CRITICAL TEACHING

Drama as an approach to communicative learning and development.

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November 2007

ABSTRACT

The following report gives account of a case study conducted at a school in Santiago, Chile in 2007. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with an emphasis on developing metacognitive skills and critical thinking in high-school students. The vehicle used to trigger and develop such skills was drama.

An elective English class formed by 16 students from different classes was chosen to carry out the study. Their initial level of proficiency was assessed through an oral interview in English, proving that their ability to speak in the target language was significantly lower than their theoretical knowledge of the language. During the next two months, students were exposed to a variety of activities aimed at developing awareness of the use of strategies for learning, communicative and socio-affective skills, starting by simple cognitive exercises and moving on to more complex tasks requiring the students to generate content, and thus, creating a bridge between their declarative knowledge and their procedural knowledge.

The results of the study indicate that by the end of the teaching unit, students had developed more self-confidence in the use of the language, ability to work in teams and, most importantly, they valued the importance of moving their static theoretical knowledge to more active communicative activity.

In conclusion, drama applied in the classroom significantly enhances the students´ cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective skills, providing them with new tools to understand their own inner processes and those of others, and to develop strategies for learning and communicating more effectively.

For this reason, it would be advisable for teachers of any subject to consider the metacognitive and social dimension of their students to help them make sense of the content studied and to develop their autonomy as learners and persons. Drama has proven to be an effective vehicle to achieve this goal.

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Drama in the classroom as a practice to promote communicative learning, critical thinking and social development.

Introduction

The following report gives account of the teaching project carried out during the second semester of this year at Colegio San Ignacio Alonso Ovalle in Santiago, Chile. The purpose of this report is to provide information related to the design of the project, the theoretical frame that supported it, strengths and weaknesses in the implementation stage, the learning outcomes and proposals for improvements of the teaching unit.
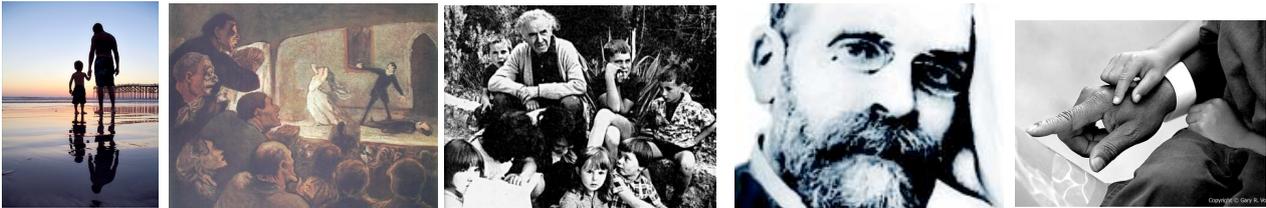
"The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows" - Sidney Harris

Ethnographic characterization

As part of my internship program, I was assigned to teach during the second semester at Colegio San Ignacio Alonso Ovalle. The school is a private, catholic, boys´ institution. It has been in existence for 150 years[1]. It costs $150,000 pesos per month, thus most of the students come from middle to upper middle social class backgrounds.

Before my teaching practice started, I had the opportunity to help in the English Department of the school by substitute teaching for a teacher on medical leave. This gave me the chance to get to know several classes and to become familiar with their dynamics. One of the first things that called my attention, was the fact that students observe certain "habits" and "rules" that are not written or made explicit anywhere. For example, when walking into a classroom, students would stand up (as a sign of respect) without me asking them to do so. I also got the impression that it is part of the institutional culture for students to not express their opinions explicitly in front of their teachers, as it seems to be considered offensive for students to contradict the teacher´s point of view.

The class I was assigned to teach was a Third Medio Electivo, composed of 17 students from the three Third Medio classes in the school. By talking to their official teacher and looking at their grades report, I realized that the majority of this class had high marks in the Electivo course and, in some occasions, higher marks than their classmates in General English. In spite

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[1] This appears in the school´s website www.siao.cl, under the section "sobre nosotros".

of the good marks, after an interview I had with the school´s psychologist, I learned that 5 of my students had presented learning difficulties in other subjects, problems in their general academic performance, emotional disorders and even a case of depression.

During my first contact with the students, I selected a group of them randomly and conducted a semi-structured interview in Spanish so that they could feel at ease and provide me with as much information as possible. During this first contact, the interviews were initially started in English, but because of the students´ inability to keep up and take an active part in the conversation, it was decided to switch to their mother tongue.

During the conversations with the students, I realized that some topics were mentioned by the majority of them. First of all, all the students manifested their interest in learning more English and being able to use it more fluently - to understand and be understood in an effective way.

The other idea that most of them made explicit, was the value they give to activities such as literal translation, completion of worksheets, drillings and others of similar mechanical characteristics, referring to them as "good" for their learning process.

From there, I started developing my first ideas and questions around the conceptions these students had about "learning" and "communication". *When do they know they have actually learned? How do they determine their communicative ability?*

I also took into account the possibility that these students valued such methods only because that was all they had ever been exposed to, and possibly, if they were involved in a different process of teaching and learning, their perception of "learning" and "communication" would change.

Diagnostic

The students in the elective class were participating voluntarily, motivated by the possibility of expanding their knowledge of the language and developing their abilities to understand and be understood in English - that is to say- to communicate.

As stated before, most of them had demonstrated good academic performance and had gotten good marks in both elective and general English. However, I observed an incongruence in their declarations between the goals they expected to achieve and the methods they considered "good" for attaining such objectives.

By the information provided by the students and their course teacher, I learned that the students had been exposed to a variety of materials designed to develop the four skills of the language, but in- what I consider -a mechanical and restricted fashion that leaves little or no room for real communication and language acquisition to take place.

As professor Patricio Novoa[2] states in Lenguas Modernas (2000), Anderson[3] identifies two types of knowledge: *Declarative* and *Procedural*. He describes *learning* as the transit from what we *know in theory* (declarative) to what we can *actually do* with it (procedural), and vice versa.

The problem I detected in this particular case, was that the students had accumulated knowledge in their memories (declarative), but had not had the chance to see it working in a realistic way because of the lack of classroom situations directed at using the structures learned. This could explain why the students - in spite of their good marks- were not able to communicate effectively in English during the first contact. Taking this into account, I decided to design a unit that would foster and trigger the transit between theory and practice. For this reason, I decided to teach under the umbrella of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, using Drama as the tool to activate communication, critical thinking and social skills.

At this point, the objectives of the unit were stated as follows:

Primary Objective:

* By the end of the project, students will be able to communicate ideas and emotions effectively.

Secondary Objectives:

* Students will develop strategies to enhance their listening and reading comprehension of texts, both written and aural.

* To facilitate proceduralization of target structures taught in class by responding and adapting them in real time to a partner´s message.

Progress Indicators:

* Students will effectively work in pairs or groups.

* Students will start focusing more on fluency rather than accuracy.

My teaching paradigm

I am convinced that an easy way to get an idea of a person´s worldview is to take a look at what they read. In this sense, to get a feeling of my teaching style, one would have to take a look at authors such as Celestine Freinet, Paulo Freire, James Dobson, Emile Durkheim, Martha Stone, Scrivener and Scott Thurnbury, among others.

The author Wilfred Carr in his book "Una teoría para la educación" (1995), offers his visions on the issue of theory v/s practice in education. He explains that these two components of the

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[2] Patricio Novoa and Alfonsina Doddis - Estrategias de aprendizaje metacognitivas en la comprensión de lectura en inglés como segunda lengua: un estudio de casos - Lenguas Modernas Nr, 26 - 27. Page 79

[3] Anderson J. - The architecture of cognition. Cambridge - 1983 Harvard University Press

educational activity work dialectically, influencing one another[4]. He then goes on to identify four paradigms[5] that define or direct diverse teaching styles or approaches. I identify more with the "practical" one because it is more centered on processes. Also, it is aimed at using the "art of deliberation" as a "base to judge and intervene the complex life in the classroom and school"[6]. In my opinion, this could be defined as a metacognitive teaching style.

My teaching style also explores the realm of the "critical" paradigm, which aims for the rational exercise of self regulating and examining one´s own practices, modifying them, and possibly replacing them by more effective ones in light of the context. It sees the educative practice not only as a moral practice, but also as a social one, historically situated and culturally implanted. The benefits it expects to produce are directed to building and improving social relationships as it promotes knowledge of oneself, setting the scene to bring wrong practices and thoughts into the light of analysis, so that they can be modified or replaced. In this sense, these two teaching paradigms are complementary.

Fenstermacher, in the book "Enfoques de la Enseñanza" (1999), also describes three styles of teaching that are closely related to the ones described by Carr. Fenstermacher´s styles are: the "Executive" (very dependent on rules, methods, plannings, and product oriented), the "Therapist" (oriented to promote self-realization) and the "Liberator" (the teacher as a freer of minds, educating integral, moral and aware human beings). My views on education and the style of classes I like to teach are more connected, I feel, with the "liberator" paradigm, although during the internship, I felt I also demonstrated traces of the "therapist".

Referential Theoretical Frame

Key concepts

To gain a better understanding of my teaching style and paradigms from which I developed the unit, I think it is necessary to clarify some key concepts first. The term "learning" should be understood from Novoa´s[7] definition (2000) which is the transition from ***declarative*** knowledge (what we know about something - stored as static data in our memory) to ***procedural*** knowledge (what we can do - dynamic information in the memory). This definition of "learning" is considered to be complementary to other, more traditional definitions, such as "relatively permanent modification of behaviour", "capability of using knowledge in different contexts", etc. Some of these definitions of "learning" have been understood from a psychological point of view of knowledge - in fact - they seem to fit very well with the methods we have

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[4] Carr explains two divergent opinions on the matter of theory and practice. According to him, one stream suggests that every practice is supported by or exists because of a subjacent theory. Another one suggests that theory does not always apply to factual reality. In spite of the controversy, Carr suggests that neither option is more correct than the other: they work together dialectically; What we think (theory) influence what we do (practice) and vice versa.

[5] Carr´s paradigms are: Common sense, Applied science, Practical and Critical.

[6] Wilfred Carr in Una teoría para la educación: hacia una investigación educativa crítica- Morata 1995. Page 73

[7] Patricio Novoa and Alfonsina Doddis in Lenguas Modernas Nr, 26 - 27. Page. 81 Universidad de Chile

grown accustomed to in our experience as students. However, when we talk about language, and more specifically, communication, the nature of the learning and teaching process becomes something wider, richer and more complex than the simple habit of memorization and the analysis of structures of information. Language has to do with the communication of ideas, feelings and emotions among human beings. One of the main aims we pursue when learning a foreign language is to acquire the ability to understand others and be understood, which - in time- leads to an understanding and an appreciation of the value of cultural differences and diversity. Independently of the order in which we attain these goals, we are ultimately talking about a social activity.

In this sense, when I talk about *social activity* , I am referring to the human interactions, which play a main role in the communicative approach - an approach coined as such by the North American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Robert Langs in the early seventies.

An important factor to consider in this respect is a phrase by the sociologist Emile Durkheim[8] related to teaching: "…education is an eminently social thing; it is social because of its goal".

Also, O´Malley and Chamot[9] considered the "socio-affective" interaction as one of the three components of their taxonomy of strategies for learning.

Another concept that was crucial to the construction and development of the unit was that of Metacognition and its connection with the fostering and development of critical thinking. We understand metacognition as the knowledge, self-regulation and planning of learning processes. From the trilogy proposed by Campione, Brown and Connell[10], this consists of three dimensions: one related to stable and conscious knowledge of one´s own cognition and problem solving; a second related to the monitoring and organization of one´s own cognitive skills; and a third that has to do with the reflection of one´s own knowledge and the processes to use that knowledge.

Drama as an approach to communicative learning and development

The main theoretical platform on which I based my teaching paradigms, and consequently my teaching unit, is the understanding or *learning* as the dynamic process described by Anderson and Novoa to which I referred to in the previous section. All the other pedagogical decisions I took to build the specific unit taught, streamed from that main epistemological vision of the teaching and learning process.

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[8] E. Durkheim, "Pedagogía y sociología", LÁnneé Sociologique, vol. VII, 1904, pp. 684-686

[9] O´Malley and Chamot distinguish 3 categories of strategies for learning: Metacognitive, Cognitive and Socio-affective. The first one appeals to the knowledge of one own´s cognitive processes and has a regulatory function of learning; the second one is related to the processing of learning materials and the third one is connected with the interactions and the affective control associated with learning. Learning strategies in second language acquisition, 1990, Cambridge University Press / Patricio Novoa and Alfonsina Doddis, Lenguas Modernas Nr. 26-27, Universidad de Chile.

[10] Campione, Brown, Connell, Metacognition: On the importance of understanding what you are doing, 1989.

Having that as a base, the next step I needed to take to build my unit was to decide for an approach that would fit well into the reality I was intervening and that would be consequent with the changes and solutions I was trying to implement, as well as providing a sound structure or scaffold that gave room to try different techniques and methods aimed at solving the problem identified during the first interview with the students.

The approach I selected was the Communicative Language Teaching approach. In the essay "Communicative tasks and the language curriculum"[11], David Nunan describes five features of the CLT approach:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.

2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.

3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.

4. An enhancement of the learners´ own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

These features set the groundwork for a more meaningful aspect of the teaching process, since it becomes something more than just "training" people in the language; it becomes the opportunity of engaging in processes that change perceptions, develop social skills, open horizons and touch lives.

Margie Berns, referring to the Communicative approach wrote: "language is interaction.. it is an interpersonal activity with a real relationship with society... the learning of a language must be directed towards its use in the socio- linguistic or situational contexts".[12]

When I had a clear theoretical base and a structure to scaffold the unit, I needed to find an approach that would give shape and bring the whole structure of the unit to life. This was where Drama came in.

I needed to trigger communicative competences in my students. Along with language awareness, I desired to activate critical thinking skills and include a socio- affective component, all within a short period of time, and Drama seemed to be an interesting and effective tool to accomplish those requirements. Interesting, because it is motivating and fun, and effective because it deals with a variety of aspects of language and communication. Besides, with students that were accustomed to traditional and rather dull models of lessons, such as the PPP (Presentation - Practice - Production) I decided to teach them from a non-traditional approach that

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[11] Tesol Quarterly 25 - 1991

[12] Functional approaches to language and language teaching: another look , M. Berns, 1984, p.5 - USA

would awake them from their routine and academic lethargy, willing to take the risk of doing things differently.

About drama, Francisco Raymund says in his book "El teatro para la comunicación y desarrollo personal del alumno"[13] that in communication "oral, written and gestural skills are fundamental vehicles. Without direct oral and gestural communication, we are left immersed in ourselves, solitaries". From this perspective, drama provides opportunities of development of language awareness in the students, in the sense that they start assimilating English as a means of communication and not as just another "school subject" to be studied and memorized, since they can experiment with the meanings and effects they produce through pronunciation, intonation and body language - just as it happens in their mother tongue.

Veronica García Huidobro, in her "Manual de Pedagogía Teatral"[14] states that drama in the classroom is closely related to teaching, and it serves in several aspects of human development, one of them being what she calls the "therapeutic dimension", where drama is not an objective in itself, but a tool and support for social integration and healing.

In this sense, drama would not only provide solutions for language matters, but also a sort of therapy to help these students in other areas, particularly those who, according to the psychologist, had presented emotional disorders or depression.

Another aspect of development where drama can be helpful is that related to critical thinking. Nowadays, there is an extensive amount of resources that deal with the topic of critical thinking, each one providing a particular, and in many cases, complicated explanations and definitions. Anne Buchanan, however, describes critical thinking in a far more accessible way: "What you generate, you know".[15]

Bonnie Potts, from the American Institutes for Research, says that critical thinking in the classroom "is facilitated by a physical and intellectual environment that encourages a spirit of discovery"[16].

I think that drama activities provide that physical and intellectual environment and are a good tool to encourage that spirit of discovery that Buchanan talks about. They also foster and develope several aspects of the language and the thinking process, as well as the generation of knowledge.

Other reasons for using drama in the classroom are[17]:

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[13] CPEIP- Ministerio de Educación 1995

[14] Editorial Los Andes - Santiago, Chile- 1996

[15] Integrating Critical Thinking skills into the classroom, Anne Buchanan in www.accessexcellence.org

[16] PARE online journal - http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=4&n=3

[17] Some of these reasons are mentioned and explained in more detail by Galina Zalta in her article "Using drama with children"- English Teaching Forum - volume 44, Nr. 2, 2006

a) It helps to build confidence

b) It helps to develop skills and strategies for learning

c) It is appropriate for different learning styles

d) It provides room for language personalization.

e) It is cross-curricular since the aims are more than just linguistic.

In terms of participation and autonomy, drama also plays an important role in the development of these areas, that is why the activities and evaluations of the project were designed under this rationale.

In the article "From passive participant to active thinker", Nguyen Thi Cam Le describes several aspects of a learner - centered approach such as drama. The lessons planned for the teaching project were conceived taking those aspects into consideration. They include the recognition of learning as "a process that includes more than just the language itself. It considers the significance of learners´ feelings, emotions, and social experience as integral to the educational process" and "a motivating experience since students are focusing on something other than language, such as ideas, issues and opinions" - in the words of Richards and Rodgers (2001 , Page 210).

Unit planning

The unit consisted of 12 lessons. The learning objectives stated in the introduction were strongly directed towards the improvement of the students´ communication skills and the development of thinking skills connected to an active involvement in their learning process. These objectives did not have a direct connection with the curriculum since there were no official programs from the Ministry of Education for elective courses.

The unit was divided into three stages. During the first, students were involved in activities oriented towards experiencing English with an emphasis on communication, rather than in formal academic content. The idea was to set the stage for the upcoming lessons which required the students to be at ease with their peers and confident enough to demonstrate other abilities. The contents seen in the first lessons were connected with attitudinal contents such as confidence, empathy, respect, involvement and creativity.

In the second stage, the lessons were aimed at providing linguistic models and practice of features such as pronunciation, intonation and body language. The emphasis of the content in this stage was put on procedural and disciplinary aspects; Restricted and freer practice of language items as part of the procedural contents and reading comprehension, pronunciation and vocabulary for the disciplinary ones.

The third stage of the project was planned to be a production stage, in which students were required to use all the skills practiced and all the contents learned during the first two stages of

the project, to produce -as a team- a dramatization or play that demonstrated their social, academic and communicational abilities they had developed until then.

Unit description

Class 1

Time: 45 min.

1) Getting acquainted

- Teacher introduces himself
- Students socialize and gather information about their partner such as full name, age, personal interests and extra programmatical activities, hobbies, etc. and then introduce their partner to the class and the teacher.
- Teacher declares objectives, procedures and expectations.

2) Poetical Autobiographies

Objectives: To help students connect language with their own lives, feelings and ideas through thinking and writing. To get a more personal look at the students perspectives and ideas. To set a high level of expectations on the students, in terms of the nature of the activities and the level of difficulty so that they get ready for high quality work.

Teacher hands out copy of the poem "I am" and reads it with the class.

Students then analyze the structure of the poem, the vocabulary and the patterns present in both sample poems. Students drill pronunciation after the teacher.

Students follow the pattern in the sample poems to write their own poems about themselves. Teacher monitors providing help and encouraging students to complete the first stanza of the poem. The extra two stanzas are given as homework so that they can continue the thinking process at home.

Class 2

Time: 90 Minutes

Class Objectives:

• To raise awareness of rhythm in oral communication.
• To activate a variety of lexical units in the students and use them in the context of a conversation.
• To experiment differences of meaning in oral communication when using different intonations and body language.

Stage 1 (Lead in):

Teacher presents an extract from the poem "The Congo", by Vachel Lindsay.

"I saw the Congo creeping through the black, cutting through the forest with a golden track"

Students repeat it after the teacher to practice pronunciation.

Teacher then clarifies possible vocabulary and context questions.
Students then practice repeating the poem using different rhythms as they sharpen their pronunciation and memorize the words.

Stage 2 A first approach to dramatization (controlled practice of vocabulary & intonation):

Teacher hands out short dialogues written in a neutral tone (no exclamation or question marks).
Example:
   a) I have news for you
   b) What is it
   a) She's pregnant
   b) no.
Students then, in pairs or threes, choose a possible context for their conversation to take place and decide on the emotional state of the characters. They then learn their lines and present it to the rest of the class.

The rest of the class then reports on the impression they got from the performance (Were the characters happy, irritated, nervous ?)

Stage 3 (Production stage. Vocabulary, Intonation & Rhythm):

Teacher elicits names of songs in English (at least 10). If students come up with names of songs in Spanish, they can try to translate them.
In pairs or groups of three, students create a short dialogue using as many of the words listed on the board as possible.
They then act it out in front of their classmates.

Closure: Students say the poem as a chant (by heart).

Class 3.
Time: 45 minutes
Objectives: To practice listening comprehension. To use logical and creative thinking. To dramatize a dialogue using body language and intonation effectively.

Stage 1
      1) Warm up
  - Teacher elicits vocabulary from the students around the concept of "Desert".
- Teacher then shows a Tie, elicit its name in English and then stick it on the board, telling the students that they will hear a story regarding a tie that took place in a desert

Stage 2
      2) Organizing events:
- Students are presented with sets of pictures that illustrate the story. In pairs, they arrange them in the order they consider logical.
- Teacher tells the story using mimicry. As they listen, students check the order of their pictures, and re-arrange them if necessary.
- Students are then presented with the text of the story, separated into paragraphs in different slips of paper, which they also have to put in order, paying attention to logical order, grammar and vocabulary.

Stage 3
      3) Dramatizing:
- Students are then asked to pay attention to the dialogues in the story, marked in black. The dialogues center around the vocabulary seen previously, using "Have you got...?"
- They learn their dialogues by heart and present them in front of the class, paying attention to intonation, pronunciation and body language.

Class 4
Time: 90 minutes.
Objectives: To experience difference in meaning according to intonation, body language and vocabulary. To learn typical expressions of anger. To practice dramatizing and identifying tense situations and the expressions used in those situations. To motivate students to communicate ideas and emotions in a freer context.

Activity 1. Total Physical Response: Miming adjectives.

Teacher explains that students will listen to a story, but if at any moment they hear a certain adjective they should react mimicking that word. Teacher pre teaches the words and their mimic.

Teacher reads the story out loud slowly at first, giving time for students to react to the words. He then reads it again accelerating the pace of the reading.

Activity 2. "Heat Wave"

Teacher and students socialize about the "heat wave" phenomenon; what it is, its effects and anecdotes.
Students then get into small groups and prepare a dialogue following the instructions given by the teacher, using the "angry expression" written on their card.
Students then dramatize their situation. The rest of the class tries to identify the expression they used.

Class 5.
Time: 45 minutes.
Class Objectives:
To reinforce understanding of non-verbal language as a way to communicate meaning.
To introduce drama techniques to the class.
To activate a variety of vocabulary in short time and spontaneously.

Warmer: "This isn't a pen"

Students sit forming a circle so that they can see each other.
Teacher shows an object, for example a pen, and tells the students that what he is holding in his hand is not a pen, but a hair brush (and mimics brushing his hair with it).
Teacher then passes the pen to a student who has to come up with a different use for the object, starting with the phrase: "this isn't a pen...it's a..." who then passes it to the next student.

Activity 1: Brain Gym
Background *In the 1970's, Dr. Paul Denisson produced an innovative approach to learning based on a large body of research from developmental specialists that experimented on physical movement to enhance learning ability. His approach, also known as Educational Kinesiology, basically consists on a series of movements that activate the brain processes and enhances the learning experience.*

Students follow the oral instructions from the teacher, and mirror his demonstration.
Instructions:
- Show your thumbs. With your thumb touch the tip of each finger, one after the other, on both hands simultaneously.
- Sit down, put your right elbow on your left knee. Then your left elbow on your right knee.
- Stand on one foot, stretch your arms to the sides and lean forward (as a plane). Keep the position for 5 seconds. Then stand on the other foot and repeat the position.
- Sit down and take a deep breathe, letting the air out slowly. Repeat 3 times.
Activity 2:

Frozen Scenes: Surgery – A day on the beach – bank robbery – a band playing.

Students form groups of 4 or 5. Teacher hands out a card with one of the scenes above to each group.

In 5 minutes, students create a "picture" of their scene, without using any words, only their bodies. The rest of the class then observe this "living picture", as if they were looking at a piece from a museum, and describe the scene, taking into account arrangement of the bodies, facial expressions, etc.

Class 6
FIELD TRIP
Class Objective:
To experience the use of English in a real-life context – outside of the school.

Activity: Field trip to Palacio Cousiño Museum.

Students experience a guided tour - in English- through the museum.
Students complete a "field trip observation sheet" to then create a presentation based on what they learned.

Class 7.
Time: 45 minutes
Evaluated activity.
Objectives: To do a presentation about the Cousiño Palace using technological visual aids, demonstrating analytical abilities, as well as communicative skills.

Presentations: Students, in groups, present their work on power point to the class, referring to facts about the palace, the family, the social and political background of the time, and their personal reflections and analysis of what they saw and learned.

Class 8.
Time 90 minutes

Objectives: To practice reading a play script and learning lines. To use drama techniques using sample plays.

Ice breaker: Drawing dictation. Teacher pre teaches some vocabulary and then describes a picture using adjectives, prepositions of place, etc.
Students listen and draw what they hear. They then compare their drawings to check if there are any differences in what they understood. Teacher then repeats his description as he draws the picture on the board so that students can now compare their versions with the original one.

Activity: Students get into groups. Teacher hands out scripts of different plays to each group.

Students choose their characters and start preparing their lines.

Class 9.
Time: 45 minutes.
Evaluated activity.

Objective: to demonstrate communicative competence in the context of a dramatization.

Activity: Students present their different plays to the rest of the class without using cue cards or scripts.

Classes 10 - 11 - 12
Final evaluated activity

Objectives: To put into practice contents learned throughout the project to create a short collaborative play, in which all students take part in the creation process of the story, characters, scripts, costumes, preps, decorations and finally, dramatization of their own play. To generate autonomous work.

Students decide on a story to dramatize and divide it into two parts. Students are split into two teams to prepare their part of the story, having "secretaries" in charge of establishing communication and agreement between the two teams.
They then come together to put the two parts together, rehearse the play, and finally present it.

Assessment

Since the unit was based on the development of communication, the evaluation instruments had to be coherent to that nature. Unlike the traditional instruments used to assess learning outcomes of grammatical or lexical contents such as tests or worksheets, communication and drama call for a different approach to evaluation that consider performance as a valid indicator of learning. Taking this into account, I planned to evaluate the students´ progress in three main stages spread throughout the unit.

* The first one was labeled "Classwork" and included students involvement, participation and responsibility during the first five sessions.

Inspired by Martha Stone´s Teaching for Understanding model, I planned to pay special attention to certain behaviors[18] of my students that would provide evidence that they were understanding what they were doing and moving in the right direction towards the learning objective I had prepared for them. Those behaviors were stated in the unit objectives as Progress Indicators, which were planned by answering a question proposed by Stone: "What can my students do to develop and demonstrate their understanding?".[19] As it is clearly seen, the evaluation of the learning outcomes did not only consider the main objective as a final "product", but conceived evaluation and assessment as an ongoing process from the beginning of the unit. The progress indicators (Stone calls them "Understanding Performances") provided qualitative information about the learning progress of individual students, little groups and the whole class since they were required to demonstrate a variety of abilities and skills through the activities carried out during the first five lessons. The continuous assessment of the individual performance through activities and effort put into them led to the first mark required by the school.

* The second stage, called "Presentation", was the result of the content practiced during the first stage and consisted of a group dissertation based on the field trip in lesson 6. Even though it was a group presentation, the activity allowed me to give individual grades since each member of the different groups was in charge of a different part of the presentation and it included the elaboration of personal insights and opinions. Along with language and communicative skills, this activity also evaluated the use of technology, as it was included as an important component in the rubric. The rubric established:

Presentation time: 5 to 10 min - Clarity and relevance of information - vocabulary and pronunciation - efficient use of Power Point as a visual support (pictures, specific information - presentation not completely typed out in the power point,etc.) - personal insights and opinions. What they learned during the field trip and their presentation led to the second grade required by the school.

* The third and final stage called "Final presentation" (the third grade in the students record) was the result of the process carried out during sessions 10 and 11 - which consisted of the collaborative creation of a short play- and the dramatization of it in the last session. The idea was to bring the group to a situation where they would have to use and demonstrate different skills and abilities developed so far, and use the product of their effort as an example of something accomplished by themselves, giving the project a nice closure. The assessment and grading of the final presentation was based on the level of achievement of the objectives and progress indicators for the unit, through observation of their involvement, participation and

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[18] By behaviour I am referring to the way students react to the activities proposed, what they do and what the say.

[19] La enseñanza para la comprensión, - chapter "desempeños de comprensión" p. 110 - Martha Stone - Paidós

leadership demonstrated during the creation of the play and a rubric[20] designed to measure their communicative proficiency during the dramatization using the descriptors: Completely Accomplished - Satisfactory - Not Accomplished. The rubric included: Preparation (student knows his lines), Voice (student can be heard and understood), Pronunciation, Intonation (student expresses questions, exclamations, cynicism, etc.), Body Language (student conveys feelings, emotions, moods and support to spoken language through physical positions, movements, gestures,etc.).

Pedagogical Reflections

Trying to do things in a different way is always a challenge. Traditional methods and approaches provide a wide "safety net" since all the contents, activities and evaluation instruments have been tried and improved upon many times over the years, making the planning, implementation and evaluation a much easier process. However, when setting out to try new things, the teaching experience can become an adventure, a journey into the unknown, a leap of faith. Many questions, doubts, expectations and ideas storm in the mind of the teacher, and possibly in the minds of the students too, when told that the route of the ship they are sailing is about to change.

Fortunately, in the case of drama in education, many others have experimented with it before, and even though their experiences and findings are not encountered in traditional scientific publications, important research papers or books, the traces they leave show evidence of the joys and benefits of giving drama a place in our classrooms.

Some of that evidence can be found in the book "Teatro Juvenil"[21] where Manuel Peña[22] writes: "(al teatro) ya no se le considera un espectáculo de diversión, frívolo y sin trascendencia, sino una actividad esencialmente dinámica que permite el desarrollo de muchas capacidades innatas en el joven... el teatro entrena en la disciplina de la mente y de la voluntad; educa los sentimientos y el gusto artístico; desarrolla la expresión oral; y, sobretodo, crea lazos afectivos entre los integrantes". He then adds that psychologists support the idea that drama has a positive effect as a therapy to overcome complexes, personal crisis, releasing tensions and helping to find ones own individuality.

In my personal experience teaching this unit, I had the opportunity not only to witness, but to be a part of the experiences described by Peña, Garcia Huidobro and other authors consulted

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[20] See appendix.

[21] Teatro Juvenil - Selección de Obras, Teoría y Práctica, Manuel Gallegos- Andres Bello, Chile 1984

[22] Spanish Teacher, Doctor in hispanic philology. Teatro juvenil, page 9

during the research I carried out to design this unit. In terms of teaching achievements, I think I was able to teach, lead and encourage my students not from the position of an "expert", so typical in expositive lessons, but in a way that made them feel involved and challenged. Being a teacher from a critical and democratic point of view is part of a process that requires time, involvement, practice and flexibility. Being in contact with these students helped me realize aspects that I have achieved so far in that sense, and others that I still have to figure out.

One interesting experience, that I consider a great achievement from both the teaching and learning point of view, is that although the project was not exempt of conflict, it was possible to manage in English and in a communicatively and socially correct manner. This was also done outside of the classroom context.

For example, at the end of one the last sessions, as I was explaining something to the class, one of the students did not agree with one of my ideas and expressed this in front of the class in a serious tone of voice, even showing some frustration. Other teachers in that school would have interpreted the student´s reaction as a sign of disrespect and challenge - something to be punished. As for me, this was something that I had tried to promote from the beginning of the project; that they could think critically and express their ideas and emotions efficiently. This student definitely achieved that, even if that meant going against the teacher´s ideas. The problem was that as I tried to get him to discuss it further, he just left the classroom. Of course, that is not a socially acceptable reaction, but I knew I just had to let him vent and deal with his reaction some other day.

To my surprise and joy, later that same day I received an email from the student:

Sir Fernando:

I'm sorry for my bad attitude on the Friday class. The reason of that is that I'm really tired and with a lot of tests, preparing my recital and solving some family problems. I know that all of us are weary, but this is not an excuse for the compromise. I saw all your effort and how you really love your profesion, something that is very uncomon in our days. I need some comprehension but I know that this will work ok. A lot of force for you and have a nice weekend.

Best regards,

Diego Prieto Rodríguez

P.S.: Now I think that you have to film our presentation.

This student, who during the first interview would not express his opinions in public, was now not only expressing them in front of the class, but also solving a conflict in English. As a teacher, and as a human being, that is worth much more than the evidences of learning expressed with numbers in their grade reports - it is learning for life.

As for the unachieved aspects in teaching, I think I failed at guiding the process for students to consciously develop metacognitive strategies for enhancing their listening and reading comprehension of written and aural texts, which was stated as a secondary objective. I tried to achieve too many objectives, not realizing that time was constrained, since I did not have many sessions to do the project, and students usually took more time than planned to do their activities. This resulted in the students not achieving that same learning goal, which would have been quite useful for them, knowing that after this project they would return to their usual classes, methods, worksheets and reading comprehension tests.

Unit improvement & Self evaluation

Fortunately, most of the students were able to understand and cope with the "new order" established during the project. I received positive feedback not just from the students -who found the activities very innovative and interactive- but from the head of the English department, who even invited me to become a member of the staff for the following year. The identity given by the institution and the discipline and habits of the students played a major role in the successful completion of the teaching unit. I was glad to see some of them exercising their leadership traits very naturally. Some students went the extra mile while others did only what was required of them. However, there was a group of students that were constantly staying behind, showing an indifferent attitude, presenting their assignments late or not attending classes. Some of those students were not present during the first session, therefore they missed the presentation of the project, the objectives and the spirit the class should live under. This could partially explain their lack of understanding and commitment to the project. Only towards the end of the project I called a couple of them to have a conversation with me in private and one of them told me they were not used to what we were doing in class, and that the English Elective they were used to consisted of easier things like completing worksheets or reading texts, which did not even require attendance. In spite of that, as a teacher, I think I could have done something more to motivate those students from an earlier stage. In the book "Consejos a los maestros jóvenes"[23], the great educator Celestine Freinet writes that it is impossible to force a horse that is not thirsty to drink water, and uses that illustration as an analogy of what happens with students that are not interested in learning what we have to offer. Even though that makes sense, I believe that it is necessary for us as teachers to forget for a moment that we are teaching "English" or "History" and remember that we are teaching "people". In my case, it means I could have developed other means of getting to those students´ minds and hearts interested and involved.

In general, some of the changes I would implement to improve the unit are connected with the length of the teaching unit, or the reduction of the number of objectives, so that there would be a balance between time and objectives to accomplish quality learning outcomes. At the

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[23] Consejos a los Maestros Jóvenes - Celestine Freinet- Editorial LAIA- Barcelona 1982

same time, I would also implement a more formal and guided process to develop conscious cognitive and metacognitive reading comprehension strategies in the students.

At the end of the day, the famous quote by Ben Sweetland suddenly becomes real:

"We cannot hold a torch to light another´s path without brightening our own".

Appendix

Specific information given by the school´s psychologist Mrs. Cecilia Guzmán:

Student 1: An episode of depression.

Student 2: Emotionally unstable.

Student 3: Academic performance deficiencies - possibly related to emotional disorders.

Student 4: Impulsive, oposicionist - needs to work on attitudes.

Student 5: Low academic performance.

First contact: Semi-structured interview with students developed as a conversation, having some of the following questions as a base for discussion:

Why are you participating in the Elective?

What do you expect to learn here?

How do you study? Do you use any methods or strategies?

What do you do when you don´t understand a word in a text you´re reading?

What do like and dislike about the English class?

Some of the general responses and ideas collected:

"I want to have a good level of English for my future, to go to university and to get a good job"

"I normally read the text without paying much attention to the words I don´t understand...later I try to guess from the main idea...I ask another classmate or I check the dictionary"

"I like the worksheets that our teacher brings us... I feel good when I can complete them... when it´s difficult, I ask the teacher or discuss it with my group of friends"

"I like to translate texts because I learn more vocabulary"

"In the elective we practice more than in general English- where we only complete reading comprehension worksheets all the time-...sometimes we do debates"

"I would like to do more interactive things...I don´t know...maybe listening to a song"

Some observations and entries from the Project´s Journal

September 27th - 1st Class: Students responded really well to activities proposed by teacher. They reacted really shy, which is understandable. It´s just their first class with me, and the approach is already different.

September 28th - 2nd Class: When required to give an opinion, students have a hard time expressing what they feel or think. There´s an awkward silence after I ask them their opinion on what we´re doing. At least they smiled when I gave them the possibility of disagreeing with me and tell me that what I was saying made no sense.

October 4th - 3rd Class: A student approached me after class. He said the classes have been creative and different from what they normally did.

October 5th - 4th Class: Breakthrough! Students are starting to gain confidence!. They now prepare their activities really quickly, speak freely and move around the classroom. The class is becoming alive. I also got to sit and talk to some of them on a more personal level. This might help me develop deeper teaching-learning outcomes.

October 11th - 5th Class: I got to the point where I can try crazier drama techniques. They feel more comfortable to be in the "spotlight". The guys are excited about the field trip tomorrow. When I mentioned that we would go by metro, they pointed out that it was a better idea to go walking.

October 12th - 6th Class: Today I felt like a real teacher. I took my class down to a museum all by myself. The guys behaved really well, they even tried to play jokes on me in the street. During the tour in the museum, they started to gain confidence little by little and started asking questions to the tour guide who was rushing us from one room to the other.

October 18th - 7th Class:Grrr...lots of students missed class today and didn´t do their presentation. I hate it when that happens. I can´t forget to book the data show for next class too. Some of the presentations were really good. They´re quite respectful when someone is presenting.

October 19th - 8th Class: Madness began. Some guys are being really lazy. I talked to a couple in private and reminded them of their responsibilities. One of the good students is not happy with the grade he got on the presentation. Apparently they all thought that 7´s (A´s) where guaranteed - yeah right! I think this will be a good opportunity to show them they have to really earn a good grade. On the other hand I felt bad for that student. He´s really nice. Maybe I should have stated my evaluation criteria clearer.

October 26th - 9th Class: Looks like some of the students are starting to get too comfortable. Another teacher came by and took my students away. I told her I needed to talk to them and she said "no" in front of them and took them away anyways! What tha heck was that! Anyway, I´ve got to start "whipping the snails" lol.

November 9th - 23rd - Last Lessons: I´ve been interrupted by several school activities, ranging from catholic celebrations (Mary´s month) to activities related to the graduation of the 4th Medios. The guys are working slower than I expected. I understand though, that they´re also on their level tests. The good thing is that they are doing everything by themselves. This is very exciting. Who knows what is going to result from all this! In the midst of all this I had the chance to teach them and excerpt from a poem by Henry David Thoreau using the running dictation game; then we analyzed it. They liked it.

"I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. To put to rout all that was not life, and not when I had come to die, discover that I had not lived".

November 30th - Presentation Day: Prior to this day, the course teacher called me during the week to ask me to give the students more time to prepare their dramatization. I agreed to give them an extension of time, not without letting them know I would be extra demanding on the assessment of their work.

This day I got the answer to why they wanted an extension of time: the students did not want to present something in a small scale just in their classroom: they wanted to use the school´s theater - an impressive building- and prepare not just their costumes, but decoration, music and lightning effects. All the trouble during the project is all paid off by the experience of seeing my students perform something done completely by themselves. Their course teacher came to see the final result of the project and we also had the visit of one of the jesuit priests from the school. One of the students tried to convince me to stay in the school because "the school needs me to bring up their level of English". Truly an experience to cherish.

Field Trip Presentation - Evaluation Check List:

Time: 5- 10 minutes	
Information: Clear, Relevant, includes social/economic context	
Language: Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Body Language, Engaging,etc.	
Technology: Efficient use of Power Point. It contains pictures, specific information, the presentation is not completely typed out on the screen.	
Personal elaborations: Include personal points of view & insights	

Final Presentation Assessment Rubric

	COMPLETELY ACCOMPLISHED	SATISFACTORY	NOT ACCOMPLISHED
PREPARATION	3	2	1
VOICE	3	2	1
PRONUNCIATION	3	2	1
INTONATION	3	2	1
BODY LANGUAGE	3	2	1

Total points: _____

Total Points: 15.

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