

YOUNG AFRODESCENDANT EFL LEARNERS EXPLORING THEIR IDENTITIES
THROUGH A CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

A thesis presented by

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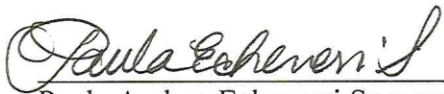
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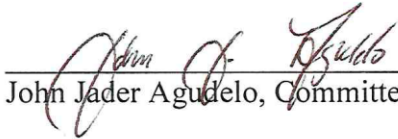
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DEDICATION

To my husband, the love of my life, who always supported me in this process. He listened to my concerns, fears and expectations. He celebrated my achievements and held my hand in moments of crisis. With his love and encouraging words, he helped me put my heart and soul in this thesis. To my family, my father who has always been my inspiration as a teacher; my mother, who has taught me to be persistent, determined and sensitive, and of course, to my sisters who are the engine of my life. Finally, to the participants of this study, who without noticing it changed my life and gave me the opportunity to grow as a teacher, researcher, and as a woman.

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ABSTRACT

YOUNG AFRODESCENDANT EFL LEARNERS EXPLORING THEIR
IDENTITIES THROUGH A CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

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Disregarding the importance of identity and culture in language learning denies teachers the possibility to understand where their students come from, who they are, the journeys they go through and the needs they have while learning a language. This study aimed at exploring the impact of a critical intercultural curricular unit in the construction and understanding of young Afro-descendant English learners' identities and their development as more critical citizens.

The findings of this study revealed that thanks to the implementation of a critical intercultural curricular unit in which unequitable relations of power, issues of domination,

and cultural stereotypes were discussed, learners explored their identities from three dimensions: their pre-established identities, their identities as speakers of English, and their imagined identities in relation to societal expectations. The exploration of such identities was not limited to aspects such as race and cultural identity; also, students were able to discover elements of their sexual identity and the positions they assumed in different contexts.

In addition, participants went through different stages during the implementation of the unit, starting with an increasing awareness of cultural differences to becoming able to deconstruct relations of power that affect diverse cultural groups. As a consequence, they reacted by proposing actions to be taken in order to foster equitable relations among people and build a just society.

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Introduction

Traditionally, learning a language has been seen as acquiring linguistic knowledge and being able to read and write to communicate with others (Pennycook, 1990, p. 2). However, as Atkinson (1999) stated, language development cannot take place without taking into consideration the socio-cultural context where the language is taught, as well as the learner's culture (p. 647). According to Kabuto (2011), learning a language implies learning a new culture and understanding the world from another perspective (p. 3). Similarly, Canagarajah (2006) argues that learning English as a foreign language influences the construction of learners' social and cultural identities and how they develop their subjectivities (p. 14).

In the field of ELT, the interdependent relationship between language and culture has been addressed from diverse perspectives that depend, among others, on different views of culture. For Atkinson (1999, p. 626) and Canagarajah (2006, p. 25), culture has been historically understood as static and homogenous; however, recent definitions have recognized that there are multiple and changing cultures within societies, which determine the construction of subjectivities and identities. Due to the influence culture and language have on learners' identities, such impact should be addressed in language education.

In the Colombian context, both *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo 2004-2019* and *Colombia Bilingüe 2014-2018* have stipulated that high school students have to learn English as a foreign language to be able to communicate with others, access higher

education, succeed in the work field and become more productive citizens (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, n.d.). This focus on a bilingual education aligns with a notion of foreign language learning where English is acquired for utilitarian purposes like the ones Usma (2009a) refers to as “economic, practical, industrial, and military” (drawing from Lantolf and Sunderman, 2001); this vision disregards the socio-cultural components embedded in the language.

In fact, the results presented by the *Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación* (ICFES) in 2016, indicate that from 2012 to 2015, the majority of 11th grade students only achieved an A1 or A2 level (according to the Common European Framework of Reference) while other important percentage of students did not develop the minimum competences for A1. The lowest English proficiency levels have been reported among students from public institutions who come from rural and urban areas and public schools (Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación, 2016b, p. 52-55).

In response to this situation, the national government with the collaboration of other entities such as the Ministry of Education and the US Embassy in Colombia have put forth a series of initiatives that are implemented by some language centers in different cities of the country and which offer English scholarship programs to indigenous and Afro descendant populations, two of the minority ethnic groups in the country that have historically had less access to education. According to a report provided by DANE (National Administrative Department of Statistics) in 2005, 10,6% of Colombian population is black and other 3,4% is indigenous. It is also indicated that the 85,94% of Colombian citizens do not belong to a minority ethnic group. Additionally, in Antioquia

10,9% of the population is black, approximately 11,2% of Afro Colombian teenagers under the age of 15 are illiterate and less than the 7% of the overall Afro population has accessed to higher education.

As a way of supporting the development of academic and leadership skills among Afro Colombian and indigenous high school students, the language center in Medellín that is in charge of implementing the initiatives mentioned in the previous paragraph, offers them academic programs that aim at learning English in addition to self-empowerment and leadership skills; however, in my experience as a coordinator and instructor in one of these programs, I have seen that the curriculum has not been adapted to achieve these goals. In fact, classes focus on developing students' communicative skills and have left it up to teachers to include topics and tasks that encourage students to become active leaders in society.

As Guerrero (2016) states, black and indigenous people in Colombia have less life chances than the dominant Colombian ethnic group "mestizos" (p. 10). This indicates that students' desire to achieve a high level of English proficiency and to obtain life opportunities similar to the ones native English speakers have is a way of dealing with the feeling of inferiority that Afro Colombian people have experienced through decades (Guerrero, 2016, p. 14).

English learning has influenced the way learners from these scholarship programs construct their identities. They have adopted ideologies, behaviors and even linguistic expressions that have been taken directly from the interactions they have in English which,

in many cases, reveal their desire of being English native-like in order to have better life conditions. As a result of the English learning process in these programs, students have been reproducing dominant discourses of English, which has been seen as a way of being successful in society (Escobar Alméjiga, 2013, p. 55) more than a path for constructing their individual and social identities.

Black people in this country have constantly fought for being recognized as citizens in modern society; thus, considering English plays such an important role for achieving academic, social and work development, learning it allows them to be at the front of the situation. These ideas about learning English have been spread in the scholarship program mentioned in previous paragraphs, contradicting its purpose as it sets aside its potential to allow participants to become empowered leaders of their communities; instead, it focuses on the acquisition of the language alone.

That is the reason why this study supports the argument that learners' voices, in terms of the cultural and linguistic issues they experience, need to be constantly heard by the administrators of these programs. Furthermore, their voices should also be considered for curriculum development to not only create a relevant curriculum, but also to strive for the active citizens the scholarship program is intended to foster.

Thus, the research presented here was designed to explore how English learning influences Afro descendant learners' identities, as they are exposed to a critical intercultural curricular unit. It is important to mention that the exploration of students' identities was not limited to aspects of race and cultural identity due to the fact that these two components were implicitly embedded not only in the scholarship program but in their own previous

construction of identities. In order to be accepted in the program, participants had to define themselves as part of a low-income Afro Colombian family. Therefore, during this research the concept of identity was explored beyond notions of race and ethnicity, taking into account how these overlap with the effects of affiliating to other social categories. Nevertheless, ideas of race and ethnicity played an essential role as students deliberately establish an affiliation with the Afro community as an empowering strategy.

Research about Afro communities has been mainly oriented to: the terminology that has been used by dominant Colombian groups to refer to Afro descendants and their history, the marginalization and the lack of validity that these communities have suffered, and the tensions between Afro groups and other ethnicities such as “mestizos”. The Colombian Ministry of Education, using the results from the census carried out in 2005, reported that some of the most significant issues Afro descendants face are related to racial discrimination, access to education, labor inequality and poor social and cultural recognition.

For instance, Montoya and García (2010) affirm that Afro descendants in Medellín are invisible and that this denial is used by these communities as a way of protecting their own people from armed groups and from the lack of attention and support they have been given by the Colombian government (p. 8). They also state that the displacement of Afro communities has brought complexity to the identification processes that Afro people experience (p. 9). Due to this, Montoya and García (2010) describe Afro descendants’ identities as multiple and influenced by the territories and cultural and social references they have interacted with.

Afro descendants' identities vary according to the context. For example, Barbary (2001) explains that the way Afro communities identify themselves in Cali differs from the way Afro Colombians from the Pacific region do. While in the former context they ask for equal job opportunities and they fight against social and racial discrimination, in the latter, people look for their vindication on their territory. In the case of Medellín, even though several organizations promote the inclusion of different identity references of Afro communities, there are still negative stereotypes associated to this ethnic group (Montoya and García, 2010, p. 61).

It is evident that when exploring Afro descendants' identities, it is essential to address multiple dimensions considering the wide spectrum of identity construction processes. Therefore, in this study, the concept of identity was intended to be explored deductively allowing participants to define themselves beyond their race.

Being aware of the social, academic and cultural struggles that Afro descendants have experienced throughout history and looking forward to contributing to the implementation of a more critical English learning program for members of such community, which actually could allow them to become empowered citizens that who at achieving and promoting fair opportunities in society, a critical intercultural curricular unit is designed for these purposes. Taking as reference the Latin-American background and not the European one, this curricular unit is focus on the principles of interculturality which promotes the recognition and respect for diversity and for different ways of being, thinking and living and the constitution of equitable power relationships among members of different social and cultural groups.

Drawing on Walsh (2010), such unit aims at creating a relevant curriculum and encouraging students to become active participants and leaders in their communities which in fact is what the English scholarship program they belong to looks forward to promoting. This curricular unit opens spaces for students to unveil dominant discourses of English while they identify and construct diverse ways of knowing, being and living (p. 11 - 12). Additionally, the implementation of this unit will inform stakeholders about how the institution's official curriculum can be enriched in order to directly promote leadership and empowering skills throughout the process of learning English. Besides, in this way, the initiative proposed by the Ministry of Education and the US Embassy in Colombia in collaboration with some language centers in the country in order to provide minority groups with academic opportunities, will not continue perpetuating so easily dominant discourses regarding language and culture because students will be able to critically analyze their own learning process and recognize the unfair relationships built within it.

In a review of some of the main Colombian journals on ELT, including PROFILE, issues in Teacher's Professional Development, Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, and HOW, few studies were found related to the construction of learners' identities in an English learning context (Alméciga Escobar & Gómez Lobatón, 2010; Crawford, Lengeling, Pablo, & Ocampo, 2014; Cuasialpud Canchala, 2010; Gholaminejad, 2017; Gómez Lobatón, 2012; Ortiz Medina, 2017; Rivas Rivas, 2013; Soler, 2012). Most of the research done on identity has been conducted in a university setting, it has mainly addressed indigenous populations and it has not been necessarily carried out following a critical intercultural approach. The focus of these studies

has been on learners' perceptions towards learning English; however, only a few of them have explored the dominant discourses English teaching reproduces and how they influence the construction of learners' identities.

In Colombia, a current discussion on how individuals are represented as language speakers has been researched from the area of language policies (Escobar Alméciga, 2013; Usma, 2009a; Usma, 2009b). Additionally, as a result of globalization, society has left aside the importance of preparing learners to critically think about their communities, their cultures, their languages and their identities (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 25). Consequently, the challenge for TESOL relies on teaching and learning a language to enrich and value other languages and cultures as Canagarajah (2006) states (p. 25), and not to promote the standardization and stratification of citizens (Usma, 2009b).

As a response to the considerations expressed above, the research question addressed in this study was: How can a critical intercultural approach influence young Afro descendant EFL learners' identities in an English scholarship program?

Theoretical Framework

Taking into account that it is necessary to understand language education from a socio-cultural and critical perspective in order to achieve the empowerment goals of the English program mentioned earlier, this study focused on exploring the impact of a critical intercultural unit in the construction and understanding of young Afro-descendant English learners' identities and their development as more critical citizens. Thus, in this theoretical framework the concept of identity is discussed as applied to language learning in close connection to language and culture. Finally, the notion of interculturality is addressed from a critical perspective, which guided the kind of intervention that was implemented in this research.

The field of ELT has privileged the study of the concept of learners' identity in recent years. For instance, researchers have explored topics such as the social construction of learning and the self-identification process of language learners. To define language learner identity, it is necessary to understand the connection between language and culture and how this relationship allows learners to assume different positions within a target language community having an impact on their learning (Norton, 2013, p. 2).

From a poststructuralist perspective, Norton (2013) defines identity as the way people understand their relationship with the world and how it is assembled over time and space, and also how individuals understand the possibilities they have for the future (p. 4). Likewise, Weedon (as cited in Norton, 2013, p. 4) explains identity as dynamic, socially

and historically constructed and framed through language. She also remarks that identity gains visibility and becomes understandable to others through culture, language, and social practices (p. 7). Consequently, research on identity is relevant for language education due to the fact that the languages a person speaks and the cultural implications they carry, affect not only his identification process but also the personal stance and social representations adopted.

For Coll and Falsafi (2010), individuals' identity construction process is permeated by how such individuals are positioned and position themselves in a certain context. In addition, they state that to be part of a community, it is necessary to develop the roles that give individuals access to the group they would like to belong to (p. 231). That is why for these two scholars, identity refers to "the processes of recognition in a social context" (p. 214). Taking into consideration that the individual, social, historical and cultural background of a person shapes their identity, in language learning, culture has an essential role in the process of identity construction.

In alignment with this idea, the understanding of the concept of culture impacts learners' identity construction process. According to Atkinson (1999, p. 626), in TESOL a received view of culture has been traditionally adopted. This perspective of culture is limited to the geographical context where individuals grow and it is also understood as a static and standard set of human behaviors. However, Atkinson (1999) argues that this view of culture should be questioned since for him "cultures are anything but homogeneous" (p. 617). By contrast, he advocates for a new understanding of culture as fluid and changeable

because for him learners cannot be positioned into fixed cultural representations; that is, their identities cannot be defined as fixed entities either (p. 633).

Hall (as cited in Weedon, 2004, p. 5) refers to the concept of identity not as a finished product but as a development in process. This indicates that when exploring someone's identity construction process is necessary to understand that only part of it is visible. Weedon (2004, p. 7) argues that the only way in which such identification process becomes noticeable is through "cultural signs, symbols and practices". In addition, she says that in order to understand how individuals' identities are constituted, it is indispensable to use language to allow individuals to make meaning, and question and analyze the assumptions made about such identities.

Identities are not only defined by the cultural practices adopted by individuals; they are also shaped by the positions that individuals wish to embrace in the near future. Norton (2013) refers to this concept as imagined identities and she explains that it describes those future relationships that individuals expect to have with other people and communities (p. 8). For Norton and Toohey (2011, p. 415), the expectations and affiliations that language learners have for their future, determine their identity as language learners. That is why they assume that the imagined communities that individuals wish to be part of play an important role in the possibilities they have for their future.

Weedon (2004, p.10) explains that "cultural practices can offer new forms of identity" allowing individuals to make decisions on the dominant characteristics of themselves that shape who they are. Such dominant features are influenced by power relationships embedded in ideas about class, gender and ethnicity which influence

individuals' identity construction (p.8). These power relationships impact the positions that individuals assume as part of their identities which can indicate situations of inclusion and exclusion in the communities they interact with. Therefore, for Weedon (2004, p. 15), "power limits the possibilities of identity" and this reveals why it is important to deconstruct such problematic relationships in order to permit individuals to objectively understand who they are.

For this research, a critical intercultural approach guided English teaching towards the development of an intimate relationship between language learning and learners' identity construction; this means that language teaching fostered the exploration and understanding of learners' identities. The use of this approach promoted discussion about dominant discourses of knowledge, cultures and languages, encouraging learners to problematize the language learning process and the effects it had on the construction of their identities.

In Colombia, the concept of interculturality has been explored and defined considering the indigenous and Afro movements that have gained strength after the 20th century. The research done keeps track of the concepts of intercultural competence, intercultural dialogue and ethnic education. Scholars have discussed the definition of these concepts and their implication in the Colombian society. Nevertheless, the findings of research studies in which an intercultural intervention has been carried out in a classroom have been limited. Therefore, an intervention from a critical intercultural perspective is scarcer.

Overall, in Latin-America, the concept of interculturality originated from the necessity to recognize and validate diversity of minority groups, in specific indigenous communities. According to Ferrao (2010), after the colonizing period in which the hegemonic culture was imposed, from the first decades of the 20th century, the first bilingual indigenous schools emerged. However, the aim of this type of education was to carry out literacy and civilizing processes that fulfilled the demand of dominant cultural groups to build a homogenous society. From the 80's, indigenous communities that had previously protested in isolation, joined forces and became a single indigenous movement not only to ask for their cultural recognition but also to claim their rights as citizens (p. 345).

Indigenous efforts have pushed governments and nations into restructuring their constitutional reforms and educational processes in order to acknowledge their diverse cultural practices, their multiethnic society, their native languages and their ways of communicating. Therefore, the concept of interculturality involves socio-political elements that as Garcés (2009, p. 24) states, so that it has now been extended to different disciplines such as sociology, philosophy and bilingual education.

According to Walsh (2005), Latin America has focused on promoting positive, respectful and inclusive interaction among diverse cultural groups, and on facing and dealing with discrimination and racism. To achieve this, it is necessary that citizens become aware of differences and look forward to building a fair, egalitarian and plural society (p. 4). For Walsh (1998, as cited in Walsh, 2005) the concept of interculturality entails an equitable interaction among cultures in which conditions of equality are essential.

Interculturality seeks to counteract the hegemonic history of a dominant culture and others dominated in order to promote respect and legitimacy among all the cultural groups in society (p.4).

In regards to bilingual education, the work done in regards to interculturality, allowed countries to establish national policies that favor plurilinguism and multiethnicity. However, this type of education is still linked mainly to the teaching of a group's own culture instead of promoting intercultural interaction and the dialogue among individuals and cultures (Walsh, 2005, p. 13).

Dervin and Risanger (2014, p.9-10) refer to the concept of interculturality as a way of re-conceptualizing cultural representations and identities. They define interculturality as “stands on discourses of the world that foreground what could most inclusively be referred to as diversity and encounters” (p. 9). In addition, interculturality has also been defined in education by Walsh (2010) from three different perspectives: relational, functional and critical.

For Walsh (2010), relational interculturality makes reference to the contact and exchange among cultures that can be produced under equal or unequal conditions (p. 77). This perspective does not question contexts of power, domination or coloniality. Functional interculturality recognizes diversity and cultural differences with the aim of promoting inclusion (p. 77); however, it does not look for creating equitable and equal societies, but it does control the relations of power and domination of the neoliberal and capitalist models that have historically marginalized unprivileged communities (p. 78). Besides, functional interculturality has risen from the governmental institutions in order to recognize diversity

and cultural differences. In contrast, critical interculturality has its foundations in the decolonial turn when there was a common concern about modernity, its subaltern conditions and the former colonies (p 78). Moreover, critical interculturality focuses on the purposes of the decolonial turn that not only analyzes how modernity is perpetuating forms of control and how to strengthen forces from subaltern communities, but also aims at giving the same validity to the ways of knowledge of unprivileged communities (p. 78).

Even though relational and functional interculturality promote diversity and inclusion, these approaches do not question contexts of power, domination or coloniality as critical interculturality does. Besides, critical interculturality allows people to understand differences among populations while re-defining and re-formulating different ways of thinking, behaving and living (Walsh, 2010, p. 79).

It is important to differentiate the concept of interculturality from the idea of multiculturalism. According to Tubino (2004), while the first concept aims at promoting equity by recognizing and valuing differences, the second looks forward to fostering tolerance to generate interaction and avoid confrontation (p. 14). For him, interculturality must be understood as a way of being and not as a mere theory. For Tubino (2004) adopting an intercultural attitude is essential to face a world in which social and political relationships dominate people's interactions and positionalities (p. 3).

Tubino (2004) states that the main difference between the proposal of functional interculturality and critical interculturality is that the first idea only promotes interaction among cultures but does not unveil the causes of unequal relationships among them (p. 6). Critical interculturality intends to eradicate those power relationships that do not permit the

dialogue between cultural groups. This demands a critical understanding of the cultural recognition process and social equity that are the objectives of this last proposal.

For Walsh (2012), promoting an intercultural society only has validity when it is done from a critical perspective and when it addresses the power relationships embedded in a colonized context (62). That is why, critical interculturality has its basis on the deconstruction of the colonial power. This concept not only aims at intervening such unequal relationships but also taking actions that allow the construction of a fairer society.

Even though Walsh's proposal emerged from the broad idea of education and it was not originally proposed for language teaching, as it pursues social transformation and actions for decolonizing communities (Walsh, 2012, p. 73), language learning and teaching become relevant tools for achieving such emancipatory objectives. Language education can open spaces for people to start the process of recognition of different ways of being, living and knowing and it can allow all the individuals involved to think of how they can contribute to the construction of a fairer society. As Tubino (2004) says it, critical interculturality must be a transversal axis of human development and language education can definitely contribute to this purpose.

Finally, a critical understanding of interculturality allows language learners to deconstruct the identities they adopt from dominant cultures and it privileges the construction of their identities within a more equitable status. Doing research on language learner identities contributes to the enrichment of learners' cultural and national identity which retrieves what has been taken from them by colonizing people and ideas spread by

other cultures and languages, and this encourages learners to empower themselves to look for a just society.

Research Methodology

The study proposed here was based within the qualitative paradigm. According to Bonilla-Castro and Sehk (2005), this paradigm is intended to systematically understand reality based on the exploration and recognition of individuals in a certain context (p.47). Glesne (2006) claims that “qualitative research methods are used to understand social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (p. 4). Therefore, the qualitative paradigm allowed this research project to capture the way participants constructed their multiple identities by exploring their pre-established identities, their identities in relation to English, as well as their imagined identities and societal expectations, through the implementation of a critical intercultural unit.

This study was conducted through a classroom action research. For Zeichner (1993), action research frames the kind of inquiry teacher-researchers experience regarding their practices (p.3). He states that action research contributes to transformation within teachers’ practices, their educational contexts, the production of knowledge, and the construction of more equitable societies (p. 2). Zeichner (1993) promotes the idea that action research can be conducted in the classroom emphasizing on social transformation (p.11). Hence, this research adopted Zeichner’s view of classroom action research to explore language learners’ identities in order to contribute to the promotion of social justice.

According to Norton and Toohey (2011), educators, through their influence on classroom practices, can provide learners opportunities for adopting different and more powerful positions in society (p. 6). Research on learner identity to promote social justice is achieved by the empowering process that participants experience as the result of being exposed to more balanced relations of power and to different pedagogical practices that provide learners with a space to understand the construction of their identities. As a result, students position themselves as more active participants in the construction of a fairer society and they were able to propose actions that challenged the existing status quo and promoted an equal distribution of power.

As an English teacher, I have always believed that language teaching goes beyond contents, themes and grammar. I see education as a powerful tool not only to promote changes in society and in my students' lives, but also as an opportunity to reflect on who I am, how I understand the world and how I can contribute to society with what I know and with who I am. However, before the implementation of this classroom research, I felt my teaching was monotonous and it was not achieving my expectations. When I decided to work on identity from a critical standpoint, I was not focused on my own learning process and I ignored the impact this implementation was going to have on my beliefs, on my everyday life and on any interaction I had with other people.

In terms of teaching, this experienced made me rethink my position in class as the facilitator of learning and it also made me evaluate my role as a program coordinator. I witnessed my capacity to transform the classroom into a community and to become a more critical and sensitive human being. Before this intervention, I felt powerless but after this

process I convinced myself about how powerful I am as an agent of change who uses English teaching as a means for transformation. I thought that those things only happened in the stories told by the papers I read during the Master's Program but I realized that teaching from a critical standpoint is a life changing experience.

Setting and Participants

This research was carried out in a language center in Medellin, in one of the English scholarship programs the institution coordinates and develops with the sponsorship of the US Embassy in Colombia. All the participants were public high school students whose ages ranged between 13 and 16 years old. Some of these students attend school in the urban areas of Medellin and others in rural sectors from different municipalities in Antioquia. Historically, the scholarship program has been integrated by boys and girls equally. Most of these students had job and academic purposes for studying English as a foreign language. As a member of the team in charge of coordinating this scholarship program, I am in constant communication with students and based on the informal talks we had, I came to the conclusion that they recognized the relevance that learning English has gained in Colombian society as a means of improving life quality; therefore, one of their main purposes for knowing English was achieving a B2 level based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) which allowed them to apply to other scholarships abroad, access higher education and/or obtain well positioned and well paid jobs.

Following the principles of criterion sampling proposed by Patton (1990, p. 182-183), five students were selected for data collection purposes based on the fact that they are

all Afro-descendant Colombian citizens, their ages are framed in the same range and they come from similar cultural, academic and social backgrounds.

Among these five participants, there were two young women and three men. Ana lived with her mother and younger sister whom she had to take care of when her mother, who worked as part of a kitchen crew, had to work for more than 10 hours. Ana had lived her entire life in Medellín and she identified with the *paisa* (from Medellín) culture. She initially showed rejection about Afro Colombian people because she considered them noisy and disrespectful. Even though she lived in neighborhood where there is an Afro settlement, Ana did not interact with them. Regarding her family, she never mentioned details of her family and she was very reserved.

Deisy was born and raised in Quibdó until she was 12 years old. She liked dancing *chirimía* (a typical Afro dance) and her favorite date was when her family celebrated San Pacho (a traditional Afro festivity). Deisy moved to Medellín when she turned 14 and she lived with her mother and her step-father who were also born in Quibdó. She always went to class with a different braid hairstyle which she proudly showed her classmates. Her mom was teaching her how to make braids and she was also making a big effort to preserve the jargon from their hometown, Quibdó, at least in their everyday conversations. Deisy used to make fun of her step father because he was using expressions that people from Medellín usually say instead of using colloquial vocabulary from Chocó.

The three boys were Jefferson, Daniel and Bruno. Jefferson was born in Medellín and he lived with his mom only; he practiced track racing. The second one was Daniel; his parents were public high school teachers and he had a little sister. Daniel was the students'

representative at school and he was an excellent drawer. Finally, Bruno was about to become a big brother; his parents were born and raised in Chocó and they moved to Medellín when his mom was expecting him. However, when this study was carried out, his parents had divorced but they were expecting another child. Bruno had a very strong connection with his grandfather who he considered a role model. His grandfather represented his Afro roots and he was the person in charge of teaching Bruno everything he knew about his cultural background. Nevertheless, Bruno could not visit his grandfather very often.

To conclude, these five participants shared some characteristics but they also had their individualities present in their preferences and expectations for their future. In the following section of this study, Ana, Jefferson, Daniel, Deisy and Bruno's identity construction process is presented, and as it was from the very beginning when they were chosen, there were similarities and differences in their identities.

Data Collection

Data was collected through four procedures and sources: semi-structured interviews to students, video/audio recordings of classes, students' journals and students' work. First, the five chosen students were interviewed before and after the critical unit implementation; each interview lasted between 25 and 30 minutes. The first interview was carried out before I implemented the unit which aimed at exploring students' perceptions about who they were as language learners and as members of a minority group. In this initial interview, participants were asked to define who they were, the cultural practices they adopted, the

reasons why they wanted to learn English, their expectations with the English scholarship program, the communities they belonged to and interacted with, and their aspirations for the future (See APPENDIX C).

The final interviews took place after the implementation of the unit in order to compare students' identification process, to analyze how a critical intercultural approach impacted the construction of participants' identities and how they understood and experienced the proposal of applying a critical intercultural perspective to English learning. In this opportunity, these five participants were asked to give their opinions about the unit implementation, to talk about their learnings and challenges throughout this process, to evaluate the activities and methodology proposed, to compare this unit with units they experienced before and to mention specific moments during the intervention in which they observed the construction of dialogue between cultures that was intended to build. Additionally, each participant was asked again, using different questions, to describe their goals for the future, to describe themselves, to evaluate their transformation after being part of this study and to define the impact this unit had on their ideas about them (See APPENDIX D).

Second, the sixteen classes taught as part of the unit implementation were video and audio recorded. This facilitated the follow up of participants' identification process and the possible changes in their opinions, attitudes and perceptions about themselves and others along the implementation of the unit. Also, these recordings permitted the collection of evidence of participants' reactions to the activities and materials proposed. For data

analysis purposes, these video and audio recordings were transcribed using selective verbatim.

Third, during the last twenty minutes of each class, participants were asked to write narratives in response to journal entries provided by the teacher researcher. The purpose of this was to ask them more precise questions about how they defined themselves and others in relation to the topics discussed in class that were related to topics of culture, gender, race and relations of power. The five selected participants also used these journal entries as an instrument for reflection regarding the positions they assumed as language learners and how this was connected to the construction of their identities.

The journal entries collected were presented in different formats. However, all of them included prompts to facilitate participants' reflection. Some of the formats included graphics, chart and questions. For some other entries, students had the opportunity to draw and label the images they created.

Fourth, during the implementation of the critical intercultural unit, participants completed different tasks that involved reading, writing and speaking exercises that were collected as part of the participants' work. These samples of their work provided information of students' ideas about stereotypes, their feelings towards the positions they adopted as part of a cultural group and English speakers, their willingness to get familiar with other ways of living, being and knowing and their beliefs of what an equitable society required. These works also allowed students to use the grammar structures and vocabulary studied in class to express their ideas, feelings and beliefs about the topics discussed. In addition, participants' work also evidenced the appropriation of words and concepts

introduced in class such as value, valid, marginalized, equitable society, privileged and discriminated which made part of the concepts taught and then adopted by participants during implementation.

Ethical Considerations

Before the implementation of the unit, participants attended a short presentation about the research in which they were invited to participate. They had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and express their concerns about their participation in the study. After having the opportunity to know the proposal, participants signed a consent form (see APPENDIX B). Moreover, in order to protect their identity, pseudonyms were used to refer to participants. All the information provided by the participants of this study was kept confidential and was discussed with the thesis advisor only.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, first I fully transcribed the initial and final interviews. Second, I carried out selective verbatim transcription of the video and audio recordings of classes. Third, students' work and journal entries were transcribed; considering that some of the entries included drawings and words, the images were described as well. Once I had the information completely transcribed and carefully organized by dates and using students' pseudonyms, I used one of the softwares suggested by Creswell (2012) called Nvivo (its 10th version) where I created nodes for each data source and I uploaded the data into the corresponding node. I also used Nvivo to write annotations and memos that helped me

recall my ideas and perceptions about the research implementation when I started analyzing the data. After that, I deductively analyzed the data. As Creswell (2012) suggests for qualitative data analysis, I read the data collected several times in order to categorize it and come up with codes that represented the repetitive patterns that emerged from the data sources (p.238). Having in mind the main two concepts explored in this study, identity and critical interculturality, four main categories emerged to answer my research question.

To guarantee trustworthiness, the data collected was triangulated as it is recommended by Richards (2003, p. 251), by understanding a specific pattern from different sources which helped me avoid what he calls “one-seize representation” of data. Lastly, the categories obtained and the data ascribed to each of them, were checked by and discussed with my advisor, who verified that the evidence classified represented the categories that emerged. This assessing process of data, allowed me to construct the findings of this research.

Critical Intercultural Curricular Unit

In this research, a pedagogical intervention was developed through a critical intercultural unit. For this implementation, sixteen classes were taught and each of them covered five hours of instruction which indicates that this study was carried out in a total number of sixty-four hours. The courses of the English scholarship program in which this research was carried out start every month because they have an intensive schedule. This means that one course lasts just one month. Considering that one month was not enough to implement this unit, I decided to carry out the intervention for a period of two months.

This critical intercultural unit was carried out between April and June in 2018. It aimed at providing tasks that allowed students to question power relationships, explore different ways of being, living and knowing and it also permitted participants to propose actions towards the recognition of different ways of thinking and communicating (Walsh, 2010, p. 15).

The activities implemented and class materials used during the intervention were created by adapting some activities suggested by Janks, Newfield, Dixon, Ferreira, and Granville (2013) and by modifying some of the exercises proposed by the textbook adopted by the institution. Moreover, there were some other activities that were created by me, the teacher-researcher. All the tasks designed and implemented were guided by six principles of the critical interculturality proposal suggested by Walsh (2010) and Tubino (2004). These scholars do not specifically list their ideas as principles of critical interculturality; however, from their readings, it is evident that they identify certain characteristics that define its purpose and objectives.

The six principles adopted for this study were:

1. Critical interculturality allows to re-conceptualize and re-found ways of thinking, acting and living. (Walsh, 2010)
2. Critical interculturality promotes the understanding and construction of knowledge and problematizes power relationships. (Walsh, 2010)
3. Critical interculturality promotes the transformation of power relationships. (Walsh, 2010)

4. Critical interculturality builds intercultural citizens committed to democracy and inclusion. (Tubino, 2004)
5. Critical interculturality promotes the critical reading of the world to understand, re-learn and act in the present. (Walsh, 2010)
6. Critical interculturality promotes the dialogue between differences. (Walsh, 2010)

These principles guided the lessons planning process of implementation. Even though only three of them dominated the planning of a specific lesson, there were not limitations to promote the other three principles that were not included as the main objectives of the class. Overall, these six principles were present in all the lessons and in all the resources used in this intervention. They permitted students to question, react, rethink and reconstruct power relationships in society.

The activities proposed promoted the understanding of different kinds of texts and topics presented in the English scholarship program curriculum. Also, taking into consideration that the program where this research was carried out demanded the implementation of the final written and oral exams stipulated for students and which evaluated their language development, it was necessary to incorporate the language notions described in the course syllabus presented by the institution as important elements in the lesson planning stage. To achieve both purposes, the program's expectations and the critical intercultural unit objectives, certain grammar structures were incorporated in the activities designed and were also part of the prompts given to participants to develop all the tasks assigned.

For instance, the first topic the textbook suggested was related to animals' abilities. The unit introduced vocabulary about animals and the modal verb "can/cannot". The main objective of this unit was to have students describe those capacities animals had by using can and cannot correctly. For the critical intercultural unit, the modal verb introduced was used for different purposes. For example, one of the activities participants had to do was to start deconstructing stereotypes they had and other people from their communities had as well about those cultural groups they identified with. Students were asked to work in groups according to the cultural group they felt affiliated to; they had to discuss about what they thought people in their cultural group could do, what they could not do, and they also had to think about what other people thought members of this group could do and what they could not do.

The idea was to have students compare their initial thoughts about these cultural groups with what they considered other people thought. As it can be seen in APPENDIX J, students were able to use the modal can/can't to express their ideas; later, they were asked to write their thoughts on a poster, paste it on the classroom walls and share with the rest of the group their conclusions. Finally, a class discussion was carried out in which students could also compare the thoughts they wrote on paper with their classmates' ideas.

Audio-visual input materials.

Most of the videos were recorded by me, the teacher-researcher. They depicted teenagers and young adults from different cultural groups who shared information in English and Spanish about their cultural practices, their ideas of knowledge, the way they communicate in their communities, and their ways of seeing and understanding life. The

people appearing in the videos belonged to indigenous and Afro communities from cities such as Quibdó, in the pacific coast of Colombia, and from Leticia, the main city in the Amazon. Other videos were authentic materials taken from YouTube. These audio-visual resources also depicted people from diverse communities providing information about their personal community and their cultural practices.

To select the videos, the main criteria I used was incorporating people that belonged to minority groups and that have historically been portrayed as part of marginalized communities. Only two videos were taken from YouTube; the first one did not include people speaking but it showcased varied indigenous communities communicating through different ways such painting their faces and performing a ritual (Suirá, 2014). The second video told the story of how Afro-descendant women have communicated through history using their hairstyle as the main form of telling stories, preserving their cultural identity and establishing communication with other members of their own community (As/Is, 2017).

Images.

Participants were exposed to a lot of images that aimed at representing problematic situations about different topics. Some of the images were presented in a form of collage in which photos of privileged and marginalized cultural groups I illustrated characteristics of their identities and manifested their cultural practices. Other images grouped people that shared similar features; such similarities were seen by society as stereotypes. When presenting these images, students were asked to compare, characterize, and position different cultural groups in order to unveil their own stereotypes about themselves and others and to introduce the concept of unequitable relations of power.

Reading handouts.

The texts used to design these handouts were mainly adapted from articles found on internet and from ideas suggested by Janks et al. (2013). The adaptations made intended to intentionally portray people in discriminatory situations and marginalized positions. Different topics were addressed in these workshops; one of them described the life of a young adult with Down syndrome (see APPENDIX F), another one defined different celebrations around the world that were traditional from countries that were socially considered dominating territories such as the United States, another reading portrayed the journey of women that were forced to work from a very young age without being able to receive the minimum conditions to survive, and finally, one of the workshops presented the history of an African teenager whose life was influenced by the Apartheid and Nelson Mandela's legacy. The activities participants had to do after they read these articles aimed at checking comprehension of content and vocabulary and promoting reflection on the situations presented in the texts.

Identity video.

Creating this video was the goal of the project work required from the institution's methodology, participants were asked to write a script and record a video where they talked about themselves, their dreams and expectations for the future, the communities they belonged to and interacted with, the reasons why they felt proud of their communities and information about their childhood and the best and worst experiences they had lived. Students were encouraged to do research about their cultural identity and explore their family's background by asking their grandparents and parents about their history. They

were also motivated to add photos of their relatives where it was possible to see some of their cultural practices such as participating of a celebration or sharing dinner together. Lastly, participants were asked to share their videos on a platform suggested by the institution in order to allow their classmates to get to know them at a deeper level.

I considered myself good at planning. In fact, I was able to adapt material, modify texts and create interesting and fun class activities. I always spent a lot of time planning because I wanted to make sure that my classes were meaningful and effective in terms of language goals. Nevertheless, this critical intercultural curricular unit not only challenged me to design a whole unit but it also helped me understand that any resource or task planned for class has to be meticulously designed in order to avoid perpetuating dominant discourses and the silencing of minority communities.

Actually, this curricular unit design was carried out in two stages. Initially, my planning did not completely correspond to the critical intercultural paradigm I had decided to base my research on, and it did not focus on issues of identity construction either which means that it was too imprecise. It was right after the second time designing the unit that I was able to put into practice the theory read and the expectations I had with this project. Finally, throughout this designing experience, I learned to wisely make grammar and vocabulary choices, to critically select texts and images and to allow students to guide my planning since there were modifications on the way which were based on their responses and reactions.

In the following section, I will introduce the findings of this research by presenting the categories that emerged after the data analysis was carried out. These findings present

the most significant results of the study and describe the journey that the five selected participants went through. Then, I will make connections between the theory and findings presented in this paper to discuss the influence that the implementation of this critical intercultural unit had on participants' construction of identities; the main aspects of these connections will be described in the discussion section and they will evidence the relevance of this study. Finally, I will mention the challenges and implications of this kind of research for teachers, students and institutions, and I will suggest elements to be considered for further research.

Findings

The objective of this research was to explore how the implementation of a critical intercultural unit influenced young Afro descendant EFL learners' identities. To accomplish this, the unit was designed based on the principles of critical interculturality proposed by Walsh (2010) and Tubino (2004). For this critical intercultural curricular unit, different tasks were created adapting the activities suggested by Janks et al. (2013); some others were modified activities taken from the textbook adopted by the institution where the study was carried out, and the rest of the resources used were my creation.

Data collected revealed that this curricular unit provided spaces for students to recognize, name, and define attributes of their identities. Students had the opportunity to reflect on the features of their present identities (that is, the identities they had already developed when they first came to my class), and they enriched this awareness by exploring their identities in relation to societal expectations, their affiliations to cultural groups, and their and others' expectations for their imagined identities. For instance, students were able to recognize that their cultural practices, the places where they come from, and where they live shape who they are. Furthermore, after being exposed to a critical intercultural approach, students could identify and problematize power relationships regarding culture, which helped them to understand different problematic situations that take place in their communities that impact their cultural identities.

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the categories that emerged from the data analysis in the process of responding to the question: *How can a critical intercultural approach influence young EFL learners' identities in an English scholarship program?*

The first category refers to the students' *present* identities; that is, their identities as defined by them at the beginning of the course. It includes their process of becoming aware of and naming their identities as constructed previous to the development of the unit. Additionally, this category encompasses students' identity construction regarding those cultural groups they relate to; as part of class activities, they were able to recognize how their affiliations to different cultural groups define their multiple identities.

In the second category, I will elaborate on students' identities as learners of English; that is, how students' perceptions of English influenced not only the way they position themselves, but also the expectations they create for their future. The third category alludes to students' construction of their imagined identities and how these are influenced by societal expectations. Finally, in the fourth category, I will explain how students showed awareness of cultural differences, unveiled relations of power and domination in relation to culture, and how they were able to think of possible actions that can be taken to promote a more equitable society. It is necessary to highlight that even though students were classified as beginner English learners by the CEFR and the institution's standards, they were able to express in English their process of becoming aware of their identities by using the basic linguistic resources acquired and reinforced throughout the implementation of the unit.

Students' identity construction in relation to their pre-established identities

The critical intercultural curricular unit implemented opened spaces for students to explore and reflect on their identities. The activities proposed always included questions about students' cultural and geographical background, about their communities and the participation they have in them. This allowed participants to confront their own ideas with the ones other people have about themselves and the world. As a result of the reflection activities proposed to promote the exploration of students' identities, the five selected students were able to identify and characterize the different representations about themselves that they had probably considered, but that they did not seem to be aware of, nor ready to talk about before participating in the implementation of this unit. These representations or initial ideas students had about their cultural selves were shaped by the cultural practices they adopted, and their expectations and desires of who they wanted to become in the near future.

Daniel and Andrea were asked to define their selves in the initial interviews carried out before the implementation of the unit. They limited to recognize themselves for what they were good at, what other people thought about them, and the way people in their communities referred to them, as well as the roles they assumed in the cultural groups they belonged to and interacted with. Before being exposed to the unit, these students related their identity construction process to the roles they adopted in their families, their school or in their group of friends. In the following quotations, Daniel and Andrea's pre-conceived ideas about themselves at a personal, academic and family level were evident.

[...] I always played the role of the brainiac, for example, I was in a Spanish Olympics last year so I represented my group at school ahh and things like that. What I do is to help with things like Antioqueñidad [...] I assume that leadership, if we have to collect money, well we chip into a collection or whatever you have to do to accomplish the job.

(Initial interview, Daniel, May 10th, my translation)

Let's see, in my family, I'm like, I mean I have the role of the older sister; if my mom has to go to work and she has no one to leave my sisters with, literally the two smallest ones, it is my responsibility to stay with them, yes, to make them food, I must be super attentive and avoid that something happens to them.

(Initial interview, Andrea, April 10th)

As it is seen above, initially, Andrea and Daniel gave relevance to the roles they played in relation to others. They attributed positive characteristics to themselves and it was evident that these allowed them to be considered as role models in their communities. However, during the implementation of the critical intercultural unit, in one of the journal entries students wrote (see APPENDIX H), they were asked to reflect on what they represented for their families and closest communities (sometimes their school context or their group of friends).

In this activity, students had to express what people said about them and it was evident that, this time, students like Bruno not only associated positive qualities to their selves but they were also able to recognize negative opinions about who they were and about what others thought about them. Bruno talked about contradictory ideas of how people described him. He recognized that others positioned him as a model to follow when they expressed he was a good student and a friendly and a sensitive person. However, he

could also identify that to refer to his abilities, people addressed him in a discriminatory way when his weight and skin color were used in a negative manner to define who he was.

“I am a studious person I am a dedicated person
People tell me: that I am an affectionate person, that I am a dear
person”

“You’re so smart Fat Black. I am scared of telling people that: tell
about sex Tell about weapons, smoking and wars Tell about negative
things”

(Excerpts taken from the journal entry 1, Bruno, April 26th)

After the curricular unit implementation, students like Bruno identified the duality that existed in the construction of their identities. Even though they understood there was recognition from others of their valuable quality as human beings, as Montoya and García (2010) unveil, they comprehended that no matter what they did, they were not completely seen as contributors in society. This made visible the lack of approval that Afro descendants receive from other ethnic groups.

Additionally, as shown above, students took advantage of writing in this journal entry to express how they felt when talking about taboo topics such as sex and violent situations. Also, it was clear from this task that Bruno felt undervalued by other people even when he was told he was good at something as it is noticeable when in this journal entry he expresses that he is called “smart” but at the same time he is named “fat black”, which positioned him in a marginalized status. These conflicting feelings that Bruno experienced differed from the ones Andrea and Daniel expressed in the initial interviews. In Bruno’s case, he commented on what people said about him while Andrea and Daniel

reported what they thought about themselves. This showed how relevant what others thought about these students was and how it might have influenced the perceptions they had about themselves.

Moreover, as part of class activities, students were able to explore the different cultural groups they identified with and they recognized that their affiliations to these groups overlap. The participants of this research discovered some determining factors that made them feel part of a certain cultural group such as their skin color, their body type, their cultural practices, and the place where they and their families were originally from.

Before the implementation of the unit, Andrea, Deisy, Jefferson, Daniel and Bruno were not totally aware of their overlapping identities. For instance, during class activities the concept of culture was discussed and they were asked to think about those elements that they considered representative of their communities and about the cultural practices they adopted in their everyday life. As a reflection activity, students were asked to think about which cultural groups they associated to each of the characteristics they considered they had. This exercise helped students to understand that who they were was influenced by diverse characteristics or circumstances developed due to their relationships with different communities.

For example, in the interviews carried out before the implementation of the unit, Jefferson, Daniel, Deisy and Andrea expressed an affiliation solely to the Afro-community. While Deisy was able to maintain this idea throughout the unit implementation, the rest of them and other classmates like Carolina and Carmen recognized that there was more than one cultural group they identified with.

"[...] Well ehhh I'm from here in Medellin but I feel more from Chocó [...]"

(Initial interview, Bruno, May 10th my translation)

“[...] Teacher: so now, I want you to think about this concept of culture. What is your culture? Can you say that you belong to a specific culture?

Students: yes, no

Jefferson: the culture of Medellín

Carolina: no, mainly I have two

Teacher: so, you have two

Carolina: I consider myself like this, Afro-descendant and paisa

Teacher: it is ok, Afro descendant and paisa

Carmen: I consider myself from the coast, Afro descendant and paisa

[...]”

(Excerpt taken from the transcription of class 9, June 22nd)

To conclude, it is important to recognize that before the implementation of the unit, the five chosen students had already explored their identities unconsciously. They came with clear ideas about themselves that influenced their interaction in class. However, it was only until they had the spaces to reflect on who they were and on their cultural practices that they were able to express their feelings and their thoughts about themselves. Also, they realized that they adopted characteristics from different cultural groups that were not strictly associated with their place of birth or their race. Besides, they were able to perceive that who they were could not be defined by their affiliation to one cultural group only and that the representations of their selves were shaped by features of their cultural groups established by other people and by themselves as well.

In addition, students' ideas about their cultural identity were influenced by what other people from their same community thought about their cultural practices and the kind

of interaction they had with other members of the cultural groups they affiliated to. For instance, Jefferson and Deisy referred to the practices they were affiliated to by describing aspects of their culture such as their accent, the music they listened to, the food they ate and the traditions that had been transmitted from generation to generation.

“[...] Interviewer: I would like to know if you know a little bit about your history, if you know about the Afro-descendant community, if your family has contact with people who still maintain these traditions.

Jefferson: Well, some of the traditions and customs are preserved, such as food, music and the relationship that I have had with people like the Afro-descendant ethnic group has been quite a lot because I have been meeting people who also belong to it[...]"

(Initial interview, Jefferson, April 5thmy translation)

“[...] Interviewer: you have a family that comes from those roots of Quibdó. What is life like in your family? Tell me all about things you enjoy doing together

Deisy: for example, sometimes my mom, my stepfather, he came to live here to Medellin from a very young age, when he was 11 or 13 years old he came to live in Medellín, then he forgot the customs and words. My mom and I know ehhe those Chocó words, so we start talking to him in our accent and all that, then he gets very confused and my mom and I laugh [...]"

(Initial interview, Deisy, April 10thmy translation)

This means that participants were aware of many essential elements that were distinctive of their community. The concept of culture was not new for them and with their everyday life activities and thank to what their parents were teaching them about their culture, participants contributed to the preservation of their cultural identity.

Students' identities as learners of English

Participating in the implementation of a critical intercultural unit not only allowed students to become aware of their preconceived identities, but it also permitted them to explore how their ideas about English and the gains they thought they could get by becoming English speakers were transformed throughout the learning process. It is important to explain that, as participants in the scholarship program, students have been predisposed to think that when they achieve the language level (according to the CEFR) required by each of the courses they take, they are one step closer to becoming proficient English speakers. That is, they will be able to communicate in English by using appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar and pronunciation. Therefore, students commonly assume that learning English will provide them with economic benefits such as getting a job easier and earning more money than other people in similar conditions won't be able to have. Also, students usually think that they will have a more privileged social status and that traveling abroad opportunities will come easily.

When Daniel, Andrea, Jefferson, Bruno and Deisy were interviewed before the implementation of the unit, they had very different expectations with what learning English might represent for them. At the beginning, some of them held stereotypical ideas of what being proficient in English symbolized for the world. In the initial interviews, students had two different positions in relation to English. On the one hand, as it is noticeable in the following quotes, Andrea's ideas reproduced the discourse about the gains and privileges people usually associate with this language. On the other hand, even though Daniel

recognized the status given by society to English, he referred to the communicative purposes and the learning opportunities that speaking this language implied. It is evident that Andrea and Daniel initially saw English as a functional tool to get access to opportunities which they thought they probably could not reach by only speaking their native language.

"[...] English is such an important and recognized language and used ahhh it is something that will open many doors for me and will allow me to communicate with others and learn things that I may not know [...]"

(Initial interview, Daniel, April 3rd my translation)

"Interviewer: why did you get motivated by the English component?
Andrea: because how can I say this? It is as a type, a very important tool nowadays, ahh how is it said? As the years go by, English is used more, they ask for it as a job requirement, in what, in all in general"

(Initial interview, Andrea, April 10th my translation)

Thanks to the activities implemented and to the audiovisual material used throughout the implementation of the unit, the five selected students described themselves as current and future English speakers, which in their opinion, gave them a privileged position in society. During the unit implementation, students had the opportunity to evaluate what they really wanted to achieve as speakers of English as a foreign language. While Bruno perceived English as a means for traveling abroad, Jefferson was able to see it as a way to communicate with others, have access to information and get to know other cultures.

"Interviewer: well, tell me, what would you like to achieve with the program?"

Bruno: the main, the main reason, go to the United States and be accepted at a good university here in Colombia. Well, I want to go to the United States because my dream is to know New York, mainly Times Square”

(Initial interview, Bruno May 5th. my translation)

"[...] English being such a universal language gives me more possibilities, for example, for some unknown topic, there are articles and information that cannot be found in Spanish, then English would help me to find information[...]"

(Initial interview, Jefferson, April 5th my translation)

It is clear that Daniel, Jefferson, Andrea, Deisy and Bruno recognized that English is a language with a worldwide impact and that it might bring benefits to those who speak it. The majority of them were interested in studying English because they believed that with it, they were going to fulfill the requirements needed to have a good job and to achieve an important position at any workplace.

“[...] Teacher: I want you to say why English is important
Students: because is the most speaking language, more opportunities
Teacher: how do you say that in English?
Students: more opportunities
Teacher: what else?
Students:it is a universal language [...]"

(Excerpt taken from the transcription of class 9, May 8th)

"[...] my expectation is that I can use the language in my everyday life, I also want to go abroad, to get a good position because of this second language [...]"

(Initial interview, Jefferson, April 5th my translation)

Initially, Jefferson and Daniel expressed that English was useful to learn new things because information about different topics was usually shared in English. This means that by becoming proficient in English, they could have more access to new concepts and it might help them succeed in their academic life. Besides, they also recognized the impact that learning English had on the relationships they could develop with others and the possibilities this gave them to discover and learn about other cultures.

"[...] Interviewer: what do you think would be the impact of studying English in your future? How would the process of learning English change your life?

Jefferson: well, in fact in this course I get to know new people, I make new friends so I can expand my social circle; also having this knowledge could give me more confidence in myself [...]"

(Initial interview, Jefferson, April 10th my translation)

"[...] Well, I would have, in my house is not that we have many economic possibilities then it is not like I can say wow I'm going to travel to the United States, but I could definitely look for opportunities in other places, let's say, I do not know a scholarship, some call or some any university that I can go to and that besides knowing the culture, improve my language skills and fulfill what I want, my dreams and expectations [...]"

(Initial interview, Daniel, April 3rd my translation)

When contrasting these initial thoughts with the ideas Daniel, Bruno, Andrea, Deisy and Jefferson expressed during and after the implementation of the unit, it is evident that, in some cases, their conception about what English represented for them changed. For the majority of them, English went from being a tool to gain economic mobility and possibilities to travel which represented positive gains for their present and future lives, to

be considered a relevant factor that determined the advantaged or disadvantaged position they assumed in their communities.

For instance, in one class, students read a text about a person who had Down syndrome. On the one hand, he was portrayed as someone useless for society, but on the other hand, his talents and his musical skills were highlighted and appreciated in the text. First, students were asked to recognize the stereotypes reproduced by society regarding people with disabilities. Second, they were also asked to reflect on why people with certain limitations were unprivileged and why, depending on the situation and on the group of people around them, they could also be seen as brave and smart human beings.

After this reading exercise, there was a class discussion about the concepts of *topdog* and *underdog* presented by Janks et al. (2013). Based on this, students had the opportunity to recognize in which situations a person was undervalued and valued at the same time. Then, students were asked to reflect on what English made them feel and what being English speakers meant to them. In the fourth journal entry, Andrea, Daniel and Bruno were able to recognize that English could make them feel marginalized or it could make them feel powerful depending on the setting they were in and the people they were interacting with.

“When I am in my English class, I am an UNDERDOG, I never give my opinion and I remain silent adapt others.”

(Excerpt taken from the journal entry 4, Andrea, May 8th)

“When I am in English class, I am TOPDOG, I have more knowledge that some of the other students, however, in other aspects I am a UNDERDOG like the participation.”

(Excerpt taken from the journal entry 4, Daniel, June 14th)

“When I am in my English class, I am an UNDERDOG
I feel that I don’t fit in this group [...]”

(Excerpt taken from the journal entry 4, Bruno, June 14th)

In the final interviews, students were asked to think about the transformation they experienced throughout this implementation. Jefferson, Ana, Deisy and Daniel referred to how relevant it was for them to have the opportunity to explore, understand, and discuss about topics such as their cultural practices, their identities and the relations of power and domination embedded in everyday life situations and interactions with other people. For instance, as it is stated in the following quote, Daniel recognized that the implementation of this critical intercultural unit not only helped him build new knowledge about English grammar, but also it encouraged him to go beyond the concept of language and start thinking about his role as an agent of change in society:

“[...] Well, not really, because the most important thing is not really the grammar or things like that, but knowing how to express yourself to the world and knowing what it is happening and about everyday situations and know what you can do to help, Do you get me?; because one knows that the world has its problems and one, as a young person, has to find a way of expressing positive things to the world and obviously also helping.”

(Final interview, Daniel, June 19thmy transcription)

However, for Bruno the most relevant gain from this experience was the improvement, in terms of language proficiency, that he had at the end of the process. Therefore, it was clear that he continued defining English as a set of language structures

used correctly. Differing from the other four students, Bruno only referred to the linguistic progress achieved through the implementation of the critical intercultural unit.

Interviewer: [...] how much transformation did Bruno experience?

Bruno: Oh in English, not some mistakes, well, I saw those letters that I wrote in English in the first two years and I was like oh seriously those mistakes, really? And I looked at my notebook and I, seriously and I am like uhh I had those basic mistakes, the teacher told me you have some basic mistakes and it was truth, I used to say she has 23 and I ahha she is she is, I do not know, and now I am more perfectionist, [...] "

(Final interview, Bruno, June 23rd my transcription)

To conclude, Daniel, Deisy, Ana and Jefferson were able to experience a change in their perception of the English language and language learning, as part of their participation in the unit. They moved from seeing English only as a tool for job and travelling opportunities to recognizing that learning it allowed them to communicate with others, learn about different cultures and contribute to the solution of the issues society faces. Students were also able to identify that learning English does not always grant them a privileged position but it also provokes negative feelings and perceptions of who they are just because of the fact that they know or not know the language. This phenomenon allowed them to understand that becoming English speakers entails relations of power that can privilege or put them in a disadvantage position in relation to other people.

Students' identity construction in relation to their imagined identities and societal expectations

Throughout the implementation of this unit, students were able to reveal the future identities that they wanted to develop and those they had assumed in order to meet the

expectations society sets for them. On the one hand, in the initial interviews (see APPENDIX C) and during the implementation, Andrea, Daniel, Bruno, Deisy and Jefferson defined the characteristics, abilities and goals they considered they had to develop according to what their parents, friends and their communities defined as ideal. Also, they based their imagined identities on the professions they wanted to have, on what they wanted to represent for their communities and the leadership role they wanted to take in each of the different social groups they are involved in.

Before the implementation of the critical intercultural unit, Bruno was asked about the plans he had once he graduated from the English scholarship program he belonged to. Following the typical life order, he expressed he wanted to study at a university and then start working. When he was asked about the job he wanted to do, he immediately referred to the career he wanted to study. Bruno's expectations for his future were based on what is commonly considered by society as the appropriate way of achieving success in life; especially when, as it is evident in the next quote, Bruno pointed out at the impact that studying a career and becoming a teacher was going to have on society.

"Interviewer: and what would you like to work on?"

Bruno: as a teacher, I had the option of systems engineering or a degree, but I like teaching more because I believe that this is how I am contributing to society."

(Initial interview, Bruno, May 10thmy translation)

While Bruno referred to the academic development he wanted to achieve in the near future, Jefferson initially related his imagined identity to the possibility of expanding his social horizons. He emphasized on the relevance that interacting with other people had for

his own development. Jefferson showed interest in knowing better the Afro community he considered he was part of and he also recognized he had already developed leadership skills he was expecting to improve throughout the implementation of the English scholarship program.

“[...] I hope I can be a better leader, develop myself better in group activities, with other people, develop more socially because I know more people and are people of my same ethnicity, of my same age [...].”

(Initial interview, Jefferson, April 10th my transcription)

On the other hand, by the end of the implementation of the unit, the five students selected could identify the responsibilities and the characteristics society expects them to have. For instance, as it is stated in the following quotes, students like Bruno and one of his classmates named Carmen expressed their desire of becoming role models for their siblings and relatives, and at the same time, they reflected on the actions that could make them be considered by society as supportive and good human beings.

"[...] if I have a sister or brother, I would like to be an example to him, as well as you and your sister. Yes, because one must set the example [...].”

(Final interview, Bruno, June 23rd my transcription)

“I fit in society when I do favors to everybody and I help others without conditions.”

(Excerpt taken from the journal entry 3, Carmen, June 18th)

Additionally, one of the most recurrent imagined identities students were able to develop was related to their desire of contributing to society with solutions to the problems faced in it. During the implementation, they were exposed to different social and moral dilemmas that helped them reflect on what their role in their communities was. By the end of the unit, it seemed that Daniel and his classmates were interested in becoming active participants and contributors in society. They showed that they were able to put themselves in another person's position, and as Daniel expressed it in the final interview carried out, helping people in difficult conditions became an important concern to be addressed.

"[...] I want to social help

Teacher: you want to help; you want to do social work. What kind of people do you want to help?

Students: poor people, people that can't do activities than the people more important can do. For example, cómo se dice anciano?

Teacher: the elderly

Students: children that don't have parents [...]"

(Excerpt taken from class transcription, June 8th)

"Daniel: well I think my mentality has changed too much because before I was not interested in social issues, I did not watch the news, I did not care about those things, but now I think my mind has gone from being something indifferent to like wanting to do something for society [...] I can also help others because not everyone has the same capabilities or the same conditions, because I am not so wealthy but I have what it is necessary and there are other people that they do not have that, so I realized that I can also help with minimal things even if I am young. I felt like very, like someone that can contribute."

(Final interview, Daniel, June 19thmy translation)

Lastly, before the implementation, Daniel, Bruno, Deisy, Jefferson and Ana defined their identities based on the expectations they had on their individual development at a

professional and social level which determined who they wanted to become in the near future. Nevertheless, after the implementation, their imagined identities were transformed into more socially oriented conceptions of who they dreamed to be, recognizing themselves not only as individuals with their goals and dreams but as agents of social change and improvement by adopting more active roles in society.

Students deconstructing and reacting to unequal relations of power

By following a critical intercultural approach, during the implementation of the unit, students were able to identify and discuss about the stereotypes reproduced in society in relation to culture. Also, they had the opportunity to explore the implications of the representations society and themselves had about different cultural groups. Students could recognize in these representations which groups of people were depicted in positions of power and which were underprivileged. Students distinguished between relations of power that were rooted in categories such as race, socioeconomic status, gender, age, language and cultural practices.

The process of deconstructing relations of power began by raising awareness about cultural differences. First, due to class activities, students were able to name the stereotypes reproduced in society and define the prejudices people had towards certain cultural groups. Throughout this implementation, students learned about diverse cultural practices and about different definitions of the concepts of knowledge, communication and science. This allowed them to think about the value of differences and the impact stereotypes had on people's perception of others. The following quotes show different class moments in which

students unveiled stereotypes other people and themselves had about certain communities and they also started to recognize cultural differences as part of the essence of the cultural identity of these groups.

“[...] Teacher: when I asked you about Colombian products, some of you said, like what did you say?

Students: Marihuana.

Teacher: What other stereotypes about Colombian products do we have?

Students: coca, coffee

Teacher: cocaine?. What are other stereotypes about Colombian products?

Students: that we are drug traffickers

Students: that there is weed everyday

Teacher: what other stereotypes about Colombian products? Things that we listen to people saying about Colombian products

Students: that the Colombian Coffee is the best coffee in the world

Teacher: ok, that we have the best coffee. Exactly, that is the general idea.

Students: that we sell the strongest liquors [...]”

(Excerpt taken from class transcription, April 30th)

“ [...] Teacher: they are telling a story

Students: sharing feelings, singing, a ritual, giving a welcome, traditions

Teacher: they are continuing the tradition. Now, is that part of language?

Students: yes, they are communicating through a dance, culture, transmit happiness

Teacher: in the indigenous communities, dancing is a way of communicating, what is one way of communicating of afro communities?

Students: hair, hairstyle, the evolution of the hair

Students: before people made braids to know where, to hide the money and know the way home [...]”

(Excerpt taken from class transcription, May 8th)

Second, after identifying, naming and understanding stereotypes, students could unveil patterns of power and domination in relation to culture. They answered guiding questions asked in class in which they identified who the privileged people were and whose voices were silenced. Topics proposed covered issues related to marginalized communities and the depiction of cultural groups. In the next quotes, it is evident that Bruno, Jefferson and their classmates were able to give their opinions on the topics discussed and they identified factors that perpetuated unequitable power relationships among people:

“[...] Teacher: who marginalizes people?
Students: social groups, everybody
Teacher: let’s use this example. Who marginalizes rappers?
Students: parents, friends
Teacher: what about women? Who marginalizes women?
Students: men, the government
Students: so, everybody has someone who marginalizes him
Students: at the end, everybody marginalizes and is marginalized
Students: every person marginalizes himself [...]”

(Excerpt taken from class transcription, April 30th)

“[...] Teacher: listen! Santiago says that they mistreat people. Who mistreat Moroccan people?
Jefferson: Amancio Ortega, founder of Zara [...] who has the power?
[...]
Students: Amancio
Teacher: Amancio, right? What happens with the person that has more power in this text?
Students: he is the boss, he abuses of his power, he has more money
[...]
Teacher: now, do you think that these people do not know what is happening?
Students: they know, obviously, maybe because Zara is such an important company, they do nothing; they do not want to lose their job, maybe they are threatened, it is the fear they have [...]”

(Excerpt taken from class transcription, May 3rd)

“Teacher: why indigenous languages are not spoken by many people?
[...]

Bruno: because they are not globalized

Jefferson: because you have not real, the same opportunities than when learning another language. You don't have the same opportunities learning French than learning an Amazonian language

Teacher: [...] you have more opportunities for what?

Students: for work, for meet new people

Teacher: why do we have fewer opportunities with indigenous languages?

Students: because there is not companies that need persons that know indigenous languages and because the indigenous languages is less spoken around the world, so it is harder you communicate with other persons [...]

“[...] Teacher: for society, in general, is that a valid way of communicating? [...]

Jefferson: I say that they are not valued because at the time, other more powerful civilizations repressed those cultures and all those beliefs, so that's why there are very few people who still have them because people from other nations came to colonize us and they imposed another culture and others customs. For us, it is weird but because we were raised with different beliefs and cultures [...]

(Excerpts taken from class transcription May 8th)

Finally, students showed comprehension of the importance of valuing differences and this permitted them to problematize the relationships of inferiority and superiority that took place in society. As a result of this, they proposed different ways of showing respect and recognition of different ways diverse forms of knowledge, thinking and living. Students were able to think of general strategies that could be implemented to acknowledge and value differences and they could also express specific actions that could be implemented in their classroom environment and at a societal level as well in order to construct a more equitable society.

For instance, in one class, students read an article from the textbook; it was about how science impacted the acquisition of new knowledge and it described a robot that had been used to help people with their everyday life duties. At the same time, the article highlighted the role scientists played while understanding how the world worked. Before reading this article, students had watched different videos where people from different cultural groups described what knowledge meant for them, their ideologies and the way they communicated with others. Then, students were asked to analyze the article read taking into account information from the videos previously seen. For example, they were asked to think about the type of knowledge that was favored and to reflect about other ways of knowing, living, and thinking that were not included in the textbook activities.

As a result of this reflection, students wrote letters to the textbook publishing house drawing attention on the fact that they were privileging scientific knowledge over other types of knowledge. In addition, Bruno, Deisy and other classmates such as Carmen made recommendations to the publishing house to incorporate non-dominant ideologies as can be seen in the following excerpts.

“[...] we think you can interview several cultures and take into account their different types of knowledge [...] this is important because all human beings are different and we have to accept that [...]”

(Excerpt taken from Deisy’s letter, May 31st)

“[...] you can include in your articles the history, rituals, myths, feelings and stories of these. This is important because everybody is valued for belonging to a community and we have different types of knowledge, this deserves to be known and respected [...]”

(Excerpt taken from Carmen’s letter, May 31st)

“[...] you aren't only teaching how to do something, you are teaching traditions and sense of belonging for something because the world isn't about science, the world is about experiences, traditions, histories, knowledges, voices and the most important PEOPLE [...]"

(Excerpt taken from Bruno's letter, May 31st)

Students also proposed actions to promote the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge in a reading comprehension activity. It was a text where an African girl described a visit to Nelson Mandela's museum during vacation and referred to Apartheid and other historical events that took place in her country (See APPENDIX G). During class, students had the opportunity to explore Mandela's life and legacy, as well as issues related to race, poverty and discrimination that people from Africa had to suffer in the past. Then, students had to think about the groups of people that were undervalued in comparison to those that were privileged. Based on this, Daniel and Jefferson proposed different actions to generate more equitable relationships among social groups:

“[...] generate spaces for sharing of different cultures in our cities, for example, fairs, recreative activities, concerts, camps, and more [...]"

(Excerpts taken from Daniel's work, June 7th)

“[...] to have a fair relationship, when I have empathy with other, when we share our agreements and disagreements, when we respect the differences that exist between people.”

(Excerpts taken from Jefferson's work, June 7th)

As a consequence of deconstructing problematic relations of power, participants were affected directly by this process. For instance, in one class, students were asked to

think about cultural groups that they considered were powerful and those they thought society marginalized. David, who in one of the journal entries expressed he was curious about his sexual orientation and in which he confessed he was afraid to talk about it, was able to recognize that the LGTBI community was powerless and it represented a group of people that society undervalued. He argued that people who were homosexual were not considered important for society; this portrays what he believed his family and closest communities could think about him and it made visible why David did not feel ready to talk about his sexual orientation.

“What cultures are less visible than others?”

David: The culture of the parts less desarrollated are less valorized than people from the important countries, and the people that is different than the majority like the people of the urban tribes, the LGTBI, the afro and indigenous and others cultures and social groups that the society don't consider important”

(Excerpts taken from Daniel's work, June 7th)

Additionally, Jefferson, who had initially stated he belonged to the Afro community, in the same activity described above, he recognized that such community was dominated and marginalized by other cultural groups. Also, Bruno supported Jefferson's idea and he referred specifically to his Afro community from Quibdó to state that it was discriminated for things associated to its members' physical appearance. As it is visible in the following evidence, Jefferson and Bruno when asked about marginalized people, immediately related their community to the powerless cultural groups that are overshadowed by society.

“What cultures are less visible than others?”

The African culture because they have less power and they are less know for the other cultures”

(Excerpts taken from Jefferson’s work, June 7th)

“Afro-descendants are less privileged because they are rejected for the appearance and skin color also is so strange see news about Chocó and other cultures.

(Excerpts taken from Bruno’s work, June 7th)

To conclude, the implementation of a critical intercultural unit allowed students to explore their multiple identities from three dimensions. First, they could identify those characteristics of their identity that prevailed and defined the positions they assumed inside the different communities they had contact with. It is possible that students had explored these elements before the implementation of this study, but they were not probably given the opportunity, in other spaces, to reflect on their own ideas about who they were. Second, English played an important role in students’ exploration of their identity construction process. Students showed transformation of their conceptions of this language and about the impact they thought it had on their lives. They moved from seeing English exclusively as a tool for economic and traveling opportunities, to identifying that it was an instrument for social, personal and academic improvement and transformation.

Third, students explored their imagined identities by acknowledging that the expectations society set for them determined who they wanted to become in the near future. Besides, they were able to see themselves as agents of change instead of simply professionals or well-behave human beings. Finally, students were able to go through a

process in which they not only became aware of cultural differences, but they were able to unveil relations of power and domination in relation to culture and propose different actions and strategies that could be put into practice in order to promote more equitable relationships in society. This process also impacted participants' affiliations to different cultural groups and it allowed them to understand that they were also part of those problematic relations of power that were unveiled throughout the process which placed them in a marginalized position in their communities.

Discussion

This study aimed at exploring the impact that the implementation of a critical intercultural unit had on the identity construction process of five Afro-descendant EFL learners who are currently members of a scholarship program intended to helping students develop communicative competence in English, as well as leadership and empowerment skills. Participants of this study came from diverse backgrounds and with different motivations and expectations for their future. Some of them came from other cities in Colombia and some others were born and raised in Medellin. The five participants selected had very different personalities and different reasons to study English.

First, there was Bruno; he has always wanted to become a proficient English speaker. His dad is an English teacher and even though he does not live with him, he is Bruno's role model because, in his family, he is the one who represents the minority that was able to study a professional career and now has a stable job. Second, Ana, a very quiet girl, has the responsibility of taking care of her younger sister when their mom has to go to work. Her shyness influenced the interaction with her classmates and sometimes this made her seem like she was not interested in learning English.

Third, Jefferson, a sportsman, full of dreams and energy, he always took the leadership in class and broke the ice when needed. He was always open to learn and reflect on his ideas about every single topic discussed in class. Fourth, there was Deisy, who demonstrated to be very smart but not very committed to her English learning process

which involved the implementation of the critical intercultural unit; as a consequence, her experience exploring who she is was affected. She is a very proud Afro woman who has stood up for her dreams and defended her Afro roots even when she moved from Quibdó to Medellín, even when she was bullied at school. Finally, there was Daniel; the dreamer, the artist and the writer. Daniel was very dedicated and perfectionist. He was sometimes quiet but in some other moments he was very participative. He enjoyed writing the journal entries and he always supported his classmates' learning process. Daniel seemed to be strict with himself but very sensitive as well.

The journeys of these five students confirmed that identity is such a complex topic to explore that, once the door is open; there are unexpected things that can come out from it. For instance, participants opened their hearts and talked about being bullied, being abandoned by one of their parents and being afraid of letting others know their sexual orientation. Situations like these ones are not easy to describe and it usually requires individuals to feel safe to remember painful experiences like the ones participants were able to narrate.

Findings suggest that during the implementation of the critical intercultural curricular unit, Bruno, Ana, Jefferson, Deisy, and Daniel explored three dimensions of their identities: their pre-established ideas about themselves, who they are as English speakers, and who they would like to become in the future.

Students' identity construction in regards to their pre-established identities

Before the implementation of the curricular unit, participants had unconsciously explored their identities. When asked about their pre-conceived ideas of themselves and their motivations to study English, they talked about the cultural group they belonged to, their dreams and life expectations, and they also referred to their position in society as English speakers. However, it was after the implementation of the curricular unit that these five participants started to experience a process of empowerment that allowed them to explore their identities with an enhanced cultural awareness.

The only characteristic of their identities that Bruno, Ana, Jefferson, Deisy and Daniel assumed as a determinant aspect of who they are was the fact that they were black. At first, for them, being Afro was exclusively linked to their skin color. Thus, if they had not recognized themselves as Afro descendants, they would not have been considered eligible candidates for the English scholarship program they belong to. In this case, being part of a marginalized ethnic group allowed students to have access to learning English as a curricular activity which in Colombia is considered a possibility only privileged social groups have.

However, during this research students expanded their views on who they were and they could also establish their affiliations to certain cultural groups by exploring and characterizing themselves as part of these communities. They contrasted their pre-conceived ideas about their cultural practices, the roles they assume in their communities

and their cultural representations with the stereotypes society has of the Afro-descendant people.

All of the participants initially defined their identities based on their abilities and on how others characterized them and they partially set aside their racial identity to allow other areas of their identities to gain presence. For instance, Bruno, Jefferson and Daniel always referred to the professions they wanted to study and the responsibilities they assumed in each of the cultural groups they belonged to. These participants unconsciously wanted to break paradigms by becoming professionals and part of the percentage of Afro Colombian people that have access to higher education which in this moment includes less than 7% of the Afro population (as reported by DANE in 2005). Being professionals was definitely a way of putting themselves at the same level than other social and ethnic groups and this allowed them to make themselves visible not just for their skin color but also for their academic and professional development.

While Jefferson, Bruno and Daniel looked for a way of achieving the same educational opportunities than the dominant Colombian ethnic group “mestizos”, Ana was focused on her duties as an older sister and Deisy wanted to follow Martin Luther King’s ideology. It is necessary to recognize that Ana came from a single-parent family in which she had to behave as an adult and take care of her sister while her mother worked. Ana seemed to be predestined to leave school, find a job to help her mother provide for their family and become part of the big group of illiterate Afro Colombian people. Actually, by the end of this research Ana withdrew from the scholarship program due to economic problems to attend classes. This reflects the difficulties that some Afro descendants have

even when they are provided with educational opportunities. This also shows that these communities need further support than just giving them a textbook and a place to study.

Besides, Deisy was the only participant that clearly expressed she had been bullied and discriminated for being Afro descendant. She had recently moved to Medellin and she was definitely the only one that proudly talked about her racial identity. This has to do with the geographical context where she grew up. Deisy came from Quibdó, a place where she practiced and enriched her ethnic identity all the time. This was the reason why she wanted to become an activist as Martin Luther King was. Deisy knew firsthand what it meant to live in a community where people share racial and cultural references and she also knew how it felt to be discriminated for the same aspects. For her, becoming professional was not a priority but defending her roots was.

Nevertheless, after being exposed to the critical intercultural curricular unit, they widened their perspectives on their identities by also considering the roles they play in the different communities they belong to and interact with, and on the cultural practices they recognized as embedded in who they are.

Problematizing traditional ideas about culture was at the core of the critical intercultural curricular unit. This process challenged the common belief that culture is defined as fixed patterns of human behavior and actions. In this study, culture as presented by Atkinson (1999, p. 626) was never limited to the geographical background participants had which he named “received view of culture”. Instead of this, throughout the curricular unit implementation, ideas about cultural practices and representations of different social groups were presented as changing entities and non-decisive perceptions to define

someone's identity. This allowed participants to understand that who they were was not limited to their skin color and that identifying with the Afro community did not mean being classified in just one category.

For instance, in the initial interviews, they all exclusively identified as part of the Afro community because their relatives or themselves were born in cities in Colombia where there are Afro settlements, because they were raised by Afro descendant parents or because of their skin color and physical appearance. This initial identification process evidences the powerful impact that their Afro roots had on the construction of their identity. It is also relevant to mention that the scholarship program they belonged to repeatedly emphasized on students' racial characteristics as a way of apparently strengthening their cultural identity. Nevertheless, it is uncertain to what extent the scholarship program understood students' racial identity as a valuable feature of who they were because this could have also been used as a form of indicating difference between them and other social groups.

This also relates to the common idea about culture that Atkinson (1999, p. 626) questions. For Bruno, Jefferson, Daniel and Ana, it was clear that they adopted many of the cultural practices and characteristics of the Afro community but also of the places where they were born and raised, the people they interact with, and the communities that are present in their lives. With this, participants were able to notice that who they are is built from the integration of their diverse identities developed which interact constantly and configure their own being.

However, for Deisy, it was a different story. The fact that she had to advocate her skin color and the evident Afro look she has in front of her school, and all the

encouragement she received from her mom to feel proud of being Afro descendant made her strongly believe that her identity was limited to those characteristics that are typically attributed to the Afro community. Additionally, Deisy moved to Medellin two years ago and she has probably been surrounded by her family and friends who share and are proud of their own ethnic roots. Besides, she has not had enough time to be exposed to diverse representations of cultures that are manifested in the city she lives now and that were not demonstrated in Quibdó, her home city, which is mostly inhabited by Afro descendants. For Deisy, her affiliation to the Afro community was so evident that she did not identify with any other cultural group.

Discrimination against Afro descendants has taken place since Africans were brought to what is now known as Colombia. Afro communities were only officially and fully recognized by the Colombian government in 1991 but even though they have the same rights that the dominant ethnic group in the country and that several communities, citizens and organizations have fought for their defense, Colombian society still marginalize them. Deisy has been a victim of the Colombian discriminatory mindset and this has made her want to not only defend herself from other people's racist comments but also become empowered leader as some of the most important Afro activists. Fortunately, Deisy's experience did not affect her own ideas about her Afro roots but it strengthened them.

Furthermore, the implementation of the critical intercultural curricular unit allowed Bruno, Jefferson, Ana and Daniel to recognize that their identity was not fixed and that it was not only shaped by aspects such as their skin color or the place where their family

comes from. These four participants were born and raised in Medellín, a place where according to Montoya and García (2010, p. 8) Afro descendants are still invisible but where they have understood that their self-identification process has transcended socio-racial boundaries (p. 60). The fact that Bruno, Jefferson, Ana and Daniel recognized the multiple dimensions of their identity showed that it is impossible to talk about a unique Afro identity because it is unacceptable to ignore processes of re-arrangement, re-establishment of territories and the struggles to maintain cultural traditions not only attached to their Afro roots but also to their history in the contexts where they have set up. Hence, this confirms Norton's (2013, p. 13) idea of identity as it is defined as changeable, hybrid and multiple and challenges participants' initial views of themselves which were limited to their phenotype.

For instance, when defining their identity, Bruno, Jefferson, Ana and Daniel mentioned at least two cultural groups they identified with and they even started to recognize which are the features they adopted from each of the groups they named. For example, Jefferson, in one of the classes where the concept of culture was explored, he identified with the Afro and paisa community as well. He mentioned that many of his traditions and preferences of food and music came from Afro roots but that the way he behaves, the clothes he wears and the way he thinks comes from cultural practices that are common in Medellín. In Bruno's case, he recognized that his grandfather's Afro influence has shaped his personality but that his expectations for the future have been defined by the paisa society he lives in. In this case, it is evident that both sources of identity construction are positioned differently. For Bruno, while his Afro identity is not enough to meet his

future societal expectations, the fact of being from Medellín allows him to consider a promising future. Bruno's ideas are permeated by an historical reality which positions the Afro society as quite interesting in terms of cultural and ethnic references and quite poor regarding economic and professional opportunities.

Different to these two mentioned cases, there was Deisy, whose overlapping identities were not evident and who actually reinforced the idea of identifying herself as an Afro woman only. Deisy always referred to her life in Quibdó, the activities she used to do with her friends and relatives, and what she missed the most from her home city which was basically her everyday life there. She never expressed her affiliation to a different cultural group; even though she had been living in Medellín for more than two years, she stated that at home and at school she continued enhancing her Afro roots. This has to do with the big influence her family has on her identity construction process, since especially her mom, tries to reinforce their Afro origin by preserving traditions related to food, hairstyle and dialect. This also happens because Deisy's family has had more contact with their Afro roots since they were all born in Quibdó and have been living in Medellín for a short time. Different to the rest of the participants' situations in which they have not had direct contact with an Afro territory and their interactions with the Afro community is limited to their families.

In addition, data suggest that Bruno, Deisy, Ana, Daniel and Jefferson experienced conflicting feelings of who they think they are. Even though before the implementation they always referred to themselves by expressing positive characteristics of their identities, during this study, they realized that other people from their closest communities expressed

negatively about them. Participants faced discriminatory comments related to their race and to their physical appearance which provoked confrontation of what they think about themselves with what they have heard members of their communities saying about them. They understood that people labeled them as advantage and disadvantaged individuals at the same time.

In society, cultural groups are attributed characteristics, almost by default. These characteristics may be positive or negative, as they provide and deny privilege and power. Bruno, Deisy, Jefferson, Ana and Daniel discovered that they were attributed negative traits that were associated to the cultural groups they identified with. For example, when asked to describe how people from his closest communities refer to him, Bruno said that he was called “smart” and at the same time “fat black”.

The fact that Bruno received a compliment but instead of exalting his intelligence, this immediately became insignificant and then he was discriminated for being black is not new. In fact, this duality of thought emerged from the initial steps of slavery. As Guerrero (2016, p. 4) reports, African slaves fought against the oppressive system and they resisted until they were recognized as Colombian citizens but this story of bravery, honor and fight for their rights and dignity has never given Afro descendants the same socio, economic and cultural status than mestizos (Colombian dominant ethnic group) have. Guerrero (2016) states that Afro descendants have been considered inferior (p. 5) and even though the Colombian government has recognized the cultural and ethnic richness of these communities, Colombian society as a strategy to keep showing superiority does not completely validate Afro descendants’ participation and contribution to the country.

This clarifies why participants of these study were offered positive appraisal but at the same time they had to deal with negative and discriminatory comments when others referred to them and their role in their communities. It is manifested that the colonial power mestizos have had throughout history in Colombia has affected Afro identity construction processes, and concerning to this research, participants understood that they were positioned as inferior.

It is important to recognize that when exploring participants' identities, it is impossible to assume that they are not aware of the elements that define who they are before any intervention. However, this was the first time they had the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their identity and to contrast who they think they are with what members of their closest communities perceive from them. In consequence, one of the most significant and relevant gains from implementing a critical intercultural curricular unit to explore its effect on my students' identities is the fact that it provided them with the needed time, safe space, and necessary tools to go deeper and know themselves from different perspectives that enriched the pre-established identities they had already developed.

Students' identities as learners of English

As this study took place in an English class, participants not only positioned as cultural subjects who identified with particular social groups, but also as English language learners, who are driven by specific motivations to learn it. In fact, the main reason why Ana, Jefferson, Daniel, Bruno and Deisy decided to apply to an English scholarship

program was to get access to a better future, which for them, it meant reaching important positions at any workplace and having the opportunity to travel abroad.

As Canagarajah (2006, p. 25) defines it, English has been considered a “global” language and with this, society has understood that it provides people with better conditions for life like a well-paid job and a privileged social status as Usma (2009a, p. 134-135) states. Bruno, Ana, Jefferson, Deisy and Daniel initially bought this discourse and they proudly mention that by speaking English their life conditions were going to improve.

Before the curricular unit implementation, Bruno and Daniel explicitly expressed that one of their biggest expectations with learning English was to have the opportunity to go to the United States. Bruno wanted to be able to meet actors and get involved in the entertainment field, and Hollywood entailed what his dreams were all about. Also, Daniel wanted to become a recognized writer worldwide, and as he said it, to be read, it was necessary to write in English. Hence, both of them stated that English was going to give them these opportunities and that these were their motivations to become learners of English.

Bruno and Daniel bought not only the Colombian government discourse about English but they also internalized the scholarship program’s idea about how English was going to solve all the problems they faced as Afro descendants. The idea behind all of this was to make participants believe that by learning English they were going to be accepted as part of the national and international dominant social groups and with such acceptance they were going to discard any discriminatory idea others might have had about them.

Nevertheless, after the critical intercultural unit, these two participants' ideas about English were noticeably different. Bruno was focused on polishing his language skills to achieve his initial dreams while Daniel understood that with speaking English he could contribute to society by teaching, helping and supporting others with what he knows which was different from being recognized as an international writer. In this case, Bruno's identity as a speaker of English was limited to the language level he wanted to achieve while Daniel's identity motivated him to think about how, with the language, he could become an agent of change.

Bruno had clearly experienced direct discriminatory comments that encouraged him to look for a way of belonging to the privileged group of Colombian English speakers. Therefore, he conceived learning English as a tool that allowed him to earn a place in such group. Meanwhile Daniel, having a less discriminatory background, had a wider view and expectations regarding English learning which gave him the opportunity to have a more critical and social understanding of the language.

In addition, it is important to mention that during the implementation, most of the participants were able to expand their ideas about English and they could recognize that besides economic mobility, by becoming English speakers, they were going to have more access to information which in a way could allow them to fight against knowledge domination. Also, they understood that speaking English had communicative purposes that could be used to interact with other cultural groups. This was the result of exposing participants' in class to different forms of communication and addressing issues related to language domination. For instance, in one class, participants were asked to list the

languages they considered dominant and those they thought were dominated. They were asked to reflect on how those languages influence society and how they can contribute to the construction of fair relationships among people.

However, Bruno's ideas about English were not transformed. He kept seeing English as a group of grammar structures and he said that speaking it with correct grammar and pronunciation was his objective in this learning process. His perception may have its basis on the fact that his father is an English teacher and that learning and teaching English for Bruno's family represented the only income they had. It is possible that his father's conceptions about English as a functional language influenced Bruno's own ideas.

When students were asked to define what position they assume while speaking English, Jefferson, Ana and Deisy recognized that there were moments in which their knowledge of the language or the difficulties they faced when speaking it, may put them in both a privileged and a marginalized place. This means that when students thought that by learning English they were going to grow academically and economically, they were taking for granted positive results of the investment they were doing on speaking English. Such investment was supposed to give them a favorable position in society which could imply more recognition in their community.

As Norton (2013, p. 44) explains, the access that language learners have to the target community, in this case to the group of English speakers, influences their motivation in their learning process. In this respect, Ana, Jefferson and Deisy recognized that instead of providing them with benefits, in one of their closest community which was the group of Afro descendant teenagers who were part of the English scholarship program, becoming

speakers of English gave them an undervalued spot. They expressed that in some situations they felt discriminated by the fact they did not understand something in English or they were not able to fluently communicate in class. This situation showed them that the investment they were doing on the language did not guarantee them a privileged position in their closest community.

Language learning is a very important aspect of the participants' general development. Undoubtedly, becoming speakers of English influenced the construction of their identities. With the exploration of their positions as English speakers, Ana, Jefferson, Bruno, Daniel and Deisy started to understand that who they were was not only defined by other people from their communities but also by the context in which they interacted in. For Norton and Toohey (2011, p. 417) identities depend on the setting they are constructed from and this shows the influence that belonging to a program and to an institution in which language proficiency determines someone's place in the community had. For example, even though Bruno, Daniel and Jefferson had the highest language levels at their schools, they sometimes felt silenced in the English classes offered by the scholarship program when they were not able to fluently communicate their ideas.

It is difficult to affirm that participants' initial ideas about English were completely transformed. It is possible that some of them, deep inside, continue thinking that English is a functional language which gives them economic benefits. It is complex to challenge this idea that has dominated the concept that society has had of language learning for a long time. However, it is positive that participants showed changes in their conceptions of the language throughout the implementation of the unit. Little by little, the concept of language

was problematized and participants started to analyze the role that becoming speakers of English had on the construction of their identities.

Besides, students' ideas about English might have been permeated by the role that Spanish, as their first language, played in their identity construction process. Even though participants were always encouraged to use English as much as they could in class and in the activities proposed, when there were discussions about very sensitive or polemic topics such as stereotypes or marginalized communities, there was always a point in which students switched to Spanish.

This happened when they got very involved in the discussion and they wanted to express how they felt in regards to the topic debated. Sometimes, students used Spanish to express very powerful ideas while in class but in other cases when it referred to a personal topic such as their sexual orientation, they expressed themselves in English. Students used Spanish as a resource to emphasize on their opinions but they definitely saw English as way of indirectly talking about more personal things that they were just probably starting to explore about themselves and they did not want everybody to have access to it. English allowed them to have a type of coding system to avoid people like their parents to read what they wrote in their journal entries about their fears, the situations in which they had felt vulnerable or their doubts about their sexuality. Participants used English as a way of denying access to their information while Spanish was a direct tool to make themselves heard when topics of discussion compromised them.

The richness of this research relies on the effects that the unit had on participants' critical awareness. Experiences like the one Daniel had when he recognized English

learning as a resource for social transformation and not only as a tool for his individual goals, showed that this intervention allowed participants to analyze the impact that being English speakers could have in society. Besides, students were also capable of understanding English as a channel for communicating with others, getting access to information, and knowing other cultures which represents a more conscious vision of what language learning means.

Students' identity construction in relation to their imagined identities and societal expectations

Participants' identity construction process was also influenced by the communities they wanted to become part of in a near future and by the imagined identities they wished to develop which were associated to those imagined communities. When referring to someone's expectations for their future, Norton (2013, p. 8) says that "imagined identities refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible". Before the implementation, Daniel wanted to be a writer, Bruno wanted to study foreign language teaching, Deisy wanted to become a fashion model and social leader, Jefferson dreamed about becoming a professional sportsman and Ana wanted to go to a recognized university. Consequently, all the expectations participants had were determined by their dreams and by their families' goals for their future which were supposed to give them the possibility to belong to different communities and at the same time allow them to develop their imagined identities.

Initially, participants limited their imagined identities to stereotypical expectations of what society considers a successful person such as being a professional and being a reference for others in their social circles. Daniel and Jefferson were always considered by their communities as a very dedicated, disciplined, and academic youngster. This probably influenced the professions they mentioned they wanted to have in the near future. Ana was very clear and expressed that one of the reasons why she applied to the scholarship program was that one of her aunts promised her that if she finished the program, she would help her to get access to higher education.

All of these participants' imagined identities challenge Colombian society and its history. As mentioned in the discussion of previous categories, Afro descendants have historically been placed in inferior social, cultural and economic positions which definitely affects their expectations for their future. On the one hand, for Daniel, Bruno and Ana being able to go to a university and grow academically determines their success, but accessing higher education represents one of the biggest challenges for Afro people. However, the justification provided for the implementation of the scholarship program students belong to and its discourse make students believe that by learning English they are going to achieve their dream of becoming professionals. The scholarship program convinces students of the power English has on their entrance to university which feels as a smokescreen for the real dominating intentions the program and its sponsors might have through teaching English.

On the other hand, Jefferson and Deisy challenged the concepts of talent and beauty respectively. By becoming a sportsman, Jefferson called into question the common belief

that only privileged people who have economic possibilities to train and afford sports requirements can be recognized as sportspeople. In Deisy's case, her expectations for the future were linked to the discriminatory experiences she had lived. As reported in this discussion, she was discriminated because of her skin color and physical features. Her desire of becoming a fashion model being an Afro descendant will break stereotypes about what beauty is and it might also show the journey that Afro women have gone through in regards to beauty standard. Deisy's dream is also a way of protesting and showing society that being Afro should not be an impediment to success in life.

After exposing participants to several situations and conditions throughout the curricular unit in which they had to deconstruct stereotypes, discuss about diversity and problematize relations of power, the most important characteristic of their imagined identities was related to the possibilities they had to become agents of change. It is evident that the spaces opened in class to discuss topics of race, gender, socio-economic status, power relations and domination encouraged students to adopt more active behaviors and show interest in taking socially relevant leadership roles in their communities. That is why, at the end of the critical unit implementation, participants such as Daniel and Jefferson projected themselves as agents of transformation and expressed they wanted to take actions that could help people be involved in more respectful relationships.

For Wenger (as cited in Norton, 2013, p. 8), one of the ways in which a person can develop interaction with a community is through imagination. Initially, Jefferson, David, Bruno, Daniel and Ana's future identities were shaped by the expectations society sets for them which are based on the professional development they should achieve and on the role

models they should become. Participants' expectations clearly respond to the plan the Colombian government established for Afro descendants some years ago and which is considered essential to show progress in the development of a less racist and discriminatory country, discourse that Colombian society has also adopted.

For instance, according to the Colombian Ministry of Culture in a report published in 2010, the Colombian government expected Afro descendants to access greater labor and academic opportunities, to have more participation in political and social movements, more suitable housing and health support, and to contribute less to the business of illicit crops. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of these expectations depended on the same government and did not allow Afro communities to manage their own future.

Nowadays, Colombian society expects Afro descendants to fight for their rights and preserve their cultural identity but the policies of inclusion and equity supported by the ideal of a multicultural society, insist on promoting non-identification processes that allowed the Colombian ethnic dominant group to continue leading the country in all aspects (Mosquera, 2007). This society also expects Afro descendants to do what they are told in order for them to be able to gain respect and legitimize their condition of Colombian citizens. Bruno, one of the participants of the study made the following statement: "I fit in society when I do favors to everybody and I help others without conditions". This unveils the dominated position Afro people has had to assume in society and it takes us back to slavery time where African descendants had not right to make decisions neither power over themselves and they had to obey the dominant group.

Some participants like Jefferson and Daniel expressed their imagined identities in terms of their desires of contributing to the promotion of a more equitable society which addressed the country's goal of reducing social, cultural and economic gaps among its population. Becoming agents of change might allow these two participants to take the leadership needed to allow Afro people to equitably position in society but at the same time this unveils that society is still biased and discriminatory and that there has not been progress in terms of ethnic and cultural inclusion.

It is important to remark that the transformation of Daniel and Jefferson's imagined identities was that they first wanted to achieve individual development but then, after reflecting on the topics discussed in class, they concluded that helping their communities and society to improve, was what motivated them to grow. It was evident that being discriminated or marginalized was something these students were not very familiar with and they probably had not had the opportunity to know about different communities that have been dominated and undervalued by other groups of people. As Montoya and García (2010) express, discrimination has been made visible in cities like Medellín and it requires reflection and documentation to be able to eradicate discriminatory beliefs and that was what Daniel and Jefferson had access to throughout the implementation of the curricular unit.

For instance, Daniel commented that being a young man was not an impediment to take actions and that the biggest gain he had being part of this study was that he considered he was very reluctant to think about others and their problems and that after this experience, he felt he needed to change and become an active citizen. This was the result of exposing

students to unequitable relations of power that were present in every community they could think of. Once they understood there was so much to be done to promote social change, they realized that as the young generation they were, they had a big responsibility on their shoulders to work towards a more peaceful society.

In conclusion, being exposed to the critical intercultural unit positively influenced the participants' own expectations for their future. Even though Bruno's transformation was not evident, it can be said that this research allowed participants to rethink their imagined identities and set aside their academic/work-only driven goals to start thinking about collective objectives that could contribute to the development of a better society. This unit motivated students to think more as a community and get involved in the solution of social issues. As Wegner (as cited in Norton, 2011) states, people do not only interact with the communities they consider they are affiliated to but they also create connections with their own imagined communities. This means that participants of this study not only defined their imagined identities but also started to anticipate those imagined communities they wanted to belong to such as a more equitable society in which relations of power can be fairer.

Students deconstructing and reacting to unequal relations of power

Power gives people privileges. That is why, deconstructing power relationships is not an easy task to do and we are not prepared to do so (Johnson, 2006, p. 12). The process of unveiling problematic relationships embedded in society should start by recognizing differences and understanding the value within them. As an expected result of this, people

should be able to react and resist to dominating forces presented in their everyday life. Here, I will describe the process participants went through in order to achieve the previously mentioned goal.

In the initial interview, Jefferson expressed he was not interested in knowing more about the Afro descendant community and Ana mentioned that she did not even like to have contact with people from this ethnic group. Before the implementation, Deisy was biased by the bullying situation she experienced and she did not show interest in knowing about other cultural groups different to her own. Moreover, Bruno wanted to become the voice of his classmates, who in his opinion, might have been under a discriminatory situation promoted by other classmates. Finally, David wanted to be a role model for his friends and family. These standpoints were notoriously influenced by the intervention carried out in this study.

Participants were exposed to materials portraying diverse social groups and their cultural practices which are commonly discriminated by dominant communities. In relation to this, Tubino (as cited in Walsh, 2010, p. 9) says that when there are discriminatory practices, it is impossible to construct an intercultural interaction. To unveil participants' discriminating ideas about people in general, during the implementation of the unit they were asked to deconstruct stereotypes about cultural groups that were related to aspects such as race, gender, socio-economic condition, physical disabilities, among others.

With the objective of problematizing participants' judgements about other communities, they were required to deconstruct and explore different ways of being, living and thinking. Thanks to this, Daniel, Bruno, Deisy, Ana and Jefferson were able to

understand that actions that were not performed by powerful cultural groups such as dancing or painting their faces (as indigenous people do) were valid and deserved all the recognition that other ways of living of dominating cultural groups have traditionally been granted.

Participants responded positively to the deconstruction activities proposed where they named, analyzed and problematized stereotypes. For example, Ana and Jefferson who did not want to interact with people from the Afro community before the implementation, later expressed they had wrong ideas about what being an Afro meant and they mentioned they were interested in knowing more about this culture.

It is probable that Jefferson's pre-conceived ideas about the Afro community, which made him lose interest in getting to know more of his culture, had their basis on the fact that he never knew his father, who also belonged to this community. This could have made him show resistance at the beginning of the implementation to expand his cultural horizons. In regards to Ana, her ideas came from her experience when living in a neighborhood where there was an Afro community settled and the people that belonged to it had specific characteristics that Ana disliked. However, the attitude they assumed in regards to their cultural identity during class activities was very positive and allowed them to explore their roots and challenge the stereotypes they had created in regard to the Afro community; this might have happened because these two participants set aside their ideas about Afro people that were permeated by individual negative experiences and they allowed other backgrounds to enrich their closeness to this community. For instance, Jefferson started to research more about his ancestors and his cultural background. In addition, the fact that

participants always compared their beliefs with what they considered other people think about cultural stereotypes, helped them understand and transformed the misconceptions they had about themselves and about other black people in general.

For Walsh (2010), in order to develop a critical intercultural attitude, it is necessary to unveil, contrast and transform the patterns that categorize people, their cultural practices and their ways of being and living (p. 12). It is undeniable that all the participants were able to propose different strategies to transform those unequitable relations of power that are embedded in society. Following Tubino's (2004, p. 2) idea of critical interculturality, this approach promotes the development of people who are committed to the promotion of inclusion and democracy. As data suggested, Deisy, Bruno, Daniel, Ana and Jefferson raised their voices to ask for the recognition of cultural diversity and the inclusion of different ways of knowing, being and living. For instance, when participants were asked to think about how they imagined an equitable Colombian society, Deisy requested English education to incorporate in the textbooks the recognition of different types of knowledges and cultural expressions. She also stated that this was important to promote the validation of diversity. (see Findings, category *Students deconstructing and reacting to unequal relations of power*)

This happened after they had read and discuss about people with health limitations, people that were exploited by their boss, people that were killed because of their skin color and about people that were not considered useful by society.

Hence, students could have portrayed themselves as part of one of the marginalized cultural groups and proposed actions as a way of reacting towards the discriminatory

positions they saw themselves involved in. This was possible because the questions asked to participants were intended to unveil the group of people that was marginalized and also who possessed the power. Besides, they were guided to think about the positions they would have assumed while living similar experiences and they were asked to reflect on how these unequitable relations of power influenced society and their positionalities in it.

Pennycook (1990, p. 311) says that empowerment goes beyond embracing someone's own culture and exploring other types of knowledge which becomes the force that helps individuals transform society. Such force was provided by the critical intercultural unit which allowed students to think as leaders in favor of their communities. As Bruno expressed, this unit helped participants reinforce their traditions and their sense of belonging to their communities and it also made them realize that the world needs to listen to everybody's stories, histories and voices in order to promote recognition of cultures and dialogue among cultural groups.

With this, it is possible to say that participants were encouraged to be active citizens and speak with confidence about their opinions in relation to what could be done to construct a more equitable society. Students were given spaces to discuss, they were recognized as diverse and diversity was promoted as an opportunity to create an intercultural dialogue, and they were also given a voice which symbolized the end of the silencing processes in which they had been involved non-voluntarily. Furthermore, with time, students also started to include different cultural groups and mentioning diverse cultural practices as part of their everyday life interactions with others.

For Tubino (2004, p. 1), critical interculturality aims at proposing and implementing ways of solving social and cultural injustice and even though it has been considered a socio-political project under construction by the Consejo Regional Indígena de Cauca (as cited in Walsh 2010, p. 1), it is reasonable to say that this unit implementation accomplished, at an initial stage, the objective of this proposal. It is a big gain that participants moved from having a regular English class in which they basically studied topics of the surface culture in addition to grammatical structures to achieve a good language proficiency level, to English classes where they unveiled relations of power and proposed relevant actions to promote a fairer dialogue among cultural groups in order to reduce the existing gap among cultures.

It is important to mention that not all the participants experienced the critical intercultural approach in the same way. For Ana, this was the perfect scenario to feel more confident while interacting with others because she probably felt she was appreciated and valued for who she was. Bruno was able to deconstruct different unequitable relations of power in regards to race, sexual orientation and socio-economic status but for him it was difficult to deconstruct the stereotypes and dominating forces that speaking English entails.

For instance, Bruno constantly analyzed and recognized discriminatory relationships embedded in the texts, discussions or materials presented in class and he was able to actively participate and problematize such interactions, but due to his position of power as an outstanding English speaker in class, he struggled unveiling the same issues of power carried embedded in the language which in this case was English. Bruno did not feel vulnerable in an English-speaking setting but he was going through a recognition process of

his sexual orientation and his ethnicity which directly affected him and made him interested in dealing with such issues. This may indicate that the capacity to understand and deconstruct power issues is biased by each person's life story. The more someone identifies with such issues, the more they will problematize and critically react to them.

In Jefferson's case, he learned to value the cultural practices he adopted thanks to his affiliation to the Afro community. Deisy expressed being discriminated as an Afro-descendant person and participating in the implementation of this unit helped her confirmed how valuable her community and her cultural identity are. Finally, David clearly expressed that the implementation of a critical intercultural unit helped him explore his sexual orientation and made him feel powerful enough to talk about his feelings and explore himself from this perspective.

This study represents many things to these five participants. For some of them, it was the perfect opportunity to explore their identities based on aspects of their lives they were scared to talk about such as their sexual orientation and discriminatory experiences. For others, it allowed them to re-engage with their cultural identity which motivated them to continue exploring their cultural practices and their affiliations to different communities. And for a few of them, it represented ambiguity. Moments when there was reflection and deconstruction of unequal power relationships, and situations where those deep processes did not have any effect, like in Bruno's case.

As Tubino (2004, p.3) clearly states, interculturality cannot be considered a concept, it is actually an ethical guide that enlightens the way in which human beings behave and that it is why he considers the proposal of critical interculturality more than an idea; for

him, it is an attitude. This might be the reason why, students responded differently to this implementation and why it is not possible to generalize the influence that it had on the participants' identity construction process. Daniel, Ana, Jefferson, Bruno and Deisy were exposed to very polemic and problematic social issues and they were involved in the recognition of themselves as drawing from other people's lived experiences as advantaged or disadvantaged. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards the unit were different. While Jefferson, Bruno and David actively expressed their thoughts in an oral and written manner, Ana and Deisy were more reserved and less expressive with her ideas which did not let me completely perceive their attitude towards the material presented and the development of the unit.

Daniel, Ana, Deisy, Bruno and Jefferson were not the only ones that explored their identity construction process during the implementation of the critical intercultural unit. Before this research, I considered myself a very neutral person, someone who never took a radical position to avoid confrontation and someone who was always looking forward meeting everybody's expectations at a personal, professional and social level. I always defined myself as an English teacher and as a woman from the Atlantic coast of Colombia.

My pre-established ideas about myself never let me explore other dimensions of who I am in the past. After understanding, designing and implementing a critical intercultural approach, I truly believe I am an agent of transformation. I have the responsibility and desire of raising awareness of diversity, the dialogue among cultures, the exploration of identities, the deconstruction of power relationships, the problematization of language and culture as dominating forces and other topics inserted in the concept of

critical interculturality. I consider the implementation of this unit also allowed me to explore my identity from the three dimensions I included in this discussion which were taken from the findings of this study.

With this, I can say that assuming a critical intercultural perspective as an English teacher influenced me as a woman and as a human being. I feel empowered and eager to keep working towards the development of a critical intercultural society. English has changed my life since I was a teenager but I never thought it was going to expose me to such a necessary conviction as this proposal presents. I truly believe that once you see the impact on people's lives of what a critical intercultural attitude entails, you cannot ignore the transformation that it provokes.

Conclusions

This research revealed the potential that a critical intercultural approach has to promote individual and social transformation through language learning and teaching. Thanks to the implementation of this study, participants had the opportunity to explore their identities by problematizing concepts such as race, origin, culture, language and even sexual orientation. The ideas they brought about themselves and about the world were revealed and confronted with those expectations their communities, and society in general, established for their future.

At a national level, the findings of this study show how even though important efforts have been made in order to promote equity and fair interactions among diverse cultural and social groups, discrimination and unequal power relations still dominate every day actions which strongly affects the evolution and the recognition of minority groups. Colombia needs to stop hiding these issues behind emancipatory and inclusive discourses that only remain in words and in the ideal of a society. This research specifically calls on the field of foreign language teaching to think about the world, language and education in general from a critical perspective that allows all participants of the teaching and learning process to construct a better society.

In an international setting, this study problematizes the idea of English as a dominant language and promotes the exploration of learners' own culture, language and way of being and living as the starting point of an intercultural dialogue among different

social, cultural and ethnic groups. Countries like Colombia that have been historically Afro and indigenous territories are responsible for looking forward to showing the rest of the world the issues that these communities are still facing and to fighting for the recognition of their diversity as a global matter.

Moreover, it was evident that Bruno, Deisy, Ana, Jefferson and Daniel became aware of problematic relations of power embedded in the interactions among their cultural groups and in the experiences they lived. Besides, they were able to deconstruct stereotypes in relation to culture, uncover inequitable relationships and raise their voices by proposing actions that could be implemented to promote a fairer society. This was possible due to the strong affiliation to the Afro community that all participants experienced throughout this process. Recognizing themselves as Afro descendants in a more conscious and critical manner allowed them to understand the different ways in which power relations are developed and perpetuated. Also, this permitted them to put themselves in the place of those communities that have been marginalized throughout history without this being strictly linked to ideas of race and ethnicity.

Considering the needs society faces of preserving communities' cultural diversity and identity to avoid the homogenization of cultural groups through language and culture, the exploration and recognition of our own identities is crucial. Furthermore, given the necessity of creating spaces for promoting dialogue among communities where domination and power issues are visible, it is extremely valuable to draw on a critical intercultural ideology to carry out teaching practices in EFL classrooms. Also, this research attempted to

avoid perpetuating stereotypes, ideologies and discourses reproduced by English that might cause economic, social and cultural inequities.

It is still problematic for Afro descendants to fight against ages of domination, slavery and marginalization of their communities. The homogenization of cultures keeps being unnoticed and, in many cases, naturalized; this makes racial and ethnic identity identification processes a necessary challenge and a struggle at the same time. Historically undervalued communities do not want to be named as such and members of these groups are reluctant to be identified with their culture for fear of being invisible in society. This tension was evident in the self-recognition process participants experienced and it can justify why some of them were initially apathetic and little interested in exploring their origin.

However, given that the critical intercultural curricular unit implemented promoted equitable relations among cultural and social groups, respect for diversity and the critical analysis of power relations in society, participants understood that exploring who they were, first, it was not exclusively limited to their race and ethnicity, second, their history and origin needed to be critically and proudly embraced, and third, their identity was shaped by different components that overlapped and made them unique.

To investigate through critical intercultural lenses such a complex concept as the process of individual's identity construction, it is essential to understand that critical interculturality is not just a theory for pedagogical purposes as Tubino (2004) points out. It has to be an attitude and a way of seeing life that guides the interaction that teachers and students have inside and outside the classroom and it also has to be transversal to all the

aspects of someone's life. This means that this initiative has to transcend from the educational context to the everyday life of participants. The identity construction process is developed through every simple action human beings do, and language is one of the richest elements that make this process possible to materialize. That is why, from this perspective, English should become a means for contributing to social transformation.

In addition, one of the concerns I had in applying a critical intercultural approach in an English learning and teaching context was the appropriation of English skills students needed to have in order to use language to discuss about deep topics such as power and domination. It is relevant to highlight that the participants of this study were able to use simple grammar structures and vocabulary to talk about stereotypes, marginalized communities, powerful forces and cultures and languages and knowledge domination. Students were able to use the grammar taught to produce basic ideas that compound in a text showed their English learning process and their understanding of the world as well.

Language structures were always part of the resources brought to class and they were presented through different sources such as written and audiovisual material. Comprehension of information was always explored and students also had the opportunity to learn the grammar structures that were incorporated in the curriculum adopted by the institution. However, students could not have been able to use the language taught to participate in class discussions without my support. They were always encouraged to express their ideas in English and used the prompts given and the language previously studied to come up with answers and proposals regarding the topics discussed.

Limitations

It is relevant to mention that a two-month unit implementation was not enough for students to fully develop a critical intercultural attitude because talking about culture, gender, race, domination and identity is a very complex thing to do. Nevertheless, this study opened the door for students to continue exploring their identities and enriching their role as agents of change.

Therefore, as a teacher researcher, I felt I was pushing students to the limit and making them feel overwhelmed by exploring very deep concepts. However, I was convinced about the importance that promoting critical interculturality in an English class had. With the time, students started to talk about very private topics in class and in their journal entries which helped me realize that they were already on board in this process.

Besides, the institution where this research was carried out dubiously allowed this intervention. Taking into consideration that there were policies, language requirements and a fixed syllabus to follow, the lesson planning stage was more demanding than expected. I had to ensure that even though I was promoting a different vision of language and culture in class, students were going to be able to accomplish the language goals established by the scholarship program where this study took place. This situation limited the assessment process carried out and the themes and topics discussed because it was necessary to cover three main topics that restricted, in a way, the dialogue promoted in class. Hence, it was indispensable to find a balance between the institution's requirements and the critical intercultural unit's agenda.

Challenges

To implement a critical intercultural unit, it was essential to establish the principles that were going to guide the teaching and learning process. Such principles had to be transversal to the activities and stages of each of the lessons planned, and also, they guided the materials design process. The planning and designing stages had to be evaluated and contrasted with the principles previously established. To design a critical intercultural unit, there were not procedures neither steps to follow. Even though there were lessons planned in advance, the dialogue promoted in class and the interaction with students determined the path to be followed.

In this research, I faced many challenges. One of them was following the planning process described in the previous paragraph. Thus, designing a critical intercultural unit is very demanding, time consuming and it requires teachers to have a critical intercultural attitude and understand the fine line that exist between similar concepts such as functional interculturality and multiculturalism.

It is important to mention that the designing process of this curricular unit was a key element in understanding how the concept of critical interculturality could be embedded in an English class. When I was able to design material that reflected this perspective, I validated the theory I had read and I could think of different ways of promoting a critical intercultural attitude. I strongly believe that the intervention carried out provided me with clear ideas of what critical interculturality is; I lived it, I promoted it and I understood how complex and difficult it is to become a critical intercultural society. Thanks to the unit

design and implementation I was the first person who reflected, analyzed and had a position in regards to the power issues explored.

Other challenge experienced was to have a clear picture of students' identity construction process and to collect enough data to understand their exploration; this ended up being difficult to achieve because of students' absences. The fact that Ana and Deisy, two of the five selected students missed class regularly, affected their interaction with the group and the development of the sense of community that was promoted during the implementation and hence my data collection process.

As a teacher researcher, in many cases, I felt overwhelmed as well. When doing an intervention, it is required to be very skillful in order to follow all the research protocol without neglecting the teaching practice. In addition, I have to admit that in some situations, I ended up being emotionally affected by students' comments and reactions. I felt powerless to hear all the bad experiences they lived because of their physical appearance, their affiliations to certain cultural groups, and the lack of opportunities their families had.

Moreover, even though participants satisfactorily used English in most of the discussions, activities and interactions promoted, it is still a big challenge to implement a study like this with beginner language learners. It requires extra support to students and carefully planned lessons that allow the use of basic grammar structures such as *can* and *cannot* to deconstruct stereotypes. This demands a lot of creativity from the teacher and willingness to try new things in the classroom like asking students to write their reflections in the journal entries by using the grammar studied.

Finally, I have to acknowledge that it is very difficult to promote discussion and dialogue about identity, to draw from a critical intercultural approach and to be notoriously objective by asking less subjective questions that guide the conversation. I have to recognize that I got involved in some of the interactions students had and by expressing my ideas I could have probably influenced their responses. However, I understood that I was also part of this journey and that even though I had the researcher's role, my identities were also under construction.

Implications

Minority groups have historically been marginalized and they have been deprived of opportunities that are more easily obtained by other cultural groups. In addition, language policies in Colombia demand all communities to learn English as a second language. Nowadays, there are some organizations and institutions interested in providing unprivileged groups opportunities to meet the language requirements set by the national government; however, the English programs that are adopted to teach these communities are not usually adapted or modified to meet these populations' needs. Hence, learners from indigenous and Afro communities do not usually have successful English learning processes.

That is why English programs that are exclusively offered to minority groups must adopt a critical intercultural perspective. In fact, institutions must understand that English cannot be taught as a functional language that only allows learners to achieve economic development. The struggles that the participants of this study had to experience in order to

explore their identities had to do with the discourses sold by the administration in relation to English; a discourse that only aimed at perpetuating ideologies from the dominant social groups that positioned students as workers as it has been done since capitalist ideas dominated society. Recognizing the necessity to reduce the gap between cultures and to promote an equitable dialogue among communities, language institutions must contribute through English teaching to the construction of a fairer society.

Moreover, institutions that aim at empowering learners cannot have fixed syllabi and they cannot only measure students' success by the language level they achieve at the end of the process. In this globalized society in which problematic representations of culture are invisible, it is extremely necessary to use English learning and teaching as a means for deconstructing such representations and avoiding the perpetuation of dominant and discriminatory discourses.

Therefore, institutions must evaluate their curricula, they must carry out research to understand the needs of each of the cultural groups they teach and they must provide teachers with a solid professional development program that contributes to their understanding of the critical interculturality proposal. Teachers should be given spaces to explore and discuss about the concept of interculturality and they should also be guided in the design stage of their critical intercultural lessons.

Finally, institutions, no matter if they are language centers or universities, should carry out research projects that allow them to understand their context and students better and permit their teachers' professional growth. An institution that is not interested in doing research is destined to keep reproducing models that instead of contributing to their

students' learning process are affecting their language learning experiences by ignoring their needs and demands.

Further Research

Developing a critical intercultural attitude is not achieved in two months through just one unit implementation because even though the process starts by achieving awareness of differences and deconstructing and reacting towards problematic power relationships, it is necessary to make the proposal of critical interculturality a core idea of language learners' processes. That is why, it is essential to design a curriculum that looks forward to helping students foster their critical intercultural attitude and encourage them to become active citizens.

For further research, it would be interesting to implement a unit that is not designed by adapting the curriculum already established by the institution but implementing a complete new unit. This might allow deeper exploration of students' identities and it would probably be a more feasible creating process for the teacher. Besides, it would be beneficial to implement a critical intercultural curriculum at a long term because the topics embedded in a critical intercultural proposal are difficult to unveil and complex to deconstruct.

Throughout the implementation of this study, students had to be evaluated in order to measure their English skills as it was requested by the institution. There were assessment tasks applied that the institution designed and other tasks that I created trying to find the balance between language development and an intercultural situation. In this research, there was not time neither permission from the institution to design evaluative activities that were

more aligned to the critical intercultural proposal. Also, as there is not a framework to follow, assessment from this perspective, is still a huge challenge and an unexplored field.

Considering that students are expected to become agents of change after being exposed to a critical intercultural proposal, it would be very enriching if it would be possible to conduct research that overstep the classroom context. In addition, it is important to implement this kind of intervention with a group of language learners that are not necessarily affiliated to a minority group such as the indigenous or Afro community.

To conclude, I will take Tubino's (2004) words to emphasize on the necessity to incorporate the development of a critical intercultural approach in all types of educational settings including language centers. Problematic relations of power are embedded in everyday life interactions and they interfere with the way people understand and read the world. That is why, this can not only be a concern of English teaching but critical interculturality has to become a core concept that guides any teaching and learning experience at any educational level.

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APPENDIX A: COVER LETTER

Medellín, Marzo 02 de 2018

Señora

XXXXX

Coordinadora Académica Programa de Inglés para Niños, Niñas y Jóvenes

XXXXX

Cordial saludo,

Yo, Maure Carolina Aguirre Ortega con C.C. 1067906999 estudiante de la Maestría en Aprendizaje y Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad de Antioquia, solicito su aprobación para desarrollar un estudio investigativo llamado “*Young Afrodescendant EFL learners exploring their identities through a critical intercultural approach*”, con el grupo de 20 estudiantes del programa XXXXX, en calidad de participantes.

Este estudio, que hace parte de los requisitos de grado de la Maestría anteriormente mencionada, busca explorar las identidades de los estudiantes a través de la implementación de una unidad basada en principios de una interculturalidad crítica.

El estudio se llevará a cabo en XXXXX, dado que el programa XXXXX además de promover el aprendizaje del inglés como segunda lengua también busca fortalecer en los participantes temas relacionados a sus identidades individuales y a su identidad cultural como grupo étnico.

En éste contexto, estaré implementando un enfoque intercultural crítico en el desarrollo de las clases comprendidas en los cursos XXXXX y XXXXX, los cuales hacen parte de la carga académica del programa. Se grabarán en audio y video las sesiones de clase con el propósito de recolectar información sobre las manifestaciones del proceso de identificación de los estudiantes. Adicionalmente, se realizarán dos entrevistas a cuatro estudiantes; las entrevistas durarán 35 minutos como máximo. El contenido de las preguntas estará basado en explorar las pre-concepciones de los estudiantes sobre su identidad y cómo sus opiniones varían o se mantienen estables durante la implementación de la unidad.

Toda la información suministrada será conocida y analizada exclusivamente por mi persona y por la doctora Paula Echeverri Sucerquia Directora de la Escuela de Idiomas de la Universidad de Antioquia, en calidad de asesora de éste proyecto de investigación.

La participación en éste proyecto no implica ningún riesgo para la institución ni para los participantes. Adicionalmente, la información recolectada será archivada cuidadosamente bajo un seudónimo para proteger la identidad de la institución, del programa y de los participantes.

Agradezco su colaboración en éste proyecto, y en caso de tener alguna inquietud puede contactarme al siguiente número de contacto: 3005557114 y/ al correo electrónico:

maure.aguirre@udea.edu.co. Asimismo, podrá contactar a mi asesora, la Dra. Paula

Echeverri Sucerquia al correo electrónico paula.echeverri@udea.edu.co

Su firma indica que ha leído este formato, ha tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre la participación de la institución en esta investigación, autoriza el uso de información y voluntariamente da su aprobación.

Firma:

Fecha:

Sinceramente,

Maure Aguirre Ortega

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

Escuela de Idiomas

Maestría en enseñanza y aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras

Formato de consentimiento de los participantes y código de ética

Yo, _____, identificado(a) con número de identidad _____, acepto voluntariamente participar en el estudio investigativo “*Jóvenes Afrodescendientes estudiantes de Inglés como lengua extranjera exploran sus identidades a través de un enfoque intercultural crítico*”, y entiendo que:

1. Ustedes, los estudiantes del programa XXXXX, serán los participantes de éste estudio
2. Para ésta investigación, algunos de ustedes serán escogidos para participar en entrevistas, las cuales serán grabadas en audio. Además, nuestras clases serán grabadas en audio y video. Por último, algunos de ustedes llevarán un diario en donde reflexionarán sobre lo trabajado en clase. Toda la información que yo recolecte luego será analizada rigurosamente.
3. Las preguntas que se les harán en las entrevistas serán relacionadas a las actividades de clase y a sus reflexiones sobre las interacciones que suceden en el transcurso del curso.
4. Toda la información que ustedes me den sólo será analizada única y exclusivamente por mí, y por mi asesora de tesis, la Dra. Paula Echeverri Sucerquia.

5. Sus nombres no serán utilizados. Por el contrario, se utilizarán nombres ficticios para proteger sus identidades.
6. Tu participación es voluntaria y por lo tanto te puedes retirar en cualquier etapa del estudio sin ninguna consecuencia. De igual forma, no se te darán incentivos económicos, beneficios adicionales, ni se presentarán riesgos (de seguridad o psicosociales) que resulten de tu participación en el estudio.
7. En caso de alguna pregunta, me puedes contactar al correo electrónico maure.aguirre@udea.edu.co o al celular 3005557114. De igual manera mi asesora Dra. Paula Echeverri, quien respalda mi estudio, estará disponible en el siguiente correo electrónico paula.echeverri@udea.edu.co, teléfono 2195780 o en la oficina 11-108 de la Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia.
8. Si quieres más información adicional o no estás conforme durante tu participación en éste estudio, puedes contactar al Coordinador de la Maestría, Dr. Jaime Usma Wilches al correo jaime.usma@udea.edu.co, teléfono 2195797, o en la oficina 12-105 Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia.

Tu firma indica que has leído este formato, has tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre tu participación en esta investigación, y voluntariamente aceptas participar en el estudio. En el transcurso de una semana, recibirás una copia de este formato para tus registros.

Nombre del participante (En letra imprenta):

Firma del estudiante:

Firma del acudiente:

Fecha: _____

Firma de la investigadora: _____ Fecha: _____

APPENDIX C: INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Entrevista Inicial

Investigadora: Maure Aguirre Ortega

Pregunta de investigación: ¿Cómo influye un enfoque interculturalidad crítico en la construcción de identidades de jóvenes afrodescendientes aprendices de una lengua extranjera pertenecientes a un programa de becas para aprender inglés?

PROTOCOLO DE ENTREVISTA

Querido estudiante:

Muchas gracias por haber aceptado hacer parte de mi estudio sobre la construcción de identidades de los estudiantes del programa XXXXX. El objetivo de esta entrevista es explorar quién eres y cómo te identificas a nivel individual y grupal. Esta entrevista durará no más de 35 minutos. Será grabada y transcrita por mí. La información que me compartas será confidencial, es decir sólo será conocida por mí y por mi asesora. Tu participación en este estudio es voluntaria y puedes retirarte en cualquier momento.

1. Cuéntanos sobre quién eres, de dónde vienes, háblame de tu familia. (lugar donde nació y creció, familia conformación, ocupación padre, madre, educación, experiencia y desempeño como estudiante en el colegio, etc.)
2. ¿Cómo conociste el programa? ¿Qué te motivó a presentarte a esta beca para estudiar inglés? ¿Qué esperas lograr con el programa?
3. ¿Qué impacto crees que tendrá el hecho de estudiar inglés en tu vida?

4. En cuanto al componente de liderazgo y empoderamiento del programa, ¿Qué esperas aprender?
5. Cuéntame sobre tu comunidad, las personas que te rodean, tus amigos. ¿Te gusta hacer parte de esta comunidad? ¿por qué?
6. En tu colegio, o en tu comunidad o en los grupos de deporte o de actividades extra clase, sientes que desempeñan un rol de líder? en qué sentido? por qué?
Cuéntame sobre las habilidades que tienes para liderar.
7. ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre la metodología del programa?
8. ¿Te ves graduándote de este programa? ¿Qué te ves haciendo una vez te hayas graduado?

APPENDIX D: FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Entrevista Final

Investigadora: Maure Aguirre Ortega

Pregunta de investigación: ¿Cómo influye un enfoque de interculturalidad crítico en la construcción de identidades de jóvenes afrodescendientes aprendices de una lengua extranjera pertenecientes a un programa de becas para aprender inglés?

PROTOCOLO DE ENTREVISTA

Querido estudiante:

Muchas gracias por haber aceptado hacer parte de mi estudio sobre la construcción de identidades de los estudiantes del programa XXXXX. El objetivo de esta entrevista es conocer tu experiencia durante los cursos XXXXX y XXXXX, tu opinión en cuanto a las clases y actividades y conocer un poco sobre tus percepciones y opiniones sobre las discusiones llevadas a cabo en el transcurso de las clases.

Esta entrevista no durará más de 60 minutos. Será grabada y transcrita por mí. La información que me compartas será confidencial, es decir sólo será conocida por mí y por mi asesora. Tu participación en este estudio es voluntaria y puedes retirarte en cualquier momento

UNIDAD INTERCULTURAL CRITICA

1. Me gustaría que me dieras tu opinión sobre estos dos cursos que viste conmigo.
 - ¿Qué dirías que fue lo más importante que aprendiste?

- ¿Qué fue lo que más se te facilitó o dificultó en las clases?
 - ¿Qué impresión tienes sobre las actividades que se propusieron en clase?
2. ¿Qué diferencias y similitudes encuentras entre estos dos cursos que viste conmigo y los cursos anteriores?
- ¿con cuál metodología te sientes más cómodo? ¿Por qué?

Otras preguntas:

- Como profe yo tenía la intención de mostrar otras culturas como protagonistas y promover el diálogo entre culturas y el reconocimiento de las culturas extranjeras y locales, aun cuando teníamos el libro, ¿en qué momentos de la clase viste tú esta intención?

IDENTIDAD

Daniel	<p>1. En la entrevista inicial, me contaste que tu sueño es viajar a Estados Unidos y que el inglés te abriría las puertas para lograr esto. ¿En estos momentos tienes algún otro objetivo o sueño que te gustaría lograr?</p> <p>2. En la primera entrevista, me contaste que te consideras un líder, que ayudas a tus compañeros, que eres muy estudioso, que eres escritor y que los demás te ven como un ejemplo a seguir. Me gustaría que me contaras si te gustaría agregar alguna otra descripción sobre ti.</p> <p>3. Inicialmente, me comentaste que tu comunidad afro-descendiente no es reconocida y que te gustaría lograr un cambio en la sociedad para que tu comunidad tenga más importancia en el mundo. Después de tu experiencia en</p>
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	<p>estos dos cursos, ¿qué opinión tienes sobre tu comunidad? ¿qué cambio te gustaría lograr y cómo crees que es posible?</p> <p>4. Después de tomar estos dos cursos conmigo, me gustaría que me contaras ¿quién es Daniel?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¿Qué descubriste sobre ti? • ¿Qué afirmaste sobre ti? • ¿Qué piensas de ti? • ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención sobre ti?
Jefferson	<p>1. En la entrevista inicial, me contaste que una de tus expectativas con estudiar inglés era que te permitiera ir al exterior. ¿Qué otras expectativas tienes en estos momentos con el aprendizaje del inglés?</p> <p>2. En esa entrevista, me dijiste que en el curso el que estabas, te permitía conocer nuevos amigos y expandir tu círculo social. ¿Qué te permitió estos dos cursos que tomaste conmigo?</p> <p>3. Cuando yo te pregunté si te interesaba tener más presencia de tus raíces afrodescendientes en tu familia, me dijiste que no tanto porque tu familia como estaba, estaba bien y que no te gustaría que fuera de una manera diferente. En estos momentos, ¿piensas lo mismo?</p>

	<p>4. En la entrevista anterior, te describiste como un deportista y como una persona realista. Después de tomar estos dos cursos conmigo, me gustaría que me contarás ¿quién es Jefferson?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¿Qué descubriste sobre ti? • ¿Qué afirmaste sobre ti? • ¿Qué piensas de ti? • ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención sobre ti?
Bruno	<p>1. En la entrevista inicial, me comentaste que tienes curiosidad por conocer más sobre tu familia de Chocó ya que recientemente tu mamá pudo también conocerlos. En estos últimos dos meses, ¿Qué has podido conocer de tus raíces?</p> <p>2. En esa entrevista me contaste que una de las razones por las que ingresaste al programa es para aprender inglés y así ayudar a turistas aquí en Medellín cuando lo necesiten. Después de tu experiencia en estos cursos, ¿qué otras expectativas tienes al aprender inglés?</p> <p>3. Me contaste que tu gran sueño es ir a Estados Unidos, conocer los famosos y aprender de actuación. En estos momentos, ¿tienes algún otro sueño que quieras compartir conmigo?</p> <p>4. En la primera entrevista, me contaste que te sentías menos identificado con la comunidad afro y que consideras que ellos han perdido su identidad.</p>

	<p>Me dijiste que te ves como un colaborador y como un adolescente que le gusta ayudar a los demás. Después de tomar estos dos cursos conmigo, me gustaría que me contarás ¿quién es Bruno?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¿Qué descubriste sobre ti? • ¿Qué afirmaste sobre ti? • ¿Qué piensas de ti? • ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención sobre ti? <p>5. En esta entrevista me contaste que tu rol es el de ayudar en todo lo que se pueda en tu comunidad. En estos momentos ¿qué rol asumes? ¿Qué rol te gustaría asumir en un futuro cercano?</p>
Deisy	<p>1. En la entrevista inicial, me contaste que te sentiste discriminada en tu colegio por ser afrodescendiente y que eso al principio te afectó mucho pero luego te ayudó a ser más fuerte. ¿Cómo te sentiste durante estos dos cursos que tomaste conmigo? sentiste que esto cambió o sigue igual, también en este grupo?</p> <p>2. Una de las razones por las que ingresaste al programa fue porque quieres luchar por los derechos de tu comunidad y que el inglés te ayudaría para visitar otros países y dar a conocer tu sueño. ¿Qué otras metas tienes en estos momentos al aprender inglés?</p>

	<p>3. En la primera entrevista te describiste como una soñadora, como una persona alegre, orgullosa de sus raíces afro. Después de tomar estos dos cursos conmigo, me gustaría que me contarás ¿quién es Deisy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¿Qué descubriste sobre ti? • ¿Qué afirmaste sobre ti? • ¿Qué piensas de ti? • ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención sobre ti? <p>4. En esta entrevista mencionaste que te gustaría hacer un programa similar a este, ¿Qué temas te gustaría incluir en este programa?</p> <p>5. Anteriormente me contaste que tu comunidad afro está muy abandonada por el gobierno y que también tienen que trabajar para dejar de tener situaciones llenas de violencia, después de estos dos cursos que tomaste, ¿qué piensas de tu comunidad?</p>
Ana	<p>1. En la entrevista inicial, me manifestaste que no te gusta compartir con personas de la comunidad afro porque no te gusta su forma de ser. Después de tomar estos dos cursos conmigo, ¿qué opinión tienes sobre la comunidad afro?</p> <p>2. En esa entrevista me contaste que te identificas como paisa porque te rodeas de personas de Medellín y porque naciste aquí. Después de tomar estos dos cursos conmigo, me gustaría que me contarás ¿quién es Ana?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¿Qué descubriste sobre ti? • ¿Qué afirmaste sobre ti? • ¿Qué piensas de ti? • ¿Qué es lo que más te llama la atención sobre ti? <p>3. También mencionaste que quieres aprender inglés para tener mejores oportunidades laborales. En estos momentos, ¿qué otras cosas te gustaría lograr por medio del inglés?</p> <p>4. En la primera entrevista me manifestaste que tu rol más importante es el de hermana mayor. ¿Qué otros roles asumes en estos momentos?</p>
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LIDERAZGO

1. Aparte de enseñar inglés, ¿sabes cuál es el otro objetivo del programa?. En estos dos cursos que tomaste conmigo, ¿cómo viste el tema de liderazgo?
2. ¿Consideras que estás desarrollando habilidades de liderazgo?
 - ¿Qué habilidades?
 - ¿Con qué propósitos?
3. ¿Qué te hace falta para lograr los objetivos del programa en cuanto al componente de liderazgo?

APPENDIX E: LESSON PLAN

<p>Main aim:</p> <p>Students will discuss about different kinds of knowledge and how they have been valued or undervalued by society</p>
<p>Subsidiary aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Students will use present progressive tenses to describe what is happening at the moment● Students will ask Wh and yes/no questions using present progressive
<p>Principles of identity:</p> <p>“Identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 9)</p>
<p>Principles of critical interculturality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● La IC permite re-conceptualizar y re-fundar modos de pensar, actuar y vivir (Walsh, 2010)● La IC promueve la lectura crítica del mundo para comprender, reaprender y actuar en el presente (Walsh, 2010)● La IC promueve el diálogo entre las diferencias (Walsh, 2010)
<p>Research aim:</p> <p>To explore students’ representations about types of knowledge and cultural differences</p>

Materials (including source):

- PPT: After listening
- PPT: Indigenous knowledge
- PPT: What is knowledge?
- Worksheet 1: While listening
- Worksheet 2: Letter template
- Worksheet 3: Chart_Journal entry 6
- Video: students from Leticia, Amazon
- Papers, markers and tape
- PPT: Who is a knowledgeable person?
- PPT: Agree or disagree?

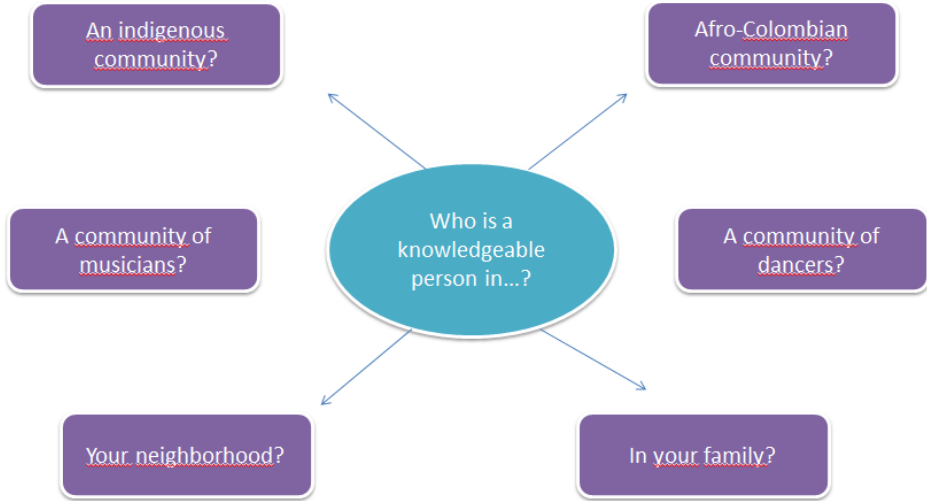
STAGE	PROCEDURE
Homework check	<p>The teacher asks students to open their books on page 91. They socialize the answers first and then they listen to the corresponding audio to check their responses.</p> <p>The teacher gives students time to ask her questions related to grammar or vocabulary they might have had while working on this homework.</p>
Listening exercise	<p>1. The teacher writes on the board:</p> <p>“ A knowledge person is”</p>

(Pre-listening)

The teacher gives students poststicks to write down a characteristic of a knowledgeable person. Students have to paste the poststick on the board.

The teacher reads students' ideas

2. The teacher asks students to think if these characteristics apply for all the cultural groups that they know. The teacher asks them:



The teacher also asks them to think about the characteristics and abilities that these people have.

The teacher asks students if they consider themselves knowledgeable people.

3. The teacher tells students that one of the definitions of who a knowledgeable person is like is connected to science and scientific

	<p>knowledge which has been proposed by fields of study that involve medicine, chemistry, engineering, genetics and others. She tells them that they are going to listen to an article about Robert Wood who is a National Geographic explorer and an electrical engineer. The teacher asks them to open their books on page 92 and take a look at Robert's photo and read description of what he does. The teacher also asks them to analyze Robert from what they can see in the picture.</p>
<p>Listening exercise (While-listening)</p>	<p>4. While listening to the audio, students are asked to complete the graphic organizer using key words.</p> <p>5. Students listen to the audio twice and then they socialize their answers.</p>
<p>Listening exercise (After-listening)</p>	<p>6. The teacher asks students if they find what Robert does interesting. She asks them to justify their answers. Now the teacher asks students to think if in order to do what Roberts does it is necessary to have a certain type of knowledge. In small groups, students have to discuss about the questions presented in the ppt: After_Listening</p> <p>7. The teacher opens up the discussion and she tells students that there is a constant debate about the type of knowledge that should be accepted as valid. Many people believe scientific knowledge is more important than what people call indigenous knowledge. The teacher</p>

asks them to think about the differences between these two conceptions of knowledge. The teacher asks students to try to describe what can be considered indigenous knowledge.

8. The teacher presents a video where former students from a program called English for girls and which is implemented in Leticia, in the Amazon and who have indigenous backgrounds talk about what knowledge is for their communities. The teacher asks students to think if the type of knowledge these students talked about is similar to the kind of knowledge the book presents.

The teacher asks students to think how different these two ideas of knowledge are. Then, he asks them to think why the textbook only presents the knowledge about science.

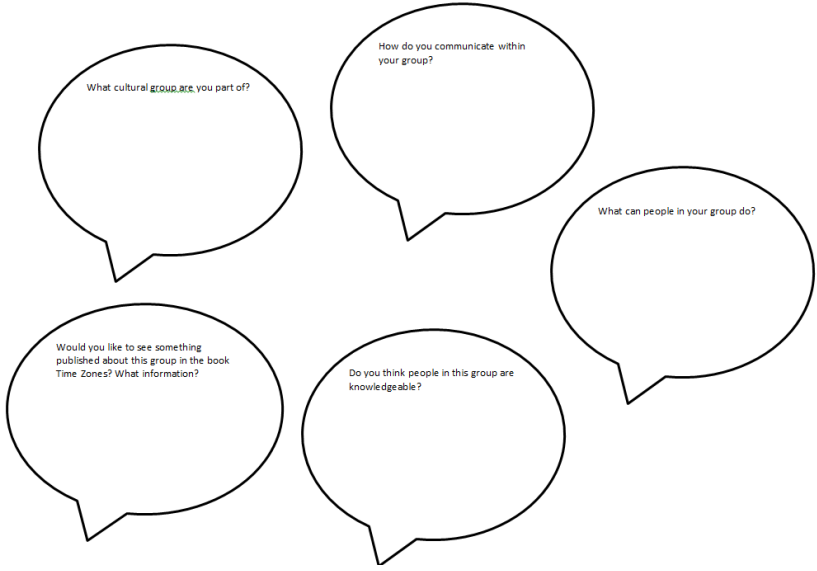
9. Now the teacher asks them to think about their communities. She asks them to reflect on the knowledge their ancestors and/or grandparents have. She gives students a chart where they can write 4 things they consider their communities/ancestors are knowledgeable about.

	<div data-bbox="613 220 1295 840" data-label="Diagram"> </div> <p data-bbox="516 913 727 949">(*See materials)</p> <p data-bbox="565 997 1458 1470">10. The teacher gives students 5 minutes to share their ideas with the person they have next to them. The teacher asks students if they had the opportunity to write an article similar to one they listened about Robert and RoboBeets but about the type of knowledge they consider should also be taken into account, what they would write about and why. The teacher asks students to share their ideas with the whole class.</p>
<p data-bbox="272 1522 349 1554">Class</p> <p data-bbox="272 1591 418 1623">Discussion</p>	<p data-bbox="565 1522 1458 1627">1. The teacher tells students that they are going to see some pictures about indigenous people doing activities in their everyday life. The</p>

	<p>teacher asks students to answer the questions they have in the ppt named “Indigenous knowledge”.</p> <p>Taking into consideration that students have to answer these questions using the present progressive tense explained in the previous class, the teacher will take advantage of this and she reviews this tense. She takes advantage of this and she asks students to come up with other example about activities people from their communities might have been doing in the moment. The teacher writes students’ ideas on the board and highlights the use of the present progressive tense.</p> <p>2. At the end of the ppt, students will be asked to think if what they see indigenous people doing is considered “valid” knowledge. The teacher shows students some phrases people have said about scientific knowledge. She asks them to say if they agree or disagree with the statements. (*See materials: PPT). The teacher promotes the discussion about what kind of knowledge is privilege in our context.</p> <p>3. The teacher encourages students to think about what they can do in order to promote the awareness of the different ways and concepts of knowledge at the Colombo. The teacher proposes students to do a campaign in which they problematize the concept of knowledge, ways</p>
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	<p>of communication and technology. Students can work in small groups and address one of these three topics.</p>
Preparation and design	<p>1. The teacher would like students to come up with ideas for sharing what has been discussed in class with other people. While students are preparing their part, the teacher will invite other groups, teenagers and adults, to pass by the classroom to contribute to the discussion. The teacher will mention this activity the class before to find out information about how students would like to carry out this part of the class, so she has an idea on how it will work and what to do in terms of logistics.</p>
Implementation	<p>2. Students from other groups will be invited to discuss the topics mentioned about with my students. Teachers and students invited will be encouraged to ask questions, give their opinions and contribute to the discussion. Students can be organized in station which will facilitate interaction and the logistics of the activity.</p>
Reflection activity	<p>3. The teacher asks students to form small groups (4-5 students) to analyze what happens during the implementation stage. The teacher asks them to come up with conclusions or interesting ideas and opinions they got from the socialization of what they have been discussing in class related to technology, communication and knowledge.</p>

<p>Writing exercise (writing process)</p>	<p>students to write a letter for the XXXXX publishing house expressing omission of other types of knowledge, other ways of communicating and technology and the impact it has on different cultural groups. The teacher and letter proposing what can be included in the textbook and also trying to raise bias and stereotypical topics proposed by the book.</p> <p>Students have to think about these guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mention if you feel represented in the pictures and topics proposed by the textbook for this course and why you feel this way ● Mention what you consider important to be incorporated in the textbook and support your idea ● Talk about the possible emphasis of topics such as technology, communication and knowledge ● Request the incorporation of different cultural practices and groups to the themes and topics proposed. <p>The teacher will help students with the structure of the text. She will help students adding the information requested and also using proper structures and vocabulary to convey the message. They will write the letter on the board, so all the participants could contribute. Once the letter is ready, the teacher will be in charge of typing it and sending it to the NatGeo publishing house.</p>
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	<p>(*see material to find the template of the letter which will help students use basic language to express their message)</p>
<p>Journal Entry # 6</p>	<p>Students are asked to work on the worksheet provided. (*See materials)</p>  <p>The worksheet contains five speech bubbles with the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What cultural group are you part of? How do you communicate within your group? What can people in your group do? Would you like to see something published about this group in the book Time Zones? What information? Do you think people in this group are knowledgeable?
<p>Homework</p>	<p>Students are asked to read the article on page 94 and answer the comprehension questions about the text on page 96</p>

APPENDIX F: READING HANDOUT 1

Zhou Zhou, The Conductor



Zhou Zhou has an extraordinary talent — he can't read music but he can memorize the melodies of songs after he listens to them.

He was born with Down syndrome on 1979 in Wuhan, Hubei province in China. His IQ is just 30% that of a normal person. He can't say how old he is and he can't count money.

However, he can tell you all the parts of the instruments in a symphony.

Zhou Zhou is from a country “where people with mental disabilities were *misunderstood* and *marginalized*.” Some people say that Zhou Zhou can't do things or that he is not intelligent. Some other people say that he does not have a talent. Some parents say to their kids that they can't play with Zhou Zhou; some others say that Zhou Zhou can't be friends with their children. Some people say that it is impossible to be Chinese and to have Down syndrome.

When Zhou Zhou was a little boy, people rejected him. Nowadays, some people still call him “idiot”. Zhou Zhou can do many things. He can be disciplined, he can practice all day, he can give a great concert and he can teach people what he knows.

Taken and adapted from: <https://goo.gl/Xz8U5J> and <https://goo.gl/C8hXQM>

WHILE-READING: complete the chart with the information about what Zhou Zhou can and can't do. Use complete sentences.

What can Zhou Zhou do?	What can't Zhou Zhou do?
a.	a.
b.	b.

AFTER-READING:

- Imagine that a person you know has the characteristics describes in the column "characteristics". What do you think people think about this person? Write your ideas in the second column. Use the prompts to guide your answers.

Characteristics	What do people think?
a. His/her IQ is just 30% that of a normal person	He/she is...
b. He/she has an extraordinary talent	He/she can...

c. He/she is rejected	Because...
d. Some people call him/her "idiot"	Because...

2. In the text, in paragraph numbers 3, there are two words in *italics* and underlined. Use the context of the reading to define what *misunderstood* and *marginalized* mean. You can also use your dictionary.

- *Misunderstood*: _____

- *Marginalized*: _____

APPENDIX G: READING HANDOUT 2

A South African trip

Hello!

My name is Zulu. I am a Young South African woman. I am 14 years old. I speak IsiZulu which is my home language; however, I also speak English fluently. I am a rap lover, I like to sing in the church choir and I am a member of a student activist group. I am in 12th grade and I study in a non-racial school. I have an older and a younger sister. I work in a supermarket helping people pack what they buy. One of my favorite things to do is to read the Sowetan daily newspaper.

After saving money for a year, in December 2017 I went to Mthatha, South Africa to visit the Nelson Mandela's museum. These are the pictures that I saw when I walked around the city of Mthatha:



I was amazed by everything I saw and learned. I wanted to visit this city because thank to Mandela's contribution in South Africa I can study in a non-racial school. This means that people from different races study together in the same school and co-exist respectfully. However, it was not always like that. In the past, before the Apartheid ended, black and white people did not study in the same school. In 1994, there was a strongly divided society of black and people who were separated into different neighborhoods and institutions. During this period, many black people did not have access to education. My people lived in a very discriminatory and oppressed society.

In the Nelson Mandela's museum, I read a lot of information about his live. For example, I learned that he was in prison for 27 years because he tried to defend people and eliminate the Apartheid movement. When he left prison, he became the first black president of South Africa. Mandela fought against racial discrimination and he was respected by people because he brought peace to the country.

There are many things I saw, listened to and learned that I can sit with you and talk to you for hours. The most important thing is that this was the best trip of my life! Well, it is the only trip I have done but it was great.

READING COMPREHENSION

1. Complete the following graphic organizer with the information from the text. Use complete ideas.

Where did she go?

Zulu's trip

Why did she like this place?

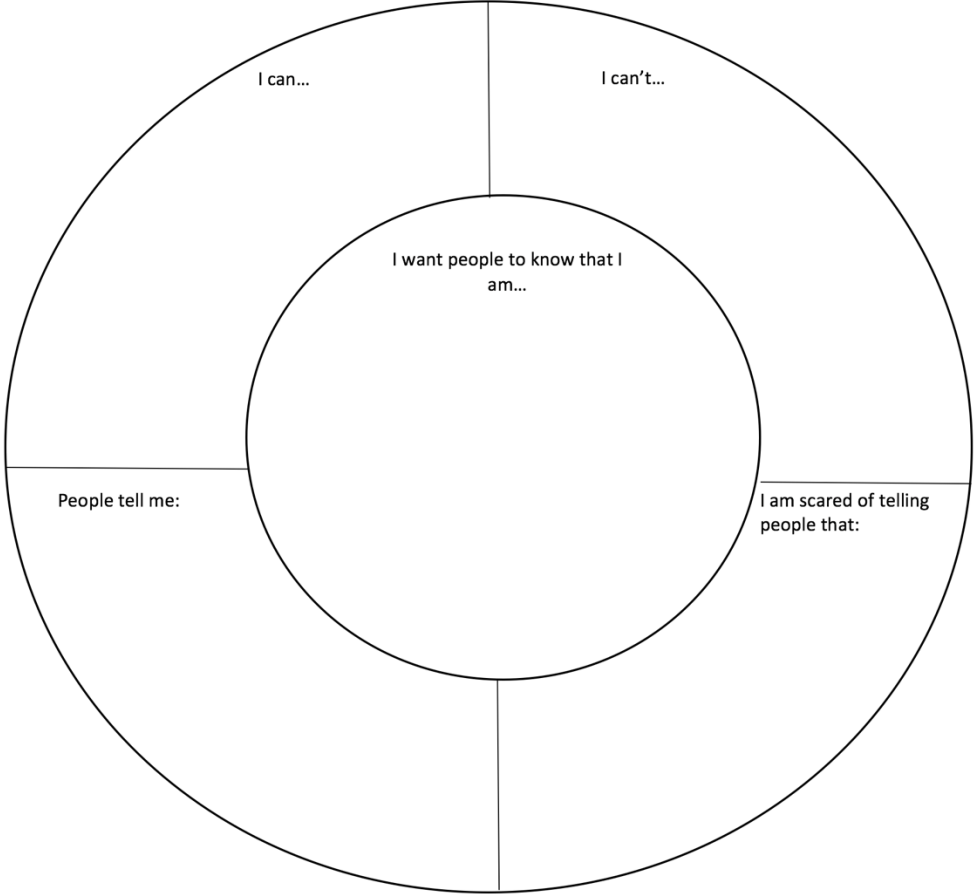
Why was Mandela an important person for Zulu?

2. Answer these questions based on your own opinion:

a. What do you think about Zulu?	
b. Would you like to visit Mthatha, South Africa? Why?	
c. What is your opinion regarding the Apartheid?	
d. How was the society during the Apartheid?	

<p>e. In our society, do we live similar situations like the ones people lived during the Apartheid?</p>	
<p>f. Is it important to know our history? Why?</p>	

APPENDIX H: JOURNAL ENTRY 1



APPENDIX I: JOURNAL ENTRY 7

IN MY DAILY LIFE



I am a **TOPDOG** when...

- *
- *
- *
- *
- *

I am an **UNDERDOG** when...

- *
- *
- *
- *
- *

APPENDIX J: STUDENTS' WORK

Students: XXXXX - TEENAGERS	
WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK...	WHAT WE THINK...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People think that we can be as they want 2. People think that we can have a good future 3. People think that we can't make our own decisions 4. People think that we can't be autonomous 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We think that we can enjoy every moments 2. We think that we can get ahead 3. We think that we can't give up in any situation 4. We think that we can't give up our dreams

Students: XXXXX - WOMEN	
WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK...	WHAT WE THINK...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People think they can only be house wife 2. They can only be mothers 3. People think they can't be independent 4. They can't be presidents 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We think they can be leaders 2. They can do everything they want 3. We think they can't give up 4. They can't stop dreaming

Students: XXXXX - EMPLOYEES AND BOSSES

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK...	WHAT WE THINK...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They can work hard (employees) 2. They are a great help (employees) 3. The bosses are cruel with employees 4. Some bosses are omnipotent 5. Employees can't give orders 6. Bosses can't threaten employees 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The workers try too hard 2. Some workers don't do their jobs well 3. Some bosses encourage their employees 4. The employees can't shout at costumers 5. Bosses can't be poor

Students: XXXXX - SPORTSPEOPLE

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK...	WHAT WE THINK...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They can take their body to the limit 2. They can travel a lot 3. They can't eat candy 4. They can't be example to others 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They can do incredible things 2. They can get tired of training 3. They can't fight 4. They can't have private life