

The effects of implementing a task-based approach to enhance student engagement in a 10th
grade English class at I.E. Doce de Octubre

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Abstract

This research project presents the results of the teaching practicum in Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras program at the Universidad de Antioquia. Disengagement has become a staple in the English classes where students felt powerless to decide what they wanted to learn. The project shows the effects of the implementation of task based activities to enhance tenth graders emotional engagement in language learning (English) at I.E Doce de Octubre, Medellin. The project was conducted with 31 students from this public institution, from February to November 2016. Data collection techniques included interviews, surveys and journals provided by the CT and students through comments and reflections. Results showed that after the implementation of the action plan, student needs, interests and emotional engagement were enhanced, improving their academic results and motivation.

Keywords: EFL, emotional engagement, meaningful content, task based approach

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain the Bachelor Education Degree in Foreign Languages Teaching (English - French) at the Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia.

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Preface

As a pre-service teacher, I was accustomed to work in non-official institutes with kids and foreigners teaching Spanish and basic English. Nonetheless, I always had special interest in working in the public sector because it is there where teachers can make a real contribution to these human beings. This interest required me to become informed about different authors who specialized in problems that reflected on issues that go beyond the academic discourse. One of such authors is Nunan 2004, he suggested that the use of meaningful content in classes included taking into account the context and realities of students, to teach language as a tool for life. For this reason, I decided to explore how I could promote meaningful learning while taking into account my students' interest, context, and the teaching of language as an excuse to give them the tools to be the best version of themselves.

Thus, when I started the first part of the practicum, I observed the CT's classes and his students. I identified a problem, I look into it and designed an action plan. I decided to implement the Task Based Approach and activities as a possible solution to enhance student emotional engagement. During the second part of the practicum, I spent three hours a week in charge of classes, student learning processes and the implementation of the action plan. I proceeded to gathered data from different sources, analyzed it, and presented my findings and interpretations from this analysis. Finally, I arrived at certain conclusions, gathered insights and gave suggestions according to my experience during this process. I believe this segment of my work can be useful for teacher practice in public schools, as it may allow them to reflect about their practice and how they can help their students to have a better experience with EFL while enhancing their emotional engagement.

Context Description

This paper is based on a series of observations that have been taking place for the last three months in a public school located in Medellin. This paper will provide descriptive information regarding the school's academic context. First, it will introduce some issues concerning the location, history, principles and physical description of the school. Second, it will describe the English syllabus implemented by the school to guide teachers on the contents students must follow. Finally, the paper will introduce the cooperator teacher who is in charge of the English class, the research teacher and it will also portray the tenth grade students who have been observed.

I. E. Doce de Octubre is a public school located in Doce de Octubre, neighborhood, Medellin, Colombia. The school has morning and afternoon school shifts from 6:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; and from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The school opened on February 2, 1979 as IDEM Doce de Octubre. Nonetheless, it became I. E. Doce de Octubre in 2009 after being granted an ICONTEC certification and going through physical remodeling. According to the PEI¹, the institution aims to be recognized for educating students in values such as respect, responsibility and tolerance implementing pedagogical tools that allow them to obtain high levels of efficiency and effectiveness. These values are crucial in a "Problem-Based Learning" approach, which is the foundation of the school's mission. This approach empowers teachers to guarantee that every student gets to achieve their maximum potential in solving problems and producing reflections in order to promote meaningful learning. Additionally, the school offers two technical programs: computer science and administration.

The Institution's physical structure is made up by-an L-shaped-two-story building that has 15 classrooms. The school's facilities include a restaurant, a playground, two computer rooms, a library, a coliseum, and a snack shop. The two computer rooms are available at all

¹ Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI). Educational Institutional Educative Project

times, yet students have to reserve computers ahead of time. On the other hand, the institution provides few resources for English classes; however, teachers can use them any time they need them. The materials available are a video beam, a computer, speakers and an English textbook.

Some of the School's English teachers designed the tenth grade syllabus based on the Colombian National Bilingual Program. They designed the topics and activities based on a school-assigned textbook, which teachers must use during the school year. The syllabus aims to be communicative in order to meet the standards that the National Bilingual Program proposes. Nevertheless, the syllabus is mostly grammar-oriented emphasizing reading and writing skills. Teachers integrate the use of the textbook with the content proposed in the syllabus to promote communicative spaces to use the language. The cooperating teacher (CT) of this study holds a major in Spanish- French- English Translation from Universidad de Antioquia. In addition, he was granted a master's degree in "IT English" from the Universidad Católica de Oriente. He has been teaching English in public schools for seven years, currently he is teaching classes in eight different groups. Finally, the teacher researcher (TR) is Karen Henao Alvarez, a 23-year-old Foreign Language student at the School of Languages at Universidad de Antioquia. She is also a Spanish teacher for foreigners in a private language school called Idiomizar. She plans to submit this project to be eligible for her bachelor's degree in English and French Foreign Language Teaching.

The class observations that guided this research project were conducted in a tenth grade group having 36 students (Ss) whose ages range from 15 to 17. This group has three 45-minute English classes a week. Students' English proficiency does not correspond to the standards established by the National Bilingualism Program for tenth graders. It would be an A2 following the Common European Framework of Reference (2002). For this group of students, it is not possible to use Basic English to speak about their families or personal lives or to write simple letters, which are competences an A1 learner should already have. This seems to be

related to the lack of contact with English and the lack of use of English in class. This is why; they have become dependent on their teacher to do all class activities. On other hand, students have a common perception about learning English. Most of them stated that they would like to use English professionally because it would facilitate their success in their future jobs.

Statement of the Problem

During my observations and according to student opinions about their English classes, there were some aspects of the English class that were affecting student learning processes. They were not engaged and seemed to lack focus. Students felt powerless to choose or decide what they wanted to learn. The teacher also had problems teaching the class in English.

Regarding the lack of focus and disengagement in class, there was something that really called my attention. They were bored and fell asleep during the teacher's explanation. They were passive and unenthusiastic about oral interaction with the teacher or with their peers. Students were not interested in writing or doing communicative tasks. Their lack of motivation produced dependence on the teacher who carried out every task. In addition, students did not have teacher counseling, that is why students did not desire to have meaningful learning. The focus of this class was not on learning but on grades. The following journal extracts describe how the lack of engagement affected the class. "Three students arrived late to class, while another was sleeping during the CT was explaining" (Journal entry March 16, 2016).

Moreover, "after the explanation of each modal verb, the CT gave them an example in English, then, he translated it to Spanish. Nevertheless, they were completely disconnected from the class; they did not participate and were silent during the activities the teacher proposed."

(Journal entry March 16, 2016) The previous journal extracts also evidence student lack of focus and disengagement. I look at the following statements you may also find how they felt powerless to decide what they want out of learning. "How boring teach, we do not even know

what the exam is about because we're seeing a mixture of things, somewhere exercises, and then you come out with a different exam” (Journal entry April 20, 2016)² and “when the teacher asked about his reasons to did not do the activity, he said that in his job as a mechanic he never uses English or that vocabulary” (Journal entry April 4th, 2016) it shows how the suggested syllabus was disconnected from student context, reality and interest.

Similarly, students showed problems having the class in English. The teacher’s use of English and Spanish in the class gave students an excuse to avoid the use of English. For instance, students constantly requested the teacher’s translation of explanations, examples and instructions. Consequently, they do not make any effort to use English because they do not feel the need to do so. “The teacher spoke English, but he immediately translated what he said to Spanish, because when he spoke English students said that they did not understand” (Journal entry February 10, 2016 “you like to make us look bad by making us speak English in the front of the room. Continue speaking to us part in English but the rest in Spanish, and you will see that that way we learn better”³ (Journal entry February 11, 2016).

Therefore, I have proposed to implement a Task Based Approach in order to engage the tenth graders in their foreign language acquisition process. This will allow me, as a pre-service teacher, to negotiate topics for the English classes with students, while taking into account the syllabus. Negotiating topics implies using meaningful content which allows students to express their realities and interests. It will also help Ss reflect and generate emotional engagement with the EFL classes. Because of the above observations, my research question became: What are the effects of implementing a Task Based Approach in the enhancement of student emotional engagement in a 10th grade English class at the I. E. Doce de Octubre?

² “Profe que pereza, uno no sabe ni de que es el examen porque estamos viendo un sancocho, unas actividades de palabras y luego sale con un examen diferente”

³ “profe a usted si le gusta ponernos a hacer el oso hablando inglés al frente, sigamos hablando en inglés una parte, pero el resto en español y verá que así se aprende mejor”

Theoretical Framework

This section provides the theoretical support, insights and relevant concepts on which this research project stands. To clearly understand the concepts that support this project, this section presents their description and theories. Here, I connect concepts, practicum and collected data. In addition, I address the issues which scholars have discussed to define and explain emotional engagement and task based approach, concepts in which is based the practicum and the data collection to the project.

Task-based Methodology

Ellis (2003) suggests that a task-based methodology is an alternative to the communicative approach in the language learning process, as it involves treating the target language as a tool to express ideas and not as the object of study in which learners try to understand the way complex language structures work. Various definitions of task-based can be found, for instance, Willis (1996, p. 23) states that “a task is an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome”. Ellis (2003, p.16) does not differ much from Willis as he defines task as “a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve one outcome”. Nunan also conceptualizes tasks, he affirms that “a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form” (2004, p. 4).

To succeed in the process of learning a second or foreign language through a task-based methodology, tasks proposed by teachers should focus on students’ contexts and realities, bearing in mind their comprehension level (Ellis, 2016). This is how task based approach is linked to meaningful learning. Furthermore, the task based approach suggests following certain stages with students. Ellis (2006) proposes three phases: 1) the pre-task phase, that prepares

students to perform the task in ways that will promote acquisition; 2) the during task phase, which consists on deciding and negotiating how the task will be performed, and on “process options” which require that teacher and students decide “how to perform the task as it is being completed”; 3) the post-task phase, that provides “an opportunity for a repeated performance of the task, encourages reflection on how the task was performed, and fosters attention to a form in particular that was a problem for learners when they performed the task”.

Engagement

Student engagement has been defined as “participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes” (Kuh et al., 2007). For Kats (2013), students who show certain behaviors, such as performing unconditionally on tasks, and communicating particular interests related to their learning processes are the ones academically engaged. On the other hand, Cambourne (2005) defines engagement as a major enlightening condition for learning. He states that “Engagement also depends on active participation by the learner, which in turn involves some risk taking... Children learn to talk because they engage talking and using language constantly in situations occurring around them” Kuh (2009a, 685) argues that: “engagement has compensatory effects on grades and persistence for students who most need a boost to perform because they are not adequately prepared academically when they start college”

Furthermore, the online Glossary of Education Reform (GER) outlines six types of engagement: emotional, intellectual, behavioral, cultural, social and physical engagement. I will focus this project on emotional engagement. The previous as a means to connect students to language meaningfully through their interests, feelings, likes and dislikes, motivation, real life situations and context.

Emotional Engagement

This term refers to student affection and emotions in schools, for instance their interest, boredom, or anxiety (Shernoff, and others, 2016). These authors also suggest how numerous environmental dimensions present direct relation to student engagement, which include supportive relations with teachers and peers that is where teachers support students' autonomy, peer acceptance, and immediate feedback. While GER mentions that "students will be more likely to succeed if one adult in the school is meeting with a student regularly, inquiring about academic and non-academic issues, giving them advice, taking interest in their out-of-school life, personal passions, future aspirations, and needs." In addition, emotional engagement has been professed as a mediator between teacher-student relations and academic outcomes (Sanna, Soini, Pietarinen, & Pyhältö, 2016). The authors also argue that social elements of student emotional engagement consist on the student's sense of belonging in peer and student-teacher relationships which relate the student to the school's particular social context.

Research Question

What are the effects of implementing a Task Based Approach in the enhancement of student emotional engagement in a 10th grade English class at I.E. Doce de Octubre?

General Objective

To identify the effects of Task-Based learning on student emotional engagement in EFL classes.

Specific Objectives

- To use the task based approach as a means to generate relevance in the appropriation of English in the classroom.
- To implement emotional engagement to develop student autonomy, peer acceptance with immediate feedback.

- To generate a sense of belonging through their social context and their student-teacher relationship.

Action Plan

An action plan has been established as a way of assessing the implementation of the task-based approach articulated to student emotional engagement in order to enhance EFL in the classroom. Initially, the (RT) has sketched the general outline of the lesson plans according to the curriculum. The RT's first action was to conduct a survey. It included student likes and interests, this was done in order to connect them to the school syllabus, and the action research requirements along with the necessary elements that according to theory may help to set the goals. Additionally, there was data collection to aid the RT's analysis of the research question. After that, the RT implemented two units, "We are all different" and "Ecotourism" which was implemented until the end of the year. Based on a 12- week calendar, 24 classes totaling 72 hours, the following chart shows a schedule and actions that the researcher will conduct during the second semester of the practicum.

The RT divided the units into three subunits as follows:

Date	Pre-task	On task	Post- task
Weeks 1&2 4 Sessions (12 hours)	"We are all Different" Vocabulary and grammar Group discussions about the importance of differences	Unit 1 "Different looks, different lifestyles" Task 1: make puppets	Formative and summative assessment Puppets presentation
Weeks 3 & 4,	Unit 2 "your own	Task 2: Role play	Formative and

4 sessions (12 hours)	beauty: be who you are” Group discussions about self-confidence and Identity. Vocabulary and grammar (physical and emotional characteristics)	write the lines to carry out the role play, showing cultural differences	summative assessment Role play presentation
Weeks 5 & 6 4 Sessions (12 hours)	Unit 3 “Mind your manners” Practicing vocabulary and grammar related to the topic.	Implementing "English please 2!" Task 3: Make a video or a magazine	Teacher interview Student Questionnaire 1 st part of the final project: Video or magazine.
Weeks 7 & 8 4 Sessions (12 hours)	"Ecotourism" Vocabulary and grammar (past perfect) Group discussions about the difference between tourism and ecotourism	Unit 1 “Eco-friendly holidays” Task 4: Prepare an oral presentation about natural places in their city. (Ecotourism)	Oral presentation Formative and summative assessment
Weeks 9 & 10	Unit 2 “Ecotourism:	Task 5: Make a	Practice and

4 Sessions (12 hours)	treasures and cultures to protect” Practicing vocabulary and grammar related to the topic	video	summative assessment. Task 5: Video presentation
Weeks 11 & 12 4 Sessions (12 hours)	Unit 3 “Colombia: a natural and cultural paradise” Practicing vocabulary and grammar related to the topic	Task 6: final project, creating a magazine or a video collecting all the previous tasks	Final project and summative assessment. Final assessment. Final project presentation

The first week of the third term, the RT will implement the module “We are all different” for six weeks. According to the topic, the class will talk about different looks and styles, your own beauty, be who you are, and mind your manners. In the fourth term, this study plans to implement an “eco-tourism” module and work the units named eco-friendly holidays, eco- tourism: cultures to protect and Colombia as a natural cultural paradise. This content will be adapted to the students’ context and interests based on an interview conducted before creating the project plan. This way, students can use meaningful language while studying topics related to their lives and preferences through which students can convey their feelings and increase interest to interact in the tasks they proposed to connect the tasks to the class improving student emotional engagement. In these two modules, the researcher will implement

the grammatical communicative content suggested in the school syllabus while implementing a TBL approach as an instrument to engage students in their English class.

To collect the data, I will have formal interviews with the cooperator teacher to record any noticeable changes in the classroom. The researcher's journal which has a detailed description of the class and reflections regarding what the researcher thinks and feels about the development of the classroom process. In addition, the researcher will use surveys and questionnaires to find students and the cooperating teacher's perception about student's engagement after the implementation of each Unit in the classroom. Apart from the ongoing formative evaluation, a summative evaluation of all the activities will be conducted at the end of the academic year through a final project which must the researcher must present. This final evaluation will be conducted using a magazine or a video which will collect all the tasks and will support the process and the outcomes of this learning experience. Finally, it is essential to recognize that students are not only intellectual but also socio-affective beings. These factors are important when planning action research in which the aim is to solve a problem found in students' learning context. To impact with a relevant project, it is imperative to take into account each student's characteristics and the possible effect the project can have on their lives.

Development of Actions

Taking into account that the main objective of this research project was to identify the effects of Task-Based learning on student emotional engagement in EFL classes, the following paragraphs show how actions were developed in chronological order to achieve the goal.

First, I interviewed students at the beginning of the project about their interests. They talked during 20 minutes about how they loved music, hands-on activities, group work and songs. In class, my CT used to evaluate through matching exercises, grammar activities and doing short dialogues. Hence, I proposed to create posters about specific topics like:

commands, basic grammar structures, vocabulary related to the units, etc. Then, I designed the first unit “we are all different”. Here, the focus was to identify physical and emotional characteristics, the importance to respect differences, peer acceptance, different beauties and cultural dissimilarities. I prepared a slide presentation and a video downloaded from internet named We are all different, designed by Tony Holz in order to present the unit. Then, students were exposed to the today’s beauty concepts and what make them different from the others.

Second, I decided to make some objects. In fact, with student aid, I directed the construction of hands-on pieces such as posters and representative puppets. During the first classes, students studied vocabulary related to the unit such as physical description, emotional description, clothes, hobbies and habits. In addition, they studied basic structures such as present simple, simple past, present continuous, present perfect and passive voice. This vocabulary was required to achieve the goals proposed in this unit and that topics have been mandatory since the institution syllabus requirements. Students designed their own posters about the studied vocabulary in which they include pictures and drawings created by themselves. After that, students chose an important person in their lives and they created a puppet to represent that person, at the same time they wrote a text in which they described their favorite person in all senses and at the end they explained why that person is different from the other and what make his/her special in their lives. Students presented their puppets while I was filming to create a collective video with the compilation of all presentations. In this video students transmitted their opinions, feelings and mainly their emotions when they talk about somebody who touch their lives in a positive way. Cambourne called this kind of activities as demonstrations and those are meaningful when engaging students in class (Cambourne, 2005, p. 416)

Concerning the data gathering techniques, I kept the journal where I registered the main issues during the classes. In addition, I registered audiovisual material as evidences to

(photography, videos and audios). Finally, after the puppets' presentation, I did a survey where students qualified from 1 to 5 to some affirmations related to motivation, participation, class organization, emotional engagement, interest, etc. that survey was carried out in order to identify if the unit objectives were achieved and if the project is going the right way according to the general and specific objectives.

Findings and Interpretations

The main findings of this action research project were divided into three categories according to the TBA procedure. Additionally, the analysis of the RT journals, the CT interviews and student surveys and interviews were cross referenced to evaluate results according to the main categories. The categories were: Task Based Approach's influence on students, Task Based Approach and Emotional Engagement, and Task Based Approach and language appropriation.

Task-based Approach's Influence on Students

Jane Willis (1996) in her book, *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*, suggests a model to implement this approach, and to promote authentic communication based on three stages which I conducted during all class tasks. The first stage was the Pre-Task, in which I presented a topic to engage learners on the main topic of the class. The second stage called On-Task, was where learners worked in pairs or small groups to carry out the main task and at the final stage, Post-Task focused on language through oral presentations and feedback (Willis, J. & Willis, D. 1996). The previous description shows the influence of the Task Cycle on the delivery of the main topic, on the execution of the activities and the production of the final project.

One of the main goals as a teacher was to comply with the integration of the topic proposed by the institution in the syllabus and student context, needs and interests. This is how

I began the Task Cycle. The Pre- Task stage involved the presentation of the main topic: For instance, the action plan for July 13th shows: We started doing a Warm-up activity called “Broken phone” in order to introduce the module “We are all different”. After this ice breaker, students were connected to the class and they focused on the next activity. The following action was a previous background check on their knowledge about the topic. I continued the Pre-Task by presenting the vocabulary and grammar structures related to the unit. Although their vocabulary was limited, they tried to participate using the above mentioned tools. To reinforce the Pre-Task objectives, they shared their opinions about two famous people. They participated and tried to use the tools, however, when asked to describe their partners’ physical appearance they became more attentive and their participation increased. This is what the Ss said about the Pre-Task activity during their interview: “when it comes to explaining things, the teacher explains everything clearly, so when we tried to do things, we already understood and we tried to do things well.”⁴ (Students interview, September 8, 2016). My journal indicates: “At the moment of starting the development of On-Task activities, students showed a clear understanding about the topic and the objectives.” (Journal entry, July 13th, 2016). As can be seen, they felt a change in the class environment because the Pre-Task activities were designed to acquire the tools to carry out the following tasks and that made the appropriation of the concepts easier.

During the second stage, On-Task, students implemented the content they learned in the previous stage. In general, all the tasks consisted on hands-on activities creating artifacts such as posters, magazines, puppets or some creative writing. The idea was to articulate the structures, vocabulary and personal interests to a tangible product. The outcomes showed that students were very receptive since they dealt with their authentic context and targeted their needs. When students participated in a class, they were taking risks mainly because their

⁴ “A la hora de explicar la profe nos dejaba todo claro y a la hora de hacer las cosas ya entendíamos y tratábamos de hacerlas bien.”

English level was the cause of their lack of self-confidence. However, when they acquired enough linguistic devices, they felt more comfortable to participate and face their fears. These effects were so noticeable that the CT said: “the strategy of the class seems to be very effective to learn vocabulary because they have lived it, and now they are not going to forget the vocabulary so easily like when they have a traditional class which just simply sees the vocabulary and that's it”⁵ (Interview October 8, 2016). Additionally, throughout the CT interview I noticed that they were motivated to learn the language and it was reflected in class participation: “In my opinion, students' participation improved a lot. It went from 10% in the first two quarters and it raised up 80 or 90% and that is very positive”⁶ (CT Interview October 8, 2016).

During the last stage, post task, students presented their work orally. After each task, I always asked about what they learned while carrying out each activity and they gave their opinions, reflections and suggestions. At the end of the third period, students answered a survey where they all affirmed they wanted to continue learning English. 93% stated that classes had direct relation to real life situations and 69% of students felt they had improved participation during this period in contrast to the last. 83% said that group and pair work contributed positively to their performance and commitment to class. Additionally, 97% recognized they had had a meaningful learning experience because during this period the tasks were connected to their interests and they were conscious about their class objectives. 90% felt the classes had clear objectives with specific tasks. Each task was clearly explained before they performed it, which improved the understanding of the topics and increased their academic results. The research shows how students moved from a feeling of continuous discomfort in

⁵ “La estrategia de la clase parece ser muy efectiva para aprender vocabulario porque ellos lo han vivido, ya a ellos no se les va a olvidar tan fácilmente como cuando uno lo ve en una clase tradicional que lo ve por ver y ya”

⁶ “En mi opinión la participación de los estudiantes mejoró mucho, de 10% en los primeros dos periodos subió a 80 o 90% y eso es muy positivo”

class, to the development of a particular interest to participate, while valuing their group work and improving their academic results.

Task-based Approach and Emotional Engagement

This category summarizes the results of the implementation in terms of students' interests, affection and meaningfulness in class. It also discusses the student-teacher relationship, peer acceptance and self-confidence through the development of the Task Cycle. When I started the implementation of each Pre Task Activity, I observed that students presented a change in attitude when they saw that their interests and opinions were taken into account. This automatically increased their participation during the Pre Task discussions. The effects of that participation allowed the development of better relationship between Ss and RT. I believe this was due to the fact that their interventions in class, allowed me to give them immediate feedback and encouragement to continue participating. This was done by showing them how valuable their opinions were which boosted their self-confidence too. In an interview, the CT expressed his thoughts about the way the class was presented to the group and its effects on student emotional engagement:

At the beginning, they all seemed indifferent. Now, now I see that most of them are connected. For instance, there are some girls who used to sit in the back like Christina, and I don't remember the other girl's name. They were always in the back and that the beginning there were contemptuous, rude, and indifferent. Now, they are always in the front of the classroom when the class begins. To me, it seems that they are very committed with the class.⁷ (Interview October 6)

⁷“Al principio ellos siempre mostraban la indiferencia, ahora si veo mucha conexión con la mayoría, por ejemplo, hay unas niñas que se hacían atrás como cristina y no me acuerdo la otra, eran siempre atrás y al principio eran despectivas, groseras, indiferentes y ya son las que están adelante desde que empieza la clase. A mí me parece que la mayoría están muy comprometidos.”

Student survey showed the effects of the implementation of TB on students' Emotional Engagement during the Pre Task stage: 93% felt a positive relationship with the teacher and that produced an appropriate environment for learning. 97% affirmed that the classes were based on their likes and realities and, that content is responsible of their motivation in the course. In addition, 89% of them thought that the language studied in class can be used in real life situations; 93% enjoyed the classes because their passions, future aspirations and needs were valued by their teacher and peers. Thus, it made them feel more comfortable and emotionally engaged with the class while.

During the On Task Activities, I again observed how taking into account student voices and articulating learning to creativity is essential to engagement in EFL classes. When students were developing the main tasks, the effects of the Pre-Task were more evident. For instance, the action plan for August 17th shows that: "Although they were using nonacademic language, they were using English according to their context! Students were implementing the previous vocabulary they learned to carry out the task." (Journal entry August 17th, 2016) They were connecting to their emotions by making puppet of an important person in their lives. Here they connected emotions to language. The class environment became less stressful for them. This allowed them to think beyond teacher requirements and allowed them to use the Pre-Task vocabulary, to take risks and participate, since once again they were familiarized with the content. The CT stated "class activities are very significant for them because all the vocabulary learning using hand crafts and the puppet is a way to reinforce learning more"⁸ (Interview October 6, 2016). During one of the student interviews, they claimed that having the power to decide what was meaningful content and study it guaranteed their motivation and participation in class: "the teacher gave us a chance to choose what we like and she respected

⁸ "Las actividades son muy significativas para ellos. Porque todo ese vocabulario que ellos están viendo, con esas manualidades y el títere, esa es una forma como de afianzar más ese aprendizaje"

our opinion regarding what we wanted to learn, and thanks to this we have learned a lot of more things and we have enjoyed doing so.”⁹ (Students interview, September 8).

If education is not relevant for students, can they be emotionally engaged in the class? This result showed that teachers have the power to engage their students by making learning more meaningful. The Task Based Approach allows students to perform specific tasks for precise topics. It allows teacher to support their student by achieving better learning outcomes while enhancing their emotional engagement to class objectives (Fredericks, et al., 2002). The following journal extract show how TB activities can connect to meaningful: “When they were doing the task, they were participating and enjoying the activity describing good and bad aspects about Selena and Maluma, these artists were proposed by them” (journal entry, July 21th, 2016)

Post Tasks were important because here, students evaluated their learning and how meaningful the tasks were. Students showed they did each activity not only because of the grades, but also because they enjoyed them and they were aware about the importance of that learning in their lives. For instances, the action plan for August 3th shows that an articulated class affects student motivation and engagement and they feel responsible for their own learning. In this class, students presented a writing activity. I wrote their general mistakes on the board, they were attentive, trying to identify their mistakes, the final activity was to carry out a co-evaluation as a part of the formative assessment. They had to correct their peers’ activity and give them a grade. This helped them develop autonomy and self- confidence: “Students showed interest in the activity. After they carried out the task, they helped me correct the sentences and they were trying to identify what mistakes they made and tried to understand

⁹ “La profesora nos dio la oportunidad de escoger que nos gustaba a nosotros y respeto la opinión de que queríamos aprender y gracias a eso hemos aprendido muchas cosas más y con gusto a hacerlo.”

the corrections in order to give a right grade to their classmates” (journal entry, August 3th, 2016).

Another clear effect was the enhancement of motivation. When the teacher created an environment where student interests were a class principle, EFL lessons became a space to learn while they enjoyed it: “When the class was over they said: Teach please! Ask for the class to continue! We don't want to go. Let's work on the song today!”¹⁰ (Journal entry, August 18, 2016) and at the end of the class, some students expressed their feelings during this activity: “it is incredible that two hours passed. When you are having fun and you enjoy doing something, time flies! Right, teacher?”¹¹ (Journal entry, August 3, 2016). That is an evidence of emotional engagement in the class because student motivation and enjoyment were present while the learned and connected their emotions to language acquisition.

On the other hand, emotional engagement refers to the relationships between students, teachers, classmates and school. To promote emotional engagement in the classroom, students need to feel they are personally accepted, respected and supported by the teachers and peers (Goodenow, 1993). Because of this, relationships between students and their teacher were taken into account in the post- task, fostering respect to their classmates’ opinions and communicating their doubts and suggestions to the teacher to get immediate feedback. Through feedback, students learn to value their partners’ effort to learn and their own determination to improve their learning process and relationships inside the classroom. During the classes, I tried to be a support for students, encouraging their self-confidence and fostering respect for others, on the outcomes it was reflected as we can see in the next journal extract:

I am bashful and the teacher has helped me to focus on pronouncing well. She has encouraged me to take a risk and participate in all the activities, and now I feel much

¹⁰ “When the class was over they said: Profe por favor! ¡Pida la clase que sigue! ¡No nos queremos ir, trabajemos la canción hoy!”

¹¹ “¡increíble que pasaran dos horas, cuando uno está entretenido y disfruta algo el tiempo ¡vuela! ¿Cierito teacher?”

more secure and I feel she is working with me along with my classmates, and they know that they cannot make fun of other people because we are all learning¹² (Students interview, September 8, 2016).

During the second semester, they showed they were motivated with the course. They were interested in the way the classes were carried out because the RT took into account what they wanted and needed. It produced student expectation and curiosity about how they were to integrate their context and likes to language “Teach, please come here. When are we going to make the posters? When are we going to learn the song? And, are we going to make the recipe we talked about? And what about the puppets? We proposed many things and we haven't done much”¹³ (journal entry, August 3th). This category evidences how the Task Based cycle was able to promote the implementation of relevant topics and vocabulary which were articulated to the syllabus. All of this was done through meaningful learning and therefore personal engagement, since they focused on real life situations while promoting connections between students' interests and language.

Task-based Approach and Language Appropriation

After implementing the Task Based Approach, in a group where traditional classes which were based on grammar and translation, the results were positive. Students worked to use their language acquisition in more contextualized ways. During the Pre-Task, students took the tools they needed to participate in class using the L2. This happened despite their lack of confidence due to the lack of integration of their previous English courses. They carried out all the activities connecting their limited background knowledge of English, to the information

¹² “Yo soy muy penosa y la profesora me ha ayudado mucho a focalizarme a pronunciar bien, a que me arriesgue a salir a hacer todas las actividades, y ahora me siento mucho más segura y acompañada por ella igual que mis compañeros que sabes que ya ninguno se debe burlar de los demás porque todos estamos aprendiendo”

¹³ “Profe venga, ¿cuándo es que vamos a hacer los posters? y ¿cuándo nos vamos a aprender la canción? ¿Y si vamos a hacer la receta de la que hablamos? ¿y los títeres? Mire que nosotros propusimos un montón de cosas y no hemos hecho casi nada”

presented during the Pre-Task. During the second stage, On- Task, Ss not only implemented the tools given by their RT, but they also explored new ways to express what they felt according to the topic. For instance, “Teach, my cousin has this tattoo that says (¡crazy life!). I’m going to get it where she has it, and I will talk about her crazy life in my presentation”¹⁴ (Journal entry, September 28th, 2016). That vocabulary was learned easier because it was the result of their desire to increase their learning according to real life connections.

After this process, the third phase of the cycle reinforced their language appropriation through reflection, feedback and oral reports. This was done in order to report the results of their learning to the rest of the class. It was an excuse to change the concept of oral participation into a more common and stress free activities. This change enhanced their self-confidence and their tolerance to the frustration.

Their last presentations consisted on choosing a meaningful eco-touristic destination for them. They then had to present its main characteristics to their classmates. This included all the vocabulary and grammar structures studied during the Pre- Task stage. In addition, they also created a poster or a magazine. I took pictures and recorded their presentations in order to give them general feedback and to clarify their general mistakes without emphasizing on individual mistakes in order to take care of their self- steam as part of the evaluating process. Although in the beginning they were very reluctant to participate, the process helped them to become more self-confident. Classmates were encouraging and helped in the presentations which allowed the Ss with more difficulties to present. At the end of this phase, Ss were in charge of supporting each other. This shows the positive effect of TBA on group work, on positive peer relationships in the classroom, on their process of language acquisitions and above all, its impact on the motivation to take risks.

¹⁴ “profe mi prima tiene este tattoo que dice (¡crazy life!) lo voy a hacer donde ella lo tiene y les hablo de su vida loca en la presentación”

The last survey, which was made by a group of 29 students shows, that 76% admitted that the language was presented meaningfully. 76% also agreed that used the newly acquired vocabulary constantly during the classes. 83% claimed they spoke more English this period because they learned that practice is the key to learn any language. This journal extract evidences their use of L2 in class, “They were using the second language in a meaningful context because as their RT teacher told them, real learning takes place not as a spectator sport, but through practice” (journal entry, July 21Th). Finally, 69% enjoyed participating in class even when they were not sure about their language performance:

“I’m positively surprised because their presentations were wonderful. They were using new vocabulary; they faced their fear of speaking English, although they used visual aids to remember what they were going to say, I noticed there was effort and preparation in linguistic aspects.” (Journal entry, August 24Th).

During the three stages, the most important aspects were to encourage students to take risks, face their fears, give them the appropriate tools to explore the topics, respect their opinions, value their participation, highlight their strengths and show them their weaknesses. This all took place according to needs and context, which made language a relevant subject for them. After that, language became a more natural process. It was used to improve life and opportunities, not for students to pass a course.

Conclusion

When I started this project and the correspondent observations, I identified some problems in the EFL classes such as lack of focus, boredom, lack of participation and disarticulated topics. I decided to prepare an action plan which included student interest, topics and tasks based on real life situations in order to promote meaningful learning through the implementations of the Task Based Approach.

At the end of the process, I realized that teachers can implement the TBA in a tenth grade class in order to enhance emotional engagement. However, teachers are responsible for reflecting on students' context, needs, passions, realities and interests, in order to create relevance in their learning process. The effects of the implementation of TBA show that if students receive the tools they need to carry out specific tasks, they will be motivated and engaged in learning. This in turn, will improve their academic outcomes even when their language level is low. If their preferences are connected to language and the teacher acts as a guide to support and motivate students, participation will increase and the language acquisition becomes a meaningful and more natural process. In addition, when students are engaged in the EFL class, behavior improves as a collateral effect because they will focus on the task which calls their attention and which is useful for their personal development. To conclude, through this project I verified that the implementation of TBA benefits student self-confidence, motivation and emotional engagement. These effects promote change in Ss perceptions about English use for life which in turn improves their academic results.

Reflections

This year of practicum was rewarding for me as a professional and as a person. Professionally, as a pre-service teacher, it was a hard year full of learning and disappointment about public education in Colombia. I learned to be aware of student realities, ambitions and contexts, in order to promote relevant learning and implement appropriate strategies according to their needs. Moreover, I realized that my students may not be interested in learning English, but they value and accept whatever is useful for their personal growth, especially when it is important in their culture and future ambitions. Students have passion for specific things, such as different lines of work, for instance, being mechanics with their own family business, police officers or barbers. These students need to learn the language from other perspectives in order to find relevance to learning it. This allowed me to understand that, as teachers, we cannot

teach the same things in the same way to everybody because we are all different. We have different intelligences, cultures, manners, objectives and beliefs. However, none of them make us better than others. They make us special and according to those characteristics we learn what is important and useful for us.

Nevertheless, it was disappointing to feel the lack of attention that social sciences receive in public institutions. For instance, I designed a plan based on a 12-week schedule. I had to reduce the content and integrate many of the activities proposed in order to finish the implementation. This was mainly due to the fact that 50% of the classes were cancelled or replaced by other institutional activities. In addition, this lost time was never recovered and it affected the student learning process. Although I had many doubts during the process, it was satisfactory to see the change inside the classroom. Students were motivated and completely emotionally engaged during the EFL classes. This experience encouraged me to continue the development of this project in the future, implementing the TBA to enhance the way English is being taught in public institutions.

Personally, in spite of the difficulties I had, after the implementation of this project, I know the power that I have as a teacher. We have the capacity to foster dreams or to do the exact opposite... destroy them. Now, I think teachers are responsible for students' self-esteem inside the classroom. If as educators we do not believe in our students' capacity, their reality will never change. We can foster bigger dreams than those that they have. Nonetheless, if we are not dreamers ourselves, we cannot motivate our students to be the best version of themselves. In conclusion teachers have the power to free students from a system which does not include their needs, interests, realities and dreams, only if they love what they do, respect who they teach and if they are dreamers at heart.

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