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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND VIOLENCE

Addressing Violence through Critical Multicultural Education in an EFL Class

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Abstract

This action research project reports the possibilities offered by a critical multicultural approach to address the issue of violence in an English class with 7th graders in Marinilla, Colombia. The project had three stages in which participants reflected on violent manifestations at their homes, school and town. Furthermore, some participants conducted an online campaign to raise awareness about violence in their community. I collected data from class discussions journal notes and students' artifacts. The findings revealed to some extent the empowerment from some participants who took actions to transform the violent realities in their context. Furthermore, the project may have contributed to develop participants' critical multicultural awareness evident in more respectful interactions and collaborative work.

Keywords: violence, critical multicultural education, critical multicultural awareness, liberal multiculturalism, essentialist perspective of culture.

Degree requirement

This action research project was brought about while I was doing my pedagogical Internship in a public institution as a requirement of the B.Ed in foreign language teaching (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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Acknowledgments

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Preface

This is the report of an action research project aiming at exploring the possibilities offered by a critical multicultural framed unit to address the issue of violence with 7th graders of a public institution in Marinilla, Colombia. The motivation to conduct this research project emerged during the first cycle of my internship from class observations linked to the current extreme violent reality that is taking place in Colombia.

The status of prestige of the English language and its validation through linguistic policies in Colombia make the teaching of the language much more complex than teaching other languages. There are aspects like the ownership of English, native-like register, domination, power, different forms of collective injustice and essentialist perspective on culture that English teachers should address with their students. Developing students' deeper understanding of how English learning in Colombia may be reproducing academic and social domination is a core aspect of English teaching according to critical multicultural education. All the aspects above mentioned are directly linked with serious social issues such as violence.

This intervention allowed me to recognize the potential of critical multicultural education to address these complex social issues with 7th graders in their EFL class. In short, I realized the potential of this approach to create more authentic and contextualized linguistic spaces in which students can learn and practice their English.

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Description of the Context

The Instituto Técnico Industrial Simona Duque de Marinilla (IETI Simona Duque) is a school with more than fifty years of service to the community of Marinilla, Eastern Antioquia, Colombia. This municipality had a lot of influence on the independence war of Colombia. Additionally, the town has a strong catholic tradition characterized by one of the most important holy weeks in the country.

In regards to the pedagogical model, the institution offers five modalities conceived to give students job opportunities in the manufacturing and industrial domains. Pupils can choose among cabinet making, metalwork, electricity, automotive mechanic and industrial mechanic. They also have the choice to do academic studies, which seems a very suitable option for many students who may not be interested in these modalities. Although training people for the manufacturing and industrial sectors is very relevant and pertinent, the development of critical thinking strategies that allow citizens to become agents of social transformation rather than just well-qualified manufacturers and workers cannot be disregarded. Hence, the institution's pedagogical model could be more in accordance with Colombian main societal needs like overcoming violence for the sake of every Colombian life and prosperity of the country. However, the critical thinking skills and collaborative work strategies fostering effective political participation in the society are present in the pedagogical model of the institution but they seem frail in everyday school life.

In the official documents of the institution, it is stated that human rights are the basis for its pedagogical action and there is also an important recognition of the armed conflict in Colombian history (IETISD, Manual de convivencia). Additionally, a serious manifestation of violence has also taken place in the institution. In 2011, many students of the institution were involved in a confrontation with the police which even called the attention of national mainstream media. This is one of the most remarkable facts of a series of strikes, protests and

social manifestations in which this institution has had a key role within the town. Although the IETI Simona Duque is recognized for its high academic level mainly noticeable in the standardized tests like *PRUEBAS SABER,* the institution does not have a very good reputation, especially because of the aforementioned role in strikes within the town. This fact biases its public image among the strong catholic and conservative inhabitants of Marinilla.

The English curriculum of the institution was conceived by a group of teachers belonging to the institution. In this curriculum, there are aspects such as a guiding question, a thematic axis, achievements and indicators of achievement. For the particular case of the seventh grade, the question and the thematic axis are based on the Common European framework in which seventh graders are expected to learn not only pieces of language related to environmental care, but also take some action like recycling and planting a tree. The language components addressed by seventh graders are the verb to be and present continuous tense. They are expected to use this language with professions family and the house thematic axis.

My cooperating teacher is an experienced English teacher who has worked in this institution for over 20 years and has a B.A from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. She asserts that she focused her efforts trying to help students become more interested and motivated in learning English. The participants helping me to conduct this action research project were the students from the 7th B class. Most Students were eleven years old who did not have any special conditions preventing them from participating in the class activities. Also, there were no Venezuelan students as there used to be in other seventh classes of this institution. Most participants seemed to like the English class and to actively participate in the activities.

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Statement of the problem

Departing from the data collection and analysis process from the first cycle of my internship, interesting categories emerged allowing me to set up a focus for this action research. After the analysis, it was noticeable the need to promote a more profound understanding of aspects of deep culture like violence. This would be meaningful not only to raise awareness about this social problem, but also because of the possibility to promote the creation of spaces conceived to reflect upon violence taking place in Colombian educational contexts. This reflection would foster student's profound understanding of how their daily interactions in the classroom put in the spot certain naturalized culture of violence being perpetuated by students and teachers without noticing it. This is important not only because of the historic outbreaks of violence that have occurred in the institution, but also because of the political situation that the country has been facing in terms of its transition from a fifty-year war, to a society leading efforts to establish a sense of lasting peace in all its territory.

This social transformation is a really complex process that cannot be brought about just by negotiation from the ones involved in the conflict. It is vital that the Colombian education system conceives a well-planned educational curriculum that promotes the ethical and communitarian values that our country needs to overcome its violent culture (Villar, 2010). An instance of this reality is the announcement of the dissidents from the guerrilla group Fuerzas armadas de Colombia (FARC) in which it was declared war to Colombian State once again in spite of the most recent peace agreement (Semana, 2019). Furthermore, on February 12th of this year the guerilla groups ELN, EPL and the FARC organized an armed strike in which many terrorist attacks were brought about in the whole Colombian territory (Semana, 2020).

The facts above mentioned are just some of the most serious manifestations of violence occurring in Colombia on a daily basis. The assassination of social leaders,

femicide, massacres and so on and so forth are still taking place everywhere in the country. Similarly, students from I. E. Técnico Industrial Simona Duque were involved in a huge confrontation with the police in the middle of the campaign for the election of the porter student (2011). If you look up on the internet, you cannot find any information about this. From our position as educators, we cannot let obliviousness to be the solution for these kinds of problems since this may be leading to the upsurge of these violent manifestations. Taking examples of critical education in Deutschland in which there is always a serious pedagogical reflection on what happened, for instance, in the concentration camps in Auschwitz and Birkenau, exercises of memory may contribute to avoid repeating these catastrophes.

Critical multicultural theories have the potential to address directly these complex violent issues taking place at I. E. Técnico Industrial Simona Duque. These critical theories go beyond the superficial recognition of the difference or sameness, and tolerance towards minorities exposed by liberal multiculturalists. On the contrary, critical multiculturalism's main objective is to raise consciousness about the many issues of hegemony and power that characterized the superiority and advantage of one culture, ethnicity, race, or social class over the others. Therefore, addressing issues in regards to racism, ethnicism, sexism, xenophobia, and all ways of discrimination and segregation taken for granted in nowadays society is essential to promote profound understanding and work for transformation (Kubota, 2015).

Considering this review of what critical multiculturalism represents for language education and the data collected in my context, the presence of sexism is evident in these excerpts taken from my journals of the first cycle of this research project:

"the teacher split the class in boys, who were on my right, Some students bullied a guy by saying "you should stay in the middle because we do not know if you are a girl or a boy" it was because of his sexual orientation"(Journal entry 1, 07/19th/2019, researcher's translation). Similarly, the class activities generated many gender issues that were not

addressed at all: "The teachers said that women were more intelligent than men. Students

carried out this activity writing sentences full of gender issues like women are easier than

men or women are cheaper than man and so on, there was no reflection on the gender issues

emerging from this activity" (Journal entry 1, 07/19th/2019, researcher's translation). In

addition, there was a manifestation of racism exemplified in this excerpt:

> "In one of the questions it was stated, who the darkest from the classroom was, you
>
> could see how uncomfortable that person felt when everybody pointed at him as the
>
> darkest because of the color of the skin. The question who was the ugliest caused a
>
> little bit like the same reaction"(Journal entry 1, 07/19th/2019, researcher's
>
> translation).

Apart from these racist and sexist comments in the class, there were lots of violent

interactions such as: "Some students started to hit each other quite heavily and aggressively.

The teacher asked them to stop. However, students continued to do it for long. students

surrounding laughed looking at their partners having these violent interactions"(journal entry

4, 09/5th/2019, research's translation). Furthermore, some participants use body language and

insults to challenge their partners to fight. For instance, "Two students pushed each other and

exchanged hits and kicks while challenging to fight with body language and insults" (Journal

entry 4, 09/5th/2019, researcher's translation).

Additionally, the violent interactions observed, I could notice that the classroom

management strategies were extremely behaviorists. The teacher frequently threatened and

punished students with the cleaning of the classroom or with being expelled from the class.

These extracts illustrate the situation: "she warned students that exchanging ideas or answers

among groups would be punished with the cleaning of the classroom" and "The teacher said

that the students failing the game would be doing the cleaning of the classroom" (Journal

entry 2, 08/5th/2019). There was also positive reinforcement, for instance, "A student was

rewarded by being allowed to go to break the classroom earlier" (Journal entry 3, 08/12th/2019, researcher's translation). Moreover, the amount of noise produced by learners made the classroom atmosphere much more hostile (Journal entry 1, 07/29th/2019, research's translation). All these facts occurring within this EFL class made me wonder about the possibilities that critical multiculturalism principles' may offer to address collective forms of injustice in the form of violence with 7th graders in their EFL class.

Theoretical framework

In this theoretical framework, I am going to present an overview of the approaches and main concepts illuminating this study. First, I will provide a definition of culture and its evolution from sociology and anthropology theories to foreign language education. Then, I will present the roots and tenets of critical multicultural education. Also, I aim at providing some hints on cultural forms of violence present in collective injustice such as racism, sexism, and discrimination in general.

The complex concept of culture has historically passed through different anthropological and sociological stages of elaboration. Firstly, Williams (as cited in Storey, 1993) provides a definition of culture which was conceived merely from characteristics such as people's educational level and intellectual competence which allow people to have particular manners of making sense of their realities. Secondly, the same author pictured a more elaborated idea of culture in which it was conceived as the way of living of a people, a period or a group, being literacy, leisure time and religion constitutive elements of this definition. And thirdly, Williams (1983) asserts that culture involves the intellectual and artistic practices whose function is to signify and to produce meaning. These definitions matter for this project because at la IETI Simona Duque the concept of culture is addressed very superficially in the English class and students are mostly exposed to biased data about other countries. Therefore, widening participants' understanding of what culture means

would enable them to discuss and to challenge dominant discourses and validated cultural

representations.

Culture has taken different nuances through its history in language education. In the

60s, Trager (1962) stated that Culture was a matter of cultural shared behaviors and

interactions from a community. The inclusion of culture in language classroom was brought

about taking into account elements of what authors called little-c culture, referring to teaching

about the daily basis of people from the target language. Later in the 70s, culture in language

education included elements such as learned behaviors, values and beliefs learned by an

individual because of being a member of this group (Saville & Troike, 1978). Therefore, in

language education, the concept of communicative competence and intercultural competence

were presented as a means by which foreign language learners could avoid pitfalls and

misunderstanding when being in contact with people from the target culture (Meadow, 2016).

This is the conception of culture in which participants from this action research are immersed

in. A more elaborated definition is given by Morphy (1998) who defines culture as the

categorization and interpretation of experience symbolic and commonly shared by the

members of a group, community or period of time.

In the 80s, the communicative and intercultural competence were principles

composed of a set of skills aiming to prepare students for interactions with the target culture

(Meadow, 2016). On the contrary, the 90s was a decade in which important categories

embedded in culture such as static and internally coherent evolved to dynamic, fluid and

emerging thanks to poststructuralists' theories (Oxford, 1995). It would be relevant that

English teaching in this institution includes conceptions of culture such as the one exposed by

authors in the 90s in order to start problematizing what participants conceive as culture. In

language education, culture took this dynamic nuance that fostered students' critical self-

reflection and educators focused on the development of intercultural competence that allows

students to interact in all the unpredictable cultural contexts. Being conscious of this historical development of culture in foreign language education is vital since the participants of this study were exposed to these static congratulatory elements which perpetuate unfair worthless life-conditions and discrimination in every society.

The critical multicultural approach described by Kincheloe and Steinberg (2013) originates from the German Frankfurt School of social research in the 20s. Critical multiculturality aims at fostering the promotion of an individual consciousness that allows individuals to understand how and why their political opinions, socioeconomic class, religious beliefs, gender role and racial self-image have been affected by dominant perspectives (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2013). This is a core aspect of what the authors described as critical multicultural awareness. Accordingly, critical multiculturality tackles culture bringing into discussion the many issues of hegemony, power relationships, domination and marginalization occurring nowadays. Furthermore, critical multiculturalism challenges the ideas of identity and ideology aiming to counter social problems such as classism, racism, ethnicism and sexism (Kubota, 2004). Thus, its main objective is to raise consciousness about the nature of what we humans conceive as culture to problematize it and to create spaces that contribute to transform the social structures perpetuating worthless life-conditions in every sphere of human societies. This study is in tune with this approach.

It is important to mention that not much critical multicultural literature was found explicitly on the issue of violence. However, Clark (1993) complements meaningfully the ideas of critical multicultural education by emphasizing that this approach was directly conceived as a tool for disarming violence. Therefore, the concept of violence itself should be more cautiously addressed and connected with the aspects of deep culture being core foundations of critical multiculturality such as domination, power and forms of collective injustice since most of this domination is exercised through violence. In fact, Galtung (1990)

introduces the concept of cultural violence as invisible behaviors present in the form of racism, sexism and discrimination which pervade what human beings do in their daily life: Art, language, science, religion, among others.

In conclusion, critical Multiculturalism may foster participants' deeper understanding of the manifestations of violence taking place in their class. Consequently, they could take action in order to transform this social problem. This would give much more political and social incidence to English teaching and learning.

Research Question

What possibilities does a critical multicultural pedagogical implementation offer to address violence in a 7th grade EFL class in Marinilla, Colombia?

Objectives

General Objective

To analyze the possibilities that a critical multicultural framed pedagogical intervention may offer to address racism, sexism as sources of violence with seventh-graders in an EFL class.

Specific Objectives

- To explore how a series of reflections on violence may contribute to establish respectful interactions among learners.
- To monitor how may purposeful collaborative work can raise learners' critical multicultural awareness.
- To create spaces for learners to impact their institution with their learnings from this pedagogical intervention.

Action Plan

In this section, I will present the actions and the data collection methods that I planned to implement in this pedagogical intervention. Aiming at answering my research question and

fulfilling my objectives, I planned to bring into discussion the concept of violence taking place in the form of issues of deep culture such as racism, sexism and physical violence. I planned to do it by using readings and reflective activities that promote purposeful dialogue about violence.

The data collection techniques that I planned to gather were journals, class discussions, and students' artifacts. The journals were meant to keep a record of students' interactions, reactions, comments and perspectives in regards to the issue of violence. Besides, I planned to be attentive to the non-behaviorist classroom management strategies to see how it contributed to a more appropriate learning environment. Students' artifacts and class discussions were meant to get an account of students' reflections and learnings in regards to the issue of violence in their context as well as in the institution. These artifacts from participants were designed to get acquainted with the possibilities that critical multicultural ideas to tackle complex issues like violence in my EFL class.

In the first three weeks of my intervention, I scheduled to inform students about the project and to encourage them to participate actively in it. Also, I meant to go deeper into the concept of violence with participants by reflecting upon their background information and experiences of the concept. Besides, I planned to expand their knowledge about manifestations of violence going beyond the physical violence by reading short texts addressing violence and reflecting upon the issue. My objective was helping students to realize the manner in which violence was taking place in their own context, its sources and consequences as well as some ideas to overcome this social problem coming from students' own reflections.

In the second cycle, I planned to propose participants' strategies to communicate the outcomes of their academic work regarding violence to their institution. The objective was to

monitor how through collaborative work, students learn to interact more respectfully while they put into practice and learn aspects of the language.

In the three last weeks, the participants were expected to impact their high school with their academic work. The purpose was that through this activity other students belonging to other classes raise their awareness about the manifestations of violence addressed during this critical multicultural implementation as well.

Finally, I planned a class discussion to get to know if a deeper understanding of the concept of violence helped them to denaturalize this issue taking place in their immediate context. And furthermore, I wanted to get acquainted with students' opinions about these kinds of pedagogical interventions and their worthiness for them and for society at large.

Development of Actions

In order to see the possibilities that a critical multicultural pedagogical framed intervention could offer when addressing the issue of violence with seventh-graders, I conducted the actions described below.

Before starting my interventions, I introduced myself to participants and told them about the project that I wanted them to help me with. I explained that my research interest was violence because of my previous observations in the institution and because of the current reality that we were facing at those moments such as the students' protests, the renewal of the conflict and the massive assassination of social leaders. I informed my participants about the purpose of this research project, the ethical protocols required and the data collection methods that I was going to be using. Finally, I said to them that we could take some actions to mitigate this social problem together which encouraged them even more to participate.

The next action that I took was giving my participants all consent forms to take home and read with their parents. I asked them to tell their parents to sign the permission for me to

be able to start with the research project. In Addition, as my project was not totally in alignment with the thematic axis from seventh grade which was taking care of the environment, I thought of the implementation in the form of short extra activities in which the participants learned vocabulary related to violence and reflected in their own language about different manifestations of violence.

Subsequently, I conducted a first-class discussion in groups in which 20 students participated. The aim was to get familiar with students' background knowledge of violence and the factors or conditions generating this social problem. After this, I conducted another class discussion with the whole class. The objective was to understand better students' perception of all the manifestations of violence covered in the cross-word search puzzle that I had shared with them in the previous action and to explore the possible solutions that they could come out with to these social problems. From this discussion, I could realize about a participant being a serious victim of violence by getting her mother massacred by a man who was obsessed with her. Some participants expressed the difficulty of forgiveness because according to them criminals do not regret what they did.

Later, the pandemic COVID-19 spread all over the world generating an unprecedented crisis in every aspect of human life. This condition changed dramatically the dynamics of this pedagogical intervention. Therefore, I took into account the many psychological and emotional challenges that my participants must have been experiencing those days because of the sanitary emergency. Thus, there was an aspect of the actions that did not take place as it was conceived in the beginning because of all the challenges the pandemic COVID-19 posed on children and their educational process. It was about broadening participants' background knowledge on violence happening in another context so that they could juxtapose different manifestations on violence in other contexts with their own. As a consequence, I designed a practical task instead that allowed me to use the

technological means available to collect students' work on violence regarding their context: home, school and immediate society.

Using a WhatsApp group that students had, I could get into contact with them and sent messages of hope and encouragement. Then, I sent them a series of images of violence taking place at home, schools, and society and ask students to reflect on the factors unchaining violence in these contexts, the main manifestations of it in its near context, and the solutions that they could think of.

After two weeks of implementing the first pilot online activity, I received only three answers from my students. This was just understandable because of the psychological and emotional pressure that the sanitary situation provoked by the COVID-19. A student asked me through the WhatsApp group if it was compulsory to do this activity and he also asked me if it represented any grade. After explaining to them that it did not have a grade, I noticed a common custom among certain learners of doing things only if there is a rewarding or a grade.

Finally, some students carried out an online campaign against violence and reflected on their experience in this pedagogical intervention. There were remarkable outcomes and some participants showing a level of empowerment and critical multicultural awareness.

Data Analysis

With the purpose of understanding the possibilities that a critical multicultural framed pedagogical intervention offers to tackle the issue of violence, I followed the analysis process proposed by Burns (1999). She suggests first to assemble the data, code it and categorize it to make it easier to handle. Subsequently, I triangulated the analysis from the different data collection methods. After that, I wrote some preliminary interpretations and shared them with my advisor, my CT, my practicum mates and some colleagues to avoid personal bias. Finally, I wrote the outcomes of the research project.

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In regards to the coding and categorization process, I decided to use the support of the qualitative research analysis software called *ATLAS. TI*. Afterwards, I just assigned a short sentence to quotes in my journals, class discussions, online reflections, the students' campaign against violence and the couple of interviews that I planned taking into account an extreme sample of participants (Patton, 1999) who had a very particular perspective or experience with violence. The analysis was done in an inductive and a deductive way. To start the process, I coded my data inductively. Some of the most recurrent codes were: students' hits with objects, students refusing to work with classmates, teacher promoting collaborative work, and non-behaviorist classroom management strategies. Then, I grouped categories that I came up deductively or taking into account theorists of critical multicultural education. These categories were: Intercultural awareness, obscuring issues of power and privilege, focus on collective forms of injustice, participants empowerment, and essentialist perception of culture. Subsequently, I established links among the different codes, categories and data collection methods. Furthermore, I created graphic organizers and tables with all the elements in order to make sense of it and wrote some preliminary interpretations. Finally, I shared the preliminary findings with my advisor, cooperating teacher, classmates and some colleagues in order to make sure the process was systematic and to avoid personal bias.

Findings and Interpretations

From the analysis of my data, I found issues in my class related to the obscuring of power and privilege regarding the English language, participants making connections between violence and collective forms of injustice. Participants showing a certain level of empowerment, and critical multicultural awareness. Besides, this pedagogical intervention created a space for participants to use their English more authentically.

Unveiling Issues of Power and Domination

Participants of this study started unveiling issues of power and domination in our English classes. This was noticeable in some of their answers to the question I posed about the reasons why violence takes place at their institution. They said it was because of classism, racism, ethnicism among others (Students' artifacts 1, 4/19th/2020, researcher's translation). Furthermore, even if all participants' reflections and actions were done in Spanish, English was always a means through which I could address this complex issue of violence (see appendix A). Besides, I noticed that the project fostered more authentic opportunities to use aspects of the language as useful expressions to react to the violent manifestations addressed in class: "I asked them about the meaning of some words from the crossword search puzzle on violence and I reacted with the useful expressions that we were learning for the class, some learners would use these expressions too" (Journal entry 4, 03/9th/2020). However, I considered that if I had designed language models helping students to express their feelings and reflection using English, it could have given my students much more opportunities to use English to communicate.

Participants Linking Violence With Aspects of Deep Culture

My students were able to make connections among aspects of deep culture such as racism, sexism, classism and cultural discrimination thanks to reflection spaces created in this pedagogical intervention. For instance, two of the participants said that the causes of violence were:

Student 1: Because of sexism. In high school because of the race, and because of sexism from men to women (Students' artifacts 1, 4/19th/2020, researcher's translation).

Student 4: Also because of social class. There are people who are very conceited because of their money and they can treat you badly and derogatively because you do

not have many economic resources. Also because of being from different cultures" (Students' artifacts 1, 4/19th/2020, researcher's translation).

The fact that some students, through the reflection exercises unveiled the relationship between racism, sexism, classism and discrimination as sources of violence shows how critical multicultural education may contribute to foster a deeper understanding of aspects of deep culture (Gómez, 2015) that are present in every society such as violence in its different manifestations. This is crucial to accomplish one of the main objectives of critical multicultural education which is empowering learners to become political actors in their communities and to make the English teaching practice contribute to create fairer more equanimous societies.

Participants' Empowerment

One student whose mother was a victim of femicide, showed some hints of empowerment to transform the worthless life conditions and injustice in her community. First, she decided to share the fact that her mother was massacred by a man who was obsessed with her in order to raise awareness about the harmfulness of violence in her municipality (Students' artifacts 3, 05/22th/2020, researcher's translation). Moreover, feeling empowered after reflecting upon the issue of violence, she encouraged her classmates to take some actions: "Guys let's do it, think about all people that are not able to denounce these things because they are scared about their husbands hitting them or because of threatenings" (Students' artifacts 2, 05/18th/2020, researchers' translation). She also conducted a remarkable online campaign against violence in the company of some other participants who showed this level of empowerment (see figures 1 and 2).

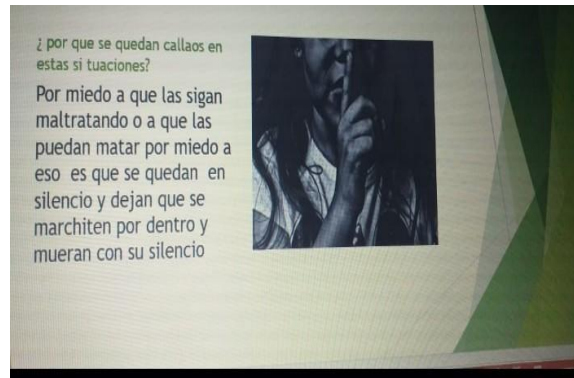MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND VIOLENCE

Figure 1. Campaign against violence created by a student [Image shows a woman who was clearly hit. Her body language says she is not allowed to denounce what happened to her. Language used by the students describes how women being victims of violence are forced to remain silent while being emotional, psychological and physically traumatized] (Students' artifact 2, 05/18th/2020).
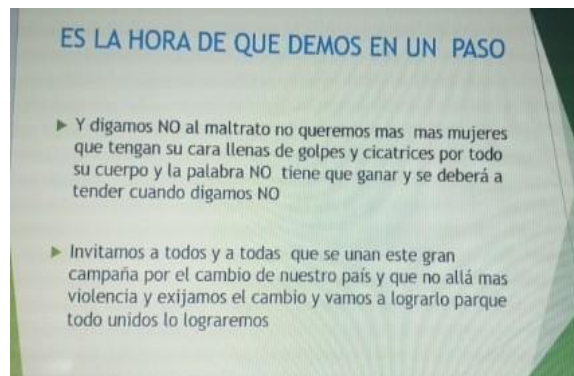

Figure 2. Campaign against violence created by a student [Image shows the voice of the participants emphatically suggested the need to overcome violence exercised on women. The participant also made a call to every Colombian to join this online campaign against the problem. She said that all together could contribute to buffer this social issue] *(*Students' artifact 2, 05/18th/2020).

Besides, the kind of language used by the participants made a lot of emphasis on the need for important communitarian values such as love and compassion instead of the use of weapons to reach peace in the country (see figure 3).
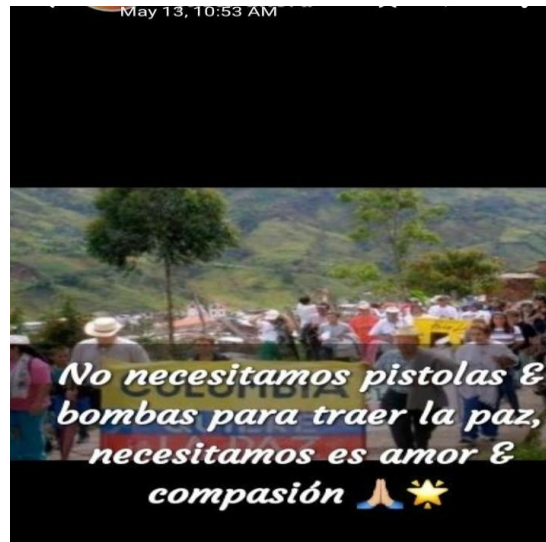

Figure 3. Campaign against violence created by a student [Image that participants chose for the online campaign against violence in which there are Colombian citizens marching to ask for peace. The hashtag chose by students was "we do not need weapons to overcome violence by love and compassion"] (Students' artifact 2, 05/18th/2020).

In same vein, the participants chose an image of children playing by an armed soldier and another one of citizens marching peacefully to ask for peace (see figures 3 & 4). The images chosen by students as well as the language may imply that they think that military repression is not a solution, but citizens' peaceful political empowerment is. Taking into account both the images and the language used by participants, we can conclude that learners may have started to broaden their perspectives about violence as well as to recognize the power of political participation.

Figure 4. Campaign against violence created by a student [Image that participants chose for the online campaign against violence in which children are playing by an armed soldier. The hashtag chose by students was "we do not need weapons to overcome violence by love and compassion"] (Students' artifact 2, 05/18th/2020).

Insights of Critical Multicultural Awareness Development

Departing from data analysis, I realized to some extent the development of multicultural awareness on most of my participants. This happened when I used classroom management strategies to promote respectful collaborative work as relevant for their learning process:

"Students were really engaged in the group activity I could see that they tried to help each other and somehow whispering to a partner's ear was something they did not refuse to do as working in pairs with some of their classmates in the previous sessions" (Journal entry 3, 03/6th/2020, researcher's translation).

In one of the upcoming lessons, the importance of the use of classroom management strategies to promote respectful interaction was also evident:

"There was one student that went to another group and while exchanging some words and then tried to hit his partner but as I called his attention by reminding him about our project on violence and the bad consequences of it. He did not hit his partner and came back to his seat" (Journal entry 6, 05/2nd/2020, researcher's translation).

Then, it is noticeable that the sorts of activities and classroom management strategies helped students to interact more respectfully. Besides, the possibility that students could self-regulate and change a common customer as hitting their classmates without being threatened or punished is a remarkable finding of this pedagogical intervention. Emphasizing on purposeful collaborative work which means all members having an important role was a key strategy that contributed to develop critical multicultural awareness among participants:

"Students were reluctant to work with some of their partners which I tried not to happen by encouraging to work cooperative and making emphasis on how important it was for their learning process. These ideas were successfully understood by the students not willing to work in group who accepted to work with their partners and even chatting friendly with them" (Journal entry 4, 03/9th/2020, researcher's translation).

"In groups, I asked students to think about an individual action, an action in pairs and with the whole group. Then I went around to monitor observed no violent interaction within the groups" (Journal entry 4, 03/9th/2020, researcher's translation).

Therefore, critical multicultural awareness fostered a change in classrooms' atmosphere allowing learners to most of the time work collaboratively in a respectful way. This may contribute to the learning outcomes of all activities and consequently to the language learning process in general.

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Changing the Essentialist Perception of Culture

Some of my students started to overcome the essentialist perspective of culture which conceives Colombian citizens as people solving their social problems through violence. At the beginning of my intervention, some participants used to portray these ideas by saying: "it is almost impossible to establish communication with criminals" some others said aloud "it would be better to kill them"(Journal entry 4, 03/9th/2020, researcher's translation). Taking into account those answers I asked students expressing this to reflect deeper on what they have said and one of them said:

"We should not kill anyone. However, we could say that it would be better to kill

them. For example, an adult that had already committed many murders. Those people

should be condemned to death or life imprisonment. We should not let them free

because they will continue doing those atrocities" (Students' artifacts 3, 05/22th/2020,

research's translation).

As we can see now the participant recognizes the importance of life and consider other forms of penalty. However, his ideas are still shaped by this mainstream essentialist idea that portrays violence repression, or in other words a culture of violence to solve our social problems.

It is important to take into account that most of my participants' reflections were done in the middle of this pandemic COVID-19 and the participants were overwhelmed with academic pressures; however, they continued reflecting and taking action to overcome violence which some of them also identified as a deadly virus. This fact suggests that the pedagogical intervention may have favored students' engagement thanks to the interest ignited by the issue of violence addressed in the English class. Hence, contextualizing English contents may contribute to increase students' engagement and to impact their learning outcomes. Besides, some participants juxtaposed the worldwide sanitarian situation with the

issue of violence by saying: "These projects are worth doing because people raise awareness and that way we could overcome violence and we learned that violence is a very harmful virus and that together we can overcome it" (student's artifacts 3, 05/22nd/2020, researcher's translation). This is an essential aspect of critical multicultural education since juxtaposing different realities with one's own contributes to foster students' deep understanding of issues from a more critical well-informed perspective rather than from an essentialist biased discourse of culture and identity.

Departing from the evidence above mentioned, we can conclude that this critical multicultural pedagogical intervention contributed to foster students' recognition of issues of power proscribed from the curriculum that are directly linked with the reproduction and perpetuation of collective forms of injustice converging in the form of violence. The level of empowerment and different attitudes from the part of students towards working collaboratively make it worth to continue exploring critical multicultural possibilities within an EFL class.

Conclusions

The purpose of this action research project was to explore the possibilities that a critical multicultural framed pedagogical intervention offers to address the issue of violence in an EFL class with seventh graders. Once I conducted the process of analysis, I realized that this pedagogical intervention contributed not only to create spaces for reflection in which participants were able to get to some extent a deeper understanding of violence and work collaboratively to overcome it, but it also created opportunities for the participants to use the foreign language in a more authentic environment.

It was noticeable that this approach and the actions that I conceived to address violence propitiated spaces for reflection, in which participants could link violence with several forms of collective injustice. Some of them also recognized deeper subtler

manifestations of violence at a psychological, emotional and social level. This implies the worthiness of these sorts of reflection spaces since apart from participants' reflections and recognition of the different forms of collective injustice as sources of violence, it may contribute to the contextualization of the educational processes with these delicate issues. This would make educational processes much more meaningful for the communities in which English teachers exercise our pedagogical practice. Learning for the sake of contributing to change violent and worthless realities and not only for the sake of learning a foreign language.

This pedagogical intervention also implied the fact that English teaching practice plays a crucial role in terms of reproducing and perpetuating dominant discourses that are in detriment of linguistics and cultural diversity if the teaching is only on linguistics aspects. Hence, I believe that teachers would expand considerably their possibilities to make foreign language learning a political tool for social transformation and empowerment by including some critical multicultural education ideas in their pedagogical practice.

Furthermore, the remarkable level of empowerment shown by some of the participants opens the possibility to conceive this pedagogical intervention as a model of a small-scale experience that should motivate educators to foster these levels of empowerment at a large-scale. With the possibilities of communicating about and denouncing socially violent or worthless conditions, the political social impact of students and teachers' practice in the society may become much more determinant and crucial in regards to the wellness of our country.

Any learning process, regardless the methodology or careful planning will not work appropriately if the environment and atmosphere where the pedagogical intervention takes place feel more like a battlefield than a classroom. This research project provided insights on the potential of critical multicultural education to address and enhance aspects that are

directly involved in learning processes such as interaction, collaborative work, motivation and engagement. The fact that I got acquainted with the terrible violent experience happening to one of my participants, suggests how meaningful for teachers it could be to conduct these sorts of projects. The potential not only to create spaces to use the foreign language authentically, but also to give students the opportunity to express their perspectives, feelings, concerns and proposals in regards to social issues taking place in their context, allow teachers to become much more aware of the contextual reality of our educational setting which is an important aspect for educators to make more appropriate and well-informed decisions in regards to their pedagogical practice.

This research, however, is subject to some limitations. On the one hand, it could have been more meaningful if I had a more rigorous planning of the activities aiming to promote critical multicultural awareness. Although authors provide clear picture of aspects related with this concept, my novice position using critical approach in my classes could have prevented me from planning more suitable activities and data collection strategies that accurately reveal what critical multicultural education principles are propitiating in an EFL classroom. On the other hand, it is certain that the academic concerns as well as the pandemic COVID-19 prevented me from fulfilling all the expectations that I had as a researcher. Nevertheless, this situation allowed me to learn and consider other aspects of the teaching practice such as the psychological, emotional and many times economic support that we either provide for our students.

Finally, it would also be worth doing further research on critical multicultural education because it is difficult to find many authors establishing a clear connection between these aspects of deep culture and violence. Only Clark (1993) highlights this connection by asserting that critical multicultural education was conceived in response to the violent realities caused by all these sorts of collective injustice and essentialist discourses on culture

and identity. I believe that curriculum designers, policymakers and teachers may develop a deeper understanding of the immense plethora of social and educational realities manifesting in the form of violence to make curricular adjustments based on critical multicultural education.

Reflection

Conducting this action research project was one of the most meaningful experiences in my life as a teacher. The critical multicultural approach which called my attention researchers allowed me to learn a lot for my teaching practice from now on. I was looking forward to seeing what these critical multicultural ideas inspired on my participants, especially because of its youth and because of the reality of violence in Colombia that we could not overcome unless every Colombian take action to eradicate such a deathly social virus.

Teaching English nowadays has certain connotations that no language educator should ignore. The status and prestige that the English language has been gaining is a phenomenon without any precedent. Consequently, governmental policies have turned into an academic imposition no one can just skip. The most controversial fact is the kind of cultural components that we teachers are supposed to use in our classes perpetuating these ideas of the native speaker register and target culture, ownership of English, knowledge, niceness, among others. Validating and perpetuating through our teaching practice these paradigms go against linguistics and human diversity itself which is one invaluable aspect of humanity. That is why teachers, especially English teachers, have a huge social responsibility. This requires a level of personal commitment and preparation which is difficult and demanding, but necessary to assume nonetheless because of the position of mediator that we have between the English curriculum and the learners.

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In regards to the crucial role we educators portray in our society, there must not be anything as important as contributing to create a better society with our teaching practice no matter our area of expertise. The fact that a student decided to share her terrible violent experience shows the potential of action research and critical multicultural approaches to contribute to create spaces for students to express their feelings, perspectives and proposal regarding aspects of deep culture related to their context. This is undoubtedly crucial to enhance any learning process which is just unrealistic if pretty basic conditions as psychological and mental health are disturbed, and equally important, if the classrooms feel more like battlefields than a place to learn and establish appropriate relationships with others that contribute to a fairer more equanimous human society.

And last but not least, a teacher willing to apply these critical multicultural ideas must be very cautious and methodic taking into account the context in which these ideas would be discussed. It is a fact that propitiating communitarian enhancement is many times a cause of assassination in this country as it has happened with more than a hundred social leaders. This fact should encourage educators to change these terrible social realities.

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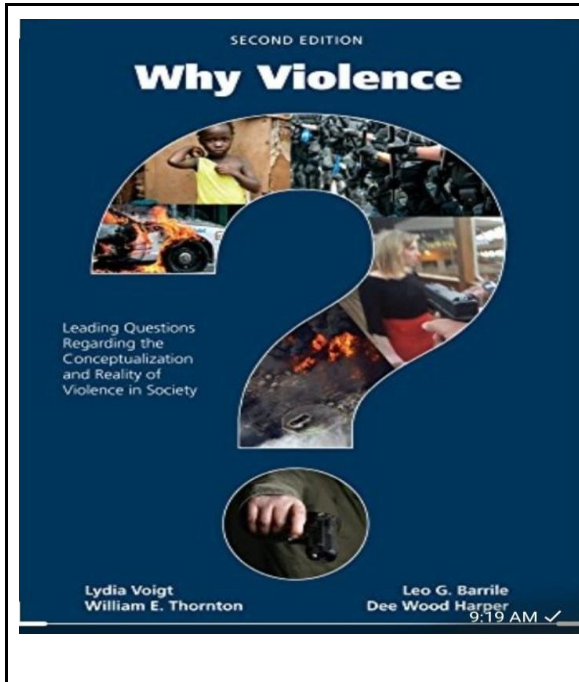
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Appendix