

Inquiring from within: seventh graders expand the uses of language

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Abstract

This action research project was carried out with the aim of understanding how the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning could expand the uses of language in an English as a foreign language class. The project was developed at Institución Educativa Sagrado Corazón during two school terms with a group of seventh graders. In this research study, data was gathered through a survey, an interview and a reflective journal that were first triangulated and subsequently analyzed. Findings revealed that Inquiry-Based Learning not only expanded the uses of language in the classroom, but also fostered a discussion environment with positive attitudes towards the foreign language class.

Key words: Inquiry-Based Learning, uses of language, language abilities, discussion environment, use of questions.

Degree Requirements

This action-research project was submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor in Foreign Language Teaching (English-French) from Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

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Preface

This action research study was carried out by a student of the Bachelor in Foreign Language Teaching (English-French) (Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras), an undergraduate program from the School of Languages at Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín, Colombia. It started in the ninth semester and its main purpose was to develop an action-research project about an educational issue in the context of an English class at a public institution. It has provided students who are about to finish their bachelor studies with practice and experience on this field.

School Context

The study was carried out at Institución Educativa Sagrado Corazón, a public school in Manchester neighborhood, which belonged to the 4th commune (Suárez), in the central area of the city of Bello. The school had approximately seven hundred fifty students from different socioeconomic strata ranging from 1 to 3 (out of a scale that goes from 1 to 6) living in close areas. The school instructed students from both genders in the following education levels: elementary education, primary education, and lower and upper secondary education. During the week, courses were divided into two different school schedules: the morning schedule, from 6th to 11th grade, and the afternoon schedule, from preschool to 5th grade.

The institution was long and narrow. It was divided into two three-story buildings; the first building included school administrative offices, the teachers' office, some restrooms, and seven classrooms (each one equipped with a TV-set available for teachers during classes), two of them with electronic boards. The other building included a cafeteria, some restrooms, a computer lab, a science lab, a library, the psychological counseling office, a private institution administrative office, and four classrooms equipped with TV-sets as well. There was an indoor soccer field on the first floor of the second building, but it was not used as it was too small; so students attended their Physical Education classes in a sports complex about three blocks away from the school. There was no playgrounds or green zones in the institution.

According to its own philosophy, Institución Educativa Sagrado Corazón was framed within the aims and principles of the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and the General Law of Education and its regulatory decrees of 1994. The school aimed at educating children, youngsters and adults within ethical and moral guidelines that promote respect for others and search for an integral development of people. These values and principles were as follows:

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autonomy, pluralism, inclusion, commitment, constant communication, human dignity, cultural diversity, democracy, prevalence of the National Constitution, environmental commitment, social knowledge and gender equality.

The mission of the institution was to guarantee the right to education based on equity and quality standards, thus complying with the sociocultural labor and commitment it had towards the community. Therefore, the school sought for academic, technical, and axiological quality as well as social commitment and sense of belonging while promoting civic and labor abilities that provide students with the skills they need to fully develop their potential in their environment.

As for the English course, the institution had two elementary English teachers and two secondary and high school English teachers. Each grade had an established English syllabus. The English course in which this study took place was delivered in a regular classroom, consisting of a big setting equipped with a 50-inch TV set. In addition, the classroom had forty-four seats, a long white board, two big windows, two fans, a cupboard and a teacher's desk.

Participants involved in this study belonged to the 7^oA course. They were forty-three students – twenty-one males and twenty-two females – with ages ranging between eleven to fifteen years. From what was seen at the beginning of the research and a survey, almost all students shared instrumental motivations to learn the foreign language, that is to say that they perceived English as a useful tool to get a better job or study abroad in the future. Moreover, they used their knowledge of English mainly while listening to music and, sometimes, while learning about topics of their interest, watching videos or watching movies.

Their English course took place twice a week, two hours every Thursday and one hour every Friday. It was mostly in Spanish, and students used their notebooks, dictionaries, and

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cell phones. They did not have a textbook to follow in the class; instead, they developed several activities prepared by the teacher (most of them corresponding to the grammar-translation oriented method).

The seventh grade English teacher graduated from a Basic Education teaching program with emphasis on English Language at Fundación Universitaria Luis Amigó. She was forty-five years old. She had been teaching English for over twenty-five years. Apart from her class at Sagrado Corazón School, the teacher was a social promoter at the Colegio Mayor de Antioquia. At school, she was in charge of the English courses in sixth, seventh and ninth grades, and she taught the Critical Reading course in sixth and seventh grades. Her main teaching purposes were to educate students with respect, ethics, quality, and professionalism; she wanted her students to get meaningful learning through interaction, in a healthy and harmonious environment where the effort of learners had to be valued and taken into account.

Problem Statement

I took part of this course for more than three months. Most of this time, I took a non-participant role inside the classroom. While carrying out my observations, several issues caught my attention such as the class methodology used by the teacher, the student's English pronunciation level, and learner's willingness towards foreign language learning.

The teacher based her English classes in a grammar-translation oriented method: topics were always related to linguistic aspects of the target language; and activities consisted of a translation or writing of several phrases following a specific structure.

“As usual, lessons are oriented on grammar-based topics. In this case, they worked with the affirmative form of the verb “to be” in simple present, writing a list of 20

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sentences using this verb. What if they had had activities in which they had used this structure in real-life situations? Or for real communication purposes?” (Journal Entry: August 25th, 2016)

However, there were some activities that involved pronunciation such as spelling and singing in which students showed a lot of interest and made an effort to pronounce the words and letters in the best way possible. Additionally, throughout the observations and a 6-question survey answered by students regarding their needs and interests to learn English, it was found that learners liked the foreign language and they were aware of the benefits and opportunities that English could provide them in the future; so most of the class time they were willing to carry out the activities proposed by the teacher.

“Students showed a lot of interest in singing the song...It was found that almost all students have a great level of pronunciation in English and enjoyed the exercise...They tried to do their best to pronounce the lyrics well; this demonstrates their engagement and willingness towards the activity.” (Journal Entry: July 18th, 2016)

“Me gusta el Inglés. Nos sirve para el futuro, para tener mayores oportunidades de trabajo, para ir al extranjero... Aprender otro tipo de idioma aparte del español es muy interesante” (Survey to students. August 8th, 2016)

Once I started teaching them, my focus of attention was drawn to another issue: students' poor use of the foreign language to communicate and express ideas in real situations. Students' willingness towards the English learning and good pronunciation level were not considered when using the target language as a means to think and talk about issues of their concern. As Mendieta (2009) stated, “English more than a goal to achieve, is a means to discover and relate knowledge.” (p 134)

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Considering the aspects mentioned above, I started to wonder how to allow students widen the use of English inside the classroom in order to create interactions among them and the world around them and, thereby, how to use the foreign language for real purposes. Then, having this idea in mind as well as my teaching principles, I came up with the exploration of a learning model that implied situations in which learners used the language in real experiences. As Bransford (as cited in Escalante, 2013) said: “Learning [...] is a process that takes place when people construct new concepts and understanding based on their existing knowledge and experiences...” (p. 480)

It is necessary to conceive language as an instrument to understand our world, to share our thoughts, beliefs and problems, and generate solutions to solve issues of our interest. As Escalante (2013) affirmed:

“The learning of foreign languages can be improved if some factors are considered, like establishing different interaction strategies among the students in the target language, fomenting the use of multiple learning styles and carrying out a cognitive approach instead of just promoting simple memorization.” (p. 481)

After having considered the importance of using the foreign language for real purposes, I realized that the best way to expand the uses of language inside the classroom could be through the use of a learner-centered methodology that leads students to discover their own environment, express their emotions and ideas, think about issues or problems they witness in their society, and look for real solutions to solve them.

Theoretical Framework

Language uses in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom is an issue that teachers have thought about for a long time. Dickson (1996) states that, although it is difficult to generalize the circumstances that influence students’ use of the foreign language, one of

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them responds to the way in which the language is taught (p. 23). As it has been said, language activities developed in English in this class concerned only grammar topics. Before presenting possible uses of language that go beyond grammar, it is necessary to examine the way in which language was seen in this study.

We based our concept of language on Halliday's definitions (2003): "language is the main instrument we have for interpreting and organizing our experience [...] for building up our model of the universe and of our own place in it." p 317 Language is a powerful tool that allows people to construct their own reality, understand the world in which they live, and share those ideas and experiences with their peers. In this sense, language learning is not merely an acquisition of vocabulary and structures for communicating, but a mean to create knowledge and find out interactions within the environment (Smith, 1997).

What kind of uses can be given to language taught as a tool rather than a simple abstract system? Smith (1977) points out that "language learning literally depends on the user's intentions. To understand language and to teach it we must understand the mind of the language learner." p. 1 Thus, educators must implement engaging activities in which students explore their world and become creative when using the new language. (Escalante, 2013). As Lee (2014) claims, learners must "communicate through meaningful interactive activities in which authentic language can be exercised while the negotiation of meaning takes place." p. 1236 They need to be aware that the foreign language can also be used to express their viewpoints, experiences, emotions, and issues around them inside and out the classroom.

Now, several approaches have been proposed in order to expand language uses inside the classroom. After an exhaustive literature review of possible model solutions, it has been found that the implementation of an Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) model would probably contribute to the issue at hand.

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IBL, also known as inquiry-based teaching (IBT) emerged as an approach and a learning strategy that tries to involve students into inquiries and the use of their curiosity with the aim of exploring and understanding; so learning takes place through personal commitment (Hudspith, Jenkins, Justice, Rice, and Roy, 2009). Lee, (2014) denotes IBL as a cognitive approach “which echoes the concerns and demands of today’s L2 teaching—that is, to foster an interactive and communicative teaching/learning environment while supporting discovery, reflective and creative learning.” p 1237

Questioning is the fundamental unit in which IBL is based since, through questions, issues are presented and instructions are delivered (Lee, 2014). However, Kuhlthau, Maniotes and Caspari (2007, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education OMOE, 2011) stated that “it requires more than simply answering questions or getting a right answer. It espouses investigation, exploration, search, quest, research, pursuit and study.” (p. 1) Asking questions brings a lot of advantages inside the classroom. While teachers “facilitate discussions in which students make connections between prior knowledge and new discoveries” (OMOE, 2011), according to Corritore et al (2016), students are provided with tasks which imply collaboration to communicate among themselves by experimenting, creating, applying, and solving problems (p. 3). As a result, educators not only afford to negotiate between meaning and cultural affairs, but also grant the exploration of vocabulary and grammatical structures (Lee, 2014).

On IBL and language uses, Escalante (2013) argues that this model of teaching:

“...motivates students to pay more attention in class and to be interested in using the target language because they feel a sense of control in a more appropriate language level. (...) This also encourages more use of the target language in a meaningful context, both, in the written and oral forms.” p 484

In addition, the expansion of language uses can be carried out by promoting student-

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centered activities that allow the discussion of ideas emerging from their own interest and inquiries (Corritore et al, 2016). In fact, the use of IBL inside the classroom not only enhances students' learning but also seeks to provide learning environments based on collaboration, creating life-long experiences and knowledge (Mendieta, 2009).

For these reasons, IBL was seen as a possible solution to widen language uses in an EFL classroom. That is why the following research question was proposed:

Research Questions

How can the implementation of Inquiry-Based Learning expand the uses of EFL in a group of 6th graders at Institución Educativa Sagrado Corazón?

General Objective

To expand the uses of the foreign language through the use of Inquiry-Based Learning.

Specific Objectives

- Describing how IBL helps students use EFL for real purposes.
- Analyzing the expansion of the uses of the foreign language through IBL.
- Evaluating how IBL widens the uses of English in the classroom

Action Plan

This action plan was designed and followed during a year of research. It was developed as a cyclical process in which planning, observing, acting, and reflecting took place all the same time (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005).

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All along the first semester of the practicum, I carried out a great amount of observations about the English class development and interactions into this group from Institución Educativa Sagrado Corazón. These observations were registered in a reflective journal, which further served to identify several issues converging in the classroom and set the problem statement. Then, data about the issue at hand was exhaustively researched and gathered in order to state the literature review. Finally, a list of actions and activities were planned to be performed during the second semester, proposing IBL as a possible alternative that would deal with the issue to work on. Data collection methods that helped me describe, analyze and evaluate the impact of IBL in learners' language use were also set up at the end of the first semester.

The second semester was devoted to implement the actions and data collection methods suggested before. The action-research plan was divided into three main phases: unit planning and unit implementation phases, which corresponded to the first two terms of the year and were based on the institutional syllabus along with the IBL approach, so classes were given by carrying out a project that fitted this model of teaching; and the data analysis phase, where several techniques were used to gather and analyze data on the expansion of language uses through IBL. Data collection methods implemented during this research study were a reflective journal, a survey, and an interview.

Development of Actions

As mentioned above, actions suggested in favor of evidencing the implementation of IBL within the classroom and its contribution to expand the uses of EFL were put into practice throughout the second semester of the practicum, which started at the beginning of the year. Firstly, I shared my problem statement and possible solution with my CT in order to make her aware of the suggestions proposed to improve the problematic issue. I also shared

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my action plan with my students because I wanted to develop this research study with awareness and collaboration from all the involved participants. Then, during the first class weeks (last two weeks of January), I planned the units to be carried out in the first two terms of the year based on the institutional syllabus and the IBL approach.

Once the lesson planning was ready, I started to implement some classes which were based on and developed by following a series of questions over the next month. These questions and class organization allowed students to get a notion about an IBL class. Additionally, some sessions were dedicated to identifying types, purposes, structures and answers of questions in English, since it was necessary to teach students how to ask questions in order for them to be capable of formulating their own inquiries later. During this time, several topics, such as the school, the neighborhood and the city, were proposed to get students comfortable with the target language to talk about issues concerning their real context. Besides, most of the times I used the foreign language to communicate with the learners; it was very challenging for them because they did not have an English class given in the target language. As time went by, they got used to the language and were able to understand my ideas, explanations and instructions.

Over the course of the next two months (second half of the first term and first half of the second term), students worked on a project based on IBL. This project called “Languages and Cultures” consisted of a process in which students worked in groups and selected a country of their interest. This project was planned according to the institutional syllabus and the suggested Government curricular framework for English classes.

Students initially were asked to become familiar, share their thinking, and wonder about the culture and language of the country they had chosen. Then, they wrote, clarified, and extended a list of open-ended questions with which they established a starting point to

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explore and analyze different issues and inquiries they wanted to respond about those cultures and languages. Consequently, they underwent an exploratory and analytical phase, so they used information from a great variety of resources to answer their questions and talk about their new findings and understanding. Finally, they communicated their inquiries and findings to the rest of the class by performing several presentations. Also, they participated in a dialogue where they reflected on the process they needed to learn those new things. Dialogues and discussion environments were promoted during the whole project development. Other issues such as students' class-skipping and misbehavior in some sessions did not interrupt the development and results of the project. Instead, students took advantage of the classes by devoting to the project to participating and sharing their discoveries with their classmates.

In the case of the research process, a reflective journal was used throughout the two terms with the purpose of describing how IBL helped students use EFL for real purposes. According to Mertler (2006), reflective journals give teacher-researchers the opportunity to keep narrative accounts of reflections that emerge from their practice (p. 66). They not only allow teachers to systematically gather these reflections but also become guidelines through which professors describe, understand and interpret the events, process and behaviors that take place in class (Buitrago et al., 2002).

At the end of the second term, a survey was designed and applied to students with the aim of analyzing the expansion of the uses of the foreign language through IBL. It consisted of a set of 5 open-ended questions intended to gather an accurate sense of what learners were thinking about this model of learning (Johnson, 2005). The implementation of this technique allows researchers to gather useful information from a large number of people in a very short period of time because they can answer the questions simultaneously and without pressure. On the other hand, a semi-structured interview was guided to the CT, with the purpose of

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collecting information and evaluating how IBL widened the uses of English in class. In a semi-structured interview “the researcher asks several “basic” questions but can also follow up a particular response with alternative, optional questions that may or may not be used by the researcher, depending on the situation” (Mertler, 2006). Both the survey and the interview were intended for academic purposes only, so confidentiality was as a very important aspect to consider.

Findings and Interpretations

Once I collected data from students, the CT and my observations, I arranged all the information by creating some charts in which I started to establish patterns and define categories. In the case of the reflective journal, I used a format consisting of a three-column chart with 1) a thick description of the class, 2) reflections, comments, questions and assumptions from these descriptions, and 3) codes and patterns that emerged from these reflections. Then, in the case of the survey, I performed an inductive analysis (Mertler, 2006) in a chart that included spaces to write down the responses, reflections and codes I inferred from each question. I also used graphics and schemas to identify the most relevant patterns. Finally, I recorded the semi-structured interview, which was about 15-minute long, in another chart containing spaces for the teacher to transcript the answers and the corresponding patterns.

Findings presented below were based on the analysis of the emerged categories and concerns mostly related to the IBL approach and the expansion of the uses of learning in the classroom. The compilation of these categories was done with the aid of a recurrence chart that gave me numerical information about the amount of times patterns showed up within data. Besides, it allowed me to compare the categories, so I was able to make more connections and interpretations aiming at answering the stated research question. I also used a

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chart where I could relate the findings with evidence from data, theory, categories, and explanations. Through the data analysis, 3 main categories were identified: IBL and uses of language in the classroom, IBL contributions to class development, and students' attitudes towards the English class.

The focus of this research was to implement an innovative learning model in order to determine if it could widen students' uses of the foreign language inside the classroom. Through the analysis of data, it was found that learners did expand the uses of language when performing activities based on IBL:

“They made an effort to use the foreign language to talk about those facts and information they had found concerning their cultures of interest.” (Reflective journal, April 21st, 2017)

“I could see that it was not so difficult for learners to talk about their topics using the foreign language. In addition, they easily learned some words and phrases belonging not only to the target language but also to the language of their corresponding cultures” (Reflective journal, May 4th, 2017).

Students went beyond using English to just perform activities related to grammar and translation. As seen in previous research studies, learners became more interested in using the foreign language during all the process because they got to feel comfortable in an environment that fostered participation and collaboration, making language learning an appealing and useful experience (Escalante, 2013 & Mendieta, 2009). It can therefore be inferred that IBL had a positive impact towards the expansion of the uses of language inside the classroom.

In addition to this first category concerning IBL and language uses, it was evident that learners showed improvements in all language skills. On one hand, the CT mentioned that

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“como se lleva a los estudiantes a indagar, entonces leen antes de llegar a la clase, escuchan porque deben participar en discusiones, organizan sus ideas y resuelven sus dudas escribiendo, lo que hace que empiecen a construir su propio vocabulario” (Teacher interview, May 12th, 2017) This kind of tasks, suggested by this learning model not only allowed the negotiation of knowledge but also helped explore language grammar structures and vocabulary (Lee, 2014). On the other hand, abilities such as speaking and pronunciation improved considerably. This was the case for survey responses from students, who said that the language skills they had improved the most were listening, speaking and pronunciation since they got to understand vocabulary gathered from research and classmates, and were now able to use it when talking to others (Students’ survey, May 12th, 2017). It is worth highlighting that the aim was to take advantage of students’ good English pronunciation level to expand the uses of language; these language abilities were mainly used for sharing ideas and participating in discussions, activities that took place during the whole project development.

Regarding the second main category, it was clear that Inquiry-Based Learning was a first step towards considering important class-related aspects such as students’ previous knowledge and the use of questions.

As it reads in OMOE’s article (2011), IBL aims at allowing students to share their ideas on a particular topic and exchange opinions on possible ways to learn more (p. 2); thus, classes were initially supported by students’ prior awareness. Most of the students stated that the project gave them the opportunity to work on the basis of what they already knew and could share with their co-workers (Students’ survey, May 12th, 2017). It was also seen in the reflective journal that they used their previous knowledge as a starting point for the project (Reflective journal, March 24th, 2017). Students’ previous knowledge is pretty essential because it is the starting point of the lessons. In fact, they chose a topic to work on based on

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their experiences, problems, or issues they consider important. They didn't just get engaged in the project but also got interested in new topics arising from their inquiries.

Apart from learners' prior knowledge, the use of questions had a fundamental role during the lessons, since they helped create a discussion environment to foster communication while encouraging thinking, new discoveries and creative language (Lee, 2014). The CT asserted that “el estudiante intervino directamente en su aprendizaje. Se planteó sus propios interrogantes, se indagó [...] Además, se preguntaban entre ellos, haciendo uso del idioma extranjero.” (Teacher interview, May 12th, 2017) As expected, questions were used during the whole process as a way to present students' inquiries and foster spaces where learners could use the foreign language to communicate among themselves and discuss about topics of their concern. Students got to talk about things that were part of the real world and that, according to them, people must know in order to understand and respect others. Students worked on their culture of interest and at the same time learned about the way people conceive the world from different viewpoints.

Finally, the third main category was devoted to students' attitudes towards the class. It was found that IBL allowed students to enhance interactions and get a more active participation.

This was observed in learners' survey responses, most specifically in the first questions, where they were asked about which were the uses of language they gave to English during the class time (See Appendix A). Around seventy percent of the participants think that they used the target language as the main way of interacting with others:

“Participar con nuestros compañeros nos ayudó a intercambiar ideas y ayudarnos entre todos con nuestras dudas.”

“Yo compartí muchas ideas en inglés con los demás.”

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” En inglés pude compartir mis ideas, podía discutir sobre temas que me interesaban, porque debíamos explicar y argumentar lo que pensábamos.” (Students’ survey, May 12th, 2017).

As said by Smith (1977), language learning is thinkable when there are possibilities to find out interactions and create knowledge into the environment (p. 638). So, it is possible to say that the implementation of IBL in this class widened the uses of the foreign language providing student-centered environments where they could not only relate their ways of thinking but also their inquiries, and that it contributed to solving these issues through collaborative work.

During class interaction and active participation, it was clear that learners’ attention was entirely captured along with their motivation. Reflections recorded in the journal indicated that students showed a lot of interest in teacher’s explanations all along the process, but they also manifested attentiveness when listening to their classmates when they talked about their inquiries and new discoveries: “It was amazing to see how students were so interested in the presentations; they all wanted to know about their classmates’ works, the presented cultures and their languages” (Reflective journal, May 4th, 2017). These changes on students’ attitudes towards the class can be summarized in the assertion of Hudspith et al (2009) for whom personal commitment is a positive outcome that comes from the exploration and understanding of learners’ own curiosities and inquiries (p. 843). Then, it could be inferred that students’ engagement and motivation were also improved by the implementation of this specific learning model.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Carrying out strategies to expand the uses of language in the classroom is an issue that has been thought about by foreign language teachers over the years. To account for the modern challenges and goals institutions need to achieve, professors are always looking for new learning models that give them opportunities to create interactions between their students and the world around them and, thereby, use the foreign language for sharing their ideas and discovering new knowledges. For that reason, it is necessary to explore strategies that include situations in which learners use the language in real situations. It is in this sense that Inquiry-Based Learning becomes an alternative to conceive language as more than just a goal to achieve or an abstract system that serves to communicate, but as a means of knowing the world students live in, being connected with their environment, building up their own knowledge, and freely sharing their ideas and opinions.

Inquiry-Based Learning relies on learners' previous knowledge, topics of interest and inquiries about their lives; and it can be adjusted to their immediate context. Although they are not constantly surrounded by the foreign language, it is essential to take advantage of the class time and promote this kind of lessons that widen the uses of language. When factors such as students' prior awareness, strengths, interest, and inquiries are linked to activities that promote discussion, motivation, commitment, and attentiveness, the use of the foreign language in the classroom increases. It is possible to create such kind of classes where all these issues come together and provide positive results for students, without straying from the institutional mission and goals expected to be achieved inside classroom.

Throughout the description, analysis, and evaluation of Inquiry-Based Learning and language uses in seventh graders at Institución Educativa Sagrado Corazón, it is possible to say that this model of learning allowed students to acquire all grammar structures and

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vocabulary objectives of the English class while using the foreign language to express their viewpoints, experiences, and concerns. In addition, as students formulated their questions and shared their new discoveries, all of their language skills improved. Thus, learners' willingness towards the language and good pronunciation level were pivotal when using English to talk about issues of their concern and interest. Now, it is a teacher's responsibility and challenge to mediate between students' topics of concern and English class objectives, and to enhance spaces where focus, exploration, analysis, sharing and reflection come together while using the target language for real purposes.

As a suggestion, I would generally recommend teachers to adopt and implement Inquiry-Based Learning models in their classes because it is an innovative alternative that takes into account learners' interests, situations and problems, it can be adjusted to the institutional syllabus and the educational requirements, and, especially, it fosters the expansion of the uses of language by encouraging students to share their previous knowledge, establish their own inquiries, participate in discussion to find out possible solutions, use a great variety of sources in order to gather information, reflect on what they discover, and have an active participation in their learning process.

Reflections

This practicum experience in a Colombian public institution was very educational for me because I grew up both personally and professionally. It was the first time that I taught at a public school, and I had to deal with different factors and situations faced by teachers in their everyday environment. I grew up personally because I was in charge of many responsibilities I did not have before, so I learned how to properly distribute my time in order to meet the demands of practicum, my studies, and my work. I also became more aware of the students' needs and problems as I made progress in my own practicum, because I took

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part in trying to solve some of the issues and situations they faced in their daily lives. As teachers, we spend a lot of time with our students, so we tend to notice when something is wrong with one of them and it is our duty to try to offer a helping hand. In fact, being part of the solutions of our communities is always a great experience. All these insights taught me to value and reconsider the role of teachers and our commitment with society.

I also enjoyed my experience as a researcher, because I felt I could contribute to the improvement of the teaching/learning process in my field of action. I had to look at things in detail, to acknowledge the importance of all the interactions and issues that took place in class; I was attentive to every action and decision I or my students made, considering the theory and analyzing the results of each decision; and I always wondered how I could have done better for me or for my students.

It has been a challenge to work with teenagers, especially from this age range because most of them are experiencing physical, emotional and behavioral changes and facing new responsibilities as they grow older. Additionally, the number of students inside a Colombian public institution classroom is very large, and sometimes there are not enough resources to carry out different activities, so I had to think of ideas and strategies to manage students' behavior and teacher-student interaction; I also had to be creative in providing students with the necessary materials for an effective development of the lessons. However, I believe that it was a great experience in which I could help other people achieve their goals and, at the same time, I began my role as teacher-researcher.

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Appendix A**Student Survey**

Por favor, responda las siguientes preguntas de la manera más sincera posible. Le recordamos que las respuestas aquí consignadas son confidenciales y usadas solo para el proceso de la investigación. Responda de acuerdo a las clases dadas basadas en IBL (Inquiry-Based Learning).

1. A través del proyecto, aprendiste a usar el inglés para: (Puedes señalar más de una opción)
 - a) Comunicarte con tus compañeros dentro del grupo.
 - b) Compartir tus ideas sobre el tema trabajado.
 - c) Participar en discusiones sobre el tema de interés trabajado.
 - d) Realizar presentaciones en público.
 - e) Otra razón. ¿Cuál?
 - f) No usé el inglés para nada.

Explica tu(s) respuesta(s)

2. ¿Consideras que tu inglés mejoró mediante las actividades desarrolladas con IBL?

SI __ NO __ ¿Por qué?

3. Prefieres aprender inglés por medio de:

- a) Lecturas
- b) Gramática
- c) Dictados
- d) IBL
- e) Otra forma. ¿Cuál?

Explica tu(s) respuesta(s)

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4. ¿Crees que el uso de las preguntas ayudó a que se utilizara más en inglés en el salón de clases? SI ___ NO ___ ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Qué habilidades del inglés mejoraste durante las clases? (Puedes señalar más de una opción)
 - a) La escucha
 - b) El habla
 - c) La lectura
 - d) La escritura
 - e) La pronunciación
 - f) El vocabulario

Explica tu(s) respuesta(s)

Appendix B

Teacher Interview

- ¿De qué manera considera que IBL ha contribuido a la expansión del uso del inglés en el salón de clases?
- ¿Consideras que el inglés de los estudiantes mejoró mediante las actividades desarrolladas con IBL? ¿Qué cambios ha notado en el nivel de inglés de los estudiantes?
- ¿Considera que el uso de las preguntas ayudó a que se utilizara más en inglés en el salón de clases?
- ¿Qué habilidades del lenguaje se mejoraron gracias a la implementación de IBL?
- ¿Qué ventajas y desventajas encontró en la implementación de IBL en las clases de inglés?
- ¿Utilizaría este modelo de aprendizaje en un futuro?
- ¿Considera que los estudiantes pueden utilizar un poco más la lengua extranjera para hablar temas relacionados con sus contextos?