

A PROCESS TO SUPPORT THE VALIDITY OF AN ORAL ASSESSMENT BY
RAISING AUTHENTICITY

A thesis presented by

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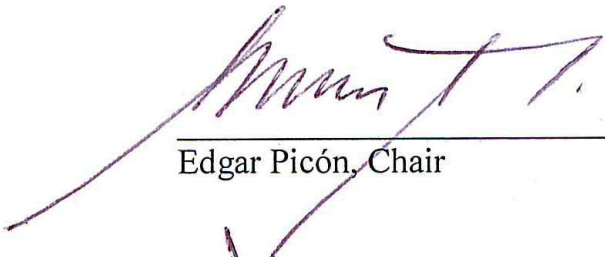
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A Thesis Presented
by
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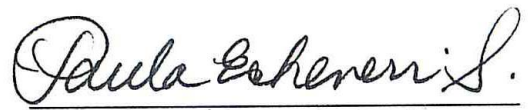
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DEDICATION

To my mother, who is by my side, in the good and bad times.

To Venezuela, where I learnt to walk firmly.

To my teachers, who open my eyes.

To my students who show me the way.

.

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ABSTRACT

A PROCESS TO SUPPORT THE VALIDITY OF AN ORAL ASSESSMENT BY RAISING AUTHENTICITY

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Developing valid evaluations within the classroom context implies a process of contextualization, assessment enhancement and autonomy increase. The Ecological and Sociocultural perspectives offered tools to develop a Teacher Research, with a practice diary as the main tool to record students' interests and needs, classroom challenges and opportunities, my beliefs, professional realizations and evidences of validity. Developed through essays about theory, methodology, context, findings and conclusions, this qualitative study took into consideration authentic evaluation theory and its application in an English as a foreign language classroom where differences among participants made the common pattern. As a result, students experienced a stimulating and motivating assessment environment that allowed them to deploy their real language abilities. Equally important, I could draw appropriate inferences from their performances and accurately interpret scores, while understanding that assessment is ongoing and embedded in the process of teaching. Concluding, my professional practice evolved as a whole: teaching, assessment and autonomy were the aspects I could enhance during this process.

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“...siempre hablamos de cosas reales. Jamás hablamos como de inventarnos como un cuento o algo, no. Siempre hablamos de la experiencia del viaje de ella, de ella, de ella. Y de lo que realmente es Medellín, no estábamos inventando cosas que no hubiera en Medellín. O sea, todo es real, entonces eso se lleva a la realidad, nada era fantasioso...” (Lina, focus group, 09/09/2015)

Introduction: Why is it Necessary to Enhance Language Assessment Validity?

Teaching languages has had a key role in my personal and professional development. At seventeen years old, I started working formally, as an English instructor, for the School of Modern Languages of Venezuela’s Central University. Since then, classrooms have constituted a constant source of engagement, rewards, and opportunities. Now, at twenty-seven years old, being a professional translator and interpreter, I keep working within the academy, but experience has not been enough to solve crucial uncertainties, such as students’ different levels of success, my anxiety in certain moments, or evaluation failures.

Even if my classes were engaging, most of students did not feel comfortable during formal assessments, and that affected their performance. Being assessment part of the learning process, it should also be engaging, just as the acquisition of knowledge is for someone who voluntarily enrolls in a course, and desires to freely experiment her hypothesis with the language (Brown, 2004, p. 4). Therefore, I needed to find a solution, beyond experience.

Theory made me realize that probably the answer was in the authenticity and validity principles of evaluation. Academics that I align with, as O’Malley & Valdez Pierce (1996), relate those evaluation principles when it comes to classroom assessment. In fact, “some equate authenticity in alternative assessment with both reliability and validity” (Fox, 2008, p. 101), stating that “authenticity or fidelity are sufficient

conditions for claims of validity” (Fox, 2008, p. 105). Accordingly, I underwent a process striving to raise both, the authenticity and validity of a final oral assessment taken by English students at a language institute run by a public university in Medellin, Colombia, where I teach.

There are different perspectives when it comes to evaluation validity. For instance, some researchers look for concurrent validity in a computer-delivered speaking test, using a quantitative approach with statistical, reliability, correlational and other types of numerical analyses (Kim, 2006, p. 1). Others apply logical and empirical analysis to examine the concurrent validity of oral abilities of a rubric in classroom context, stating that “validity is a matter of professional responsibility on the part of the teacher”, and that “the development of assessment instruments that are valid and reliable is a complex task”(Muñoz, Álvarez, Casals, Gaviria, & Palacio, 2003, p. 155).

At the same time, I found researchers who even analyze the possible causes of a lethal airplane accident that “could have been prevented with better, more valid teaching, learning, and assessment” (Badon et al. , p. 2, 2005). It was then when I understood that by detaching language from students’ needs I was not only provoking stress, but also possibly putting them at risk. That was the final call to embrace the responsibility of raising authenticity and validity of assessments in my classroom, not only to make them enjoyable, but also to avoid linguistic risks.

The ecological and sociocultural approaches for teaching and learning provided guidance in my quest. For instance, the first focuses “on language as relations between people and the world”(Van Lier, 2004, p. 4), and the second complements it by understanding “testing and assessment activities take place in a social context”

(Wigglesworth, 2008, p. 120). From such a combination of views, in order to enhance assessments it was necessary to understand the context, “hearts and minds of students: Why are our students learning English? What are their ultimate goals? What can knowledge of the English language do for them?” (Brown, 1991, p. 246). At the same time, I could not assume that all participants would share the same ideas or goals (Tudor, 2003, p. 7), therefore valuing differences among students began to play a key role in my assessment practices, turning them more democratic and fair (Picón, 2013).

As the subject of this enquiry was an oral evaluation, I needed material regarding this matter. I found a study about willingness to communicate within a second-language classroom framed within the ecological perspective that appealed my interest. This research made it clear that “an emic perspective may provide greater insight into the complexity and dynamics of the classroom” (Cao, 2011, p. 477). Therefore, it became clearer that in order to understand and enhance the evaluation dynamics in my practice, I needed to study what happened to my students and to me while learning and teaching.

Additionally, I came across an analysis of factors regarding language students’ success and access to resources, that supports the sociocultural view, stating that “learning is a socially mediated activity” (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p. 361), when addressing the importance of interaction. With this study, I also understood that social contexts affect their possibilities of achieving their goals. Consequently, focusing only on their individual abilities was not enough, it was also necessary to explore the social environment of the class as a whole, in order to avoid inequality among them in the English class.

Both studies encouraged me to set out for an emic research to better understand the social dynamics of oral assessments in my practice. In other words, my research was conducted from inside the classroom, implying and taking advantage of the direct contact I had with students as their EFL teacher. As such, the results we achieved as a group enhanced our oral assessment experience during that course, and probably for the rest of our lives. Nevertheless, the emic approach only allows drawing local conclusions, as actually its purpose is not to look for general truths.

In the Colombian context, two studies opened my mind. One of them deepened into fair and democratic practices in the evaluation of foreign languages (Arias, Maturana, & Restrepo, 2012), and the other one was about teachers' perceptions and uses of assessment in the language classroom (López & Bernal, 2009). According to Arias, Maturana and Restrepo (2012), teachers' evaluation practices became more democratic and fair, based on a variety of assessment instruments and formants, carefully designed to optimize tests' qualities¹.

Nevertheless, López and Bernal (2009) found that in Colombia "few universities with education programs for teachers offered courses on language assessment or assessment in general" (p. 62). Besides, they found that teachers lacking training in assessment understand evaluations only as summative procedures, instead of as a strategy to enhance learning. Consequently, in the process of reaching valid and authentic assessments for my students, I reflected on evaluations as strategies to enhance their learning experience. At this point, such effort not only represents progress for me, but also a contribution for all those Colombian teachers who have not been educated in assessment matters, and perceive students' discontent affect

¹ I translated all information originally published in Spanish that is cited in this thesis.

performances during evaluations, as I did. Additionally, this research could also open windows in the fields of professional development programs and teacher education courses, among others, as those are contexts where educators acquire tools to develop fairer and more valid alternatives.

Enhancement of assessing practices is evidently needed in this country, whether it comes from the implementation of a democratic evaluation system which empowers teachers (Arias *et al.*, 2012), or from “more training in language assessment in Colombian education programs for teachers” (López & Bernal, 2009, p. 63). Aiming to be part of the solution, in this enquiry about my practices I took into account what was meaningful and authentic for students, considered correspondence with curriculum objectives — content validity —, and improved teaching and learning (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). By considering those factors, an authentic, valid and negotiated task emerged, in which students could deploy what they had learnt during classes, while applying the language in a situation that could reflect their reality. Along the process, I reflected upon my practice; class development and outcomes; and students’ interactions, interests, goals and needs. By the end, I understood that evaluations are “powerful educational, societal and political devices” (Shohamy, 2008, p. xvi), whose validity embraces tests’ values, consequences and more.

According to Cumming (2008) “professional expectations are now that test validation is a continuing process that involves precise specifications of the construct that the test intends to assess and the ongoing accumulation of multiple sources of empirical evidence” (p. 6). Such view of validity is expanded by Moss (1994, cited in Fox, 2008), as she “views arguments for validity as internal to the assessment process itself, and reliant upon dialogue and consensus reached among key stakeholders” (p. 6).

Complying with such views, this Teacher Research reformed my practices, “by prompting powerful intellectual critique of assumptions, goals, and strategies” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 35), and it provided light to answer: how could authenticity and meaningfulness build a strong argument to support the validity of a final oral test in an English beginners’ course?

The intention of this study was to achieve classroom-generated results, and the possibility of proposing a process that other teachers could probably adapt to the characteristics of their settings, in order to increase the validity and authenticity of their classroom evaluations. The context I researched within was a 40-hour English course of general English for beginners, at a languages and culture institute run by a Colombian public university. I had nine students, and they were all participants of the research. Deepening in the interests of all of them was possible, of course, due to the small size of the group and their helpful disposition. Two of them were males: one in the last year of high school, and the other willing to study a masters’ degree. Among the females, two of them were prosperous ladies, two of them were hard-working citizens, and the rest were either high school or university students.

Throughout the following sections, the reader will find six essays, collected and reflected during the process of this study. Each essay corresponds to a section of this thesis: theoretical framework, methodology, setting, findings, discussion, and conclusions. Material to develop them emerged as I systematically kept and analyzed a teaching journal, conducted interviews and a focus group with students, asked them to answer questionnaires, paid close attention to their voices, and analyzed the development and results of class activities, as well as of assessments. My hope is to broaden knowledge and to understand teaching and assessing processes by theorizing

about learning development, my professional growth, and knowledge for teaching and assessing (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

Theoretical Framework: How Does Theory Provide the Grounds?

This research had an emic approach, with an “insider perspective on events” (Richards, 2003, p. 15) looking at teaching and learning from the ecological and sociocultural perspectives. Accordingly, I combined components from the Communicative Language Teaching (Savignon, 2001) and Language Ability (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) models to set a coherent language, teaching and assessment construct, merging individual characteristics with real communication and language knowledge. It was such a construct that allowed the establishment of close relations between classes and evaluations, and relevant inferences out of scores. Additionally, I worked with soft data, or the “perceptions and attitudes of people” (Tudor, 2003, p. 7), in order to understand participants’ motivations and realities. The intention was to build a validity argument while reflecting about what students expressed to be authentic for them, drawing on elements such as their interest, expectations, goals or needs, and merging them with the course syllabus.

Bringing classroom practices closer to students’ realities made it necessary to understand that students and I “both are human beings whose involvement in the process of language study is shaped by a complex set of beliefs, attitudes and perceptions” (Tudor, 2003, p. 5). In this sense, planning meaningful class activities and assessments mirroring such tasks required collaborative work, trying to raise interactiveness, or the involvement of students’ individual characteristics in accomplishing tasks, including their language knowledge, strategic competence, their knowledge of the world or topical knowledge, and affective schemata (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Looking at language acquisition from a sociocultural perspective, context and interaction take a central role in the classroom. If language emerges according to the meaning of sociocultural activities in which the person takes part (Johnson, 2009), it seems essential to propose meaningful interactions that allow English to flow in engaging and contextualized evaluations. In other words, meaningful tasks involving knowledge that represents something in the life and culture of students would prompt language during evaluations.

Through this process, I explored notions about my teaching practices, language as a social construction, language use, and assessment authenticity and validity. In addition, I considered elements such as students' expectations, goals and regular interactions or preferences, in order to understand the ecology of the group and frame classes within a meaningful socio-cultural perspective. All those elements guided my reflections and practices, alongside which I looked for creating and maintaining an environment for students to be and become more autonomous too (Fandiño, 2009).

In order to help students achieve their goals outside the classroom, it was necessary to make language available in such an authentic way that they felt comfortable using it, during classes and assessments. Therefore, I entailed to establish "relations between the active learner and elements in the environment" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 53), called affordances in the Ecological Approach, which "involves exploring language teaching and learning within the totality of the lives of the various participants involved" (Tudor, 2002, p. 4). In this way, students would be able to express their own ideas in the new language, facilitating their performances in and out the classroom.

Formal assessments are defined as "systematic, planned sampling techniques" used to judge what students have achieved in class (Brown, 2004, p. 6). If class

activities are authentic, evaluations should resemble them with meaningful tasks, serving learning objectives, paying attention to the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, and fostering educational goals (Gipps, 1999). At the same time, according to Brown (2004), an evaluation is authentic when language is as natural as possible, items are not isolated but contextualized, topics are meaningful for learners, there is a thematic organization, and tasks reflect real-life situations. Consequently, what my students and I were looking for was a final oral evaluation in the form of an authentic formal assessment.

While authenticity concerns the content of the tests, validity has to do with the inferences made out of its results. According to Kane (1992 cited in Fulcher & Davidson, 2006, p. 278), “validity is associated with the interpretation assigned to test scores rather than with the test scores or the test”. Likewise, Gronlund (1998, p. 226 cited in Brown, 2004, p. 22), assures that validity is “the extent to which inferences made from assessments results are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment.”

In the view of Kane (1992 cited in Fulcher & Davidson, 2006), there are three criteria to support a validity interpretative argument: clarity of the argument, coherence of the argument, and plausibility of assumptions (p. 280-281). The clarity of the argument criterion is present if the assumptions, conclusions and inferences made out of tests’ scores are enough detailed to be understandable. The coherence of the argument criterion is present if there is consistency with the theory applied to make inferences out of tests’ scores. Finally, reaching plausibility of assumptions implies collecting several evidences supporting the argument: observations, teaching materials, interviews, etc.

By the same token, Brown (2004) analyses validity through content, criterion, construct, consequential and face evidences. A test presents content-related evidence if it measures the subject matter that is supposed to measure. Criterion validity rises by comparing results among assessments that are supposed to apply the same criteria. Construct-related evidence is found in the theory behind the test. Consequential-related evidence includes accuracy in the criteria, impact on the learner's process, effect on the student, and the social costs of the scores. Finally, face validity has to do with the judgment of students about the tests, as fair and useful in their learning path.

In order to support the validity of this final oral evaluation, the idea was to concentrate in drawing clear, coherent and plausible assumptions for each student, based on content, construct, face and consequential evidences, collected throughout the course. Nevertheless, those aspects seemed insufficient for my purpose. Therefore, the validity argument would be also built taking into account ecological insights, such as: sufficient context for language, goals and thoughts of students, side by side communication, focus on the learner, support for autonomy and a stimulating assessing environment (Van Lier, 2004). Finally, while collecting those evidences I understood that a validity argument is always improvable, as "test validation is an on-going process, and interpretations we make of test scores can never be considered absolutely valid" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 22).

Regarding content validity, I would support it by considering an evaluative procedure that "requires the test-taker to perform the behavior that is being measured" (Brown, 2004, p. 22) with "correspondence between local curriculum objectives and the content of the assessment" (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 25). When it comes to construct, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) offers components

that easily adjusted for the purpose of this study. The idea of developing an authentic and meaningful evaluation “calls for recognition and respect for the individual personality of the learner”, labeled as the “My language is me” component of the Communicative Curriculum (Savignon, 2001, p. 22). Furthermore, this teaching approach recognizes that “language experience is the use of English for real and immediate communication”, calling it the “Language for a Purpose” component (Savignon, 2001, p. 20).

Even if the CLT offers to expand learners’ communicative competence, by integrating grammatical, discourse, sociocultural and strategic competences (Savignon, 2001), I did not find its model of language analytical enough for my purpose, as it is not specifically designed for evaluations procedures. Therefore, it was useful to guide classes, but I needed to complement the construct of evaluations with more analytical elements that would help support a strong validity argument. Following this train of thought, the Model of Language Ability (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) provided an answer, as it was calculated for assessment purposes, considering communicative goals and speech characteristics.

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), Language Knowledge is “a domain of information in memory that is available for use by metacognitive strategies in creating and interpreting discourse in language use” (p. 67). Those metacognitive strategies are meant to conform the strategic competence, or “higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The strategic competence integrated with affective schemata, or “the emotional correlates of topical knowledge” (p. 65) and the topical knowledge, or real-world knowledge (p. 65), allow language use.

Language Knowledge includes communicative goals and speech characteristics such as vocabulary, syntax, phonology, cohesion and organization. Those elements shape the grammatical and textual components of a conceptual basis that coherently complements CLT, because they allow drawing contextualized inferences about students' language ability on the basis of authentic communicative assessment performances.

Moreover, clearly stating “the purpose of the assessment activity, the expected performance, and the criteria for each task”, with negotiated rubrics in the form of analytic and holistic rating scales (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 67), combined with constant informal feedback, would ensure high consequential and face validity, as well as reliability within the classroom scope. In this sense, follow-up evaluations would help me focusing posterior activities to enhance students' learning (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996), as well as would allow students to self-regulate their studying strategies and self-evaluate outcomes, serving the purpose of shaping my practices and their choices (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

Regarding Authentic Assessment, I comply with O'Malley and Valdez' ideas, because, in their view, authentic assessments “represent classroom and real life settings” (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 1), making validity only achievable through Authentic Assessment (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. iv). The combination of validity and authenticity is the core of my inquiry: my primary intention was to enhance assessing practices by reflecting about the process of developing an authentic and valid final oral evaluation.

O'Malley and Valdez (1996) identify three examples of Authentic Assessment: performance assessment, portfolios and self-assessment. I concentrated in developing

performance assessment, because it was conveniently adaptable to the format of the final oral evaluation of that course, as it could be rated with rubrics and take the form of a meaningful task, involving prior knowledge, recent learning and relevant skills O'Malley and Valdez (1996). Consequently, my reflections went around the development of an authentic performance assessment for a valid final oral evaluation, in the form of a challenging and motivating activity that mirrored class instruction and allowed students to speak their minds.

O'Malley and Valdez (1996) provide examples of tasks that can be adapted when attempting to design authentic oral assessments. Among those examples, the following ones were useful in my context: oral interviews, information gap, improvisations / role-plays / simulations assessment (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

Firstly, interviews are interactions in the form of conversations or discussions, conducted with individuals or in pairs. They constitute a reflection of students' interests and class activities, useful to elicit descriptions, give and ask information, or give opinions (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Secondly, information gaps are activities in which students are given partial information that must be used to solve a problem by sharing information and detailed descriptions (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Finally, improvisation / role-play / simulations intend to reduce anxiety among students as they integrate real-life elements in interactions throughout another identity, without consequences (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

The intention was to contextualize and negotiate some of those activities, in order to achieve authentic, meaningful and valid formal assessments. Therefore, the first follow-up evaluation was an adaptation of information gap, as students worked in couples to orally describe and find the names of places in Medellin, we named it Guess

Where (see Appendix A). The second one was a role-play, also in couples: students talked as old friends, sharing their possibilities and preferences in Medellin (see Appendix B). In the third follow-up evaluation, students had an individual interview with me, about a pleasant experience (see Appendix C).

According to Shohamy and Inbar (2006), “the choice of which assessment instruments to use at any given time and given context depends on the purpose of the assessment and the content and language that the teacher wishes to assess” (p. 1). Apart from evaluating students’ use of English, the purpose of the formal assessments carried out in this course was reaching an authentic and comfortable atmosphere in which students could deploy their best oral abilities.

For such a purpose, assessments would have to resemble class and real life situations, as well as to comply with program’s requirements merged with students’ interests and expectations with the language. Consequently, for the final oral evaluation we decided to use a constructed-response assessment that would measure “productive language use as well as the interaction of receptive and productive skills” (Brown, & Hudson, 1998, p. 661) combined with authentic features. It took the form of a group conversation in which all students shared a pleasant past vacation experience.

It would have a positive washback as it attended program’s linguistic and pragmatic requirements, as well as students’ communication goals, while respecting their personalities, in a situation that intended to simulate an engaging oral exchange of information (See Appendix D). Therefore, the impact would be positive, as the evaluation “would measure the same types of materials and skills that are described in the objectives and taught in the course” (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

As this was a general English course, there was not specific domain to evaluate, and my intention was not either to evaluate aspects of students' interests. It was rather to use them as resources to facilitate the emergence of language, beyond grammar and vocabulary, in a rich semiotic environment (Van Lier, 2004), or an atmosphere with plenty of opportunities to express meaningfully in the target language. Therefore, assessing content-knowledge was not the primary aim of evaluations. It rather was the use of language in authentic ways through tasks that "do not presume a single correct answer", but "generate a variety of outcomes" (Shohamy & Inbar, 2006, p. 2). In this sense, performance assessments are characterized as higher-order thinking, integrative, process-and-product inclusive, depth informative that would allow students to construct responses (O'Malley and Valdez, 1996) in a meaningful manner, rather than in a memorized grammatically perfect one.

The formal performance assessments of this course also intended to be authentic communicative pair-work tasks and group discussions (Brown & Hudson, 1998). In other words, performance assessments that would "provide more valid (a) measures of students' abilities to respond to real-life language tasks, (b) estimates of students' true language abilities than traditional standardized multiple-choice assessments, and (c) predictions of students' future performances in real-life language situations". Finally, our evaluative activities took some characteristics of Personal-response Assessment, as students would be able to communicate what they wanted to express (Brown, & Hudson, 1998).

As assessment and learning are inseparable, an attempt to develop a valid, authentic and meaningful final oral evaluation permeated my actions within the classroom (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996), and demanded deep reflections. Such

reflective process constituted an attempt to theorize through ongoing dialog between my practice and the existing theories of authenticity and validity, the environment, what students expressed to be meaningful for them, and the requirements in the syllabus (Sharkey, 2009).

By establishing a dialogical inquiry of my practice, I gradually became a reflective intellectual, understanding and taking responsibility for the social and moral consequences of my actions (John Dewey 1993/1998 cited in Sharkey, 2009). In this way, my reflections, based on Sharkey's (2009) proposal, went beyond what happened or not according to plan, transcending to:

- What did I learn about myself as a teacher?
- What did I learn from my students?
- How did this inform subsequent lessons and evaluations in order to make them more authentic and valid?
- What concepts, ideas or beliefs influenced my actions and interpretations?
- How are the goals of the class been achieved?
- What were the evidences of students' progress?
- What were the evidences of authenticity and validity found in my assessment practices within this context?.

Through this process, not only my students gained autonomy at the psychological dimension, by taking responsibility for their own learning (Benson, 1997). I also learned to take control of my actions, becoming a more autonomous teacher (Vieira, 1999), constantly asking myself : “how do I improve my practice?” (Fandiño, 2009, p. 133). The autonomy that I gained while becoming a reflective

teacher can be characterized from the subjective level proposed by Usma (2007) for the teaching and assessment domains. He assures that an autonomy analysis at this level considers “the relationship between teacher sense of autonomy and professional competence, teacher confidence, awareness about new theories and practices, perceptions about teacher and student autonomy, job satisfaction, and teacher empowerment” (p. 256).

As stated in the introduction, it is not easy to find teacher enquiries about the validity of oral evaluations, from the sociocultural and ecological perspectives. Nevertheless, some works about related topics helped conceptualizing this process. By drawing on MacIntyre (1994), Cao (2011) defines willingness to communicate as the “intention to initiate a communicative behaviour” (p. 468), and identifies certain factors within some dimensions that affect such intention. Within the environmental dimension it was found, for example, that the topic of conversations influences students, as they “reported feeling disadvantaged in discussions of topics they lacked knowledge about. They would also feel reluctant to talk about topics that they thought were not interesting” (p. 472).

At the same time, the importance of communication in academic success was studied by Sharkey and Layzer (2000), who identified “students' limited interaction in their mainstream classes” (p. 364) meant poor proficiency and not lack of interest. They explain that students need “numerous opportunities to interact in substantive, meaningful ways with others” to improve proficiency, and that a teacher who understands linguistics needs might be of great help.

Willingness to communicate in the foreign language and assessment practices are well connected by Arias, Maturana and Restrepo (2012) as they found that

testees' use of strategic competence depended greatly on personal characteristics, as well as on the type and intention of the communicative situation framing the evaluative task. In other words, affective responses, combined with the characteristics of the task may influence language use to the extent of affecting students' task completion, as Bachman and Palmer (1996) explain when referring to the affective schemata component of a test.

However, the previous theorists do not seem to combine teachers' reflection with classroom oral assessment validity. In my research, reflections framed within the sociocultural and ecological approaches would allow designing a contextualized final oral test whose validity could be supported with sufficient evidences, as it will be demonstrated in the following sections. The result: learners developed communicative language skills in the foreign language, taking into account their history and social selves (Van Lier, 2004).

Methodology: What Are the Means for Enquiring?

The primary aim of this research was to find a path through authenticity and validity to enhance my assessment practices. To accomplish it, my students and I worked within an authentic semiotic environment, in which students felt confident to share ideas related to their context, to build a validity argument. The study was carried out inside my classroom, from an emic point of view, intending to include students' voice and the course syllabus in the development of classes and evaluations. It was a process to answer: how could authenticity and meaningfulness build a strong argument to support the validity of a final oral test in an English beginners' course?

Through a qualitative inquiry that demanded “rigour, precision, systematicity and careful attention to “detail” (Richards, 2003, p. 6), the methodology that I considered suitable was the Teacher Research Typology proposed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993). It allowed me to order the analysis of information that I gathered through experiences, following my own deliberate plans (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993). These authors define Teacher Research as “systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work” (p. 23-24), and propose two branches: empirical and conceptual.

Firstly, empirical teachers' research is constituted by “teachers' explorations of practiced-based issues using data based on observation, interview, and document collection” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 27). Secondly, conceptual research is developed through essays containing “teachers' interpretations of the assumptions and characteristics of classroom and school life and/or research itself” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 27). As I explored and interpreted data to answer a research question, this was an empirical classroom study whose outcomes were narrated “to convince

others about particular ways to teach and understand the processes of teaching and learning” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p. 35).

A systematic collection of information about my teaching experience and students’ affordances was necessary and desirable in order to reach relevant ecological and sociocultural results. Particularly, the ecological perspective, defined as the study of organism, or participants, in relation to their environment through contextualized or situated research (Van Lier, 2004), provided grounds to understand that “the key to effective teaching is the ability to feel and respond to the dynamics of each class as it is in its own terms” (Tudor, 2003, p. 8). Consequently, this approach guided me when collecting data directly related to students’ interests. In addition, the sociocultural perspective required me to increase my sensitivity and awareness to local context (Zuengler & Miller, 2006), and to “view language development and learning as interactive, collaborative, and embedded in the social and cultural life of the individual” (Fox, 2008, p. 101). Hence, my reflections navigated between the two.

Driven by the aim of my research, the characteristics of the ecological and sociocultural approaches and the requirements to answer the research question (Richards, 2003), I decided to apply a convenience sampling strategy. Accordingly, I could collect data coming from all students. The group was conveniently small, which allowed me to collect information during class activities, apply two questionnaires, lead a focus group, record evaluations, carry out short interviews, and reflect on each performance, and on the class as a whole in my diary.

The process I underwent developed interpreting and validating continuously. The fundamental elements to collect data were my reflections and my experiences as a teacher, joined with students’ work and classroom observations (Cochran-Smith and

Lytle, 1993). I also considered students' voice, seeking to build a dialectic narrative between argument and evidence to raise the validity of a specific mandatory evaluation. My teaching experiences were collected in the form of diary entries written when possible after every class and whenever I felt it necessary. In each of them, I recorded not only ideas to develop classes, but also what I had learnt from the environment in terms of authenticity and meaningfulness. Students' interests were collected through the systematic observation of class activities, short interviews, evaluations results and feedback, and questionnaires. Classroom observations were kept through notes made on class plans, specifically addressing class situations, and through my journal. Finally, general perceptions about the course and assessments' validity and authenticity were collected through a questionnaire and a focus group.

The oral evaluation subject of this validity argument was the mandatory final speaking assessment procedure applied to 9 students of a 40-hour-English-II course in a language and culture center. We carried out this evaluation in the last session of the course, and it was planned to foster students' deployment of their best speaking skills, by transmitting meaningful information for them, using language acquired during the level. The proposal of the task was the result of careful analysis on students' choices throughout the course, combined with course objectives.

The first data-collection technique applied served the purpose of getting acquainted with students' realities and expectations. By asking them to answer certain questions on the board and taking pictures of it, I could identify important activities in their lives, their preferences, reasons why they studied English, and the kind of activities they thought would be useful and enjoyable in class. Specifically, the questions were:

- What are three very important activities in your life?
- What are three things you really like?
- What are two things you want to do in/with English?
- What are three enjoyable activities we can use to learn English in class?

Their answers provided initial information to prepare meaningful classes and possible authentic assessments, as well as to design the protocols for the subsequent interviews.

Interviews started in the second class. I recorded four short interviews, with one, two or three students at the time. In each one, we had purposeful formal conversations (Richards, 2003) with questions such as: in what situations do you see yourself using English out of class? How do you think we could simulate those situations in our class? Do you think we could relate learning English with your interests in tourism, food, sports, music, animals, family, studies or work? How? Which of the following evaluations would make you feel comfortable? Why? -interview about past experiences, presentation about a chosen topic interesting for the presenter, group conversation, other-, which of the activities developed in class so far has appealed to you the most? Why?

Answers to those questions allowed me to design meaningful and authentic class activities, in order to build the bases for valid evaluations, including rubrics. At the time of collecting information coming from students, I also kept a diary. I used it to reflect about all aspects of my research process, including my own learning, students' progress, outcomes of actions or future plans (Richards, 2003). This diary was written on my computer, and by the end of the process, I had eleven entries with an average of 2530 words each approximately.

Additionally, I collected students' impressions through two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was answered at the end of class six, addressing aspects such as interactiveness and authenticity of class activities and follow-up evaluations, and students' preferences for the final oral evaluation. In the initial question of the first questionnaire, participants could choose a maximum of three options, reflecting meaningful and useful activities, among 23 options. With the second part, my purpose was to find out the degree of meaningfulness that each of the three follow up evaluations had represented in the lives of students, while reflecting their goals with the language. There, questions had to be answered through a Lickert scale with five options, ranging from complete disagreement, to complete agreement. The last question was useful to better understand the kind of activity that during the final oral test would appeal most to students. It included an open section to justify choices (See Appendix F).

The second questionnaire specifically addressed students' impressions about the final oral test, and they answered it in class ten, before finishing the course. Through this questionnaire, I could collect evidences to support the authenticity and validity of the final oral test, validate my interpretations drawn from previously collected data, and identify aspects that would had enhanced the evaluation. In the first part, students found ten statements to agree or disagree with, in a Lickert scale ranging from complete disagreement, to complete agreement. Those questions addressed what happened before and during the exam, regarding the clarity of instructions, the content of the course, its interactiveness, its authenticity, its usefulness to acquire the language, whether it was a source of motivation or not, the rubric, fairness of the grades, consequences of the feedback, its capacity to represent their goals with the language (See Appendix F).

Moreover, the recordings I could keep of the follow-up evaluations served various purposes at the same time. Firstly, I used them with the rubrics to provide students with their scores. Secondly, each recording provided me with detailed information about students language needs that I used to design the next classes and to deliver accurate feedback individually and to the class as a whole environment. Thirdly, they were validity evidences, as the inferences made out of results could be contrasted with the actual performance.

Finally, after the final oral evaluation performance had finished, I conducted a focus group with all participants, to collect students' impressions about the meaningfulness and authenticity of the whole course. Here, I recorded validity evidences to support the final oral test, and asked about the usefulness of developing classes with sociocultural and ecological characteristics: listening to students' voice and taking into account their interests and contexts.

Due to the active characteristics of my study, the methodology I considered suitable to scrutinize information was the one proposed by Saldaña (2009). The analysis process developed alongside almost the entire progression of data collection. Through my diary, I kept and preliminarily analyzed memos. This allowed me to plan and modify actions along the way. The questionnaires and focus group served analytical purposes, as I could check my interpretations with students, about previously collected information. Finally, I coded, following a deductive and inductive process, my diary, recordings, questionnaires' open questions, while transcribing what was necessary and engaging with the data (Altrichter et al, 1993; Burns, 1999; Richards, 2003). The triangulation, engagement, observation and checking of the data allowed me to raise the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the results; therefore,

trustworthiness and relevance are also characteristics of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All data were organized in a qualitative analyses software called NVivo, version 10. With this tool, I systematized and related categories, which later I used to configure findings.

Setting: Who was there and under which conditions?

A simple description of the context of this study would include general characteristics of the institution and superficial information about the participants. Nonetheless, both deserve more than that, as they were central and fundamental aspects in the reflections through which I became a more autonomous teacher. Hence, I will describe them in depth.

The language institution where I researched is located in Medellin's downtown, at the corner of two important streets. Many people say this is the corner of Medellin where more people get robbed, and most of the victims do not even notice it. At the beginning, as a foreigner, it was shocking for me to know that this would be my workplace, and some of my students feared this area too. That affected the ecology of the class, because some students would always leave earlier to avoid risks. Even so, an outsider's sight of this place would not notice its dangerousness so easily, as during the day thousands of people of all social classes walk around normally.

The facilities of the institution are located in the middle of most of the services one would ask for in a city. There are banks, bakeries, religious temples, a metro station, clothe shops, restaurants, museums, telephone companies, bus stations and many other kinds of legal and illegal businesses within walking distance. This is to say: to study and work at this institution is easy and difficult at the same time. It is easy for those who enjoy the advantages of being at a place where almost anything is accessible, and have no problem with the typical noise of crowds. At the same time, people who are afraid of street sellers and cannot walk rapidly find it almost impossible to get to its door. Such characteristics of the environment outside the classroom became prompts for class activities, like descriptions of the surroundings, conversations about events that

happened outside the institution, things that could or could not be done in that area, and even eliciting of critical opinions about the social situation there.

As a language center that belongs to the Continuous Education Center of the School of Languages of a prestigious Public University, its courses are attractive for a variety of people. The general population associates its quality to the quality of the University, as regardless of the location, prestige seems to be an important factor when choosing where to study. Besides, costs are not among the highest of the city, probably because the State owns it. Referring to the English courses, each of the twelve levels has a program and some units of a textbook assigned. It is possible that a teacher sees students of a course twice a week during two hours in each occasion, or once a week, during four hours. Such distribution means that a level of English probably lasts 10 classes of four hours each, or 20 classes, of two hours each, to complete the 40 hours of a course.

There are different languages taught here, such as English, Portuguese, Italian, French and others. The coordination, apart from organizing the schedules for each trimester, also prepares cultural activities at certain moments of the year. For those events, students voluntarily show their abilities in the language they study, generally orally. It could be by acting in a play, by reciting a poem, by singing or any other artistic expression that fits the cultural event. It is worth noting that most of students do not attend this opportunities to share academically outside the classroom. Among other reasons, the lack of attendance is because they are held after 6 p.m., which makes it difficult for some people to feel safe when going out the institution.

The syllabi provided by the coordination could be framed within the Notional-Functional Approach, as well as the suggested textbook. According to the guidelines

and content of each level, there are notions to be learnt, such as prepositions, and functions, such as giving directions. Typically, a lesson includes dialogs that students should listen and repeat or use to extract certain information and expressions to use in a different activity (Freeman & Freeman, 1998). About assessment, guidelines provide information about the percentages of the final evaluations and the follow-up period. The final written test is provided by the institution, and teachers are supposed to design a task for the final oral test of their correspondent levels, that must be carried out in the last class. When all grades are written down in the forms provided, teachers hand them in to the staff of the institution, who use them to enroll students in the next level.

There were nine students from the beginning to the end of this English II course. We studied from July 8th to September 9th 2015. The schedule and location suited routines of students, working professionals, retired women and housewives. The youngest student was 15 and the oldest 60 years old. Some of the characteristics that would give a hint of their interests included gastronomy or leisure activities. Such information was useful to know them beyond the class context, and to prepare meaningful class activities that would reflect their interests in general².

Hilda showed herself as a generous and kind woman during the time I had her as a student. She enjoyed sharing with her classmates, always collaborating with their home works and lending them materials, such as pencils or sheets of paper. She is 60 years old and lives in one of the wealthiest zones of Medellin. She currently works as an accountant, even though she wants to stop working soon because she has done it for many years. She is married and has children. One of them lives in an English-speaking country and Hilda dreams about visiting him one day, which is the main reason why she

² All participants are protected under pseudonyms.

is interested in learning English. Her favorite food is chicken and she likes to read in her free time.

Carla was the happiest spirit of this course. She is also 60 years old and is Hilda's friend. Carla is interested in fine arts and sports, she likes to paint and swim. Her favorite food is *chicharron* with *arepas*, but she does not know how to cook and is not interested in learning, as she has always had cooks at her service. Unfortunately, she has some back pains that sometimes make it difficult for her to come to class. She studies English to expand her knowledge, but not for a particular reason.

Lina is a hard-worker woman of 36 years old. She is married and has two children. She works at a foreign telecommunication company, surrounded by Colombian engineers who communicate with each other in English. Her major interest in the English language comes from the desire of participating in her coworkers' conversations. Additionally, the company might require that she communicates in English for some tasks, as she is a Human Resources Assistant who interviews future employees.

Fernanda is another hard-worker woman. She is 28 years old and works as a nurse, with very long shifts that sometimes did not allow her to sleep before class. She lives in a city that is right next to Medellin. She loves eating hamburgers and adores traveling, which is why learning English is important for her.

Luis is a 28-years old dentist who was born at one of the most important cities of the Colombian coast. He lives in Medellin at the moment, but he has lived in some other major cities of this country. He is interested in movies and he is a music lover. One of the reasons he studies English is to understand the lyrics of songs he likes.

Another reason is that he wants to study a masters' degree at a public university, but there is a foreign-language requirement stopping him. His favorite food are sandwiches from a fast-food restaurant.

Cache was one of the most energetic students of this course. She is a 20-years old creative woman who works, and studies a pre-university course. She began to study economics, and she liked it, but got tired of feeling people did not take her seriously and dropped out. She wants to improve her English in order to have better communication with foreign friends and members of her family who live outside of Colombia. She also thinks one day she might work as a tourist guide. She loves fast food.

Beatriz is a young sportswoman. She is 17 years old, finished high school not long ago and practices rugby with a team. Sometimes, she works in small family business, or takes short contracts. Her dream is becoming a sign-language interpreter. She likes eating spaghetti.

Alejandro is about to finish high school and already got accepted into university. He is 16 years old and is interested in history, geography and languages. He thinks he might one day become a translator. He lives in a city next to Medellin, with his family and dog. He likes playing tennis.

Simona was the youngest student in this class. She is 15 years old, still a high school student. She likes eating pizza and going out with her friends during her free time. She lived in a country next to Colombia with her mother some years ago, and remembers it was a very hot place. The reason why she studies English at this institution is to complement what she learns at school.

These nine personalities and the variety of their interests made it possible to have interesting classes in which English was not the only subject to be learnt. We all shared meaningful experiences and interests that clearly varied from generation to generation, allowing English to emerge in different ways. In order to develop a validity argument for the final oral evaluation of this course, it was paramount to make it in fact valid for everyone taking it. Looking at this argument from the ecological and sociocultural perspectives, I had to take into account the realities and personalities of all members, as we were all elements of the ecology of this class.

Finally, me, the teacher-researcher who conducted this study. As I was included in the ecology of this class, it is important to mention some of my characteristics too. I work for the School of Languages above mentioned, as a full-time fix-term contract professor. My weekly working hours and salary vary from one semester to another. In average, I teach 25 hours per week, distributed among English, Portuguese and translation courses. I also save some time for working as a freelance translator and interpreter. Out of work, I like to do exercise and to eat pizza. Regarding the teacher me, especially in terms of assessments, my beliefs and attitudes changed during this study. When I walked into this classroom for the first time, I had the intention of involving students as much as possible in their learning process and evaluations, as I had the hypothesis that it would result positively. However, this was totally new for me. Before, I expected students to fulfill my expectations as a teacher, therefore I did not take into account their contributions to class topics, activities or assessments. Finally, outcomes exceeded what I thought it could happen, and I when I walked out of the classroom for the last time, my teaching and assessing strategies had opened to a world of authentic and valid learning.

Findings: What did the Search for Authenticity and Validity Give Birth to?

One strategy to deploy the findings of this research is presenting what the process of constructing the validity argument revealed, and the impact it had. As a process, this study advanced in phases. Interpreting, reflecting and validating with students in each of those phases allowed me to become a more autonomous teacher and to make decisions in order to continue pursuing my goal: to enhance my assessing practices by reflecting about the process of developing an authentic and valid final oral test. The phases and their outcomes were closely interconnected to each other, developing unexpected elements. While finding out what was meaningful for students and reflecting for assessment validity, interactiveness and autonomy came across, supporting the creation of a valid, stimulating and authentic assessment environment that affected positively various key elements of my practice.

Exploring the Environment: Different Voices, one Classroom Ecology

In order to start the process of constructing an authentic and valid final oral evaluation, I needed to understand the ecology of the class, and find context for the language. This information, collected through an initial class activity, interviews and a questionnaire, helped me to shape classes and assessments taking into account students' communication goals, the contexts of their lives, their linguistic purposes and their proposals for meaningful class events. The pragmatic and organizational dimensions that I found helped me to shape the syllabus through authentic and meaningful tasks, as "language and the physical, social and symbolic world are interconnected in a myriad of ways, and this should be reflected in curricula, materials and classroom practices" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 72). While exploring communication goals, meaningful dimensions, significant class events and linguistic purposes among members of the class, I also

started treasuring the beauty of diversity within the ecology of this environment, as different dimensions, goals and possibilities arose. The following paragraphs deploy what I found to be meaningful for students. This information was rich food for my reflections, starting to understand that “as language teaching and learning are always lived out ‘locally’, in the specifics of a given situation, decision making, too, needs to be a local phenomenon” (Tudor, 2003, p. 8).

At times, their communication goals seemed to blur with their meaningful dimensions. Nevertheless, when I mention communication goals it specifically refers to the reasons why students enrolled in the course, while meaningful dimensions refer to significant circumstances in their lives. The first three elements of the class ecology to be presented are at the blurry border between those two scopes of context for the language. The rest of elements belong to one or the other, clearly.

Family appeared as one of the most meaningful interests of students, as most of them talked about it in different ways, when expressing themselves about important contexts in their lives. Besides, it was also mentioned as a communication goal, specifically addressing members who live outside the country.

Traveling also represented a high level of interest. Students expressed that traveling could be counted as one of their preferred activities. Additionally, traveling was one of the purposes some of them had in mind when enrolling in an English course. One student managed to express her communication goals, mentioning family and traveling at the same time, as shown in the following extracts:

Interview 15/07/2015:

00:00:12	Hilda	Ehh Mejor dicho ¿para qué estoy estudiando yo el inglés?
00:00:15	Patricia	Precisamente. Sí señora.

00:00:17	Hilda	Ehh Primero, para comunicarme con mis hijos, que todos hablan inglés.
00:00:21	Patricia	Hmmm ya veo. ¿Quieres hablar con ellos en inglés?
00:00:24	Hilda	Sí. Para yo poder conversar con ellos, y con las novias, y...
00:00:32	Patricia	Ah, pero, ¿no viven acá?
00:00:33	Hilda	Hay uno que vive lejos, no, dos que viven lejos. Entonces, por lo menos yo digo HI y no más.
00:00:40	Patricia	Ok.
00:00:41	Hilda	Pero ya sé más, ya me defiendo un poquito.
00:00:44	Patricia	Me parece genial. Entonces...
00:00:46	Hilda	Y, y para poder, como tengo también otro hijo en el exterior, en Australia, poder irme a pasear y poder defenderme. Entonces, me interesa mucho aprenderlo.

One more interest expressed as a communication goal and a meaningful dimension at the same time was engaging in oral interactions. When talking about important context in their lives, students expressed inclinations towards sharing time with acquaintances. Similarly, when talking about communication goals, some students also made it clear to be interested in having conversations with foreign people, in English. Additionally, in the first questionnaire, all the oral interactions performed until the middle of the course were chosen, at least once, as representations of activities mirroring something important in students' lives, at the time of reflecting their goals with the language. Finally, when asked about their preferences for the final oral test, six out of nine students chose to perform a group conversation. The following extract of an interview shows the same interest as a meaningful dimension and as a communication goal:

Interview 29/07/2015:

00:00:14	Cache	Pues, a ver, a mí me encanta hablar con extranjeros, pues conozco mucha gente de afuera y tengo muchos amigos, familiares, todo. Lo pensado es viajar, yo quiero viajar, quiero irme a conocer.
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Students confirmed my interpretations expressing their thoughts in the open question of the first questionnaire. In their opinions, oral interaction was helpful in the learning process, because it allowed them to enhance performance, learn and share opinions – 12/08/2015–:

Student 1: “Porque en grupo podemos simular hablar con alguien lo cual ayuda más para el aprendizaje, y simular ser de otro país da mejor cultura.”

Student 2: “Para interactuar, corregir y aprender vocabulario.”

Student3: “Me parece buena idea compartir con todo el grupo nuestros diferentes gustos y opiniones y entre todos formar un diálogo en el que participemos todos.”

Furthermore, another interest in this blurry border was music. To begin with, a male student expressed to have a high interest in different rhythms, as he enjoyed the act of listening to music. Moreover, the same student expressed to be interested in learning English to understand the lyrics of songs, while other students proposed listening to songs as an interesting class event. The following extract of an interview shows music as an important dimension of life, and understanding lyrics as a goal:

Interview 29/07/2015:

00:01:16 Luis Ok. En mí caso, me gusta mucho la música. Entonces, yo me levanto con música, voy en el transporte con música y es mucha que es en inglés. Entonces, a veces, se oye muy chévere y me gustaría saber qué significa, pues sin estar buscando en un diccionario o buscando la traducción. En mi caso, me gustaría por ese lado.

Finally, working or studying appeared as meaningful dimensions in the life of some students, as well as reasons they considered when taking the decision of learning English. Working or studying were part of their everyday life. Additionally, some of them expressed the need of the language to develop their duties, or to access job or

studying opportunities. Talking about the need of English in her job, the thirty-six-year-old lady who worked as a Human Resources Assistant expressed:

Interview 05/08/2015:

00:00:37 Lina Ehhh pues realmente yo ingresé y me parece muy interesante porque mi trabajo lo amerita, o sea, todo el tiempo todos los muchachos hablan en inglés.

Other meaningful dimensions were: food, sports, and nature. Food appeared to be an important context for everybody, ranging from the mere act of eating to a taste for national or foreign dishes. Additionally, some of them expressed interests in exercising, specially practicing rugby or going to the gym, as well as in nature, whether admiring it or caring for animals.

Additionally, students expressed during the first class activity and in the interviews that their communication goals included sharing life experiences, interests, as well expressing themselves about their surrounding contexts and learning about different cultures. During a class, one of the students expressed a summary of the previous in one phrase: he was looking forward to expressing his own discourse instead of repeating without thinking. This idea is supported in the words of another student:

Interview 05/08/2015:

00:04:04 Lina Yo, pues no sé si es... yo pienso que cada uno debería traer una situación X del trabajo o de la casa, o del estudio, o del colegio: ah no! Es que me pasó esta semana esta situación. Y tratar de voltrear eso todo al inglés, esa situación, y uno decir: ah bueno, me pasó esta situación.

Lastly, regarding students' linguistic purposes, during the first class activity and in the interview, they specifically mentioned their need to improve vocabulary, as well as listening, pronunciation, grammar and interaction skills. Proposals to reach such goals in classes through meaningful class events ranged from games to acting, including listening tasks and visiting places, as well as activities close to their realities.

Interview 15/07/2015:

	Patricia	¿Qué actividades podríamos hacer en clases para acercarnos a las situaciones en las que quieres utilizar el inglés fuera del salón?
00:01:35	Hilda	Ehh yo diría que, que escuchando más acá las conversaciones
00:01:44	Patricia	Ok. ¿Grabadas? ¿Conversaciones grabadas?
00:01:45	Hilda	Conversaciones grabadas, para uno educar más el oído.
00:01:50	Patricia	Ok.
00:01:51	Hilda	Educar más el oído, entonces cuando la persona te hable, uno poder si quiera escuchar lo que está diciendo. Eso me ha parecido algo...
00:01:58	Patricia	Útil.
00:01:59	Hilda	No, ¡difícil! Por ejemplo, ponen una conversación ahí y uno ya oye es al final.
00:02:4	Patricia	Entiendo.
00:02:09	Hilda	Entonces, tratar de educar más el oído.

Actually, when supporting their choice of task for the final oral evaluation in the first questionnaire, three students expressed the idea of improving vocabulary through a group conversation -12/08/2015- :

Student 4: "Porque se utiliza más vocabulario."

Student 5: "Porque la interacción grupal permite ampliar el vocabulario y proyectarnos con todos los compañeros;"

Student 6: "Para interactuar, corregir y aprender vocabulario."

Reflecting for Authenticity and Validity: The Design and Implementation of Meaningful, Interactive and Authentic Assessments

Information about students' interests and contexts made it possible to develop reflections regarding possibilities to raise the involvement of their preferences in meaningful class events, and authentic and valid assessments. While also enquiring my practice and teaching theory, I found it empowering and encouraging at the same time to develop a course' syllabus through activities that projected students' language knowledge, strategic competence, topical knowledge, and affective schemata. On the one hand, I took control of my practice through grounded pedagogical decisions and life realizations, noticing students' high level of engagement. On the other hand, using authentic activities that appealed students took great theoretical and creativity efforts, as the following extract of my diary shows:

3rd diary entry 23/07/2015:

I will keep on drawing on students' interests to prepare activities thru which the course program can be developed. We have been talking about traveling, but in the following classes, I will try to look for material that addresses their interests in sports and animals. Regarding the food interests, I am drawing on the cultural background of students, so the content develops around Colombian food, which enables them to share a piece of their own culture in situations in which they are meeting people from other countries. In a way, even if implicitly, this practice empowers them as cultural agents, as Kumaravadivelu (2003) explains, learners are able to give information about their origins in other language, and to ask for this kind of information if they feel curious about the culture of other countries.

Students' impressions about this course support the positive impact on learning that my reflective effort to raise interactiveness and meaningfulness had, as they could accomplish tasks while making use of their language knowledge, strategic competence, topical knowledge, and affective schemata (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The following

evidence shows a student expressing her satisfaction because she feels closer to her communication goals, with English knowledge that allows her to manage her speech – strategic competence– , to express real-world notions –topical knowledge– with emotional correlates –affective schemata– :

Focus Group 09/09/2015:

00:17:17 Beatriz Yo considero que es muy provechoso porque estábamos hablando de nosotros, de lo que nos gusta, y estábamos hablando de lo que nos gusta en otro idioma. Entonces, una charla con otra persona va a ser más real, porque bueno ya sé en inglés lo que me gusta, ya sé lo que me interesa, ya sé de mis viajes, ya sé hablar en pasado. Entonces, es algo como más autónomo que hablar de la vida de un personaje de un libro. Ah, es más provechoso hablar de mi vida y de mis gustos, y de las cosas que hago, mis actividades y mis rutinas.

Through reflection, I became sensible about certain aspects. Class after class, reflection after reflection, the enquiry about my practice became more and more relevant. Each entry addressed everyday problems and solutions, the need for different strategies, plans, anxiety issues, diversity among students, my beliefs, my flaws and other aspects. In sum, I ended up theorizing about autonomy, professional competence, confidence, students' autonomy and empowerment.

My reflections addressed all aspects of the course. They started by characterizing the ecology of the class, including the environment, possible constraints and questions about what would appeal more to students in terms of topics or activities. In a short while, they evolved to proposing and trying out innovative solutions, such as applying heuristic grammar (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), as well as to finding learning opportunities in situations that before would have seemed as constraints. For instance, taking advantage of students' different needs to promote collaboration among them. As a consequence, assessments that lacked validity or in which validity could be supported

became evident. In other words, critically reflecting on my strategies I could notice the flaws and advantages of my practice as a whole, specifically of my assessment practices.

By the end of the course, I had understood that the reflective attitude needs to be a constant one. It provides me with self-critical tools, such as avoiding general truths, to evaluate my beliefs and ground my sense of autonomy and awareness about innovative theory and practices, students' autonomy, job satisfaction, professional competence and confidence.

I started to understand the usefulness of adapting theory about authentic assessments to solve challenges while trying to bring the class closer to students' context. In other words, I became more aware about innovative theories in my practice (Usma, 2007).

1st Diary entry - 08/07/2015-:

The biggest challenge will be finding activities that allow students to interact in an authentic manner, while making use of their backgrounds. For sure, I will be revising O'Malley and Valdez (1996) to adapt some of the ideas they propose.

At the same time, I was perceiving manifestations of autonomy in my students' learning process (Usma, 2007), as I saw the effectiveness of students discovering language knowledge by themselves, instead of me providing detailed explanations about how it functions. This realization encouraged me to approach the syllabus from a more autonomous perspective (Usma, 2007), towards a communicative approach to teaching and assessment, by developing heuristic explanations, instead of guiding students through a listening and repeating path.

5th Diary entry 07/082015:

When explaining how a language works it becomes boring to tackle every aspect, since students can discover things by themselves or asking and this is more interesting than explaining everything to the point of perfection. This I realized when I explained that HOW was mainly for manner, feelings, and that WHEN was for time. One of the students asked the meaning of HOW LONG and then I had to add to the explanation that expression that included HOW and was about time. This could probably be solved using heuristic grammars, which I will have more into account for the following lessons, instead of following traditional explanations. No doubt that the fact that this question came out of student's curiosity, made it much more fixable for him that if I had explained it out of no-one's curiosity.

As students moved towards a more autonomous use of the language , not only by acquiring language through their curiosity, but also by using English for communication that mattered to them, my engagement and satisfaction increased (Usma, 2007) towards the meaningful results we were achieving.

8th diary entry 26/08/2015:

The class began very productively, and I managed to organize all to fit the time we had, which before class I thought was going to be more complicated than it turned out to be. The homework was a big task, and everybody did it successfully, and their production was very useful to practice questions referring to the past. They all had to write a little diary at the end of each day, from the last class to this one. In this way, they would practice regular and irregular verbs combined in an authentic activity as it is to tell the most important activities you did during the day. My efforts are worth it: they all did it very well.

The previous elements conjugated in a way that raised my confidence while increasing my personal and professional competences (Usma 2007), as I realized that evaluation permeated my teaching practices (Brown & Hudson, 1998), therefore it could have a negative or positive impact on them. Moreover, I gained awareness about the tight connection that could exist between my teaching practices and the lives of

everyone involved, which confirmed the importance of taking assessment as an important matter. Feeling confident to merge course syllabus with students' interest empowered me (Usma, 2007) to include students' voices to propose authentic activities that were closer to their life experiences and learning processes, which many times meant ignoring the course book, for example.

10th diary entry 10/09/2015:

Throughout this class and the whole course I learnt to be a better teacher and a better human being. I learnt to be a better teacher because now I see the importance and advantages of being sensible to students' interest and to what is meaningful in their lives. Before, I used to think of students as people who needed to fulfill my expectations as a teacher or as the language speaker, and the expectations of the program. Now, I understand that students don't learn the language as a separate aspect of their lives, that they are looking to do something with it that is meaningful in itself within their context. Therefore, making the effort of merging those interests with what can be done with the language results in much more productive classes, as students see direct relation between the content that is studied and what they can use it for, in terms of situations that are close to their realities and interests. This allows me to be a better teacher because I understood that the best source of class content are my own students, as long as they feel motivated. I do not have to break my head trying to find interesting content that would engage every student and make it fit in the course program. Now, I rather adapt the course program to what students see as interesting, which I know by asking them directly.

Reflecting about students' performances, I gradually noted an increase in quality. I observed more risk-taking attitudes, while confidence in the language was raised through activities that prompted affective responses, with positive schemata. It is worthy to mention that students noted their achievements as well:

Focus Group 09/09/2015:

00:09:37	Simona	Que ya nosotros tenemos una conversación, cuando antes no éramos capaces de hacerlo.
00:09:41	Fernanda	Antes, sólo decíamos: hola, ¿cómo estás?
00:09:45	Patricia	Se animaron así un poco más.
00:09:45	Simona	Sí.

Contextualizing classes through affordances, or establishing relations between students and their environments, included striving to raise tasks interactiveness and fairness, by including students' characteristics and voices in the design of tasks, looking for a positive impact on their learning (Picón 2013). To this end, activities included creating sentences about students' realities, describing real familiar scenarios, encouraging students to create authentic examples and dialogs, proposing interactions about their contexts and interests, fostering spontaneous conversations, assessing through interviews about topics chosen by students, sharing information about their past experiences, etc. My diary contains the argumentation, development, outcomes, and students' reactions regarding my efforts to support validity.

Addressing *topical knowledge* by encouraging students to use the language with reference to the world in which we live:

2nd diary entry 16/07/2015:

In this occasion, we did 3 rounds of questions, about quantities, thinking of topics like food or movies, which are among the patterns I identified from the interest I gathered in the previous class. Of course, they could also step out of those topics. The activity consisted in asking questions and answering unexpected questions from other students. The questions have real answers, but the activity does not encourage correct or incorrect answers, so students can use their imagination if they don't know the answer. This is a valid activity from the content and authenticity points of views, since students need to combine the grammar structures that are requested by the course, with content extracted from their realities, or city contexts, or situations that we all as citizens live.

Striving to encourage affective responses combined with language knowledge, I reflected about *affective schemata* and *strategic competence* (Bachman & Palmer, 1996):

6th diary entry 13/08/2015:

In this class, the first conversation between 2 members of a family that were catching up left me with a very encouraging feeling, since each of the couples developed their conversation in a very unique way. None of the conversations were similar in content, but all of them complied with my specifications. I pointed this out in the class, because I remembered that one of the ideas that one of the students expressed in her interview was that almost all conversations followed the same patterns. So, for this activity I told them they didn't have to begin with formalities, but they could go straight to the point of exchanging information about what they like to do in the city, and the possibilities around it. So, when I pointed this out, all students realized the same and smiled satisfactorily.

Fostering to combine world knowledge with strategies to use language

knowledge, I developed reflections about students' *topical knowledge and strategic competence* (Bachman & Palmer, 1996):

7th diary entry 20/08/2015:

When the activity of things that can be done in the city was over, I moved to ask each student about something that cannot be done in the city. Here, it was a bit more spontaneous, because they didn't have anything prepared, and very interesting ideas came out, like: "in Medellin you cannot be violent" or "you can't drive drinking alcohol".

All activities added up to the process of raising authenticity and interactiveness of classes and assessments, even if some resulted more efficient than others, and their level of difficulty varied. The extent to which authenticity and interactiveness was reached during classes was the product of reflecting about the emergence of language through students' affordances merged with course syllabus. Table 1 shows mergence between course syllabus and students' interests, and relation to assessment, class by class.

Overall, depending on the moment of the course or of the class, sometimes scaffolding or simple sentence constructions were necessary to later develop more authentic interactions. In order to contextualize the course, planning for meaningful class activities with different levels of interactiveness, and finding out which ones resulted more efficient in terms of linguistic acquisition and students' satisfaction were two key elements of my reflections.

Table 1

Merging Course Program with Students' Interests, Class by Class

C L A S S	PROGRAM	STUDENTS' INTERESTS	ABOUT ASSESSMENT
1	General Descriptions of places, there is/are (negative, questions), classroom and house vocabulary	City vocabulary, talking about their surroundings, touristic places, sharing touristic information.	Initial gathering of interests to design classes and assessment proposal. Informal oral assessment of previously acquired knowledge.
2	Many, a lot of, some, any, how many, prepositions of place, descriptions, kitchen and house vocabulary	Meeting people from other countries, personal and family information, sharing time with the acquaintances.	Explanation and oral practice of meaningful descriptions, providing accurate feedback on it.
3	Demonstratives, directions, questions, like, dislike	Traveling, food/restaurants.	Negotiation of evaluation plan proposal, including activities already performed in class and students' interests. Negotiation of rubrics, including aspects of students' interests.
4	Possibilities, abilities, routines, activities, can/can't, questions, base form verbs	Study/learn about different cultures, animals, traveling.	1 st follow-up oral evaluation: description of a well-known place in Medellin, applying structures previously practiced in class, in couples. Immediate feedback among students.
5	Wh questions + can, verbs in present and past, time expressions, verb to	Work, junk food, daily activities with friends, family music, travel.	Formal feedback based on the analysis of performances during the 1 st follow-up evaluation. Introduction and meaningful practice

	be in past, like/dislike		of language related to possibilities and abilities.
6	Questions in past, could, prepositions of situations, irregular verbs in past, negative past, time expressions	Music, movies, architecture, art, preferences, food.	2 nd follow-up evaluation in the form of a dialog about preferences and options for activities in Medellin. Performances recorded in order to analyze carefully and provide accurate feedback. Immediate feedback among students. Introduction and meaningful practice of past tense. Homework to practice past tense with everyday activities assigned.
7	Time expressions, apologizing, irregular verbs in past, present vs past, general information about oneself in past.	Geography, sharing time with people, work, share personal experiences.	Formal accurate feedback provided with the negotiated rubric. Homework checking and continuing with conversations in groups about meaningful experiences. Peer and teacher informal feedback. Homework related to everyday activities assigned in order to keep practicing past tense.
8	Verbs in past (questions and answers), various prepositions, numbers, physical activities	Work, exercise/sports, tourism, share professional experiences.	Homework checking as an introduction to interviews performed among students about important life experiences. 3 rd follow-up evaluation in the form of an individual interview with the teacher, talking about a significant event in the past. Immediate feedback + recordings. Negotiation of the task for the final oral test.
9	Sports and seasons. Final written test	Current possibilities, sports and seasons vocabulary.	Formal accurate feedback provided with the negotiated rubric. General review of course content through questions and answer, orally and on the board. Final written test.
10	Questions in past about personal information- Final Oral Test	Drill of questions about work, family, food, music, traveling, animals, sharing time with friends.	Feedback provided on the final written test and on general progress during the course. Group conversations about last holidays. Final oral test performed and recorded in the form of a conversation with all participants sharing and asking about a great holiday experience.

Constructing an Assessment System: Positive Impact of Feedback and Meaningfulness on Learning and Teaching

Raising authenticity to support a validity argument for the interpretations of the final oral test of this course implied constructing a communicative and authentic assessment system, merging course syllabus with students' preferences. Meaningful affordances were complemented with constant feedback regarding students' performances, with clarity in the evaluation processes, and a positive correlation. Those elements ensured students' positive attitude towards assessments, and the deployment of the best of their abilities. Feedback was provided formally, in rubrics, and informally, in each class. Furthermore, a system of formal assessments was proposed, discussed, agreed and modeled. Hence, every student knew exactly what was expected in the evaluations. Finally, the criteria to score performances were also discussed.

Feedback let students know about the positive features of their performances, becoming a source of motivation and confidence. Furthermore, feedback informed about aspects to improve, which allowed students to walk towards *autonomy* by taking more responsibility for their learning (Benson 1997), monitoring their own actions. Those aspects propended a positive consequential validity, or positive impact on students' leaning process, as they helped them to regulate their choices and learning strategies, which raised consequential validity of the whole course. In the focus group when asked about the usefulness of feedback, students answered:

Focus group 09/09/2015:

Patricia ¿Ustedes qué opinan de la retroalimentación informal que les di aquí en clases durante las evaluaciones? Que ustedes hacían algo y yo les retroalimentaba como: es de esta manera, o cuidado con la pronunciación acá. Digamos que, ¿ustedes piensan que fue oportuna, fui clara? ¿Eso les ayudó en el

		tema? ¿Si, no, cómo?
00:11:56	Luis	Sí, fueron bien oportunas esas retroalimentaciones, porque en cada actividad había una retroalimentación, y es súper chévere tantas actividades, o tantas evaluaciones. O sea, que no sea nada más la evaluación final, porque uno a medida que va haciendo esas evaluaciones, va retroalimentándose y va obteniendo, pues lógicamente, más recomendaciones.
00:12:15	Carla	Se va poniendo las pilas.
00:12:16	Luis	Y se va poniendo las pilas.
00:13:50	Fernanda	Esa retroalimentación le daba a uno más confianza. Pues, hoy la retroalimentación que hicimos para el diálogo, pues, ya en el segundo momento que hablé me dio más confianza, más como para ayyy
00:14:03	Patricia	Qué bueno. Y eso fue en parte la retroalimentación informal que hacíamos en las actividades de clases, pero yo también, en la rúbrica que ustedes tenían, siempre les escribía...
00:14:13	Lina	Los comentarios.
00:14:13	Patricia	Cómo les había ido en el examen. ¿Qué opinan de eso? ¿También fue útil?
00:14:16	Varios	Sí.
00:14:16	Lina	Muy buena.
00:14:19	Patricia	¿Por qué buena?
00:14:20	Simona	Porque sabíamos en qué mejorar y qué cosas teníamos buenas
00:14:23	Carla	Sí, muy buena.
00:14:28	Beatriz	Eso es lo que usted sintió de nosotros, y en qué estuvimos bien, y en qué estuvimos mal.
00:14:35	Luis	Y atinaban totalmente, Atinaban, o sea, todo lo que se decía eran errores reales, o sea, eran situaciones que sí, que sí lo estamos haciendo mal. Entonces, atinó muchísimo.
00:14:50	Carla	Yo digo que fue muy personalizada, y me parece muy bueno.
00:14:55	Varios	Ujum.
00:14:57	Patricia	¿Sirvió para tu proceso personal?
00:14:58	Carla	¡Total!, pues, no y tu enseñanza, a pesar de que somos nueve, yo creo que fue personalizada para cada uno. Por ejemplo aquí me pusiste lo que debo reforzar. O sea pues que ehh pensaste en mí como persona independiente.

Additionally, evaluations were based on classes, requiring them to deploy the language that had emerged, as it was expressed in the second and last questionnaire. In the Lickert scale, eight students completely agreed with the final oral test reflecting class content, while one of them only agreed with it. Such view was supported by opinions expressed during the focus group.

Focus group 09/09/2015:

00:08:25	Patricia	Súper. Muchas gracias por eso. Ahora, muchachos ¿ustedes consideran que el contenido que estudiamos en las clases se vio reflejado en las evaluaciones que hicimos?
00:08:35	Varios	Sí.
00:08:35	Luis	Total
00:06:35	Lina	Totalmente.
00:06:36	Lina	Todo lo que vimos en clases...
00:06:37	Luis	Lo que veíamos era lo que se evaluaba.
00:06:39	Lina	Era lo que se evaluaba.

In general terms, validity and authenticity purposes were accomplished throughout the course. Remarkably, students felt the difference between working with activities directly related to their contexts, and working with content detached from their lives, as they had experienced before. In their words, in this course language emerged through activities likely to happen in their lives, including the final oral evaluation that, being improvable, represented a meaningful situation, according to answers for the open questions in the second questionnaire – 09/09/2015 –:

12- ¿Qué considera que debió tenerse en cuenta para que esta evaluación reflejase mejor una situación cercana a la vida real?

Student 7: En la vida real se tendrán situaciones en las que te preguntaran, que recuerdas de alguna experiencia que tuviste en un viaje; y esta evaluación hizo que nos acercamos a saber hablar en pasado y así dar respuesta a cuando sucedan estas situaciones.

Student 8: Creo que fue una experiencia real - muy resumida pero real.

Working with students' affordances made English emerge in a meaningful and stimulating way. Actually, eight students supported that the final oral test had been an opportunity to express something important in their lives, according to responses in the

second questionnaire. Additionally, in the focus group, when asked if they had observed connections between course syllabus and their interests, their response was positive:

Focus Group 09/09/2015:

- 00:02:02 Beatriz La rutina, las actividades, las preguntas, lo que nos gusta, eh lo que podemos y no podemos hacer, en el tiempo, en las expresiones de las relaciones, en el presente y el pasado, en las preguntas en general, en ser, estar, hacer, en esto, en los verbos regulares e irregulares, en todo.
- 00:02:30 Simona Cuando uno hacía por ejemplo los viajes o en Medellín, o lo que pasa o no le pasa en Medellín, siempre abarcamos como todo.
- 00:02:41 Alejandro Pues yo la verdad vi esa relación en todas las clases. Cada actividad que hacíamos, pregunta, ¿cuál es tu comida favorita? Por ejemplo. Entonces, me gusta la pizza. ¿Si me entiende?

Additionally, when asked if class activities helped them achieve their goals with English, answers were also positive:

Focus Group 09/09/2015:

- 00:07:41 Luis Sí. Que la relación ha sido total. Yo pienso que los objetivos que tenemos ehh pues se vieron concretados con toda la metodología. Ehh fue una metodología muy didáctica, y quisiera, pues, comparando con otras situaciones o en otros cursos anteriores ehh pues era mucho de libro y era como seguir el viaje del señor X o de la señora X, y que en cierta forma no era vivencia propia. Yo pienso que llevar este inglés a nuestras vivencias hace que sea muy productivo y que permita pues que el conocimiento sea mucho, mucho más enriquecedor para nosotros.

Coherently, students noticed connections between classes and the final oral evaluation, in terms of content and construct, as expressed in some open questions of the final questionnaire:

11- ¿Qué considera que debió tenerse en cuenta para que esta evaluación reflejase mejor lo que estudiamos durante el curso?

Student 9: El examen final estuvo muy bien y el contenido del curso estuvo presente en el examen y fue muy bueno realizar este tipo de examen donde todos participamos.

13- ¿Qué considera que debió tenerse en cuenta para que esta evaluación reflejase mejor los logros que usted alcanzó durante el curso?

Student 1: En esta evaluación se reflejó todo lo aprendido en pasado simple y en especial los verbos tanto irregulares como regulares.”

Furthermore, positive consequential evidence emerged when students expressed that what was learnt during the course could be applied in real situations, as well as with 7 students who expressed total agreement with the final oral test being a motivation to review what was studied, in the Lickert scale of the second questionnaire. Additionally, we addressed the topic in the focus group:

Focus group 09/09/2015:

00:08:40	Patricia	¿Ustedes percibieron, o si la percibieron cuál percibieron, alguna relación entre las actividades que realizábamos en clases y alguna situación que ustedes podrían encontrar en la vida real? Si hubo relación ahí, ¿cómo la hubo?
00:08:59	Varios	Sí.
00:09:00	Patricia	¿Más o menos cómo? A ver, ¿qué vieron ustedes?
00:09:02	Beatriz	Por ejemplo, cuando tengamos una conversación en inglés, y pues te van a preguntar sobre ¿qué música te gusta? ¿Qué te gusta hacer en tus ratos libres?
00:09:16	Cache	Hablar sobre el pasado.
00:09:17	Beatriz	¿Cuáles son tus rutinas? Un viaje o una experiencia que tuviste en el pasado. Estamos aquí hablando: ay! Acordá... Una vez a mí me pasó esto.
00:09:27	Fernanda	Sí.
00:09:27	Beatriz	Y ya. Todas, en esas situaciones sí se ve reflejado lo que uno estudió y para lo que necesita.
00:09:45	Simona	Sí.

Regarding the authenticity of evaluations, students' perceptions were positive concerning the oral situations, but not so much regarding the written test provided by the institution:

Focus group 09/09/2015:

- Patricia Bueno, eso con respecto a las actividades de clases. Pero, ahora, recuerden las evaluaciones que tuvimos. ¿Alguna de esas evaluaciones, o todas, o ninguna, también podría reflejar algo que podría suceder en la vida real? Las actividades, ya sabemos que sí, ¿las evaluaciones? ¿Cómo la conversación de hoy, o las entrevistas que hemos tenido? ¿Podrían ser algo de la vida real?
- 00:10:05 Simona Sí.
- 00:10:06 Luis Claro.
- 00:10:07 Lina Uff Mucho.
- 00:10:09 Varios Claro, sí.
- 00:10:10 Beatriz Siempre con las conversaciones...
- 00:10:12 Simona O preguntas que le pueden hacer a uno.
- 00:10:14 Lina Además que siempre hablamos de cosas reales. Jamás hablamos como de inventarnos como un cuento o algo, no. Siempre hablamos de la experiencia del viaje de ella, de ella, de ella, de ella. Y de lo que realmente es Medellín, no estábamos inventando cosas que no hubieran en Medellín. O sea, todo es real, entonces eso se lleva a la realidad, nada era fantasioso.
- 00:10:35 Luis Pero, yo pienso que el escrito no fue tan real. El escrito sí era como cosas muy generales, y pienso que en el próximo diseño de debe tener algo más, una pregunta más abierta.
- 00:10:49 Carla Menos resumido.
- 00:10:50 Luis Más abierta, dónde nosotros podamos describir algo, o una situación o algo.
- 00:10:56 Lina Ser más específicos.
- 00:10:57 Luis No, no.
- 00:10:58 Patricia ¿Tú estás hablando del examen escrito?
- 00:10:59 Luis Del examen escrito.

For these students, the fact of developing a group conversation for the final oral test represented a source of comfort and enrichment, replacing the stress of being assessed, as it used to happen with my students before this research. This was expressed in the open questions of the first questionnaire and confirmed during the focus group:

First questionnaire 01/09/2015:

Student 9: “Porque de esa manera optamos por tener una disposición menos tensa al hablar de un examen y puede que obtengamos una mejor calificación.”

Focus group 09/09/2015:

00:15:44 Patricia ¿Y por qué prefieren ese tipo de interacciones?
00:15:46 Carla Ah porque aprendemos cada uno de cada uno, hay unos que saben más, otros que saben otras cosas distintas, y, y entonces por ejemplo Carla sabe una cosa, Alejandro sabe otra, Beatriz sabe otra, Hilda sabe otra, y entonces nos vamos alimentando también de lo que saben los compañeros.
00:16:06 Patricia Claro, no es solamente yo, sino que todos ustedes...
00:16:07 Varios Ujum
00:16:08 Beatriz Y además, nos ayuda a bajarle un poquito la tensión.
00:16:11 Cache Sí.
00:16:11 Fernanda Ah sí.
00:16:12 Beatriz Porque ya no es solamente preguntas ella y yo en una evaluación, entonces somos las dos nerviosas, y entonces no hay nadie como que nos guíe. Pues, yo también lo estoy haciendo, calmate, esto lo otro. Por ejemplo hoy, yo estaba muy nerviosa, pero usted empezó y yo: ah lo voy a hacer. Y ahí ya estaba más calmada y así. Cuando hicimos las preguntas ya estábamos todo como más calmados.
00:16:38 Hilda Más relajados.

Correspondingly, students pointed out advantages related to authenticity and interactives when expressing their opinions regarding the methodology of merging course content with their meaningful affordances:

Focus group 09/09/2015:

Patricia Y, ya la última es: ¿ustedes consideran que relacionar sus intereses personales con los objetivos del curso es provechoso para alcanzar las metas en un segundo idioma?
00:17:00 Lina Yo considero que es muy provechoso porque es una manera muy útil de, de practicarlo y reconocer los errores que usted tenga para irlos corrigiendo en el camino, y usted se adecúa como a situaciones de la vida real.

As students orally communicated around their goals during some class activities, I reflected about the level of engagement that each occasion provoked, paying attention to factors that would raise authenticity or interactiveness, therefore would support validity. One of those activities was carried out in the sixth class, and my posterior reflection shows:

Dairy 6th entry 13/08/2015:

When that was done, every student got to read the information they had written about the possibilities in the country of their interests. The phrase was “in XXXX you CAN...”. This activity was very interesting for everyone as we got to listen details from a great diversity of countries like Egypt, Madagascar, Italy, Australia, Scotland, etc. Everybody completed their homework in a very accurate manner, except for one of the old ladies, the friendliest one, who read a long text that wasn't of her own about Australia. But, even if that was not the goal of the activity, she got to a very interesting point which was identifying the phrases that talked about possibilities and extracting them. She was satisfied with this.

After everybody had shared the information of their countries, we talked a bit about the different things that were presented, and then it came the summit of the activity, the idea that came to my mind some minutes before starting the class. I asked them to get into the pairs I chose, and talk about what they liked of those countries and the possibilities in them, without writing a word, everybody in English, as they had to imagine they were from those countries. All students got very easily into this mood, and they loved it. I let the activity run for about 5-7 minutes, and I was walking around to check on their production, and assist when possible. I have to say that at the beginning they had little trouble to start their conversations, but as minutes went by I swear they forgot they all shared the same language as they were using many strategies, linguistic and non, to express their ideas and request information from their partners. I got really happy with this, that it was difficult to stop them, but I did it at a point in which I felt they were kind of running out of ideas, so the point of the conversations was coming to an end. I didn't wait until the last minute, because I didn't want students to feel they had nothing to say, but I wanted them to remain with the idea of being in a really interesting conversation.

When that was done, everybody had very happy faces and I had to ask what their impressions were. In that moment all the excitement of their achievement invaded the classroom, as students expressed to be very satisfied with the activity, and I supposed that one of the reasons was that they were communicating freely, without a script, with their own ideas and curiosities, with the linguistic tools they needed for that occasion of meeting and exchanging information about possibilities in different countries.

When that was over, I was confident to run the test of that session, as I knew students were feeling also confident with the linguistic tools and content they were displaying.

Empowered by a valid assessment system connecting follow-up and final test, I could autonomously develop a proposal by adapting course contents and grammar functions into a communicative task connected to students' lives, that allowed them to express themselves orally, in a significant class event, while using the language acquired through class activities. Such proposal was the product of reflecting on class outcomes, students' preferences and the possibilities in the syllabus, as expressed in my diary:

Dairy 8 entry 26/08/2015:

When that was done and almost all students were in the class (the youngest lady didn't come today) I proceeded to propose the activity I had thought of for the FOT.(Final Oral Test) I explained that I had matched the interests they had expressed, with their answer regarding activities with meaningful content and the course program. I had to give it a lot of thought to come up with this idea, even if it sounds simple. I had like 3 previous ideas, and they evolved to this one. I thought that in order to be meaningful, the content had to be related to themselves or their family. In order to meet their traveling objectives it had to be about a traveling experience, and in order to comply with the objectives of the program it had to include the grammar tense we are currently working on: simple past. Apart from that, the most chosen activity in the questionnaire for the FOT was a group discussion, because it lowered their anxiety levels and the teacher could take notes and participate, among other reasons. So, trying to merge all that, I proposed to have a conversation about past traveling experiences, out of Medellin, in or out of Colombia. Everybody is going to share an experience of a trip, including me, and everybody should ask at least one question about the experiences of the partners. I think this task is ambitious enough and fulfills everybody interests, because we are all going to share something from ourselves, or this is the way I picture it, gotta see what really happens. They all agreed and got excited about this idea.

Agreements about the task, regarding topic, language to be used, aspects to evaluate and possible extra-linguistic resources were reached. This is how the desired stimulating testing environment for the final oral test was finally conformed, and a

reliable instrument to grade all performances was born. Table 2 shows the rubric we followed to prepare for the task and do the assessment.

Table 2

Final Oral Test Rubric

Conversación grupal sobre experiencias de viaje (20%): en una conversación con todos los compañeros de la clase, cada alumno contará en inglés alguna experiencia de viaje fuera de Medellín que haya sido importante en su vida. Todos escucharemos atentamente las historias de cada compañero, y formularemos preguntas sobre aspectos que nos llamen la atención. Cada alumno debe formular por lo menos una pregunta, sin que esta interrumpa alguno de los relatos. Se utilizarán verbos irregulares y regulares en pasado, incluyendo sus formas negativas e interrogativas, así como marcadores temporales que contextualicen las frases. De igual manera se aprovecharán las oportunidades que surjan durante la interacción para incluir vocabulario y estructuras gramaticales aprendidas durante el curso, o de alguna otra manera. Cada alumno puede utilizar los recursos lingüísticos o no lingüísticos (internet, fotografías, gestos, etc.) que considere necesarios para complementar su historia.

Porcentaje	Criterio	Descriptor	Porcentaje alcanzado				
20%	Coherencia y cohesión	Puede contextualizar su discurso y enlazar ideas para interactuar en una conversación grupal sobre experiencias de viaje importantes en la vida de los participantes.	0 – 3,9	4- 7,9	8- 11,9	12- 15,9	16- 20

Comentarios

20 %	Léxico	Puede utilizar palabras y expresiones simples para interactuar en una conversación grupal sobre experiencias de viaje importantes en la vida de los participantes.					
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Comentarios

20 %	Pronunciación	Puede articular su discurso de manera comprensible para el interlocutor.					
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Comentarios

20 %	Interacción	Puede relacionarse con su interlocutor coherentemente, al responderle o formularle preguntas cuando es necesario, en una conversación grupal sobre experiencias de viaje importantes en la vida de los participantes.					
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Comentarios

20 %	Gramática ³	Puede utilizar con precisión las estructuras gramaticales especificadas en las instrucciones para interactuar en una conversación grupal sobre experiencias de viaje importantes en la vida de los participantes.					
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Comentarios

Niveles de Evidencia

Insuficiente 0 - 3.9%	Para mejorar 4 - 7.9%	Aceptable 8 - 11,9%	Bueno 12 - 15.9%	Excelente 16 – 20%
No alcanza los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia falta de preparación.	Se aproxima a los objetivos propuestos, pero necesita trabajar aspectos claves.	Alcanza el mínimo esperado. Evidencia potencial para mejorar su desempeño.	Cumple exitosamente con los objetivos propuestos. Se comunica con pocos contratiempos.	Cumple y sobrepasa los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia efectividad en la comunicación oral.

Calificación final + Retroalimentación:

³ “Grammar” is a label meaning “syntax”, as otherwise it could have turned out confusing for students.

This rubric evidences validity, regarding construct aspects. To begin with, it was a communicative task that resulted, as evidenced before, meaningful for students, and with positive emotional correlation. It not only recognized individual characteristics, but also fostered the experience of language in real and immediate communication through an authentic class event. Furthermore, it included students' communicative goals of interacting in English around a meaningful dimension, and took into account speech characteristics such as vocabulary, syntax, phonology, cohesion and language organization. Additionally, it provided space for accurate feedback and suggestions. Those elements made of it an analytic and holistic rating scale with high construct validity.

Students not only communicated around information directly related to their lives, but also engaged in a conversation about past travel experiences. Those characteristics complied with some of their communication goals – traveling, sharing life experiences, learning about foreign cultures, developing own discourse –, it represented an event of their interest – oral interaction –, and required language knowledge – simple past, time expressions, cohesion, coherence – that allowed me to interpret their capacities in a similar situation outside the academic environment. An extract of that conversation shows the level of English and allows to infer the extent of interactiveness prompted by the task in the final oral evaluation -09/09/2015-:

00:17:30 Cache This is the best trip of my life. The travel was in 2004. I was 9 years old, and my family were with me. We stayed in the Rodadero beach, it's a beautiful place in Santa Marta. We visited the Aquarium, it is really beautiful and we saw the dolphins and shells. We ate at different place everyday. But, in the hotel restaurant the food was very good. In the trip, I found many friends and I speak today. On 2014, I went to Santa Marta, the best trip of my life, but I was very child and my brother and me enjoyed all time in the sea.

Similarly, this final oral test reflected class work and previous assessments, during which students gained confidence to perform orally in meaningful interactions. Therefore, this final oral test was also authentic and valid from the point of view of its familiarity. For instance, one of the follow up evaluations in the assessment system meant to develop a conversation between two people who were getting to know each other, triggered interaction in the following way:

Second-follow up evaluation description in the rubric:

Me gusta y puedo!: conversación casual entre dos personas que se están conociendo y comparten información sobre sus gustos, posibilidades y habilidades, en relación a sus intereses en la familia, la alimentación o el trabajo, según se desarrolle la interacción. Se utilizan las estructuras LIKE y CAN, incluyendo las formas negativas e interrogativas.

Consequently, during the final oral evaluation students had sufficient context to develop their true abilities, during a performance assessment with high authenticity, interactiveness and validity, in the form of a conversation about significant holidays, as I could notice in this extract taken from the transcription of such interaction -

09/09/2015-:

00:28:25	Beatriz	What is the popular food in this place?
00:28:30	Fernanda	The food is fish
00:28:38	Patricia	Fish?
00:28:39	Fernanda	Sí.
00:28:40	Patricia	Is the most popular food? Ok.
00:28:47	Beatriz	For Cache. How did you feel with your experience?
00:28:58	Cache	I felt very good in my trip.
00:29:10	Cache	I have a question for Alejandro.
00:29:13	Patricia	Go.
00:29:16	Cache	Because you lost in Guarne?
00:29:17	Patricia	Why?
00:29:18	Alejandro	Why.
00:29:19	Cache	Why. Why you lost in Guarne?
00:29:23	Alejandro	Because I walked in the pinewood, just was curiosity.

Specifically regarding the perceptions of validity and authenticity of the final oral assessment, students expressed general consent. For instance, from the Lickert scale used in the second questionnaire (See Appendix F), eight out of nine students completely agreed with the final evaluation reflecting all the content of the course, just one person chose the second option of the scale, which was to only agree. Similarly, eight students completely agreed on the exam being a good opportunity to express something meaningful, and one person chose the second possibility.

By the same token, eight students agreed with the rubric being useful, and one only agreed with it. Likewise seven participants completely agreed on the exam being a source of motivation to study, one of the participants only agreed on this, and another one had a neutral opinion. Regarding the grades, seven students completely agreed on scores reflecting the knowledge acquired in the course, another student decided to only agree, and one did not answer.

Finally, this final oral assessment reflected a balance between authenticity and interactiveness, supported not only by the instructions of the task and students' performance, but also by their perceptions. From the Lickert scale of the second questionnaire, the following statements, related to validity received 100% of agreement:

Las instrucciones del examen oral final estuvieron claras; la retroalimentación que recibí de esta evaluación me ayudará desempeñarme mejor en futuras ocasiones; desarrollar una temática importante para mi vida fue productivo para mi aprendizaje del inglés; el examen oral final fue una representación de mis intereses con el inglés. (See Appendix F)

The first statement evidences construct validity, the second evidences consequential validity, and the last two reflect interactiveness. Such balance

shows students perceived a validity balance in the final oral evaluation, despite some authenticity drawbacks. Three out of nine people did not completely agree with this evaluation being a representation of a real life situation. Nevertheless, their answers were still in the agreement or neutral ranges of the Lickert scale, which means they did not have a completely opposite opinion. The previous represents an achievement: a significant level of authenticity and validity was reached to the point of having zero students expressing disagreement with the clarity of instructions, the usefulness and motivating characteristics of the task, or with its similarity to a real life situation.

Discussion: How did a Reflective Spiral of Assessment Enhancement Involve Authenticity, Validity, Autonomy and Students' Voices?

The search for authenticity, as the resemblance of students' interests outside the classroom, was the key element that fueled the development of a reflective process towards assessment validity, involving students' voices and my autonomy. While developing authentic classes and assessments another element emerged inevitably: interactiveness, as the involvement of students' characteristics in each task. Raising both, authenticity and interactiveness, resulted, as intended, in meaningful and motivating classes and assessments. Such a spiral allowed me to understand that evaluation affects numerous aspects of the teaching and learning processes, as there is a close relation among them. For instance, it touches autonomy, motivation, engagement and meaningfulness of all lessons, because "assessment needs to be conceptualized as an ongoing activity that involves gathering, interpreting, and evaluating information, and action, based on results, rather than mere documentation of students' performance" (McMillan, J., 2003, p. 39).

Authenticity, led to interactiveness, meaningfulness, and motivation as a synchronized and integrated innovative spiral moving towards validity. Creating a rich semiotic environment, embedding assessment enhancement within class development, and becoming a more autonomous teacher were the fueling elements of this research, looking for an answer to: how could authenticity and meaningfulness build a strong argument to support the validity of a final oral test in an English beginners' course?

To begin with, authenticity and interactiveness were boosted within a rich semiotic environment, including resources related to students' feelings, experiences and habitats (Van Lier, 2004, p. 73): meaningful and contextualized classes. Likewise,

assessment enhancement was embedded within class development, through tasks that made it possible to draw appropriate inferences out in students' context, while requiring their language ability, and ensuring interactiveness (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

At the same time, focusing on the individual, on her process, enquiring my practice, integrating theory and practice, and reflecting introspectively guided me towards a pedagogy for autonomy (Vieira, 1999). In other words, a pedagogy who seeks to develop in students the ability to take responsibility for their own learning in an intentional and systematic way (Vieira, 1999). Meanwhile, I also became a more reflective professional, who takes the responsibility of solving problems in her practice, thinking of the community wellbeing (Contreras, 2001, p. 94). Within the classroom, taking responsibility for my actions, negotiating with students and proposing a final oral task involving their voices represented a sign of me moving towards an autonomous practice, while breaking the boundaries of a textbook.

In this study, finding affordances "to engage with them and stimulate further social interaction" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 81) meant including elements that students considered meaningful, such as relevant aspects of their lives, or purposes with the language. Those elements provided me with ideas to frame the language within a context (Van Lier, 2004), taking into account events of students' interests, their communication goals (Savignon, 2001), and linguistic purposes. In this way, they managed to "use the language in reference to the world in which they live" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 65), and I could find "possibilities for action that yield opportunities for engagement and participation" (Van Lier, 2004, p. 191).

Meaningful and communicative classroom work was essential to develop organized, pragmatic and topical language, based on students' affective schemata

(Bachman & Palmer, 1996). This is to say that, listening to students' voices made it possible to plan for class communicative activities, through which they could use the target language to express dimensions that mattered to them. While recognizing students' personalities and encouraging them to use real and immediate language (Savignon, 2001) students' autonomy was promoted to a certain psychological level, as they began to take more responsibility of their own learning (Benson, 1997), as the feedback provided motivated them. In this way, they started to develop confidence to use their skills, while speaking their own voice and connecting themselves to the language (Van Lier, 2004).

The final oral evaluation of this course evidenced the extent to which working within a rich semiotic environment, facilitated the emergence of discourse and interaction in a given situation (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), through communicative responses with grammatical—vocabulary, syntax, morphology, phonology—, pragmatic— ideational, heuristic—, sociolinguistic—naturalness—, and topical—personal—characteristics (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The following excerpt, in which the student deployed his oral abilities in English, could exemplify the quality of the discourses that emerged during the final oral evaluation.

Final oral evaluation 09/09/2015:

00:08:41 Luis Ok. I visited Cartagena in the past vacation. Cartagena is a beautiful city in Colombia. It's small, but it is fantastic. I went to the beach all day, I swam here and I was very, very happy. I ate in the restaurant delicious food, I was in the San Pedro Restaurant. There are many restaurants in this city. In the night, I went the disco with my family and my friend. I danced and heard a good music, for example Vallenato, Mapalé, Cumbia, and I drank a delicious beer, beer, beer, in these discos. Cartagena is beautiful, but it has many problems. For example, insecurity. But, the persons from Cartagena are very happy because this city is beautiful, and they live in a lovely city.

00:10:31 Patricia Good! Nice trip, very nice trip.

In this piece of Luis' speech, it is possible to notice that the engagement he had while talking about a meaningful experience facilitated a smooth communication in this situation. In such a short excerpt, he did not only use the target language pragmatically and naturally, but also included a personal opinion within a characterization of a place, with positive, negative and cultural aspects. Additionally, he described his actions and talked about other people. Such a deployment of abilities in the target language is a sign of what he is capable to do outside the classroom, within an engaging and meaningful environment. Therefore, the task proposed for the final oral evaluation reached a level of authenticity and validity that made it possible to infer students' abilities in real-life situations, since it represented their interests not only with the language, but also their general preferences.

A rich semiotic environment helped us – me and the students – to carry out assessments backed by “a chain of reasoning and evidence” from which I drew interpretations and proposed strategies based on my inferences related to their abilities and knowledge (Fulcher & Davidson, 2006). In this way, assessment enhancement was embedded in the development of all classes, by establishing a clear connection to teaching, adapting the course syllabus to include students' voices through their interests and needs, clearly defining language ability with students, and negotiating the assessment with them. Those strategies ensured students' positive attitude and facilitated their performances during evaluations by raising the interactiveness of procedures, designing authentic assessments, and complying with the objective of the course's program.

In order to ensure students' positive attitude and their best performances during formal assessments, it was necessary that they perceived those evaluative situations as familiar, clear and doable challenges (Brown, 2004). In other words, face validity had to be high and the affective schemata of the task had to be positive, because that would lower their anxiety and would foster their performances. This was possible not only by making evaluations reflect class activities, but also because they represented meaningful challenges, as it was revealed during the final oral evaluation, in which some students spoke about the best trip of their lives.

Additionally, the instructions of each procedure were negotiated and adapted to students' expectations and progress, which resulted in the creation of four consensual rubrics (Appendixes A, B, C, D). By reaching agreements on the instructions and aspects to take into account, the evaluation acquired democratic features. Basing assessments on students' affordances and characteristics throughout the course helped raising content validity and students' motivation. As a result, this democratic and collaborative process increased fairness as whole (Picón, 2013).

Assessment enhancement also implied proposing learning activities to "engage students in ongoing and active learning" (Fox, 2008, p. 99), with natural language, contextualized tasks, meaningful themes, resembling real-life situations (Brown, 2004). Essentially, through this process, my reflections on students' interests, class development and my practices guided me to design more authentic assessments, that involved the characteristics of students while using the language with the function of communicating meaningfully. Essentially, the interactiveness and function of language became key elements for me to design valid and authentic proposals for evaluations.

Nevertheless, striving to ensure a positive attitude and designing authentic assessments would have not been enough to raise the validity of a final classroom evaluation. Hence, it was necessary to build class assessments with “correspondence between local curriculum objectives and the content of the assessment” (O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 25). That is why all the activities of this course had the rationale of complying with syllabus’ objectives while developing authentic classes. Such effort made it possible to enhance assessments from the authenticity and content validity points of view, and such enhancement happened during the 40 hours that the course lasted.

A process of reflection regarding my own practice, through which I gained reasoning and control of my professional decisions, facilitated the development of the rich semiotic environment and authenticity of assessments. Progressively, I discovered myself developing “an attitude of inquiry towards knowledge and the social contexts where it is constructed, to explore personal theories and practices through processes of awareness-raising, interpretation and confrontation” (Vieira, 1999, p. 223). Fortunately, it is a lifetime gain, as they say: once you go Rolex, you never go back; once you start reflecting, you can never stop doing it.

The reflective spiral that started during this study, and has kept on turning ever since, has helped me to direct my practice through questioning “what, why, and how things are done in class”, while “examining the beliefs and values that form or shape actions in class” (Fandiño, 2009, p. 132). Even reflecting on the obvious characteristics of the group’s ecology, such as age and socioeconomic status represents a step towards analyzing my context, judgments and interpretations, as I open my assessing practices for inspection (Fandiño, 2009). Therefore, deeper reflections definitely allow me to

enhance assessment practices, as I can understand and treasure diversity, lower my anxiety, and plan for strategies to contextualize theory about research methods. At the same time, I walk towards becoming a more autonomous teacher, who questions her role in the classroom, attempts to understand and advice students, engages in investigation and appropriates expertise of her own (Fandiño, 2009).

Monitoring my own actions by recording them in the diary of this study allowed me to “evaluate, change or confirm previous ideas and practice” (Vieira, p. 224, 1999), which had various advantages beyond the enhancement of my evaluation practices. Firstly, paying attention to individual characteristics allowed me to treasure differences among students, as I understood not all participants “share the same perceptions and goal structures” (Tudor, 2003, p. 7). Therefore, expecting the same products from all students would not be realistic. Secondly, I could reduce my anxiety by acknowledging students’ progress, recording reached agreements, and understanding that learners can contribute to each other, which makes collaboration among students an essential element of the class. Thirdly, contextualizing methods theory of authentic teaching and the combination of other strategies, such as adapting to time constrains and providing further explanations, raised my teaching and human sensibility to the point of truly understanding the service nature of my job, and realizing theory and language are not the only elements present within the human interaction developed inside a classroom. Now, my eyes look at theory and time as useful as the students need them to be.

Diary 10 entry 10/09/2015:

As a teacher, I also learnt that students value my efforts, not only expressing it with nice words, but also by engaging in the class activities and in the favors that I as a researcher ask them. I learnt that knowledge does not come for granted, that just because I know something I can share it, I learnt that everybody has a different attitude and different possibilities that might even be related to physical or social conditions. As teacher, I learnt that trying to explore knowledge with

students taking into account those differences takes me way further in the learning process of everybody involved, than having the same treatment to all. And that this might be way more useful when trying to take students to a certain level. In other words, at different paces and fulfilling different needs, everybody can reach their own goals and programs goals.

While becoming a more autonomous teacher, learners' autonomy also became an emergent element. Through activities mirroring students' context, they could start taking control over content and their learning process (Vieira, p. 229, 1999). Additionally, by focusing on learning and constantly providing feedback, students became aware of their abilities through activities that provided information useful to modify teaching and learning strategies (Lamb, 2010). Indeed, the initial spiral that looked for the validity of evaluations by making them more authentic, also gave birth to an increase in autonomy through assessment for learning. That is to say that the evaluative activities that emerged helped each student to walk towards developing "the necessary capacities for becoming an autonomous learner with a view to improving learning through better self-monitoring and self-evaluation leading to better planning" (Lamb, 2010, p. 100) . Feedback let them know about aspects to improve; hence, they were able to monitor their actions to increase the quality of performances. In other words, while I was becoming a more autonomous teacher by improving my assessment practices, students could also "assume greater control of their own learning" (Fandiño, 2009, p. 137).

On the whole, meaningful affordances made it possible to create a rich semiotic environment, engaging students in significant class activities and motivating evaluations. This reflective spiral turned towards the importance of interactiveness in formal assessments for learning, and showed me the way to develop a clear construct

for classes and evaluations, supported by coherent, plausible and clear arguments. Consequently, raising the validity of the final oral evaluation of the beginners' course subject of this study meant combining evidences of content, construct, face and consequential validity, from which I not only gained outcomes regarding authenticity and validity, but also interactiveness and autonomy, all involved in the spiral of my reflections.

Conclusions: Could this Spiral Turn in Other Contexts?

This study revealed that the process of boosting authenticity and meaningfulness as basis for an argument to support the validity of a final oral evaluation implies raising interactiveness of assessments and motivation of students, as well as clarity in a construct that is significant for them. Worth to mention, the reflections of this spiral of assessment enhancement would have not been sparked without paying close attention to students' interests, needs and realities, as the syllabus was adapted successfully by taking into account that information. There were three elements in this spiral that, when turned engrained, allowed me to enhance my teaching practice: a rich semiotic environment, assessment enhancement and autonomy.

This study revealed a process with various phases, and its impacts. Looking at teaching and assessment from the ecological and sociocultural approaches, I underwent a phase to understand the ecology of the class, and a phase of reflection and contextualization. Interconnecting those phases, allowed me to find the three elements above mentioned. Hence, an initial spiral sparked by authenticity and validity ended up leading to opportunities to express a meaningful discourse in the target language, with clarity on the construct to be assessed and encouragement to walk towards gaining more control of actions. Overall, this process took all my students through a significant experience with the language, as it could be seen when some of them, like Cache or Luis, talked about a vacation that they remember as a milestone in their lives, during the final oral test, or through the words of Carla and Beatriz expressing their positive impressions during the focus group. Additionally, my professional practice, including assessment, was enhanced and my beliefs changed, as the excerpts of my diary show.

Within the foreign language-teaching arena, especially in Colombia, evaluation validity appears to be mainly related to the analysis of assessment instruments, leaving aside students' characteristics, affective schemata or expectations. It seems difficult to find academics attempting to pursue authenticity and meaningfulness in the development of classes and assessments, or studies about the importance of the reflection process of a teacher about her evaluation practices. As a reaction to that reality, as I suggest in this thesis a teacher and her students can obtain substantial gains when the former engages in an enquiry process relating authenticity, meaningfulness, interativeness and validity of assessments, which implies contextualizing course contents, establishing a clear concept of language ability, including students' voices and negotiating assessments with them.

This study was implemented during the forty hours that a level lasts at the institute where I work. Additionally, it was impossible for me to devote all my working hours in this research. Therefore, the time limitation of this study could be taken as an opportunity to develop further research around a similar topic. For instance, it would be interesting to find out the outcomes of a longer reflection process of the same nature. Without the shade of a doubt, reflecting opened possibilities for me, such as lowering my anxiety and treasuring differences in my classroom, among others like developing a self-critical attitude. However, what else could be there? Probably a longitudinal study would tell. Additionally, gaps in my study that could be solved with further research include students' self-evaluation collected systematically, as it is one of the types of authentic assessment I could not implement due to lack of knowledge on how to guide students through it. It would also be interesting to do another assessment validity study, triangulating teacher's reflections with students' self-evaluation to find possible mismatches.

Finally, while raising assessment validity and authenticity, I learned about authentic affordances, designing meaningful classroom work, autonomy, interactiveness, and the like. In other words, in my case, tackling assessment validity from the authenticity and meaningfulness points of view through reflection embraced and enhanced almost all the aspects of my teaching professional practice. Therefore, conclusions on this regard seem significant for those foreign language researchers who are interested in teaching and assessment practices, as well as in professional development.

Implications of this study include taking into consideration teachers' reflection time and assessing skills when planning for their formation and working hours. That is to say, teacher educators, professional-programs developers and administrators are directly addressed here as they take part in the responsibility of enhancing education by improving teachers' conditions. Moreover, teachers who devote their time to the classroom are also addressed, as this research invites them to take a reflective position on their practices, to improve their experience, with a positive impact on students' learning. If reflection improves teaching and assessing practices, sufficient time should be allotted to it. Finally, there is also food for thought for curriculum designers, as it was found here that the more authentic and contextualized activities, the more valid results can be obtained.

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APPENDIX A: RUBRIC OF FIRST FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

Inglés II

Profesora: Patricia Grillet

Fecha:

Alumno:

Firma:

Evaluación de seguimiento 1

Clase 4- **Adivina dónde** (20%): descripción oral de un lugar famoso en Medellín. Conversación entre dos personas locales quienes comparten información sobre lugares famosos de la ciudad, describiendo sus características. En la interacción se evaluará el uso de vocabulario correspondiente al escenario de ciudad, los cuantificadores A LOT OF, MANY, SOME, ANY, las estructuras THERE IS/THERE ARE y la capacidad de interacción en inglés, al producir frases contextualizadas y lograr tanto preguntar como responder, hasta lograr el objetivo de la conversación, que es dar con los nombres de los lugares descritos.

Rúbrica

Porcentaje	Criterio	Descriptor	Porcentaje alcanzado					Total
			0 – 3,9	4-7,9	8-11,9	12-15,9	16- 20	
20%	Coherencia	Puede contextualizar su discurso dentro de la situación social en la que interactúa.						

Comentarios

20 %	Léxico	Puede utilizar palabras y expresiones simples para describir.						
------	--------	---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Pronunciación	Puede articular su discurso de manera comprensible para el interlocutor.						
------	---------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Interacción	Puede relacionarse con su interlocutor, al responderle o formularle preguntas cuando es necesario.						
------	-------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Gramática	Puede utilizar las estructuras gramaticales especificadas en las instrucciones.						
------	-----------	---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

Niveles de evidencia

Insuficiente 0 - 3.9%	Para mejorar 4 - 7.9%	Aceptable 8 - 11,9%	Bueno 12 - 15.9%	Excelente 16 – 20%
No alcanza los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia falta de preparación.	Se aproxima a los objetivos propuestos, pero necesita trabajar aspectos claves.	Alcanza el mínimo esperado. Evidencia potencial para mejorar su desempeño.	Cumple exitosamente con los objetivos propuestos. Se comunica con pocos contratiempos.	Cumple y sobrepasa los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia efectividad en la comunicación oral.

TOTAL 100%:

TOTAL pts:

Retroalimentación

APPENDIX B: RUBRIC OF SECOND FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

Centro Internacional de Idiomas y Cultura CIIC

Inglés II

Profesora: Patricia Grillet

Fecha:

Alumno:

Firma:

Evaluación de seguimiento 2

Clase 6- **Me gusta y puedo! (20%)**: conversación casual entre dos personas que se están conociendo y comparten información sobre sus gustos, posibilidades y habilidades, en relación a sus intereses en la familia, la alimentación o el trabajo, según se desarrolle la interacción. Se utilizan las estructuras LIKE y CAN, incluyendo las formas negativas e interrogativas.

Rúbrica

Porcentaje	Criterio	Descriptor	Porcentaje alcanzado					Total
			0 – 3,9	4-7,9	8-11,9	12-15,9	16- 20	
20%	Coherencia	Puede contextualizar su discurso dentro de la situación social en la que interactúa.						

Comentarios

20 %	Léxico	Puede utilizar palabras y expresiones simples para expresar habilidades y posibilidades.						
------	--------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Pronunciación	Puede articular su discurso de manera comprensible para el interlocutor.						
------	---------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Interacción	Puede relacionarse con su interlocutor, al responderle o formularle preguntas cuando es necesario.						
------	-------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Gramática	Puede utilizar las estructuras gramaticales especificadas en las instrucciones.						
------	-----------	---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

Niveles de evidencia

Insuficiente 0 - 3.9%	Para mejorar 4 - 7.9%	Aceptable 8 - 11,9%	Bueno 12 - 15.9%	Excelente 16 – 20%
No alcanza los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia falta de preparación.	Se aproxima a los objetivos propuestos, pero necesita trabajar aspectos claves.	Alcanza el mínimo esperado. Evidencia potencial para mejorar su desempeño.	Cumple exitosamente con los objetivos propuestos. Se comunica con pocos contratiempos.	Cumple y sobrepasa los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia efectividad en la comunicación oral.

TOTAL 100%:

TOTAL pts:

Retroalimentación

APPENDIX C: RUBRIC OF THIRD FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

Centro Internacional de Idiomas y Cultura CIIC

Inglés II

Profesora: Patricia Grillet

Fecha:

Alumno:

Firma:

Evaluación de seguimiento 3

Clase 8- **Hablemos del pasado (20%)**: a modo de conversación informal, cada alumno es entrevistado por la profesora, en una interacción alrededor de experiencias pasadas, por aproximadamente 2 minutos. Los estudiantes informan a la profesora sobre el tema de la entrevista en la clase 7 o antes. Se utilizarán verbos irregulares y regulares en pasado, incluyendo sus formas negativas e interrogativas, así como marcadores temporales que contextualicen las frases.

Rúbrica

Porcentaje	Criterio	Descriptor	Porcentaje alcanzado					Total
			0 – 3,9	4-7,9	8-11,9	12-15,9	16- 20	
20%	Coherencia	Puede contextualizar su discurso dentro de la situación social en la que interactúa.						

Comentarios

20 %	Léxico	Puede utilizar palabras y expresiones simples para expresarse sobre sus experiencias pasadas.						
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Comentarios

20 %	Pronunciación	Puede articular su discurso de manera comprensible para el interlocutor.						
------	---------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Interacción	Puede relacionarse con su interlocutor, al responderle o formularle preguntas cuando es necesario.						
------	-------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

20 %	Gramática	Puede utilizar las estructuras gramaticales especificadas en las instrucciones.						
------	-----------	---	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comentarios

Niveles de evidencia

Insuficiente 0 - 3.9%	Para mejorar 4 - 7.9%	Aceptable 8 - 11,9%	Bueno 12 - 15.9%	Excelente 16 – 20%
No alcanza los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia falta de preparación.	Se aproxima a los objetivos propuestos, pero necesita trabajar aspectos claves.	Alcanza el mínimo esperado. Evidencia potencial para mejorar su desempeño.	Cumple exitosamente con los objetivos propuestos. Se comunica con pocos contratiempos.	Cumple y sobrepasa los objetivos propuestos. Evidencia efectividad en la comunicación oral.

TOTAL 100%:

TOTAL pts:

Retroalimentación

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA – ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS
MAESTRÍA EN ENSEÑANZA Y APRENDIZAJE DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS
TESIS: REFLECTING ABOUT AUTHENTICITY TO BUILD AN ARGUMENT SUPPORTING THE
VALIDITY OF A FINAL ORAL TEST**

CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Julio 08 de 2015

Cordial saludo,

Se le invita a participar en un proyecto de investigación que estaré llevando a cabo desde julio de 2015 hasta julio de 2016, aproximadamente, bajo la supervisión del asesor Edgar Picón, docente de la Universidad de Antioquia. Esta invitación obedece a que usted forma parte de la comunidad académica del Centro Internacional de Idiomas y Culturas (CIIC) de la Universidad de Antioquia. Tómese el tiempo que considere necesario para leer este documento, ya que es muy importante que sepa lo que implica su participación, en caso de que decida aceptar.

Mi propuesta de investigación consiste en explorar la construcción de un argumento sólido para respaldar la validez de la evaluación oral final del curso. Planteo recoger datos durante las 40 horas de clases, con técnicas específicas: observaciones, diario, grabaciones, videos, entrevistas, encuestas, trabajo de aula, documentos existentes.

Si usted accede voluntariamente a participar, será observado durante clases, entrevistado, tomado en cuenta para grupos focales, y/o recibirá encuestas o cuestionarios para que suministre información. Su voz o y/o imagen serán grabadas con su previa autorización. Su participación podría constituir algún riesgo, sin embargo, el objetivo de mi propuesta es contribuir con el desarrollo de prácticas válidas de evaluación, para que usted sea promovido al próximo nivel con la utilización de tareas auténticas y significativas.

Para proteger la confidencialidad de su identidad, sólo yo (como investigadora) tendré acceso a los datos recolectados, que se mantendrán en lugares seguros. Su nombre no será utilizado en ningún momento. Se utilizará un seudónimo para proteger su identidad en la presentación final de este trabajo de investigación, así como en posibles conferencias o artículos originados a partir del estudio.

Su participación en este proyecto es completamente voluntaria y usted tiene la libertad de retirarse del mismo cuando considere. Si participa o no, su estatus como estudiante en la institución no se afectará. Puede solicitar una copia de los resultados de la investigación cuando el estudio concluya.

Información de contacto

Para preguntas sobre la investigación, por favor contacte a Patricia Grillet por los teléfonos 2179107, o 3003476516, o por correo electrónico a: patricia.grillet@udea.edu.co. También puede contactar al profesor Edgar Picón por teléfono al 3147694484 o por correo electrónico: edgar.picon@udea.edu.co

PATRICIA GRILLET

AUTORIZACIÓN: He leído la información arriba consignada y entiendo la naturaleza de este estudio. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en él y acepto las condiciones. Sus datos o los de su representante.

Nombre: _____ Firma: _____ Fecha: _____

APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE 1

INSTRUMENTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN PARA LA TESIS DE MAESTRÍA
 REFLECTING ABOUT AUTHENTICITY TO BUILD AN ARGUMENT SUPPORTING THE VALIDITY OF A FINAL ORAL TEST
 MASTER'S IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNIG - UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

Fecha: ___/___/___	Edad ___	Sexo ___	Número de cuestionario _____
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Presentación

El siguiente cuestionario es parte de la recolección de datos para la investigación que llevo a cabo en relación con la validez y autenticidad de las evaluaciones.

Pretendo averiguar en qué medida el contenido desarrollado en clases ha representado algo importante en la vida de los estudiantes, al tiempo de reflejar sus intereses con el idioma inglés. De igual forma, pretendo averiguar en qué medida las actividades evaluativas realizadas y propuestas reflejan dicho contenido.

Parte 1: actividades no evaluativas desarrolladas durante las clases 2; 3; 4; 5 y 6.

De las siguientes opciones, marque con una X las actividades de clases que han comprendido contenido representativo de algo importante en su vida, al tiempo de reflejar sus intereses con el idioma inglés. **Puede dejar todas las opciones en blanco, marcar 1; 2 o máximo 3.**

1	Simulación de una conversación en la que se describen algunos aspectos de Colombia, que se lleva a cabo fuera del país (clase 2)	
2	Escuchar la descripción de un lugar en Medellín hasta dar con su nombre (clase 2)	
3	Describir un lugar en Medellín hasta que los compañeros den con el nombre del lugar (clase 2)	
4	Escuchar y llenar espacios en blanco, en actividad en la que se utiliza vocabulario relacionado con la cocina o del salón, para describir dichos espacios (Actividad del libro, clase 2)	
5	Describir su casa (clase 2)	
6	Construir oraciones relacionadas con sus intereses en animales, música, deportes u otros, incluyendo demostrativos (clase 3)	
7	Leer, aprender vocabulario y responder preguntas a partir de un texto informativo sobre los servicios e instalaciones de los aeropuertos más grandes de Colombia (clase 3)	
8	Describir una edificación famosa en Colombia y hablar sobre su importancia (clase 3)	
9	Actividad del libro: escuchar y completar un diálogo con expresiones utilizadas para dar direcciones y vocabulario de ciudad (clase 4)	
10	Espontáneamente dar direcciones para llegar a puntos de la ciudad, partiendo de la puerta del instituto (clase 4)	
11	Simulación de una conversación entre un Paisay un extranjero, quien necesita llegar a un punto específico de la ciudad (clase 4)	
12	Construir oraciones sobre posibilidades y/o habilidades, relacionados con la familia, los deportes, la alimentación u otro tema de su interés (clase 4)	
13	Construir oraciones sobre lo que no se debe hacer en Colombia (clase 4)	
14	Simulación de conversación con una persona nativa de algún país que quiera visitar, en la que usted formuló preguntas sobre las posibilidades en ese país (clase 4)	
15	Conversación sobre lo que puede hacer en su lugar de trabajo o estudios (clase 4)	
16	Interacción con los compañeros sobre las posibilidades y habilidades de los miembros de su familia (clase 5)	
17	Simulación de conversación con un turista en la que usted formula preguntas con las palabras interrogativas aprendidas en clase (clase 5)	
18	Simulación de situación en la que usted llega a un país en el que va pasar un tiempo, y conversa con una persona nativa para hacerle preguntas que considera importantes para adaptarse al nuevo contexto (clase 5)	
19	Escuchar y llenar los espacios en blanco de canciones (clase 5)	
20	Buscar y escribir información sobre las posibilidades en un país que quiera visitar (clase 5)	
21	Simulación de conversación entre dos familiares que no se veían hace mucho tiempo, en la que comparten información sobre sus posibilidades y habilidades relacionadas con su trabajo o estudios (clase 6)	
22	Escritura y lectura de párrafo sobre lo que se puede hacer en un país que quiera visitar (clase 6)	
23	Simulación de diálogo espontáneo sobre los gustos y las posibilidades alrededor de ellos en Medellín (clase 6)	

Parte 2: evaluaciones de seguimiento

A continuación, se evaluará su percepción respecto a las evaluaciones de seguimiento planteadas para el curso. Utilice la siguiente escala de valoración para sus respuestas. Encierre en un círculo el número que considere, según la siguiente tabla de valoración.

	Totalmente de acuerdo	De acuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Totalmente en desacuerdo				
	5	4	3	2	1				
1	La 1ra evaluación de seguimiento del curso, en la que tuvo que interactuar para describir un lugar y dar con el nombre de otro, ambos en Medellín, reflejó algún aspecto importante de su vida, al tiempo de representar sus intereses con el idioma inglés.				5	4	3	2	1
2	La 2da evaluación de seguimiento, en la que usted conversó sobre sus gustos, habilidades y posibilidades alrededor de temas como familia, alimentación o trabajo, reflejó algún aspecto importante de su vida, al tiempo de representar sus intereses con el idioma inglés.				5	4	3	2	1
3	El planteamiento de la 3ra evaluación de seguimiento, en la que usted estará en una entrevista con la profesora, para hablar sobre sus experiencias pasadas relacionadas con un tema de su escogencia, refleja algún aspecto importante de su vida, al tiempo de representar sus intereses con el idioma inglés.				5	4	3	2	1

Parte 3: evaluación oral final

De las siguientes opciones, marque con una X la actividad que más refleja algún aspecto importante de su vida, al tiempo de representar sus intereses con el idioma inglés. **Escoja sólo 1 de las opciones propuestas.**

1	Con un compañero de clases, simular un encuentro con un extranjero y compartir información sobre gustos, posibilidades, habilidades y experiencias pasadas.	
2	Presentar información sobre un país que quiera visitar y responder preguntas al final de su presentación.	
3	Interacción grupal en la que cada persona simule ser de un país diferente y se compartan informaciones referentes a cada país, incluyendo aspectos culinarios, de deporte, musicales, entre otros.	

¿Por qué escogió esa opción?

¡MUCHAS GRACIAS POR SU TIEMPO!

APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE 2

INSTRUMENTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN PARA LA TESIS DE MAESTRÍA
 REFLECTING ABOUT AUTHENTICITY TO BUILD AN ARGUMENT SUPPORTING THE VALIDITY OF A FINAL ORAL TEST
 MASTER'S IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNIG - UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

Fecha: ___/___/___ Edad ___ Sexo ___ Número de cuestionario _____

Presentación

El siguiente cuestionario es parte de la recolección de datos para la investigación que estoy realizando en relación con la validez y autenticidad de las evaluaciones. Las preguntas se refieren específicamente al examen oral final, que fue una conversación con todo el curso sobre experiencias de viaje significativas en la vida de cada participante.

Pretendo averiguar en qué medida dicho examen reflejó contenido importante para la vida de los estudiantes, al tiempo de representar sus intereses con el aprendizaje inglés, sin perder de vista el contenido estudiado durante el curso.

Parte 1: escala de valoración

Utilice la siguiente escala de valoración para sus respuestas. Encierre en un círculo el número que considere, según la siguiente tabla de valoración.

	Totalmente de acuerdo	De acuerdo	Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	Totalmente en desacuerdo
	5	4	3	2	1
1	Las instrucciones del examen oral final estuvieron claras.				5 4 3 2 1
2	El examen oral final reflejó el contenido que se estudió durante el curso.				5 4 3 2 1
3	El examen oral final fue una oportunidad para expresar algo importante en mi vida.				5 4 3 2 1
4	El examen oral final representó una situación que podría sucederme fuera del aula.				5 4 3 2 1
5	Desarrollar una temática importante para mi vida fue productivo para mi aprendizaje del inglés.				5 4 3 2 1
6	El examen oral final me motivó a estudiar los contenidos aprendidos durante el curso.				5 4 3 2 1
7	Conocer la rúbrica con anterioridad me ayudó a prepararme para el examen oral final.				5 4 3 2 1
8	La calificación que obtuve en el examen oral final refleja mis los logros que alcancé durante este curso.				5 4 3 2 1
9	La retroalimentación que recibí de esta evaluación me ayudará desempeñarme mejor en futuras ocasiones.				5 4 3 2 1
10	El examen oral final fue una representación de mis intereses con el inglés.				5 4 3 2 1

Parte 2: preguntas abiertas

11- ¿Qué considera que debió tenerse en cuenta para que esta evaluación reflejase mejor lo que estudiamos durante el curso?

12- ¿Qué considera que debió tenerse en cuenta para que esta evaluación reflejase mejor una situación cercana a la vida real?

13- ¿Qué considera que debió tenerse en cuenta para que esta evaluación reflejase mejor los logros que usted alcanzó durante el curso?