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Identifying and Reflecting on Representations of Indigenous People and Peasants using  
Critical Multimodal Storytelling

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### **Abstract**

This action-research aimed at identifying and reflecting on ideas, assumptions and generalities about Colombian indigenous communities and peasants using Multimodal Storytelling. It was conducted in a public school in Rionegro, Antioquia with 25 third graders. Action strategies included involvement and exploration of students' ideas and assumptions about indigenous people and peasants. Data gathering instruments included teacher's journal, questionnaires, students' artefacts, and interviews. Findings referred to four cases-participants, including me; as follows: From Intransitive Thought to "I changed my Mind", From Semi Transitive to "Knowing about Them Is Knowing more about History", From Stereotypes to a Reflective Thought, and Me as the teacher from Semi Transitive Thought to Action as Part of the Reflective Thought.

*Keywords:* Multimodal Storytelling, reflection, generalization, indigenous communities

**Degree requirement**

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree in foreign language education (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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Finally, I want to thank my students who participated in this research project for being part of this process that contributed to my personal and professional growth.

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### **Preface**

I am a student of foreign languages teaching program from a public university in Antioquia, Colombia. I am a teacher interested in learning more about the power of languages in societies. The desire for this research has originally come from my willingness for researching and writing on social issues in Colombia from a critical perspective and exploring the applicability of critical approaches for language acquisition in young learners in the EFL context. This research study was carried out from late January to late November in 2022. As a pre-service teacher, I conducted the project in a public school in Rionegro, Antioquia and I was assigned to observe a group of 26 third graders. This research project is mainly addressed to educators, who acknowledge the importance of agency in the teaching practices and learning experiences in EFL contexts.

María Valentina Jurado Castaño

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### **Description of the Context**

The institution where this action research was carried out was a rural public school with 506 students, located in the countryside of Rionegro, Antioquia (Colombia). The school mission is to promote the integral and inclusive development of students as well as to promote the development of skills in basic, citizenship and labor competences. As for the vision, by 2021, the school wanted to be recognized as an educational entity that promoted the development of cooperative relations between the members of the educational community, industrial and tourist development of the region. (Institución Educativa Antonio Donado Camacho, 2022).

Concerning the class, it was a 3rd grade and lessons were one time per week in 120-minute period. The main guidelines for the development of the objectives, contents and competences for the school year are based on the Basic Learning Rights (Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje) by Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN). The methodology most used was Direct Method in which its focus is on learning the language through visual aids, sounds or demonstrations to illustrate meaning, as well as props, images, or gestures are used to incorporate the words or concepts. Besides, listening, pronunciation and repetition are prioritized to learn how the language is used.

Participants in this study included 22 students and my cooperating teacher (CT). Students were 6 girls and 16 boys, whose ages ranged between 8 and 10. Most of them are middle-low class students and come from the urban areas in Rionegro. They like to learn English through videos, stories, role plays and in teamwork. Regarding my cooperating teacher, she holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with English Emphasis. She has thirty years of teaching experience, four of them in the current institution (CT, personal communication, March 17, 2022).



The major problem that I have observed in this class was the lack of class spaces for students to speak and reflect on the language contents of the class and on what is embedded in their life. Its causes were the lack of opportunities to ask questions, to interact with their classmates, and the lack of adapted materials for students to learn English in context. Likewise, the preference of translating, transcribing and repeating vocabulary affects students' capacity for thinking and reflecting not only on their learning process of the language as young learners but also on their background and concerns as young children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

During the observations period, I could identify that privileged silence and well behavior are limiting students' opportunities to reflect, question and speak about their contexts and class contents from different perspectives. This is mainly due to the repetition of isolated vocabulary, the lack of chances to use the language in context, as well as the lack of adapted material in the English class.

To internalize vocabulary, the repetition of isolated words characterized the English class, restricting opportunities to reflect and discuss about class contents and students' interests. This issue is evident in the observations' descriptions, where I registered that "students had a worksheet where they had to follow instructions to color a part of the face 'eyes blue', 'mouth red'. In the middle of the work, students started asking questions like 'teacher, who taught men to write?'. Although this question aroused the curiosity of other students, "the teacher only looks at them and does not say anything but silenced them instead: 'Alright, that is enough. Be quiet and continue working'". At that point, their chances to reflect were neglected to prioritize the repetition of isolated words (Observation excerpt, February 23, 2022).

In addition, due to the prioritization of the repetition of isolated words, the language taught in the classes was not contextualized. The consequence of this is that the knowledge learned in the English class might not be relevant to students, negatively affecting their encouragement and the opportunity of using that knowledge in real-life settings. Lynch (2016) states that in a social constructivism framework, knowledge results from many social interactions and shared experiences with language use, in place of resulting just from individual experiences. Thus, the aids and props used in class “help students understand the meaning of the vocabulary and the topic they are learning, [...] but students would be more engaged, and the material and the activities will be more meaningful to them, finding connections with the real world.” (Observation excerpt, March 7, 2022).

Furthermore, the material used in the classes is not adapted to students’ needs and interests, affecting their engagement towards it. The materials used in class were mostly copies taken from textbooks or web pages without adaptations. Consequently, students were sometimes distracted during worksheet activities leading them to pose random questions and conversations. (Observation excerpts, February 11, February 21, February 28, March 7· April 1, April 8, 2022). This showed students’ lack of engagement with the material, in addition to a lack of comprehension of its purpose and affinity to their interests and needs. Duarte and Escobar (2008) suggest that one of the main elements of a language class is the material, since it not only supports the teaching process, but it can also affect students’ motivation in a positive or negative way.

Critical pedagogies used in the language classroom through storytelling offer opportunities to use language in real-life contexts, to adapt material, and open spaces for students to reflect and question about class contents and their contexts from different perspectives.

Besides, according to Lopez-Ladino (2017) Storytelling can become a moment of dialogue between reality and fantasy, and between classroom and family situations, values, knowledge, and learning. Lastly, Critical Multimodal Storytelling is a methodology that allows the implementation of different activities and materials through stories, giving spaces for identifying social issues and reflecting on the world. Telling a story is also telling a vision of the world (Andrews, Hull & Donahue, 2009; Barton, 2000; Boltman, 2001, as cited in Lopez-Ladino, 2017). Therefore, Critical Pedagogy used in the language classroom through Storytelling aims to link students' contexts and language learning needs to the stories in the English classroom. Some theoretical features of these strategies are discussed in the next section.

### **Theoretical Background**

In this section, I introduce the theoretical bases on three core concepts that guide this action research. Firstly, the concept of Storytelling and the guidelines for its implementation in the EFL classrooms are stated. Secondly, Multimodal Storytelling is explored. Thirdly, Critical Pedagogy and its strategies are similarly stated. Finally, I propose the concept of Critical Multimodal Storytelling that could foster students' identification and reflection on adapted stories about representations of Colombian indigenous people and peasants.

First, different authors have defined the concept of Storytelling in the language classroom. One of them is Lopez-Ladino (2017). She states that the concept of Storytelling "is an umbrella term that can be used in different contexts and for different purposes" (p. 9). Some other authors state that, historically, tales and stories have always been an essential part of our humanness; specially to preserve the history, traditions, desires, and taboos of their social groups (Dujmović, 2006). This last author defines that, particularly in the language learning and teaching field,

Storytelling might serve as a method for language development of young children offering opportunities to understand the world, the history, traditions, desires, and taboos of their social groups. For instance, according to Rahiem (2021), Storytelling is considered an educational strategy that significantly improves language acquisition in young children. This strategy helps them learn and appreciate the world and promotes moral and social development.

In fact, Storytelling is a method of EFL teaching that offers advantages in the language classrooms. According to Dujmović (2006) stories are motivating and fun creating positive attitudes and desire to learn the foreign language and language learning. Besides, listening, reading and writing stories provoke a social and emotional experience that can help build up children's confidence and encourage social and emotional development. Moreover, the natural repetition of vocabulary and structures help children acquire and reinforce language items, semantics and gradually learn to anticipate what is about to happen next in the story.

Additionally, Storytelling allows to introduce new vocabulary and sentence structures by offering language in varied, memorable, and familiar contexts, enriching children's thinking and their own speech.

Equally, some actions are required to guarantee the achievement of the goals and purposes in terms of language acquisition in Storytelling. The framework proposed by Dujmović (2006) is the guideline to make stories more accessible to young learners in an EFL context:

- Help students be involved is important to provide a context for the story and link it to students' experiences and real life. After, introduce the characters and elicit key vocabulary to involve students in predicting and participating in the story.
- Provide visual support; images, objects, masks.

- Identify the language features your students need to comprehend the story:  
lexical set, language functions and structures.
- Decide the follow-up activities to offer students opportunities to use the language.
- Make sure students understand the objectives of the lesson and its relation with the story.
- Adapt the story to make it more accessible to your students.
- Support stories with other materials to reinforce the language.

Regarding to the concept of Multimodality, “it is the integration of a set of modes (e.g., sound, color, text, images, etc.) as resources for sending a message” (Mejía-Vélez & Salazar Patiño, 2014, p. 1). In other words, a multimodal approach of Storytelling means different modes to tell stories and to create meaning. Lopez-Ladino (2017) states that Multimodal Storytelling “is a teaching strategy that mixes storytelling and multimodality. It relies on different ways to present a story by integrating modes, such as: gestures, audio, videos, images, labels, words, textures, or smells to create meaning, in this case, the story” (p. 12). Multimodal Storytelling allows children to experience the stories and the language through a more sensorial way (visual, hear, touch) which can, indeed, make those experiences more meaningful.

A third approach that better helps me with the objective of guiding students and I to identify and reflect about our representations of indigenous people and peasants is Critical Pedagogy. It began in the early 70’s with Paulo Freire’s work, a Brazilian educator whose ideas suggest a transformation of oppressed people to allow them to be subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation instead of being objects of education. (Aliakbari et al, 2011). In that sense, CP in

education becomes the opportunity for social transformation of the relations of power and inequality while emancipating and empowering learners. In this regard, Freire (1970) proposes an education for what he calls *conscientização* (for conscientization), which is “[...] the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality.” (Freire, 1970, as cited in Cruz, 2013).

As part of the basis of *conscientização* Freire proposes different levels of consciousness namely, intransitive, semi transitive, and critical consciousness. The lowest level of consciousness is Intransitive Consciousness in which individuals accept their lives as they are. (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011) The changes that might happen in their lives do not depend on them but as a result of magic or miracles. They do not make any attempt to change their life conditions and they are not able to identify the causes and origins of those conditions (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011) The next level is Semi transitive consciousness which is characterized by the “over-simplification of problems; by a lack of interest in investigation, accompanied by an accentuated taste for fanciful explanations; by fragility of argument; by a strongly emotional style”. (Freire, 1970) People with this kind of consciousness are able to identify problems around them and are able to change one thing at a moment. (Aliakbari, et al, 2011). The third level is Critical consciousness in which the subject intends an extensive interpretation and analyzation of reality of problems and is able to “make connections between their problems and the social context in which these problems are embedded.” (Aliakbari, et al, 2011) The subject is also open to “test one’s findings and by openness to revisions; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them.” (Freire, 1970)

Despite of the levels of consciousness being classified as linear and progressive levels, they

do not presuppose an established criterion. For reaching the different levels of consciousness, it might imply different processes in the middle involving a possible incorporation of aspects from the different levels. For that reason, the boundaries between levels are not rigid and there can be a certain amount of overlap. (Roberts, 2010). In addition, an individual can exhibit characteristics of different levels of consciousness, different with respect to the sphere of that person's life under examination (Roberts, 2010, p.153)

Those levels of consciousness in this study attend to analyze how students identify and reflect on the different stories about indigenous people and peasants in Colombia. Having that in mind, the concepts proposed by Freire are adapted for the purposes and objectives of this study by naming them according to the main characteristics that are going to be analyzed: Intransitive Consciousness as Intransitive Thought, Semi transitive Consciousness as Semi transitive Thought and Critical consciousness as Reflective Thought. As an illustration, students' and my ideas are going to be analyzed separately as thoughts to observe how those ideas changed over time and not as whole as permanent consciousness.

In this study, I propose three stages based on the strategies by O'Brien and Vasquez (1996, as cited in Literacy GAINS, 2009) which can be taught to primary students using all manner of texts to provide opportunities for students to reflect and draw their own ideas and views of the world and the implications for themselves and others. The first stage is Exploration, the second Identification, and the third is Reflection. Some strategies they propose include the following: a) presenting, comparing and contrasting texts on a similar topic to explore possible perspectives and points of view; b) exposing predictions to identify assumptions about the text; d) examining alternative endings to highlight implicit values and societal expectations; e) applying everyday life texts to show that these are not neutral by nature and to decode and identify social and power

relations; f) posing questions and engaging students to pose questions to problematize and evoke thinking about issues of text and power (e.g. what view of the world and what values does the text present?) In the first stage, we will explore perspectives, points of view and assumptions; In the second stage Identification we will decode and analyze the stories and propose alternative endings. In the last stage, Reflection, we will problematize stories and the initial points of views and assumptions.

In contemplation of previous ideas, the concept of Critical Multimodal Storytelling in this study, is undertaken to offer stories to students to learn and teach the language that come in different modes such as gestures, audio, videos, images, labels, words, textures, and so on; that are linked to students' real life and context to foster the identification and reflection on the representation of indigenous and peasants. This allows students to get involved and participate in the story by learning, exploring the language, exploring their points of view and assumptions, as well as predicting alternative endings and posing questions about the story text. Students' language needs are prioritized to favor its acquisition and the comprehension of the story; after that, they have spaces to identify, reflect and problematize implicit values and issues of language, text, and power. Lopez-Ladino (2017) suggests that:

Storytelling helps children to learn a language, multimodality facilitates the understanding of messages, literacy promotes the reading of the word and the world, and critical approaches allow them to make their voices heard and act in the world. (p. 19)

Therefore, engaging in Critical Multimodal Storytelling allows students to understand the language as a social practice through the transformation and reconstruction of ideas and texts to challenge the status quo.



### **Research Question**

How can the use of Critical Multimodal Storytelling help third graders and I identify and reflect on representations of indigenous people and peasants in Colombia?

### **General objective**

To analyze how my third graders and I identify and reflect about representations of indigenous people and peasants in Colombia using Critical Multimodal Storytelling

### **Specific objectives**

To identify how Critical Multimodal Storytelling promotes students' reflection about indigenous people and peasants in Colombia.

To analyze students' and my reflections in light of Freire's levels of consciousness.

To understand how Storytelling helps students portray and/or question their representation of indigenous people and peasants in Colombia.

### **Action Plan**

In order to answer the research question stated for this project, three actions were developed from September to November. The first action was the development of activities where representations of students' ideas were presented by drawings, puppets and their own creation of written stories, focused on exploring students' assumptions and initial points of view about Colombian indigenous people and peasants. The second action was the adaptation of stories and representations of those communities throughout history presenting them in hand with some multimodal aids, props and materials aiming at identifying and naming possible issues related to indigenous communities and peasants in Colombian. The third action was the creation

of students' proposals of alternative endings to the stories and reflections to offer students' spaces to reflect on their own assumptions about Colombian indigenous people and peasants through a variety of activities about the stories presented. Besides, the lexical set, language functions and structures were provided through follow-up activities to reinforce students' usage of the language during the three different actions developed.

Data was collected through memos, video recordings, students' artifacts, students' reflections and a questionnaire. These aimed at, on the one hand, evidencing students' reactions, attitudes, responses, points of view and assumptions towards the topics and the issues being discussed. And on the other hand, evidencing students' oral and written production or use of the language by using simple structures to talk about the issues presented in class. Another purpose was to analyze how Multimodal Storytelling promotes students' reflection about the issues being discussed, and to analyze the impact that Critical Pedagogy through Multimodal Storytelling has on students' development of language learning and their capacity to reflect about these issues.

### **Development of Actions**

As part of the first action, I explored students' assumptions about indigenous people and peasants in Colombia through discussions and analysis of images or representations of these communities. In that exploration, students created different drawings representing how indigenous people and peasant look and behave according to their beliefs. In addition, students presented their assumptions using the target language, they used verb to be and adjectives to describe and express simple ideas about those representations. In the final part of this action, students created their own stories following the structure of a narrative text. They wrote about an issue that could affect Colombian indigenous people or peasants, and they also created puppets as their characters.

The second action involved the presentation of two stories about indigenous people and peasants in Colombia: one story with two versions of the conquest and discovery of America, and another story about Arrieros in Colombia. The stories were presented using different objects, music, and images presented in Power Point slides to make the stories a multimodal experience. The purpose of this action was that students identify issues of any kind related to these communities through the stories (issues of power, issues using the language, and issues that have negative impacts in those communities). This identification was done first, deciding on what version of the story about the conquest or discovery they wanted to believe in. Then, students explained why they made that decision and what implications that version has on the characters of the story. For this, I taught my students some expressions to give simple opinions and I reinforced the use of verb to be, and adjectives written and orally. After exploring and identifying, the last action was about reflecting. To do so, students wrote an alternative ending to the stories they created to improve or change the issue they wrote about. The purpose was that students reflect on the initial assumptions and create alternative ways to something that affects indigenous people or peasants in Colombia and explaining why they made those choices.

Finally, the last activity focused on students' reflection about the process during the development of actions and how their assumptions and points of view about indigenous people and peasant changed or did not change over that time. A guest speaker, that recognizes himself as an indigenous person, came to the classroom to tell students what it means to be an indigenous person in Colombia socially, economically, and culturally. This strategy helped students in their reflection process as learners and as a person. In terms of language, students wrote their reflections using expressions to give simple opinions, verb to be and adjectives.

### **Data analysis**

I chose four participant-cases from my group of students based on their four different points of view presented in the first questionnaire. Memos were written and codified weekly, students' voices from video recordings, audio recordings and interviews were transcribed, codified and analyzed as well as the students' artifacts and questionnaires were scanned and analyzed following the three stages of consciousness proposed by Freire (1998): intransitive thought, semi-transitive thought, and critical transitivity. As part of data collection, I included My Reflections considering I am a participant of my research.

Data was analyzed using the 5 stages proposed by Burns (1999): assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. I brought together the data collected, I started collecting categories and codes, organizing the data according to those codes, and comparing the data in order to build interpretations. To interpret this data, a chart in Excel was created and organized with the four names of the cases and the different stages related to their identifications and reflections.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

This study aimed at fostering students' identification and reflection on representations of indigenous communities and peasants in Colombia. This section presents and illustrates findings encompassed in the names of my cases-participants as (a) Seske, (b) Naruto, (c) Vegeta, and (d) Me. Analysis revealed four findings namely: From Intransitive Thought to "I changed my Mind", From Semi Transitive to "Knowing about Them Is Knowing more about History", From Stereotypes to a Reflective Thought, and Me as the teacher from Semi Transitive Thought to Action as Part of the Reflective Thought. In the following paragraphs I provide an in-depth

explanation of each finding.

### **From Intransitive Thought to “I changed my Mind” (Seske)**

Data analysis revealed that the Storytelling activity as part of the stage of identifying issues helped Seske go from “Intransitive Thought” to “I changed my mind” and promoted his language acquisition. During the stage of exploring assumptions Seske expressed that:

Los indígenas no tienen la misma creatividad que nosotros tenemos. Nosotros podemos crear cosas diferentes como la tecnología, la tecnología no la crean ellos porque no son inteligentes. [...] De lo que ellos hacen allá, es construir casas y mantenerse pendientes de que no haya [sic] guerra, de que todo esté en paz y todo esté bien. (Class conversation, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022).<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt shows that during the exploration stage, Seske described how indigenous people were and behaved according to his points of view. He expressed this idea as settled and accepted and he was not able to identify the causes and origins of those conditions. According to Freire (1973), this level of consciousness is characterized by the lack of attempt to change the causes and origins of those conditions.

During the final interview with Seske, as part of the Reflection Stage, he said that new and different ideas came to light after the presentation of the multimodal stories, more specifically the versions of the history about the discovery of America (conquest or discovery). When I asked him when these new ideas arose, he answered “Desde que vimos la historia”, in English “Since we saw the history” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). In the following excerpt from Seske’s interview he described indigenous people as:

Como si ellos fueran creativo, inteligentes. Porque la creatividad también [sic] se refiere a la inteligencia. Porque si por ejemplo yo voy a armar un casa, necesitamos no solo

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous people are not as creative as us. We can create different things as technology. They do not create technology because they are not intelligent people. [...] What they do there is to build houses and to be attentive that there is no war, that everything is in peace and that everything is fine.

armarla, sino tambien [*sic*] saber las medidas, sumas, divisiones y eso. Ya cambie [*sic*] de opinion [*sic*]. Inteligente y creativo son iguales. (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022)<sup>2</sup>

This piece of evidence showed that Seske also moved from Intransitive Thought to Reflective Thought since in this last stage he was able to identify that there were issues in identifying indigenous people as “not intelligent” (Class conversation, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022) by arguing his reasons and the implications of it. During the conversation with the guest speaker invited to discuss about the topic, Seske expressed: “los indígenas no son personas inteligentes pero tal vez creativas” in English “Indigenous are not intelligent people, but creative people perhaps” (Class Conversation, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022), then in the interview he said “después de esa clase, un viernes o un sábado creo, antes de acostarme yo pensé, antes de que [the guest] se hubiera ido me debería disculpar, porque él me había dicho que eso es ofensivo”, in English “after that class, a Friday or a Saturday I think, before I went to bed, I thought: I should have apologised with Yeison before he left because he told me that what I said was offensive” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Regarding his reflective process, Seske started becoming aware of where his ideas came from, how his ideas could affect people and how his ideas changed over time, revealing how MS helped him transit from one level of thought to another one.

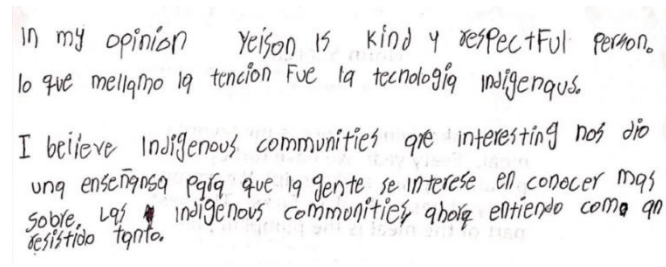
In terms of language acquisition, Seske referred to the creation of stories as an activity that helped him foster language acquisition. During the interview when asked if any activity helped him to learn English, he answered “Me gusto la de las historias que nosotros creamos”, in English “I liked the stories that we created” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Seske was able to create simple sentences using verbs and common expressions to give opinions, as well as some adjectives to describe people and situations as shown in Figure 1.

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<sup>2</sup> As creative people, intelligent people. Because creativity also refers to intelligence. Because if, for example, I am going to build a house we need not only to put the pieces together, but we also need to know the measures, the sums, the divisions and so on. I changed my mind. Intelligence and creativity are related.

## Figure 1

*Seske's Reflection. October 31st, 2022*



In my opinion Yelson is kind y respectFul person.  
lo que me llama la atención fue la tecnología indígena.  
I believe Indigenous communities are interesting nos dio  
una enseñanza para que la gente se interese en conocer más  
sobre las indígenas communities que entiendo como que  
resistencia tanta.

### From Semi Transitive to “Knowing about Them Is Knowing more about History” (Naruto)

Data revealed that class activities related to the stories about indigenous and peasant communities played a supportive and facilitative role for Naruto going from a Semi Transitive thought to a Reflective Thought, as well as helped him improve vocabulary and sentence structure construction in English.

Even when Naruto was interested in knowing about indigenous' people material belongings, in the first sessions, he started expressing ideas through class conversations about images from the stories presented, in which he was identifying and naming issues that could affect indigenous people's culture and personal integrity positioning himself in a Semi Transitive Thought since people with this level of consciousness “are able to identify problems around them” (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). As an illustration:

Los españoles les están robando cosas a los indígenas [...] Los españoles están amenazando la cultura de los indígenas. Ellos se están defendiendo de los soldados [españoles], porque los soldados les quieren quitar a ellos lo que tienen. Entonces ellos se quieren defender para que no les quiten los que tienen. (Research Memo, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Spaniards are stealing things from the indigenous people [...] Spaniards are threatening indigenous people's culture. They are defending themselves from the soldiers [Spaniards], because soldiers want to take away what they have. So, they want to defend themselves, so they do not take away what they have.

Afterwards, in a class conversation as part of the Exploration Stage, Naruto showed he was expanding his interests and concerns beyond class activities: “Mi papá sabe mucho sobre los indígenas, entonces yo le pregunté y él me cuenta casi todo lo que pasa con eso. Porque tenía dudas. Yo se lo pregunté como hace un mes”<sup>4</sup> (Research Memo, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Class activities related to the stories led Naruto to start asking questions about the class contents as well as to try to make connections of those questions to his world allowing them to enter in a Reflective Thought since he was able to “perceive and respond to questions arising in his context, increasing his capacity to enter into dialogue” (Freire, 1974, p. 13). In the interview Naruto expressed that:

A partir de que empezamos a hablar de los indígenas en la clase se me ocurrió preguntarle a mi papá. También con el profesor Carlos Diego en sociales estaba explicando también sobre lo de Cristóbal Colón y yo le pregunté a mi papá y él me respondió. (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022)<sup>5</sup>

In addition, in a written reflection exercise after the class conversation with our guest speaker; Naruto considered the historical background that indigenous communities have gone through as something important for him to know about and gave a recognition of indigenous communities as part of our cultural diversity. Figure 2. shows Naruto’s reflection.

## **Figure 2**

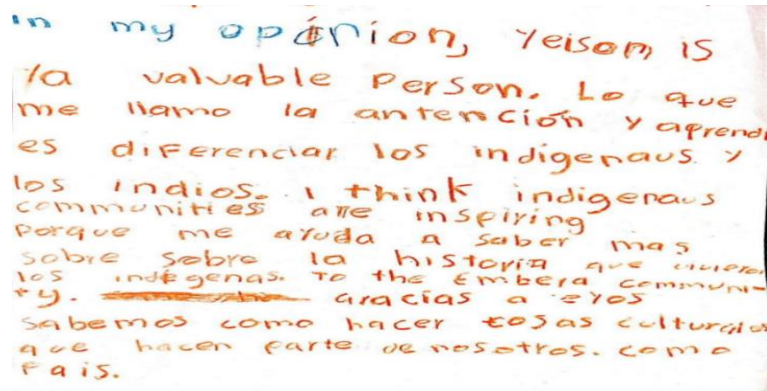
*Naruto’s Reflection. October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022*

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<sup>4</sup> My dad knows a lot of things about indigenous people, so I asked him and he tells me everything about it. Because I had questions. I asked them about it about a month ago”

<sup>5</sup> After we started talking about indigenous people in class, I thought about asking my dad. Also, the teacher Carlos Diego in Social Sciences was teaching about Cristopher Columbus, so I asked my dad and he gave me answers.



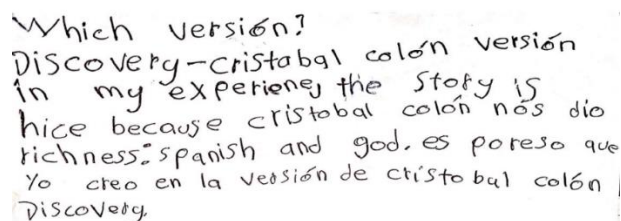


This evidence showed how Naruto could be positioned in the Reflective Thought, according to Freire (1973), people with this kind of consciousness can make connections between identified problems and the social context in which these problems are embedded.

In terms of language acquisition, Naruto hinted that class activities fostered his English vocabulary acquisition and the construction of English simple sentence structures. Naruto expressed that “[las actividades en clase] de los indígenas y campesinos me enseñó cómo llamar a los campesinos e indígenas en inglés” in English “[The class activities in class] about indigenous people and peasants taught me how to call the peasants and indigenous in English” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.). Class activities allowed Naruto to make use of the vocabulary learned as well as to describe people, situations and opinions using adjectives, simple sentences, and common expressions, as seen in Figure 3.

### Figure 3

*Naruto's Writing Exercise. October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022*



### **From Stereotypes to a Reflective Thought (Vegeta)**

Data analysis demonstrated that class conversations and activities related to the multimodal stories played an important role in increasing Vegeta's interest in the Colombian indigenous communities, helping him in the process of going from Intransitive Thought to Reflective Thought and enhanced Vegeta's English learning process in aspects such as sentence construction and vocabulary development.

In a class conversation that made part of the stage of exploration of assumptions, Vegeta expressed that: "ellos [los indígenas] hacen sombreros con las plumas de los pájaros" in English "They [indigenous people] make hats with the feathers of the birds" (Class Conversation, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022). In the same conversation he also said: "Los indígenas usan vestidos y así, pero hay algunos indígenas que no utilizan ropa. Pues, sí utilizan pero no camisas y así [...] Ellos solo necesitan las hojas pa [sic] taparse" in English "Indigenous people wear dresses but some of them do not wear clothes. I mean, they do wear clothes but not shirts or something like that [...] They only need leaves to cover themselves" (Class Conversation, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022). In this Exploration Stage, Vegeta described indigenous people in a view of popular stereotypes and representations about their practices and the way they look. Following Freire's ideas (1973), these points of view are characterized by accepting what he perceived as settled. And by not being able to identify where ideas and conditions come from, making him be in a passive position about the circumstances. This suggests that Vegeta started in an Intransitive Thought in the stage of Exploration.

In addition, data exposed that class conversations and the activities related to the stories about indigenous and peasants in Colombia enhanced Vegeta's interest in investigating and exploring about the indigenous communities in Colombia outside the classroom. In the interview

as part of the Reflection Stage, Vegeta said that:

Yo estoy en un hogar y nosotros celebramos el Día de la Raza. Entonces a nosotros nos enseñan todo, que el racismo, todo. Y la Noche de La Alegría nosotros celebramos la diferencia. Entonces ahí, yo ya tenía curiosidad por el tema que usted nos había dado, pero me entró como ganas como algo saber mucho más. (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022)<sup>6</sup>

The above ideas suggested that Vegeta clarified that this interest started in the class conversations proposed about indigenous people and peasants, but that it has gotten stronger outside the classroom. “Vea, en el colegio se me creó [el interés] y allá [en el hogar] se reforzó más. Más curiosidad” in English “Look, in school my interest was created and at home, it was reinforced. More curiosity” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Vegeta remarked that his interest was mainly in knowing “cuántas comunidades [indígenas] o donde se encuentran las comunidades de los indígenas” in English “How many [indigenous] communities are there and where they are located” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). This commitment to investigating allows one to reconsider the assumptions and stereotypes by recognizing there is always something more to learn about. In this Reflection Stage, Vegeta allowed himself the possibility of testing his findings and being open to revisions which is a characteristic of the Reflective Thought according to Freire (1973, p.15).

Moreover, data revealed that the creation of stories activity that made part of the Exploration and Identification Stages reinforced the comprehension of vocabulary in English that was used in simple sentence construction, giving opinions and description of people, animals, and situations. In the interview, when asked about the activity that helped him in the process of learning English, he answered:

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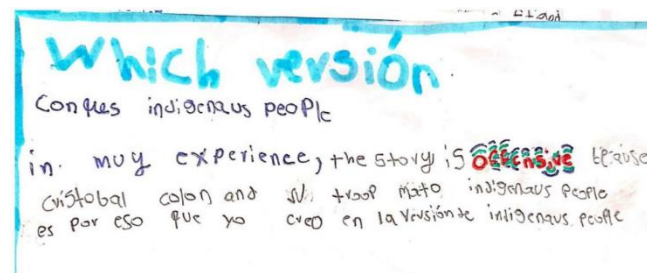
<sup>6</sup> I live in a foster care facility, and we celebrate the Day of the Race there. So, they teach us everything there, about racism, everything. And in the 'Night of Happiness' we celebrate the difference. In those moments, I was already curious about the topic that you presented to us, but I felt the desire to know much more.

Cuando usted nos empezó a hablar de “yo” “ellos”, y cuando nos dijo así se escribe campesino y así se escribe indigena [sic] en inglés. Entonces fue durante las conversaciones. Pero la actividad que me reforzó mucho fue cuando nos pusiste la de hacer un cuento en inglés, contar la historia, que del cat, yo me invente la del cat [...] Bueno, eso me reforzó. (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022)<sup>7</sup>

For instance, Vegeta evidenced the language improvement he mentioned in the interview through the writing of which version of the story (discovery or conquest of America) he chose. Figure 4. demonstrates Vegeta’s comprehension of vocabulary and sentence construction or expressing opinions and descriptions.

#### Figure 4

*Vegeta’s Writing Exercise. October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022*



#### **Me as the teacher from Semi Transitive Thought to Action as Part of the Reflective Thought**

Data proved that the implementation of Critical Pedagogy through Multimodal Storytelling related to indigenous and peasants in Colombia influenced and permeated me, personally and professionally, through the process of identification and reflection on representations about indigenous people and peasants. This process has also positioned me in Freire’s different levels of consciousness at different stages of the process. Similarly, I started in a Semi Transitive Thought of ideas about indigenous people and peasants in relation to the

<sup>7</sup> When you started talking about “I” “They”, and when you told us how to write ‘peasant’ and ‘indigenous’ in English. So, it was with the class conversations. But the activity that reinforced me much more was when you made us write a story in English. To tell the story about the cat, I created the story about the cat. [...] Well, that reinforced it.

classes that I was designing at the beginning of the implementation. I was able to move into a Reflective Thought thanks to the reflections and considerations that led me to make actions when designing the final stage of the implementation.

During the development of the first actions, the criteria for selecting images of the first questionnaire that was intended to explore students' assumptions about indigenous people and peasants:

I was looking for images that could represent indigenous people and peasants. I wanted to put images where students could see people cultivating, with hats [...] For the image that represented an indigenous person [...] I wanted some representation of their practices and maybe traditional accessories and clothing. My criteria were to look for images that could make my students say, "these are peasants" and "this one is an indigenous person" (My reflection, September 10, 2022)

After analyzing class conversations, I realized I was not cautious in the selection of the criteria. I was following the only interest of pushing my students to see specific things even when my ideas did not follow what I was portraying there. At that point, I was accepting and reproducing those popular stereotypes, and I was not attempting to change or to problematize what was behind those choices. I was oversimplifying the complexity of what could really mean to be an indigenous person or peasant which cannot be only represented or described through popular representations of what they wear or look like. According to Freire (1973) those choices are characterized by the Semi Transitive Thought.

Some classes later, I realized that those choices were permeating my students' points of view based on what I was constantly portraying in the class activities. In a class activity that made part of the Identification Stage, I asked students where their ideas came from, some of them were answering "profe, por la imagen que usted nos mostró" in English "teacher, from the image that you just showed us" and "profe, por la imagen que vi la clase pasada" in English

“Teacher, from the picture that I saw last class” (Class conversation, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> 2022).

“[...] What caught my attention was that some students were telling me that many of their ideas came from what I was showing in the images. I realized how I have been unconsciously influencing my students’ ideas and assumptions” (Research Memo, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

From that excerpt, I would say that the main problem there is not just the power that I was having on my students’ ideas, but that I was not aware of how ideas and material selected were shaping students’ perceptions of the issue. I became aware that choosing certain questions to discuss and leaving others aside can have repercussions on students. Connecting those situations to Freire’s idea of “language is never neutral”, I could infer that every time we make language/text/image choices when designing material, we are favoring one point of view and excluding another one. Making choices is not an issue, the issue is not being aware of the implications and the effects those choices can have in privileging or excluding people and ideologies. This led me to propose the two versions of the history of the Conquest/Discovery of America in which my students could decide according to their “reading” of the world, which version they wanted to believe in. Again, even when we open possibilities and offer different versions of the world, we are in the first place influencing those possibilities and what matters is that we give them *options*, and not *the* answer.

Later, I was moving towards a more Reflective Thought when I could identify the issues that were present in my ideas and practices allowing me to reflect on what working with critical approaches means:

I started questioning the applicability of critical approaches in EFL classrooms. [...] I knew from the very beginning that it was not going to be easy. But I was not aware of the effects that working with critical approaches could have on oneself as a teacher. I started questioning what I was doing and for what purposes. [...] (My reflection, September 28<sup>th</sup>,

2022)

Consequently, I entered in a Reflective Thought (Freire, 1973, p. 15) by being open to test my own ideas and preconceived thoughts about critical approaches and taking actions to make changes. The analysis also showed how the implementation of my research had effects on my teacher education process for actions and changes I was taking during the development of the project. The changes I made aimed at responding to my students' reactions to the activities and the reflections they were sharing in class, hence, taking actions to get the best out of the circumstances that arose. (Freire, 1973, p. 15)

The lack of evidence on how ideas about peasants changed over time made it difficult to analyze how those thoughts transitioned from level to level of consciousness. However, from the very beginning, students represented peasants as land, hard workers that cultivate food (Questionnaire # 1, September 9, 2022). Different from their ideas about indigenous people, ideas about peasants were more related to their work and practices in crops than to stereotypes about race or ethnicity. According to my cases, they have been more able to interact with peasants in their lives or have been able to participate in those practices and those ideas come from those interactions. In the last interview, my case expressed some ideas as Seske: “Lo he vivido. Cuando yo vivía en la finca, trabajaba haciendo eso. Sembrando maíz, lechuga, frijol en la finca de mis abuelos” in English “I have lived it. When I lived in the countryside, I worked doing that. Cultivating corn, lettuce, beans in my grandparents' countryside house (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Also, Naruto “mi abuelo, él es un campesino, y cuando yo fui, tenían mucha cosecha cómo mazorca, tomate, lechuga” in English “My grandfather, he is a peasant, and when I went to his house, they had a lot of crops of corn, tomato, lettuce. (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022) and Vegeta “en el hogar donde yo vivo, trabajan campesinos” “in the foster care

facility where I live, peasants work there” (Interview, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022). This reflects how their ideas did not change or transition, but this might be due to the construction of these ideas from their subjectivity and personal relation to what, for them, means to be peasant.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This research had the purpose of analyzing how the implementation of Critical Multimodal Storytelling (CMS) in the EFL classroom helped students and I to identify and reflect on representations of indigenous people and peasants in Colombia. From the data analysis, I could conclude that Critical Multimodal Storytelling helped students to achieve a Reflective Thought in relation to their initial ideas about indigenous people and peasants; and that CMS played a supportive role in students’ language acquisition process in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure.

In addition, this research project entailed some implications for teachers’ practice in this context. A first implication is that teachers should be open to allow students to use a variety of language resources such as Code-switching and Translanguaging to make meaning and reflect in the target language classroom. In that sense, when promoting English in written and spoken reflections, attention must be paid to the language expected objectives from the syllabus, and the language that can be used in their mother tongue to allow students to express themselves and not restrict their opinions when conditioning it ‘target language only’. It is an invitation, as well, to recognize students’ mother tongue as a resource for learning English and reflect on their context.

Another implication is that the development of Reflective Thought in the classroom needs time, and it is not a ‘finished’ process but a constantly constructed one. This means that being aware (in terms of *conscientizacao*) of the implications of our thoughts and representations



that affect a specific social group as indigenous people or peasants, it does not imply an awareness in other stances of thoughts and ideas that can affect different social groups in terms of issues of power, language and socially. This indicates that in order to acquire a consciousness as *conscientizacao*, it is important to consider it as a constant construction, it is not a 'finished' work and does not happen overnight. Implementing critical approaches in the EFL classrooms can be a starting point for us, students and teachers, to construct a critical consciousness responding to our social contexts.

This project provides a better understanding of the effects of CMS on students' critical awareness and language learning in an EFL classroom. It also contributes to identifying relevant factors related to the implications of implementing critical approaches in the EFL classroom in terms of improvements or limitations in students' language acquisition. Nevertheless, further research on these issues needs to be conducted involving different settings to elucidate to what extent CMS can improve students' language acquisition while identifying and reflecting on social issues.

### **Reflection**

In this last stage of the process at the university and reviewing it all in retrospect, I would say that in spite of the challenges that emerged and that seemed difficult to overcome, I perceive the whole process as satisfying and strongly relevant for my personal and professional growth. Besides, being involved in my own research project helped me become more aware of my teaching practices for future considerations, contributing at the same time, becoming more aware of my position in relation to those practices and my principles as a teacher.

In the first place, my teaching practice allowed me to explore and put into practice the

insights that I learned in the university. However, I would also say that I learned more from the unexpected situations that were arising in the classroom and the context since they were leading me to make constant considerations and improvements to respond to my students' needs and goals. I have been open to learn from the negative and positive happenings and that has made my teaching practice more than enriching.

Having a fractured ankle in the middle of the process allowed me to take some distance and reflect on the decisions I considered in the first place for the implementation of my research. These reflections led me to even considering the purposes of critical approaches in the classrooms realizing that sometimes critical approaches are sometimes taken as methods to follow as a trend, going along with idealizations of our practices as teachers, but less taken as the opportunities that they could actually bring into the classroom for discussing and problematizing the given state of mind. However, my pretension was not to change the whole world, or my students' lives, but at least to challenge one of those reproduced stereotypes and representations that constantly affect and exclude individuals and communities in our country. Still, I would like to emphasize the importance of considering our classrooms as places to avoid the social invisibility that is perpetuated through massification.

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