How Can the Implementation of a Problem Posing Approach Promote Critical Reflection

in the English Class?

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Medellín

November 2016

Abstract

This action research study intended to explore how problem posing promotes critical reflection through the discussion of social issues in the English class. The project was carried out in a public school in Medellin city. Actions consisted in first connecting class topics to students' interests and realities, then including two strategies (code switching and true cognates) to ease students' participation in class discussions, introducing problem posing as a teaching approach, and finally, evaluating the impact of problem posing on students learning process. Data were gathered through surveys to students, interviews to my CT, journals and students' produced artifacts. Findings revealed that problem posing fostered participation, language development, and critical reflection on the students' part.

Key words: Problem posing, critical reflection, discussion of social issues, code switching, true cognates

Degree Requirement

This action research study was developed during my teaching practicum in a public institution in the city of Medellin, Colombia, as a requirement to receive my B. Ed degree in foreign languages teaching (English and French) at Universidad de Antioquia.

Table of Contents

Preface

Before starting this research process, I was not clear about what to expect. However, I was concerned about the challenges I could encounter in the public institution I held my practicum since I knew the context was difficult, and the majority of students from there are prone to be problematic. Therefore, during the observation stage, I could notice several factors that led me to decide for a teaching approach in which I could encompass not only linguistic matters but also those social issues students face every day. In my experience as a language student in Universidad de Antioquia, I have always felt attracted to critical approaches in education; I think teaching from that perspective is a way of contributing to the construction of a better society.

With this research study, I wanted to help students change the pessimistic perceptions they have about life, offering the benefits a critical approach like problem posing can add to the classroom. Even though I knew it was going to be challenging, I was expectant that it was going to improve to some extent students' attitudes towards their lives, and hence towards the English class.

This project wouldn't have been possible without the invaluable support of my family, not only throughout the development of my teaching practicum but also during this long journey through the university. Moreover, I especially want to thank my thesis advisor Claudia Gutierrez, because her dedication, patience, knowledge and passion for her work, made of this arduous process something more bearable, and on top of that she guided me in concluding this episode of my life successfully.

Context Description

The setting of the study was Benedikta Zur Nieden institution. It is located at San Javier neighborhood, Medellin city. It was founded in 1959 as (Escuela Urbana de Niñas San Juan Eudes) but since April 2003, the name of the institution was changed to Benedikta Zur Nieden because there was a private school with the same name. Currently, the institution offers education in pre-school, primary, high school, and technical education in 10th and 11th grades; it provides its services to 1.600 students approximately and the staff is comprised of one director, three coordinators, fifty-one teachers, two secretaries and one librarian.

The vision and mission of the institution aim to offer an education founded in research, affection and competence development, allowing students to grow as committed citizens and to develop integrally in order to perform successfully in a demanding contemporary society. The institution has adopted human dignity, equity, and inclusion as its main principles. It also states that strong values education is essential to educate responsible citizens with a life project. The institution took this into account to create its pedagogical model that is based on the "affect pedagogy", "social pedagogy" and "pedagogical constructivism".

The English class took place in classroom 407, the classroom was adequate for around 40 students, but there were not enough chairs for all of them. Students met twice a week for the English lessons, on Tuesdays and Fridays, two hours each day. The syllabus was based on the National Bilingualism Program standards, that has adopted the Common European Framework of Reference. It was also organized around competences and performance; assessment criteria were mainly attached to the basic competence standards,

and students were assessed through quizzes, exams, and workshops. The class dynamic

was, in general, explanations by the teacher, followed by an activity in which students

would practice the class topic.

My cooperating teacher is graduated from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in the

English and French teaching program. She has 25 years of experience as an English

teacher in public institutions. According to her, she implements participative

methodologies in order to motivate students.

The study participants included 35 students that were part of the 8th grade, group 3,

they were between 12 and 17 years old. Most of them live nearby the school, in

neighborhoods that are marginalized by social violence and poverty. Furthermore, they

showed a lack of interest and engagement by students towards the English class. Most of

the students did not like the English class because they found it difficult and not relevant

for them. Students were rather apathetic to teacher's explanations, due to the use of

metalanguage which created an atmosphere of confusion and complicated even more

language learning.   Moreover, the teacher's methodology did not take into account

students' interests, thereby causing   students' resistance to learn English.

Statement of the Problem

Eight graders students from Benedikta Zur Nieden institution Located in Medellin,

are facing several problems when it comes to their learning process. Through class

observations, I could identify a couple of matters that may be hindering students learning.

For instance, observational data collected in journal number four (February 12th) evidence

that the activities prepared for the class were not proper activities for improving students'

performance, for instance, when they did homework during class time. This issue could affect students' attitudes towards the class since they could think it is not a serious thing, the following excerpts shows a description and the correspondent interpretation of such issue: "*She told them that she was going to give them the opportunity to do the homework they did not do at home, in the classroom; In this part, I think the teacher wanted students to be busy*".

On the other hand, concerning her teaching method, it is put into evidence in journal number nine (March 1st), how a grammar-translation method is generally used to explain isolated topics. Besides, the use of metalanguage might be overwhelming to students. The next excerpt shows my interpretation of one of the teacher's explanation:

> The use of metalanguage by part of the teacher might confuse students. Even if she explains in Spanish, students keep struggling when it comes to applying what the teacher taught them. I think the teacher should approach explanations using a simpler language for students.

Another significant issue observed in this class was how the environment or context in which students have grown during their lives, have forged pessimistic thoughts and beliefs about living and it also has developed a negative vision about the future. Thus, the lack of engagement and disposition to learn could be translated as the social constructs they already have in their minds, maybe their aspirations distant from succeeding at school, since they have different models in their neighborhoods. The cooperating teacher commented about this issue in an interview that was held on April 1st, 2016:

> -interviewer: ¿He notado que en algunos casos, a los estudiantes les cuesta comprometerse con las actividades en clase, por qué cree que esto sucede? –interviewee: porque no tiene la consciencia de ¿por qué? Y ¿para qué? Están acá, no hay acompañamiento en las casas, no

tienen ninguna norma, es que no tiene ningún interés, no tienen como ningún objetivo de vida, del que hacer con sus vidas en el futuro.

Considering all these aspects, it was necessary to find an approach which could address language learning while leading students to reflect and think critically about such issues in their lives. Accordingly, I think problem posing should be implemented in class in order to create an atmosphere in which students would become critical about the problematics they can encounter in their daily lives and surroundings. At the same time, they can build up counter-narratives to their assumptions about the future. Hernández (2004) states that "The aim of this approach is to teach students to solve real and meaningful problems that are related to the realities being constantly faced by human beings in their communities and in society as a whole" (as cited in Mendieta, 2009). Therefore, problem posing would allow me to approach learning in a meaningful way for students, as well as it would allow reflection and critical thinking to take place.

Theoretical Framework

Nowadays education is highly pointing to promote critical pedagogy in the classrooms; critical pedagogy grants the opportunity to reshape the conceptions of both, classrooms and education. McLaren (as cited in Samacá ,2012) states that critical pedagogy is "A way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state", (p.199).

Accordingly, problem posing furnishes the classroom with spaces to promote social discussions and reflection among students, in other words, it fosters critical thinking that is

the main aim of critical pedagogy. Freire (as cited in Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004) argues that – "the purpose of education is human liberation, which takes place to the extent that people reflect upon themselves and their condition in the world—the world in which and with which they find themselves", (p.7). In order to implement such critical approach in the classroom, it is necessary to take into account various changes in teaching methodology, as stated by Umbarila (2010) "Language teaching from Critical Pedagogy requires a methodology that involves questioning assumptions, beliefs, and values and considering multiple points of view in order to make possible a more inclusive world where individuals act upon their convictions". (p.59)

This research project arises as a way of raising awareness on students towards the different social issues that they, as citizens, encounter in their everyday life. Thus, in this task of inculcating this kind of reflection, it is important to rethink the teacher's role in the classroom. Being a teacher is more than just following a curriculum, the teachers' task entails being a guide who is available for helping and attending students' concerns, a teacher is someone who understands and accepts the heterogeneity of students (Samacá 2012).

Thus, it is essential to take into account students' contexts as well as their interests in order to approach and discuss appealing class topics (problems) for them, that way students might react in a positive way since they would feel familiar with such topics. The teacher's task is to supply relevant and appropriate materials (or as they are often called "codes") for addressing problems. According to Nixon-Ponder (1995) "teachers select and bring the familiar situations back to the students in a codified form: a photograph, a written

dialogue, a story, or a drawing. Each situation contains personal and social conflicts that are of deep importance to the students". (p.3)

Regarding reflection, as it is the main focus of this inquiry it is important to understand what it really entails. According to Mortari (2015) "Reflection aims at understanding the forms of intelligibility by which the world is made meaningful". (p.1) That is to say it is crucial, in problem posing, to show students the different connotations and nuances the society consists of. Reflection allows students to analyze what is happening in their surroundings, to think about their experiences and hence to construct new meanings and make changes. However, Brookfield (1995) says that to reflect does not necessary implies being critical, therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the fact of merely reflecting about things in order to gain deeper understanding of situations; According to this author

> It is quite possible to teach reflectively while focusing solely on the nuts and bolts of classroom process. For example, we can reflect about the timing of coffee breaks, whether to use blackboards or flip charts, the advantages of using a liquid crystal display panel over previously prepared overheads, or how rigidly we stick to a deadline for the submission of students' assignments. All these decisions rest on assumptions that can be identified and questioned, and all of them can be looked at from different perspectives. But these are not in and of themselves examples of critical reflection. (p.7)

Thus, In the process of fostering critical reflection among students, problem posing also allows to promote language learning, not as isolated grammatical items but as a means to express different points of view and offering possible solutions to specific social issues while incorporating real life like language; Abdullah, M. H. (1998) asserts that "By posing language learners problems like those found in real life, teachers can bridge the gap

between language use in the real world and what Dyson calls the 'fake' world of school".

(p.2).

Bearing this in mind, there could be challenges when it comes to implementing this

approach in the classroom; there is reason to believe that students might feel overwhelmed

when imposing problem-posing methodology in their classes, as in Mendieta's (2009)

words, "I was worried about the fact that students did not conceive of the English class as a

space to study issues other than the language itself and that they were not used to asking

and answering puzzling questions". (p.125). Consequently, it is important to understand

this problem-posing process in order to successfully use it as a tool for teaching the

language while critical reflection is fostered. In this research study, I will adopt the

Freirean problem-posing process suggested in Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004) in which

they assert that students have to:" 1) describe what they see; 2) define the problem; 3)

share similar experiences of their own lives; 4) question why there's a problem, and 5)

strategize what they can do about the problem". (p.37). Thus, following a process step by

step will allow me to introduce little by little critical reflection while students learn how to

use the language to express themselves.

Research Question

How can the implementation of problem posing promote critical reflection in the English

class?

Objectives

Main Objective:

To explore how the implementation of problem posing promotes critical reflection in the English class.

Specific Objectives:

- To connect class topics to students' realities and interests.

- To provide students with a variety of vocabulary and language input in order to perform in class discussions.

- To expose students to different social issues while fostering the use of different language skills.

- To examine how problem posing impacts students' performance in the English class.

Action Plan

In order to promote critical reflection through problem posing, this research study was divided into four stages. First, I planned to connect class topics to students' interests and realities. Therefore, to find out about these aspects, I decided to apply a questionnaire. Second, I decided to include code switching and true cognates as strategies into the lessons as a way to provide students with the necessary language tools that would allow them to perform in activities and class discussions. As for the main purpose of the study, the third action I planned consisted of introducing Problem posing as a teaching strategy in the classroom to foster students' critical reflection on relevant social issues while using the necessary language tools and the language structures required in the syllabus.

At the end of the process, the fourth planned action was to evaluate the impact that problem posing had on students' learning process, as well as its possible influence in their lives. Therefore, I planned to use the following instruments: 1) A questionnaire to students in order to examine first, their opinions and attitudes towards the implementation of problem posing in the classroom, and how this improved or not their English learning process; and second, to what extent students built up a sense of reflection towards the social issues that were addressed in the English class. 2) An interview to my CT, at the end of the units implementation, with the purpose of analyzing her perceptions regarding whether students had developed not only language skills, but also reflection skills. 3) Students' produced artifacts to check their performance and reflection on class assignments. 4) Journals to keep record of students' performance during class activities from my own perspective.

Development of Actions

This section describes briefly the actions developed during the problem posing implementation to achieve the research objectives.

The first step in this implementation was to connect class topics to students' realities. Therefore, I asked students to answer a short questionnaire in order to determine the themes for designing the next lessons. Thus, I intended to allow students to express what their realities are by answering the questionnaire, instead of assuming what their problems are by myself. After analyzing the questionnaire answers, I chose the most common ones: drug addiction and violence which gave me an account of what most of the students face in their everyday life. Then, I articulated the course syllabus to these themes by designing two units.

The second step aimed to organize each unit following the Freirean problem-posing process suggested in Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004). This process was divided in five moments: describing the content, defining the problem, personalizing the problem, questioning the problem and proposing possible solutions. Consequently, the first lesson objective was to describe the content. Thus, I provided students with useful vocabulary about the topic (drug addiction). Next, students worked in groups in order to create a graffiti in which they described a specific drug addiction term I assigned to each group. I then checked students' previous knowledge about the topic by discussing some questions. Later, in the second lesson the intention was to define the problem. I first showed students some flashcards portraying different people and I asked them to say what would happen if those people decided to do drugs. After that, I introduced some expressions such as "I think" and "I consider" so that they could express their opinions about drug addiction. Afterward, I proposed the strategy "think, pair and share"; I asked questions related to drug addiction, then I asked students to get together in order to share their ideas, first in pairs and then to the whole group.

The next stage consisted in personalizing the problem. Firstly, students discussed causes and consequences of drug addiction. Secondly, they answered some questions about whether or not they had had experiences with drugs. Finally, the students were expected to do a role play portraying an experience with drug addiction. However, due to problems with time management, it was difficult to carry out this activity. The next step was promoting reflection and discussion about drug addiction among students. In this lesson, I started by teaching true cognates as a strategy to facilitate students' performance in discussions. Then, I handed in a short story about drug addiction. After some reading

comprehension activities, I asked some questions in order to promote reflection, such as "what will happen if the person of the story decides to stop doing drugs? Will he have a healthy life? Will he be happy? Will he be successful in life? etc. Moreover, I asked students to write a counter text from the short story I had previously handed in, so that they could make a comparison of what life would be like while doing or not doing drugs. Later, in the fifth lesson, students were expected to propose solutions to drug addiction problems, as the last step problem posing suggests. Thus, I presented different scenarios related to drug addiction for students to think about possible solutions for each situation. In this stage, I proposed the strategy "think, pair, and share" as well, since I expected students to critically reflect and discuss their thoughts and ideas with their classmates. Finally, students were asked to design a poster in which they could evidence the five steps of problem posing by reflecting and proposing solutions to problems related to drug addiction.

The next step was to design and teach the second unit, which continued the same approach than the first one. I provided different language tools and strategies such as true cognates and code switching in order to ease students' participation in class discussions. Moreover, I distributed the unit into five lessons, taking into account the steps of problem posing. Therefore, students followed the same pattern to critically reflect and discuss violence issues.

Nevertheless, class activities were quite different in the second unit. The first lessons were more directed towards reading comprehension. First, I provided useful vocabulary that students were going to find in a text. Later on, I posed questions such as "who is in the text?" or "what is the problem?" in order to describe and define the problem.

I also made use of flashcards for asking students to predict what was going to happen next in the text. Then, I taught students how to show agreement and disagreement. Moreover, I showed them several statements related to violence. E.g. "Medellin is the most violent city in the world". Thus, they could be able to express their points of view. In order to personalize the problem, I gave students a worksheet full of emoji, and I told them to write experiences they had had with violence in their life using the emoji to better express their emotions. In the next lesson, I posted a sequence of pictures on the board leaving spaces between some of the pictures for students to predict what was going to happen next. Then, I asked students to identify the problems they found in the story and I asked them to write why they thought the situations they identified in the story were problems. By asking students to question the problem, I expected to raise awareness on how regular and common acts of violence in their context, such as domestic violence, psychological violence, and physical abuse are problems in our society. Finally, students were expected to design a poster for a prevention campaign about violent acts. With this activity, I wanted students to deeply reflect on the violence issue they considered more relevant for them. Therefore, they had freedom to choose the topic for their campaign.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data gathered throughout the implementation, I went over the different artifacts and protocols I used. First, I read my journal entries in which I described important aspects during the lessons. Consequently, I started to select information I considered pertinent and relevant regarding my research objectives. Then, I revised class assignments' such as worksheets and posters in order to check students' production, and I identified meaningful data related to reflection and language performance. Afterwards, I

designed and implemented two data collection protocols to provide not only my perspective of the process, but my students' and my CT's perspective as well. Firstly, I transcribed the interview to my CT, and I focused on different aspects of the implementation: students' language performance, reflection skills, and participation, this last one due to the increase of students' participation during the lessons. Secondly, I analyzed students' answers to the questionnaire to select data about their impressions of problem posing as a teaching method and what impact it had had on them.

Accordingly, I followed the steps for analyzing data proposed by Burns (2010). To begging with, I assembled my data having in mind my research question, and I looked for general patterns that could be useful to answer it. In the second place, I inductively coded the data to identify the initial categories which were closely related to the study objectives. Moreover, I identified emerging categories from data that were not answering my objectives, but that were revealing relevant information. Third, after coding all the data, I started comparing the data from the different sources, and I organized all the meaningful information in a chart, creating categories and subcategories to have a general overview of the most recurrent patterns which led me to my research findings.

As for assuring validity of the data collected, I used a triangulation method. According to Burns (2010) "This is where using more than one source of information gives you different lenses for viewing the situation, and allows for more objectivity" (p.131). Therefore, I crosschecked the data gathered from journals, artifacts, interviews and questionnaires.

Findings and Interpretations

The findings of this research study evidence the impact that the implementation of a

problem posing approach had in eighth graders. The main findings were regrouped in

three categories: 1) increase of students' participation in class activities, 2) impact of

problem posing on students' language development, 3) critical reflection on the students'

part.

Increase of Students' Participation in Class Activities

During the lessons taught with a problem posing approach I gathered data that

positively show how students were more participative in these classes while discussing

social issues related to their lives. In the same line, Mezirow (1997) states that "Education

that fosters critically reflective thought, imaginative problem posing, and discourse is

learner-centered, participatory, and interactive, and it involves group deliberation and

group problem solving. Instructional materials reflect the real-life experiences of the

learners and are designed to foster participation". (p.10). This can be evidenced in the

following excerpt from an interview to my cooperating teacher when asked about students'

participation: (…) "en cada clase ellos participaban activamente, y de acuerdo a su

vivencia, a su diario vivir… ellos, ellos daban sus aportes, su experiencia, participaban

activamente". (…). (C.T interview, 18/10/2016).

Data also revealed that students felt more encouraged to participate in class

discussions since they were allowed to speak and express their own opinions and/or

feelings towards topics such as drug addiction and violence, as one student claimed in the

questionnaire: (…) "Porque el maestro dejaba dar opiniones y preguntaba, y eso ayudaba

mucho a que uno como estudiante se sienta más motivado y participe más en las

actividades". (Questionnaire, 28/10/2016).

Another important aspect is that the unit themes were directly related to students'

lives and realities. Thus, when being exposed to these kinds of topics in the English class,

students felt more involved and interested in participating in the activities proposed for

class. This is evidenced in the following journal lines: (…) there has been an increase of

students' commitment to this kind of activities [reading comprehension activities or

describing and discussing pictures related to social issues]. I think it is thanks to the topic

that is interesting for them somehow". (Journal, 16/09/2016). Correspondingly, when the

cooperating teacher was asked about students' perceptions towards the chosen topics for

the units implementation, she asserted that "[los temas] fueron acordes a su entorno, a la

vida real, entonces se sentían motivados al desarrollar estas actividades. Yo pienso que

ellos recibieron bien esas clases, les gustó. (C.T interview, 18/10/2016).

Consequently, this increase of students' participation is important because it

reaffirms that as teachers, when proposing class activities, we should consider not only

students' interests but also students' life experiences. As a result, class activities would

provide familiar spaces for students so that they are able to participate since the topics are

closely related to their realities. Besides, it is more likely that learning takes place when

students have more opportunities to participate in class activities. Moreover, students

realize that their participation is essential for the development of the class assignments.

Impact of Problem Posing on Students' Language Development

Data revealed that the class activities proposed during the problem posing implementation, which aimed to promote critical reflection on students, clearly fostered students' commitment to work, that way some of them showed a little improvement when it came to language learning. I described in my journal a situation that can give account of this matter:

(…) I asked them to express their opinion about each picture using the expressions I had taught them in the previous class, (I think, I consider, in my opinion) (…) Most of the students followed this structure and it was easy for them to write their sentences, but some others did it in a different way, and it was also good, because I saw they are learning a little. (Journal, 26/08/ 2016)

Moreover, the language used during the problem posing lessons was related to students' daily lives, and they could make connections between the classroom language and the outside world language. As a result, students felt encouraged to say or write real things from their life experiences. Regarding that matter, Schleppegrell and Bowman (1995) stated that:

Since language learning in a problem-posing design evolves out of an issue that is relevant to students' lives, it has the advantage of being highly motivating and providing a purposefulness to language-learning activities. Students learn to say in English what they really want to say, and structures can be acquired in the order students need them for authentic discourse creation. Problem-posing lessons allow for affective responses while building the language, critical thinking, and life skills students need, and providing them with opportunities to practice and apply those skills. (p.299)

Furthermore, the use of some teaching strategies such as true cognates and code switching was an aspect that truly helped students to improve their performance in each required assignment.

On the one hand, using true cognates to teach vocabulary allowed students to recall words more easily in class discussions and/or in their writings since these words are very similar to their Spanish equivalents. According to Lengeling (1996) "The learner can easily recognize these words and understand them in the target language because the meanings and spellings are similar in both languages" (p.3). Thanks to this strategy, students felt that it was easier for them to understand and learn new concepts of the language, as one students expressed in the questionnaire: (…) "porque nos sirvieron de ayuda para ciertas palabras o verbos y poder aprenderlos". (Questionnaire, 28/10/2016). Moreover, from my own perspective, I could evidence how effective this strategy was on students' language development; as the following excerpt from my journal shows:

In this activity, students were very motivated. They participated positively using the language structures required. They also tried to use true cognates and the language that I had taught them about violence. I think this activity was successful. Students focused on what they had to do, and I could notice that they were remembering vocabulary and in this case, they used language structure properly. (Journal, 27/09/2016)

On the other hand, a code-switching strategy allowed students to feel less pressure when they did not know certain words in English, that way they could focus on the language structure and the words they knew. When students were asked about how useful this strategy was, some of them answered: (…) "Porque me ayudo a solucionar muchas actividades de clase más fácilmente". (…) "Porque era más facil expresarse" (Questionnaire, 28/10/2016).

This finding reflects how possible is to implement critical approaches with low proficient students. It is thought that this kind of approaches only works when students are skilled enough to take part in class discussions. However, from my experience teaching

with problem posing, when students are furnished with the necessary language tools and useful language expressions they can perform successfully in such class discussions. Moreover, I think that students are more likely to learn language that they use or encounter in their daily basis, thus, learning is more meaningful.

Critical Reflection on the Students' Part

As the result of including different activities with a reflective purpose into the lessons, data revealed that students developed and improved their critical reflection abilities. The activities proposed in class allowed students to analyze and understand from a critical perspective the most common social issues in their contexts. However, students struggled at showing critical reflection in the first unit. The following excerpt from one of my journals is a good example to illustrate this situation:

> I noticed that most of the students were just copying what they had in their notebooks, they were not really reflecting. So, I had to tell them that the most important thing was their reflection on the topic. After that, some students included some reflections in their posters, but these were quite shallow. When students finished their posters, I could observe that they remained mostly in the descriptive part. This has been a real challenge for me; although some students try to go deeper in their reflection, the majority of them don't make a big effort. Sometimes they copy from their classmates, or even they just copy from the examples I provide. (Journal, 9/13/2016)

This might be due to the fact that it was the first time students were being exposed to this type of teaching approach. Comber (as cited in Mendieta, 2009), states that "Most of the school activities do not go beyond the search for facts and information, leading students only to worry about getting the tasks done, instead of exploring issues critically and from different perspectives". (p.130).

Regarding the second unit, students' critical reflection significantly improved. In fact, students seemed more conscious and responsible when it came to developing class activities related to the discussion of social issues. Moreover, students showed a better performance in their reflecting outcomes, expressing deeper reflections than in the first unit. This is evidenced in the following journal lines:

> I think most of the students were really reflecting in this activity; they were not just talking about violence in general, but they decided to address some specific situations. This shows me that students were more committed than in the first unit. (Journal, 09/30/2016).

Not only could I evidence this critical reflection improvement by reading my journals, but also by comparing the artifacts from both units. It was evident how reflections gradually improved from artifact to artifact, reflections went from being superficial, for instance "drugs are bad" to being quite deeper, for example "violence is not only physical, verbal violence can harm people too", as students expressed in the posters they designed reflecting about drug addiction and violence.

Besides, students expressed they liked the lessons about drug addiction and violence because there was a space for them to reflect and learn about important things in their lives. Nixon (1995) agrees on that by stating that "problem-posing is a dynamic, participatory, and empowering philosophy that teaches students how to critically think and analytically examine the world in which they live". (p.7). Some students' answers to the questionnaire reflect this affirmation: (…) "porque en lo que estudiábamos inglés también intentaron hacernos reflexionar". (…) "porque me estaban enseñando cosas que me sirven mucho en la vida". (Questionnaire, 28/10/2016).

Students becoming more reflective is important to their learning process since they are more aware of the effects that the social issues happening in their neighborhoods might have on them, and now they have the elements to analyze those situations. Thus, they can choose to be part of the problem or the solution. Besides, problem posing allows students to be critical not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom, in their life. This is beneficial for students because they learn to make choices and how those would affect them either in a positive or a negative way. Moreover, students are able to understand and question the causes and consequences of social problematics in their surroundings. Nonetheless, promoting this kind of reflection in the English class is a process that takes time, and teachers that are willing to use problem posing as a teaching approach need to be patient and start a scaffolding process in which students would develop a critical reflection sense.

Conclusions

This research project was set out to explore how the implementation of a problem posing approach could foster critical reflection on students in the English class. This study also examined the impact that this critical approach could have on the students' language learning process. After having analyzed the data gathered throughout the study, I could conclude that, on the one hand, the implementation of problem posing, promotes critical reflection in the English class and it also considerably increases students' participation in class activities. On the other hand, the employment of different strategies (true cognates and code switching) helped students to offset their low language proficiency, and as a result, an improvement in language development was evidenced. This way, students became more reflective without leaving aside the language learning aspect.

The results of this study suggest that teaching English through a critical approach implies that language is taught from a different perspective which encompasses critical thinking or reflection and also communicative and linguistic aspects of the language. Thus, teachers interested in working from this perspective are responsible for accompanying students in the transition they should make from the traditional teaching methods they are accustomed, to this more communicative and critical method that they are probably not familiar with. Therefore, teachers should take a guiding role, providing students with all the indispensable tools they would need to succeed in this way of learning. Moreover, teachers should be prepared to grant more spaces for students' voices to be heard. In other words, dialogue should become an important aspect in the English class, in which both the teacher and the student share information and knowledge to create a community where they all learn together inasmuch as problem posing is distant from the conventional teacher centered lectures.

Another important implication consists of taking students' realities into consideration when planning and designing lessons and materials. That is why teachers should not only bring to the classroom predefined activities taken from text books or web sites; instead, it is important for teachers to explore what truly concerns and matters to students. This way lessons will be prone to elicit more meaningful discussions, and thus more critical reflection.

As for the limitations of the study, even if the results were positive in promoting critical reflection in the English class, it could not be ensured it had an impact on students' lives outside the classroom and in their social relationships with friends and families. In other words, this study aimed merely to investigate how eighth graders perform and reflect

on some specific assignments specially designed for the English class. Nonetheless, factors concerning students' capacities to critically reflect in different scenarios apart from the English class are still important to examine. Hence, future research on this field could analyze the impact of problem posing when implemented in different school subjects and focus on the implications it might have in students' non-academic life.

Reflection

Thinking of the experience I had in the teaching practicum and research process, I consider it was highly enrichening for me since it helped me face and overcome many fears and doubts concerning my future role as a languages teacher.

Regarding all my learning process since I first entered the foreign languages teaching program, I have encountered myself with several challenges, specially becoming a practicum student and a pre-service teacher. In fact, standing in front of almost forty teenage students was very intimidating for me at the beginning. However, despite all the arduous work and stressful situations, there has also been a positive side. For instance, being part of a public institution, and seeing how it works from inside, and not just as an outsider, made me value teachers' work. Moreover, I feel happy to have taken part of students' language learning process, and I expect that, perhaps, I might have changed their perspective towards the English class, and their lives in general.

In the same way, teaching English from a critical approach made realize that teachers are not limited merely to the transmission of knowledge; in the case of English teachers, we are not only capable of teaching grammar rules, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc., but also, through English we can educate people, we can take part in their process of

becoming good citizens. Indeed, I felt very satisfied when some students expressed the learnings they had throughout the discussions of social issues, and how they will share those messages and reflections with their friends. I think it is important to promote critical approaches in schools, especially in public education, where most of the students are immersed in problematic contexts, and they must deal with very complicated scenarios in their daily basis.

All in all, this experience helped me grow both personally and professionally; now I feel a little more confident when teaching, and on top of that, I know my work can contribute to students' comprehensive education.

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