

From management to engagement: An affective teaching approach

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Medellín

November – 2016

**Abstract**

This project was carried out at the Institución Educativa Doce de Octubre with a 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class. Traditional classroom management strategies implemented by my CT led students to respond to a behavioral stimulus to avoid being punished. However, students were not engaged and constantly disrespected each other. Looking for alternatives to the traditional classroom management, I came across affective teaching. It is an alternative which allowed me to move from managing the classroom to engaging students and helping them become agents of change. Teacher's journals, two interviews with my CT and three student focus groups allowed me to find out the extent to which these affective teaching strategies contributed to student engagement and helped them become agents of changes.

*Key words:* Classroom management, student engagement, affective teaching, agent of change.

### **Degree Requirements**

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) Program at Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia. It was carried out at the Institución Educativa Doce de Octubre.

### **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I would like to thank my family who has supported me economically and emotionally to be able to study and overcome difficulties through all these years. Second, I would like to thank the teachers who inspired me and encouraged me to follow them in this journey. Finally, I would also like to thank my thesis and practicum advisor Claudia Posada for her patience, commitment and support along this process.

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## Preface

As a student who studied and graduated from a public institution and, who grew up in an underprivileged neighborhood, I always thought that if I was able to get ahead, then more people from there could too. I have always seen education as an opportunity to have a better quality of life and to change social patterns. I believe no matter where you come from, if you study, you can achieve anything you want. That is why, when I chose to be a teacher, I wanted others to overcome their context difficulties and adversities and get ahead just like I did. Therefore, I decided to carry out my practicum in the same neighborhood where I grew up, in the same socioeconomic strata where not many teachers want to be due to its adverse conditions.

A challenge was what I was looking for, and a challenge was what I found. I began to work with a group of students who were not engaged in learning, who were diminished by their teacher and, to whom education did not really matter. They saw English learning as something boring and difficult. Working with this group was a challenge every day, not only because of their low level of English or their reluctance to learn it but, because of their resistance towards change and, mainly because of the lack of respect among themselves.

That is how I began the journey on affective teaching. I intended to take into account student interests, experiences and their real context in order to engage them. From there on, my work was to emphasize on mutual respect, tolerance and team work. At the end of this process, I can honestly say that they learned from me as much as I learned from them. As Catherine Ibargüen said, “Nothing that is worthwhile comes easy”.<sup>1</sup> This became their class slogan and that is exactly what made this experience so enriching and meaningful for me. It has been a year full of challenges, full of learning experiences in which English became the means to get students to respect each other and to work better together.

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<sup>1</sup> “Nada que valga la pena es fácil”.

### **Description of the Context**

Understanding a context is fundamental in order to design an implementation plan that suits student and the academic community's needs. First, this section will describe the school's history and philosophy. Then, the school's location and environment. Finally, it will discuss the class where this action research project took place.

The I. E. 12 de Octubre was founded in 1979 under the principles of the German pedagogue Friedrich Herbart. In 1988, the Institution signed an agreement with the CASD vocational education Institution. Later, in 2003, the Institution embraced the Leon de Greiff Elementary School and signed an agreement with SENA with the purpose of offering 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students vocational education in logistics, accounting and administrative assistance. In 2012, the school received a quality certification granted by the ICONTEC, as well as "Gold Medal Distinction" from the Council of Medellin. According to the School Principal, the school focuses on teaching students how to live together and develop their life projects.

The Institution is located in the North-West, Doce de Octubre neighborhood, Comuna 6 of Medellín. The neighboring areas are Castilla, Picacho, Santander, Pedregal and Robledo Miramar. The school has a built area of 7000 m<sup>2</sup>. In addition to its classrooms, it has a library, a school restaurant, a basketball court, two computer labs, two cafeterias and three administrative offices. Near the school you can find the Community Action Group, the Center of Community Integration, a Fire Station, the Doce de Octubre Intermediate Health Center, a Family Service Agency and the Gabriel Garcia Marquez library park. According to the Institution's PEI, there are criminal bands around the school (PEI, 2014, p. 43).

Regarding English language teaching in the school, the Principal considers they are just starting. Recently, they granted an additional hour of English per week. They also received new books from the National Ministry of Education that are being used in 10th and 11th grade.

Currently, they are adapting the English syllabus to the contents of “English Please” and, they use “Expedición Currículo” and Guía 22 as the base documents for the construction of the syllabus. Complementarily, looking at last year's results of the Pruebas Saber test, we find that only about 7 % of the students reached an A2 level or higher, and 91.5 % of students only reached an A1 level or lower (See Appendix A). These results position the school far from the English National Plan goals.

This action research study was conducted with a 9th grade group of 43 students between 13 to 17 years of age. Most of them live in the 12 de Octubre neighborhood. The great majority of students belong to socioeconomic strata 2. Additionally, 11 out of 43 students do not live with their male father figure. The students' parents are mainly housewives or work as security guards, sellers, clothing manufacturers, builders or have informal jobs. As stated in the institution PEI, most families are dysfunctional. They have low incomes and in some cases students deal with domestic violence (PEI, 2014, p. 43). Finally, the 9th grade cooperator teacher (CT) has been at the Institution since 2009. Currently, he teaches in 8th and 9th grade. He uses a traditional teaching approach that is grammar, translation and repetition activities. This class could be considered a teacher centered class.

Having explored the context in which this research project took place, provided me with a wider perspective about Institutional and student needs in terms of language teaching and learning. In addition, it allowed me to understand the many different aspects that intervene and affect student possibilities towards English learning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

When I arrived at the school, I had an idea of how challenging the context and students age would be. As stated by Lewis, (2007) “... in certain circumstances students can have serious



emotional problems which require attention. In puberty, teenagers are confronted with very adult problems which they may not know how to cope with (such as pregnancy, substance abuse, violence)". However, I kept an optimistic and persistent attitude towards the challenges I would face during my practicum. A series of conversations with my CT, 29 class observations and a survey administered to students allowed me to reflect about the most prominent issues I wanted to work on this year.

On the one hand, I noticed my CT had effective classroom management strategies that allowed him to control discipline in the classroom. Although they worked, those strategies were basically limited to setting and applying rules, changing seat arrangement, raising his voice to call student attention and threatening students with grades or more work. Consequently, students reacted to what the teacher did in the class, and behaved or worked in order to avoid being punished by their teacher as we can evidence in this excerpt: When the teacher passes by, they pretend they are working. The teacher tells them, "I'm going to give you a 1.0 if I see that you're sitting there wasting your time in order not work".<sup>2</sup> (Student-teacher Journal entry, 08/02/2016). Additionally, students were constantly reprimanded, they did not know how to work in groups, they were not self-regulated and classes did not take into account students interests or realities.

On the other hand, when I started teaching once a week, I found that I needed to work on developing classroom management strategies which would allow me to manage discipline issues in the classroom. Since my voice was not as loud as my CT's and I did not threaten students with grades, students started to misbehave. This motivated me to read about classroom management and tried to be a little stricter in my classes. When I tried to be stricter, I felt it was not my classroom management style and it was not working at all. Thus, I realized I did not want to limit my actions to classroom management strategies but to go beyond and look for alternative

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<sup>2</sup> "Le voy a poner un 1.0 si yo veo que están por ahí perdiendo el tiempo para no trabajar".

classroom management ideas which would allow me to be more caring about students and improve their engagement in the English class.

After considering the previous issues, I realized that more than classroom management, students needed to be engaged and involved in the classes. That is how I came across Shechtman & Leichtentritt (2007) who claim that “affective teaching is an approach in which students are emotionally involved in the learning process through activities that are interesting and relevant for them such as their personal lives, perceptions, emotions and interests” (p. 325). Consequently, student misbehavior should reduce and teachers should have better relationships with students.

### **Theoretical Background**

For the purposes of this project, three concepts were addressed in the research question that needed to be defined in order to understand the perspective from which each of them were conceived in this project and how they related to each other.

#### **Affective Teaching**

According to Shechtman & Yaman (2012), “...affective teaching has its origins in humanistic theory” (p. 548). They define it as “...the teaching device to increase students’ personal and emotional involvement in the learning process, hence making it more interesting, relevant and challenging to the students” (p. 325). Additional to Shechtman & Yaman’s ideas, LeBlanc & Gallavan (2009) specify that affective teaching seeks to get students involved in “...understanding and caring for themselves, interacting respectfully with others, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, conflict resolution, violence prevention, abuse prevention, and so on”. (p. 115). They affirm that society is reflected in schools; consequently, they suggest as teachers prepare their students academically, they should educate them to be active change actors in their communities as well. (p. 115)

In order to carry out an affective teaching education, teachers should promote caring and supportive relationships among students, develop student's self-confidence, teach social skills such as communication, trust building, leadership, decision-making, goal setting, social influence skills, mutual respect and especially conflict resolution skills (LeBlanc & Gallavan, 2009; Shechtman & Leichtentritt, 2007; Shechtman & Yaman, 2012; Zhang, 2014). Teachers play an essential role in affective education since everything the teacher does in the classroom aims at reinforcing the previous skills by modeling them him/herself (LeBlanc & Gallavan, 2009; Range et al., 2013; Zhang, 2014). Moreover, teachers cannot cease believing in students. Instead, teachers should strive to make themselves available to the students, to encourage them and inspire them to gain hope and confidence in themselves (LeBlanc & Gallavan, 2009; Zhang, 2014).

To conclude, it is important to establish the existing link between affective teaching and classroom management. As Shechtman & Leichtentritt (2007) assert, an important outcome of an intervention with affective teaching, “could be a change in the teacher's role from the classroom manager to the supportive adult in children’s lives” (p. 331). In a similar vein, Zhang (2014) remarks that more than being a person who intervenes to reduce misbehavior and who maintains order in the classroom, “affective teaching is a way to create more supportive classrooms, in which personal growth of the students is encouraged by teachers” (p. 330). He explains that students' emotional engagement in classes does not only come from themselves, but the environment and people around strongly influence it (Zhang, 2014, p. 41).

### **Classroom Management**

According to the glossary of educational reform, “classroom management refers to the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, order, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class” (In

<http://edglossary.org/classroom-management/>). Congruently, Emmer & Stough (2010) state that “a broad view of classroom management encompasses both establishing and maintaining order, designing effective instruction, dealing with students as a group, responding to the needs of individual students, and effectively handling the discipline and adjustment of individual students” (p. 104).

Traditional perspectives of classroom management support the idea that students should be punished when a misbehavior occurs. However, Dunbar (2004) asserts that instead of advocating for punitive responses to student misbehavior, teachers should make an emphasis on student’s possibility to make a choice regarding their behavior, and the positive or negative consequences that behavior may imply. The previous idea is supported by Marzano, Pickering, & Marzano (2003) who affirm that teachers are not the only responsible for management. They advocate for implementing strategies to work with students to make them more aware of their role and responsibility in classroom management (p. 77).

Alternative strategies to classroom management suggest that “the management style that teachers employ should be congruent to the teacher’s instructional goals for their students, the types of activities used in the classroom, and the characteristics of the students themselves” (Emmer & Stough, 2010, p. 104). Palumbo & Sanacore (2015) also consider that effective teachers are organized, and evaluate and return assignments in a short time, their lessons are connected one to the other, state clear goals for every lesson and put into practice meaningful activities that are linked to students’ future learning (p. 68). In this regard, Wright (2005) adds that teachers should provide opportunity for students’ self-expression. He considers jokes as affective markers that reflect a positive classroom environment (p. 182). That is to say, a classroom management that takes into account affective teaching ideas “can help to create a harmonious classroom atmosphere, and establish a good relationship between teachers and

students, so as to promote the students' interest in learning and improve the effect of classroom teaching" (Zhang, 2014, p. 39).

Moving into the next concept, different authors state that classroom management can have a positive impact on students' engagement (Burch, Heller, Burch, Freed, & Steed, 2015; Emmer & Stough, 2010; Trowler, 2010). Wright (2005) believes that "engagement, or a lack of it, is integral to classroom management practice" (p. 147).

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement is classified into three types, cognitive, physical and emotional engagement (Bedell, 2014; Burch et al., 2015). Although the three types are related to each other, for the purposes of this study the focus will be on emotional engagement. Bloom (as cited in Trowler, 2015) affirms that "students who engage emotionally would experience affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment, or a sense of belonging" (p. 5). From an affective teaching perspective, Shechtman & Leichtentritt (2007) remark that "when learners are involved, when they believe that teachers are interested personally in them, when learning is connected to the real world and their personal interests, pupils may not only become effective learners, but also enhance their social skills" (p. 324).

In order to engage students through an affective teaching approach, teachers should not only relate lessons to students lives, but also teachers need to look into "students' attitudes, preferences, aspirations, relationships and personal experiences" (Shechtman & Leichtentritt, 2007, p. 326). Furthermore, Palumbo & Sanacore (2010) consider lessons should be planned taking into account students' "strengths and needs since all students are unique and they do not fit into a one-size-fits all perspective" (p. 70). Considering the previous concepts and the perspective from which I conceive them, I found that the following research question should guide my project.

### **Research Question**

How does a teacher shift from managing to engaging students through an affective teaching approach in the 9th grade English class at the I. E. Doce de Octubre?

### **Objectives**

#### **General Objectives**

To engage students in the English class through an affective teaching approach as an alternative to classroom management.

#### **Specific Objectives**

- ❖ To move from managing the classroom to becoming a supportive adult.
- ❖ To engage students in activities related to their interests and realities. engaging students in the class
- ❖ To develop strategies to help students become agents of change.

### **Action Plan**

Having observed my teaching practicum group during 14 weeks allowed me to conclude that I needed to work on alternative classroom management strategies aiming towards the engagement of students through an affective teaching approach. In order to achieve this action research project's objectives, I implemented some actions that took into account the context, a complete student survey about their interests and perceptions, the English school syllabus and my teaching principles.

In language education, a principle is a set of insights derived from history, theory, empiricism, and experience that guides one's practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 38). Taking into account the previous definition, I consider that as foreign language teachers it is essential to have

a clear idea of what the principles that enlighten our practice are. Consequently, I consider the following principles as the main pillars that guide my practice: a) Language should be taught through content, b) Skills should not be separated in lessons and, c) Content should be contextualized to the learners' interests and reality. These previous principles were reflected on my lessons. Additionally, I agree with Wright (2005) "Engagement is a precondition of learning and helps define the strength of motivation and individual's approaches to learning" (p. 17). Finally, in my classes I wanted to encourage my students to participate in such a way that they could all listen and respect each other.

The actions I carried out in order to achieve this action research project were divided into three units. I planned to implement the first unit from July through half of August. This unit consisted of music genres and artist, since students expressed they liked the topic in the first survey they completed. The purpose of this unit was for students to learn to respect different music preferences their classmates had. Connected to this, unit 2 was planned to be implemented at the end of August and the beginning of September. This unit sought to help students reflect about the importance of collaborating in group activities, mutual respect and conflict resolution skills. By the end of September, in unit 3, students were expected to explore their community in order to learn about the art expressions they could find there, cultural representations and activities their community offers youth groups.

The previous actions were developed considering affective teaching ideas. With a teacher that moves from authoritarian to more caring and supportive classroom management in which students' interests and realities are considered. It was expected that students engaged in the English class bringing as a result a confident and affective learning atmosphere that led students to the achievement of the linguistic goals suggested in school syllabus (Shechtman & Leichtentritt, 2007). The above mentioned actions were assessed through an oral presentation, a

mini reflection paragraph and another oral presentation corresponding to each unit. Teacher journal, three focus groups, an interview with my CT and students' work along the year were the data collection tools that allowed me to evidence the process and establish to what extent this action research implementation contributed to engage students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class at the I. E. Doce de Octubre.

### **Development of the Actions**

The above mentioned actions aimed at getting students engaged in the classroom through activities that were interesting for them and connected to their realities. Thus, moving from the traditional classroom management strategies to affective teaching strategies that allowed students to be in a confident learning atmosphere. Three units were implemented from July to September.

During the first six weeks of this implementation, all classes were planned around music. First, students learned about different music genres and were able to make a presentation about their favorite artist. Students were involved in classes about artists and current music trends such as Fifty-Cent and Gangnam style that allowed them to express their impressions and opinions due to their familiarity with them. The focus of this unit was on respect, that is to say, as students learned about the variety of music genres, they were expected to learn about the importance of respecting others' musical preferences even if they differed. In addition, teamwork was encouraged through activities which required them to work collaboratively.

During the first three weeks, students learned about different music genres, artists and musical instruments. Through a classical "Find someone who", students found out about their classmates musical preferences. Then, the emphasis and the reflection was made around the importance of respecting what others like. During this period of time, I made sure everybody's music genres were included from Reggaeton to Christian music. During the presentations



students made about their favorite artists, they were encouraged to listen and respect the effort their classmates were making thus, enhancing mutual respect and student self-confidence.

Since the students were arranged in six rectangular tables that could not be separated, teamwork was imbedded in most class activities. By the fifth week for instance, I gave every table a blank puzzle piece in which they had to write the meaning of a text excerpt. Every table had a different piece of the whole text. Thus, when all the puzzle pieces were together they would have the whole meaning. If the students did not complete their work, the puzzle would be incomplete. Through such activities, students were taught about the importance of teamwork.

For the second unit, during the following four weeks, the focus was on mutual respect and tolerance. Students had the chance to analyze the characters from the movie “Freedom Writers” and how the fact that they did not respect each other’s differences led them to violent situations. Because of time constraints due to school activities, and multiple issues with technological resources, students were not able to watch some movie excerpts. Therefore, the focus on conflict resolution was not fully addressed. Instead, I connected the issues from this movie with a closer reality students’ face which is the hooligan groups who kill each other in Colombia because they like a different soccer team.

In a class planned for this unit, students and I brainstormed on the board different soccer teams they like. Then, through a “Find someone who” activity, students found out how many different teams they liked in their classroom. After that, we had a discussion about a quote that raised awareness about soccer team t-shirts being the protagonists in many youths’ deaths. Finally, in groups, students had to make a puzzle in which fans with different soccer t-shirts were hugging each other. Every group had to describe that puzzle picture in a sentence. We wrote those sentences on the board and talked about the importance of tolerance towards others’ likes. To conclude this unit, students wrote a mini-reflective paragraph about tolerance and respect.

Finally, following the same line of thought regarding respect and tolerance and considering student interests, this last unit focused on urban tribes, graffiti and activities students' community offers to the different youth groups. Students researched and presented some characteristics of the different urban tribes they were able to find in their school and neighborhood, in groups. In one of the classes students made graffiti and posters with messages alluding respect and tolerance towards everybody, no matter their soccer team, music genre, artist, urban tribe preferences.

A student focus group was conducted at the end of every unit. Their purpose was to find out the extent to which affective teaching strategies had started to contribute to their individual and group change. At the beginning and at the end of this research experience I conducted an interview with my CT. Their purpose was to understand my CT's perspective on teaching, classroom management and student engagement.

### **Findings and Interpretation**

The findings to be described emerged from three different sources of data which are the teacher's journals, three student focus groups and two interviews with my CT. Every source of data was uploaded to Nvivo 10 software which allowed me to analyze the qualitative data from my project. After having thoroughly analyzed data, the following were the most prominent patterns found along this analysis. The first one refers to the *impact on classroom management*, the second one has to do with *the impact on student emotional engagement*, and the last one is *student as an agent of change*.

#### **Impact of Affective Teaching on Classroom Management**

Affective teaching as an alternative to classroom management allows teachers to shift their role from that of a manager to a supportive adult in the classroom (Shechtman &

Leichtentritt, 2007). This was evidenced by my CT's comments as follows, "I think you were very punctual to your classes. You were very committed, attentive to the students, you gave, and have given a lot of yourself".<sup>3</sup> (CT Interview 2). Additionally, students highlighted the teacher's patience, dedication, creativity and interest in them as we can evidence in the following excerpts:

"Responsibility because if you did not plan the classes, we would not have anything to do in class. First of all, respect because even though we sometimes didn't understand, you didn't yell at us, you didn't mistreat us for not understanding, you explained instead. Tolerance because even though our group isn't easy to understand, you helped us and collaborated so we could learn more".<sup>4</sup> (Student Focus Group 3)

"...Creativity because you taught us topics and you tried different ways for us to learn and for everybody to understand more easily".<sup>5</sup> (Student Focus Group 3)

The teacher as a supportive adult is a teacher who does not only teach the subject matter, but someone who cares and encourages students to become agents of change: "She is a wonderful person because she teaches us everything she knows and she wants us to be better people. She is very generous and she worries about us".<sup>6</sup> (Student Focus Group 1)

It is also important to mention that teacher consistency has great impact on student attitude in the classroom (Zhang, 2014, 41). Teachers as a supportive adults "must model the caring and respect expected of everyone, which means kindness to self and others (Carrell 2010; Levine 2003 as cited in Range et al., 2013). This was evidenced in this student comment: "I see

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<sup>3</sup> "Pienso que fuiste muy puntual a tus clases, fuiste muy entregada, fuiste muy atenta con los estudiantes, diste, has dado mucho de ti".

<sup>4</sup> "La responsabilidad porque si usted no trajera las clases preparadas seríamos ahí como sin hacer nada. El respeto porque ante todo así nosotros en ocasiones no entenderíamos las cosas usted no nos, no nos gritaban, ni nos maltratan por no entender antes nos explicaba. La tolerancia porque el salón no es fácil de entender y usted sin embargo nos ayudaba y nos colaboraba para que pudiéramos aprender más".

<sup>5</sup> "...la creatividad porque nos enseñaba temas y nos daba distintas maneras de aprender para que todos entenderíamos con facilidad".

<sup>6</sup> "Es una persona maravillosa porque nos enseña todo lo que ella sabe y quiere que nosotros seamos mejores personas y ella es muy compartida y se preocupa por nosotros".

the English teacher as an example to be followed and a model for our lives”.<sup>7</sup>(Student Focus Group 1)

Although being a supportive adult had a great impact on students’ attitude in the classroom, in some occasions and generally as a last resort, it was necessary to apply traditional classroom management strategies in order to return them to a receptive mode: “They were very disruptive and I noticed the seat arrangement was not working the way it was supposed to because they were talking and doing something different from the class. So I changed their seats”. (Student-teacher Journal, entry 01/08/2016) Although it seems like a step in the opposite direction, this should always be the very last resort, my CT’s comments were also reassuring, that is “to know he sees a change, because I sometimes do not see it from my perspective”. (Student-teacher Journal, entry 01/08/2016)

Despite the fact that some students still consider that classroom management is the teacher’s responsibility, Marzano et al. (2003) consider “that addressing discipline problems is not the sole responsibility of the individual classroom teacher” (p. 27). To this respect, we can evidence that some students started to raise their awareness about their responsibility in classroom management: “Responsibility goes on every individual, teacher, I mean if a person for example misbehaves or uses bad words, this persons hurts everybody. This person does not only hurts himself but the others too”.<sup>8</sup>(Student Focus Group 1). Another student adds: “It is everybody’s responsibility because we all have to do our share to be in order”.<sup>9</sup>(Student Focus Group 3). Furthermore, attitudes such as the following evidenced in my teaching journals serve as support to this idea, “Students were very understanding and remained quiet and calm while I

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<sup>7</sup> “Yo veo a la profesora de inglés como un ejemplo a seguir y un ejemplo para nuestras vidas”.

<sup>8</sup> “La responsabilidad es de cada quien profe, pues si una persona por decir se porta mal o trata grosero nos perjudica a todos, no se perjudica solo a él sino a todos”.

<sup>9</sup> “Que es de todos nosotros porque todos ponemos de nuestra parte para hacer orden”.

was able to get the other speaker working”. (Student-teacher Journal entry, 08/08/2016).

Listening was another issue within classroom management that students had to work on and that improved along the process, “They are learning more and more to raise their hand when they want to participate. They listened to the other group’s answer, and told me if the answer was correct or incorrect or if there was another way to say it”. (Student-Teacher Journal, entry 22/08/2016).

As seen above, the impact of affective teaching on classroom management was evidenced in terms of how the teacher moved from being a manager to becoming a supportive adult for the students in the English class, and on how student awareness increased in regards to their role in classroom management.

### **Student Emotional Engagement**

As theory states, student emotional engagement is reflected in terms of student enjoyment, interest and class participation. This is how it was analyzed:

Student enjoyment in the English class is an affective reaction that occurs when students are engaged (Bloom, (1956) as cited in Trowler, 2010, p. 5). In relation to this, students stated: “...when teacher Yuliana arrived, classes are now like more fun, classes are like more fun and they have, I mean now we learn playing and so on”<sup>10</sup>. (Student Focus Group 2) This is also supported by the teacher journal in which I was able to confirm how students enjoyed some of the activities done in class. “In the last game, everybody participated. Giselle wanted to play so excitedly, she said, -teacher, let us do it again-”. (Student-teacher Journal entry, 12/09/2016)

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<sup>10</sup> “...cuando llegó la profesora Yuliana pues las clases ya son como más divertidas, las clases son como más divertidas y tiene y pues y ya uno aprende jugando y así”.

Students did not only highlight the enjoyment because of the games in class, but they also explained the contrast between theoretical and practical classes and how practical classes made learning more entertaining and interesting. This is what they said:

“When teacher Yuliana arrived I thought –oh wow a new teacher, let’s see what she is going to make us do, how interesting- I was really surprised by seeing the teacher made classes mainly practical, and I liked it because I was involved and I learned more”.<sup>11</sup>

(Student Focus Group 2)

Concerning student interest in class, Shechtman & Leichtentritt (2007) assert that interest occurs when the topics are connected to students lives and real situations. Having considered student interests allowed them to be familiar with the topics addressed in class. As my CT mentioned in his final interview:

“...I even remembered not long ago there was a class that you were talking, I don’t know, like some artists, you displayed some artists, athletes and some other famous people that I said to myself, you displayed them there and I said to myself “who’s this? But I saw them (the students) and they answered immediately. And I said to myself “wow students know what she’s talking about, me? I have no idea”.<sup>12</sup> (CT final interview)

This comment evidences on the one hand, the effort made to reach into student’s previous knowledge and background as a starting point for learning. Additionally, it shows the positive response to such actions in terms of participation and assimilation of concepts. The result of

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<sup>11</sup> “Cuando llegó la profesora Yuliana yo pensé “oh vaya una profesora, vamos a ver que nos va a poner a hacer, qué interesante” Y realmente me sorprendí porque al ver que la profesora nos ponía más que todo clases prácticas me gustaba porque me entretenía y aprendía más”.

<sup>12</sup> “... yo recuerdo incluso hace poco hubo una clase que tú hablabas de no sé, como unos cantantes, ponías unos cantantes, unos deportistas y otras personas famosas que incluso yo mismo, tú los ponías allí y yo en mi mente decía ¿eh quién será este? Pero ellos yo veía y si respondían de una y yo decía: Wow, o sea los estudiantes no los corcha, a mi si me corcharía con esto”.

student interest in class brought about their increased interest to find out the meaning of new words and structures:

“I think we learned more because your classes were so interesting so, we tried harder to look for the meaning of words, we tried harder to look for the words. And when we found those words, we liked them, even more because you made, your class was so interesting so all the words were interesting at the moment”.<sup>13</sup> (Student Focus Group 3).

As stated before, having connection to their previous knowledge on issues and topics addressed in class, encouraged students to participate and express their likes and opinions:

“Having finished the puzzle activity, I told them that today we were going to be talking about 50 Cent. We brainstormed some ideas about his life and I found that they knew a lot about him. Even a student said, -oh teacher, I love that singer-<sup>14</sup>”. (Student-teacher Journal entry, 05/07/2016)

The use of technological resources, when available, got students out of the routine therefore, they were expectant and interested in finding out what they were going to do every class. A student claimed for instance that classes were interesting because they were not always writing in their notebooks, but doing different kinds of activities, “We don’t always have to write. It is not always text, but every day the teacher Yuliana brings different activities so that we can learn more easily. We are not always stuck to our notebook because a notebook does not help at all”<sup>15</sup>. (Student Focus Group 2)

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<sup>13</sup> “Yo creo que aprendimos más porque como las clases las hacías tan interesantes entonces nos empeñamos más en buscar cómo los significados, nos empeñamos más como en buscar esa palabra, y eran palabras que cuando las descubríamos nos gustaba, más porque hiciste, como hizo la clase tan interesante entonces todas las palabras eran interesantes en el momento”.

<sup>14</sup> “Ay profe a mi ese artista me gusta mucho”.

<sup>15</sup> “No siempre es copiando. No siempre es texto sino que la profesora Yuliana cada día trae actividades diferentes y así aprendemos más fácil. No siempre estar pegados a un cuaderno porque un cuaderno no sirve de nada”.

Finally, class participation was the other indicator of student emotional engagement. As mentioned before, when students are familiar and captivated by the topics addressed in class, they are more willing to participate. This was also mentioned by my CT who said: "...they participate a lot and I think when someone participates massively is because he/she feels attracted, feels interested in what is being taught".<sup>16</sup> (CT final Interview). That massive participation allows students to become more involved in class:

"All the groups participated. I noticed they were working together trying to get the answer. When a group did not know the answer, the other groups were enthusiastically raising their hand to give the answer. Even those students who have been more reluctant like José, María and David were participating and trying their best to give an answer".

(Student-teacher Journal entry, 22/08/2016)

Addressing student previous knowledge at the beginning of the class encourages them to participate and express what they know or think about a topic as in the following case reported in my journal:

"When I asked them what a mixtape was, a student said, "teacher, it's like a mixture"<sup>17</sup> I asked him, "¿a mixture of what?" He said, "of music". I repeated the definition in English. Then I showed them a picture and asked them in English what they thought was the relationship between the boy and the girl. I gave them examples in English, "Are they brother and sister? Are they friends?" Students started to participate trying to guess what their relationship was". (Student teacher journal, entry 18/07/16)

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<sup>16</sup> "...ellos participan mucho y pienso que cuando uno participa de manera masiva es porque se siente atraído, se siente interesado en lo que se está tratando".

<sup>17</sup> "Profé es como una mezcla".



### **Student as an Agent of Change**

In this section, I will address the three actions students took during this implementation in order to become agents of change. Based on the difficulties observed at the beginning of the school year, my action plan aimed to develop the following aspects that would allow students to have an impact not only in the English class, but also an impact that in the long term could go beyond the classroom. These aspects are student self-confidence, team work and mutual respect.

For students to become agents of change, they need to thrust themselves and what they know. According to my CT, activities in which students had to talk in public were helpful not only for school purposes, but also to prepare them for other settings in which they might have to talk public (CT final interview). In this regard, a student stated, "...we have been able to, we have become more confident because we have learned more verbs, and we have learned how to build sentences and how to pronounce new words we didn't know. Thus, with the presentations we become more confident with the group so, we start learning more and becoming more confident".

<sup>18</sup> (Student focus group 3)

Furthermore, student's impressions about the oral presentations done in class were positive because they felt more prepared for future situations in which they might need to express themselves, "For instance, the presentations helped us not to be embarrassed for instance during an interview, in the future you never know, and English when we are in a job or something like that". <sup>19</sup>(Student Focus Group 1)

Despite the positive impact this implementation had on most students' self-confidence, I cannot fail to mention that the lack of mutual respect is one of the aspects that affected student

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<sup>18</sup> "...hemos podido, cogido confianza porque hemos aprendido más verbos, a construir oraciones, y a pronunciar palabras nuevas que no conocíamos, y así con las presentaciones más confianza con el grupo entonces uno va aprendiendo más y cogiendo más confianza".

<sup>19</sup> "Por ejemplo en las exposiciones nos ayuda a perder la pena por ejemplo en una entrevista o más adelante uno no sabe, y el inglés cuando estemos en algún trabajo o algo así".

self-confidence the most. Concerning this issue, I found at the beginning of the process students did not respect each other. They did not listen to each other, cursed and were sometimes aggressive. According to the first student focus group, they still did not feel the classroom offered a confident learning atmosphere. They said that the following three aspects reflected their lack of mutual respect: The lack of listening when somebody else was talking, the rudeness towards each other and the feeling that their personal belongings were not safe.

In order to change the above perceptions and to allow students to become agents of change, I made special emphasis on mutual respect. By the end of this implementation, students highlighted how they raised their awareness about the importance of respecting each other's differences regarding soccer teams they like, music preferences, urban tribes others may belong to and gender identities: "All those topics made us understand that we are all equal and we deserve respect in all the manifestations we made".<sup>20</sup>(Student focus group 3)

In addition, they were more willing to listen to their classmates and teacher's interventions as evidence in one of the last journal entries: "During Carolina's presentation, they listened and respected her while she was talking. Even Laura, who is very reluctant to talk in public, did it." (Student-teacher Journal entry, 03/10/2016). According to my CT, mutual respect was encouraged and modeled by the teacher which brought as a consequence mutual respect not only among students but also between the teacher and the students:

"The way you treat the students, the respect. And it was noticeable the reciprocity in that regard because I don't remember having seen at any moment, any student answering you rudely. They were very sensible when talking to you because, because I think you did it the same from the beginning and they got that. They understood the kind of person, the

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<sup>20</sup> "Todos esos temas pues nos dieron a entender que todos somos iguales y merecemos respeto en todas las manifestaciones que hagamos".

kind of teacher they were relating to, so they like, got used to your style and they were able to do everything according to the style you have suggested. That is why the respect was mutual”.<sup>21</sup>(CT final interview).

A last aspect that helped students to become agents of change was team work. Although in the beginning it was difficult for students to work in groups and to help each other, little by little they improved in this regard. Students expressed they liked to work in groups because they were able to help each other, had others’ opinions and accomplished their tasks faster. Besides, I noticed in some activities students were discussing and talking to each other in order to come to an agreement. Likewise, students, who in the beginning did not want to work, started to notice they could contribute positively to their team and started to work with them:

“I mean this way, working in groups, eh it was good because everybody contributed to give their opinion when we were given a topic. And the advantage was that we could always have our classmate’s opinion, to have several and different opinions about what we had to do”.<sup>22</sup>(Student Focus Group 3)

Complementarily, students also expressed working in group favors learning as mentioned by a student in the first focus group: “I think working in groups is very good because the teacher allows us to choose our groups, besides we learned a lot from the other person or from the other group members”.<sup>23</sup> (Student Focus Group 1)

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<sup>21</sup> “La forma como tratas a los estudiantes, el respeto y se pudo notar la reciprocidad en ese respeto porque no recuerdo ningún momento haber visto algún estudiante que te respondiera con groserías, ellos eran muy prudentes contigo a la hora de hablarte porque, porque pienso que así tú lo hiciste desde el principio y ellos captaron eso, entendieron con qué tipo de persona, con qué tipo de profesora estaban tratando entonces como que se acostumbraron a ese estilo tuyo y pudieron entonces como hacer las cosas al estilo que tú les has propuesto y por eso ese respeto que se veía mutuo”.

<sup>22</sup> “Pues así en trabajo en grupo, eh fue más bueno porque todos contribuían a dar las opiniones cuando nos daban algún tema y la ventaja era que siempre podíamos tener lo que opinaba el compañero, tener varias opiniones distintas para para lo que nos pusieran”.

<sup>23</sup> “Me parece muy bueno trabajar en equipo porque la profesora nos deja escogernos a nosotros mismos y, pues si y además aprendemos mucho de la otra persona o del equipo”.

### Conclusions

The main results supported by my project will be addressed in this section. They were done in terms of the impact this implementation had on classroom management, student emotional engagement and students as agents of change. Additionally, I will address the role English played in this implementation since it was not the ultimate goal.

The findings above allowed me to evidence how affective teaching opened alternatives to traditional classroom management strategies. This means, classroom management that takes into account affective teaching ideas, raises student awareness about their role and responsibility in it. In consequence, I ended up with students that cared more about their own learning, more than just getting a grade or responding to authoritarian classroom management strategies. However, there are some situations under which traditional classroom management is needed to refocus their attention. It is fundamental to look at the teacher's role from an affective teaching perspective in which more than a classroom manager the teacher is a supportive adult. A supportive adult who according to LeBlanc and Gallavan (2009) refuses to give up on the students, on the contrary, makes him/herself available to them, and tries new ways to motivate and encourage them, thus inspiring them to gain hope and confidence in themselves (p. 112).

Considering students interests, personal experiences and ways of learning are essential elements to get students engaged. As we could evidence in this implementation, the topics and issues addressed in class emerged from a survey at the beginning of the school year. Topics such as music genres and artists, soccer team fans and urban tribes were of the interest of the students and this allowed them to be familiar and more eager to participate on the suggested activities. Trowler (2010) considers "students need to be engaged with the world outside the classroom" (p.

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41) that is why these topics addressed in English were the means to achieve deeper changes in student's self-confidence, mutual respect and team work. The changes generated in students are the first steps towards becoming agents of change and to take those learning experiences out of the classroom.

Finally, I want to conclude that English played an important role in this process. Despite of students low proficiency level in English and their reluctance to learn it, lessons were planned and adjusted to their level and by the end of the implementation, progress was evidenced: "The students haven't learned too much but they have learned enough. They have learned what is required for, for, how can I say? for this school grade, so the topics that they had to work on, have been worked and the students, you explained the topics and you can notice they participate and they have learned".<sup>24</sup> (CT final interview). During this implementation English was used as a means to reach individual and academic student objectives.

### **Reflections**

This practicum and research experience allowed me to reflect about my role as an English teacher.

In public institutions, we often find discouraged teachers who give up on their students and who are absorbed by the adverse conditions and situations they have to face in their classrooms. However, this experience also allowed me to reflect about the necessity of passionate teachers who believe in what they do and who persevere to get the most out of their students. Circumstances such as lack of resources, disengaged parents, large classrooms, few hours of English per week have become, for many teachers, excuses for not trying or doing a good job. I believe, if we chose to be teachers, we need to be willing to work for our students and to

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<sup>24</sup> "Los estudiantes no han aprendido demasiado pero han aprendido lo suficiente, lo que se ha requerido para, para, para este cómo decirlo, para este para este grado, entonces los temas que toca trabajar se han trabajado y los estudiantes, tú explicas tu tema y ellos se nota que participan y que han aprendido".

empower them to get ahead and overcome context adversities. Lack of empowerment may lead them in the opposite direction of education. If we want a more balanced country, with more equal opportunities, we have to start in our classrooms, educating people who believe in themselves and who can contribute positively to society.

Carrying out this project also allowed me to reflect upon the role English plays in an education context because English should not be an end but a means to learn about many different issues. This is how I came to understand that I did not focus on linguistic aspects as much as more serious issues that needed to be addressed within the classroom. Having understood the context allowed me understand that English would not make sense for students if they did not respect each other, did not trust themselves and were not able to work in group. Accomplishing these goals over a three month implementation is overly ambitious. However, I believe that through these results I was able to evidence the big steps that were taken towards the empowerment of these future agents of change. Who, I believe in the future, are going to be able to take what they learned outside the English class.

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Appendices

Appendix A



6.3. Distribución porcentual de estudiantes por niveles de desempeño del establecimiento educativo y sus sedes-jornadas, de la ETC a la que pertenece el establecimiento y del país, en Inglés

| Código DANE  | Nivel de Reporte                   | A-    | A1    | A2    | B1   | B+   |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
|              | COLOMBIA (8979 Establecimientos)   | 41.5% | 40.8% | 9.4%  | 6%   | 2.3% |
|              | MEDELLIN (328 Establecimientos)    | 34.9% | 40.2% | 10.7% | 8.9% | 5.3% |
| 105001011363 | INST EDUC DOCE DE OCTUBRE          | 48.2% | 43.3% | 5%    | 2.8% | 0.7% |
| 105001011363 | INST EDUC DOCE DE OCTUBRE - SEDE   | 48.2% | 43.3% | 5%    | 2.8% | 0.7% |
| 105001011363 | INST EDUC DOCE DE OCTUBRE - MAÑANA | 48.2% | 43.3% | 5%    | 2.8% | 0.7% |

**INTERPRETACIÓN**

Los niveles de desempeño son una descripción de lo que un estudiante puede hacer en términos de las competencias evaluadas en el examen. En la tabla se reporta el porcentaje de estudiantes clasificado en cada uno de estos niveles.

*Resultados Pruebas saber 2015*

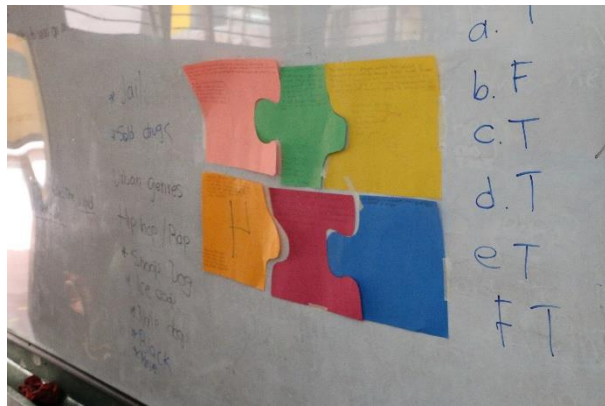
Appendix B



*Student's Favorite Artists Presentations*



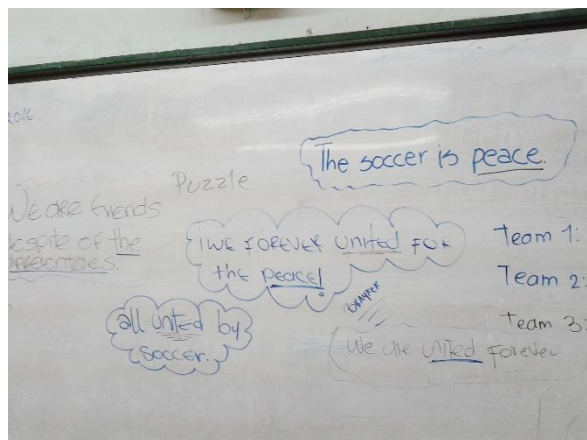
*Soccer Teams Puzzle*



Whole class Group work



Urban Tribes Posters



Student messages about soccer



Graffiti made by students