SIN TÍTULO, 2003
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Critical Thinking in the EFL Classroom: The Search for a Pedagogical Alternative to Improve English Learning*

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This article reports the results of a research study that was undertaken by a group of teachers working in the English program ascribed to the School of Education at Universidad Externado de Colombia, with the financial support of COLCIENCIAS. Tasks related to critical thinking were designed and implemented with three groups of students. A qualitative interpretative case study was conducted to examine how students constructed meaning when dealing with the tasks, the meta-cognitive processes involved in the process, the types of interactions built around the tasks and how they influenced language competence and critical thinking. The findings indicate that language competence and criticality are on-going, never-ending processes. However, teachers can refine them through thought-provoking, stimulating materials.

Keywords: critical thinking, meaning construction tasks, meta-cognition, interaction, English competence.

Este artículo reporta los resultados de una investigación hecha por miembros del cuerpo docente del Programa de Inglés adscrito a la Universidad Externado de Colombia, con el apoyo de COLCIENCIAS. Se implementaron unidades didácticas que involucraban habilidades de pensamiento crítico con tres grupos de estudiantes. Se llevó a cabo un estudio de caso de tipo cualitativo con el propósito de examinar la construcción de significados hecha por los estudiantes con base en estas tareas, qué tipos de procesos metacognitivos y de interacciones se generaron y cómo incidieron estas interacciones en el desarrollo tanto de la competencia en inglés como del pensamiento crítico. Los resultados indican que la competencia en inglés y el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico son procesos continuos que no están delimitados por un punto de llegada específico. Como procesos tienen la posibilidad de ser refinados por medio de materiales que estimulen y generen controversia.

Palabras clave: pensamiento crítico, tareas construcción de significados, metacognición, interacción, competencia en inglés.

Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche faite par les membres du corps enseignant du programme d'anglais rattaché à l'Universidad Externado de Colombia, avec l'appui financier de COLCIENCIAS. Des unités didactiques, intégrant les aptitudes d'esprit critique des trois groupes d'étudiants, y furent réalisées. Une étude de cas de type qualitative fut menée dans l'optique d'examiner la construction de signifiés réalisées par les étudiants sur la base des tâches attribuées, quels types de processus métacognitifs et d'interactions furent générés et comment ces interactions ont influencé le développement

de la compétence en anglais tout comme celui de l'esprit critique. Les résultats indiquent que la compétence en anglais et le développement de l'esprit critique sont des processus continus qui ne sont pas limités par un point d'arrivée spécifique. En tant que processus, ils peuvent être améliorés par des moyens stimulant et générant la controverse.

Mots clés: esprit critique, travaux pour la construction de signifiés, processus métacognitifs, interaction, compétence en anglais.

INTRODUCTION

In Colombia, we have laws that demand the inclusion of at least one foreign language in the curriculum (Law 115, *Ley General de Educación*, 1994). Besides developing competent citizens with key roles in their families and in society, the law highlights the importance of encouraging individuals to become globally active. The participation of individuals in today's world requires the development of their capacity for critical thinking as it enables them to examine, from multiple perspectives, issues that affect them and evaluate the appropriateness of solutions to different problems. Individuals' critical perspectives and their engagement in economic, social, political, and cultural spheres contribute to the development of nations around the world. In light of the need to provide opportunities for our learners to participate in different environments, it becomes essential to focus on the teaching of English, as it is the language most commonly associated with global processes**.**

Although we have witnessed changes in the teaching of English, the tendency to emphasize the accumulation of information and the mere mechanization of linguistic structures still prevails. We believe that the role of language educators should not be limited to the teaching of language features exclusively. It also entails becoming agents of change, which means encouraging learners to actively reflect on current concerns. It is through this reflection that learners are enabled to realize that they are not passive recipients and that eventually they could become active members of their society who can contribute to ameliorate their nations' needs.

However, our national community of educators has limited information on how to infuse higher-order thinking skills into our EFL programs. Consequently, we, a group of teachers of English ascribed to the School of Education at Universidad Externado de Colombia, decided to embark upon the task of implementing a series of didactic units designed on the basis of critical thinking principles. When we began the implementation, we noticed that such tasks promoted more interaction and that students were apparently more motivated to talk. We decided then that it would be important to systematize our experience and examine it with the purpose of deepening our understanding of the possible

incidence of these tasks on language competence and the development of critical thinking. Our assumption was that when the didactic units focused on issues that generated controversy, touched on their reality, were intriguing and challenging, students tended to participate more. Such participation was marked by features of critical thinking. Our research proposal sought to answer the following questions.

1. How do students construct meaning when engaged in tasks that involve the application of critical thinking skills?
2. What meta-cognitive processes are developed when performing critical thinking tasks in the EFL classroom?
3. What is the nature of interaction during the implementation of these tasks?
4. What is the impact of these interactions on the development of English language competence?

1. CORE CONCEPTS OF OUR PROJECT

For our project we considered the constructivist notion of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and its relation to thought. In the constructivist model, a learner draws on his own internalized cognitive system to actively construct meaning. The process of making sense implies interpreting our reality from a subjective perspective, which is shaped by our history and through interaction with others. The constructivist notion of learning stresses that socialization and individualization mediate the meaning-building process. Learning is a personal construct where there is intervention from the learner's social environment and the learner himself. There are also socio-cultural factors that mark the constructivist activity of any individual. We integrate into our cultural groups by mastering cultural tools such as values, beliefs, experiences, concepts, etc. (Abbot and Ryan, 2001).

1.1. Critical thinking

Critical thinking is at the core of our proposal. Despite the multiple interpretations that the body of literature provides regarding critical thinking,

there is a consensus on what it implies (Pithers and Soden, 2000). Among other things, critical thinking involves identifying questions worth answering, directing one's search in responding to those queries, developing a sense that knowledge is contestable and presenting evidence to support one's arguments. Thus, critical thinking differs from just acquiring and retaining information. It implies continuous self-reflection (Scriven and Paul, 2003; Facione, 1998).

Different authors have tried to create categorizations of critical thinking. Bloom's taxonomy (1956) for example, includes a six level hierarchy of cognition. In this model, an individual begins with the basic level, which is called knowledge level, and then progresses until he or she reaches the most complex level, which is evaluation. The model, as it is proposed, seems too rigid. Also, dividing the thinking process, which is characterized by its complexity, fluidity, and continuity into discrete skills, seems artificial. However, to make the topic manageable it is necessary to divide it into pieces. This does not imply that each piece acts in isolation or that thinking is composed of fragments. Halpern (1996) clearly states that the division was indispensable for instruction and learning purposes "and is not meant to imply that critical thinking can be cut into neat packages" (32). As this author does, we believe that human learning entails a cyclical activity in which we constantly add and refine our knowledge base so as to keep on elaborating more sophisticated thinking processes to which we also attach our beliefs and personal values. A person can use one or many of these processes at a time to deal with a specific task or objective.

The taxonomy we included in our project includes precepts from Bloom (1956) and Facione (1998), who are recognized experts in the field. We kept Bloom's knowledge level because we acknowledge the importance of retaining and retrieving information. When we gain insights about the way our memory functions, we improve our chances to recall information better. This is crucial in second language learning because we are constantly storing and retrieving new linguistic information. Besides knowledge, critical thinking involves the following cognitive skills or mental abilities: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. We selected this last categorization because it entails the idea that individuals should be capable of

monitoring their thought processes, which is at the core of becoming an ideal thinker. Each cognitive skill is subsequently explained in brief:

1.1.1. Knowledge

Knowledge refers to the capacity to evoke appropriate material when resolving a problem that usually embraces memorization and identification. It involves remembering specific terminology, facts, and conventions in specific domains; classifying; categorizing; and using criteria to prove or judge facts.

1.1.2. Interpretation

Interpretation deals with the capacity to apprehend a set of qualities that characterize a piece of information. It usually involves translation, interpretation, and extrapolation. Translating deals with paraphrasing using a person's own words. Interpreting embraces students' ability to capture the content of a given context as a whole, the ability to understand and interpret different types of texts, and the ability to discern between legitimate and contradictory conclusions.

1.1.3. Analysis

Analysis relates to the capacity to fragment material into its components in order to establish relationships among those components and understand principles of organization. It entails three subcategories. The first one refers to the analysis of elements or the ability to recognize non-explicit assumptions; that is, distinguishing between facts and hypotheses. The second one deals with analysis of relationships or the ability to understand relations among ideas, and cause and effect sequences. The third one has to do with the analysis of principles of organization. It evaluates the capacity to determine the structure and organization of communication through inferences.

1.1.4. Inference

Inference is the cognitive skill that consists of recognizing and assuring factors that allow for rational results. These results in turn, form assumptions and theses to examine significant information and help to infer the outcome from opinions, data, tenets, and convictions.

1.1.5. Explanation

Explanation refers to the capacity to affirm the results of our own thinking, to justify our reasoning based on concepts, methods, sound criteria, and contextual considerations that constitute solid ground to support our convictions. Establishing consequences, providing reasons to support procedures, and expressing controversy are included as sub-skills of explanation.

1.1.6. Evaluation

Evaluation has to do with the capacity to form judgments about the value of ideas, masterpieces, methods, materials, etc. It involves using solid criteria to establish the validity of any statement. For both, Facione and Bloom, *evaluation* refers to the process of judging the validity of statements, events, convictions, expressions, opinions, facts and figures, and regulations by using solid criteria as well as estimating the rational fortitude of the current and future deductive relationships among different forms of representation.

1.1.7. Self-regulation

Self-regulation implies monitoring our own thinking processes. That is, constantly revising all elements used to achieve a task. The goal is to question, confirm, validate, and correct one's skills, how they were used, and the results obtained. Self-examination and self-correction are at the center of self-regulation. This component will be explained in detail in the section dealing with meta-cognition. A graphical representation of these critical thinking skills would be as follows:

Critical thinking is not a measurable concept, nor is it a final stage a person can reach. Despite the fact that we would expect critical thinking to permeate all spheres of our lives permanently, we sometimes render ourselves to the use of irrational thought and behavior. In addition, we cannot say that an individual has completed the task of becoming a critical thinker. Instead, we can speak of varying degrees of criticality (Scriven and Paul, 2003) and consider that there is always an opportunity to enhance one's skills and abilities. Thus, becoming a

critical thinker is a life-long task that is only developed and sharpened through time and learning experiences.

Figure 1. Critical thinking skills
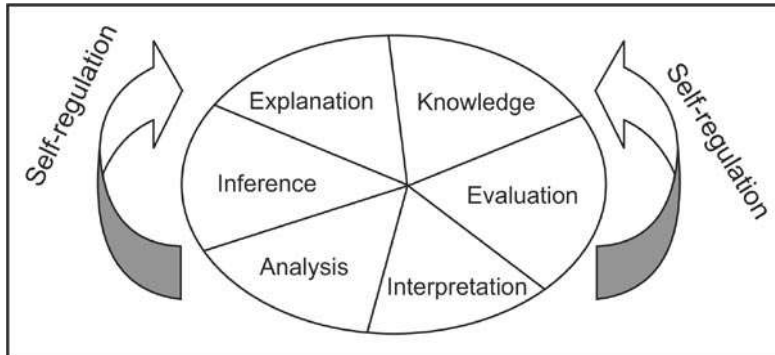
1.2. Metacognition

Critical thinking is related to meta-cognitive processes. Meta-cognition is considered a reflective activity that embraces awareness and control about the global development of learning processes. Hence, meta-cognition requires permanent planning, assessment, and evaluation of thinking processes (Mayor, 1993). Meta-cognitive strategies include, but are not limited to perception, critique, judgment, and decision-making that allow learners to orchestrate and self-regulate their own learning. This notion of self-regulation in thinking leads to autonomy and learning to learn.

1.3. Communicative competence

Since we are also interested in examining if the communicative competence of our students is affected by the interactions built on the tasks related to critical thinking, it is necessary to briefly clarify what these terms mean. Communicative competence was a term coined by Hymes (1972**,** as cited by Bachman, 1990**)** in relation to the use of a person's mother tongue, and that Canale and Swain (1980 as mentioned by Bachman, 1990) and Bachman (1990), among others, later developed in relation to foreign language. It refers

to the capacity of using language successfully and appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose within the limits of a given context (Ortega, 2000). Thus, it embraces the abstract knowledge about a language that speakers possess and the abilities to apply that knowledge in communication.

There is no consensus on what the communicative competence embraces nor is there conclusive evidence to validate these components. Bachman (1990) for example presented the following model that has served as the basis for foreign language curriculum designs in Colombia (*Lineamientos de Lenguas Extranjeras*, 1999). The model entails two main areas: organizational and pragmatic competencies. The former includes grammatical and textual competencies whereas the latter involves illocutionary and sociolinguistic competencies. Each of these sub-divisions includes several smaller components.

2. THE TASKS

We devoted a lot of energy and effort to making the tasks not only challenging, but also visually attractive and enjoyable. In our view, poorly designed materials generate boredom and apathy. Therefore, we tried to include activities such as puzzles, word games, and interesting pictures to give the tasks a more dynamic character. The tasks progressed from simple to complex both in terms of content and structure, and addressed the different competencies. In relation to critical thinking, the primary focus was on the following constructs (based on the ideas of Facione, 1998 and Bloom, 1956): infer information from oral and written texts; compare and contrast ideas; identify advantages and disadvantages related to different issues; distinguish facts and opinions; write short compositions stating their point-of-view with supporting arguments; conduct surveys and analyze the information collected; examine the contents of different types of readings; use logical thinking to solve fictitious cases; examine and discuss issues from different perspectives (social, political, economic); analyze implications; judge events and peoples' views about them; judge the validity and applicability of alternative solutions; and reflect on the social impact and consequences of various issues on our community.

Many of the tasks required discussions in which the students needed to state their point-of-view and try to provide arguments to justify their choices. The ultimate purpose was to foster interaction and exchange of ideas. Before getting engaged in the discussions, they were given ample input so that they could enlarge their vocabulary. Students got acquainted with words related to the main topic of the didactic units through carefully selected excerpts and exercises. We also included writing and speaking tasks aimed at helping them internalize new grammatical structures.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 The context

Universidad Externado de Colombia is a private non-profit higher education institution located in Bogotá. The School of Education has an English program that offers classes to the Schools of Economics, Business Administration and Accounting. The staff from the school of Economics supported our endeavor and allowed us to carry out this project. Our students take a placement exam and are placed in the seven levels that comprise our program, which is centered on the communicative approach. They take six hours of classes per week for sixteen weeks.

3.2. The students

Economics students who were enrolled at the time of this research comprised the group of individuals selected for this study. The total number of participants in our project was thirty-three (sixteen females and seventeen males) distributed as follows: ten in level I (beginners), fourteen in level IV (intermediate), and nine in level VII (advanced). Their ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-two years old. Out of the thirty-three students, eighteen had taken English classes offered by our program. In other words, they had been enrolled at one point with us. The criterion for the selection of the three levels was that they represent the entry, mid-point, and the exit stages of the language development continuum of our program. More specifically, students in level one are capable of constructing short sentences, making brief descriptions and comparing and

contrasting items and ideas. In level four students elaborate longer and more complex linguistic structures. They are expected to state and substantiate their points of view, identify causes and effects, etc. In level seven, students are supposed to have mastered more complex structures, hold a conversation and be more fluent in the elaboration of arguments and in the justification of their choices. We requested students' permission to gather information by means of a consent form that all of them signed.

3.3. The teachers

There were three female teachers involved in this project. Two were full-time and one part-time teacher who designed and implemented the tasks and materials for level I. Also, there was a female research assistant who collaborated in the analysis of the data for this level. Our role was that of teacher-researchers because we both designed and implemented the tasks and carried out the process of data gathering and analysis. All of us worked collaboratively in the design of the tasks, the supporting materials, the means of instruction, and the process of evaluation that we were to follow. It is important to note that in our program there is a different teacher per level. Thus, the teachers involved in this project did not have past teaching relationships with the students.

3.4. Data collection procedure

A qualitative case-study intervention guided our inquiry. The information collected during the second academic semester of the year 2002 was obtained through different data gathering procedures by the three teacher-researchers involved in the project. A total of eight classes per teacher were audio- and videotaped. The teacher-researchers also used field notes from direct classroom observations. We collected their thoughts on these notes. We also collected students' compositions.

3.5. Data analysis procedure

The grounded approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) was used to analyze the data. Each audio and videotape was transcribed orthographically. We concentrated on the cases in which students showed more eagerness to speak.

More concretely, we focused on the interactions that were built around the critical thinking tasks we designed. Each teacher-researcher worked individually looking for aspects such as who initiated the interaction, the type of responses given, speech modifications, and most important of all the content of the interactions to identify aspects that could be connected to being critical; such as evoking material, paraphrasing ideas, interpreting, fragmenting information into pieces, examining issues from multiple perspectives, evaluating choices, and reconsidering one's interpretation and assumptions. As we noted patterns and themes that emerged from the data, we organized them into a matrix that was continuously revised to form the categories. In short, we corroborated our findings by using three types of triangulation: (1) methodological, which consisted of the different data gathering methods, (2) investigative: three teacher-researchers and (3) theoretical: more than one theoretical perspective was considered for the analysis.

3.6. The results

Overall, we identified seven categories that answered our questions and that in general indicated that there was a nascent development of critical thinking expressed in English, in which the influence of the tasks and materials could have been a determining factor. Our analysis provided evidence of an incipient development in linguistic, pragmatic, and argumentative competencies whenever exchange of ideas was stimulated, supporting the Vygotskyan idea that meaning is built around social interaction. Each category is briefly explained and illustrated with a representative sample selected from the multiple instances that were recurrent in our analysis as follows.

3.6.1. Making associations and interpretations using background knowledge

This category responds to the question: "how do learners construct meaning when engaged in tasks that involve the application of critical thinking skills?" The analyses of our data indicate that students drew upon their repertoire of personal experiences and that the arguments they built reflected the manner in which they interpreted their reality. We noticed that the construction of meaning was strongly influenced by background knowledge, which we divided up into

three noticeable areas: knowledge students brought from their fields of study, more specifically from the discipline of Economics; their personal beliefs, values and experiences, and global and local knowledge. This last point refers to all that information they possessed and expressed regarding their communities (local knowledge) and foreign communities (global knowledge). These three sub- categories were interwoven as they influenced one another. For instance, a personal belief could be the result of knowledge of an Economics theory, and/or what students had learned through the mass media or the community in which they were immersed. We must acknowledge that the influence of L1, Spanish in this case, quite frequently permeated the arguments they constructed. That is, the associations and interpretations they expressed were shaded by Spanish structures and literal translation. The following fragment shows students providing their personal opinion about celebrating football world cups in Colombia.

77.	T:	The opening ceremony generates expenses.
78.	S2:	Teacher, I have the same but in advantages because the Keynes theory say something.
79.	T:	Oh, yes! It could also be a positive aspect. Come on, tell us!
80.	S2:	Eh…. this event increase the public expenditure. …
81.	T:	Yes, football world cups increase public expenditure.
82.	S2:	Keynes say that this is good for a country.
83.	T:	Why do you think it is good for the country?
84:	S2:	Because generate and increase the employ in all country.
85:	T:	Yes, because… public expenditure…no, they generate…. football world cups generate
86.		employment and therefore what? If you have a job you receive…? What else is increased?
87.	S5:	Income!
88.	T:	Yes, income and?
89.	S3:	Consumption!
90.	T:	Yes, and consumption. So it could be a positive aspect you would like to include.
91.	S3:	For example when companies sell much?
92.	T:	Sell more, yes.

(Level IV, audiotape 2, page 3)

The students used Keynes' theory as a referent as Keynes is an authority in the social science of Economics (line 78). The choice of lexis (lines 80, 82, 84) denotes their appropriation of Keynes' proposal in terms of the economic implications of increasing public expenditure. The task seemed to activate students' schemata, aiding in the retrieval of information from Economics that was also connected to the analysis of a situation at the local level. It is generally assumed that when we activate and build on our academic and professional culture (Dudley–Evans and Jo St. Jones, 1998) and our own personal world (Monroy, *et al.*, 2001), learning is more significant. Students bring to the process of learning a second language, not only their personal views, but also knowledge of their own fields of study and of their communities.

3.6.2. Embryonic critical thinking

As the core of our project was the use of tasks related to critical thinking and materials, this category is also connected to the first question. We use the term "embryonic" in a metaphorical sense to signify that although we did not find instances that could be used as evidence of strong rationality, there were some traces of nascent criticality. More concretely, although students' construction of arguments was still grounded mainly on personal views, beliefs, and experiences, they used some of the features that characterize critical thinkers such as the capacity to evoke material, paraphrase, interpret, examine issues from different angles, and so forth. As it was suggested in the explanation of core concepts, we do not believe that one type of thinking precedes the other. Our tasks, therefore, included activities in which students resorted to one or more of these aspects. It is important to note that our intention was to examine critical thinking features in each of the three levels from the beginning of the intervention until its end, but not to establish comparisons among the three levels.

The following sample from level IV shows students' critical capacity despite the fact that the arguments presented linguistic inaccuracies. It is worth noticing that they built on their personal views and values, but as the discussion progressed they included knowledge from their field of study and proposed alternative solutions such as reinforcing laws and creating high security prisons.

663.	T:	We are talking about drug dealing and terrorism. What can be done to stop drug dealers and
664.		terrorists actions?
665.	S2:	Uhm:: the drugs must be eh:: on the same terrorists. In this society, or in this world all
666.		change because of globalization. The coalici…. How do you say coalición?
667.	T:	Coalition.
668.	S2:	Coalition is present all the world, in all the nations, the nations is a group and the terrorism
669.		is not accept in this world. It's my idea.
670.	T:	Thank you S2, Yes?
671.	S1:	Although S2 has a point there, I think that the government should take the bull by the horns
672.		because as it says in the paper Mono Jojoy and all those criminals and terrorists are thinking
673.		that they are going to die and they won't receive any punishment. I mean, they are going to
674.		die naturally. I think that they should be taken to prison for the rest of their lives, because
675.		they have done many bad things to our country. Many people is afraid, they don't feel safe to
676.		go out to the streets, they are afraid of bombs, afraid of being killed, afraid of being robbed. I
677.		think that the judicial system should... I don't know implant something on our... I don' know,
678.		how to say ….reforzar?
679.	T:	It is to harden, it is to reinforce our laws basically.
680.	S1:	To reinforce our laws and give them a very hard, very hard punishment because if we see
681.		here are people suffering, when they do those bad things and I don't know, maybe many
682.		children are trading their dead bodies or trading, I mean their childhood, they don't let them
683.		live their childhood I mean that they should receive the most the hardest punishment like,
684.		well I don't think that being sentenced to death would be the most….
685.	T:	Appropriate?

686.	S1:	The most appropriate punishment. I think it would be better to take them to a prison without
687.		seeing anybody, only eating bread and water and starving them to death and not letting them
688.		watching the sunlight. Well what happens is that that government is afraid of those guys.

(English IV, audiotape 5, pages 14–17)

The following excerpt refers to a didactic sequence in which the students were comparing and contrasting the information from an article in *Time* magazine. The article dealt with the science of forensics and the relationship with popular television drama shows such as CSI (*Crime Scene Investigation)*. The students had to identify the similarities and differences between a real scenario, which was the role of crime investigators, and fictitious settings such as those created by television. The task included identifying from which perspectives the journalist had presented the analysis. This was the comment included in the teacher's field notes, which shows that the student's reflection emphasized an element that was missing in the text. Critical thinkers are expected to examine rival causes, that is, plausible interpretations, "different from the interpretation made by the communicator, for why events turned out as they did" (Browne and Keeley, 2001).

> One of the things that called my attention was that Student 8 indicated that "the reading didn't consider any costs". I inquired what she meant by that. The student said: "They discuss all aspects of technology, and advancements, but never mentioned something about the money that is spent in each case". She went on explaining that technology implies investment and that the authors of the article didn't mention this fact.
>
> (Level VII, field notes, October 28th, page 2)

The next example is taken from a videotaped lesson in Level I. The students were expected to analyze the causes and consequences of some environmental problems. In lines 98, 100, 101, and 106 we observe that students identified problems associated with the environment using one-word utterances and short phrases. The students' responses indicate that they possess the ability to evoke appropriate material, categorize, classify, and establish causes and

consequences, among other critical thinking skills. However, the lack of linguistic resources interferes with the possibility of examining the level of criticality they have developed. It is at this point where we acknowledge the fact that perhaps we created false expectations in terms of what our tasks could help our students to achieve. Also, we question their appropriateness in terms of allowing us to observe changes in the development of the critical thinking of our low proficient students.

94	T:	Garbage. For example Mondoñedo, yes? What is the problem near Mondoñedo because
95.		of the huge quantity of garbage... What kind of gas? Methane gas.
96.	S1:	How do you say epidemia?
97.	T:	Epidemic, yeah! That's the point, very important.
98.	S1:	Contaminate.
99.	T:	Contaminate, underground contamination.
100.	S1:	Underground.
101.	S2:	Aguas subterraneas!
102.	T:	Underground waters, uhum. Good point. Student 3, do you have another?
103.	S3:	Cutting, double t, no?
104.	T:	Cutting down trees, yeah, cutting down trees. OK. What is the consequence of cutting
105.		down trees? What is the problem?
106.	S1:	Erosion.
107.	T:	OK.
108.	S4	Less animals.

(Level I, video 2, pages 5 and 6)

Students' writings also included evidence of their attempts to become critical thinkers. This sample refers to the effects of implementing "*La Hora Optimista*" ("The Optimistic Hour"), as a reward for citizens in Bogotá for their behavior during the implementation of a measure to control drinking and driving in Bogotá. This is the final version of the composition after completing the process of writing an outline and a draft that was submitted to the teacher for feedback. The writing compiles many aspects that were discussed with the teacher and peers. It is organized in three main areas: advantages of the law, disadvantages of the law, and a personal opinion about it. In each of these areas, the student

illustrates with concrete examples both positive and negative effects considering the economic and social impact, and includes statistics although the source is not provided to substantiate her claims. There is use of connectors to show sequence and contrast.

La "Hora Optimista" was implemented in August 6th of this year by the Mayor of Bogotá, Anthanas Mockus. The main purpose of this idea is to extend the "Hora Zanahoria" from 1:00 AM to 3:00 AM. The Mayor implemented this law as a kind of "gift" for the good behavior of the citizens during the "Hora Zanahoria" period, especially in what refers accidents and drunkers.

The advantages of this policy are: first of all, is good chance to show that it's not necessary to be restrictive with night entertainment; second, other advantage refers to the economic aspect, because the owners of bars and night clubs can earn more money, create more jobs for young people, and they can compete with the owners of bars who tramitted especial permissions to close later; third, the citizens can make other plans like dining out, and then they can go to the bars or discos; and last, and very important, the citizens would have had more options of entertainment here in Bogotá and then they don't have to leave the city, for example go to Chia, what it's very dangerous.

On the other hand, the disadvantages of this policy are: first, according to the news the accident rates increase from approximately 35 per night to more than 100, because the people drinks until to lose their mind and they are not awarness about the danger that it implies; and for that reason the Mayor is thinking about cancel the "Hora Optimista"" second and last, it's more difficult for the police to control the drivers under the influence of alcohol, the minours of age in bars, the selling of drugs, etc.

To conclude, my personal point of view about it, is that I'm disagree with "la Hora Optimista" because it had been showed that we are not ready for this law, because in our minds, we are accustomed to obey orders and to act according to restrictive permissions, because we can't control our behavior; of course, I am not saying that all the people follow the same pattern of behavior, but I consider that for many people, who can't join this "gift" in the right way and responsibility, the rest of us have to face the consequences.

(English VII: Third written assignment, Student 1)

The examples presented show that there were attempts at criticality. This is the basic reason why we state that there was a nascent stage in our classes. It is necessary to note, though, that the tasks were implemented in one academic semester. Therefore, it would be unfair and inappropriate to expect our students to become critical thinkers. As mentioned elsewhere (Scriven and Paul, 2003), becoming a critical thinker is not a task that can be mastered overnight. It is an on-going and never-ending process.

3.6.3. Emphasizing self-regulation processes

This category is the answer to the second question: "what meta-cognitive processes are developed when performing critical thinking tasks in the EFL classroom?" It is necessary to clarify that at the beginning of the semester the teachers introduced and explained the meta-cognitive model proposed by Chamot, *et al.* (1999). The students became familiar with each one of its steps: planning, selecting and applying strategies, monitoring and evaluating strategies**.** Each task included the application of various strategies, but we emphasized the notion that students select and evaluate those that they considered most effective to achieve the proposed objectives.

The analysis of the data showed that the emphasis on the selection and evaluation of strategies, which are integral components in the self-regulation process, permitted the students to use those that facilitated interacting with the material. It is our contention that if learners can identify and apply the strategies that allow them to interact with written and oral texts, they are demonstrating their capacity to bring control over their own learning process. It is in this sense that we affirm that teachers played an important role in the initiation of the monitoring and controlling that students did of their learning. In our project there were two courses of action. One related the use of overt teaching of learning strategies. The other consisted of encouraging students to go beyond the superficial messages of texts, to look for hidden assumptions, and to reflect on what they apparently understood from those texts. In relation to this aspect, it is important to note that self-regulation in critical thinking also embraces a permanent questioning about what we understand and how

we understand it. Teachers in our projects tried to emphasize this questioning by means of the Socratic method.

Regarding the first course of action, several studies confirm the effectiveness of strategy instruction (Kinoshita, 2003; Chamot, *et al.* 1999; Oxford, 1990). These studies indicate that strategies can be taught and that their application had a positive effect on task performance. In the direct approach to strategy teaching, the teacher makes students aware of the reasons and purposes for using a strategy, names and defines the strategy, models it and provides opportunities for its use. Our findings seem to corroborate those of Kinoshita (2003), Anderson (2002), Chamot, *et al.* (1999), and Cohen, Weaver, and Li (1999). They state that we enhance students' awareness of the strategies that facilitate language learning by means of overt strategy teaching. The following sample from our data corroborates this statement.

> I explained how to identify cause-and-effect relationships by using a simple example: "pollution is caused by industrialization". I asked: "what generates pollution?" Everybody answered "industrialization". Then I asked: "what is the result of industrialization?" and they early responded: "pollution". Then I asked: "what helped you identify industrialization as the cause of pollution and pollution as an effect?" The all said: "is caused". I used a green marker to indicate that this is what is called signal words. After explaining this example, students worked in pairs on a set of similar exercises. It called my attention that when we corrected the exercise, they had identified the signal words in each sentence. Apparently, the strategy worked as they put it into practice.
>
> (Level IV, field notes October 21st, page 2)

Despite the fact that the teachers in our project explicitly instructed students on the features and application of some strategies, there was an emergence of some others derived from the materials and tasks designed. The most frequently used were associating meaning by using first language, taking notes, using key words and questions for clarification, making inferences and guesses, self-correcting, using imagery, activating prior knowledge and circumlocution.

According to Kinoshita (2003), these strategies are part of what came to be known as uninformed strategy instruction. Students are not informed of the name, value, or purpose of a given strategy. Instead, materials and tasks are designed to elicit them. Clues are provided to the learners so that they recognize and employ the appropriate strategy in the textbook rubrics. The aforementioned author finds this approach pedagogically inadequate for three reasons. The first has to do with the level of proficiency of the learners, which may impede following instructions. The second one deals with the lack of emphasis on strategy use and purpose, and the third refers to missing chances to augment a learner's strategy inventory. As a result of this stagnation, in her view, not only the transferring of strategies to new learning tasks is constrained, but also life-long learning. These ideas partially conform to our beliefs. Although we think that overt strategy instruction is beneficial for all students, we believe that uninformed strategy use is not inadequate at all. The spontaneous use of those strategies may be the result of students' transferring them from their previous learning experiences.

The second course of action is illustrated in the next sample. It shows how the teacher guides students in becoming more assertive in reading between the lines of a text. In this case the students watched a video that showed a CIA agent and an al-Qaeda member referring to the September 11th events. The teacher's comments and questions guide students in examining the content of the material used in this unit.

28.	T:	So, what was this Muslim leader implying?
29.	S1:	That the attack on the Twin Towers was justificate? …justi
30.	T:	Justifiable
31.	S2:	I think that the, the attack eh::: was justifiable for Osama, but, but, the attack don't
32.		have any justification in any part, in any place in the world. Eh:::because in the attacks
33.		died a lot of people, and that is not, is not justi…justified?
34.	T:	So you're saying it's not justifiable. Many people died (writing on the board)
35.	S3:	Teacher, I consider the problem and:: and Osama and the group in general…is a

36.		problem of revenge and in this sense it's not justifiable.
37.	T:	It's not justifiable according to you. But then… what arguments do they provide?
38.	S4:	United States also attacked and also and the Arabian people eh::: the video
39		showed parts of the missiles and some, some attacks that they have had… and for that
40.		reason it was an interesting question for me, a question that the Arabian leader asked to
41.		the journalist is that what is the difference between American people and Arabian
42.		people. The leader asked what would you do if the United States was attacked. I think
43.		eh:: he:: want to show they are humans, yes? They will do the same.

(Level VII, video 1, page 2)

3.6.4. Prioritizing feedback: prompting students' speech and critical reasoning

This category along with the themes "asymmetry of interaction" and "adjusting language input to facilitate communication" responds to the third question: "what is the nature of interaction during the implementation of these tasks?" We have stated that teachers play a crucial role in terms of facilitating self-regulation processes. That role becomes even more salient as it provides the appropriate scaffolds for the students to learn. In relation to the types of interaction that took place when implementing tasks related to critical thinking, our data indicates that the Initiation−Response−Feedback (IRF) model prevailed in our classrooms. Generally, teachers initiated the interaction seeking an answer from the students and responding to those answers. Students tended to talk more whenever the teacher posed different questions, rephrased students' statements, and elaborated on the ideas provided by the learners.

Our findings support Young (1997) who indicates that given the appropriate slots for interaction, learners can engage in critical work. He defines slots as the invitation teachers extend to question, explain, and critique. The teacher becomes a "scaffolder" of debate by summarizing students' contributions and keeping track of the relationships among students' ideas. This scaffolding

embraces techniques such as confirmation checks, comprehension checks, clarification requests, repetitions, reformulation, completion, and backtracking, which Lynch (1996) labels as interaction modifications. The following excerpt illustrates the role of the teacher as a scaffolder of debate.

430	T:	You're talking about different values, yes? You talked about femininity and masculinity.
431		What is feminine for you? What is masculine for you?
432	S1:	For me a feminine woman is a person who is polite, is a person who knows how to talk,
433		is a person who doesn't need physical strength to do things…just her mind. It is a
434		feminine woman to me.
435	T:	What about you guys, what is femininity for you?
436	S2:	For me is a girl who knows how…how…
437	T:	Who knows what? …who knows how…
438	S2:	How to talk to the other people…who eh:: how to be soft
439	T:	How to be soft. So you wouldn't go out with Anna Kurnikova? What is the name of the
440		tennis player? The blond tennis player, you know? You wouldn't go out with her because
441		she is too strong?
442	S1:	Well, I don't mean by saying that softness is her body. I mean her movements. I mean
443.		way of dressing. I wouldn't like a girl who dresses with boots, leather pants, those things
444.		you know? Scruffy hair. Softness for me is basically, I don't know , the way of dressing,
445		the way of touching the other person, and cuteness, ok?
446	T:	Cute? Being cute?
447	S1:	Being cute…that's softness
448	T:	and for you?
449	S3:	eh:: She doesn't have to say dirty words. For me that's pathetic
450	T:	Pathetic, yes, as pathetic as it sounds when guys say dirty words!
451	Ss	(students laugh)

(Level IV, audiotape 4, pages 10–12)

This instance illustrates the idea that feedback that seeks more elaboration, but that acknowledges the students' universe, is more conducive to fostering speech and critical development. The IRF model is not restrictive in this sense. On the contrary, it orients both teachers and learners in the construction of shared meanings, which is an idea that we have already stated in the analysis of our first category. Nevertheless, we recognize that the interaction around our tasks related to critical thinking led us to conclude that discourse is still marked by dominance on the part of the teacher.

3.6.5. Asymmetry of interaction

Acknowledging students' beliefs, experiences, and knowledge were determining factors because the students were valued as active participants in the construction of knowledge. However, we realize that despite attempting to change the dynamics of the EFL classroom by means of different forms of feedback, there still was asymmetry in terms of teacher and students' talk.

Rincón et al. *(*2003) strongly criticize the IRF model because of the asymmetry it creates. In their view, classroom talk, in which the IRF pattern of interaction is found, allows teachers to exercise power in terms of turn-taking and participation. The teacher still controls the order of the oral exchanges and specifies who should contribute and to what extent. Also, in the IRF model, students do not address each other but address their comments to the teacher who becomes the focus of attention.

We observed that teachers in our project were still figures of authority. We became the focus of attention during our discussions. That is, students addressed their ideas to us, and very seldom directed their comments to one another. This feature was marked by the use of the third person singular or plural, and the absence of the pronoun "you" which conforms to Cadzen's findings about asymmetric classroom talk (as cited by Rincón, 2003). When a student wanted to elaborate on what a previous student had said, she/he named the person or used the corresponding name or relative pronoun. The teacher, in the majority of the cases, directed the discussion as the following excerpts demonstrate.

68.	S1:	What happens is that his ideas are not me teacher, eh:: this is the same that if I say
69.		if I say he's not a good person for me.
70.		Who?
71.	S1:	well, I don't agree with those ideas.
72.	T:	What would you say to her?
73.	S2:	Well I agree with S1 in some aspects, years ago the people for example…

(Level IV, audiotape 5, page 2)

268.	T:	They were tired of being charged taxes, is that what you are saying?
269.	S6:	Well, according to what Student 4 is saying is that eh::: in the 50 the political power
270.		were was in 20 or 30 people, and eh::: the other people were repressive?
271.	T:	So the political power was held by few people and they wanted to react to that. So
271.		what made them change? What made them change Student 3?
272.	S6:	Other interest, economic interest
273.	T:	Can you elaborate on that Student 3?
274.	S3:	Yes, what S6 says is like kidnappings and narcotraffic
275.	T:	What happens with that?
276.	S3:	Is eh::: the income of the guerilla.

(Level VII, video 2, page 10)

3.6.6.   Adjusting language input to facilitate communication

Another aspect related to the type of interaction that was built around the tasks dealt with the language adjustments that facilitated meaning negotiation. Various studies have shown that interlocutors negotiate meaning by adjusting linguistic input (Doughty, 2000; Ellis, 1995). We must remember that input refers to all written or spoken forms to which language learners have access (Ellis, 1995). Teachers make adjustments to their speech in order to address their learners. These modifications entail, among other things, changes in pronunciation, the use of frequent pauses and gestures, the modification of syntax, the use of less complex vocabulary, repetitions, expansions on students' sentences, and even completion of their utterances (Richard–Amato, 1996). It is through these input modifications, which usually take the form of corrective feedback, that data is transformed so as to make it perceptible to the learners in order for them to modify their interlanguage. In our study, the data indicated that teachers

reformulated their input by using the aforementioned modifications. Students generally proceeded to incorporate the linguistic forms provided by the teacher. However, there were many instances in which the students disregarded the teacher's corrections, comments and observations, and continued elaborating on their idea. These two examples illustrate this finding.

446.	S4:	The children are in the street eh::: asking for money..
447.	T:	Begging for money.
448.	S4:	Begging for money and eh::: or selling eh::: candies?
(Level VII, audiotape 3, pages 13–15)		
284.	S12:	I think I doesn't matter for her because he… she has many many money.
285.	T:	Yes, she has lots of money or too much money.
286.	S12:	I think that Mrs. Wilkinson must choose the first alternative.
(Level IV, audiotape 1, page 8)		

Teachers used reformulations to make students aware of gaps in their interlanguage. These reformulations apparently were effective pedagogical interventions that helped students focus on form, as students very often incorporated the suggested forms. In those cases in which the reformulations did not work as the teacher expected, it is probable that students were more interested in getting their messages understood rather than in constructing accurate linguistic forms. It is important to note that the merging of feedback on form and feedback to explore students' ideas was significant in the elaboration of more thorough discourse. This is explored in the following section.

3.6.7. The evolving nature of language competence

This category refers to the last question: "what is the impact of these interactions on the development of English language competence?" Our data analysis indicates that our students attempted to construct more elaborate discourse. There were changes in terms of lexical development. That is, students incorporated more vocabulary and expressions in their lexical repertoire. Although syntactic aspects were refined to a certain extent, we feel there is still progress to be made. We speak of an evolving language competence

because we think that students modified their discourse as a result of being engaged in the tasks. However, we believe that language learning is an on-going process where outcomes cannot be assessed in brief periods of time. It would be unrealistic to expect students to achieve higher levels of proficiency in one semester. Nonetheless, we hoped they could develop higher levels of linguistic accuracy. Certainly, our data indicates that there was a tendency to produce more discourse, to argue, and to participate in conversation, which is a valuable starting point. The term "language development" connotes continuous change and refinement. These two features were present in the discourse of our students.

We noticed that discursive competence was enhanced and that students appropriated knowledge of socio-pragmatic competence within the boundaries of the classroom context. We have to acknowledge, however, that sometimes students struggled with linguistic resources in the target language to communicate their ideas, and that this struggle prompted their use of Spanish. The appropriateness of tasks related to critical thinking, especially with beginners, is therefore subject to criticism. This may be congruent with what some theoreticians have noted about the application of critical thinking with low proficient students (Reid, 2000; Young, 1997). This is an area that deserves further exploration. That is, we need to explore ways to maximize students' interaction skills without undermining the role of grammatical skills. We consider that this becomes a challenging task for the language educator in an EFL context, as the environment itself naturally leads to reliance on our shared linguistic background. The two instances below from Level I show students' attempt to use more elaborate discourse. The first sample is a fragment from the teacher's notes at the beginning of the intervention, whereas the second was the last audiotaped session at the end of the academic semester.

S1:   Lower expenses.

S2:   More opportunities for the kids

S1:   Less kids on the streets. Children are more independent.

T: TV , and friends are replacing parents at home.

S1:   Birth rate diminished. Adopt children.

T: Women have more roles now.

Ss: worker, sister, wife, mother and daughter.

S4:   Women is stressed.

(Level I, field notes, 21st August, page 13B)

273.   T: Do you find any relation between economic activities and drugs, for example?

274.   S1:   If you do drugs the people can, how do you say "demanda"?

275.   T: Demand.

276.   S1:   Demand and the people... and the rich people can obtain more!

277.   T: OK. If there weren't drug addicts, probably we wouldn't produce, yes? Probably, I don't 278.

278.   know!

279.   S1:   Maybe in our country the people don't consume eh:: drugs, but in another countries people

280.   need drugs because don't have /???/ don't have the same problems that we have.

281.   T: Yes, because of the culture, no? OK, if there weren't consumers of drugs, drug addicts,

282.   addicts to drugs, probably we wouldn't produce drugs. What do you think? Impossible or 283.

283.   not?

284.   S1:   If the process was legal, we was we wouldn't a rich country.

285.   T: OK. It is just business.

(Level I, audiotape 5, page 11)

As mentioned earlier, we speak of an evolving competence because there were changes in the discourse of our students. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of our tasks was that they served to trigger interest and desire to participate in conversation. There were opportunities for our students to use language in a more significant way and to improve their lexical and discursive competencies. We feel, however, that the syntactic, socio-pragmatic, and strategic components need to be addressed in a more suitable way in our tasks, as we feel that our Spanish background and all it entails always influenced the way we addressed each other and the strategies used to maintain communication. Perhaps, as Sinor (2002) proposes, an alternative solution would be fostering students' meta-linguistic awareness, which means encouraging learners to engage in linguistic reflection that could help reduce the interference of their native language. This

idea takes us back to explicit or overt teaching. This explicit teaching should focus on reflections about students' productions instead of just providing them with a set of de-contextualized linguistic rules. Although we think this may be an appropriate alternative, we question how it would interfere with the processes that are usually promoted in the communicative classroom.

4. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

In relation to the first question, the analysis of the interaction built around our tasks related to critical thinking permitted us to examine the process by which students and teachers constructed meaning together. Undoubtedly, our students made associations and interpretations using their background knowledge as a platform for the new construction of meanings, which matches Vygotsky's ideas (1978). From the array of knowledge our students brought with them, three areas emerged as the most noticeable and influential: knowledge from their fields of study, personal beliefs, values and experiences, and the use of what we call local and global knowledge. We pointed out before that the influence of students' primary discourse, Spanish, permeated the arguments they constructed in each of these areas and that these four aspects in turn were interwoven as they influenced one another. Another crucial aspect related to this question is that students in our project demonstrated that they possess a nascent capacity for applying critical thinking skills.

With respect to the second question that was intended to examine meta-cognitive processes, our data indicated that teachers play an important role in the initiation of the monitoring and control that students have of their learning. There were two courses of action that aided in the monitoring of students' thinking. One consisted of encouraging students to go beyond the superficial messages of texts, to look for hidden assumptions, and to reflect on what they apparently understood from those texts, which are essential to bring control to someone's thinking. The other related the use of overt teaching of learning strategies.

Regarding the third question, which sought to characterize the interaction generated around the tasks, the study led us to conclude that the Initiation—

Response—Feedback (IRF) model still prevailed in our lessons, and that as a result there was asymmetry of interaction. However, whenever the feedback component was thought-provoking, students tended to elaborate more on their ideas.

Lastly, there was an impact on the development of students' language competence. We talk of an evolving discourse in the English language when considering the oral and written language production of the students from the beginning until the end of the intervention. We use the term "evolving" to indicate the notion that discourse was continuously modified and re-elaborated, which implies that there was language competence development, especially in terms of students' lexical and discursive competencies. However, there were some areas (syntactic, socio-pragmatic and strategic) that needed further refinement. The learning of a language, as well as the development of critical thinking, is a long-term task that entails continuous practice and reflection from both teachers and learners.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In general, we think that the changes observed could be the result of two factors. First, the tasks included varied activities that exposed students to different elements of language competence. Second, there were opportunities for the students to put these elements into practice. Therefore, it is essential that language educators give learners plenty of opportunities to familiarize themselves with language structures and to struggle with the language. The term "struggle" for us has a positive connotation. In our view, it is only when you are challenged to actually use the language that learning takes place.

It is crucial for the language educator to design tasks in which the learners can bring forward their knowledge and expertise. This does not necessarily mean that English teachers have to become experts in a given field, but it certainly requires preparation on their part. This implies, first of all, a disposition to engage in continuous learning by means of reading and content updating. Many of our students in our current primary and secondary levels receive instruction

in English in the content areas or attend intensified English programs. When they reach the tertiary level, most of them will be seeking to refine their English repertoire and most probably connect the language to their future professional careers. Therefore, a change in how educators view the teaching of English at the tertiary level will be needed.

It is also essential to acknowledge the students' universe and guide them in the elaboration of new knowledge by inviting them to strengthen and challenge their own assumptions. In addition, the fact that the students in our project established relationships with the world surrounding them, demonstrates that they have accumulated valuable knowledge about their immediate communities and those around the globe. Language educators can lead learners to reflect on issues that may be affecting their lives by exploring that array of knowledge. Such reflection may consequently contribute to the appropriation of more solidly constructed knowledge.

The students in our project demonstrated that indeed they are endowed with the capacity to apply critical thinking skills, and we assume that most probably, they have developed this capacity through their life-learning experiences. Thus, we should bear in mind the ideas proposed by Paolo Freire, who indicated that students are not empty vessels and that they have a remarkable and latent power that can be gradually enhanced when they are engaged in challenging tasks. It is thus our responsibility to look for alternatives in which students can develop their potential. Teachers should advocate the use of criticality in their EFL classrooms. We believe it is a course of action that guides learners to reflect not only on what others say and do, but also on what they say and do themselves.

The findings that resulted from the analysis of interaction sequences centered on the tasks related to critical thinking indicate that feedback in the form of thought-provoking questions and statements is crucial to stimulate classroom talk and to encourage learners to engage in critical work. Our role as teachers is not only important in guiding learners to monitor their thinking processes, but it is also a determinant factor in interaction. It is through interaction that we develop, articulate, and handle our interpersonal relationships (Vygotsky, 1978).

As a starting point to favor explanatory and descriptive talk, open discussion and dialogue in the English class we, as educators, should examine our current interactions with students to determine if we are giving the appropriate interaction slots, as Young (1997) suggests, for learners to engage in critical work. It is by means of this reflection that we can refine our repertoire of scaffolding techniques such as confirmation checks, clarification requests, reformulations, summaries of students' contributions, and completions, among others. Consequently, this refinement would promote the idea of the teacher as a scaffolder of debate. Refining one's scaffolding techniques promotes opportunities to confirm or disconfirm understanding of our students' meanings. By rephrasing or elaborating on students' contributions, educators acknowledge their universe and stimulate the development and maintenance of students' meaning ownership.

We also consider that it is essential to examine our interaction patterns as it would allow us to observe how we are handling issues of power and control. As identified in our project, we still exercise control over the interaction. Maybe it could be due to the types of classroom arrangements we had. The majority of our critical thinking activities were done as a whole class. We wonder what the effect of the tasks would have been in terms of roles assumed during the discussions, if we had organized small group work.

6. Limitations and questions for further research

One of the main limitations we faced related to the schedule of our classes. Students had tight daily agendas and the English classes were held in the afternoon, which may have interfered with the level of motivation to participate. Also, we requested material from other countries to enrich the design of our tasks and it took a considerable amount of time to have access to materials that could have helped us in refining our activities.

There are some lingering questions related to our project and its findings that we hope further research can address. First, what pedagogical practices take place in other disciplines that could be associated with the teaching of

English? Second, what previous L1 academic experiences do students bring with them and how can they be linked to L2 in order to facilitate language development? Third, how do classroom interactions unveil information about power relationships in the classrooms? Whose views are accepted? Who is given priority and under what grounds? Fourth, what argumentative resources do students use in their Spanish classes or in other subjects? Fifth, how do socio-pragmatic and strategic competencies evolve as a result of organizing small-group activities centered on tasks related to critical thinking? Finally, what are teachers' and students' beliefs regarding their role in interaction, and about critical thinking? Answering these questions would provide us with a more complete picture of the application of a critical perspective in the EFL classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, our proposal led to the development of a pedagogical innovation that hoped to foster language competence while stimulating students' critical thinking processes. Our objective was to contribute to the promotion of a well-rounded individual who graduates from university not only with an appropriate command of the English language, but also with a disposition to engage in higher-order thinking. In this sense, we believe that the teaching of English should be geared towards more meaningful experiences in which the learners can bring their cumulative, personal, and academic experiences. These experiences can be further explored and refined through the guidance of the teachers.

We are not proposing this alternative as the panacea for teaching English effectively. We acknowledge the fact that perhaps we had very high expectations in terms of what we, and our students, could do. We certainly believe that there is a myriad of possibilities we can explore in our EFL classes, and critical thinking is just one of them. However, we think that it is important that we exhort the community of English educators to examine their own contexts and re-orient the process of reformulation of their objectives and instructional procedures to promote the development of language competence while fostering criticality.

We believe in the capacity of our Colombian educators to transform pedagogical practices and to innovate. More concretely, we think that we play a crucial role in fostering social responsibility among our learners. We should not be alien to concerns that affect our society and the world in general. The implementation of new ideas that could engage our learners and us in constant reflection will constitute the first step towards the construction of a better society.

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