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THE USE OF GAMES TO PROMOTE INTERACTION AMONG ELEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC INSTITUTION

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The Use of Games to Promote Interaction Among Eleventh-Grade Students at A Public
Institution

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Abstract

This action research project was carried out with the intention of exploring to what extent it is possible to promote interaction in the English classroom through the use of games in a public school in Medellín with 35 eleventh-grade students. The data collection process was done through active observations, an interview with the cooperating teacher; a questionnaire, a guided conversation with the students, video recordings of the staging of a role-play, and students' written works; all the processes supported by reviewing professional literature. Data analysis showed that using games in the English class is effective in promoting interactions and providing a collaborative environment. The conclusions of this study showed that interaction among students was encouraged by the definition of a class framework that progressively invited students to enjoy playing games that promoted interactions, motivation, and learning about the language thanks to the fact that students felt more confident and motivated.

Key words: Games, collaborative environment, interaction, motivation, enjoyment.

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement for the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

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Table of Contents

Preface

From my experience when I was in high school, English classes turned out to be very repetitive, focused on teaching grammatical structures and translating words from English to Spanish. I thought that this was the correct way to teach a language.

Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to meet dedicated teachers, from whom I have learned that being a teacher is not just about having specific knowledge of a language. We must be aware of the indispensable role of pedagogy as a significant agent of development in the teaching-learning process. We must be knowledgeable and empathetic with our students' realities to offer them the best way to learn while enjoying the process.

From the observations I made when I started my research practice, I could see myself reflected in those students. I saw how they copied in their notebooks and repeated words, seeing English as one more subject in which they did not have the opportunity to interact with each other.

Thinking about how to provide students with an environment where they feel confident to participate and interact using English without feeling judged, I remembered that years ago, I had researched about games in English class. Then, if when we are children, games allow us to learn and interact in our mother tongue, in these young students who are just learning English, it would also allow them to be a means of interaction and learning.

That is why this project sought a way to explore how games can promote interaction among students while creating a collaborative and enjoyable environment.

Description of the Context

This study was conducted at Institución Educativa El Playón, located north of Medellín, in El Playón neighborhood. This neighborhood was founded by victims of forced displacement and has been constantly affected by gang violence and drug sales. However, little by little they have found solutions to these problems in the union of families, a better social organization and the creation of schools focused on social and cultural transformation.

Continuing with this desire for transformation, El Playón emerged as a mixed educational institution, and since 2015 offers formal education at the levels of preschool, basic primary, basic secondary and technical secondary. One of the educational objectives at this school is to foster the creation of values among students that allow them to transform realities. As a vision, by 2025, the institution hopes to be recognized for its transforming work in society thanks to the development of life projects that promote respect for oneself and for others. Its philosophy is based on principles that seek to generate a positive impact both in society and in the social and family environment of students.

In terms of facilities, the school is a 3-storey yellow and blue building. It has a teacher's room in which there is a utility room with lockers and is equipped with two desktop computers and an individual desk for each teacher to work and have lunch. The school also has a cafeteria which was temporarily closed due to the pandemic, but is now operating normally; a patio that also acts as the sports area, a library, a computer room and a total of 12 classrooms.

The institution has 22 full-time teachers hired for both primary and secondary, and according to the areas. One of those areas is English, which is taught in all grades. In primary school, it is the same teacher of each group who teaches English with the other subjects. In

high school, there are two teachers who are in charge of teaching English and Spanish. One

of them teaches classes from sixth to eighth grade, and my cooperating teacher (CT) is in

charge of the ninth, tenth and eleventh-grade groups, with an hourly intensity of 3 hours per

group a week.

       The objectives of the institution's English syllabus for each group are divided into

three academic terms and are based on the Basic Standards of Foreign Languages

competencies (Guía 22)[11] framed in the work carried out by the Ministry of Education (MEN)

through the implementation of the National Bilingualism Program (PNB) issued in 2006. One

of the references for this program is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

for Languages which defines the knowledge and skills that students must acquire to achieve

effective communication in the language to be learned.

       Regarding my CT, she has a degree in Foreign Languages from the University of

Antioquia and a Master's in Teaching English. When I interviewed her, in relation to her

methodology, she told me that she does not define her teaching in any way, but rather adapts

the contents to the abilities of the students and teaches them for life. As for her experience,

she has worked in private schools and universities before working at El Playón. This

transition was a shock to her and completely changed her view of education. She thought that

meeting the basic proficiency standards would be easy, but the reality was that the students

did not have the language skills to do it, nor the motivation because they did not find any

meaning in learning English. In addition, she mentioned that even in Spanish they have a

hard time understanding, and she has to repeat the lessons.

       This study started with a group of 34 tenth graders in the second semester of 2021.

This group passed to eleventh grade with two new students. They belong to a socio-economic

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[1] Guía 22 is a tool that defines the standards of the National Bilingualism Plan, establishing what students must know and be able to do to demonstrate a B1 level of proficiency at the end of Eleventh Grade.

stratum 1 and 2, which indicates that they live in conditions of scarce resources. Most of them live in El Playón, but some of them live in surrounding neighborhoods. In the English class, students spoke Spanish and did not participate unless the teacher asked them to. The class began with a greeting, a summary of their grades, and what they were going to work on in the following classes. Then, the teacher explained a topic to them and assigned them an activity. While they were working, the teacher called the roll and checked that they brought the English dictionary. Not taking it to class negatively affected their grade point average.

At the beginning of this project, in 2021, and as part of the measures implemented to face the pandemic caused by Covid 19, the students were receiving face-to-face classes under the alternation modality proposed by the government. Then, the schedule was divided so that two subgroups of each group attended the same day, following the same order of subjects. So, for high school, one subgroup had to attend from 6:15 to 9:00 a.m. and the other from 9:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. This measure was complemented by the mandatory use of masks and social distancing. Through the first semester of 2022, the groups worked with the total number of students, with full class hours. Social distancing was no longer required but the use of masks was.

Statement of the problem

Since I began to observe in the tenth grade at El Playón school, I noticed that the students did not interact during classes. The students only responded in Spanish to what the teacher asked them. The opportunities to interact among them in English was non-existent, there was participation but no interaction. To demonstrate this lack of interaction, I collected information by recording the observations in my journal and interviewing the CT and some students. In a class observation (August 23rd), the teacher explained the lesson to both groups with almost the same exactness and choice of words. It seemed to me that I was seeing the same class twice. She told them that they were starting a new period so they had to mark their

notebook with a cover. And she wrote on the board what they should put in their notebooks.: THIRD TERM - 3rd TERM. Additionally, she wrote, "What feels like the end is often the beginning". She gave them the translation of the sentence she wrote at the beginning and told them that they should explain what it means to them in a paragraph. Then drew a table on the board with the title "Adverbs of frequency", and wrote eight adverbs with their percentage of frequency, each with an example. While the students were copying, she called them one by one to show them their grades. They did not socialize either on the quote she asked them to write on their notebooks. They did not have the time to do it, although some were interested in understanding it. I also noticed that to introduce the subject, the teacher did not inquire about their previous knowledge, she only asked them to copy.

In the interview I conducted with the cooperating teacher, she expressed that one problem they face is that because of many situations at school, classes are canceled, teachers hardly cover the contents for the term, and still students have to get a grade. Regarding the use of Spanish in the class, she mentioned that it was difficult for them to understand even in Spanish, and she has to repeat the lesson. She affirmed that the oral activities were more difficult to work with, for example, asking them to make an oral presentation meant that they would read from the cell phone, not only in the English class but for every subject. For example, to promote conversations, she had to do it through guided dialogues because they do not like to share with the whole group. When the issue of the use of dynamic activities like games was addressed, she told me that they are excellent ways to consolidate knowledge or as warm-ups. However, in this school, she used them rarely because sometimes classes went out of control, creating competition and causing them to become undisciplined. In other words, she limits interactions among students to avoid disorder.

Finally, I interviewed 8 of the 10th-grade students, four from each of the groups organized to face social distancing, to inquire about their perception of English and the

activities carried out in the class. From these interviews, I concluded that, in general, the students had a good relationship with their families and considered themselves good at activities related to sports and creativity. Most of the students did not like English, however, they knew that it was necessary if they wanted to leave the country one day. Everyone liked how the teacher explained and what they liked the most about the English class was the teacher. They did not like creating sentences or going out to the board because they were afraid of embarrassment. The activities they liked the most were doing dialogues, playing games, and drawing. However, they highlighted that they had only done these activities once or twice. Finally, I asked them what activities they would like to carry out in class, to which they responded to go out on the board more, draw, do dialogues, play together, and play didactic games like the lottery.

My initial intention was to work on social problems through a strategy that allowed their reflection and interaction because the school was located in a context where violent acts are constant. I considered doing it through role-plays, however, through the observations, and the interviews I conducted with both the CT and the students, I realized that social problems were not directly of students' concern. With the information above, I was able to verify that some issues influenced the performance and motivation of students in the English class, which I classified into two. On the one hand, there was a teacher-centered interaction since students' opportunities to participate or interact with each other was minimal. And on the other hand, only grammar-focused activities were proposed in the class. There were activities such as filling in blanks, copying and following a scheme to form sentences. To address these issues, I could take into account the students' suggestions and carry out more dynamic activities so that they interact and participate and thus feel more involved.

Theoretical Background

After delimiting the problem, I began a review of academic articles that could

enlighten me in the proposal of a project to be implemented. The initial key concepts that emerged from this dialogue with theory, and that guide this proposal are interaction and games in the language classroom. First, I will refer to the importance of interaction in the learning process. Second, I will refer to the advantages of using games in the English language classroom and how they can help to promote interaction. Finally, about the concepts that contributed to the understanding and enriching of what emerged through implementation.

Interaction

As social human beings, interaction is essential because we build ourselves from our relationships with others. We learn from others, even the same rules for living in society. In the classroom, interaction plays a fundamental role in learning. According to Allwright (1984), everything happens in the classroom because of person-to-person interaction. When I was reviewing the literature on how interaction affects language learning in the classroom, I found Yu (2008), who states that it is through classroom interaction that language acquisition takes place. In addition to providing practice opportunities in the target language, interaction contributes to the learner's development. The author explains that when students talk, they are not only interacting or practicing the target language and constructing their language development process, but developing awareness of self-regulation when they negotiate with peers and tutors. Therefore, interaction becomes a vehicle that allows L2 learners to acquire linguistic knowledge and ability, and students and teachers become creators of learning opportunities; thus, motivation and interest to communicate are enhanced.

Games

As it is suggested above, the English class needs to become a space for students to interact with each other. Similar to everyday life interaction, students require support to communicate effectively in a foreign language, and this can be done through different activities, either to use what they have learned in the lesson related to diverse topics, or the

theoretical part that the teacher presents. One of these alternative activities is using games.

Since we are children, we have used the game to have fun and make friends. In the classroom, games can create an interactive environment suitable for learning, where students can learn while having fun and interacting with their peers using the language for a purpose. Talak (2010) defines games as "fun activities that promote interaction, thinking, learning, and problem-solving strategies" (p. 04). Thus, games work as a foundation for learning. They provide an environment where the students and their learning are central.

I also found that this author mentions different advantages of implementing games in the classroom. Among them, it is worth mentioning: It improves the self-esteem of the students, eliminating the risk of failure since it proposes different solutions for the same problem; improves participation by involving students in a more realistic setting; promotes different learning strategies and styles; promotes interaction among students helping to eliminate barriers and stereotypes; develop a collaborative relationship, through teamwork, which also helps improve trust, players must trust each member of their group. Finally, the games allow students to practice vocabulary by repeating the same words and concepts in different ways, with a purpose. They learn by doing and also by seeing how others do it. (Talak, 2010, p. 5).

In the action research report by Bryan Arias (2017, p.19): "Promoting Interaction in the English Classroom Through the Designing of Board Games with Sixth Graders at a Public School", he explained his interest in verifying the effectiveness of board games to promote interaction with a group of 37 students. He first implemented activities to acquire vocabulary, such as videos and worksheets. While they were acquiring vocabulary, they performed several pre-designed board games to practice and give them examples of what they should do. In the second part of his implementation, he taught them how to create the questions to design their own games and finally, the students created and played their own

games. The researcher found that using board games improved the levels of interaction among students. These helped to create a stress-free environment in which students felt confident to participate even using the target language.

Planning Games

Since the planning of games is essential to obtain effective results, I have taken as a reference the postulates of Zhu (2012, p. 804). The author addresses first, the amount of time allocated to both the content and the development of the game, it is important to find a balance. Second, the importance of knowing how to choose the most appropriate type of game for the context, students' level, objectives, interests, resources and materials. Third, the need to prepare the student linguistically and logistically, as well as to prepare the space and conditions. Beyond this, he also talks about foreseeing setbacks and having multiple options to overcome them. Finally, concerning management, the teacher decides the organization of the students and the classroom to carry out the game. The teacher must be the leader and guide of the students, and ensure the correct development by encouraging participation, the use of the language, providing feedback and maintaining commitment and motivation.

Role-Playing Games

One of the games considered for the implementation of this project is Role-play. These are dramatic games in which imaginary or real situations are represented. In other words, performing a role-play in the language class allows students to imagine themselves as someone else and interpret an authentic situation. This helps improve their oral performance and practice the vocabulary and structures learned, thus promoting interaction among students. According to Thuyet (2020) there are three stages to using role-play in the classroom: before, during and after the role-play. In the first stage, the aim is to attract the attention of the students with games, images, etc. Also instruct them in new vocabulary and structures so that they are able to recognize role-play dialogues and can practice them among

themselves or among the whole class. In the second stage, students have the opportunity to modify their dialogues or even create their own. Finally, the after role-play stage is about reviewing the performance of the students and giving them feedback. In this part it is also possible to include a reflection of the students about the situation they interpreted.

Collaborative Work

If games encourage interaction, they will encourage collaborative work. The individualistic vision begins to fade slightly due to the dynamics established by the games, as proposed by Talak (2010) "the students will begin to see each other as individuals and will learn more about each other instead of seeing what they are on the surface... It promotes a symbiotic relationship where they can learn from each other." (p.7) Since students must cooperate to achieve the same goal, they need to learn to work with each other in order to learn from themselves and with others. Barriers between students are eliminated as discussion and analysis to find the solution to the challenge takes precedence. By sharing their different positions, highlighting their abilities and recognizing their weaknesses, students improve their understanding of themselves and their peers, enhance their self-esteem and build trust. That is why I would dare to say that talking about interaction and forming a collaborative environment is related to the development of a community.

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Research Question

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Now, taking into account my understanding of the context in which I would carry out my practicum and research stage, and the theoretical concepts I explored, the question that guides this research is: How can classroom games promote interactions among students in an eleventh-grade group of a public institution in Medellín?

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Objectives

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General Objective:

To foster interactions among students in a group of eleventh graders at a public school

through games.

Specific Objectives:

To promote interaction and enjoyment among students through games to use the target language.

To create a cooperative and participatory environment for learning.

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Action Plan

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With the purpose of exploring the impact of games fostering interactions among tenth graders in a public school, this action plan was designed to take place over a period of 16 weeks. The implementation was initially divided into two cycles: the practice cycle (6 weeks) and the creation cycle (10 weeks). This plan would start with the socialization of the research proposal, and consulting students about their approval to be part of the research through informed consent. The objectives and the stages of each one was planned as follows.

For the Practice cycle, the objectives were, first, to provide a transition space to support students in their search for meaning in interacting with their peers and to promote interaction among students; second, to learn about their perceptions of the impact of the games in this effort. The first game, Pictionary would aim at practicing vocabulary and build their confidence; the second game snakes and ladders (board game), at answering questions in teams to work on the conversational part; finally, the third game would be Charades in which one student would act out an action without speaking and other students would guess what the action was. This last game would act as a transition for role-playing games (RPG) in the creation cycle. At the end of this cycle, a questionnaire would be administered to the students to find out their perception of the games played.

The creation cycle would aim at encouraging students to create and implement their own role-play in the classroom and use argumentative skills to express their point of view. In turn, this cycle would consist of two parts, in the first we would do a RPG with a given

situation, and in the second, it would be the students who would create their own situation for

a role-playing game. For the first part, I would start by explaining to them what an RPG is all

about and showing them sample videos. Then I would assign them and explain the situation

created by me, in this case, "The Queen of Hearts". The context for this role play is a

kingdom in which the queen considers that it is necessary to eliminate those who do not

contribute something good to her. Each student has a role: one of them is the queen, and the

other students have to choose an occupation and argue why they are needed in the kingdom.

If they don't give a good reason, the queen will kick them out of the kingdom.

After explaining the situation, students would create their characters, taking into

account personal information, personality and profession. Likewise, I would teach them how

to create an argument. Students would create their own plots and select an object that

identifies their characters. After the staging, we would reflect on and discuss the social issues

implicit in the game such as Power, Authority and Inequality, and the implications for us as a

country and ourselves as part of it.

The second part of this cycle would be the counterproposal by the students to the

situation in the role-play The Queen of Hearts. In groups, the students would create a role-

playing game that answered the question: What would a community in which you would like

to live to be like? They would have enough time to create them and my constant help during

this process. Later, the students would direct and play the created games. Finally, we would

have a conversation about the entire process and reflect on the issues addressed in their role

plays. For data collection, a focus group and a guided conversation would be held.

Development of actions: What actually happened

The action plan for this project was proposed for 16 weeks of classes, in which

students would have two English classes per week, for a total of 32 classes from February 03

to May 27. However, this could not be carried out in its entirety, since there were 14 days in

which classes were canceled for different reasons. This reduction in time implied a modification of the activities that were going to be carried out throughout the implementation. Additionally, the action plan was also modified by circumstances such as: the ICFES tests that students must take in September, and the fact that the students required more support to take risks with English language use to participate in games. These circumstances also implied a change in the topics to work on and in the games proposed for both cycles.

Something important throughout the implementation was the organization of the class, which was divided into two parts, one of explanation in which examples were built collaboratively, this with the aim of knowing the previous knowledge of the students and motivating them to use what they already knew about the topic. And the other part of practice or production in which the students carried out an activity to use what they learned during the class. The decision-making process concerning the organization of the class responded to the need to support students through the activities that would lead them to the creation of characters.

From my observations and reflections as I started the implementation, I was able to notice that the students did not have the appropriate language for some of the games that I had proposed in the action plan, then I decided to modify or even change them, as was the case with Snakes and Ladders that was replaced by "Who wants to be millionaires?" both involved answering questions, however, the latter involved a format and rules known to them. Additionally, I took into account the grammar structures that were going to be needed throughout the process to meet the main objective of the second cycle, which consisted of a role-play. These topics were related to the creation of biographies such as the verb to-be, adjectives, physical description, professions and skills. In the following paragraphs, I will give an account of the framework to play games with this group of students, and the changes

implemented in the practice cycle which responded initially to the linguistic needs I identified as students started to participate in the activities.

The strategy I defined to introduce students to the world of games in this project was to play hangman using a day of the week to connect with a topic they had already studied. The students passed a ball among them, and when I said stop, the person who had the ball said a letter. Everyone was participating and paying attention to the ball and the board.

I continued with the guessing game '**Who am I?'** When a student came to the board, I put a piece of paper on his forehead or on the board, and the others would give them clues to discover who he was, according to the card. For example, the first character was Shakira, the students said keywords like "woman" "singer" "she is from Colombia" "Piqué". Everyone was collaborating and interacting so that each student would guess their character. Then I explained to them how to talk about ourselves and describe people using personal pronouns and the conjugation of the verb to-be for each pronoun. Then they created sentences with the verb to-be, and it was at this point that I realized that the students did not have the vocabulary and grammatical structures to actually participate in the games I had planned.

Being aware of students' linguistic needs I planned a review to use what they had worked on in previous classes with the CT, and I named it as **Puzzle.** For the first part of this activity, I wrote Shakira's biography on the board with simple sentences mainly using the verb to-be. I underlined the nouns with one color and the verbs with another color. We read them together. And most of those in the room understood what the paragraph was about. For the second part of the activity, we

Figure 1
Puzzle
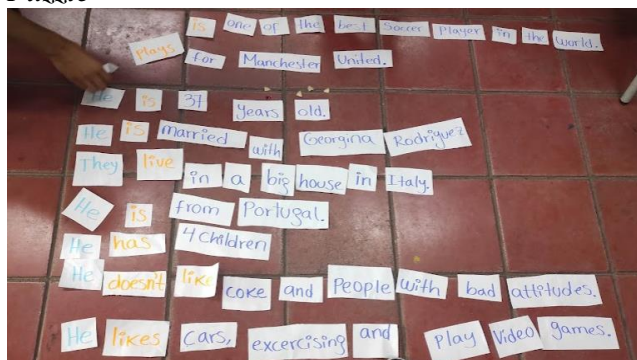
Note: Cristiano Ronaldo's biography

put together the biography of Cristiano Ronaldo (Figure 1), as if we were doing a puzzle.

Each student received two words so that we could organize a coherent text. These words were classified by colors, one for nouns, another for verbs and the other for complements so that students could find a sequence, and also be guided by the example on the board.

In order to start promoting other types of interactions among students, I planned a **Bingo!** that would allow them to prepare for interviewing peers. There was an explanation about how to use wh-words using examples for each one of them. Additionally, I asked them to provide more examples, and as I noticed that the students were responding positively to the explanation, I also explained that there were other ways to ask questions and one of them was yes/no questions. We transformed the previous examples into yes/no questions and answered them together.

In the second part of the activity, we used both types of questions to make a Bingo. I first performed an example with one of the students. Then, I gave each student a piece of paper with a bingo box and some questions below it to be completed with the names of their classmates as they walked around the class, asking their classmates until they found someone who answers yes to any of the questions in the worksheet. Once they completed all the boxes with a name, they had to call BINGO. After 5 minutes, some had finished.

To continue providing a context for the use of questions, I decided to play with them **Who wants to be a millionaire?** I defined the questions taking into account the topic we were working on to practice for the ICFES test, which was the signs that can be found in different places in the city. This time it was a team effort, so the group was divided into two teams. The first group answered the first question and they had 1 minute to discuss it among themselves and answer. With each question, I reminded them that they had lifelines. During the game, students who felt sure of their answers took the risk to share them, and I noticed how they discussed and argued about what the correct answer was.

In order to address the use of adjectives to describe people, we played **Unscrambling.** First, we talk about the most used types of adjectives: Size, color, opinion, and feeling. For each one, I asked them for examples, and I wrote 4 adjectives and two sentences in each category. They also had to write them in their notebooks. We also did several examples using adjectives when they are part of the subject or when they are part of the complement in a sentence. To play the game, I wrote 6 scrambled sentences on the board, which included adjectives. In groups, they had to find a coherent order for each of them. To share the answers, we called a random number from the roll and the student had to explain why they had organized the sentence in that way. Then, that student would say a number from the list who would be the next student to participate. Although they all put the sentences in the correct order, only two of them were able to explain why they had used that order.

There were even some words with different meanings and among them, they tried to negotiate to know which one was correct. For example, one of them asked me about the meaning of smooth. He remembered that word from the song "Smooth criminal" as "sigiloso", not as "suave" as the dictionary said. I explained to him that both were correct but it depended on the context, so he could write both.

To wrap up this practice cycle, I planned to involve students in playing **Charades,** as a transition, and in order to get ready for the creation cycle. I explained the main differences between charades and role play, and provided examples for each one. We tried to make a role-play together by creating characters of a Colombian family.

For the charades, I had prepared an online spinner with the names of each of them and on small pieces of paper, I had written the professions that they had chosen for the task. One of the students acted as an assistant to start the roulette and the chosen person had to go to the front, take a role and act according to the profession assigned without saying a word. The rest of the class had to say the name of the profession in English.

This time the students seemed to be enjoying the game, everyone was participating, and some didn't want to participate or didn't know how to act, so I helped them by saying how they should act or even serving as a supporting actress. For example, one time a girl didn't know how to play a policeman, so I acted as a thief so that she would arrest me and others would easily guess.

Once we completed the practice cycle, it was time to organize for the creation cycle in which students would have the opportunity to create their characters and participate with others in **Role-Play** that would allow them to use the language we had explored through different games. This dramatization game had been considered the most important for this project in the action plan, since, in addition to interacting with each other, the students were going to create their own characters, according to a given situation, using elements such as the description and the argument. Additionally, they would create their own role plays by proposing a situation. For this part of the action plan, 9 weeks had been proposed. However, due to all the classes missed, the time was not enough. We did the first part, that is, the role-playing game in which I proposed the situation to be interpreted.

I had proposed a single role-playing game called "The queen of hearts" in the action plan. However, at the time of implementation, I thought of an additional situation, since the Queen of Hearts implies an unknown context for them, since most of them were not familiar with the story of Alice in Wonderland. Then, I had the idea of adapting the main situation of the movie Wall-E, which depicts how the planet earth became an uninhabitable place due to humans' neglect of the environment, then, people are being evacuated in a giant spaceship called The Axiom. This evacuation is free, but they cannot take everyone, so there is a selection process. This became the context for students to present their arguments as to why they deserve a place in The Axiom.

To carry out the RPG we use 6 classes. In the first one, I explained to them through slides, what a RPG was, and the steps to do it. Then I showed them on the slides the two situations that I had prepared including the characters that would be needed. Additionally, I showed them an example of a character using images, which allowed them to better understand the idea of the example, and tried to confirm that they were understanding with each image. See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2

Examples of characters

Note: Creation of characters for role-play

In the Second class, the emphasis was on how to create the character, taking into account personal information, physical appearance, personality, profession and skills. Additionally, I gave an example for each situation. Here they began to create their own characters. In the third class, they continued to work on their character development and completed it. In the fourth class, we did a staging practice, divided into two groups, each student interpreted their character by reading what they had written. In this class, I realized that the rest of the class did not understand what each student was saying, so for the fifth class, I proposed that they make a drawing in which they had to show graphically what their abilities were so that their classmates could better understand what they said. See Figure 3.

Figure 3

Students' creations
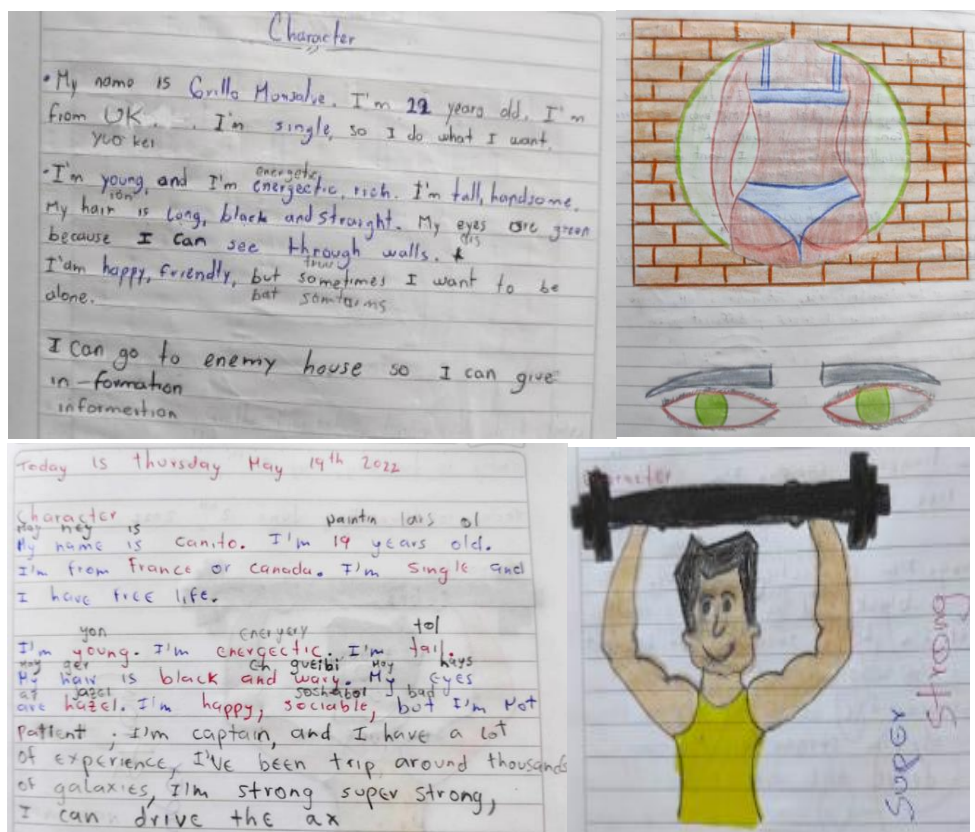
Note: Description and drawing of the character that two different students chose for the role-play.

Finally, in the sixth class, we had the staging. At the beginning, it was difficult because the students no longer wanted to present their characters because some students who had important roles had been missing and some also felt on the spot. However, after an intervention of my CT, the students were motivated and expressed that they did not feel confident in the pronunciation, so we set aside part of the time to practice again the dialogues they were going to read. Finally, when they felt confident, the first group of the situation "the Queen of Hearts" passed. This was gratifying because at the beginning there were only going to be some members of the group who were going to participate, but then everyone got excited at introducing the character and providing the reasons for staying in the kingdom. Some were very confident, others very nervous, even so, the result was incredible because students who in the first classes did not even dare to participate or say a word in English

presented a character created from their imagination and were committed to their role. Then it was the turn of the second group with the situation "The Axiom". In the end, all the students were very happy and seemed to have enjoyed the experience.

Analysis and interpretations

To know how classroom games can promote student interactions, I collected data through different instruments: A pedagogical journal in which I recorded my observations of how the class was going and wrote down my reflections on these events. In addition, I designed and applied a survey at the end of the first cycle to know the students' perceptions about using games in the English class. Finally, at the end of the implementation, I carried out a guided conversation with all the students to find out their perceptions about the whole process. The data derived from each instrument was triangulated and analyzed in the light of the ideas of McNiff, Jean & Whitehead Jack, (2006).

In order to promote interactions through games, I identified that this process requires what I am going to name as Moments of Involvement. These moments consisted of: preparation considering students' needs related to language use; fostering gradual collaboration and participation; and invitations to collaborate and enjoy. Within the implementation of this project considering the aforementioned moments, games aimed at promoting interactions, promoting motivation, and promoting learning about the language.

Preparation considering students' needs: related to language use

According to Zhu (2012), preparation is essential to obtain effective results by using games in the English classroom. This preparation involves taking into account the confidence students have in using English and, depending on the type of game, providing them with the linguistic tools to achieve the objective of playing. From the beginning of the implementation, I noticed that the students did not have the linguistic repertoire to play the games I had proposed in the action plan. To prepare them, I decided to teach them the topics

they would need to play the different games, mainly role-play, and explain the rules of each game with examples and demonstrations. This resulted in fostering students' willingness to participate since, as they already had the tools to play, they felt more confident when participating. For example:

> "Following the plan of **what they need to know to create** their characters for the role-play, the topic for this day was adjectives. I wrote the title on the board and started trying to **find out their previous knowledge**, none of them could say what the meaning of adjectives was. So, I gave them an **example** with the sentences "she is a beautiful woman" and "The house is red", highlighting the words beautiful and red, and they all remembered it is used to describe." (March 17th-pedagogical journal)

Using examples was crucial for students to better understand the topics and what they had to do to complete an activity. An effective strategy when giving examples was relying on images, (See Figure 4) as it facilitated understanding the examples, and describing abilities, and characteristics of situations that could go beyond reality .

> "I started class by doing a review of the previous class, explaining the difference between charades and role-play. This time I focused on role-play and explained the steps we must follow to create our character. The first one was to choose the situation. So I showed them on the slides the two situations that I had prepared including the characters that they would need.

Figure 4

Example of character

Note: Example used to illustrate the students in the creation of the character for the role-play

Additionally, I showed them **an example** of a character using images, which allowed

them to understand the idea of the example better, and I was trying to confirm if they were understanding each picture related to the example." (May12th-pedagogical journal).

Fostering gradual collaboration and participation

Through the implementation of games, a collaborative environment was created in which students felt free to interact and participate. Activities were carried out in such a way that students gradually found the opportunity to help each other. For instance, in the survey that I applied to 29 of the students, when I asked them if the games had allowed them to help their classmates to understand, either English or the instructions of the game, 25 of them responded affirmatively, and only 4 answered that they were not sure. Along the same lines, when I asked them if the games had allowed them to receive help from their peers, 24 answered yes. This is something that I could notice throughout the implementation, for example in the following excerpts from my journal: "Before the presentation, everyone was interacting with each other, trying to help each other, asking the teacher or me, practicing among themselves so that everything went well, evidencing a collaborative environment" (June 3rd - pedagogical journal)

The use of examples changed in those moments since it was no longer a matter of giving them a guide, but instead building them together from the vocabulary to learn, and in this way, they contributed the knowledge they had and could feel part of the construction of knowledge.

Invitations to collaborate and enjoy

In turn, the collaborative environment mentioned above took place thanks to the invitations that I made to the students so that they were encouraged to participate not only in the games, but also in the activities and the construction of examples. Feeling invited to be part of the class aroused in them the desire to collaborate and help. In addition, the fact of not

feeling evaluated allowed them to enjoy the experience. One way to make them feel included

was by consulting with them about the games and activities that we were going to carry out,

so that when they agreed, they felt in a certain way a responsibility to be part of it.

Another way to participate and collaborate that they enjoyed was through the use of the

board. They lost their fear of the board and took advantage of the opportunities to come

forward, while receiving the help of their peers with the risk of being judged or eliminated.

"When everyone finished. I gave markers to two of the students, and when they sat

down, everyone else wanted to participate, even getting up and lining up to go to the

board…everyone wanted to participate." (March 17th-pedagogical journal)

Games promoting interactions

The use of games in the English class provides the students with more opportunities to

interact throughout this process of implementation. This interaction took place in different

ways, then following the 10 patterns of interaction suggested by Ur (1991, p.228), I found 4

different types of interaction: *open-ended teacher questioning, full-class, student-student and*

group work.

During the moments of preparation of the students for the games, the interaction

followed an *open-ended teacher questioning pattern*, in which students provided as many

answers as they could to a question. An example of this can be found in an extract from my

pedagogical journal:

"The students were very receptive and participated by providing examples, and on the

other hand, we tried to use English most of the time. Many of them did not say

complete sentences, only words but that helped to enrich the sentences. For example, I

would say "in a restaurant we can…" and they would say eat, drink, etc".

This can make evident how asking open-ended questions during the explanation of the topic,

in this case, places in the city, allowed the students to participate and be part of the lesson.

During the games, the class followed a *full-class interaction,* where the whole class was involved in the development of an activity and the teacher was the one who guided and motivated the students to participate and collaborate. An example from my journal is the following: "And using a worksheet with different images of places, we built together examples of things we could do in each place and I wrote two of each on the board and everyone participated." (March 3rd - pedagogical journal)

And finally, *student-student* interaction, in which students interact among themselves. When I asked the student to answer from 1 to 5 how much playing games in English class has allowed them to interact more with their classmates. 55% of them chose 5, and 31% answered 4. This indicates that most of them have felt that the games have allowed them to interact. An example of this type of interaction is recorded in my journal: "Again I noticed that the students seemed very excited to participate. Some said the answers to each other and others discussed giving their point of view. They were interacting among them." (March 4th-pedagogical journal)

There were also times when *group-work* interaction occurred, in which students worked in small groups on activities. An example of this comes from my journal where I expressed:

"In order to understand what role-play was, we tried to make an example among all of us by creating a Colombian family. In groups I asked them to tell me the characteristics of a member of the family, each group had to describe a different member. So, they interacted to agree on the characteristics that would give them their character." (May 05th-pedagogical journal)

During the process of preparing the role play, especially in the process of creating the characters, there was a group work interaction, as it required students to use their imagination and creativity to introduce their characters and help each other to make it easier.

"I suggested that they start creating their character and that we do it with personal information and think about what profession and skill they would have. Some formed groups and worked as a team and helped each other look up words in the dictionary. others did it individually. And almost all of them asked me, the CT or my advisor for help…" (May 16th)

Games promoting motivation:

Information collected from different sources through this process confirmed that games promote students' motivation and increase their confidence and risk-taking. In the guided conversation that we had at the end of the whole implementation, I asked them in Spanish, what do you think of playing games during the classes? How did you feel during the classes, and more specifically during the process of creating the final project, which was the Role-play, one of the students said: "Bien, nos metimos en el personaje. ¿Cómo te sentiste siendo super fuerte? uuu uno se sentía una chimba, uno sintiendo que tiene superpoderes, uno se imagina muchas cosas"[2]. Also, when I asked them if the activities made them feel more motivated to participate in class, they answer: "Si, daban ganas de salir al tablero, -nos sentimos motivados por los mismos compañeros, uno veía que salían y daban ganas de salir"[3]. The survey also provided information to support these gains concerning confidence. When I asked them how confident they felt in participating in the games, 79,2% of them answered that they felt confident, 31% answered very confident, and 48,2 % answered confident, while 20% said little confident.

From the observations recorded in my pedagogical journal, there is also evidence of the moments when the students were motivated. For example, when we played "Who wants to be a millionaire?

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[2] Well, we got into character. How did you feel being super strong? uuu I felt very good, feeling that I had superpowers, I imagined many things.

[3] Yes, they made us want to go out on the board, we felt motivated by our classmates, we saw that they came out and they made us want to go out too.

"During the game, I saw risky students who felt sure of their answers, I noticed how they discussed and argued about what the correct answer was. When they got the answers right, the whole group celebrated and felt proud, and even when they got it wrong, they continued to be motivated to continue playing. It is perhaps in this part that self-esteem begins to appear because they are surer of themselves. Even though the CT was not present, they were participating and collaborating for the correct development of the game." (March 11th)

There was also a moment during the classes, which became a beginning ritual in which the increase in the motivation and participation of the students was evident. During the previous year, the students were called from the list to write the date on the board, and sometimes some refused. During my intervention, I wanted to continue with this same dynamic, but this time it would be written by the student who wanted to do it voluntarily. I encouraged them by telling them that if they didn't know, together we would help them. And as the classes progressed, more and more students were willing to do it, some even volunteering themselves before the class started. Here are some examples from my pedagogical journal:

"The class started and the students were attentive, they helped me to connect the video beam. I started by asking who wanted to write the date and several were willing." (March 3rd). "I greeted them and asked them to write the date and several they wanted. I feel that more and more they like to use the board." (March 17th). "I asked someone to put the date and many of them raised their hands" (April 28th).

Games Promoting learning:

From the information collected, it is also shown that through games it is possible to promote the learning of English in students while they enjoy the process. In the survey when I asked them what other aspects of using games in English class they liked. These were some

of their responses: "Cuando nos ponía a pronunciar las palabras uno así se ayuda mucho."[4]

"Usar dinámicas al unir palabras me enseñan mucho"[5], "A través de los juegos se aprende

más"[6], "A que el inglés me guste más"[7], "Que nos podemos concentrar más mediante los

juegos."[8]

     Also from the guided conversation when I asked them how they liked the games ,

they said: "Bien, estuvo mejor el último, porque nos enseñó más, porque para este se requería

más de la creatividad de uno"[9]

Conclusions and reflections

*"**Life is more fun if you play games**," Roald Dahl*

What I learned and what we achieved together:

     Everyone can play in the English class with the proper preparation, that is one of the

greatest learnings through the implementation of this project. I experienced the importance of

knowing students in order to provide them with what they need in a way that is

understandable and pleasant for them. In my attempt to help them see English in a different

way, I described that student were visual and if they saw the words written or represented in

pictures, it was easier for them to understand their meaning and remember it later. That is

why the planning and the use of examples with images became the key factor for the success

of this project since it is not just about playing, they need significant preparation and if they

did not have previous experience with games proposed with the topics we worked on, the

examples gave us an instant experience.

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[4] When you made us pronounce the words like that, it helps us a lot.
[5] Using dynamics to join words teaches me a lot
[6] Through games we learn more"
[7] it makes me like English more
[8] That we can concentrate more through games.
[9] Well, the last one was better, because it taught us more, because this one required more of one's creativity

There were challenges such as the fact that the students did not have the knowledge and language to play. That implied a modification of the plan of action that I had in mind. So I had to organize classes so that students learn vocabulary. One of the goals of this project was for the students to have fun, and I noticed how they laugh and enjoy each game, even during the explanations and when giving examples.

A very important achievement was that we were able to create a collaborative environment. With each game I saw how the students gained more confidence when participating, seeing how students who at first were not involved, or worried about being part of the class dared to interact with others. In the classroom I felt their confidence, the fear was gone. The board stopped being a place of judgment used to punish, to be that place where students could share their knowledge and receive help from their classmates and the teacher, where they learned by practicing. This allowed us to see that we are all important, and what each person contributes to the development of the class is crucial. In short, for interaction to take place among students, there must be a cooperative environment, where they feel part of a community.

Reflections:

The creation of a community was a process I wanted to experience with my students, so that they understood the sense of community and the importance to discuss social issues. I aimed at this with the creation of their own role-play, however, due to lack of time, it was not possible to address their feelings to issues of social concern. Despite this, important insights were given that left an open path to experience the sense of community through games and a collaborative environment.

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