Bogotá.

Effects of Emotional Barriers and Disempowerment on Learning and Communicative Processes Present in EFL Students

Introduction

According to Bandura (1993), emotions play a fundamental role within the learning process as the emotional self is said to be directly related to the cognitive self. The relationship between personal experiences and the learning process, which are inherently inseparable, may produce either a positive or negative effect on cognition (Kolb & Kolb, 2002). Such personal experiences include emotional, behavioral, attitudinal, and social factors that are encompassed in students' academic environments. These factors, as suggested by Krashen and Terrell (1983), are directly related to the learner's affective filter, or the cognitive mechanism which is said to either positively or negatively affect language learning. Consequently, emotional factors in the EFL setting may hinder the learning process as emotional breakdowns may lead to lower self-esteem, efficacy, and confidence in the language classroom. This study, therefore, aims to identify such emotional barriers and their influence in the language learning process. Furthermore, the role of empowerment strategies and their contribution to the mitigation of the difficulties at attaining the marks established by the course curriculum at school[1] will be assessed.

Teaching and learning a second language has become vital to the professional development of the new generations in Colombia (MEN, 2009). To promote this professional development, it is important to understand the correlation between emotional factors and the barriers of such in language learning so that students can grow

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[1] The marks established by the course (seventh grade) curriculum are communication, reading strategies and writing processes. In communication, students use English in order to interact with teachers and peers. They need to express ideas and necessities.

competently within this area. Thus, understanding the different factors which affect the learning process of an individual is indispensable. Emotional barriers produced by anxiety factors and disempowerment in the learning process are characterized in this study and, accordingly, an emotional empowerment approach is proposed in order to enhance language-learning proficiency. The research relies on the empowerment theory (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998), and focuses on helping thirteen- and fourteen-year-old EFL students achieve the curricular goals proposed by the target language classroom.

It is crucial for this work to identify the negative aspects that lead to emotional barriers in EFL and the consequences of such on student learning. Such investigation will enable the development of an approach aimed at assisting institutions, educators, students, and perhaps parents in the detection of emotional barriers. This approach, therefore, proposes the implementation of empowerment strategies in order to decrease the affective filter shown during the learning process.

Description of the Problem

Human learning, which includes the language-learning process, encompasses numerous factors that may include several cognitive variations in learning. In the field of foreign-language learning, a primary factor is related to the affective domain. According to Nunan (2004), the affective domain refers to the emotional aspect of human behavior that exerts a direct effect on cognition. Emotional factors in foreign-language learning have been identified along with variations in EFL teaching and learning during the last decade (Gardner, 2000; Garner, 1996; Kolb & Kolb, 2002; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 2000). Consequently, there is a necessity for establishing a clear relationship between these factors as they relate to foreign-language learning.

According to the Colombian Ministry of Education (2009), learning English as a foreign language has become an educational priority in order to adapt to the rising pace of modern times. Although the learning of a foreign language in Colombia has become common practice, many challenges still exist related to the EFL learning process. Some of these difficulties are related to the specific emotional and cognitive barriers present in students concerning their academic, cultural, and social context. These situations include limitations of access to content in English due to social status, group pressure exerted from classmates and peers, parents' pressure to achieve excellence in English classes, and previous negative experiences within the language-learning process. Consequently, some of the barriers caused by academic and social environments can be related

to emotional factors that may affect cognitive and behavioral patterns from a student throughout the EFL learning process. According to the prior experiences of the participants, specific emotional barriers in learning and communication related to anxiety and empowerment were identified. This, of course, coincides greatly with the age and maturation of the student and, as such, varies greatly by population. This research study, therefore, attempts to define the barriers which may produce an undesirable effect on the language acquisition of thirteen- and fourteen-year-old students in the EFL setting.

In order to understand these effects, the challenges in education must be understood by educators. One of the inherent challenges of education is the perpetual teaching of knowledge aimed at the completion of a specific curriculum. The curriculum, by definition, includes theoretical, practical, and productive aspects. In order to attain the goals proposed by the target curriculum, teachers must direct students through the three aforementioned components. Throughout this process, teachers must also consider the emotional aspects of their students, as such emotional factors have been demonstrated to hinder cognitive ability in previous research (Krahen, 1988; Lin, 2008; Sparks & Ganschow, 1993; Willis, 2000). In order to avoid this condition, education should aim towards the complete development of the individual by considering not just his or her cognitive needs, but aspects concerning his or her emotional development as well. The consideration of the emotional development of the student, and the deliberate effort to foster student efficacy will be referred to henceforth as emotional empowerment.

Such emotional factors can be identified as crucial hurdles in the learning process and, as Menendez (2006) suggests, 30 to 50 percent of students' failures in school are rooted in emotional causes. Although researchers have provided excellent tools for mitigating this problem, a wide variety of students continue to present negative results due to emotional barriers related to EFL learning processes (Gardner, 2000; Garner, 1996; Lin, 2008; Mayer & Salovey, 1995; Willis, 2000). These barriers may affect children, adolescents, and adults causing difficulties in communication and the expression of ideas in a foreign language.

Through observation of the interactions between the teacher and the students, this study has identified emotional barriers in thirteen and fourteen year old students in seventh grade. These barriers created by emotional factors are considered significant on the limitation of the learning of a foreign language. Therefore, the research problem of this study focuses on emotional barriers as a variable affecting success in the foreign-language classroom.

In an attempt to put forth a plausible solution, this study intends to propose a valid pedagogical approach focused on mitigating these emotional barriers in the EFL learning process. In order to attain these goals, the implementation of an innovative pedagogical approach is necessary. Foreign-language learning is in need of an approach that deals with this type of emotional barrier. Some of these strategies must be directed to managing anxiety, increasing self-efficacy, while promoting empowerment and the creation of study skills among others. It is through the investigation conducted in this research that a new approach has been developed which seeks to confront real emotional barriers and the fear of failure in the Colombian context concerning EFL communicative learning competences.

Literature Review

In the field of education, more precisely in second language acquisition, educators and academics such as Krashen (1983) have identified that emotional problems may be linked to academic proficiency. These psychological states may produce emotional barriers in students to the point of generating learning problems. According to Krashen (1983), when the speaker or writer is thinking about factors such as language accuracy and relating them to language anxiety, he or she may experience difficulties in attaining language proficiency.

Thus, the teacher plays a critical role in the language learning process. The educator may transmit anxiety factors to the students which may hinder learning. From his hypothesis, Krashen (1987) suggests that:

> …our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter… The input hypothesis and the concept of the Affective Filter define the language teacher in a new way. The effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation. (p. 32)

This idea suggests that the teacher's role is focused on the control of anxiety factors and cognitive construction. For the purpose of this study, empowerment is a definitive factor which may allow the teacher to follow the roll proposed by Krashen.

Through the integration of empowerment and control of anxiety factors, the teacher may reduce certain interactions that may trigger emotional breakdowns and mental blocks. In addition, the teacher must take into account the social environment in which the student is immersed. As such, it must be understood by both teacher and

student that emotional factors may cause difficulties in language learning and acquisition. The communicative approach is a meaningful path that teachers may implement in order to reduce affective filters.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

Aligning itself with Krashen's theory (1987), this study confers the importance of self-confidence and anxiety in the language-learning process. The promotion of such factors may foster an acquisition process that can be validated and better measured using communicative tests. The affective filter hypothesis can be defined as the foundations of this research project.

> The Affective Filter Hypothesis captures the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition by posting that acquires vary with respect to the strength or level of their Affective Filters. Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter– even if they understand the message, the input will not reach that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device. (Krashen, 1987, p. 31)

As Krashen (1897) states, a student may comprehend a message but not achieve acquisition due to the emotional factors that influence their thoughts at the moment of receiving input. Thus, if input is not comprehensible, a deficit may be rendered on intake and, subsequently, language production. The relationship between comprehensible input, intake, and comprehensible output must be unified and connected. In addition to emotional factors, attitude towards the language plays a vital role in language acquisition. If the student's attitude is not constructive, the affective filter will increase.

Language acquisition is not solely related to the way a certain methodology is applied in order to achieve the proposed goals for an academic curriculum. It also deals with the character of the individual and his or her manner of dealing with the different barriers which affect his or her learning process. These barriers can be analyzed in a more effective way taking into account the level of affective filter present in a student. Some students show a very poor academic performance in the second language, the reasons for which rely mainly on the lack of interest shown by the student, a low level of self-confidence, an inappropriate teaching approach, or some negative assumption about the targeted language based on experience.

In the broadest sense of the word, the affective filter refers to the manner in which an individual perceives him or herself in regards to the learning process. The theory is based on the belief that a mental block, caused by affective factors prevents input from becoming intake and therefore reaching the language acquisition device (Krashen, 1983). Lack of interest, low self-esteem, and anxiety factors all affect language acquisition, thus affecting the way in which any comprehensible input is received. As demonstrated below, the language input may be obstructed by the affective filter, therefore prohibiting access to the language acquisition device.

Filter

Input → ┆ ⋯⋯▸ **Language Acquisition Device** ⋯⋯▸ **Acquired competence**

The Affective Filter Hypothesis, as proposed by Krashen (1983), seeks to explain how input is prevented from being used for language acquisition. Learners who show a high level of participation and acquisition of the language are said to have low affective filters. Krashen further states that if the language learner is anxious or has low self-esteem, it will be difficult to learn a second language with ease (1988). As such, by promoting low anxiety the learning process becomes more effective and will, in turn, prevent students from assuming a defensive attitude (Stevick, 1976). Moreover, a learner who is angry, anxious, bored, or simply tense may block the necessary abilities required to make use of any comprehensible input within the EFL classroom (Krashen, 1983). To sum up, the hypothesis states that, depending on the learner's state of mind, the affective filter may interfere either positively or negatively during the learning of a second language.

The affective filter was incorporated by Krashen (1983) as one of his five input hypotheses. Krashen argued that people acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input to be processed with positive outcomes. An outcome may be understood as the way in which the language is being produced after comprehensive input has been given. A key argument of this theory is that the affective filter is influenced by a person's lack of interest, negative attitudes, the presence of anxiety, and lack of self-confidence. He concludes that a heightened affective filter can block input from reaching the

Language Acquisition Device. The Language Acquisition Device (LAD) is a hypothetical brain mechanism that Noam Chomsky postulated to explain human acquisition of the syntactic structure of language. Furthermore, it is suggested that a lowered affective filter facilitates the acquisition of input. Although the affective filter is responsible for the individual variation in second-language acquisition (SLA), it is important to point out that the affective filter is not an issue for first language acquisition; in children who are acquiring their first language the affective filter is said to be nonexistent.

The importance of citing Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1983) relies on its practical effects for SLA. Affective factors which trigger mental blocks must be managed in a way that allows student's adaptation to different language-learning environments; in turn they may mitigate language anxiety, increase self-confidence, and improve overall results in the SLA process.

In conclusion, and as the main theoretical contribution for this study, the affective filter hypothesis plays a meaningful role in language acquisition. A learner who is tense, angry, anxious, or bored may block the comprehensible input he or she receives, thus limiting acquisition. Depending on the learner's state of mind, the affective filter limits what is noticed and what is acquired. The presence of an affective filter may act as a mental block if a poor affective state exists (Krashen, 1983). According to this, if the student presents obstacles to the learning process due to emotional barriers, the acquisition process may be negatively affected.

Effects of Anxiety in Foreign-Language Learning

To better clarify the effects of anxiety in second-language learning, it is important to define anxiety in a more general context. According to Durand and Barlow (2007), anxiety is a negative emotional state characterized by physical symptoms which involve tension and apprehension. Although it may be negative, anxiety in adequate levels serves the purpose of preparing the individual for a specific action. In moderate levels, anxiety promotes and enhances physical and intellectual performance in an individual. If these levels are exceeded, the functioning of the individual will be significantly decreased. Due to the negative nature of anxiety and the close bound it has with apprehension about the future, effects of anxiety on people may be significant causing lack of control. Taking into account academic environments, anxiety is present in second-language learners (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Thus, a characterization of anxiety factors will be required in order to establish the relationship between anxiety and emotional barriers.

Anxiety as a construct is considered to play a significant role in second-language acquisition. Spielberger (1972) defined anxiety as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the atomic nervous system. For many students, English class can be either a fulfilling or a threatening experience. Recent studies have shown that while some students seem to be highly involved with their learning process, others who also strive for academic success do not reach expected results due to high levels of anxiety which can be detrimental to learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

The effects that anxiety may cause on an individual when communicating a message in a second language may also affect oral performance. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) used the concept of situation-specific anxiety as proposed by Brown and redefined it as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). FLA refers to the anxiety aroused by a particular academic situation. These events include classroom participation, speaking in public and oral interactions in EFL settings. Thus, it is crucial to understand how language anxiety affects student. Anxiety can be experienced at various levels inside a classroom (Horwitz, 1981). It can be identified by an individual's predisposition to be anxious which may be triggered by the experiences related to a particular event or act. According to Horwitz (1981), FLA presents itself through different channels, thus sub-categorizing anxiety manifestations into physiological symptoms, behavioral symptoms, and cognitive symptoms. For the purpose of this work, anxiety must be characterized in these three sub-categories in order to arrange and analyze possible emotional factors. This research must also identify whether anxiety stems from a more global trait or due to a particular situation at a given moment as, for example, an EFL setting.

To complement anxiety present in foreign-language learning, Sparks and Ganschow (1991; 1993; 1995), postulated that the primary source of differences in language achievement in an individual is language aptitude. In other words, if an individual has an elevated language aptitude and reduces anxiety, he or she would be able to achieve the expected results in the EFL learning process. According to this theory, language anxiety may be reduced if the individual identifies and fosters his or her language aptitude. Sparks and Ganschow (1991; 1993; 1995) define language anxiety as an affective variable. Side effects of affective variables are considered harmful for the language-learning process. Language anxiety can play a significant role in creating individual differences in both language learning and communication (Sparks & Ganschow, 1995). Anxiety is present in most communicative processes, and there is a need to understand its effects on learning.

Despair and uneasiness, it has been suggested are the most common results in students when they confront emotional barriers in the EFL setting. Feelings of frustration add to this negative process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

In conclusion, anxiety is a negative state that presents itself through behavioral, physiological, and cognitive channels. Its most common symptoms include apprehension about the future, mental blocks, cognitive distortions, nervousness, tension, excessive sweating, constant movement, and evasion among others. Anxiety plays a fundamental role in foreign-language learning and, as such, has been defined by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) as Foreign Language Anxiety. It can be interpreted as the apprehension that an individual experiences in a specific situation that involves the use of a second language.

Emotional Barriers: The Invisible Walls that Hinder Acquisition

Throughout the educational process, a student may find obstacles hindering the achievement of his or her goals. In EFL learning and teaching, a very common obstacle exists with the student as well. Emotional barriers are imaginary walls that prevent the individual from achieving their goals (Garner, 1996). Thus, emotional barriers may cause the obstruction of attaining results in the learning process. According to Dewey (1938), the student finds goals that embrace the structure of what is being taught as this concept establishes that the learning process is governed by goals. If emotional barriers allow for the possibility of success to diminish, it is easily deduced that emotional barriers are a main factor for learning barriers.

Moreover, emotional barriers play a significant role during the language teaching and learning process. In order to understand the relationship between emotional barriers and the language-learning process, it is crucial to define emotional barriers. Garner (1996) has suggested that one of the main existing barriers to unbounded communication is the emotional barrier. Emotional barriers deal with feelings of mistrust, anxiety, and fear. Therefore, the relationship between barriers and the learning process is based on communicative factors. If communication is somehow affected by emotional barriers, it is probable that the learning process will suffer. According to this, a thwarted communication process is directly enabled by emotional barriers. Based on the researcher's experience as a teacher, if there is not a plausible communicative process, the teaching and learning of English may become complicated and the results can be described as weak. According to Garner (1996), the emotional effect that an external situation may

exert on a person's mind can lead to a mental block. As a consequence of emotional factors, mental obstacles restrain the path for meaningful learning and, subsequently, for acquisition. Many of these blocks are restrictors of imagination and innovation which are very hard to notice or understand within the classroom.

To strengthen Garner's concept of emotional barriers it is important to define the concept of communication barriers. Communication barriers are considered to be the hurdles in the way of free and smooth communication (Willis, 2000). The message may become vague and the interaction between the student and the teacher may break down and suffer from a serious flaw. As a consequence of emotional barriers, the message is confused and interpretation becomes unclear. The student's mind is placed in another setting, or it is not present at all. Willis (2000) explains that when emotional barriers are present, the receiver of the message cannot easily interpret its meaning due to an emotional block that impedes the cognitive process. This problem may occur in a bidirectional manner as the receiver and the sender may both be affected by the emotional obstacles.

Following the communicative barriers theory of Willis (2000), if a student is mentally blocked, internal factors may negatively influence the situation. Emotional factors that may lead to mental blocks include anxiety as anxiety unleashes emotional factors that compel the individual towards mental blocks. When a mental block occurs, the cognitive state experiences an obstruction and no immediate response for confronting the situation is generated. Thus, comprehensible output is reduced. Moreover, the student may experience physiological symptoms such as excessive sweating, face coloring, emotional breakdowns, avoidance, and crying.

The mind can also experience worries that imply a lack of attention or a misplace-ment of priorities in the brain. Willis (2000) suggests that if a person has pressing work or an unresolved issue, the mind will cycle thoughts and create imaginative episodes that will close the person to all external factors and will create a state of confusion. These cyclical thoughts are defined as ruminations. Sometimes an individual may become emotional when he or she is dealing with any subject that is against his or her personal interests or feelings. As stated by Willis (2000), emotional factors play a significant role in the communication of a message. Hence, these emotional factors mentioned above directly affect communicative proficiency and cognition.

In order to comprehend the effects of emotional barriers in the communicative process, a general characterization of barriers is required. Emotional barriers are generally

characterized by anxiety, inhibition, uneasiness, low self-esteem, suspicion, mistrust, and apprehension. While some amount of these factors and may be necessary, an excess is often counterproductive and prevents the individual from effective communication.

Emotional barriers are considered as the set of factors that interact in a multi-directional way and therefore affect language-learning proficiency (Willis, 2000). These barriers are caused by emotional factors that interact with academic and social environments and produce a series of reactions and attitudes towards the language. It is to be understood for the purpose of this research that emotional barriers are imaginary walls constructed by anxiety and empowerment factors that impede meaningful learning and, therefore, language acquisition. Some reactions and attitudes produced by anxiety and disempowerment are temporary states, possibly caused by problems related to past learning experiences and social interaction. If these factors are repetitive in a certain period of time, the emotional barrier may become permanent, changing from an emotional state into an affective condition. If this were to happen, the student might experience hopelessness in regard to the language-learning process.

After having considered emotional barriers and their participation in the learning process, it is important to note that there are other types of barriers that may also be present in EFL learning. One of these barriers is determined by Garner (1996) as a language barrier. Such barriers are defined by Garner (1996) as the components an individual may present in the language usage process and that produce a difficulty in the understanding or communication of the message. Expressions, idioms, jargon, and buzzwords are identified in within this category. Also, unknown vocabulary and comprehensible input are included in the characterization of language barriers. Based on the research, and taking into account Garner's perception about language barriers, it may be inferred that if a student lacks comprehension of a word or expression, it is possible for him or her to present communication barriers.

Emotional Intelligence

To conceptualize emotional intelligence, an understanding of the concept of emotion needs to be exemplified. Emotions have been understood by philosophers as merely subjective and argued from a cognitive perspective, such that emotions could be construed as a source of knowledge. This suggests, therefore, that emotions are intentional acts where the essence is undefined and only understood by a person's self-awareness (Scheler, 1954). Moreover, the symbolic expressions of emotions are

implicit only in the human mind for it is not a palpable object but a symbolic affair. According to this definition, this research study believes that identifying and working with emotional states is a demanding and challenging task. Emotions that may affect the cognitive part must be characterized from the cognitive perspective as well.

On the other hand, intelligence has been viewed as the faculty or function of the intellect (Diccionario de Filosofia, 1997). It is a plateau of relations between capacity for learning, reasoning, understanding, and similar forms of mental activity, aptitude in grasping truths, relationships, and facts. These characteristics can be related to the cognitive faculty of an individual responsible for undertaking tasks that involve reasoning and inference.

Blending the two concepts of emotion and intelligence, emotional intelligence can be defined as a series of skills that have to do with an individual's knowledge and control of emotions and the ability to recognize them in oneself and in others as well (Goleman, 1995). Taking into account this definition, the different variables present in educational research must be contextualized. To fulfill the requirements, a look into a proposal that facilitates the understanding of the dynamics regarding emotional intelligence, social behavior, and educational environment must be considered.

One such proposal is that of emotional and social aptitude, or the act of understanding by means of processing the emotional and social aspects of our lives. The ways by which we develop these aptitudes define ways of intelligence (Gardner, 2000). Gardner defines intelligence as a set of abilities capable of resolving problems. According to this definition, an individual is capable of resolving difficulties, and when exposed to the appropriate environment, he or she can demonstrate an individual capacity not just for resolving, but for creating situations that empower the development of knowledge.

From Gardner's model, we can divide intelligence into three abilities or fundamental processes: reading, decoding, and understanding information. These abilities lead to the capability of using specific information to solve tangible problems. Another aspect of intelligence deals with the ability of being a creative learner. To contextualize, speakers of more than one language need to be able to decode spoken and written symbols in order to be functional within a language, or in the case of a multilingual speaker, transfer meaning from one language to the other. Social and emotional intelligences require the decoding of oneself and others. This ability establishes the fundamental aspects linked to the resolution of problems. It also provides a set of tools which allow an individual to confront any educational challenge, such as the control of their emotional experiences. According

to Gardner (2000), other challenges to be confronted by social and emotional intelligences include communication barriers and social context behavior problem resolution.

In conclusion, emotional intelligence is considered to be the ability to untangle situations that involve emotions in specific contexts and the capability to manage emotional reactions through self-awareness. Social factor are inseparable from the educational process; therefore, emotional intelligence plays an important role in the language-learning process. It is important to take into consideration the way parents and teachers affect these processes both intentionally and unintentionally.

Empowerment: An Effective Self-efficacy Generator

Empowerment theory has been applied in various fields of social relationships as a means to improve social competence and personal growth. It is to be taken as a multicultural, multidimensional process which seeks people's awareness of their own potentials and capabilities to succeed in a particular field or area of social interaction through knowledge. Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (1998) define empowerment as:

> A process by which individuals and groups gain power and control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals. (p. 91)

This view suggests that empowerment is a multi-dimensional, social process that occurs within different areas of social interactions such as economics, politics, and education-related topics centered in EFL learning. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community, and must be understood as a social process, since it occurs in relation to others.

Over the last two decades, empowerment has evolved from the new paradigm-challenging concept to become a construct that has gained popularity and credibility within many fields of research and study which include health and education in schools (Kuhn, 1970).

Empowerment must seek to foster power in people for use in their academic and personal lives. According to Bailey (1992), the way in which a person defines empowerment is influenced by context and pragmatic situations. Based on this statement and the necessity of a proper definition of the term in concordance with the present research, we suggest that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that may enable a better understanding of the processes involved within the learning of a foreign language and dealing specifically with emotional barriers.

Empowerment theory consists of two parts that are defined as processes and outcomes. This suggests that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering, and that the outcome of that process results in a level of being empowered (Swift & Levin, 1987). Therefore, the study suggests the use of empowerment-orientated interventions to enhance wellness while also aiming at the solution of problems present in a given academic context.

Characteristics demonstrated by the use of empowerment involve the participation of the community in organizational processes. The result is a social awareness on behalf of the individual that share collective responsibilities and promote the importance of shared leadership. The active participation with others stems from the individual's need to achieve a particular goal. This action allows further understanding of the consequences of empowering processes.

In conclusion, empowerment is viewed in this work as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their social practices. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they consider to be important. This may allow people to improve skills and knowledge that will empower them to take steps to improve their own lives including their academic performance in an EFL setting.

Power and Knowledge

Much of what Foucault (1980) has written about power is stated as a systemic view of the nature of power and its participation in various contexts associated with social relationships and interaction. His specificity of each situation leads to the focus on how individuals both experience and exercise power. Most individuals are always in the position of simultaneously submitting to and exercising power, power which can be both internal and external to the individual. In the classroom, the most frequent example is the one-dimensional exercise of power exerted by the teacher. In education this is referred to as a teacher-centered approach. Power, in this sense, is seen as a single, external dominating action by one individual to another. However, it must also be viewed, in respect to the present work, as the way a person exerts an internal influence that will enable the overcoming of specific academic situations related to EFL learning.

According to Foucault (1980), power is viewed as a dual process. In the first conception of power he presents, it as a set of devices of both juridical and institutional components applied to an individual in a form of controlled known as "political power."

The second view is more relevant to the matters discussed within the following pages. Power is then viewed as:

> A conception of regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms whose practices are of omnipresent character in the daily life; thus, transcending the plane of the institutionalized. (Albano, S. & Foucault, M., 2005, pp. 61-62)

This view of power is useful to the understanding of the dynamics inside a classroom. It is evident that inside classrooms the teacher needs to set standards of discipline. On the other hand, the student must learn how to abide by the limits and parameters, and integrate self-regulation. This self-regulation is an important factor that helps to empower the student. The institutionalization of rules and limits may be negotiable in certain circumstances, thus leading to multidirectional power relationships between student and the teacher.

For the purpose of this investigation, power is seen as the positive ability to enhance learning. These abilities are manifested when a particular individual is able to control the environment for his or her own benefit. Negatively, power can be seen as means of constraint on human action, but also, in the positive sense, that which makes action possible. It is proposed by this work that the relationship between both knowledge and power relies on the knowledge acquired after empowering the student as viewed by the empowerment theory as proposed by Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (1998).

Background Research on Empowerment in Colombia

In the Colombian context, the article *Educación y Educadores* (2010), mentions Professor Yamith J. Fandiño regarding his work on research as a means of empowering teachers. This work was aimed at the empowerment of teachers so that they could undergo a change within their approach to teaching in order to create a more effective teaching environment to attain specific needs. The work shows how to empower teachers and urges them to see the process not as a control mechanism, but as a means to develop professional competence. Teachers are then encouraged to use action research not only to gain and exercise power but to open the doors to personal and professional growth.

Another effort in the field of empowerment is the work by De Mejía, Tejada, and Colmenares (2002). In their article, the results of an ongoing process of empowerment in a school in Cali are presented. The research presents evidence that suggest that the constant fluctuations noted between resistance, consent, and asymmetry facilitate processes of empowerment. The work concludes that empowerment is an individual

process that deals with the development of the self. Furthermore, the reality of bilingual processes enhanced by empowerment is evidenced. Although the process is complex in nature there is evidence that guided activities facilitate empowerment processes.

Reviewing the work of these two Colombian researchers, it becomes increasingly evident that the need to enrich the empowerment literacy engaged in the Colombian bilingual context is a necessity. Consequently, it is imperative to some extent that Colombian bilingual educators learn how to use empowerment as a means of complementing academic instruction, and, therefore, understand how to delegate and share power within classrooms. It is also of vital importance that they learn to characterize problems and emotional barriers present in students, in order to reduce the affective filter so very present in Colombian backgrounds.

Methodology

This research intended to observe behaviors and patterns that may lead toward the understanding of emotional barriers present in students in a qualitative manner. The situations that were observed consisted of natural interactions that contributed to analyzing the variables involved in this research.

All of the emotional problems described in the introduction of this research were definitely present in Colombian classrooms. To support this idea, the study group selected was an example of emotional limitations in the EFL setting. The study group presented antecedents such as language anxiety present at the moment of speaking, negative experiences that included mistreatment from former teachers and unfavorable results on exams and evaluations, apprehension and uncertainty about future events which affected their behaviors while producing oral language.

A thorough characterization and observation of the participants took place by identifying social factors in relation to their context. This particular group, which consisted of six students (three girls and three boys between thirteen and fourteen years of age), was marked by other educators and psychologists from the institution as "socially difficult." According to these descriptions, their emotional and social characteristics tended to be problematic. This particularity encouraged this investigation to consider the group as an ideal case to be analyzed.

The observation aspect of this research provided the constant identification of emotional barriers present in EFL students and, as such, is a powerful tool for analysis. The written reflection guided the research towards the gathering of relevant ideas and aspects

identified in the observation. As a complement, the observation process helped the study to produce written reports that were used to draw conclusions. The questionnaires and surveys obtained extra information from the students. With this, the researcher planned to explore the causes for emotional barriers and reactions that students may have had in their learning process. The methodological strategies were eclectic implementations within the population aimed at enhancing the learning process in the group.

The dynamics of the investigation covered observations of different aspects related to emotional barriers (mainly within the realm of anxiety) and the implications these barriers may have had on the learning and performance in the EFL classroom. During these observations, the participants attended a regular class in which they completed activities and oral tasks. These sessions were combined with working periods which led to a total number of classes programmed for the observations that took place. During these sessions, a questionnaire was administered in order to analyze the perceptions of the students. Finally, a collection of data related to previous class observations and from the experiences with the group based on the history of their academic performance and general behavior in school took place.

After analyzing the observations, a semi-structured interview was implemented in order to extract more personalized and useful information that contributed to identifying emotional barriers regarding foreign-language learning. Finally, data from the investigation was analyzed in an attempt to design an approach to foreign-language learning that takes into consideration the emotional factors that affect student learning.

Anxiety Factors

In accordance with the data collection, anxiety factors have been demonstrated to play a primary role within the learning of English as a second language. The information analysis showed a constant variation of anxiety factors which confront the students throughout their English classes. Some of these factors produced discouraging effects on the oral performance of the participants. Moreover, some factors that could easily be classified as positive were also producing unfavorable outcomes on the learning process.

Anxiety factors classified as cognitive symptoms were evidenced throughout the sessions. One of the most frequent cognitive symptoms found was that of excessive worry. According to Speilberger (1972), anxiety is a feeling built up by tension, apprehension, and excessive worry. This was evidenced through the following observations:

> No puedo más con la preocupación, cada vez que tengo que presentar algo en inglés me muero del miedo.
>
> I can't deal with this worry anymore, every time I have to present something in English I really get scared. (Observation; February, 2011)

The student in this observation presents a high level of anxiety. The student is disrupted by the fear that he experiences every time he has to present something in English. The impact on his oral performance is somehow unfavorable as his communicative competences are being directly affected by such excessive anxiety. Here the interaction of emotional factors and the production of an emotional barrier are evident. This excessive worry was communicated in the semi-structured interview with the participants. One student stated the following:

> Sé que mañana tengo que presentar otra vez ese reporte oral, y me preocupa hasta el punto que no quiero venir al colegio.
>
> I know that tomorrow I have to present again that oral report, and it worries me to the point that I don't want to come to school. (Interview; March, 2011)

This student deals with a meaningful amount of worry due to his oral report that was already presented and which received a low grade. The effect observed here can be defined as a desire to avoid attendance of class. It is important to note that if the students experience this effect, the learning process may be meaningfully altered.

> Estoy muy preocupada porque si no presento el examen y saco buena nota voy a tener muchos problemas.
>
> I am very worried because if I don't present the exam and get a good grade, I will have a lot of problems. (Interview; March, 2011)

In this case, the student is worried about the grade that she may get as she may get in trouble if her grade is low. The effect observed here suggests that the student's excessive worry influences her performance on a future test. She is also experiencing external pressure from the house, due to the report about the probable trouble she might get into.

> Es que me preocupa demasiado, anoche ni dormí bien porque sé que voy a ser un desastre.
>
> It worries me too much, last night I didn't sleep well because I know that I am going to be a failure. (Interview; March, 2011)

This participant experienced insomnia due to the worry caused by her low performance in oral production. Consequently, the impact can be described as harmful to the student's health. The report of excessive worry is closely related to the negative results in commu-

nicative tasks and written evaluations. The predisposition experienced by the participant throughout the complete observation is the support for identifying that mental blocks and imminent tension are a consequence of worry. The excessive worry was also demonstrated by the participants during their oral presentations. In the questionnaire and the interviews, most of them stated that they experience worries in oral interactions and before being evaluated. This can be attributed to poor comprehensible output and low affective filter.

Another effect found in most of the participants was that of distraction. Through the observation, this research identified distraction in all the students as a consequence of boredom and impulsiveness. This was evidenced by the lack of attention towards the class. Whenever instructions were provided by the teacher, the participants continuously asked each other about the task they were to perform. All the participants executed different activities during explanations. Consequently, their results were affected in both oral and written evaluations. In another semi-structured interview, one participant stated the following:

> Yo por más que quiero me distraigo fácilmente en clase, mis amigos siempre me están hablando, y a veces es muy cansón escuchar siempre al profesor.
>
> Even though I try, I get easily distracted in class, my friends are always talking and sometimes it is tiresome to listen to the teacher. (Interview; March, 2011)

This student states that he is easily distracted in class, mostly because of his classmates, who encourage him to establish conversations on topics different from the class contents. This behavior present in this participant cannot be justified by external distractions. He should be aware of his own process. In this specific case, disempowerment can be identified as a factor contributing to poor academic performance. In a question related to this factor, one participant responded in the following manner:

> Me distraigo siempre que el profesor empieza a hablar, es que siempre me aburre la forma de la clase.
>
> I get distracted every time the teacher starts talking; I always get bored by the way the class is taught. (Questionnaire; Febrero, 2011)

This student states that he is easily distracted when the teacher develops his class. He attributes his distraction to the teacher's methodology. The distraction in most of the participants is evidenced when the teacher asks about any content that was just explained. This research study considers that students justify their attitude and blame the teacher. If the student is not aware of his mistakes and flaws, it will be extremely complicated to achieve the expected results.

The next category to be analyzed is that of cognitive distortions. According to Sparks and Ganschow (1991; 1993; 1995), cognitive distortions are generated by negative expectations and distorted thoughts. Negative thoughts were commonly found within the participants. Feelings of inadequacy were reported in the questionnaire and the interviews. The following response was given to a question related to cognitive distortions:

> Me cuesta algo de trabajo. A veces me cuesta bastante. Yo no soy capaz, soy bruta para el inglés.
>
> It is difficult for me. Sometimes it turns very difficult. I am not able, I am stupid for English. (Questionnaire; February, 2011)

The student expressed incapability regarding her English skills. She also stated ignorance towards the language. The effect caused by cognitive distortions is detrimental for academic purposes. This participant evidences a clearly discouraging impact on the learning process. During the observations, three participants declared their unfavorable expectations towards the English language to their classmates:

> Sabía que todos se iban a burlar de mí, seguro me volvería a bloquear.
>
> I knew everyone was going to mock me; for sure I was getting blocked again.
>
> (Interview; March, 2011)

The student declared that she was aware of the mockery she would probably experience from the rest of her classmates. She also communicated a recurrent mental block. The cognitive distortions present in the participants respond to anxiety factors that directly influence their results and oral performance. Their attitude towards the class and the teacher can be described as discouraging.

Mental blocks were found within the cognitive symptoms of anxiety. According to Garner (1996), emotional effects exerted by external factors on a person's state of mind may lead towards mental blocks. Theses external factors were witnessed throughout the observations. Situations such as mistrust for accuracy, state of alert, nervousness, and apprehension can be evidenced as the cause for blocks. The observations demonstrated that a series of mental blocks occurred when the participants had oral interactions in public and when the students were aware of evaluation. One specific student demonstrated mental blocks during the in-class observation period. During the class, the student presented excessive worry and unease facing the presentation of an oral report. She stood in the front of the room and attempted to speak about her topic, but only mumbled and spoke in a very low tone. Afterwards, she collapsed and broke into tears,

she expressed that she was not able to continue. This block occurred due to previous emotional factors that created an emotional barrier. The student stated:

> Sé que mi nivel de inglés es malo, no me gusta pasar al frente a hablar, siempre me bloqueo, siempre estoy predispuesta y sé que va a ser un desastre.
>
> I know that my English level is poor, I don't like go to the front and speak, I always get blocked, I am always negatively influenced and I know it will be a disaster.
>
> (Interview; March, 2011)

This student stated her predisposed fear of oral interactions in English. She expressed the constant blocks she has experienced throughout her learning process and she announced an imminent disaster when speaking in public. It is evident that mental blocks are causing deficient results in communicative competences. Students present lack of confidence along with mistrust, thus causing blocks and evasion for speaking. A clear distortion in comprehensible output is somehow present in some participants, constituting one of the most frequent emotional barriers in the learning process of English as a second language. Following this, a snowball effect is created. This impact can be explained by the feeling of inadequacy reported by the participants while presenting oral reports. Thus, lack of self-esteem produces avoidance that may cause frequent absences. Consequently, one of the most common effects caused by mental blocks includes chronic absence and school avoidance.

Finally, ruminations were identified throughout the data implementation and observation processes. Students tend to think about their problems and their possible solutions in a cyclical manner. Ruminations generally occur during oral drills and oral exams. During the interviews, some students stated that they ramble constantly before they are able to produce comprehensible output. The use of fillers during their speech was also observed. During the interview sessions, one student suggested the following:

> Siempre pienso más de dos veces lo que voy a decir, porque simplemente no sé qué voy a decir y a veces se me olvidan las palabras.
>
> I always think twice what I am about to say because I don't simply know what to say and sometimes I forget the words. (Interview; March, 2011)

This student evidences his ruminations before speaking. He constantly forgets words and experiences difficulties in communication. Ruminations may also be a definitive factor for deficient oral production, thus causing another emotional barrier in students. The impact of this barrier delays oral performance and therefore creates obstacles that may affect self-esteem and self-efficacy in future presentations.

Manifestations of anxiety classified as behavioral symptoms were also evidenced during the observation processes and data implementation. Manifestations such as evasion and unease were commonly experienced by the participants. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), evasion is an important component caused by anxiety. This is evidenced by the constant refusal of the students to present oral exams, oral presentations and different activities proposed by the teacher. During an in-class observation, several participants refused to present an oral report. The students preferred not to complete their task in order to avoid failure and disapproval from the group. Evasion was also evidenced on one specific response to the questionnaire:

> Como cometo tantos errores, a veces prefiero no pasar al tablero, prefiero sacarme un 1.0 que pasar por una pena.
>
> As I make a lot of mistakes, sometimes I prefer not to go to the board, I prefer to get a 1.0 than to be embarrassed. (Questionnaire; Febrero, 2011)

The participant is expressing his preference for evasion in an oral task in order to avoid shame in front of the rest of the crowd. Once again, avoidance is present in the students. The effect caused by evasion, as mentioned before, directly affects academic performance due to a reduction in participation and practice of the language. This same manifestation was evidenced in an interview in which a student stated the following:

> Si me da miedo hablar no tengo por qué pasar a hablarle a los demás, siempre que pueda evitarlo será mejor.
>
> If I am afraid to speak I don't have to speak to other people, if I can avoid it, it will be better. (Interview; March, 2011)

This student is expressing her fear for speaking and therefore her refusal to undertake oral presentations or oral interactions. Evasion can lead to lack of participation, thus diminishing the learning process in communicative competences.

Uneasiness was evidenced by the different body movements that the students presented at the moment of speaking in English. Uneasiness can be characterized by repetitive and accelerated hand and feet movements. Tense gestures and constant chewing were also identified within the sessions. During most of the observations, all the participants experienced these physical responses. During the interview, one student stated the following:

> No me interesa mucho el inglés, por eso a veces soy indisciplinada y me pongo a hablar mucho, nunca me quedo quieta.

I am not very interested in English, that is why sometimes I am unruly and speak too much, I never remain still. (Interview; March, 2011)

The student explains her unease in English class due to her lack of interest for the subject. As observed, this behavior directly affects her performance in all language skills. The clear effect of unease causes distraction. As mentioned before, this distraction is a critical factor concerning language learning proficiency.

According to Speilberger (1972), an arousal of the nervous system is a consequence of anxiety factors. Thus, the anxiety present in the students at the moment of oral productions is transmitted to physical reactions. Most of the students experience constant facial coloring, especially when tension takes control of their emotions. One participant showed excessive hand and body movement when speaking. The effect evidenced on these physical manifestations can be described as disturbing in order to produce comprehensible output. Students focus their thoughts towards these distracting movements and isolate intake. Finally, physical responses such as breathing alteration and excessive sweating, particularly in the hands, were found during the observation processes. These physical manifestations are useful in order to identify anxiety factors that in contribute to the nurturing of emotional barriers.

In conclusion, anxiety factors were present in physical, behavioral and cognitive manifestations. The most frequent factors found in the participants were worry, unease, tension, apprehension, nervousness, fear, evasion, ruminations, and mental blocks. These emotional factors highly contribute to the strengthening of emotional barriers in the English learning process. This research evidenced that anxiety plays a critical role in the second-language learning process, thus fostering distortions mainly in communicative competences.

Empowerment Factors

One of the main purposes of this research is to propose a pedagogical approach involving emotional factors and empowerment within the language learning process. Therefore, empowerment is a main category within the data analysis. Empowerment is a process by which individuals and groups gain power and control over their own lives (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998). Throughout the process, learners increase their ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals. Following this concept, the power control within the sessions observed is unbalanced and unidirectional. According to Bailey (1992), to achieve empowerment, a multi-directional

interaction must take place. This means that the power given to a certain individual must remain balanced in order to attain the outcomes expected. In other words, the teacher is disempowered by student's behaviors and institutional hurdles, therefore the outcomes and results tend not to show the expected.

Factors that contribute to disempowerment within the class tend to vary according to the context. In this specific context, the teacher directly influences the disempowerment process. This was evidenced throughout the observations, where the teacher had no visible positive influence on the learning process. During the in-class observations, there was a clear indication of addressing this deficit. This was evidenced when the students performed different activities from the class, yet no explicit reaction or correction from the teacher was provided. This deficit was also evidenced during subsequent in-class observations. The participants show an significant lack of interest in the activities proposed by the teacher. The teacher ignores this behavior and disregards reinforcement. In general terms, on the questionnaire and in several interviews, three students reported the poor assessment they received during classes and that the methods used by the teacher in class are not fostering interest in them. During the interview process, one participant stated the following:

> Yo aprovecho para hacer otras tareas en clase de inglés, el profesor no dice nada, además él no es claro con las instrucciones, se confunde fácil y lo que hace es aburrirnos a todos.

> I take advantage of the English class in order to do my homework, the teacher doesn't say anything, besides his instructions are not clear, he gets easily confused and what he does is to make us bored.

> (Interview; March, 2011)

This redirection of attention towards other activities is common with adolescent students. The effect of this attitude is unsuitable for academic purposes due to the misdirection of input.

Other empowerment factors identified during the observations and data collection were the deficit on rewards, deficit on limits, and deficit on study habits and study strategies. This research study evidenced a clear deficit on rewards when students correctly perform a certain activity. With oral reports, only negative reinforcement was present. No feedback was identified along the speeches. To demonstrate this concept, the following was stated in the oral interview:

> No muy frecuentemente, a veces me hace falta ser felicitada.

Not frequently, sometimes I would like to get congratulated.

(Questionnaire; Febrero, 2011)

The student stated the lack of rewards from the teacher when performing oral activities. Therefore, lack of interest and disempowerment are fostered. Rewards are necessary for encoding power roles inside the classroom. This concept was discussed by one student who suggested the following:

Cuando hago las cosas mal nunca tengo correcciones y si las hago bien nadie me felicita.

When I do things wrong I never get corrected and if I do them alright nobody congratulates me. (Interview; March, 2011)

The student reports a clear deficit on feedback and rewards. Insufficient feedback, combined with inconstant assessment produce disempowerment on the students. In consequence, the impact may be described as harmful for the learning process. The deficit on limits was also evident during the observations. One participant was always bothering the rest of the students and could be considered an emotional bully. Every time he had the opportunity, he mocked the rest of his classmates. There were no parameters imposed by the teacher in order to direct this behavior. Again, a symptom of disempowerment was shown during the in-class observations. In general terms, the students had the freedom to break rules and defy authority without any sanctions. If the students exert control and power over classroom limits, the teacher will be disempowered. It is important to note that the empowerment processes must remain multidirectional.

Finally, study habits and working strategies were not very clear during the sessions. This research study observed that neither the teacher, nor the institution provided study strategies to the students. The participants reported that homework was not revised as frequently as it should. Moreover, some papers and reports fell into oblivion and oral presentations did not receive a fair evaluation. Once again, academic achievement is influenced by factors that interact and contribute to the edification of emotional barriers.

Evidence on disagreement in evaluation was found during the sessions. Empowerment Theory consists of two parts that are defined as processes and outcomes. According to Swift and Levin (1987), actions, processes and activities that empower students will produce empowerment on the outcomes; one of these processes is evaluation. Therefore, if the student is disempowered during the evaluation process, the learning process will suffer the same effect. Students report that they receive lower grades than they expect when compared to their work. After observing the evaluation

strategies applied by the teacher, previous work on specific tasks was not taken into account. The evaluation methodology is somewhat narrow and subjective. This does not mean that a subjective evaluation process is deficient. During the oral interview, one participant stated the following:

> Prepare mucho los trabajos y exposiciones que tengo que presentar y el profesor me pone menos nota.

> I prepared a lot papers and expositions that I must present and the teacher gives me a lower grade. (Interview; March, 2011)

This student states that he receives lower grades than he expects, despite the previous work and preparation invested in certain activities and tasks. Generally speaking, the observations evidenced disapproval in most of the participants according to the evaluation process. This contributes to disempowerment and lack of interest in the learning process. This research study considers that a student must agree with the evaluation process in order to foster empowerment towards a certain subject. The impact identified in this particular situation is increasingly counterproductive for language learning proficiency. This assumption can be supported by the interest lost by the participant after experiencing deficient evaluation processes.

Another factor found during the observation is the permissive style of the instructor. This means that the teacher's way of addressing the class is consenting. Returning again to the concept of empowerment, the ability to transmit to others the feeling of capability is crucial to deal with permissive styles. Power has to be cyclical and managed in a multidirectional way. Thus, the pragmatic usage and timing of power relationships are necessary. In other words, the key relies on who has the power and when. This research study observed that students do not have limits for performing certain behaviors. Therefore, the power is managed by them to the point of disempowering the teacher-student relationship. In this specific case, the learning process is being affected and it is lacking intelligibility. The participants report that they do not have the capacity of learning English. In the questionnaire, one participant responded as follows:

> No me siento capaz de aprender inglés, en clase tampoco veo que el profesor ayude por que deja que todo el mundo haga lo que se le da la gana. Además en mi casa mis papas quieren que aprenda inglés pero no me ayudan a nada.

> I don't feel capable of learning English; in class I don't see that the teacher helps because he lets everybody make whatever they want. Besides, at home my parents want me to learn English but they don't help me at all. (Questionnaire; Febrero, 2011)

This student reports that he is not capable of learning English. He states that the teacher does not help due to his permissive style. The rest of the students practically do whatever they want in class. Effects generated by permissive styles are conducive to lack of discipline, disorder, and disempowerment. This participant also stated that his parents constantly demand that he learn English, but he received little support from them. It is evident that disempowerment is taking place due to permissive styles of teaching and parents' lack of support.

Risk taking was another emotional factor identified by this research. Most of the participants reported that they avoided undertaking certain task in order to evade criticism. During the observations, three of the participants refused to present oral reports. This evidenced disempowerment due to the absence of personal beliefs of success in a specific activity. On the interview applied on March 9, participant 2 stated the following:

> Yo siempre que pueda no voy a pasar al frente a hablar, para que se me burlen tiempo sobra. Yo no soy muy arriesgado que digamos.
>
> I will never pass to the front and speak; there are better things than getting mocked. I am not much of a risk-taker. (Interview; March, 2011)

This student stated he is not a risk taker. He reported that he preferred not to present oral reports in order to avoid criticism. During the observations this research study evidenced that the teacher lacks the necessary strategies for mitigating awkward risk-taking situations. The institution does not have a clear structure for teaching approaches that may help students with this situation. It is evident that academic performance is affected negatively due to risk taking factors.

In sum, the observations and data collection demonstrate that academic performance and communicative competences show deficient outcomes due to disempowerment present in students, the teacher, and the institution. Factors that affect the empowerment process can be classified as pedagogical and emotional. The absence of direction, authority, rewards and study strategies play a critical role in attaining goals proposed by the school curriculum. Risk taking issues exert a negative influence in fluency and communication.

Emerging Categories

Through out the observation phase of this investigation, emerging categories were uncovered that were considered meaningful for future research. Social and group

pressure was evidenced during the observations. Some participants reported serious manifestations of pressure from their parents. The students stated that in some cases their parents demanded high levels of excellence. They receive this pressure and have to deal with anxiety in order to fulfill their parents' requirements. The participants reported that on occasion, their parents would threaten them by taking away certain privileges if they failed English. This failure in certain tasks is likely to occur in this group of students due to the coercive power exerted by some parents. During the interview process, one participant stated the following:

> Mi papa siempre me está diciendo que si no saco buenas notas en inglés me quita el
> televisor, no me deja ir a las fiestas que me gustan y me quita el computador.
> My dad is always telling me that if I don't get good results in English, he will take away
> my T.V., he will not let me go to parties I like, and he will take away my laptop.
> (Interview; March, 2011)

The student stated that if certain expected results in English were not reached, his father would confiscate his computer and television, and will forbid going to parties. For the student, these entertainment aspects are part of his priorities. He also has to deal with possible sanctions or punishments from his father. Generally speaking, the participants stated that this pressure affected their anxiety levels to the point of emotional collapse. Effects of anxiety and disempowerment are recurrent in the learning process and exert negative influence on language learning proficiency.

During the observations, evidence regarding group pressure was found. Some of the participants experienced pressure from their classmates when they had to present oral reports. Several incidents displaying an attitude of nonsense and mockery occurred during oral interactions. In some cases, the ring leader was conspiring with other two students. The sabotage was initiated with strong gazes and looks and a visual communication system was referenced. These attitudes towards other classmates can be linked to power relationships exerted by agents that participate in the academic process. The effect on the students due to group pressure is robust and intimidating as power is not exerted the way it should be. Several participants experienced a tense environment from other classmates at the moment of oral presentations. This group pressure increases anxiety levels causing evasion and mental blocks. During the observations, the participants mentioned above generated such anxiety levels that they decided to withdraw from the task they had undertaken. Criticism of pronunciation and the constant ridicule of mistakes and errors were present during the oral sessions. In response, students evaded situations

in which they could have been exposed to this type of situation. Sorrow, apprehension, and mistrust are the consequence of group pressure within communicative settings.

In conclusion, external factors such as social and group pressure must be considered when analyzing the language learning process of adolescent students. The pressure observed throughout the sessions exerted negative effects on communicative competences. Parents' pressure plays a critical role on students' mood and disposition to learning. The impact produced by external pressure on the English learning process can be described as unfavorable for acquisition.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this research study fulfilled the expectations in both anxiety factors and empowerment. Initially, several emotional implications were identified within the group due to the proximity that the researcher had with the participants, as he had been their teacher in previous years. The background and prior knowledge of certain behaviors within the students and their learning process provided valuable information that aided the construction of assumptions and ideas for the research. Furthermore, the problem stated before conducting the research had been present in almost all the researcher's teaching experience. Emotional barriers as an obstacle for language proficiency constitute a significant problem in foreign-language learning. For this reason, the impact of the study is meaningful as specific variables that could affect EFL learning were identified and characterized. The results of this research are in accordance with the hypothesis initially proposed and may be applied in further research in order to mitigate emotional barriers in the learning environment. The value of this research is undoubtedly positive not only for students, but for teachers and institutions that may want to implement the emotional empowerment approach proposed by this study.

Anxiety and empowerment factors analyzed follow a theoretical framework that was defined and constructed throughout the research process. As a consequence, the findings support the constructs that preceded them. The results encompassed most of the anxiety factors that create obstacles as emotional barriers in learning. In accordance with Mayer and Salovey's (1995) findings, emotional barriers found throughout the data collection process tend to hinder certain competences in the language-learning process. However, Sparks, and Ganshow (1993) suggest that anxiety role in second language acquisition is critical. This study found that in one of the participants, anxiety fostered his fluency and communicative processes. In this particular case, the student experienced

adrenaline surges caused by anxiety and took advantage of his English level to increase utterances. The results of this investigation are, for the most part, in agreement with Sparks and Ganshow's theory; however, it has been determined that anxiety, at certain levels, may not always produce a negative effect on communicative competence.

In accordance with Willis (2000), anxiety factors found during the observations and data collection created communicative barriers in oral interactions. This study also found that anxiety was not the only factor influencing these barriers. Disempowerment plays a critical role on comprehensible output and language learning proficiency. One of the main contributions of this research is the proposal of an emotional empowerment approach. Before describing the approach, it must be stated that the empowerment features analyzed involve not only the students and the teacher in the classroom, rather that the institution itself, parents, and peers outside the school context all exerted a multidirectional power relationship within the study group. Therefore, academic effectiveness, including communicative competences, presents disempowerment from these external sources. The implications concerning this matter include what is not being done inside and outside the classroom in order to help achieve a certain goal. The institution is not providing pedagogical freedom to the teacher, who is directly disempowered before starting a class. Consequently, the teacher is disempowering students through his lack of interest and apathy towards the class. On the other hand, parents exert pressure over the students, disempowering them and increasing anxiety factors. The students try to negotiate power with useless sources and therefore intend to create a unidirectional manifestation of power. After not reaching expected results, disempowerment peaks and, when combined with anxiety, becomes detrimental to the students' language learning proficiency. What must be understood is that power has to be managed in a multidirectional way. Foucault (1980) suggests that power is viewed as a dual process. Thus, empowerment has to be applied as a transmission of regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms where the student creates awareness and self-efficacy.

The Emotional Empowerment Approach

For the purpose of this approach, power is seen as a positive ability to enhance learning, even though it may also exert negative influence in the learning process. The concept of empowerment does not necessarily happen in situations where there is a lack of power or done to the powerless. Power must be understood as multifaceted and thus empowerment must be considered as equally diverse. The Emotional Empowerment

Approach is based on the transmission of mechanisms aimed at creating self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-determination, and self-control in students through the interaction of power roles. As with any approach, assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning must be considered. The proximity to the student emotional state to the learning is vital in order to attain the proposed goals in the language learning process. It is crucial to demonstrate compassion and empathy to the student, always trying to listen and comprehend every situation. Another important assumption is the mitigation and control of anxiety factors using empowerment activities that transmit feelings of capability and less-tense learning environments. A teacher must negotiate limits and rules and, through this process, establish the power roles of the classroom. The educator must be firm but understanding, yet not fall into a permissive style of teaching. For this approach, the teacher must be involved in empowerment processes, which must be made clear to educators and students alike. If possible, the teacher must develop avoidance for disempowerment in the teaching processes. This avoidance includes his or her own practice as a teacher and the influence that the institution may exert. It is important to note that this approach is based on the belief that language is learned best in the communicative setting. Finally, the teacher must agree with the belief that language is learned out of pragmatic necessity and the supportive setting that the teacher, parents, and institutions must provide in order to facilitate emotional states that are linked to the language learning process.

The emotional empowerment approach to language learning, therefore, consists of the following techniques and activities that may be implemented by teachers, students, parents, and institutions:

- Learning to recognize, distinguish, and characterize emotional states of the students. This can be achieved by interviewing the student several times during the initial period of classes.
- Learning to identify students with emotional barriers. Oral interactions in public, debates, presentations, and inquiries are perfect activities in order to observe anxiety factors within a group of students.
- Characterize and classify emotional barriers into categories that include cognitive, behavioral, and physical symptoms. After characterizing barriers, the teacher will have a better understanding of the factors and variable that may cause difficulties in students. It is recommendable to socialize academic difficulties and negative experiences with the students.

- Learning to mitigate and control emotional barriers through empowering activities that foster lighter learning environments. All empowering activities deal with high self-esteem factors. These types of activities aim to reduce emotional factors in order to provide confidence to the student. Activities that use topics that a student can master easily will be useful for controlling anxiety factors.

- Learning to create empathy and compassion with the students. For this, the teacher must be a great listener and must take the time to comprehend the students' needs avoiding permissive styles of teaching.

- Empowering negotiation of rules and limits including power roles. These power roles not only include the student, but the teacher's practice and the influence of parents and the institution.

- Understand the concept of empowerment and the use of power in the classroom in a multidirectional way. It is vital, for the purpose of this investigation, to comprehend that empowerment is understood as the teacher's ability to create awareness and self-efficacy in the students. Through empowerment the teacher must provide control in students over their own learning process. The empowerment approach is a multi-dimensional social challenge that may enable a better understanding of the processes involved within the learning of a second language in general and dealing specifically with emotional barriers. Power must be managed in a multidirectional way, establishing limits and creating rules that are negotiable. The sense of respect is not imposed with coercive power, but earned demonstrating that the power relationship is multidirectional.

- The teacher must agree with the communicative approach and design activities that foster communicative competences. The use of oral interactions in front of the group, expositions, debates, presentations, opinions, and inquires is meaningful for this approach.

- The teacher must understand that language learning is based on pragmatic necessities and that the students will reach language learning proficiency if they see a real purpose of application to language. Activities for fulfilling this principle may include students' interests such as music, entertainment, and sports. These activities may also include real life examples and experiences.

- Designing an emotional supportive learning setting for the student. These settings include supportive attitudes encouraged by the teacher within all class participants. The teacher has to be the biggest supportive emotional tool in the process.
- Creating a bicultural identity with critical perspective and purposeful ideas. The teacher should involve foreign material that brings a closer perspective from the L2 culture to the student. The use of music, news programs, and games that introduce the foreign culture is important to develop cultural awareness. The teacher should always ask for perspectives, points of view, and opinions to awaken critical thinking.
- Providing the students with alternative ways of evaluation. Written exams may be discouraging. There are many alternative evaluative tools that provide confidence to the student. If there are students that always produce negative results, it is vital to design evaluations which provide positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. Constant assessment and constructive feedback are vital in evaluation processes.
- Providing the students alternative ways of class activities. If possible, the teacher must use different resources apart from guides, textbooks, cloze exercises, and extensive readings. The use of games and music are effective tools for diminishing emotional barriers in the learning process.

After the research project was implemented and based on the data analysis and results, this research study proposed the Emotional Empowerment Hypothesis. This hypothesis is represented by the construction analogy, which models the interaction of emotional factors along with participants in the educational process. This interaction leads to the edification of emotional barriers that hinder language learning proficiency.

Emotional Empowerment Hypothesis

There is a need to establish a clearer relationship between emotional factors and the second-language acquisition process. These factors contribute to the edification of emotional barriers in language learning. Emotional barriers are considered as the set of factors that interact in a multidirectional way and, therefore, affect language learning proficiency. These barriers are caused by emotional factors that interact with academic and social environments and produce a series of reactions and attitudes towards the language. Emotional barriers can be understood as imaginary walls constructed by

factors of anxiety and disempowerment that impede meaningful learning and therefore language acquisition.

Emotional barriers that create obstacles in learning should be characterized through anxiety factors that can be identified through cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms. These factors exert an unfavorable influence on language learning proficiency and communicative processes. Among others, variables that include cognitive distortions, evasion, excessive worry, apprehension, emotional breakdowns, mental blocks, ruminations, unease and distraction encompass a wide variety of anxiety factors that build Emotional Barriers.

Emotional barriers that create obstacles in learning should also be charac- terized through empowerment as a social concept that delegates power and authority and confers the feeling of capability in order to attain self-efficacy and control over emotions. Empowerment is multi-dimensional and social process that occurs in areas of social interactions including education related environments centered in EFL teaching and learning. Consequently, empowerment strategies must seek to foster positive power in people for attaining academic proficiency and if so, in enhancing their personal lives as well.

A teacher who is able to convert intake into comprehensible output, empower students, and understand their emotional background by controlling anxiety factors can be described as a competent and skilled educator. Through this process he or she will accomplish the mitigation of emotional barriers in language learning processes. To sum up, an effective teachers must develop emotional empowerment aptitude, and will have to foster this aptitude in their students, and if possible in parents. The emotional empowerment aptitude can be understood as the set of abilities and skills directed to empower a person in a multidirectional way through control and awareness of anxiety factors.

In conclusion, the Emotional Empowerment Hypothesis posits that anxiety factors must be controlled and reduced through empowerment strategies in order to mitigate the emotional barriers that affect communicative competence and second-language learning proficiency.
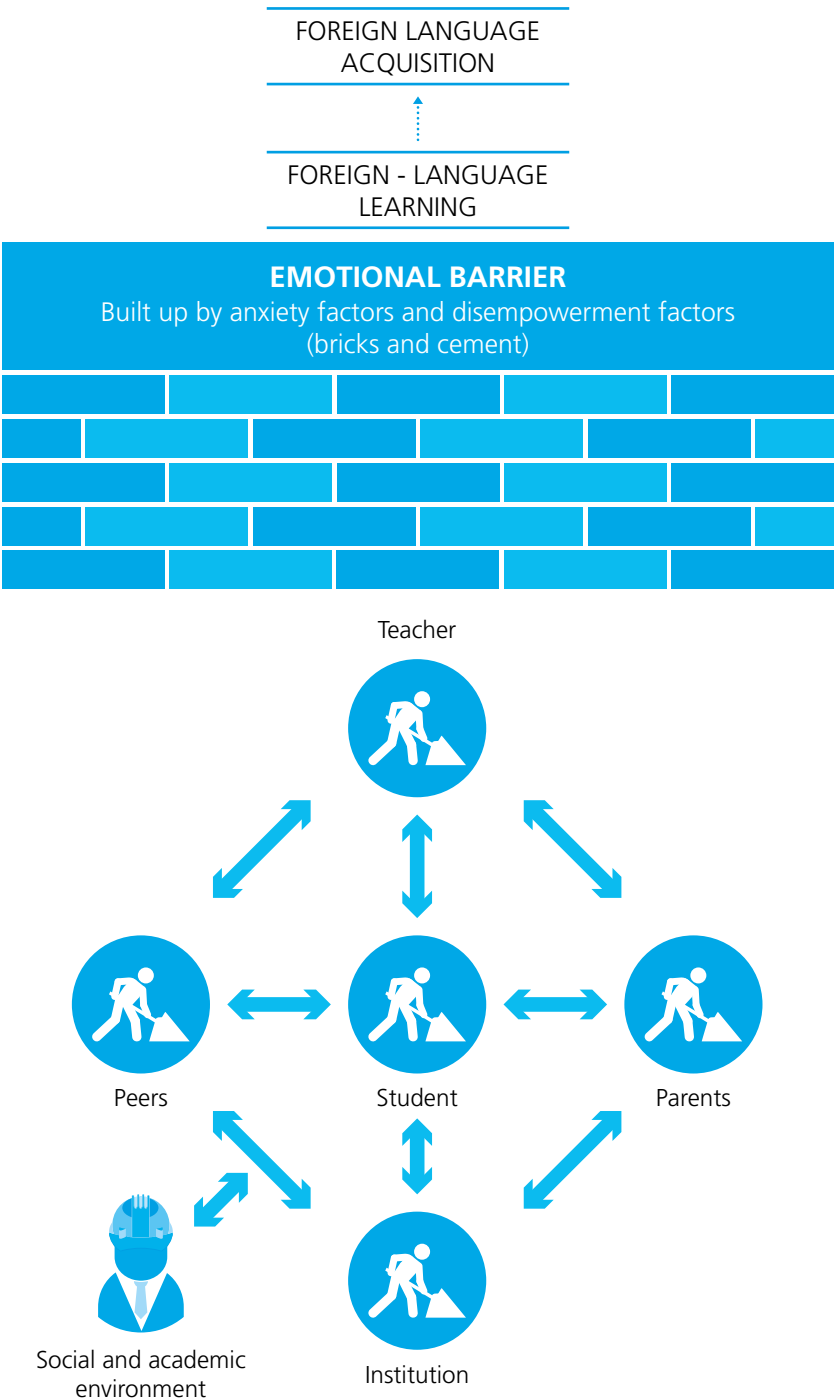
The Construction Analogy

The construction analogy refers to the assumption that a wall built up by anxiety factors and reinforced by disempowerment factors, hinders second-language learning. The bricks in the wall represent anxiety factors, while the cement represents factors of disempowerment. Both are essential materials for constructing a solid wall. Anxiety

factors are joined together by empowerment factors and build a wall that may become as big as the amount of bricks and cement used. This wall is represented by emotional barriers in language learning processes.

In order to construct the wall, construction workers must interact to follow the steps proposed by the project manager. Workers can be represented by the agents that construct the emotional barriers in education. Students, teachers, parents, peers and institutions can be defined as construction workers that build emotional barriers using the different materials (anxiety and disempowerment factors) in a one-dimensional power exercise. The construction workers interact among each other through behaviors, attitudes, and social interactions that contribute to the edification of the wall. These behaviors, attitudes, and interactions represent the building tools used by real construction workers. These workers follow certain steps provided by the project manager, who represents the social and academic environment. The manager commands the workers in a real-life situation. In the analogy, social and academic environments encompass all of the agents present in the educational process, and command and provide instructions to the creation of an emotional barrier.

Finally, successfully overcoming the wall may be accomplished through the use of various tools. The simplest and more effective tool that can be used is a ladder. The ladder is represented by the Emotional Empowerment Approach. A student that desires to achieve language learning proficiency can follow the approach with help of the teacher, parents, peers, and institutions. The assumptions that conduct this approach include the proximity to the student's emotional state and the learning process. This may be accomplished through the mitigation and control of anxiety factors using empowerment activities that transmit feelings of capability and less-tense learning environments, the negotiation of rules and limits which include power roles, the direct empowerment of students, avoidance of disempowerment in teaching processes, the belief that language is learned best via communicative settings, the belief that language is learned out of a pragmatic necessity and the supportive setting that the teacher, parents, and institutions must provide in order to facilitate emotional states that are linked to language learning processes.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION

FOREIGN - LANGUAGE
LEARNING

EMOTIONAL BARRIER
Built up by anxiety factors and disempowerment factors
(bricks and cement)

Teacher

Peers

Student

Parents

Social and academic
environment

Institution

Conclusion

Emotional factors have been identified in this study contribute to the creation of emotional barriers in the learning and communication process. As such, the Emotional Empowerment Approach has been developed in an attempt to provide educators with a teaching model aimed at mitigating the negative emotional effects that students may experience in the learning environment. The assumptions that conduct this approach include the proximity to the student's emotional state and learning process, mitigation and control of anxiety factors using empowerment activities that transmit feelings of capability and less tense learning environments, the negotiation of rules and limits which include power roles, the direct empowerment of students, avoidance of disempowerment in the teaching process, the belief that language is learned best via the communicative setting, and the belief that language is learned out of a pragmatic necessity and the supportive setting that the teacher. Parents and institutions must provide these features in order to facilitate emotional states that promote an increase in learning.

As such, emotional barriers that produce obstacles in learning must be characterized through empowerment as a social concept which delegates power and authority and confers the feeling of capability to students in order to develop self-efficacy and control over their emotions. Constant reinforcement of emotional barriers articulated by ongoing anxiety and disempowerment factors elevate the affective filter and cyclically amplify previous emotional barriers. The constructs that support the emotional empowerment approach must be directed toward the control of anxiety factors, and include empowering activities that may transfer feelings of capability in order to foster self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-determination, and self-control.

Chapter Four
Literacy Practices and Language Issues in Colombian EFL Contexts

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Literacy Practices and Language Issues in Colombian EFL Contexts

Introduction

Teaching and learning processes involving the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method have increasingly become an important concern for English language teaching researchers. According to experts, the use of CLIL in content area instruction often accompanies a lack of cultural considerations (Deller & Price, 2007; Marsh, 2002; Merril, 1986; Met, 1999).When the idea of implementing the CLIL method in Colombia was initially raised, it brought the need to explore childhood education in English as a foreign language in Colombia (MEN, 2006) and to understand its importance in Colombian teachers' training (Rodriguez, 2011). The findings are inherent in four main categories: culture in students' contexts, students' progress in content learning, language production in social and academic contexts, and thinking skills. The study presented in this chapter attempts to explore CLIL when involving students' backgrounds in science classes.

Statement of the Problem

In Colombian public schools, limited exposure to the English language makes the teaching of a subject in English a significant problem. Colombian students, generally speaking, have no solid educational or social background experiences to draw upon as effective resources to achieve an adequate level of performance completely immersed in such complex academic contexts, specifically, within the subject of science. This research study is based on previous investigation regarding the impact of students' background

upon their English performance, as proposed by Monsalve (2006). An aspect to be studied in this research includes the lack of contextualization when implementing CLIL in public schools, along with the lack of teachers' training on such approach.

Furthermore, the role of culture in the teaching and learning process affects student performance, both directly and indirectly. If cultural aspects are not taken into account, teachers cannot assure that students will understand the target language as a meaningful resource to express and relate events appropriately. Building practical relationships when teaching and learning a language are mandatory in order to create familiarization between the language and the learner's culture (Zeichner, 1992). In other words, the environment and atmosphere in which individuals are raised create habits which determine one's attitudes and responses in life (Rokeach, 1973).

In spite of the seemingly innumerable limitations that give rise to the barriers of the implementation of the CLIL method, it is imperative to recognize that CLIL can introduce new, and necessary, alternatives into Colombia's bilingual educational programs. CLIL implementation can be a successful way of providing Colombian learners with new academic opportunities, as long as real conditions and previous experiences are placed at the core of this approach (McDougald, 2009). Overall, expanding the opportunities of teaching and learning practices in Colombia is a matter of evaluating how helpful proposals such as this result, or fail to result, in improved foreign language projects. Thus, this investigation seeks to determine the impact of students' backgrounds on their performance in science courses working within the Content Language Integrated Learning framework. Furthermore, students' performance while interacting with the CLIL methodologies in the science classroom is also of particular interest.

In short, the importance of this research is to explain the correlation between students' backgrounds, language skills, and their real needs within their own authentic context as these are important aspects to value when learning content areas in English. Additionally, this research attempts to analyze students' responses to learning science content through the CLIL method, bearing in mind the relationships that must exist as concepts, topics, and instructions are delivered in the foreign language. It is essential to mention that the CLIL approach is not a rigid or inflexible method; therefore, it might provide pedagogical contributions to bilingual education at public schools, institutions that could benefit from the CLIL method, improving performance while integrating knowledge and language with consideration of social context and local needs. Moreover, it may be a revolutionary way to break the existing fallacy that CLIL is only for bilingual

schools. The flexibility of the CLIL method may prove beneficial even in a low-performing public school like Nueva Aurora (name has been changed) where applying any modern teaching method would be a novel experience for faculty and students alike.

Literature Review

Language and Culture Dependency

In an anthropological sense, culture is defined, simply, as the way people live. Thompson (1990) defines culture "as the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various types, by which individuals communicate with each other and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs" (132). Basically, culture allows people to understand and accept others' behavior, decisions and transformations since there has been a comprehension and development of uniqueness, recognition and tolerance of thoughts diversities around the world. This definition provides an understanding of culture for this research; however, more concepts related to culture could be considered in further research due to the diverse perspectives and definitions about it that have emerged and will continue to emerge over the years.

In this research, culture plays an important role when considering students' backgrounds. In the learning process, culture is seen as the principal instrument of familiarization with another language since it is linked with language in most aspects (Najafi & Rashidi, 2010). Certainly, learning another language implies learning about the culture associated with that language. These two entities cannot exist independently, and must play a role in classroom instruction as culture affects students' development when learning a foreign language (Merril, 1986).

The previous statement is related to the importance of teaching language and culture inside the classroom, and is directly connected with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Marsh, 1994). Teachers cannot carry out their profession if they are not conscious of the necessity to teach language as well as culture to their students. Both must be considered equally relevant as these two concepts cannot be separated in the learning process (Byram & Morgan, 1994). Therefore, it is crucial to identify how the CLIL method gives vital significance to these two aspects in its application. Researchers in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), as well as bilingual programs that teach curriculum through the medium of English, are

now widespread in non-English-speaking countries (Deller; & Price, 2007). This present investigation, therefore, proposes the CLIL application bearing in mind the impact of students' backgrounds throughout the whole process and the importance of culture in the field of language education.

Teaching a subject in English may be an appropriate alternative to integrating learning practices in different educational contexts. English is often presented as the international language standard which permits access to the modern world and allows an individual access to better opportunities. In the Colombian context, English has been advocated for "as the one and only necessary tool for academic and economic success" (Guerrero, 2010, p. 294). The bilingual program in Colombia has attempted to promote and support optimum usage and development of the English language throughout the entire educational system so that it may become more competitive with respect to the demands of globalization. However, there have been certain difficulties in trying to achieve the bilingual goals set by the Colombian educational authorities. Such difficulties have been manifested by the low results students and teachers have obtained in evaluations, demonstrating how little they know about English as a foreign language (Sanchez, 2012). Clearly, the transformation to a truly bilingual nation requires more than written goals or lofty ideals; thus, Colombia needs to be realistic about the real situation faced by society in relation foreign-language education.

The implementation of CLIL inside a classroom allows subject content and language to have joint roles in student learning. This pedagogical approach considers the target language as a part of the process which is assessed through the subject knowledge (Deller & Price, 2007). The basic methodology adopted in CLIL classes encouraged students to learn by incorporating activities such as relating content with real situations, learning a topic through visual and listening resources, interacting with certain material and through collaboration. This means that students are able to face learning processes like thinking and reflecting on the target language through the content area which promotes development of mental skills such as perception, memory, language comprehension and use, problem solving and reasoning (Marsh, 2002; 2008). Furthermore, the "content serves as a powerful mechanism for promoting communication in the new language" (Met, 1999, p. 48). Thus, language is the object of study and the vehicle through which meaning is transmitted. CLIL promotes language production and supports student performance during the learning process not only in their comprehension of the target language but of the content as well.

CLIL Advantages and Benefits for Learner Performance

Today's world requires people who are able to handle specific fields of knowledge that can be expressed in at least one foreign language. This reality encompasses a real commitment to the quality of education students should receive beginning in early childhood when they may start exploring basic concepts in a foreign language. At early ages, students are opened to receiving as much content as possible in the way it is presented to them; then, if content is given in a foreign language from early childhood, it is going to be adopted by them in a more spontaneous way. Therefore, the acceptance of teaching more difficult content subjects in a foreign language may be less difficult for students without focusing entirely on the language learning, but on the continuous enriching of both, content and language as well (Wolff, 2007).

Students' interests and their backgrounds must to be considered to teach content progressively and effectively. The way learners are able to create continuity in their learning processes depends on how well previous, current, and future content is related to students' realities and cultural relationships (PMSEIC, 2009). Thus, teachers may verify students' ability to retain content knowledge by focusing on the appropriate utilization of their background. This background consists of personal experiences both inside and outside of the classroom that may affect the way they internalize the information learned in school. Thus, in order for students and teachers to develop an appropriate atmosphere for teaching and learning specific content, it is necessary to keep in mind that significant vocabulary acquisition through activities such as reading and writing about topics of interest and verbal interaction with students is necessary. Such tasks are fundamental and may be useful to learn about and explore students' abilities and weaknesses while dealing with content-area leaning (Marzano, 2004). Unmistakably, the more students' background knowledge is understood and accessed, the better performance students will have; otherwise, every attempt to leave valuable knowledge in their minds will result in partial or complete failure.

As a result, CLIL opportunities and advantages will not address global necessities unless educators realize that the daily life experiences and realities of the learners must be taken into consideration. Teaching through the CLIL method is not a mere act of providing students with a multitude of content and language input and expecting immediate results from them. Rather, it is a matter of starting from the most basic student perceptions of life as the first step to take them through an advanced, meaningful, and holistic performance guided by sequential processes (Walqui, 2006). Undoubtedly,

formal education is urged to use connected strategies and methodologies to provide students with the opportunity for complete, comprehensive learning.

Research Method

As this investigation refers to the study of people's behaviors, culture, customs, and beliefs, it is defined as a qualitative, descriptive, case study which incorporates components of ethnography (Harris & Johnson, 2000). This study attempts to implement CLIL tasks progressively by intensifying the cultural component in order to analyze and describe its impact on EFL processes and practices. As such, individual behaviors and perceived behavioral trends have been identified as essential to demonstrate the necessity of considering students' backgrounds when designing instruction for content classes taught in English. Also, the way people see and understand the world will be demonstrated by their achievements, knowledge, and personal reactions to challenging situations. In accordance with these parameters, this research was informed by the case study approach in an attempt to answer the research question.

Learning occurs through social interaction with others within specific contexts and communities (Fagan, 2008). Social context is essential in the development of behavior towards the target language, its participants, and the language-learning situation. Consequently, learning opportunities are also determined by real-life experience. Accordingly, students are believed to be social beings participating in structured social environments. Similarly, Lantolf and Johnson (2007) state that the argument is not that social activity influences cognition, but that social activity is the process through which human cognition is formed (p. 878).

According to Spradley (1980), there is a series of steps that should be followed when conducting an ethnographic study. Spradley states that this type of study is a cyclical process since the researcher proposes certain questions to be answered at the beginning of a study; however, once those initial questions are answered, new ones may emerge, and so the research must follow the steps again.

Spradley states that, in the first step, it is necessary to determine the social situation where the research is going to be implemented. In addition, the author notes the importance of bearing in mind three crucial components while determining the social situation: place, actors and activities. Addressing these specifics, this research was developed at a public school in Bogotá Colombia with twenty third-graders with some previous exposure to CLIL tasks in their science classes.

The second step when conducting an ethnographic study developing questions to be answered through a detailed data collection process. Therefore, based on the questions already designed for this project, researchers collected the required data through multiple participant-observation sessions. Drawing on the above, it is imperative to mention the necessity of having an organized and sequential description about the stages of this research process.

As a third step, Spradley describes the collection of ethnographic data through field work to discover people's actual behaviors and explore every factor involved in the studied situation. This fieldwork begins with a general perspective of the situation, but then must be narrowed to get the specific data that is required. Subsequently, in order to glean useful data from this approach, this research relied on participant observation, interviews, and recordings.

The fourth step in Spradley's method is making an ethnographic record to support the evidence gathered. This step includes note taking, photographs, map-making, as well as other means of documentation. This research project used a data collection form, recorded participant observation, photographs, and transcripts of interviews.

Spradley's fifth step is analyzing ethnographic data to build the bridge between fieldwork and new questions and hypotheses which may arise throughout the process. Spradley mentions that this feedback loop is the natural cycle of ethnographic research until the study is completed. As such, this research was subject to any of the modifications or refinements that arose once data had been collected and analyzed.

The sixth and final step involves describing the ethnography in writing to show results that was presented to readers, explaining the population's situation, their processes throughout the investigation period, their real situation and their own role(s) in the research.

Accordingly this ethnographic research was done by following the recommendations as to show readers the investigation process in detail.

Data Analysis and Findings

In the analysis of students' behavior while learning science content through the CLIL method, researchers sought to examine the common attitudes, processes, and performance while considering their background. This approach guided researchers to discover and comprehend students' responses when faced with CLIL sequential lessons, based on their English level and previous knowledge. The goal was to maximize their

ability to meaningfully relate to one another and to the content since students were allowed to examine and criticize what they have learned in relation to their own environments (Cummins, 2008). Throughout the research period, different behaviors related to students' culture, perspectives about language, interaction with the language, realia, and written tasks provided researchers with the necessary information to study this population's progressive performance. In presenting the findings, the observations and analysis were categorized into four categories. These categories mainly emerge from the 4Cs framework proposed by Coyle (2005); however, in this research they were referenced from the ethnographic approach and are as follows: culture in students' contexts, students' progress in context learning, language production in social and academic contexts, and thinking skills. These categories helped to meticulously study students' performance within the CLIL method while studying content in science. This approach serves to discuss real environments in Colombian education when linked to CLIL practice.

Culture in Students' Contexts

Culture is a dynamic system of rules, both explicit and implicit, which are established and shared by groups in order to ensure their survival, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors (Matsumoto, 2000). As such, researchers examined students' attitudes and responses taking into account background as one of the elements to be considered when scrutinizing some discrepancies related to the understanding of weather from a cultural perspective.

The cultural phenomenon that appeared in this case study had to do with a reality ignored by the people of this country due to the lack of knowledge of certain weather conditions, a kind of knowledge that shapes cultural thinking. The following conversation took place in the second class, in November, 2011, while developing content for a lesson on weather.

> Student: "Emm, la lluvia." ("Um. It is rain.")
>
> Teacher: "No. Esto es nieve. Lo que pasa es que en nuestro país no tenemos este tipo de clima." "No, this is snow. What happens is that we do not have seasons in our country". (Conversation; November, 2011)

In this situation, the information students were receiving inside their classroom had nothing to do with their real environment or necessities, a situation which causes them to memorize concepts mechanically, considering them as a requirement to pass a

subject but not as having any relationship to their lives. Culture needs to be incorporated into the learning process bearing in mind that no thought can be considered as insignificant since it may have relevant background meaning for the student. Some Colombian people most likely do not consider such life conditions as a priority (like seasons) as these do not affect their lives. In contrast, their priorities are closely related to their surroundings, necessities, and realities (food and shelter). Besides, people need a point of reference to accept and understand their environment. For example, North Americans are able to see snow in the winter, but in Colombia, this may only be possible via travel to *los Nevados en el eje cafetero*. The lack of knowledge of seasons by the third graders unfamiliar with the concept of "snow" was a clue for researchers that as Colombian teachers, we may not be considering environmental realities affecting the students' own environments. If students' realities were considered, they could easily relate that which they learn inside the classrooms to that which they experience and live outside.

Certainly, most Colombian institutions are following standardized criteria when designing and implementing English content-area curriculum without adapting materials, strategies, and methods to their actual population context. It is necessary to include students' perceptions, real environments, and identities in order to avoid confusion or lack of understanding. For example, teaching students about diverse weather from a global perspective requires that educators first discuss cultural diversity by considering what students know about weather both in their country and in others. In order achieve this goal, CLIL Colombian teachers need to recognize that contextualized materials and resources —books, videos, and technology, etc. — that include Colombian realities should not be an option, rather a requirement in order to facilitate the comprehension of a subject content taught in the foreign language by considering the culture and contextualization roles in the teaching and learning process. The following is the description of a situation which occurred while teaching the weather topic during the investigation.

The weather seasons topic was presented to the students in class where they had certain difficulties relating the word windy with their cultural context. Some days later, they were given an exam in which the weather topic was chosen as a point to develop by drawing and writing the different seasons. However, only two students were able to draw and write the correct season corresponding to wind which is unique in autumn in North American countries but not in countries such as Colombia.

Teachers and institutions must possess appropriate materials, as well as the required consciousness and training to provide a meaningful teaching environment in

which the students' contexts are considered and where students are able to interact with and construct knowledge more accurately.

Culture is generally understood as the shared and dynamic values, reflections, and transformations that serve to understand and to respect people's attitudes and identities (Nieto, 2000). Obtaining positive results from teaching practices depends on the way learners' realities are considered in order to relate concepts to dynamic events in people's lives. In other words, it will not be worth the time to try to implement a successful method such as CLIL in Colombia if there is not a vast change in consciousness about how language, content, and culture are intricately connected.

Students' Progress in Content Learning

Content is the educational component of topics to be taught in certain contexts. This category specifies what students are supposed to learn throughout a course from the basic concepts to the most complex (CSBE, 1998); it clarifies what students are supposed to understand and produce at the end of a unit or subject and it is considered as one of the main CLIL requirements and goals; for this reason, it was necessary to determine how science-content teaching was going to be implemented in consideration of students' backgrounds since the given content had to go in accordance to students' needs and realities for them to better internalize the taught topics. Therefore, in order to explain the results of teaching an organized content-area subject to students when taking their real situations into consideration, it was fundamental to examine how students progressively received content. Thus, those issues led us to our findings. Accordingly, succeeding while designing content and classes in light of these students' cultural backgrounds depends on how clear and continuous such contents are presented to them.

The experience of teaching subjects by changing from the traditional methods is a real challenge. As Coyle (1999) suggests, content must be explicit or explained in detail in every CLIL lesson. Furthermore, these lessons should contain a meaningful contextualization of the subject involving a dynamic relation between language as the way an individual identifies him/herself among others and content as an accurate tool to obtain knowledge (Marsh, 1994). The situation below occurred at the Nueva Aurora School as twenty third-grade students were developing a communicative task:

Students were able to use the given knowledge meaningfully so that they could participate in an oral activity expressing short sentences in the foreign language according to real and regular situations as shown in a video. For example, one student

said, "I wear gloves on cold days," while another said, "I wear a skirt on sunny days," Another student stated, "I wear gloves in rainy days," a young boy said, "I wear umbrella on rainy days," and finally another students said "I wear cap on sunny days:"

Thus, CLIL learners have the ability to link content and language by developing certain competencies in debate, justification, discussion, and explanation of more complex situations than they have to confront in usual language lessons or daily life experiences (Coyle, 1999).

The usage of real and authentic materials while teaching a content area facilitates students' learning since relationships between actual situations and academic contexts are possible (Theall, 1999). This research provided insight into the use of different didactic strategies to be adapted in class allowing students to enjoy and comprehend details of every topic by developing different activities. The diversity of input was key for researchers to understand the teaching of science content using a method to which students were required to adapt while interacting and sharing ideas in different situations. The following describes a situation in which the students were learning about living and non-living things:

Inside the classroom, students could relate the given content about weather with realia (clothes brought to the classroom) to create relationships in their minds to the kind of clothes they would wear according to the climate; also, at the time of teaching about weather, the teachers identified themselves as different weather seasons by wearing a big headband for students to see so that they could relate the topic with the teachers' role. This helped them to answer certain questions such as: "Guys, how is today's weather?" Students would look outside and realize it was raining and then look at the teacher with the rain headband. This demanded that they relate everything surrounding them in order to answer correctly. It demonstrated how well visual aids and real contexts may work together while teaching a content area in a foreign language. In another case, a teacher wanted students to relate content and language while playing, thus a big dice with faces showing the seasons and their corresponding names was brought into the classroom. Students rolled it in turns, identifying the season showing and relating it to the corresponding clothing they would wear for that specific season.

It was evident through student performance that newly-implemented strategies like these produced more accurate results from students on assignments and assessments.

After students achieved positive results in their classes, it was recognized that these alternative and creative resources played an important role. Teachers have a lot of

responsibilities at school which, in some cases, do not leave them with enough time to prepare their classes in as much detail as necessary. This issue of lack of time forces many teachers to focus on traditional materials, thus turning their classes into lectures which are not effective for most of the students.

On a daily basis, schools have to deal with thousands of documents, forms, students' personal issues, parents' issues, bosses requirements, pressure, grades, students' safety, and teachers' own personal issues. In addition, teachers have to prepare detailed classes for at least three different subjects with approximately 30 students per classroom. That reality has been directly affecting the teaching practice as teachers have too many things to do at the same time and it seems to be that duties such as meetings with parents, meetings with bosses, document submission, and producing standardized, quantitative results are most important within the institution. Consequently, the time devoted to class preparation according to students' own needs is restricted.

It is necessary for teachers and authorities inside educational institutions to reconsider and evaluate which duties should be considered educational priorities in order to improve student-centeredness. Doing so may produce the success that authorities within a school strive to project when they simply focus on appearances.

Content, students' backgrounds, and their current realities must be taken into consideration in order to avoid the teaching of superficial and impractical topics while implementing CLIL. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze if the content to be taught will turn out to be useful and significant for students according to their regular environments and the contexts in which they live. It is also important to recognize the necessity of teaching content with which students may be familiar. Different types of content delivery may provide positive results through the use of the CLIL method.

Language Production in Social and Academic Contexts

"Communication is a symbolic process of sharing meanings. A key to interpreting communication is to find meanings of the message, and those meanings are found in people, not in words" (Galvin & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 1). This category was the bridge for researchers to find out students' backgrounds, recognize their needs, interact with them, assess their continuous performance, listen to their experiences, and learn their expectations throughout the course. The communication category of analysis provided the lens through which to analyze student' interactions with others in the target language while applying the "code switching" tool—a technique whereby students are allowed

to mix words, some phrases and even sentences from at least two different languages and speech styles (Bokamba, 1989). Such a strategy helped them to relate concepts and topics more easily. In addition, the communication category provided researchers with insight into some students' confusion during the CLIL lessons when trying to express ideas in a topic where their knowledge was taken for granted. Those issues compelled researchers to explain the events and findings as they occurred. Communication is the bridge to understanding others' perspectives of life and the best way to verify how good learning outcomes are achieved and how teaching processes are received by students (Diggins, 2004).

However, another problematic communication phenomenon emerged during the investigation: the topic did not enable students to communicate spontaneously, orally, in the target language due to lack of vocabulary and confusion in relation to the topic.

> Teacher: (Showing a green plastic bag). What kind of material do we put into this bag?
>
> Students: Mmm…
>
> Student1: Green es gris? (Does "Gris" means green?)
>
> Teacher: No, green es verde. (No, "verde" means Green)
>
> Student1: Teacher, how do you say "vidrio" in English?
>
> Teacher: It is "glass." (vidrio)
>
> Student1: Ah, ahí va el glass. (Ah, glass goes there)
>
> Teacher: Sure?
>
> Student1: Mmm, es que no sé. Se me olvida como se dicen esos materiales. (Um, I don't know. I forget how to say those materials.)
>
> Teacher: Ok, let's remind them, (Showing a glass bottle) It is glass material; (Showing a cardboard) It is cardboard; (Showing a sheet of paper) What is this?
>
> Student2: Paper
>
> Teacher: Good, now (showing the white plastic bag) what kind of material do we put into this bag?
>
> Student3: ¿Qué color es "White" en español? (What color is "white" in Spanish?)
>
> Teacher: Guys, what is this color?
>
> Student3: Mmm…
>
> Teacher: (Pointing a white object) "It is white"
>
> Student3: Ah, ahí va eh… ¿cómo se dice vidrio? (Ah, that's for the… how do you say "vidrio" [in English]?)
>
> Teacher: Glass.

As it is demonstrated in bold above, some of the vocabulary terms were more complex for students. Although the topic seemed to be basic, students had difficulty using color names in the foreign language to apply concepts they already knew in their native language. Students experienced frustration because they could not communicate prior knowledge about recycling classification in English.

Some teachers do not take enough time to diagnose how students relate prior knowledge to that which is being learned. Teachers failed to provide students with further concepts about how and why to recycle, assuming that students knew what recycling implications were and how to use color names in English. Through students' "poor" and "weak" responses such as "glass goes in the green trashcan" and questions such as "¿Green es *gris*?" the researchers realized that even though a topic may seem to be clear, it cannot be taken for granted.

The reality is that some students are not able to communicate sufficiently because their actual competencies or abilities have not been evaluated appropriately before a new topic is introduced.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that teachers cannot take for granted that knowledge will always be acquired, so if students are unclear about a fact or a concept, they will not be able to talk or share ideas.

At the beginning of the process, when students had not yet been faced with building sentences in English, teachers asked them to complete the task, but it was apparent how difficult it was for them to say sentences such as "I like to eat rice," or "I like to eat broccoli." In fact, they expressed difficulties with pronunciation and the structure of the sentences. However, some of the students still enjoyed that communication space regardless of their mistakes and felt proud of their accomplishments.

Such moments in which students participated spontaneously while trying to speak in English despite their difficulties with the foreign language, demonstrated that background experiences indeed influenced the way students interact and communicate with others.

Communication is a path for CLIL usage to be assessed which, in turn, contributes to understanding how foreign language can best be integrated into the instruction of any subject. As Long (1983) affirmed, learning a concept through a foreign language can be achieved if content is related to experience and real-life situations where the conversational interaction allows students to integrate knowledge. As such, CLIL provides

tangible advantages such as the context for meaningful communication to take place and the opportunity to use the target language frequently.

Thinking Skills

Cognition is a capacity that helps an individual to identify, criticize, defend conceptions, and to build knowledge to solve real problems (Bloom, 1956). For this research, it was more important to make sure that students truly understood and internalized few but useful concepts, than to overwhelm them with lots of information of questionable usefulness. The applicability of this category in the research analysis was explored in three ways: first, by determining how students were able to relate previous knowledge with new knowledge; by establishing how well technological resources worked to facilitate students' comprehension; and, finally, by verifying the limitations of the listening and speaking skills activities within the classrooms. This provided researchers with enough information to describe the finding and the results. A topic or a concept is truly understood as long as it can be applied outside of the classroom where continuous and internalized knowledge are applied in every context.

People's experiences help them to develop simple and complex intellectual skills that they use throughout life. Through the different implementations, the students' faculty for processing information and retaining it as meaningful were identified in their performance. Taking into consideration student age, researchers were able to define their cognitive behavior as appropriate and accurate throughout the foreign language science content classes. Many classes were structured by the use of the multiple intelligences model to further deep exploration of the topics (Gardner, 1989).

Students were able to practice their musical intelligence by singing the song "the needs of a plant" whose chorus proved interesting and enjoyable for them. Also, they worked with spatial intelligence by developing a crossword which helped them to internalize vocabulary and to make connections between the word and its meaning in real contexts. Linguistic intelligence was also developed in every class. Furthermore, interpersonal intelligence was encouraged through interaction between students to understand their necessities. This was possible when sharing ideas about topics like food, when working together to guess the meaning of a drawing, when discussing backgrounds by asking questions such as "*Why is recycling important?*" to which the student responded, "because we have to take care about the city and because we have to be clean people" Intrapersonal intelligence was also developed as students were able to

increase their self-confidence gradually by completing the assigned tasks. Some students made comments such as: "*teacher, eso estaba fácil!*" (teacher, that was easy!).

Students were able to apprehend information without ignoring the target language, the usage of which increased significantly. In fact, cognition was the key that allowed students to be critical, analytic, and creative throughout the learning processes which led them to produce and understand the language as it should be.

In terms of cognition, the CLIL method provided excellent opportunities for challenging all learners' thinking skills, which increased students' concentration, engagement, and independence. In this research in particular, it promoted students' progression in both language skills and knowledge construction (Coyle, Holmes, & King, 2009). Nevertheless, some activities were not easy enough for students due to their low English levels, which in some cases made the process harder and took longer to cover as demonstrated with the topic of recycling. In this situation, teachers explained to students the importance of recycling and its classification represented by colorful plastic bags: blue, plastic materials; grey, paper and cardboard material; green, regular material; white, glass material; and red, hazardous material. However, students felt so overwhelmed with that classification and its colors that when they were asked to state where they would deposit certain material, they could not do it easily which slowed their performance and weakened their responses.

Undoubtedly, thinking skills need to be connected with actual relationships as part of the learning process in order to encourage students to feel interested in the class, to participate, and to share and discuss what they learn inside and outside the classroom spontaneously.

Another visible cognitive phenomenon was identified while observing how useful visual and listening resources were as to develop students' learning skills. In fact, they were crucial in this analysis. Visual aids were crucial in this analysis. When employed in the classroom, students became more involved in the topics and were more active in the classes without reverting to their native language. Although positive results were found when implementing listening activities through the classes, it was seen that the public Nueva Aurora School does not provide students with enough space in which to develop their listening skills in English due to the lack of academic resources such as computers, language labs, video projectors or players, tape recorders, an auditorium, and, in some cases, lack of support for teachers to develop the capacity to lead listening

activities. There are many worthwhile topics to teach using CLIL strategies, encouragement, and appropriate teaching resources collaboratively.

Ultimately, this is a research analysis about how students performed using the target language as the main resource to learn a topic. Students' minds were prepared little by little to receive information and to reproduce it in a language different from their native tongue. This gave them self-confidence while using the foreign language as all of their intellectual capacities were validated. It was not an easy process, but their attitudes helped them to develop, practice, and use the target language spontaneously through CLIL.

Conclusions

Involving students' socio-cultural backgrounds in lesson design influenced students' performance throughout the duration of this research. Students' outcomes demonstrated that even though each had their own personal difficulties, unique personalities, and conceptions about the world, they were able to make the classroom environment become a context in which such differences and personal experiences did not negatively affect their common academic interests. In fact, students' mutual encouragement within the process showed that in spite of some of these students' difficult life situations, most of them truly enjoyed learning science content while practicing and taking advantage of the foreign language. Students evidenced a great improvement in terms of motivation, engagement, and active class participation. It was evidenced that most students became really involved and adapted to the CLIL method. In spite of their initial reluctance to learning a content area through a foreign language, both the researchers and the students came to the conclusion that learning science content through CLIL is indeed possible.

It is imperative to identify the repercussions of including every student's background when teaching a content area through CLIL. In this research, it was witnessed that the students accepted the teaching of science content appropriately and responded effectively to most of the proposed activities. Students were able to understand and to produce most of the content in the foreign language, a fact that encouraged teachers to take advantage of students' good behavior. Students were dissuaded from being worried about their grades in the subject as high scores were not the primary aim; rather, they were encouraged to learn what their teachers taught them without thinking about how long they were going to be in the classroom. Colombian schools, where language and content are integrated, should adapt and contextualize diverse tools, resources, and

materials that the students can use when they need to construct relationships between content and their own realities. Choosing content to teach should be in accordance of learners' backgrounds in order to obtain confident performance from them.

Students' backgrounds and continuous assessment of their performance while interacting through the CLIL method were essential to explaining and supporting the findings. This research demonstrates that CLIL methods and teaching strategies can provide teachers and students with positive results as long as such implementations and educative proposals are adapted, contextualized, and designed according not only to students' real situations and needs, but, according to teachers' training and capacities. Students' responses were the clues for researches to identify that Colombian students' realities seem to be ignored by teachers since they continue giving classes without being aware of students' real needs, or the impact of relevance on retention. Learners better internalize knowledge if their whole environment and their natural relationships are taken into account. One way to do this is through exposing them to teaching innovations.

Chapter Five

Children's Narratives: A Mirror
of their Social Sensitivity

About the Author

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Children's Narratives: A Mirror of their Social Sensitivity

Introduction

Traditional instructional practices and the interest to bridge the gap between the school philosophy of the institution in this study and the socio-critical dimension of writing were primary issues in the development of a pedagogical intervention to encourage children's social sensitivity, voice, and awareness regarding their individual realities through the writing of narratives related to their life stories. Participants of this study had been used to writing their papers based on academic and technical practices of writing; nevertheless, with the creation of a writing center designed to explore their social views, the exercise of writing became a social practice. The writing center implemented in this research helped students to explore their social views and issues taking into account their own realities, as well as to promote and inspire children within the socio-critical dimension of writing.

Through the writing of narratives, children narrate their lived experiences and expand on their awareness concerning social issues that are enclosed in such life stories. The intention of this research was to provide students with a social environment in which they could recall specific events from their lives and make sense of these personal experiences by reflecting and expressing themselves through writing. Thus, in an attempt to expand their voice as writers, conferences served as a supportive instrument in which students asserted their awareness, convenience, and understanding

of the related components that surrounded their experience. As such, students may be provided with a transformative writing proposal that empowers their identity as social beings who nurture this reality and contribute to a more literate society.

This chapter presents a qualitative interpretive case study which has been designed considering the fundamental principles of the theory of Critical Pedagogy such as voice, conscientization, and reflexivity based on the work of Freire (1973), Wink (2001) and Colombo (2003). In addition, the considerations regarding narratives and writing as a social practice have been based on literature which promotes and values the literacy process as an unfolding reflective awareness permitting students to narrate and humanize their surrounding world.

The contents of this chapter are organized in the following way: First, the statement of the problem and the rationale that guided this research are discussed, followed by a literature review which seeks to define and develop the main constructs of the study. Next, the research and instructional design of the study are presented, after which the data analysis and findings are be discussed in detail. To connect the findings of this study to real-world application, the pedagogical implications are also discussed, as well as the implications for future research.

Nevertheless, it is also necessary to state the implications that this study may bring to the field of education since the nature of this study is mainly focused on the *River of Life*[1] participants have gone through as, undeniably, social conceptualization is one of the greatest outcomes students and now readers can observe. To this respect, students not only engage in a more rewarding writing experience in which their social sensitivity arises, but they also discover how this social sensitivity may eventually shape their awareness of a new conceptualization of their surrounding social issues.

For the purpose of this chapter, the reader has the opportunity to follow a connection in regards to the students' needs, a practical intervention and the fact they come to raise their social awareness through the writing of their narratives. Since this case study deals with exploring and describing children's understandings of social issues enclosed in their realities and life stories, the intervention accounts for practical activities clearly described and accomplished in the process of mediating social practices in the EFL classroom as a contribution to the field of social research.

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[1]   The *River of Life* is the name given to the writing center implemented in this study, and also refers to the path that one follows throughout the course of their life.

Statement of the Problem

Within the school observed in this study, the English area considers various communicative approach principles (communication, task, and meaning) in order for teachers to design their lessons and accompanying materials on a monthly basis. Due to the fact that those worksheets are the main source of activities for the class, English teachers attempt to include different tasks designed to enhance the four language skills. Furthermore, each worksheet intends to instruct learners in a specific communicative topic and grammatical structure. To this respect, students are taught about a language topic that they normally practice through various exercises within such principles.

Accordingly, it is appropriate to point out that most students have been at school for approximately seven years, the first three in preschool. From that time, they have been exposed to the target language. That is at the core of the English area. In fact, the emphasis in early grades is on listening and reading comprehension, as well as oral production which means they were not used to writing. In fact, they were quite proficient at understanding and decoding oral input taking into account their academic results and class performance. Finally, as the students moved from preschool to elementary, they became familiarized with the process of writing in the target language.

Due to the fact that students have been exposed to more oral production in preschool, these children do not demonstrate equal capacity in the area of writing. Even though they attend three other subjects in English, their written production suggests some difficulty in the areas of word choice, syntax, orthography, and semantics. Certainly in English, writing production in the target language is dependent upon the proposed activity and the level of language that is required to complete such a task. For instance, the topic for the fifth-grade students is related to past events, requiring the simple past tense in all statements, and the activity involves the writing of a postcard in which they describe their last vacation. The goal, therefore, is to encourage the use of verbs in the past and to describe a past situation. Thus, they work on a grammar structure (past tense) via a communicative function (narrating past events through writing a postcard). Through such activities, writing has been considered as a task to accomplish curricular goals. In addition to such goals, writing may be also implemented to promote the value of children's sociocultural background as the primary tool in the construction of knowledge, and the attainment of consciousness and reflection upon their realities.

For this reason, it is important to provide students with an appropriate environment in which they have the opportunity to portray social issues in the narration of their

life stories, and hence, express their voice in regards to this socio-critical dimension of writing.

Rationale

The aim of this project was to provide fifth-grade students with the opportunity to explore their social views based on their realities and life stories. To create this objective, the previous exposure students have had to the target language and the main causes of their difficulties to convey meaning in their written texts have been analyzed. The school's philosophy was also considered as one of the main sources to encourage English language development, as well as its principles to educate them as social beings.

Although some teachers have implemented pedagogical projects in this setting, they have tackled specific cognitive areas of a particular academic subject to learn about a specific topic. For example, the mathematics area fits within the cognitive dimension; therefore, math teachers design activities which develop precise skills of a math topic. However, they have let the social practices be developed by special programs at school such as FAS (*Formación y acción social*) to promote affectivity. To this respect, holistic education has been used within all academic subjects at school as a means to implement their area programs, but it has not yet been used to explore students' social views with a critical attitude regarding their surrounding world.

Although some teachers have implemented pedagogical projects at my setting, they have tackled specific cognitive areas of a particular academic subject to learn about an explicit topic. For example, the mathematics area fits in the cognitive dimension, therefore, math teachers design activities which develop precise skills of a math topic. However, they have let the social practices be developed by special programs at school such as FAS (Formación y acción social) or Affectivity. To this respect, holistic education has been used by all academic subjects at school as a source to implement their area programs but they have not been used it yet overtly to explore students' social views with a critical attitude regarding their surrounding world.

Therefore, this project intends to bridge the gap between the school philosophy and the writing practices of what is being done in class by means of an intervention that fosters writing with a social purpose. As such, this research study addresses writing as a social practice which is understood as the powerful tool that permits an individual to re-think the world and consequently, organize his or her own thoughts (Lerner, 2001). In addition, it will be demonstrated that writing is a social practice worth exploring in the

foreign language setting since it guides children to manifest their voices towards social sensitivity from their own life experiences. In the same line of thought, such children's voices are to be understood as the opportunity to express and share personal ideas and points of view in regards to their social environment.

Hence, it is by means of expressing and hearing those voices that this project intends to guide children to act and reflect upon their realities and, consequently, achieve an awareness of, and a critical attitude towards a more liberating vision of the world around them. For these reasons, children complete written tasks fruitfully as they see writing as a means to empower their voices and consider their own reality from a critical perspective.

Literature Review

A Personal Writing View

For many years, writing has been a worthy issue in literacy studies. Nowadays, not only language teachers, but different social agents are concerned with the literacy processes our kids are encouraged to develop in the high-tech educational setting. From this perspective, writing has been considered as the language skill that provides individuals with linguistic and communicative resources addressed to a particular community. That is to say that through writing, individuals are able to submit common papers, letters, and simple notes or academic reports.

Consequently, language as regarded in this investigation is not the object of study but the resource. Thus, language is not understood from the limited perspective of developing linguistic abilities, rather it is considered a critical and cultural matter to encourage children to perceive, notice, and create an awareness of the realities they face. In this way language has a new socio-critical conception, not one of code, but as a factor that allows students to witness each life story as the expression for making decisions during the occurrence and, subsequently, interpret the different alternatives at a pragmatic level (Wink, 2001).

In this sense, a social being has to see his or her reality through a special critical lens. Due to the instructional practices of writing, students are used to writing only for academic purposes, yet they never truly face natural literacy practices. With no connection to the outside world, an artificial environment is created in the educational setting to teach or guide the writing practice.

To a Socio-Critical Dimension of Writing

According to Byrne (1988), we use, organize, and arrange our ideas in order to translate them into printed language. Learners, he suggests, write to express their feelings, thoughts, and views on any subject; however, such task demands deep efforts in coherence, objectivity, and communication for a reader or community.

Likewise, effective writing can be interpreted in the way learners are challenged to express their feelings, thoughts, and memories into words in the target language (Mitchell, 1996). In this connection, Byrne (1988) and Mitchell (1996) agree on the purpose of writing with Pellegrine, Galda, and Rubin (1984) who developed a research study with first, third, and fifth graders in order to identify the features of children's oral and written text production across the elementary years. Children were encouraged to produce messages in narrative and persuasive genres which guided their written production to become much more explicit and resourceful in their language text production. Therefore, learners should find out the possibilities of improving their writings by means of simple strategies to rethink the development of written ideas (White & Arndt, 1991).

However, writing must be understood as more than the mere submission of papers, but also as a living and active practice able to transform human consciousness (Ong, 1994). Similarly, if writing is a school responsibility, teachers must be supportive agents in their learners' literacy development and, as such, educators should seek to promote tools which permit students to see their experiences as material resources in the construction of their texts through the critical lens (Wink, 2001).

Commonly, teachers assume that children come to school as empty individuals in regards to literacy; nevertheless, Emilia Ferreiro, in Goodman (1990), holds the view that students come to school with knowledge about literacy since their community, social environment, and family directly influence the development of these two elements. Therefore, teachers must begin to think of and accept children's responses, opinions, and feelings towards their realities as a way for them to be active literate beings that strongly contribute to their literacy development and the teaching of writing practices at school.

Accordingly, Hernández (2006) suggests that through the writing of short stories, learners are encouraged to use writing as a powerful tool for genuine communication. Similarly, the author holds the view that writing is not a matter for developing academic or evaluative purposes, but to encourage students to express their voices. From the results of his research, Hernández (2006) reports writing as a process in which students may create their written stories bearing in mind clarity, organization, and style, as well as their own

abilities to organize their thoughts, actions, and motifs. However, as the research study advanced, the author realized that these students incorporated their surrounding world experiences into the writing of their papers. For instance, students portrayed their personal life experiences, taking into account issues like family, friends, and human relationships.

Through the implementation of Hernández's study (2006), based on reading workshops and sensibility in literature, students presented their concepts by using and interpreting literary language, and from the pedagogical intervention emerged two basic results related to the use of students' personal reflections and the use of students' voice as an author. Thus, the participants discovered themselves as writers who were able to produce spontaneous, creative, and personal narratives which attempted to portray their individual realities. In this way, participants considered their inner experiences and conceptions of society in the development and writing of short stories. With this study, the literacy background students deal with to reflect upon their realities when writing becomes apparent. Additionally, there is rewarding evidence of the teacher's concern to encourage students' writing skill as a genuine communication tool.

Likewise, in the search for making writing a more rewarding activity, Ree (2006) aimed to provide students with an alternative form of written communication in order to improve their writing. The use dialogue journals, it was demonstrated, proved an effective means of communication with their teacher, and served to create a bridge of communication in which students were able to express themselves freely about their lives inside and outside school. Through such dialogue journals, students were encouraged to write their journal entries focusing on meaning and interest rather than on form. As a result, students wrote more freely when they selected topics which were related to cartoons, values, family, teachers, academic duties, holidays, and friends. Moreover, this activity allowed students to use language for authentic communication and to increase their involvement in the empowerment of their confidence and language learning. This research concluded that the use of authentic communication paired with writing activities related to children's lives may enrich the writing process and encourage students to write freely in the language classroom.

Undoubtedly, it is apparent that teachers and schools have felt challenged to transform the environment, including material sources, the curriculum itself, and their thoughts towards literacy development as a way to increase children's potentials as cognitive beings. Therefore, children's life stories must be considered as the basic elements in the development of writing activities since this allows the exploration of their social view and

draws upon their conclusions towards their immediate communities and life experiences (Teberosky, in Goodman, 1990).

These types of changes and strategies within the educational setting promote children's meta-cognitive skills, improve their effectiveness in the writing competence as well as provide a critical view concerning socio-cultural features. In the same way, children and teachers become dynamic participants in the construction of knowledge within the learning community (Pontecorvo & Zuccermaglio, in Goodman, 1990). Furthermore, children in this study are able to value the acquisition of new knowledge and the possibilities of interacting with others in the search for sociability and recognition (Maqueo, 2004).

As Goodman (1990) states, "children come to know literacy through their daily and mundane experiences in their particular social, cultural, religious, economic, linguistic, and literate societies" (p. 43). In this way, narratives serve the purpose of exploring these children's environments and precognition towards their own life events due to the fact that narratives open the possibility of embodying a whole situation in which children symbolize a personal social and affective position as regards the registered incident.

For instance, Colombo (2003) discusses narratives as research tools that access the interpretative frameworks that individuals may use to construct their accounts of events and to make sense of their actions. Thus, every experience is interpreted by making use of the context, interactions presented, organization of the experience, and reflection. As a result, the narrative interprets actions and portrays the continuity of the self on a temporal level, that is, past and present actions project themselves to future situations.

Accordingly, the teaching of writing practices must attempt to guide the learners to discover and use writing as an instrument to reflect upon their own thoughts in the process of interpreting the world that embraces them. It is suggested that learners attribute personal meaning to the social learning and use of writing as a social practice (Lerner, 2001). As a result, even their voices may be heard inside or outside of the academic setting. Therefore, academic environments should be designed to explore students' voices, realities, and views about their particular worlds. Thus, students may be instructed through a more critical approach which may help them accomplish their human and citizen tasks with deeper consciousness.

Voice

Voices can be heard when individuals assume a critical role within a family or community, but the question remains as to how learners make their voices heard.

Voices begin with the nature of opinions and views towards a topic with arguments and reflection (Wink, 2001). It requires courage and conviction to develop ideas and convey a particular message. However, speaking out about ideas that have undergone the process of reflection becomes a difficult task in traditional societies whose change is often associated with pain.

Within the field of critical pedagogy, voice, knowledge, and transformation are seen as locally-situated, historical, meaningful, personal understandings and practices for living (Freire, 1973). Therefore, within the educational institution, curriculum becomes negotiated, challenged, and personalized to give students a position among a social group in order to attain learning and gain voice by means of reflexivity within their own experiences (Colombo, 2003). By gaining voice, students transform their own ways of thinking, assume a more critical view rewarding their personal experiences, and feel more aware and challenged to assume all social issues that may be involved in their life stories.

Capello's research (2006) suggests that children's engagement within a writing workshop provided them with the opportunity to construct identity and voices through writing. Furthermore, the author reports that the classroom environment must be constructed as to influence students' voices for the opportunity to explore their own intentions and personal expressions through the writing of personal texts. Through her research, Capello has demonstrated that children's social identities are deeply related to children's voice in writing. As such, it may be concluded that voice is viewed as dynamic and changing as it develops in the writing of texts and contributes to the expression of personal experience.

Conscientization

In the opinion of Wink (2001), conscientization is a synonym of knowing. When individuals are aware of their knowledge, they have used the power of voice to make their reflection valid and tangible. Therefore, some sort of confidence appears concerning what they believe, act, and think. For this reason, conscientization seeks to promote the comprehension of life incidents and why that matter affects the learners themselves and those around them.

Conscientization is born when a person finds the power of his or her own voice in regards to life experiences (Wright, 1997). In the same way, there is no conscientization if reflection and criticality are not involved in learning. Students do not only live conscientization at school, but also from the social awareness they live with everyday situations.

Conscientization means freedom and knowledge, and children achieve consciousness of reality as soon as they approach it and assume a critical view towards it. That is to say, humans must transcend their immediate realities and critique the facts in order to reach an advanced level of cognition. When writing and revising, learners tend to include their perceptions, yet it is when reading that they re-interpret the facts and words and visualize a new consciousness of what they have lived and the implications in the lives or thoughts of others.

To experience conscientization we must uncover reality, which means analyze it in action and reflection (Freire, 1973). That is to say that we must overcome the traditional face of society, and to change the perceptions of it. Hence, we come to know reality as it truly is. Sometimes we live life as it comes, but we do not stop and look at it critically, at least, to assess our decisions and actions. Through writing, we might be able to do such a task and go back to construct our awareness about lived experiences which turn into our deepest personal features and determinations in society.

The more the individual reflects on society, the more he or she seeks to transform it (Freire, 1973). Concerning this premise, literacy practices are important elements that provide the learners with the ability to be much more connected to the world. As such, being literate gives the best opportunity to guarantee a further comprehension of reality, and empowers humans to change the context they are part of. Thus, the learner becomes his or her own social instructor.

As demonstrated in Schaafsma's research (1989), children feel the need to communicate their stories not only to make knowledge on their own but within a community. Therefore, they write about their own life events in order to portray their world. That is, through writing, students narrate and learn about themselves which means they become empowered participants of the community able to look at it critically. In this perspective, stories represent these children's selves as a means to shape relationships with others in the community.

Social Sensitivity

Every person has a history which consists of both rewards and negative experiences; alternatively, their history presents social, cultural, and personal issues that mold their personalities, thoughts, behavior, and determination in life (Goodman, 1990). Therefore, these elements constitute pivotal data in literacy development due to

the fact that people feel more comfortable using known facts or familiar information to incorporate themselves in their culture and learning processes to look for a transformation of their realities.

In fact, we cannot consider any transformation without reflection. Students come to know and explore their immediate world by giving meaning to the experiences they have as well as to value those that introduce them to learning (Quintero, 2003). For this reason, they are called to change their minds and assume a more critical view as 'knowers' in their societies by means of their literate potential.

This process of reflection and transformation for the benefit of the society is what Freire (1973) refers to as humanization. For every educational act to be worthy, reflection has to be included in the process and, in this case, literacy. Specifically, to value the learning and teaching processes at school, educators must take into account the conditions in which individuals live and their social and cultural context as pure origins in the individuals' action in the world.

Antes, Andersen, and Reiter (1972) provide the evidence of how a group of racially-mixed elementary school children perceive their position as it is defined by society. The authors determine disadvantaged children's concern with an emphasis on the social issues in their environment, and examine the extent to which opinion prejudice and race prejudice affect these children's belief systems. Through their investigation, these investigators became aware of the adequacy of materials and environment according to children's needs, personal life situations, and estimated a social vision of the school curricular plan.

It is only along this order that people discover a critical spirit which enables their learning abilities and actions to transform their realities. As a result, every man and woman is encouraged to be an active writer, actor, and director in the maintenance of their current society. In other words, they are faced with confronting and estimating all living realities by making their voices heard.

Children's Life Stories and Narratives

Narrating is one of the basic human activities in which we express our ideas in our own words; additionally, we use this elaborated ability to indicate how consciousness towards any topic represents an active operation in the learning process as well as in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, narrating permits humans to explore their own feelings, thoughts, and intentions as a way of creating awareness of their social

behavior (McEwan & Egan, 1995). Thus, narration constitutes a rich action that provides the individuals with the required elements to transmit their views and, consequently, turn into the transformation of a personal experience.

The natural tendency toward narration is declared not to be a way to specify the facts that surround humans' lives; rather the specific medium people can use to make their thoughts, sentiments, and perceptions comprehensible for themselves and others. Even though the act of narrating has been understood as an oral skill, it is by writing that it shows the specificity of details and the capacity to interweave and extract the most representative information to make the story a rewarding piece of the human living history.

According to Rincón De La Rosa (2003), when we write narratives, there is a clear indication of a narrator who, by means of a monologue, describes how a being lives and overcomes several situations which interweave in order to achieve an expected result. In this process, different meanings, intentions, social components, and incidents may produce a comprehensible and communicable text. For this reason, it is relevant to state the way humans undeniably experience a process of careful selection of the information to guarantee that their message has been accurately conveyed.

Accordingly, the narration of episodes portrays the relationship humans establish with the world around them (Ricoeur, 1999). That is to say, it is through narration that we represent our reality as a means to be an active part within it. In fact, we assume a role which expresses the way personal experiences are perfect pieces in the development of the nature of the social being in any environment. By all means, narration becomes one of the most common ways humans interact and constitutes a fundamental activity that leads people to socialize (Adam & Lorda, 1999).

In the opinion of McEwan and Egan (1995), the way the situational facts interlace with the acts of human beings represents how a narrative constructs a very complete connection between its contents and human life. Thus, a narrative not only indicates people's perceptions, expectations, or ideas, but also how those factors are seen from a particular individual's perspective, within his or her own life context. Naturally, this narrative structure indicates that the history of human consciousness has been constructed and developed within the frame of subjects as thinking beings from infancy.

According to Ochs and Capps (1996), narratives serve three specific purposes as they are a means to help individuals make sense of the experience. First, narratives work inseparably with the child's self-understanding to promote an unfolding reflective awareness of the individual's place in the world. Secondly, narratives provide individuals

with the sense of their past and future as fundamentals of their life process and, finally, the authors view narratives as a two-dimensional tool which embraces individuals' temporality and point of view. Therefore, by means of narratives, individuals signify their personal and collective understandings and, additionally, construct present and projected views of their world.

It is also relevant to stress the social bond between narratives and the representation of society. As reported by Sigrun Gudmundsdottir, in McEwan and Egan (1995), values and narratives are interrelated instruments that help humans interpret and appraise their surrounding world. Thus, narrative turns into an experience organizer.

Fitzgerald, in Muth (1991), discusses several components that characterize a text as a narrative. Among those are the characters, environment, aim, plan, action, plot, flashback, pre-figuration, social interaction, repetition, and end point. Such pivotal elements accomplish two tasks in the construction of the narratives. First, they provide significant rhetorical devices that fulfill the text content, but particularly, connect the reader to the social sensitivity and environment of the author or narrator.

In this perspective, the narration comes to be a means to reflect upon the humans' personal experiences as a way to sequence life events. Similarly, a narration brings the possibility of using past experiences and projecting them in the future. In fact, a narrative re-describes human action, which is undeniably used to assume a probable natural transformation of life events (Adam & Lorda, 1999).

Thus, Shulman, in McEwan and Egan (1995), explains how educators can guide their pupils to narrativize the experience. He states that when we use narration as a way to learn, we assign meaning to the events and provide them with coherence, integrity, width, and conclusion. What is more, we confer on those events a moral nature, which certainly deals with the social system that encircles a lived experience. In addition, the author declares that the dimensions of interpretation, reflection, and transformation within the narrative inspire humans to describe their reality through written texts that acquire meaning in order to comprehend the world in many distinct ways and communicate new ideas to the others. Therefore, narratives become real texts to teach and learn, taking into account socio-cultural features that encompass individuals' closest communities and particular situational facts (Witherell, in McEwan & Egan, 1995).

Literacy practices must be appreciated in educational settings with a social perspective and teachers must conceive of reality as the core of their teaching practices. Freire (1973) states that literacy is the means by which humans give account to their

common reality to reflect, transform, and liberate others' minds to an open and intelligent world. Thus, students must face their realities in order to empower their consciousness and to assume a critical view of the personal experiences in their lives.

As reported by Mongui (2007), narratives allow individuals to establish coherent connections among life events. From her investigation, the author concluded that students accounted for relevant events of their life stories by recalling topics related to their culture and realities, made sense of their personal experience by means of reflection, and exposed their beliefs and understandings of their displacement conditions. Additionally, through the use of narrative, students emphasized the use of voice as a transformative agent within their particular social context as well as the empowerment to make future decisions that might affect their lives.

As demonstrated, language is the means to connect the self to the world. Our personalities are shaped by the events that we have experienced and are also transformed by the social connection we have to the world around us. Therefore, teachers should transform their classes into a laboratory in which children may simulate the life experiences both in and outside of the school setting.

As soon as teachers provide students with more social issues directly aligned with their reality, most students begin to see the value of learning and, as a result, their literacy processes may be enhanced. Such literacy processes cannot be just a language subject or topic of the week, but the way we read the world outside in math, science, technology, arts, and so on. Thus, learners can accomplish their task efficiently, and truly begin to appreciate learning.

Research Design

Type of Study

This investigation has been carried out using a qualitative, interpretive case study in which children's narratives were seen as the means to account for their social sensitivity. The way children read their world provides information about how they make sense of their life experiences and social implications mirrored in their texts. This is one of the main reasons which demonstrates the value of social research, since more relevant learning comes from the social environments that we are immersed in.

The qualitative research paradigm "involves observing what people do and trying to understand and explain what is going on" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 82).

Therefore, a qualitative perspective may help examine and understand the issues that are enclosed in students' life experiences. Additionally, qualitative research can facilitate the completion of the picture of what students' narratives contain in regards to their social sensitivity. In this sense, "this qualitative research is aimed at understanding the meaning children have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and their experience within it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 117).

An interpretive case study is designed to give account of specific personal experiences that students may deal with, and also of the many aspects that shape their understanding of their world. Thus, this interpretive research study attempts to access children's narratives and uncover the meanings participants assign to them. In brief, the case study method allows investigators to hold on to the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2002), which, in this investigation, are the social issues mirrored in children's texts. In consideration of these parameters, this case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' socio-critical dimension of writing and children's meanings in regards to their environment (Merriam, 1998).

Research Setting

This research project was carried out in a Catholic institution that follows Ignacio de Loyola's philosophy in order to educate children holistically, taking into account their human dimensions and potentialities as lifelong learners. In addition, in this institution, the teaching practices are based on Personalized Education that take into account the person as a particular human being. In this perspective, students during their school life, have the opportunity of enriching their principles of creativity, socialization, singularity, and transcendence which search for articulating academic and personal life experiences.

Furthermore, the PEI (*Educational Institutional Project*) is dedicated to developing students' holistic education and is based on the constructivist approach in which students use their funds of knowledge to build up new knowledge. Thus, learners in this institution select relevant information, organize it coherently, and integrate it to increase or improve their learning (Mauri, in Maqueo, 2004). The constructivist view states that students acquire knowledge when being active in the process of granting meaning to academic contents through a process of selecting relevant information, organizing it coherently, and integrating it when writing their narratives and participating in conferences.

It is relevant to point out that this institution's philosophy, coupled with the personalized education approach, are main tenets to the teaching of each academic subject.

That is to say that even though each subject matter has its own program, these values and beliefs are found across the curriculum. Thus, teachers are highly trained to value the school's philosophy as the core of education and know how to integrate this philosophy in each subject area program. Furthermore, English worksheets are designed following a scheme according to the *Ignacio pedagogic paradigm* (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation), which suggests the development of activities according to students' learning objectives.

Thus, in the area of English, teachers design eight guides during the academic year, one per month, and two per term. Each guide focuses on a specific grammar structure with its corresponding communicative function contained in the area program under the principles of EFL teaching. As a result, teachers use the guide as the basis for their planning, but supplement the classroom work with other activities related to the topic. The English area opted to follow the communicative approach and works under the standards of the Common European Framework. These two components seek to give students the possibility to interact with other people around the world and therefore language is used for real purposes.

Participants

For this research project, nineteen fifth-grade students took part in the in-structional activities. As the research study advanced, ten participants from the group of nineteen were selected under criteria defined for data analysis purposes only. Due to the fact that nine students could not attend all class sessions when this project was implemented and did not submit the eight narratives, the ten remaining students were selected as primary participants for the data analysis since they were involved in the project in its entirety. These students were between ten and eleven years old, and the majority of them had been at school since pre-kinder. Since that time, they have received and attended English lessons from six to eight hours per week. Additionally, the first three years at pre-school were designed to provide the students with a large quantity of oral input; hence, they were skilled in comprehension and expression, specifically within the areas of listening, speaking and reading. However, it was not until they entered elementary school that they started to construct written texts.

The students also received instruction in English in the subjects of science, art, and computers. English was studied in its own setting for an additional six hours per week with activities to develop all four linguistic skills. These upper-class students'

interests were related to technology, mythology, sports, animals, superheroes, music, and current TV programs.

In the beginning of this study, the students' focus of attention was on the instrumental and mechanical dimensions of writing. However, it was by exploring their life experiences that their writing ability could be encouraged and also their awareness of the world around them.

Instruments

Children's Written Narratives

These organized written texts involve life stories (McEwan & Egan, 1995), and include children's feelings, facts, ideas, fears, and hopes. Such texts permit children to communicate who they are, what they do, how they feel, and why they follow certain lines of action or others. In this sense, narratives present the opportunity for children to tell their own life experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Therefore, children's life stories contain remarkable experiences in regards to social issues, and show how children interpret the world around them.

In this sense, the written narratives for this study constitute an instrument for gathering primary data. These are developed after engaging students in different steps in order to provide them with an appropriate sensitive environment. It is by these written narratives that students reveal their particular life situations and portray social issues that concern or surround them. Therefore, it is very feasible that by means of these written narratives, children may depict values and social themes that, in turn, become the data for interpretation (Gudmundsdottir, in McEwan & Egan, 1995).

Conferences

Through this process, children have the chance to return to their own work, reflect upon its meaning and make sense of the social aspects that surround their reality by means of a dialogue. With this technique, valuable information can be uncover since it permitted to clarify and add information they wanted to express in their narratives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Within this technique, there is also the possibility of sharing their works and discussing them with a partner or the teacher as a means to make sense of social issues of which they sometimes are not aware. Thus, when children exchange their texts, there

is a mutual reply and the option of giving meaning to their realities as well as to reflect upon them. As a result, the students are able to achieve some level of conscientization of the particular events in their own environment. Therefore, children come to understand that conversations give them the opportunity to reflect, and they recognize their living conditions as part of their own (Haroutunian-Gordon, in McEwan & Egan, 1995). Hence, the objective of the conferences is raising children's awareness about social issues.

It is through this technique that the pedagogical and the formal aspects of the language converge in this study, even though this research project intends to implement an innovative genre of writing which deals with the development of written texts related to social awareness. Furthermore, it is by conferencing that children's voices will be heard in order to make sense of the socio-critical dimension in their texts.

Validation of Instruments

The two instruments for data collection, the narrative format and the conference questions, were developed to give account of the social issues that surrounded students' life stories and their social sensitivity towards writing. For this reason, in the narrative format pictures related to the human senses and sentences associated with them were included. Such pictures and ideas were aimed at eliciting some students' vocabulary and expressions bearing in mind some event of their lives, which might help them in the construction of the narrative. The questions suggested for the conference were dependent upon on what could be portrayed in the children's narratives.

Taking into account these initial formats presented, these two instruments were used with four fifth graders who did not belong to the group of participants selected for this research project. Students were asked to write about a particular event of their lives, the format and the purpose were generally explained, and after, the students wrote their own texts. Sometime after, the four students and the researcher met again for a conference session. The intention was to explore a bit more about their understanding in regards to specific information from their narratives, and also to clarify some concerns that had arisen from reading the narratives they wrote.

From the piloting of these two instruments relevant features emerged. In regards to the narrative format, the space provided was limited and did not permit children to give great details of the particular event they were about to write, either in the text content or length. Hence, the amount of information registered in their narratives could not constitute sufficient data for exploring their social view. In relation with the

conference session, the sort of questions posed showed an intention to clarify ideas from the text; nevertheless, such questions should have been dedicated to help children make sense of what they wrote. From this point of view, students might have had more reasons or criteria to expand their own knowledge. Besides, these four children had not had the exposure to a writing environment which might permit them access to their social view of the world around them in a sensible way.

Nevertheless, it was by the transformation and enlargement of the narrative format, the construction of a writing environment, the reading and interpretation of these children's narratives, and the conferences sessions, that these instruments allowed me to gather the essential and relevant data for identifying the social issues children depicted in the construction of narratives, and in addition, examining their voices.

Instructional Design

The instructional design has been developed under the principles of critical pedagogy. This pedagogical approach embraces a rising of the consciousness, a critique of society, as valuing students' voices, as honoring students' needs, values, and individuality, as a hopeful, active pedagogy (Wink, 2000). Thus, the teaching methodology underlies open-ended dialogues, in which many answers come from children's experiences. Therefore, language is not only a tool but also a process that enables students to think more deeply and critically. Taking into account all these features, it is relevant to state that the tenets of critical pedagogy interweave with the philosophy at this particular institution. To illustrate, the school PEI is aimed at educating people that can contribute to the world outside to build a new Colombia, and subsequently, educate students to be critical in a way that permits a plausible transformation in society supported by their significant ideas. Moreover, this pedagogical intervention aligns with the tenets of critical pedagogy as it facilitates children in the portrayal of social issues and promotes reflection through narratives.

To begin this process, there is a survey supported and introduced by a brief speech given by the president of the school, Father J. J. The speech is dedicated to contextualize students on what life stories mean. Father J. J. usually explains that life is like a river, with rapids, obstacles, rocks, little waterfalls, etc., but all of them, part of the river, and part of life. So, he uses this comparison to encourage students to understand their life situations more comprehensively. For this reason, I invite him to give a social atmosphere to the project, and subsequently, use this contextualized social environment,

to guide students fill out a survey. They include the most representative life stories and events as a means to establish the topics of the narratives they write about.

From this point, I have the basic themes students have portrayed in their produced narratives. As soon as I have some clarity regarding the topics of the narratives, the preliminary phase begins. This phase is based on five main stages: first, students and I decorate the classroom taking into account their life experiences' photos or allegoric posters; second, students are informed about how the activities are developed (narratives and conferences); third, there is a negotiation step as regards the access of their texts, fourth, students are given with some tools and resources (program, dictionary, emotion faces page, etc.) to enrich their written productions, so that they account for an adequate completion of those; and fifth, they know about the scheduled phases of the project instruments as well as the nature of the study.

In this respect, the activities of the pedagogical intervention are developed in three phases: *preliminary, in-action, and culmination*. In the preliminary phase, agreements are established, discussed and negotiated. Then, in the in-action phase, students use different resources and tools to produce their narratives. They are also provided with a sensitive environment decorated and supported by sensitizing activities, strategies, and resources at the beginning of each session which can be images, sounds, readings, dilemmas, video segments, guests, photo albums, toys, etc., To accomplish this, the ambiance provided provokes students to pre-write their texts taking into account the first page of the narrative format which is based on the five human senses. After a short time, this pre-writing task helps in the construction of the narrative, that is, students use this motivation to draft and write a more complete text.

In the third phase, students hand in their revised narratives and some other questions are discussed. In the last session of conference, the aim is to make sense of the social impact that surrounds students' life stories. As a result, by means of reflection, awareness and a critical attitude may emerge. Hence, the objective of the conference sessions is to lead children to a liberating vision of their social world around them via their narratives and life stories appraisals.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data collected for this study was solicited from *The River of life* writing center in which children participated actively in the process of creating and maintaining a sensitive environment for the writing of their narratives. For some weeks, narratives

were written and conferences recorded. Thus, such instruments provided relevant information in order to determine the social issues which are portrayed in children's narratives within a sensitive writing environment. Therefore, narratives were the primary source of information in which social issues were displayed and conferences were considered the means students used to expand major ideas regarding the issues portrayed in the writing of the narratives.

In order to answer the research question, the gathered data was triangulated in three ways: by theory, alternative instrument, and by participants. After collecting the children's narratives as a main data source for this research project, a matrix was organized in which each student appeared with his or her eight narratives, the title they selected, the theory related to specific issues revealed in each narrative, and some codes and labels which emerged from the topics students managed within their writings. This was implemented during the reading of each narrative, in which text interpretation was necessary to achieve some interpretation of the issues they portrayed in their texts. Then, the student conferences were recorded and transcribed following a certain protocol that helped to expand the initial interpretation for achieving a better understanding of the previous list of themes that emerged after reading the children's narratives. Thus, individualized questionnaires were given to each participant and those case-specific issues were expanded on by students through conferencing. Subsequently, I read the transcribed conferences were read and specific themes were identified from the response. The list of themes present in the questionnaires was compared to those in the students' narratives to establish commonalities. These commonalities were grouped into patterns which displayed a list of items presented in the data collected from both instruments. As a result, the nature and quality of the information gathered and the list of patterns to determine the categories to inform this research study was taken into account. After the reading of the data, one main category emerged: *Children's realities: mediation in the interaction with the world, the appraisement of life experiences and a socio-critical dimension of writing.*

In this category, children make sense of their realities by means of their texts in which family dynamics, their understanding of social relationships and cultural issues, and human behavior and attitudes regarding explicit social experiences arise. Furthermore, children make sense of the facts that surround their life experiences and expose the meaning construction of the specific context. Furthermore, children make their voices heard by presenting the social and affective connection they are aware of regarding the incidents they write about and their reflection upon it as well.

Some social experiences that appear in these children's narratives relate to birth, travelling, death, accidents, assuming changes and new life stages, their participation in a specific group and personal achievements, religious sacraments and celebrations, human relationships, human behavior and attitudes, family dynamics, and the exposure to a different culture. More than simply portraying their experiences within their narratives, these students state their viewpoints towards these topics or issues as components of their socio-critical dimension of writing by interpreting some symbolic features that may modify or transform the situation on a personal level. Therefore, in the next samples, children not only discuss specific moments in their lives, but additionally, they reflect upon explicit social issues impregnated by the way they interact with others. That is to say that, human relationships are implicit topics at any human experience crossroads.

To start, Ja in his seventh narrative describes the arrival of his brother to the family. He indicates the impact that this birth has had on him and the quality of the relationship with his parents. However, in his second narrative, Ja had already pointed out that he was really hoping for a brother and he experienced happiness as soon as he knew his brother was coming. However, his cousin warned and advised him about the way this birth would affect his life. Even having a brother after being an only child for about ten years constitutes a huge emotional challenge; his cousin influenced Ja to become unenthusiastic about the situation. Furthermore, Ja depicts the changes he started to experience which transmit melancholy and some depression. After communicating this unfortunate situation to Ja's parents, there have been changes in his family dynamics which contribute to making him feel like an important component of his family circle. Nevertheless, he still thinks his brother's role in his family is not as positive as he at first foresaw.

To this point, Ja has mentioned how his brother's appearance in the family has generated many changes, largely in his parents' attention to Ja's necessities. However, this particular case can be considered as the expansion of other student participants' beliefs that have also experienced the arrival of a new sibling or cousin. Some of these children assert that these births have significantly altered their roles among family dynamics. These roles may include, assuming new responsibilities, feeling in some way replaced, assuming a new role, and establishing a relationship with this new person. In this perspective, some children assume conflict as basic element in the development of awareness of their reality and find out strategies to face this particular situation and adjust to their social role within a family (Fitzgerald, in Muth, 1991):

Thus, these children show that having a close relative means that they have permanent company throughout their lives, and surely, a supportive friend. There is even a change in their parents' behavior which a struggle for these students. They are conscious of this new person's role in their family, but much more in their particular lives. Perhaps, accepting that they are no longer the focus of their parent's attention encourages them to establish new social relationships since they are faced with being members of a community, in this case the family circle. Thus, narratives contribute to encouraging children's capacity to debate about inquiries and life problems due to the fact that their function consists of making our actions intelligible not only to us but to others (McEwan & Egan, 1995).

When Jg expanded on his description of his brother's birth, he declared how he at first was happily expectant, but afterwards he mentions that he feels there is difference in the requests between him and his brother's behavior. At the same time, Jg recognized the advantages in how his parents have educated them signifying that the student has a clear awareness of his family intentions for raising them the way they have done. Additionally, Sj supports this viewpoint by declaring how each family dynamic represents the way they express their love, care, and support one another.

On account of this, these participants have realized their potential to establish relationships with others and their realities, which as implies that intelligence, a critical spirit, and the knowledge to act motivate them to react to the demands of society (Freire, 1973). Thus, children may become much more empowered and aware of their living facts as the road they have to track to be free or literate and read the world as it is presented to one's life.

On the topic of confidence, Am comments in her narrative "my life in Bucaramanga," how moving from there provoked an uncomfortable situation with her mom due to the fact that Am lived in Bogotá for about six months with her grandma. Most likely, the physical separation at the age of six deeply impacted her mother-daughter relationship. Nowadays, she accepts that their relationship does not allow for the affectivity she would like. During the conference, Am suggested that the relationship between her mother and herself is not trustful due to the fact that her mom does not believe her, and also because Am senses a preference towards her brother's behavior and attitudes which she finds inappropriate.

As demonstrated in the conference with Am, she and her mom do not have a good relationship as there is neither trust nor comprehension from one another. As Adam

and Lorda (1999) contend, narratives provide insight into human actions, correctness, and ethics. Am finds a huge difference in the way her mom treats her own kids and she cannot identify the reasons for which her mom acts that way. Thus, it is observable that there is no communication between them, as she has already referred in her narrative: *communication is broken*. They do not listen to one another in order to solve their problems, they simply act frightened and ignore the situation in general.

Other cases have discussed the protection of parents and the intention of children to feel older, and consequently, to have rights to feel much freer; and second, the understanding of confidence as fundamentals in the establishment of good and sane relationships.

Children also convey confidence when they write about travelling. This is demonstrated in the example from Jg (*When I overturn in the car of my grandfather*) when he and his family had a car accident, from which he learned that when he begins to drive, he must be careful when he takes curves on the road. Additionally, Jg and Sj report in the conference the confidence they have in their fathers' driving knowledge and skills.

Taking into account what the students discussed regarding confidence, children at this stage of their lives feel that there is a discrepancy between their parents and their needs. However, they also see confidence as a basic issue in a family to foster security and respect towards others' skills. Now, let us consider a different stage of these children, who reported their school initiation in their narratives. That is the case of Ja who, through his narrative, explains how this specific issue of his life brought awareness to his behavior at school which has to do with becoming more independent as he grows up.

Thus, by means of his narrative, Ja discusses how the experience was a rewarding situation in his life as it suggests that he is growing up. Furthermore, this school initiation implies socialization, separation, and human development. Therefore, the narrative gives Ja the opportunity to understand a fundamental situation of life as well as re-create a vital life experience to find out its pertinence in the process of his life. It also provides him with a social view regarding his family dynamics.

Studying at a school like S. B. provides students with the opportunity to participate in immersions by travelling to other countries. However, this opportunity is also supported by their economic advantages which give them the chance to better their English level or their cultural knowledge of the countries they visit. To this point, the social issues that are presented in these children's narratives have to do with the development of responsibility, the privilege of travelling and the identification of cultural issues at these places they visit.

First, Jg in his narrative *When I Went to Canada*, describes the whole experience as a way to interact with the world, friends, and another culture, but focuses on the acquirement of liberty as synonymous of responsibility for his own actions. Thus, the narrative led him to rescue from the experience particular results as learning, making friends and acquiring personal aptitudes.

Now, the opportunity of traveling becomes a much more reflective exercise. That is the case of Dc, who described in his narrative the experience of visiting Canada. First, he identifies cultural issues that are seen as a huge difference in comparison to our culture, and also demonstrates that he values the opportunity to travel to another country as a specific advantage he has had in his life experience. He considers what travelling and witnessing a different cultural dynamics implies, that is a privilege and a model which our society could actually follow to be improved and recovered.

Hence, Dc reflects upon learning about another culture as a critical and creative acquisition of this human experience. As a matter of fact, Dc discovers his critical spirit by creating, re-creating, and revealing the cultural differences he discovers. In this perspective, it is permissible to say that Dc is cultivating his own vision of culture due to the fact that he is now able to be critical after his travelling experience and being capable of contrasting cultural issues regarding his knowledge about both countries. To be precise, with this experience, Dc had the courage to question our cultural roles and privileges we have which we do not value.

Other social activities that permit children to interact with the world and praise their life stories include celebrations and becoming members of a group or team. These students are very used to celebrating important events with family and friends and, at the same time, receiving presents which for them have a valuable meaning. By celebrating, children socialize efficiently and feel as though they are an important part of their families as well as significant beings in their friendship circles. Then, celebration guarantees the social position among a community and provides children with tools to shape their personalities, interests and personal goals; also they signify through presents (mediators) a related message in the way they interact with others.

Through these narratives, the students unveiled the parents' tendency to reward children after obtaining or achieving personal goals. These children's parents have good economic resources, so they use them to praise their children's results as methods that make children have the picture of loving parents who recognize efforts and who compensate their achievements. Another social advantage these children have is their

inclusion in a group which motivates them to achieve specific goals. This was apparent in Da's narrative in which he described the dream of being the chess league representative.

Another social issue that resulted from the writing of narratives deals with their holy communion and their view about religion. It is relevant to mention that these students study at a catholic school which, in third grade, provides students with a class destined to prepare for this sacrament. Therefore, the writing of narratives gave these students the opportunity to write about this particular life story, but additionally, explore their voice regarding religion, their spiritual dimension and their standpoints about Jesus and God.

To this point, these children are still constructing their ideas about religion which has been configured by their family beliefs and their preparation at school. For the time being, they now feel that they are closer to God which represents a personal gain based on pardon, grace, gratitude, and internal and spiritual changes. However, a different opinion during the conference with Jg exemplifies how children now make their own inquiries about all this input and start to analyze religious issues more critically.

With Jg's opinion, there is a critical approximation to reality, which is the definition of conscientization (Freire, 1973). His reflection upon reality makes him discover that he is not only in the reality but with it. This ability to discern what is proper of humans allows him to value the existence of a God and also establishes relationships with him.

As it has been demonstrated, children have used their narratives as means to praise every moment in their life stories as funds in their human development and awareness towards their reality. Therefore, through the construction of meaning, the establishment of social and affective connections and a personal reflection upon the experience, children start to praise each one of the facts that have surrounded their life stories since they have awakened their social awareness.

The praise of life experience indicates how children construct meaning in their life stories by means of their narratives as a learning condition understood as one of the most elaborated strategies of thought and literacy (Hunter & Egan, 1995). Through narratives, children make sense of their ideas with their own words, enrich their viewpoints, and gain their voices to reflect upon lived events which, in turn, become learning situations. Hence, these learning situations permit children to notice the context in which they find themselves and to achieve some level of consciousness regarding the social environment around them. Thus, children may feel able to extol each life story as a meaningful experience in their lives as well as they value the experience reflective-ly (Colombo, 2003). In Freire's (1973) words, humans are situational-beings who are

immersed in space and temporal conditions which permit them to reflect upon their existence critically.

In regards to the context, Sa titled his narrative "The Mudanze: The Real Story" to inform about the experience of moving from one house to another. He writes about this social change and supports his ideas responding to the challenges posed by his new life context. Thus, his new context demands from him reflection, organization, and action to become not only "adapted" to the reality and the others but "incorporated."

Sa claims he is scared of such change since he was used to a reality and how he, at the moment, was supposed to face the implications this moving had in his routine, affectivity, and close reality. Additionally, he mentioned people involved in the situation considering the establishment of relationships has been seen as a hard social task that requires time, dedication, and a critical look at these new people's interests or habits. For this particular narrative, Sa seemed to be worried about having new friends and socializing with them, situation that eventually did become possible. In this way, Sa accepted the move much more easily. To develop his view, Sa expanded upon his narrative during a conference. He asserted how positive this change has been in his social life due to the fact that it has provided him with new friends and his social circle has been enriched with kids of his own age. Hence, he has more chances to be in contact with others which seemed to be his fear when considering the moving.

Social changes constitute one of the most difficult situations people have to face. Am experienced this situation, bringing as a consequence a loss of trust between her mom and her. In her narrative, she expresses how the change has had a negative result for her, not only for the location but also for her leisure activities and the quality of her mother-daughter relationship.

In the conference, Am remarks on how difficult it was to become accustomed to a new city and new habits. She describes the settings in order to be fully explicit of the meaning she wants to construct in regards to her moving as well as her view of the relationship between her mom and her. Through conferencing with Am, a personal construction of the context that surrounded her life story has been demonstrated, but moreover, she draws her conclusions not only from the written text but also from the context and the experience in which the situation occurred. For this reason, it is evident that context constitutes one of the most important aspects children utilize for describing stories of their lives. In fact, children do not only enrich their texts with a simple list of events but they also provide their narratives with a detailed portrayal of the environ-

mental and situational factors of their particular human life (McEwan & Egan, 1995). As such, children take into consideration the social factors in which they are enclosed as elemental issues that mold their living situation in one way or another. It seems that they truly have to consider the context to be aware of the events they have faced.

In this research study, children clearly articulate their life experience, their emotions and their reflection since it is possible to observe what they think and feel in order to learn something about themselves (Proffitt, 1992). In fact, humans learn by means of reflecting upon past actions that encompass their life stories. Even past events have a structured cognitive connection between themselves; they do make sense shortly after humans reflect upon them, and lately, shape the sequence of events into a narrative (McEwan & Egan, 1995).

To praise any life experience, there is always a place for social and affective connection. According to McEwan and Egan (1995), when children write their narratives, without paying attention to the topic, human feelings are not entirely absent. Therefore, there is always an internal motion that inspires the writer by a desire of acting, an objective to reach, or the assumption of a sentiment provided by the situational incident (Adam & Lorda, 1999). To illustrate, Sa in his narrative *When my cousin born*, comments on the way he interacted with his cousin to establish a good relationship, even when at the beginning he was not happy with his cousin's arrival in the family. He gave himself the opportunity to value his experience and recognize his feelings for his cousin:

In the beginning, Sa described his cousin's birth as a negative experience because this fact moved his family's attention to his cousin. However, Sa gave himself the opportunity to interact with his cousin and, consequently, experienced the feeling of having a cousin which permitted him to count on someone (at least to play); even though sometimes they had differences and argued. Therefore, in the conference he explained the way he transformed his feelings towards his cousin from jealousy to love. Thus, his intention in the narrative was not to say something about a topic, but to express himself through his own discourse.

Through writing, children are able to raise their feelings, discover their voices and articulate their ideas (White & Arndt, 1991). For instance, in his narrative, Jg points out his feelings concerning his relationship with his dad and which, similarly, he expanded upon in his conference.

In Jg's situation, it is observable how frustrated and hurt he feels because of the way he has been treated by his dad. He sees a difference towards the relationship

between his father and his brother. Therefore, by means of his narrative, he has the courage to express his voice, admitting his love for his dad even though their relationship is not as good as he wishes. However, his voice is the expression he uses to paint a picture of his reality, his feelings and his needs. Further, he admits his dad's role, love, and devotion to his family and the pursuit of creating a better family, even though, Jg does not comprehend the unequal behavior his father has with his own children.

Affective issues are mainly connected to the interaction we have with people in our reality. The way we view relationships makes us experience different feelings which we assume as either positive or negative. Both require an exposure of our voice to make others understand how we comprehend and express our social sensitivity. Thus, we are allowed to search for a language with which we convey exact meanings of our social awareness regarding our own realities. In Mitchell's (1996) words, generating ideas in a different language is a thinking activity in which writing about life experiences makes the writers shape their meanings in new ways (Ree, 2006). For this purpose, children in their narratives are challenged since they have to translate their feelings, images, or ideas into words in the target language.

To recapitulate, in their narratives, children portray the different social issues they face in their quotidian life as the assumption of new roles, their family dynamics, their economic advantages, their personal interests or needs, their feelings towards a particular situation and the way they read the world that surrounds them. By means of these narratives, children express their viewpoints but in addition, they assert the implications these life stories have helped them in the construction of a more conscientious view of their society. Therefore, these children have developed a social sensitivity regarding their life situations, consequences, the impact on their lives, and their thoughts in the establishment of a better reality.

As such, through narratives and conferences, children expanded their personal reflections towards specific issues of their lives, which permitted them to achieve some degree of conscientization as a test of their reality (Freire, 1973). In this sense, children have kept awake their reality not only because they have faced it but because they have taken action and reflection from the circumstances presented as fundamentals of their living process. As a result, this dialectical practice encourages children to transform their world by assuming future events in a more critical and literate style.

As Freire (1973) states, humans decode their reality in order to make sense of it. For this research study, children have used their life stories as a pretext to enlarge and

interpret their world vision which helps them tackle their life situation with a different viewpoint and action. Hence, children are able to reflect upon their life conditions and comprehend that through reflection, there is a meditated explanation of such living facts which now give account of their places within a social community. For this reason, narratives acquire this relevant status, due to the fact that the events attain a temporary sequence and by reflection, children make sense of these facts (McEwan & Egan, 1995). On account of this, narratives are a valuable transformative instrument, which allows us to comprehend the world in new ways and helps us communicate new ideas to others. Certainly, narratives do not only intend to inform students but also transform them.

The intention with the writing of the narratives was not to say something about any particular life event; it was to give children the space to give meaning to themselves in their own discourse (Ricoeur, 1999). In fact, with narratives, children had the option to look inside their feelings and uncover their inner voice to claim their pains, thoughts, needs, and opinions regarding their life situations. Incidentally, these narratives were means to make children be aware of their surrounding world and consequently, value their experiences reflectively.

Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The intention of this study was to identify the social issues children depicted in the writing of their narratives and explore and describe their understandings regarding those issues shown in their contexts and life stories. Therefore, it was necessary to look for a transformation in the teaching practices related to writing, and identify the social patterns that endorsed not only language learning but the social dimension that empowers us as human beings. For these reasons, a pedagogical intervention was implemented in which, by means of narratives and conferences, the social issues portrayed in children's narratives within a sensitive writing environment were uncovered.

To answer this question, writing was considered from a social perspective that nurtured traditional instructional practices. Thus, writing was considered as a means to engage children in the development of more authentic samples which portrayed their realities from a more rewarding social perspective and sensitive environment. That is to say, these children used their life stories as primary resources to explore and construct their writing. With the creation of the *River of Life* writing center, the gap between instructional practices of writing and its social perspective was bridged. As such, the first intention was to provide students with the opportunity to write authentic samples based

on their realities, which may account for the social and affective issues that endorse the life incident they write about and problematize in regards to their personal experiences. As a result, they may become authentic and empowered language users who give account of their social reality. Thus, students feel much more aware of their reality and make big efforts to transmit their feelings, views, opinions, and personal experiences in order to give meaning to their life story. In this sense, participants in this study find their realities as the *mediation through which they interact with the world*, and as a result, make sense of their histories as transformative events that nurture their awareness as social beings.

Thus, the social issues that are portrayed in children's narratives produced in a sensitive writing environment correspond to the way they interact with different features of their world. To this respect, material, psychological, and interpersonal mediators enrich the construction of knowledge and the empowerment of their voices as main tools in the development of social awareness and the social practice of writing. In this perspective, students demonstrate issues concerning social experience facts, social activities, and social interaction in their narratives. Regarding social experience facts, children explore and reflect upon issues related to their school initiation, social changes or moving, travelling, religious sacraments, accidents and the acquiring of new roles and new life stages. From the social activities, children render issues as their participation into a specific social group, personal achievements, and celebrations. Regarding social interaction, children consider relevant issues in relation to their family dynamics, the exposure to a different culture, affectivity, human relationships, human behavior and attitudes.

As a consequence, this interaction with the world allowed children to write about specific issues that surrounded their life experiences in their narratives. Nevertheless, these social issues are simply the basis for students to signify their social view and the way they may praise their lived experiences. For this reason, in the *praising of life experience*, students come to make sense of their social perspective and reflection towards their surrounded realities. They begin to value the experience reflectively when they come to understand why their life story transforms their actual world and provides them with awareness about its adequacy, purpose, and aim in their particular lives. That is to say that they become conscious of their realities and feel able to problematize their stories as purposeful situations in their lives.

When children write their narratives, they not only describe a living situation but come to understand the inclusion of it in their lives. Moreover, children use these narratives as resources to praise each fact of their lives in order to contribute to their close

community for improving as social beings in constant transformation within a socio-cultural perspective. Additionally, valuing each life event allows children to praise their experiences with critical lenses which may mold their personalities, thoughts, behaviors, and determination in life as well as to feel more comfortable using such known facts or familiar information to incorporate themselves in their culture and learning processes and thereupon look for a transformation of their realities.

Taking into account that there is no transformation without reflection, children come to know and explore their own world by giving meaning and value to their own experiences which situate them in the path to change their minds and assume a more critical view of their societies and their own potential; that is, reading the world with a powerful social sensitivity. In addition, the effort of these children to express their voices must be emphasized. Due to the fact that they were young, it constituted a challenge for them to account for their views regarding their particular life events which represented going back and beyond the incidents, and furthermore, to be aware of the situation by assuming a critical view that may encourage a transformation of their specific world or community. As a result, expressing their own voice was a sign of the fact of becoming aware of their lifestyles and expectations as active social beings of our society.

Although narratives were the instrument that provided this research with relevant data, it was by conferencing that students' voices emerged and became significant. For this reason, each life story became a rewarding event for these children in the sense that they were empowered to view it through a critical lens. To this respect, these students might feel committed to not only live life as it goes but to enrich every moment with a reflective quantity of consciousness from a more liberating perspective. It would not be odd if these students in the near future narrativize their experiences to make their voices be heard and transform not only their individual reality and their school philosophy, but the social practices that surround them as well. That is why the intention to hear student's voices in this research project became particularly fundamental, because it is how challenges, liberation, critical social views, and reflexivity have their implications in human consciousness.

This research development contributed to the transformation of three specific facts as they are the view of writing, the learning environments, and the teaching practices as pedagogical implications. It is tremendously relevant to adopt a new view of writing as a social practice; the way our world is presented and carried out demands us to provide our students with social resources that may guarantee more genuine language learning

and use. As soon as teachers assume a more critical view of the reality, artificial written tasks will disappear and relevant and real written constructions will be transformed and established to produce rewarding written experiences. Besides, it is by modifying the common environments that students' motivation will arise as a symptom of nurturing their own learning process. That is, not only a decorated space but the use of our nearest reality's components and characteristics which will mirror students' needs and literate knowledge that, consequently, will unveil their writing capacities and standpoints. Finally, this research suggests that all teachers provide students with more authentic experiences that will be raised from their living realities and which may contribute to real learning in any subject area. With this in mind, the traditional practices can be nurtured with a socio-critical component that may account for students' learning and socio-cultural contribution remarkably.

Further Research

Taking into account the results of this study, future teacher-researchers can further investigate the following research questions: What do students' narratives reveal about their affectivity from a gender perspective? What funds of knowledge do students portray when writing narratives? How can parents contribute and support their children's social view through the writing of narratives? These questions have been suggested because affective issues are depicted as relevant issues in the writing of narratives. Feelings are constant matters when social beings narrativize their experience. It is also suggested that future research take into account students' funds of knowledge as fundamentals to shape humans' personality, reactions and thought, and life purposes encompassed in their role as social beings. And finally, the inclusion of parents in the development of narratives as social agents who may nurture the lived experience is suggested. These suggested research questions aim to have learners value their life stories reflectively, but additionally, assume ownership and a more critical position about their learning from a social perspective.

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Within the diverse Colombian context, the issues concerning the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) call for theories and methodologies entering into the socio-political realms of influence which shape the dynamics of the language-acquisition process. As such, Social Research Applied to English Language Teaching in Colombian Contexts: Theory and Methods takes into consideration a comprehensive analysis of five social phenomena, interpreting their impact, and prompting reflection on alternative strategies for development and growth within the EFL social environment. However, this work not only embodies characterizations, theory, and reflections within the area of social research, it also exemplifies academic community building in which students, alumni, professors, university researchers, and outside research collaborators have come together to inquire about, understand, and share the findings of innovative research regarding the complex language acquisition dynamics in EFL social contexts.

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