

Helping Students Develop the Critical Awareness about Discrimination in the Eighth Grade
Classroom

Nelly del C. Mendoza Bettin

Universidad De Antioquia

Thesis and Research Practicum Advisor

Sandra Milena Echeverri Delgado

Medellín

November, 2017

Abstract

This action research project explores how the designing and implementation of a critical literacy unit helps students to develop their critical awareness about discrimination in an eighth grade classroom of a female public school in Medellin (Colombia). The information necessary to show the results of the project was obtained through observations, interviews, surveys, and students' artifacts. After an analysis of the data, they revealed the ways in which students live and face discrimination. Some critical media literacy strategies were used in order to promote students' critical awareness resulting in a positive change regarding the attitude of the students when facing this social issue.

Key words: Critical awareness, discrimination, critical media literacy.

Degree Requirement

This paper is the compilation of the descriptions of actions and results of my action research project “Helping Students Develop Their Critical Awareness about Discrimination in the Eighth Grade Classroom” which was carried out in a public school in order to receive my degree in Foreign Languages Teaching.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to my practicum, research and thesis advisor, Sandra M. Echeverri Delgado for her patience and guidance during this arduous process. Without her help, it would not have been possible to conclude this project.

I would also like to thank María A. Ospina Barrera, my greatest friend and partner, for her unconditional support and love. Without it I would not have had enough courage to face this challenge.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for having faith and trust in me and my courage. Without their word of encouragement, I would not have come so far.

Table of Contents

Preface	7
Context Description	8
Statement of the Problem	9
Theoretical Framework	11
Research Question	14
General objective	14
Specific objectives	14
Action Plan	15
Development of Actions	15
Pre-Tasks	16
While-Tasks	17
Post-Tasks	18
Data Collection Techniques	20
Findings and Interpretations	20
Students' conception of discrimination	21
Students' identification of discrimination	22
Student's identification of types of discrimination:	22
Students' rejection towards the differences of the others	24
Students' attitude toward discrimination	25

Students' language performance	26
Conclusion	27
Reflection	28
References	29
Appendix A	30
Appendix B	31
Appendix C	32
Appendix D	33
Appendix E	34

Preface

In our society we are accustomed to seeing discrimination as something normal and quotidian, guided by stereotypes and prejudices created by people, in which you can judge others because of their physical appearance, ideologies, sexuality or religion but without having a consequence.

I carried out my action research project at the San Juan Bosco Educational Institution of Medellin, as a student of the School of Languages of the Universidad de Antioquia, in the Foreign Language Teaching Program, where I worked with eighth grade students.

With the help of the students, I selected the topics to work during the second term and I identified discrimination as a problem present within their institution and their environment. For this reason, I decided to create a critical literacy unit focused on discrimination and to connect the grammar topics presented on the English syllabus of the school with this social issue. The intention of this study was to develop the students' critical awareness about discrimination and change their perspective and opinion about how to treat people, regardless of their race, ideology, sexual preferences, among others.

This is a small step to reach my project as an educator, not only to educate good students, but also to educate good people, capable of generating a change in our society through their actions, where they can demonstrate equality, tolerance and respect towards the others.

Context Description

This action research was conducted in a public school in Medellin, Colombia. The institution is located at Campo Valdes neighborhood and its name is “Institución Educativa San Juan Bosco”. The school received its name from the priest San Juan Bosco who founded the school. This institution has always been a female school coordinated by the Salesian community.

The quality policies and the principles of the school was governed under the political constitution of Colombia and the Salesian reasoning; these principles guide the educational activity towards an integral education that tends to the harmonious development of the person, considered as subject and agent of his own formation, able to be responsibly engaged in the construction of the society with a deeply Christian sense.

The school had a good physical structure divided into three floors where we could find several rooms for administrative offices, the science laboratory, the systems room, the English laboratory room, the elementary and secondary school classrooms. In the middle of the school there was a playground with a multifunctional field where the girls could practice physical education and sports like Soccer, Basketball, Hockey and Volleyball. The school also had one auditorium, a library, two cafeterias, a church and a nuns' house.

The group that I observed was 8th A. In this group there were thirty students among 12 to 16 years old; most of them lived in the in the nearby neighborhoods like Aranjuez and Manrique. They were girls from low and middle social strata. Students were interested in the subject and had some knowledge of the language; in general, they were participative and contributed to the good development of the class; however, they were not satisfied with the kind of activities developed in class.

This institution worked under a classic model of curriculum development, since the syllabus was established by those who occupy a higher level of authority; teachers often participated little or nothing, and students did not participate in the construction of that program. The English syllabus of the I.E San Juan Bosco was a mixture of Grammar Syllabus, Situational-Topical Syllabus, and Functional-Notional Syllabus. Most of the aspects established within the program were grammatical contents such as “Present simple and Past simple” but cultural contents such as “The wreck of the Titanic” were also included.

The cooperating teacher has a degree in basic education with emphasis in humanities and a postgraduate degree in human development. He has worked as a teacher for 31 years, 4 of them at this institution. The teacher bases his teaching on the use of guide books and grammar explanations. He defines his own methodology as Task-based work and Project-work.

Statement of the Problem

Methodology is considered “the relationship between the approach or philosophy of teaching and the techniques derived from that philosophy,” (Muñoz, 2010, p. 79) that are implicit on a set of instructional methods and teaching and learning activities. According to the PEI of the I.E San Juan Bosco, a constructivist approach was one of the institutional goals in the transformation of its curricular plan. However, the school admitted that a traditional model is still present in its pedagogical practices and that it will take time to reach that change. Those traditional pedagogical principles that were also reflected on the English program interfered with the planning and creation of an efficient syllabus, and also delimited and determined the kind of activities employed for teaching. In a school governed by traditional principles, the prevailing

methodology represented an obstacle for the adequate learning since it did not fit the true needs of the students.

Then, the latent traditionalist philosophy that regulate every aspect of the school San Juan Bosco can be seen in the structure and contents of its English study program. Although the English program reflected some characteristics of different types of syllabus such as Functional-Notional Syllabus, Grammar Syllabus and Situational-Topical Syllabus, in the practice, all the contents were worked under the principles of a grammar-based orientation. It happened, for example when “the teacher tells them (the students) that he was going to dictate some sentences in Spanish for them to translate them into English” (journal entry 8, March 16, 2017).

In addition, since the program is a combination of different syllabus approaches, it also had a negative impact on the coherence and connection of the contents established for each period. For example, the content for the first and second terms included cultural and thematic elements like “The wreck of the Titanic”; grammar elements like “simple present and past simple”, and situational elements like “travels and tourism” (English Syllabus, p 13 & 16). These isolated and decontextualized contents stated in the syllabus affected the progressive learning and acquisition of the language since it did not allow following a coherent sequence. Otherwise, it was evident how the traditional approaches played an important role in the way in which English was taught at the school. Despite the methodologies and activities stated in the syllabus proposed by the school such as “project work” and “task-based in context” (English Syllabus, p 13, 14, 15 & 16), the common activities used in the classes were grammar oriented. Tasks such as text with blank spaces that the students had to fill (journal entry 15, April 4, 2017) and list of words that the girls had to learn by heart (journal entry 2, February 23, 2017) were frequently developed into the classroom.

As a result of these teaching activities, in which “The teacher writes the title of the song on the board and asks the girls for translating it from English to Spanish” (journal entry 6, March 9, 2017) or “He tells the students that irregular verbs are not easy and they must learn them by heart” (journal entry 8, March 16, 2017), students’ attempts to sabotage the classes appear. The girls expressed their disagreement through acts of indiscipline within the classroom; since most of the time they preferred to talk among them or use their cellphones ignoring the teacher (journal entry 2, February 23, 2017) and demanding changes in the teaching methods for other more dynamic (journal entry 1, February 21, 2017).

Due to the lack of the syllabus coherence and the students’ dissatisfaction with the type of grammar oriented activities, I intended to redesign the English plan through the creation of a critical literacy unit. This syllabus design intended to consider teaching principles, language learning, and the use of contextualized contents with a purpose for this specific audience in which grammar was not the main objective of learning but a part of this. For a better implementation of this unit, I took into account the students’ proposal made during negotiations of the theme to work on; thus, they chose to work from a problematic such as discrimination, for which they felt affected in their daily lives and remained present within the school environment.

Theoretical Framework

For a long time, methodology and the inefficient teaching practices have been the most frequent issues in Colombian education because of the predominance of traditional models that prevent the development and implementation of other educational and pedagogical models in public schools. This project seeks to change the school methodology by another with a critical character that contributes to a better English learning.

To give a clearer definition of the purpose of this action research, the concept of Critical Literacy will be defined with the aim of giving an approach to what the term Critical Media Literacy refers. Then, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of Problem Posing, Photo Juxtapositioning, Mind Portrait, Alternative Mind Portrait, and Question Prompt since these were the action strategies implemented in order to reach the purpose of the project. These last two were also considered as data collection methods. It is also necessary to give a definition of Critical Awareness, since this is what is sought to be promoted through the implementation of the previously mentioned actions.

Thus, trying to give a solution to the problems that the methodology represents in the adequate planning and implementation of the syllabus, Critical literacy represented an adequate alternative thanks to its characteristics, since it

Entails the developmental engagement with the major texts, discourses and modes of information in the culture. It attempts to attend to the ideological and hegemonic functions of texts, just as in critical pedagogy models. But it augments this by providing students with technical resources for analyzing how texts work, and how they might be otherwise represented by both authors and readers in a process of redesign. (Luke & Wood, 2009, p 7)

In addition, Robinson & Stock (1990) said through critical awareness focused on the understanding of diversity, empowered teachers and students are sought to create spaces where they can negotiate what is right to adopt a critical attitude in real life. (As cited in Yoon-Heen & Sun-Joo, 2003, p 147)

In this specific case, the development of the unit was designed around a cartoon; so this could be established as Critical Media literacy, defined by Garcia, A. et al. (2013) as "...a

progressive educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies and also deepens literacy education to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences, information, and power.” (p 111). Its use is appropriate since with it, questions about social problems can be posed by judging the media to which students are exposed on their daily life. (Garcia et al., 2013, p 112)

In order to encourage students to react to the content of the material used, strategies such as Photo Juxtapositioning and Problem Posing are useful considering “juxtapositioning is used as a strategy to help the reader disrupt the commonplace and see the text in a different way” (p 50); thus, when this strategy is implemented, it offers the possibility of critically examining two photographs that represent points of view (p 51). The second makes the readers participate in the analysis, through the formulation of critical questions made at the end of the interaction with audio visual or literary materials. (DeVoogd & Mclaughlin, 2004, p 41)

With the purpose of engaging students in critical reflections about the events presented in videos, it is necessary to use strategies that promote critical reflections such as Mind Portraits and Alternative Mind Portraits. This technique is used to analyze two points of view that may or may not be present in the text, since one of them may be evident and the other may be completely implicit. Then, the shape of two heads is sketched in order to represent the two perspectives through drawings, written sentences or a mixture of both (DeVoogd & Mclaughlin, 2004, p 51). In this specific case the academic prompt sheets are Question Prompts that according to Ge & Land (2004) “the instructor can use question prompts to direct student attention to important aspects of problem solving” (p 6)

Thus, the intention of using all these techniques is to encourage the development of students’ critical awareness. Critical awareness allows explicitly addressing several social

problems with a high emotional and political content (Hope, 2012, p 8). becoming critically aware include the development of a critical vocabulary and knowledge base; an introduction to the corporate construction of childhood; a critical critique of movie representations about educators, students, and schools; and teacher presentations of their critical interrogation of the hidden curriculum of selected cultural artifacts. (Raymond, 2003, p. 299).

In a broader perspective, it is possible to suggest that this action research is appropriate to help students to develop their critical awareness about discrimination through the use of critical literacy activities that not only help them to be aware about real life situations, but also to learn English language.

Research Question

How does the designing and implementation of a critical unit help students develop their critical awareness about discrimination?

General objective

To explore how the implementation of a critical unit helps students develop their critical awareness about discrimination

Specific objectives

- To create a contextualized and meaningful unit around themes connected to discrimination.
- To help students to develop their critical awareness about discrimination.
- To teach grammar topics through the use of themes related to discrimination.

Action Plan

To design my critical academic unit, I decided that the best option would be to allow the students to participate in the choice of the theme that would be addressed during the second semester, since I considered that they would feel more comfortable and familiar with the subject. After the selection of the main topic, I would focus on the design of activities that would facilitate the students' learning of some vocabulary, concepts, facts, and grammar topics in order to achieve the purpose of helping them develop their critical awareness.

Then, with the intention of knowing if my students were gaining the expected critical awareness, I would collect information through the observation of each session (see Appendix A – Journal format), conducting a structured interview and a mixed survey, and by means of the analysis of students' artifacts resulting from the development of the planned activities.

Development of Actions

I dedicate this section to the illustration of the actions I took with the aim of reaching the objective of my action research. After negotiating with the students and having decided that the main focus of the classes would be discrimination, I designed a teaching plan composed of four units. However, it had to be modified because of the time limitations to develop the research. Thus, it was necessary to make some changes to the plan and delimit it to a single unit. For this unit, I designed a series of activities divided in three stages; with the intention of giving them a logical order, they were organized in Pre, While, and Post tasks.

Pre-Tasks

For the first stage I planned the first Pre-task activity called *Knowing the Ethnic Origins*; the goal of which was teaching students adjectives for describing physical and personal aspects of people, but also to recognizing the attributes and qualities that people have even when they belong to different ethnic groups, races and/or cultures. For teaching this, I put emphasis on Disney Princesses, given that some of them have different ethnic origins and belong to different ages; additionally, they are represented as brave women who made important things for their communities or themselves. This way, students had to make physical and personal descriptions of the princesses and at the end they had to select one with whom they felt identified thanks to her principles.

The second Pre-task consisted in understanding the reasoning that justified racism. The name of this group of activities was *Knowing the Origins of Racism*; here the students had to read two texts: the first was an ensemble of fragments taken from the book of Genesis in which it is explained how God gave control to the human over all the animal of the garden of Eden, and how the serpent tempted Eva to eat the forbidden fruit. The second was an expository text explaining how these fragments of Genesis were interpreted to justify racism and slavery. At the end of these readings, students had to answer two questions (*What do you think about this bible interpretation? and which consequences do you think this action had?*) in order to let me know their opinion and to connect the following and final pre-tasks.

The third and last Pre-task was an ensemble of tasks called *Jungle Jitters 1*. To develop this, it was necessary to watch the video *Jungle Jitters*, a cartoon produced by the Warner Bros in 1938: the cartoon tells the story of an African tribe dominated by a white queen; they were

visited by a selling dog who wanted to offer them electric appliances but the natives capture him. However, the dog is released, since the queen falls in love with him and wants to force him to get married. But he does not accept and prefers to return to be prisoner of the natives. One of the purposes of showing this video to the students was to know their analysis capacity, since there was implicit racial discrimination in the events shown in this cartoon. The other purpose was to introduce the linguistic topics proposed for this term. Students learned the use of *There was* and *There were*, they showed it by making descriptions of the scenes of the video. They also learned the *Progressive Past* for describing the actions that the characters of the cartoon were doing. Finally, they had to reuse the adjectives to make personal and physical descriptions of the characters. As a final result of all the aforementioned activities, students had to complete a Question Prompt Sheet (see Appendix B – Scheme 1) where they had to answer three questions (*What is the story about?; Who is the main character of the story?; and Why do you think this is the main character?*), to make a brief description of one of the characters, and to make a drawing for representing each answer expressing only their personal criteria. Likewise, they had to make a Mind Portrait (see Appendix C – Mind Portrait and Alternative Mind Portrait) to represent the image they had built about two of the characters of the video. To do the mind portrait, students had to follow the instructions and an example I gave them. The instructions provided to complete this exercise were: *Write words, symbols, complete ideas or make drawings to show your thoughts.*

While-Tasks

In the second stage, students had to apply the knowledge they had learned in the first stage. These activities were intended to helping students develop their critical awareness about

discrimination. The While-Tasks were called *Jungle Jitters 2* and included two teacher's guide activities that had the purpose of showing the students another perspective of the content of the cartoon: the first one was a *Photo Juxtapositioning* in which I used some images from the video and others from real life; the aim of this task was to compare the characters of the cartoon with real characters and real events. Thus, I compared the queen of England with the queen of the video, and compared the African tribes that were captive in human zoos with the natives of the video. The second one was a Problem Posing activity in which students had to answer some questions such as: *Who talks in the video? Who does not talk in the video? What do you think the creators of the video want you to think about the events they present? What do you think the creators of the video want you to think about the characters?* The intention of the activity was to encourage students to make a reinterpretation of the video by themselves through the analysis of those little details. After the development of these activities, students had to complete a question prompt sheet with exactly the same questions of the first Prompt Sheet, and to make an Alternative Mind Portrait of exactly the same characters of the Mind Portrait. All of this for establishing if there were changes in the students' perceptions of the characters and events of the video.

Post-Tasks

As a way of fostering the students' critical awareness, I designed two Post-Tasks to help students identify their prejudices and the stereotypes and how they could change them. In the first Post-Task named *Knowing Own Prejudices and Stereotypes 1*, I showed the students several photographs of artists among whom there were two singers and one white skinned African

actress and a singer who was not identified with any sexual gender. The exercise consisted in the students trying to identify the artists and their nationalities.

For the second and last Post-Task I took the suggestion of the girls who had asked me to plan a class based on the Harry Potter's books and movies. This ensemble of tasks was named *Knowing Own Prejudices and Stereotypes 2*. In the first activity, I explained to the girls some concepts taken from Harry Potter's books and movies such as *Death Eaters* (they were the followers of the villain and they should take charge of destroying The Order of the Phoenix to impose a new social order where non-magic people or muggles did not exist), *The Order of the Phoenix* (an organization of magicians with the purpose of fighting against the villain and protect the muggles), and *Muggle* (human being without magical abilities). Thus, the students had to identify themselves as *Death Eaters* and they had to tell me when they had discriminated against someone; they had to identify themselves as a member of the *Order* to tell me when they had defended someone; and they had to identify themselves as *Muggles* to tell me when they had felt discriminated. The purpose of this exercise was that they could recognize the hostile attitudes they had had with others and those attitudes that others had had with them. After recognizing their prejudices and stereotypes that led to negative attitudes toward others, the girls apologized to each other in the classroom. To perform this activity, they made posters in which they wrote the name of the person they wanted to apologize for, the reason why they had to apologize, and the aspect in which they should improve. To indicate the reason for which they had to apologize, students had to use the *present perfect*; and to indicate the aspect to improve, they had to use the *modal verbs, should, must and have to*.

All the grammatical topics included in each stage of my action plan were taken from the English syllabus designed for eighth grade. I distributed them in that order with the intention of giving coherence to the topics, and connecting them with the main theme.

Data Collection Techniques

During the period I was developing my research project, I wrote a journal each class in order to notice the existence of changes in students' attitude toward discriminatory acts. In the same way, I conducted six structured interviews and six mixed surveys to two focal groups of students during the development of the first stage. To be part of the groups some students who often made derogatory comments about their classmates or situations into the school were selected, and others who showed a timider attitude during classes. The intention of collecting this information was to identify students' prejudices and to know how they faced discrimination. Equally, I collected the students' question prompt sheets and the mind and alternative mind portraits to observe the change in students' perceptions about the events and the characters of the cartoon.

Findings and Interpretations

The purpose of this research project was to achieve a change in the way of teaching and learning English in an eighth grade. The fundamental objectives of this study were not only to teach grammar, but also to promote the development of students' critical awareness of a social issue such as discrimination. Data analysis indicates that the design and implementation of a critical literacy unit is really useful to reach both objectives, especially in helping students become critical respecting discrimination and gain awareness about their attitudes when

addressing other people. In the following paragraphs I provide evidences of how students achieved these goals.

To obtain the evidences to support my study, I dedicated a lot of time to detailed analysis of my sources of information which were my journals written during the classes, the structured interviews carried out with the students, mixed surveys answered by the them, and students' artifacts such as question prompt sheets and mind and alternative mind portraits. In order to obtain the evidences to support my study, I re-read all the collected information to define and classify them in categories; I created a chart to write down the recurrence that appeared when analyzing the data; and finally I grouped the categories to better manipulate them at the moment of noticing the results.

Thus, it was necessary to divide the data in two parts determined by the way in which the activities and the information were collected. Through the analysis, I identified two biggest categories: *Students' opinion on discrimination before the development of the unit one*, and *Students' opinion on discrimination after the development of the unit*. These two categories were subdivided in thirteen more categories. For reporting my findings, I considered five of them: *Students' conception of discrimination*, *Students' identification of discrimination*, *Students' rejection towards the differences of the others*, *Students' attitude toward discrimination*, and *Students' language performance*

Students' conception of discrimination

In the first stage of the process, before the implementation of the actions, I found that the theme selected by students was connected to a real situation they lived in their daily routine and that was reinforced into the school environment. In surveys and interviews, students defined in a

general way that the discrimination consisted in the non-acceptance of the differences of the people, and also in ridiculing them. An example to illustrate what students thought about discrimination can be seen in the answer to the question *what do you understand by discrimination?*: “Es como llegar y decirle a alguien tú eres feo porque tú no encajas aquí, porque eres de un color, o tú no puedes estar aquí porque no te gusta este género” [It's telling someone you're ugly because you do not belong here, because you have an skin color, or you cannot be here because you do not like this genre] (student, interview September 21, 2017)

Students' identification of discrimination

During the interviews, the students admitted they had felt discriminated and ridiculed and that this was a normal phenomenon within the school, as expressed by a student during the interview: “Voy caminando o estoy hablando con alguien y me miran se empiezan a reír, siento que algo de mí les parece gracioso” [I am walking or talking with someone, and somebody look at me and start to laugh, I feel something about me looks like funny] (student, interview September 21, 2017). When the students completed the first question prompt sheet, eighth students said that the video was about discrimination (scheme 1, September 19, 2017), however, students had difficulties explaining the reason why they argued that the cartoon was about this social issue.

Student's identification of types of discrimination:

Students also indicated that the most frequent types of discrimination they saw into the school and to which they had been subjected were physical appearance, ideological beliefs and racial discrimination. One of the students said “Aquí en el colegio se da más que todo con la gente de color, porque yo he visto y me ha pasado en grados anteriores,

que la gente solamente porque es una persona totalmente distinta, de una religión distinta o de color distinto, creen que pueden manipularla, o me ha pasado muchas veces que solamente por ser distinto a los otros y no seguir el estereotipo la discriminan o le hacen bullying” [Here in the school it happens mostly to people of color, because I have seen and it has happened to me in previous grades, that people believe that they can manipulate others because are a totally different , because of their religion or their ‘s color, it has happened to me many times that only for being different or not to follow the stereotype people discriminated or bullied me] (student, interview September 21, 2017).

In the first question prompt sheet, students mentioned that discrimination was practiced against the dog, since “He was discriminated for being different” (nine students, scheme 1, September 19, 2017) but they did not make any kind of reference to the other characters or to other situations that occur in the cartoon. This shows that at this point in the implementation of the actions, the students did not have much capacity for abstraction or critical analysis, since it was difficult for them to see beyond the superficial concepts that were exposed in the video. Then, they could identify cases of discrimination only if they were presented in an explicit way.

However, by offering students tools that allowed them to inquire deeper into the facts depicted in the cartoon, they were able to notice the way in which discrimination was implicit in each scene of the video. They expressed this new perspective saying that “the natives are discriminated” and that “The queen enslaves the natives” (students, scheme 2, September 28, 2017)

Students' rejection towards the differences of the others

It was observed that students could easily say in what ways they had felt discriminated. In the survey one student affirmed she felt discriminated because of the things she liked, because of her sexuality, and because of the things she thought (“Por mis gustos, por mi condición sexual, por como pienso”) (student, survey, September 14, 2017). Equally, they could recognize that they have discriminated other people. Nevertheless, for them it was difficult to admit that they had done it in a conscious way. Referring to this, one student expressed in the interview “De pronto sí, pero sin darme cuenta, sin estar consciente de eso” [Maybe yes, but without realizing, without being conscious about that] and added “Por ejemplo, discriminar a alguien por ser flaca o por ser lesbianas sin yo quererla herir, pero pasa” [for example, discriminate someone for being skinny or for being lesbian without wanting to hurt her, but it happens] (Student Interview, September 21, 2017). This suggests that the discriminatory acts are so quotidian events for them and that they did not perceive them as something negative if they performed the act; whereas if they were the ones who received the act, they felt very offended.

When completing the mind portrait about the queen and the natives, students showed the superficial appreciation they had about people. Nine groups used the word “ugly” to describe the queen and five groups indicated that the main characteristic of the natives was that “their skin was brown” (Students, Mind portrait, September 21, 2017), here they wrote these words in a derogatory way. In addition, sometimes some of the students made derogatory and stereotyped comments about situations and people just because they were not their preference, for example, one of the students said that she and her friend did not like Trap music because “it was black people’s music” (students, informal conversation, September 12, 2017).

Nonetheless, after carrying out the activities to foster students' critical awareness, I noticed they were changing the way they usually used to refer to other people. There was also a change in the construction they had made of the characters because when completing the *Alternative Mind Portrait*, they showed a change in their discourse. They began to use adjectives to describe the personality traits of the characters, instead of describing them only physically (see Appendix D – Student's Mind and Alternative Mind Portrait/Prompt Sheet).

Students' attitude toward discrimination

Following the changes that the students had with respect to the way of expressing themselves about the others, there were also significant changes in their attitude at the time of facing discrimination. At first, half of the girls surveyed and interviewed sought active alternatives to counteract it, such as getting anger or the looking for dialogue, as this student mentions: "Trato de dialogar. O sea, yo sé que la mejor alternativa no es la violencia, trato de dialogar porque yo nunca dejaría que me discriminaran y no me quedaría callada frente a la situación" [I try to talk. I mean, I know that the best alternative is not violence, I try to dialogue because I would never let them discriminate me and I would not be silent about the situation] (Student Interview, September 21, 2017); while the other half of the girls preferred to ignore it or accept it, like this example: "No, es que uno no puede ir en contra de la ignorancia de las personas uno tiene que dejar que las personas caigan en cuenta" [No, we cannot go against the ignorance of the people, we have to let people realize it] (student, interview September 21, 2017)

However, thanks to the new perspective that the students got through the performance of critical-reflexive activities, they adopted a more conscious thinking of what discrimination implied, as one student expressed after the completion of an activity in which they had to

identify the origin of certain artists, among whom there were three Africans with completely European features: “me parece que muchas aqui tenemos estereotipos de lo que se supone que es la gente negra y de lo que no es y eso da vergüenza” [I think that many of us here have stereotypes of what black people are supposed to be and what they are not and that is embarrassing] (journal entry 22, October 3, 1017).

Besides, the students showed more active and combative attitudes in real situations where discrimination occurred in their environment; as happened during a class in which a student scoffed at a female companion for having been born in the department of Chocó and being white-skinned, and another student interceded to stop the act: “no me parece gracioso que te rías de Deisy por ser del Chocó y ser blanca; yo soy negra y soy de Medellín, nací aquí y me crié aquí. Nada tiene que sea de aquí o de Japón, eso no es un motivo para hacer chistes. En este salón deberían hacer algo, somos puras viejas tirándole a otras viejas por todo. ¡respetemos más! ¡Que yo no entiendo cómo una mujer le tira a otra mujer, estamos mal, muchachas!” [I do not think it's funny that you laugh at Deisy for being from Chocó and being white; I am black and I am from Medellín, I was born and grew up here. It does not matter if she is from here or from Japan, that is not a reason to make jokes. In this room we should do something, we are girls bothering other girls. Let's respect more! I do not understand why a woman bothers another woman, we are wrong, girls!] (Journal entry 22, October 3, 1017)

Students' language performance

As another result associated with the development of this project, it was found that the students had a significant progress in terms of English language learning. They learned how to use different grammatical structures such as adjectives and simple past verb tenses. At the

beginning of the development of the activities, they did not know the structure that a sentence in English should have, and they did not know how to conjugate the verbs; for this reason, they were allowed to combine English and Spanish when writing, or to use isolated words to express their ideas. But at the end of the classes, after the implementation of actions, they were able to write simple sentences using the correct structure as well as the correctly conjugated verbs. (see Appendix E – Student’s Question Prompt Sheet and Alternative Main Portrait).

Conclusion

The goal of this action research project was to help students develop their critical awareness about discrimination through the design and implementation of a critical literacy unit. During the three stages of the study, it was possible to observe a gradual change in students’ attitude respecting to discrimination, especially racial discrimination.

They gained awareness about their attitudes when addressing other people, and this is especially noticeable in the most respectful way they addressed each other. They also adopted an active position at the moment of facing this social issue, since they went from accepting and ignoring discriminatory acts to finding alternatives to face them such as dialogue and scolding.

Likewise, teaching the language with the purpose of helping students’ develop their critical awareness, applying to a realistic context, and following a logical organization of the grammatical contents facilitated the accomplishment of this objective proposed for the course. It also benefited students’ learning and the well development of the critical actions.

Finally, the design of the thematic unit around the topic of discrimination, which was based on the negotiation and suggestions of the students, promoted a change in the students’ attitude toward learning English. By associating the learning of the language with the topics

suggested by them, their interest for the classes increased considerably and this was seen with the students' participation and their new proposals about themes to work in classes. To sum it up, it can be affirmed that the objectives proposed for this project were achieved in a satisfactory way, since the critical awareness of the students was developed. At the same time an advance was achieved respecting to the English knowledge that the students possessed before my intervention.

Reflection

In my opinion, this action research project was very useful for me, because it helped me to recognize what kind of teacher I want to be and in what way I want to teach, since I want to give to the students not only knowledge about the English language but also contributing to their formation as human beings.

This project was also a big challenge since in many moments I felt rejected by some people from the school because of my appearance. They used derogatory comments and ill-founded accusations that affected my professional image because of my way of dressing, my tattoos, my haircut, and my piercing. However, these contradictions and discriminatory comments helped me lead my study to the right way.

References

- DeVoogd, G. & Mclaughlin, M. (2004). Teaching Critical Literacy. *Critical Literacy: Enhancing Students' Comprehension of Text*, 35 - 58
- Garcia, A., Seglem, R., & Share, J. (2013). Transforming teaching and learning through critical Media Literacy pedagogy. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 6(2), 109–124.
- Ge, X & Land, S. (2004) A conceptual framework for scaffolding III-structured problem-solving processes using question prompts and peer interactions. *Educational Technology Research and Development* 52 (2), 5–22
- Hedley, C. & O'Callaghan, C. (2010) Contextual Redefinition: Using Clues as a Word-Learning Strategy. *Developing Content Area Literacy: 40 Strategies for Middle and Secondary Classrooms* (2) 32 – 38.
- Hope, E. (2012). Cultivating Critical, Sociopolitical Awareness in Urban Secondary Schools: Tensions and Possibilities. *PennGSE Perspectives on Urban Education* 9(2), 1 - 28.
- Luke, A. & Woods, A. (2009). Critical literacies in schools: A primer. *In: Voices from the middle* 17(2), 9 -18.
- Muños, A. (2010) Metodologías Para La Enseñanza De Lenguas Extranjeras Hacia Una Perspectiva Crítica. *Revista Universidad EAFIT*, 46 (159), 71-85.
- Yoon-Heen, N. & Sun-Joo, K. (2003) Critical literacy in the EFL classroom. *English Teaching*, 58 (3), 143- 163
- Raymond, H. (2003) Developing a Critical Awareness of the Hidden Curriculum through Media Literacy. *The Clearing House*, 76 (6), 298-300.

Appendix A**JOURNAL FORMAT**

This appendix shows the format that I used to write the journals through the practicum process.

**Universidad de Antioquia
Escuela de Idiomas**

Institution:**Course:****Data:****Number of students:****Time:****Observer:**

Agenda / Objectives	Tools	Agreements

Class description	Questions and reflections	Categories

Appendix B

SCHEME 1

This appendix shows the format I used to make the Prompt Sheet activities.

Scheme 1

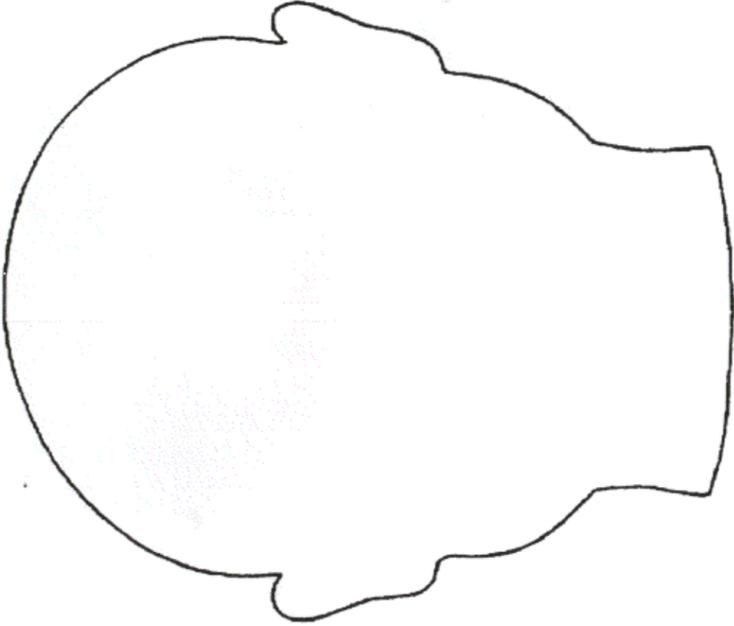
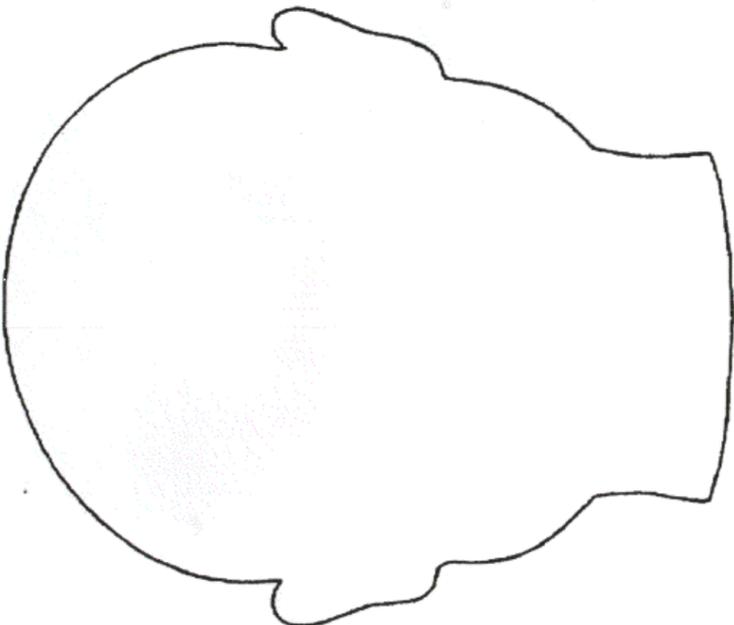
Name : _____ Date : _____

	<i>What is the story about?</i>	<i>Who is the main character of the story?</i>	<i>Why do you think this is the main character?</i>	<i>Describe the character</i>
Write				
Draw				

Appendix C

MIND AND ALTERNATIVE MIND PORTRAIT

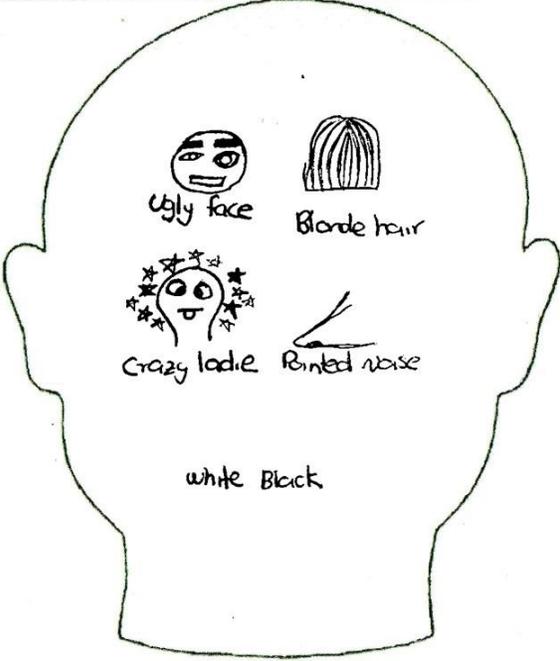
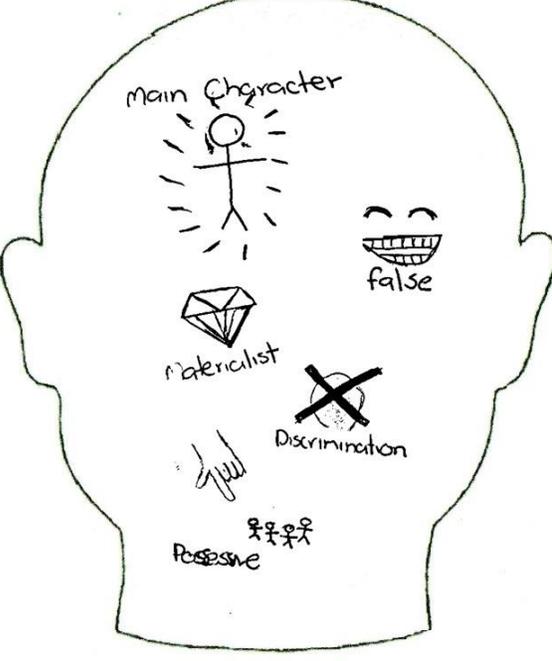
This appendix shows the format I used to make the Mind and Alternative Mind Portrait activities.

<p>Alternative Mind Portrait</p>		
<p>Mind Portrait</p> <p>Write words, symbols, complete ideas or make drawings to show your thoughts</p>		<p>The Queen</p>

Appendix D

STUDENT'S MIND AND ALTERNATIVE MIND PORTRAIT/PROMPT SHEET

This appendix shows the change in the students' discourse since they began to use adjectives to describe the personality traits of the characters instead of describing them only physically.

Mind Portrait	Alternative Mind Portrait
Write words, symbols, complete ideas or make drawings to show your thoughts	
 <p>Ugly face Blonde hair Crazy ladie Pinked nose white Black</p>	 <p>main character false materialist Discrimination Possesive</p>
The Queen	

Appendix E

STUDENT'S QUESTION PROMPT SHEET AND ALTERNATIVE MIND PORTRAIT

This appendix shows how the students were able to write simple sentences using the correct structure as well as the correctly conjugated verbs.

Mind Portrait	Alternative Mind Portrait
Write words, symbols, complete ideas or make draws to show your thoughts	
<p>Tall brown skin Frizzy hair brown eyes Happy Brave</p>	<p>The natives were slave The natives were nocent</p>
The Natives	

	What is the story about?	Who is the main character of the story?	Why do you think this is the main character?	Describe the character
Write	The story is about of the culture different in the Jungle	The main character is the dog	The dog is the main character Because He was The new in the culture	The dog: • He was well dressed • He was Tall • He was ugly • The dog was Slim • The dog had Moustache
Draw				