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Embracing Sisterhood: Using Women's Literature to Favor Positive Interaction and
Collaborative Learning in a Group of Eleventh-grade Girls

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Abstract

This collaborative action research project was designed to describe how women's literature fosters positive interaction and collaborative learning in a group of eleventh-grade girls at the Centro Formativo de Antioquia (CEFA), located in Medellín. The project was co-constructed with 38 girls enrolled in the English Specialization offered by the public institution. Data were collected through a focus group, student surveys, and reflective journals. Moreover, the strategy revolved around topics and activities related to violence against women, women's identity, relations, and empowerment. Finally, findings suggest that the proposed activities enhanced students' agreement-making skills, co-construction, solidarity, women's history awareness, and a sense of sisterhood.

Key words: *women's literature, positive interaction, collaborative learning, literature circles*

Degree Requirement

This collaborative action research project was developed in a public school in Medellín, Colombia, during my teaching practicum in 2021-2022 as a requirement to obtain my B. Ed. Degree in Foreign Language Teaching at Universidad de Antioquia.

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To the women of the world, for making this planet a place for life.

“No black woman writer in this culture can write "too much". Indeed, no woman writer can write "too much"... No woman has ever written enough.”

-Bell hooks, *Remembered rapture: the writer at work*

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Preface

After applying for developing my practicum at Centro Formativo de Antioquia in 2021 and being accepted in the same year, I was commended for accompanying the pilot of the English Specialization course offered for tenth and eleventh graders. During this first term, I carried out some classroom observations, and I realized the students were dealing with interaction issues that prevented them from working collaboratively and learning from others.

Then, I designed a research proposal that included students and allowed them to overcome those distances by building bridges of respect, assertive communication, and chains of affection. I was also thinking about a way I could help the students empower themselves as other women empowered me in the past.

Context Description

This practicum was carried out at Centro Formativo de Antioquia (CEFA), an educational public high school for girls located in La Candelaria, District 10, Medellín. The school facilities have three floors with different classrooms, restrooms, laboratories, offices, two auditoriums, a chapel, a cafeteria, two playgrounds, inner gardens, an exhibition on Medellín's old aqueduct, a pool, a gym, a sports center, and a library.

The mission of the institution focuses on excellence: to promote and educate its students in Basic Secondary and Technical-Academic Education, underpinning citizen culture for work initiation and access to higher education. In regard to CEFA's vision, it aims at being one of the best city's education institutions, open to the world, where students are educated on the route of excellence to achieve an efficient citizen culture and high academic competitiveness; being recognized for its visionary sense for exploration of horizons for work initiation and access to higher education.

Concerning its pedagogical model, the school's team created their own called VIDCAMA (by its initials in Spanish), which stands for Experiences, Searching, Conceptualization, Deepening, and Implementation. In addition, CEFA offers nine programs and specialization modalities for tenth and eleven graders. Thus, the students can enroll in the English Specialization, where students must attend English classes seven hours a week. This modality was created and implemented in 2021, and the cooperating teacher used *English, please! 2*, a textbook produced and suggested by Colombia's Education Ministry.

The cooperating teacher graduated in Business administration from Universidad del Tolima, and she has been teaching English at CEFA since 2019 in ninth grade and the English Specialization. My cooperating teacher was committed, attentive to the students' learning

processes, and open minded. She was also concerned about the students' mental health. The class methodology was grammar-oriented and focused on the grammar-translation approach.

Regarding the English Specialization students, the course comprised 39 girls aged between 14 and 16. These students came from different neighborhoods of the Metropolitan Area of Valle de Aburrá. In closing, although they had significantly improved their English skills, most had difficulties with fluency and accuracy when sharing their ideas orally and written.

Concerning the students' attitudes toward the English language, they had a positive one. Students manifested that they were learning this language because of personal interest and fulfillment and because their parents wanted them to have better life opportunities. Regarding the students' behavior, they were generally respectful, fun, engaged, cooperative, and motivated to learn the target language; however, they had some responsibility issues since they did not develop some of the assigned tasks as evidenced in the following excerpt: "*Many students say they have not started reading because of their midterms (...); some others say they forgot about it*" (Journal entry extract, May 10th, 2021).

Problem Statement

After observing this class for one month and a half and paying attention to its development, many issues of interest appeared on the horizon. While some of them caught my attention from the first time, others lasted to appear in the outlook; during the course, some gained or lost my interest once they were getting more complex. Then, many issues were identified, written down, and described in the journal entries; however, some of them remained in my mind, leading me to analyze the classroom's events and interactions regarding those issues.

Thus, some common issues were addressed in the journals' descriptions: the indiscriminate use of cellphones by the students, a notable difference in the students' English fluency level, the case of a student who got nervous and anxious when participating orally in the class, and the fact that most of the students did not develop the tasks the teacher proposed. However, I identified and stated another issue present in the classes' development that did not catch my attention enough at that moment as it would later: the student-teacher and the student-student interactions.

All these affairs influenced, in one way or another, the development of the class, causing distractions, tensions, disruptions, and challenges. Those issues were coming and going, appearing, disappearing, and revolving in my head. However, it was after discussing them with my advisor that enlightenment arrived. He emphasized we must connect one of those problems identified with our own emotions and interests. I remembered how life had always surrounded me with women and how their presence had been more than meaningful and fundamental to me.

Once again, life put me in a place where I could not only learn from women but also help them become stronger too. Thus, I realized that the student-teacher and student-student interaction issue was the one on which I must focus my attention, passion, energy, and efforts. During the classes, there was a tense calm until a student's participation triggered a moment, as the following excerpt illustrates: "*The teacher speaks in Spanish to clarify what a modal verb is. (...) The same student participates again; she has got an excellent English performance. Some girls make some gestures and roll their eyes*" (Journal entry extract, September 15th, 2021).

As stated in the journals, I evidenced arguments between the teacher and the students and tensions among the latter, mainly among those with excellent English. The tensions had highs and lows, but they were latent. Based on my teaching principles, I considered this atmosphere

not the most appropriate since it deviated from the learning process, preventing students from learning and helping each other boost their strengths and work on their weaknesses.

At some point, I doubted the decision to develop this process with these girls and the role I could assume because I was a man telling girls that they should not recreate patriarchal practices; a man telling women what and how to do. However, while reading Chimamanda Adichie, I found the determination I needed to start walking along this road. In *We should all be feminists*, Adichie (2014) stated: “All of us, women and men, must do better (p. 55)”. Then, I realized that making this world more equitable is also my responsibility, and since I had this platform and the opportunity to be part of the change, I needed to take it.

With this said, I wanted to promote positive interactions and collaboration among these girls by acknowledging their abilities and working on their weaknesses, to know the origin of these tensions, the students’ awareness or unawareness of their attitudes and behaviors, and how they perceived each other. In addition, I intended to do so by using women’s literature, with a selection that might help other English teachers who struggle with similar situations. I did not mean this study for a document archive, but for the students/teachers to be aware of the reproduction and reinforcement of the patriarchal system in which we were taught. Thus, they could recognize the following: building a world with others is much easier than doing it alone and women are not enemies but allies.

Therefore, considering the problem identified where tensions, competitiveness, and misunderstandings mediate student-student and student-teacher interactions, I would like to tackle the following research question:

How can the implementation of women's literature favor high school girls' positive interaction and collaborative learning in a group of eleventh graders at CEFA school?

Objectives

General:

- Describing how women's literature fosters positive interaction and collaborative learning in a group of eleventh-grade girls.

Specific:

- Identifying the women's literature class activities that foster positive interaction and collaborative learning in a group of eleventh-grade girls.
- Establishing the aspects of positive interaction that promote collaborative learning in women's literature class activities.
- Determining the level of positive interaction and collaborative learning through women's literature class activities.

Theoretical Framework

As this study emerged from the intention of promoting positive interaction and collaborative learning among girls through the use of women's literature, this theoretical framework presents the structural categories, related concepts, and their respective referents in three different sections as follows: first, an overview on Women's Literature (WL). Second, an approximation to the interaction concept, whether student-student ($S \rightleftharpoons S$) or student-teacher ($S \rightleftharpoons T$). Finally, it presents the basis for Collaborative Learning (CL).

Women's Literature

Women's Literature refers to women's work in different literary genres. According to Rienda (2012), it is different when we approach women as literature producers or writers because, through their texts, we can know their world understanding and the contradictions

existing among them and men, and their reading of society. When using their female voices, women unveil their world conception and constructions of reality in a constant search for their identity and self-recognition, knowing others, their relationships, and their surroundings.

When addressing women's literature, it is essential to mention the *gender perspective*. Cremona (2011) defines it as a political option to reveal the position of inequality and subordination of women concerning men, referring to the historical debt our societies have to women, allowing us to identify and question the discrimination and exclusion women have suffered in different fields, practices, and even places based on the justification of their biological or moral differences regarding men.

Following the same line of development, Casares (2006) states that this perspective allows us to comprehend how identity construction, power and oppression relations, and social inequalities originated, replicated, and their relationship with culture. Then, there are two spheres that the gender perspective relates to: the individual and the social one. It focuses on the subject, women in this case, and the way the cultural constructions, the process of socialization, and the context end affecting women's development in one way or another.

In addition, along with the *gender perspective*, it appears the *relational approach*, which Miranda (2012) defines as an approach that admits the existence of the sexes but looks for equality between them by recognizing women's rights, social contributions, and identity traits, for example. Nevertheless, to apply this relational approach, we must follow the trail of women's work and contribution in fields such as literature, identifying, compiling, and sharing their production.

Revising 'literature's history' is a must since this process allows us to identify, recognize and revindicate those names and stories left behind, whether by intention or omission, which

usually respond to women's names. Santos (1994) refers to WL as *periphery literature* (non-canonical, non-official, non-accepted, non-recognized, non-legitimated, excluded) in the literary system, where women had to join, organize, and write in their own literature circles, turning those peripheries into their own centers as a process of resistance and resignification.

Mignolo (1998) supported this by saying that peripheries represent a center on their own instead of thinking that all rivers must converge in one specific spot considered as the only center and, in this way, we can respect the different traditions in which human beings live. Then, some people have considered it necessary to wonder about women's production in every context concerning the place-time particularity. This type of search has not been easy; however, it is helpful to recognize the different efforts made by some authors to rescue women's work from oblivion, displacement, and imposed silence.

Interaction

Oxford (1997) defines interaction as an interchange of actions among people. This way of acting leads to an exchange of experiences and information with others, and it can happen in verbal or non-verbal language. In addition, regarding interaction in L2 classrooms. He also adds that it refers to [inter]personal communication, which is facilitated by an understanding of four elements: language tasks, willingness to communicate, style differences, and group dynamics. Thus, this author mentions that, in educational settings, interactions happen not only among students ($S \rightleftharpoons S$) but also with the teacher ($S \rightleftharpoons T$) and it implies giving meaning to those actions.

Finally, some authors have suggested paying enough attention to the $S \rightleftharpoons S$ and $S \rightleftharpoons T$ interactions since classes are made of and developed through these exchanges. On one hand, according to Lyster (2007), there is a pedagogical and communicational intention in the teacher-student interaction. On the other hand, Johnson & Johnson (1985) assume that a teacher must

pay attention to student-student interactions since they are meaningful and take place in classrooms for long periods. In conclusion, for these authors, interactions have a fundamental role in class development and goal achievement.

Collaborative Learning

Matthews et al. (1995) affirm that several disciplines have conceived the concept of collaborative learning as a social construction of knowledge from a theoretical, political, and philosophical perspective. By saying this, these authors highlight how knowledge construction in a classroom needs others. This process is not the teacher's or the students' responsibility but a joint effort that must be developed together.

Students and teachers can go more profound from a surface to the unknown depths during classroom interactions and through dialogue to build knowledge. For Qualley and Chiseri-Strater (1995), CL implies reflecting on and having a better understanding of the words said. In addition, Smith and MacGregor (1992) support the previous idea by saying that in CL can take place in classrooms when students join to understand, look for solutions or meanings, and create a product or complete a task. Then, tasks become a pretext and the collective knowledge construction raises as the main aim.

According to Bruffee (1995), collaborative learning is a process that allows us to turn knowledge into a common property and reconfigure knowledge communities where students can also be part of them. By doing so, students become knowledge users and builders, recognizing their abilities and working with others to achieve the primary goal. It also allows students and teachers to create and be part of their knowledge community.

Action Plan

The instructional action plan for this research project was implemented during the second semester of 2021 devoted to observation and planning matters (see appendix 1), and the first semester of 2022 (see appendix 2) when the implementation, data collection, and analysis processes were carried out. In the following charts, the timetable for each stage can be observed.

This study was conducted under the Socio-Critical Paradigm, an educational classroom practice, that allowed me not only to know students' perceptions, imaginaries, and constructions but also to analyze how power was exerted and influenced these girls' lives. This paradigm also allowed me to empower students through class interactions with the objective of transforming their reality and helping them become transformation subjects. In addition, this study responded to the Collaborative Action Research Approach Burns (1999), considering the nature of the research proposal as well as there is a constant observing-active role of the learner-researcher, the students' participation, and aimed at a descriptive scope.

Development of Actions

This Action Research project implementation took ten weeks. It intended to foster positive interaction and collaborative learning in a group of eleventh-grade girls through women's literature. The instructional action plan was divided into two sections, each of which lasted one month. However, it is essential to mention that before the corresponding launch, the teacher-researcher presented the project to the students to receive their feedback and make them participants in the project co-construction process.

Then, the students decided to expand the original type of texts to be addressed by covering novels, children's books, and poems and including songs (sung poems) written by women. They even proposed a song list to be subjected to a curatorial process by the teacher-

researcher. Then, I would decide when and which ones to use based on the texts' appropriateness, complexity, and theme. This exercise of co-construction took place mainly during the first implementation section.

In the first implementation section, four micro-units of 3 hours long were proposed. Each one included pre-, while-, and post-reading activities regarding its specific theme. Moreover, the main activity revolved around the Literature circle strategy, which DaLie (2001) considers engaging, enriching, and reading-stimulant for English-language learners. Thus, the girls could choose a text considering their likes and interests, gather with other girls with the same choice, read, play roles, analyze, reflect on, discuss, create a collage, and give a presentation. Finally, for the four micro-units, it was proposed a list of texts to be used (see appendix 3).

The first micro-unit entitled *They have pulled some petals off. Violence against women in our societies* intended to address and question violence and roles assigned to women in our societies. In that class, the students approached for the first time the Literature circle strategy and proposed some texts for upcoming micro-units. Regarding the second micro-unit called *Who am I? A Self-recognition trip for what being a woman means*, which sought to invite girls to explore their own identity and recognize themselves from their particularities. Then, the students organized themselves in Literature circles and repeated previously mentioned actions.

The third micro-unit was named *Women are rivers that converge*, aiming to promote empathy and solidarity among girls by wondering about the different types of relationships women establish with other women. Concerning the fourth and last micro-unit of this section, it was entitled *To be a sunflower in the darkness: women empower women*, whose purposes were to recognize the power words have on others and analyze the different ways women can empower themselves and others.

The second implementation section was divided into four lessons three hours long and was entitled *Sisterhood is a ship we are all in: women's stories written by women*. It aimed at sharing women's stories from different worldwide contexts and reflecting on the situations women deal with. For doing so, three books with different backgrounds were proposed (see appendix 1), and the same strategy of Literature circles was implemented. Furthermore, the students participated in class discussions and activities about how girls and boys are raised differently, inequality conditions, feminisms, and sisterhood. Finally, the students designed a collage and made a presentation about the book.

Data Collection Techniques

For this Action Research Study, I implemented three different data collection techniques in a time frame of two months in order to collect information from the participants. These methods were teacher journals, student surveys, and a student interview conducted in a focus group.

Reflective Journals

This data collection method was necessary to see how students interacted and their performance in collaborative learning work when using women's literature. In addition, this allowed me to identify what issues or possibilities emerged from those observations, how students dealt with them, and if an action plan modification was necessary on the march.

After each class implementation, a journal entry was written to keep track of the influence of women's literature class activities on the students' interaction and how these activities promoted collaborative learning. This method was implemented for two months, corresponding to 8 English classes that were 3 hours long.

Student Survey

One survey was conducted on the eleventh-grade students. It allowed me to get information about students' thoughts and feelings regarding interaction issues, identify their awareness or unawareness of the situation, and know their perceptions and feelings towards the action plan implementation (see appendix 4).

A focus Group

To know the students' perceptions about the impact of women's literature to favor interaction and collaborative learning and if there was any mind shift, I carried out an hour-long focus group interview with five students. Three students were chosen based on the journal entries, considering if they had interaction issues with their classmates, and the other two volunteered to participate. This focus group was conducted two weeks before the end of the study implementation (see appendix 5).

Data Analysis

According to Burns (1999), the following process of 5 stages is suggested to carry out the data analysis: assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. I started the process by assembling the data according to each instrument: my journal entries, a student survey, and a focus group. After doing so, I started coding the data inductively.

The first instrument I analyzed was my reflective journals. During this process, I labeled some categories under my advisor's supervision. Then, I analyzed the survey and the focus group. I found that almost all the categories that emerged from these last two instruments were relevant to those derived from the journals. Then, I came up with a list of themes, which were

composed through the process of reduction and the aid of the recurrence charts for every instrument I analyzed.

After this process, I finally grouped them into final categories. Once the data were categorized, I triangulated the different sources, and I found compelling findings concerning the development of my action plan. Thus, the final categories to be addressed in this paper are *Women's Literature as a Gender Enhancer*, *Literature Classroom Activities*, *Setting Class Conditions*, and *Collaborative Learning for Mutual Growth* with their respective subcategories.

Findings and Interpretations

Women's Literature as a Gender Enhancer

This category was identified in the three data collection techniques and had the most significant number of entries. I found that women's literature (WL) was fundamental for the students to know about themselves and the others by reflecting on their women's identity, as evidenced in the following excerpt: "During that discussion, I realized that once they identified what made them the women they are, they were not willing to lose it." (Journal entry extract, March 29th, 2022). Then, women's literature promotes questions to explore identity search so that the students can take roots, recognize themselves from their particularities and understand others'. By doing so, as expressed by Lomeli (2021), "I am woman, I am fearless/I am sexy, I'm divine/I'm unbeatable, I'm creative/ Honey, you can get in line/I am feminine, I am masculine/I am anything I want".

Another issue to highlight is that the girls expressed they saw themselves reflected in those stories. This can be evidenced as follows:

“A student says she has been reading *Like Water for Chocolate* and adds she identifies with Tita because of her strong bond with cooking. She also mentions the beautiful relationship between Tita and Nacha, comparing her with her mom.” (Journal entry extract, May 17th, 2022)

Then, the texts allowed the students to connect with their inner worlds and made them crawl inside the skins of the characters they identify with by relating traits in common. In those moments of identification, a kind of Mirror Stage takes place, a concept introduced by Lacan (2001) based on the belief that people feel attracted to and empathize with others similar to them.

Making Sense of Being Women

Concerning this subcategory, I found that students got the chance to bring new meaning to being women in a society that discriminates and undervalues their participation. This could be illustrated with the following fragment:

“The fact of being by women and for women is beautiful because we learn from other women and we feel powerful (...). When I see one of my friends or one of the women I know doing something super brilliant, super mega amazing, which is supposedly for men (according to society), I feel empowered because she did it”¹. (Focus Group Interview, student 3).

Thus, women became not only role models to follow, but also their stories turned out to be inspiring and encouraging for them, as referred to by Gómez (2004) “I am the sum of all of you (...)/ Your voice is my voice,/ faraway women/ women of my time/ for you I sing and shine like the simplest of all the stars”².

¹ Que sea de mujeres para mujeres es hermoso porque aprendemos de las demás mujeres y nos sentimos poderosas (...). Cuando veo a una de mis amigas o a una de las mujeres que conozco hace algo super teso, super mega teso, que normalmente es para hombres (según la sociedad), yo me siento empoderada porque ella lo hizo”. Estudiante 3.

² Yo soy la suma de todas ustedes (...)

La voz de ustedes es mi voz,
mujeres lejanas
mujeres de mi tiempo
por ustedes canto y brillo como la más
simple de todas las estrellas.

Naming and Overcoming Violence against and among Women

In regard to this subcategory, data showed that the students were aware of two types of violence that I will name: outer *violence* and *inner violence*, and the need to overcome them. The first type refers to the acts of violence women suffer, and which are exerted by society, institutions, and the patriarchal system, as expressed by one of the students:

“People just teach us to be the wife of successful men. People tell me I talk too much; they tell me not to express what I am feeling. “Do not open your heart”. So, I know I cannot do that because I am a girl.” (Journal entry extract, May 10th, 2022).

In this manner, the students developed a sense of women’s history throughout the sessions. They recognized that women have historically been immersed in an oppressive system that excludes and subjugates them through psychological, physical, verbal, cultural, political, religious, academic, and emotional violence. To support this, O’toole et al. (2007) affirm that *gender violence* refers to any gender-oriented violation exerted in a male-dominated social system.

The second type describes the actions of violence, discrimination, and reproduction of the exclusionary system among the girls. The following statements support this: “I think it is a very nice strategy because many times we mistreat each other, we mercilessly criticize and harshly judge among ourselves.”³ (Focus Group Interview, student 2)

“In my family, I was raised with very misogynistic attitudes. It was a very hard process for me to understand that I had no rivalry with any girl. On the one hand, it has happened thanks to CEFA. On the other hand, your classes have helped me a lot. I feel that I have learned and unlearned.”⁴ (Focus Group Interview, student 2).

³ “Me parece una estrategia muy linda porque muchas veces entre nosotras mismas nos tiramos muy feo, entre nosotras nos damos muy duro y nos damos mucho palo”.

⁴ “En mi familia me educaron con actitudes muy misóginas. Fue un proceso muy duro para mí comprender que yo no tenía ninguna rivalidad con ninguna. En cierta parte ha sido gracias al CEFA. Y por otra parte, lo que me ha ayudado mucho han sido tus clases. Siento que he aprendido y he desaprendido”.

As a consequence of being taught in a hostile environment for women, they continue with the chain of violent acts among them, which have been problematized and progressively changed thanks to a rising women's critical awareness. This has been expressed by Adichie (2014) "We raise girls to see each other as competitors – not for jobs or accomplishments, which in my opinion can be a good thing, but for the attention of men." (p. 32).

Women's relations

I found that the students continually talked about and praised the family, social, academic, or political relationships they have established with other women to resist, show love, and empower each other. The benefits of those bonds are highlighted as this excerpt illustrates:

"It seems that there are many things about us that are better when we are together (...), because when we are together, when we connect, when we create bonds of sisterhood, that is when things result (...). If one of us had done it alone, most likely they would not have resulted."⁵(Focus Group Interview, student 2)

With this said, a sense of sisterhood was developed and strengthened among the girls during the project, convincing them that they were stronger together and in a constant, gradual search for convergence. In this same line, Hooks (1986) defines *sisterhood* as a women's relation in political solidarity, where they are united by shared interests and beliefs (although respecting their diversity) to fight against oppression.

Literature Classroom Activities

Concerning this category, I discovered that the students found the class methodology very unusual and appealing for them and their interests since they saw themselves as women represented in the content of the lessons and activities, as expressed by one of the students:

⁵ "A mí me parece que hay muchas cosas sobre nosotras que cuando estamos juntas son mejor (...), porque cuando nosotras estamos juntas, cuando nos conectamos, cuando creamos lazos de hermandad, es ahí cuando salen cosas (...). Si una lo hubiera hecho sola, muy seguramente no hubieran salido." (Focus Group Interview, student 2)

“I think they are enriching and profitable activities for both group and individual learning. Likewise, I consider that the activities proposed are necessary for female learning and empowerment as such, combined with how dynamic and playful they are, generating a desire to learn”.⁶ (Student survey, student B)

Therefore, students have been getting used to a particular way of learning-teaching that could be not meaningful or attractive to them. They give meaning to any proposal that ends up being considered valuable and engaging. DaLie (2001) affirms that the Literature circle learning approach is practical since it allows students’ empowerment, collaboration, and authenticity.

Extension Literature Activities

Considering this subcategory, I found that most of the classroom activities proposed promoted participation, collaboration, creativity, language learning, engagement, exchanging ideas, and assuming a position. At the same time, students were able to develop listening and empathetic skills. This could be evidenced in the following excerpt: “These are wonderful activities that, besides promoting the learning of a foreign language, allow us as students and women to talk about topics and share moments that would not come up in other spaces.”⁷ (Student survey, student X). The students found that the class topics and activities motivated them to participate and share their own ideas and that they were not only learning English but also reflecting on what being a woman means and implies. Ainley (2012) suggests that for achieving students’ motivation and engagement, classroom activities must take into account the immediate context and the broader classroom (e.g., community and culture).

⁶ Me parecen que son actividades enriquecedoras y fructíferas para el aprendizaje tanto grupal como individual. De igual manera, considero que las actividades planteadas son necesarias para el aprendizaje femenino y el empoderamiento como tal, esto combinado con lo dinámicas y lúdicas que son las mismas; generan ganas de aprender.

⁷ Son actividades maravillosas que, aparte de promover el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera, nos permiten a nosotras como estudiantes y mujeres hablar de temas y compartir momentos que en otros espacios no saldrían a relucir.

Effects on Students

Considering this subcategory, I found that students regularly were able to defend or change their positions when listening to a convincing argument. Besides that, they had the chance to assess and make sense of their relationships and place as women in society. The following survey answer illustrates this finding:

“Before, I thought that everything many women fight for was an exaggeration since we all have rights (...). Thanks to Julián and many of my classmates, I have realized that women have been treated as the “weak sex” all the time, which is why people take advantage, and abuse happens (...). I have also realized that we women can also help each other and that we can be better considering what people think”⁸. (Student survey, student T)

The students modified their thoughts when listening to different perspectives. They learned to make informed decisions and gained awareness about gender violence. This awareness and change of position are shared by Campbell (2014) and expressed in one of her poems:

But suddenly one discovers/ that her hands are empty./ And then one day/ one no longer wants to
be a woman/ because being one/ is not always so good nor so sweet./ Then she refuses and
complains/ curses and argues/ then revolts and denounces/ and then she does not/ does not
renounce to be./ She only thinks, decides, speaks up/ and warns everyone/ that from now on
she will be/ a woman.⁹

Setting Class Conditions

⁸ Antes pensaba que todo por lo que muchas mujeres luchan era una exageración ya que todos tenemos derechos (...). Gracias a Julián y a muchas de mis compañeras me he dado cuenta de que las mujeres sí hemos sido tratadas como el sexo débil todo el tiempo y por ello aprovechan y se dan abusos (...). También de que también entre mujeres nos podemos dar la mano y que podemos demostrar que entre nosotras somos mejor de lo que normalmente dicen.

⁹ Pero de pronto una descubre/ que las manos las tiene vacías./ Y entonces un día/ una no quiere ser más/ una mujer/ porque serlo/ no es siempre tan bueno/ ni tan dulce./ Entonces niega y reniega/ maldice y discute entonces/ se subleva y denuncia/ y entonces no/ no renuncia a ser. /Sólo piensa, decide, habla/ y le avisa a todos/ que a partir de ahora/ será/ una mujer.

Regarding this category, it can be said that setting classroom conditions were an essential factor that influenced class development and goal achievement. Consequently, it was found that paying attention to classroom decoration, agreement making, and affection as a pedagogical practice improved the learning environment. The following reflection supports this: “Elements that could be “insignificant” for some could represent a lot for the students who are usually in the same classroom looking at the same white, simple, boring walls.” (Journal entry extract, May 24th, 2022). In this way, teachers can prepare the classroom’s environment to catch the students’ attention, include their voices, and make them feel comfortable for learning production. In the same direction, Hardman and Smith (1999) state that teachers are responsible for identifying and adapting classroom conditions toward creating positive learning environments.

Ritualizing Teaching-Learning

I identified that rituals strengthened learning processes and favored positive interaction and reconciliation among the girls. As stated in one of the journals:

“The ritual was one of the most powerful moments in the whole process: some reconciliations took place. It was really emotional. (...) When I looked at their faces and saw they were talking with love, I realized my mission was finished. (Journal entry extract, May 24th, 2022)

Rituals have been excluded from schools, and teachers have not given them the recognition and importance they deserve. We, as teachers, need to ritualize life, and retake those practices that allow us to connect with others, learn, and heal.

Making Agreements for Progress Achievement

This subcategory emerged after finding that teacher/researcher-students’ agreements were continuously proposed and achieved after identifying some obstacles in the research plan implementation. This process allowed the teacher-researcher to include students’ voices by

taking into account their ideas, concerns, and constraints. This could be evidenced in the following journal fragment:

I realized most students had read just a pair of pages or none. I got worried, but then I proposed a negotiation, inviting the students to agree on the number of pages they could read. After various minutes of dialogue, we agreed to read 100 pages of each book. (Journal entry extract, May 10th, 2022)

Teachers should not be the only decision-makers in classrooms. Teachers' openness to listen to, comprehend, and accept students' ideas and proposals should be present to avoid hierarchical violence. Breen (2000) asserts that there are three types of classroom negotiation a teacher must consider and be aware of: personal, interactive, and procedural.

Socio-Affective Practices

Under this subcategory, it was interesting to discover that the teacher-researcher frequently used socio-affective practices to encourage, congratulate, calm, and engage the students to boost learning achievement. The following excerpts reflect the students' positive reaction to the teacher-researcher's chain of affections:

Student 1: "I like that, during the presentations, you put little things on the assessment sheet like "I really liked what you presented". Student 5: "Oh, yes, those messages are so pretty". Student 3: "I cried with what you put behind the feedback of *They yelled at me black* because we really thought a lot about speaking because we had Student 7 in the group and because we were three white women talking about racism and we had to be very respectful with what we said".¹⁰

¹⁰ Estudiante 1: "A mí me gusta que en las exposiciones usted en la hojita de evaluación pone cositas como de "me gustó mucho lo que expusiste". Estudiante 5: "Ay, sí, tan lindos esos mensajes". Estudiante 3: "Yo lloré con lo que nos puso detrás de *They yelled at me black* porque realmente sí la pensamos mucho para hablar porque teníamos a Student 7 en el grupo y porque éramos tres mujeres blancas hablando de racismo y había que ser muy respetuosas con lo que dijéramos".

Then, teachers do not only teach from what they know but also from what they feel and how they make their students feel. Women's self-confidence and self-perception have been affected by years of gender violence, which can be enhanced by caring, empathetic words and shows of affection. In the interview conducted by Molano in 1983, Bateman (1983) defines what he calls a chain of affections by saying this:

If a person is absolutely felt, constantly loved, if a number of strong affections come together in them: the affection of the mother, of the sisters, of the lover, of the friends, this chain of affections defends them from death, from danger, makes them almost immortal¹¹.

Collaborative Learning for Mutual Growth

Considering this category, I found that a sense of community and collaboration was framed during the lessons where students helped each other looking for improvement. Students came to value each other's potentialities, interests, abilities, and qualities. This can be evidenced in the following excerpt:

I love working with Student Z... I think she has wonderful opinions; she is too brilliant, she makes an effort to learn and asks, "how do I pronounce this? How do I do it?" (...) When I realize I will be working with her, I say "yes, yes, yes!". She is wonderful, and you learn a lot from her, which I never expected¹². (Focus Group Interview, student 3)

With this, the students demonstrate they perceive knowledge as a social construction where it is necessary, through interactions, to join efforts, work collaboratively, and strengthen each other's

¹¹ Si una persona es absolutamente sentida, constantemente querida, si en ella se dan cita una cantidad de afectos fuertes, el afecto de la mamá, de las hermanas, de la amante, de los amigos, esa cadena de afectos lo defiende de la muerte, del peligro, lo vuelve casi inmortal.

¹² Me encanta trabajar con Estudiante Z, me parece que opina maravilloso; me parece que es demasiado tesa, ella se esfuerza por aprender y pregunta ¿cómo pronuncio esto, cómo lo hago? (...) Cuando en los grupos me tocan con ella, yo digo..¡síiii!. Es maravillosa y aprendes muchísimo de ella, que nunca me esperé aprender.

weaknesses. This is, in turn, a political bet where students recognize themselves as a collective body in which no one must be left behind in the sense Matthews et al. (1995) propose.

Students as Active Participants and Co-constructors

Regarding this subcategory, I found that students became active participants in the co-construction research project by providing ideas, suggesting materials, and helping the teacher-researcher properly develop the lesson activities. The following interview fragment illustrates this:

One of the things I like the most is that you give us a chance, you give us the space to give you feedback with ideas. For example, the songs that Student W suggested to you. The songs that Student 1 suddenly suggested. You provide that honesty, that confidence that we can suddenly enrich the classes¹³. (Focus Group Interview, student 4)

Since the students received the teacher-researcher's backing, they participated in the research project and contributed to achieve a common goal; they felt confident to give ideas and become co-constructors. This is another way of creating environments for the students to feel empowered and break the glass ceiling society has imposed on them.

Conclusions

This collaborative action research project was implemented to describe how women's literature fosters positive interaction and collaborative learning in a group of eleventh-grade girls. Considering the findings mentioned above, I would like to state some conclusions

¹³ Una de las cosas que más me gusta es que tú das chance, das el espacio, de que te retroalimentemos con ideas. Por ejemplo, las canciones que te ha sugerido Student W. Las canciones que de repente Student 1 te sugería. Tú brindas esa honestidad, esa confianza de que de repente nosotras podamos retroalimentar las clases.

regarding the proposed strategy's effectiveness in terms of collaborative work/learning and positive interaction promotion and some constraints identified while developing the project.

As evidenced, this project promoted students' reflection and awareness regarding sensitive topics and problems that have historically affected women. Many girls expressed how engaged and moved they felt about the discussions. The girls considered our classroom a safe space to talk about the gender violence women suffer and the situations they deal with in their everyday lives. Moreover, they are aware of the unequal society in which they live, where women are still subjugated in many spheres by a male-hierarchical system. However, they also know that this needs to be changed, so they have been empowering themselves to do so. As expressed by one of the students, they are the women of the future and, even though they cannot change the world, they can change themselves to impact others too.

In addition, the Literature circle strategy allowed the students to share ideas, listen to others' voices and perspectives, understand their world view, make agreements, and co-construct to achieve a common goal. Moreover, most students were willing to participate actively in the class activities, help each other while struggling, and even be part of the co-construction and development research project. Allowing students to choose the text they wanted based on their likes and interests highly favored that willingness. During those activities, students who were reluctant to work with classmates or develop the proposed tasks had a change of heart, which was very positive.

Regarding interaction, I did not mean they only exchanged actions, words, or gestures, but that those interplays came from empathy and understanding and were carried out with love and care. As mentioned in the problem statement, negative competence and bad manners prevented girls from joining efforts and accepting they can learn from each other. Then, thanks

to the texts and discussions proposed, we agreed the world was already too difficult and violent for women, so they must not be the stick on another woman's wheel. Instead, a sense of sisterhood (political solidarity among women) must be cultivated and promoted.

However, not everything was positive during the project development since it was censured by some of the school's members who thought I must be in charge of "academic affairs" instead of talking about "thorny topics" with the girls. This led to a forced project modification in which some topics were explicitly forbidden², and texts were subject of examination. These difficult times brought some repercussions on the project itself and some impacts on the teacher-researcher's mental health. In any case, the obstacles were sorted out, and the project could be implemented until the end.

Finally, I need to acknowledge that the purpose of promoting positive interactions and collaborative learning is not 100% fulfilled since it takes time to change the social imaginaries we have been growing up in, which are still latent. This is a long-term process that takes lots of effort to achieve the desired goal. However, although the patriarchal system incites women to compete and look at others with suspicion, this must be the beginning for many girls to start changing that state of mind and collaborating as they did during the class activities.

Reflections and Suggestions

To begin with, being a teacher-researcher is a laudable job. Simultaneous teaching and researching is a time-consuming, complex, and challenging process. I acknowledge that we have big shoes to fill and many responsibilities on our shoulders. However, I need to acknowledge how gratifying and necessary researching and teaching at the same time are since they allow us

to improve teaching and learning practices and adopt a critical perspective of the issues that take place in our classrooms and societies.

I want to share my position against academic extractivism in schools. Researchers have repetitively presented themselves as saviors and morally superior subjects who will solve a community problem. Nevertheless, they end up collecting information for their own interests and benefits and then leave. As teacher-researchers, we have the opportunity and responsibility to put knowledge into practice and take advantage of it to the maximum; this includes communities. Then, knowledge derived from research should not be meant for increasing academic production or accomplishing personal fulfillment but for people's benefit and to help communities solve contextualized problems.

As usual, women have taught me more than I could teach them. That is why I end up feeling I still owe them something. They have made me the man I am today and keep making me a better version of myself. My admiration for those who were my students for around a year is deep and still increasing. During the moments of doubt when I thought the project would be adrift, my mom, boyfriend, friends, and teachers got me and encouraged me to continue working. That is the necessary chain of affections Jaime Bateman talked about, and I would like to keep promoting.

As closure, I have some unpretentious suggestions for teachers with similar problems, interests, and/or contexts. First, keep exploring the bibliography; literature is a vast universe that enriches humanity. Second, address Latin American writers and those from marginalized contexts; there are thousands and thousands of incredible female writers and texts to discover. Third, try new activities and strategies to teach; students always appreciate new practices and

different ways of teaching. Finally, keep promoting chains of affections among your students; the world is already difficult to add another problem.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Table 1

Matter	August	September	October	November
First institution contact and context description	●			
Class observation	●	●		
Journal entries	●	●	●	●
Class implementation			●	●
Problem statement			●	
Theoretical framework			●	
Research Methodology			●	
Action plan design				●

Appendix 2

Table 2

Matter	February	March	April	May	June
Initial contact and project presentation	●				
Micro-units design	●				
Class implementation		●	●	●	
Teacher's journal		●	●	●	
Focus group			●		
Student survey				●	
Data analysis and interpretation				●	●
Findings and discussion writing					●
Project revision					●

Appendix 3

Bibliography used

Violence against Women
1. Strawberry shortcake, Melanie Martinez
2. Pretty hurts, Beyonce
3. Breaking down, Florence
4. Hair, Lady Gaga
5. All about that bass, Meghan Trainor
6. Orange juice, Melanie Martinez
Women's Identity

-
1. They yelled at me “black”, Victoria Santa Cruz
 2. Me llamo Yoon, Helen Recorvits
 3. My name, Sandra Cisneros
 4. *I’m woman, Emmy Meli
 5. Born this way, Lady Gaga
-

Women’s Relations

-
1. Like the moon loves the sky, Hena Khan
 2. Imani’s moon, JaNay Brown-Wood
 3. *Bad Blood, Taylor Swift
 4. *The Bronte sisters. Good night stories for rebel girls, Elena Favilli
 5. The other side, Jacqueline Woodson
-

Women’s Empowerment

-
1. Ama del día, Ana Ilce Gomez
 2. *Superwoman, Alicia Keys
 3. Still I Rise, Maya Angelou
 4. *Roar. Katy Perry
 5. Bird set free, Sia
 6. *Savage daughter, Sarah Hester
 7. Song without fear, Vivir Quintana
-

Women’s Stories written by other women:

-
1. Purple Hibiscus, Chimamanda Adichie
 2. Like water for chocolate, Laura Esquivel
 3. Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi
-

Appendix 4

Student survey

1. ¿Qué piensas de las actividades propuestas en clase por el profesor-aprendiz?
2. ¿Qué tanto crees que has aprendido de tus compañeras en las actividades de clase propuestas por el profesor-aprendiz? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Cuál de las actividades implementadas por el profesor-aprendiz en clase has sentido que promueven el intercambio de ideas? ¿Por qué?
4. ¿En algún momento has cambiado tu punto de vista sobre un tema luego de escuchar las ideas de una de tus compañeras? ¿Qué hizo que cambiaras tu posición?
5. Sientes que tus compañeras:
 - a) Te ayudan
 - b) Te entienden
 - c) Te impiden mejorar
 - d) No te tienen en cuenta

- e) Otra (diga cuál)
6. Durante las discusiones desarrolladas en clase, ¿has experimentado alguno de los siguientes sentimientos hacia tu(s) compañera(s)? (Puede seleccionar más de una respuesta)
- a) Admiración
 - b) Envidia
 - c) Indiferencia
 - d) Celos
 - e) Enfado
 - f) Motivación
 - g) Entusiasmo
 - h) Preocupación
 - i) Otro (diga cuál)
7. Escoge uno de los anteriores sentimientos. ¿Podrías contar brevemente por qué y en qué situación lo experimentaste?

Appendix 5

Focus group

1. ¿A ustedes les gusta la literatura?
2. Ahora que se han podido acercar a esta estrategia que utiliza literatura escrita por mujeres, para mujeres y sobre mujeres, ¿qué piensan acerca de que las clases hayan girado alrededor de este tipo de literatura?
3. ¿Por qué creen que el proyecto giró en torno a esta estrategia a ustedes?
4. ¿Creen que las actividades propuestas han favorecido la interacción entre ustedes?
5. ¿Cuál es la actividad y la temática que más les ha llamado la atención de las que hemos abordado? ¿Por qué?
6. ¿Ustedes creen que estas actividades han promovido que ustedes puedan aprender con y de las demás?