

LIFE STORIES: A WAY TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL  
SIXTH GRADE LEARNERS

MARYER ANDREA ACERO HINCAPIÉ

Thesis Director

Ph.D Vladimir Núñez

Universidad Pedagógica Nacional  
Facultad de Humanidades – Departamento de Lenguas  
Master in Foreign Language Teaching  
Bogotá, Colombia

2015

LIFE STORIES: A WAY TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING IN EFL SIXTH  
GRADE LEARNERS

Maryer Andrea Acero Hincapié

Thesis Director  
Ph.D Vladimir Núñez

“A thesis submitted as a requirement to obtain the degree of M.A in Foreign Languages  
Teaching”

Universidad Pedagógica Nacional  
Facultad de Humanidades – Departamento de Lenguas  
Master in Foreign Language Teaching  
Bogotá, Colombia

2015

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First of all, I want to thank God, the Heavenly Father for giving me the opportunity to study this program. Every goal I have reached in my professional development has happened because of Him. I must thank Him for giving me the strength and motivation to work hard, despite the obstacles and difficulties in the way. I would also like to thank my family, specially, my husband and my mom, for encouraging me and praying for me so that things went good.

I want to thank all my professors at the program for having contributed to my development and learning in order to improve my teaching practices. Thank you for having made me realize of the importance of being updating and getting better all the time. Thanks to the professors who were part of this treacherous way of doing the research study, namely, Luis Alfonso Ramírez, Consuelo Vargas and of course, the last and most important, Vladimir Núñez. Thanks him for his patience, help, guidance, advises and even smiles which eased the process.

Last, but no least, I have to thank my lovely students at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor, who wanted to participate in the project and did it actively. Thanks them for supporting me and enjoying the time together. Also thanks them for being so special with me in all the time I had the chance to be their English teacher and homeroom teacher too. Finally, I must also thank the board of directors in the school for having allowed me developed the research there.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is the report of a qualitative action research study which aimed at exploring and explaining how critical thinking skills could be developed in sixth graders when working on literacy through life stories in the English class. The project was carried out the first semester of 2013 with seventeen students of sixth grade at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor, a private institution in the north of Bogotá. Data was gathered by means of a questionnaire, field notes, artifacts and an interview.

The data revealed that students developed mainly three critical thinking skills in the implementation, namely, interpretation, analysis and explanation. The three of them were evidenced in the reading cycle, while in the writing cycle, mainly the last skill, which is explanation, was observed. The study suggests the importance of the peers and teacher's role in the process of understanding texts and constructing meanings from them, highlighting the role of L1 and non-verbal communication among beginners. It also shows how important questioning is for individuals to become strong critical thinkers. Finally, it reveals how motivating and appropriate the use of life stories can be in the EFL learning classroom for students to feel comfortable to read and write since they have contents related to their actual, daily contexts and issues of interest.

**Key words:** literacy, reading, writing, critical thinking skills, life stories.

## RESUMEN

Este documento constituye el reporte final de un estudio cualitativo, para precisar, una investigación acción que buscaba explorar y explicar cómo se podían desarrollar en los estudiantes habilidades de pensamiento crítico mientras leían y escribían historias de vida en la clase de inglés. Este Proyecto se llevó a cabo el primer semestre de 2013 con diecisiete (17) estudiantes de grado sexto en el Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor, una institución privada al norte de Bogotá. Los datos se recogieron por medio de un cuestionario, diarios de campo, productos de los estudiantes y una entrevista final.

Los datos revelaron que los estudiantes desarrollaron principalmente tres (3) habilidades de pensamiento crítico en la implementación, a saber, interpretación, análisis y explicación o argumentación. Estas tres habilidades se evidenciaron en el ciclo de lectura, mientras que en el de escritura, principalmente se observó la última, es decir, explicación. El estudio propone la importancia de los pares y el docente en el proceso de comprender textos y construir significados a partir de ellos, resaltando el rol de la lengua propia o primera lengua así como de la comunicación no verbal para este proceso de comprensión, en el caso de aprendices principiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (para el caso, sexto grado). El estudio también muestra la importancia del cuestionamiento y la curiosidad para que los estudiantes puedan llegar a ser fuertes pensadores críticos. Finalmente, el estudio revela cuán motivador y apropiado puede ser el uso de historias de vida en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, esto para que los estudiantes se puedan sentir cómodos al leer y escribir en tanto los contenidos están relacionados con sus contextos reales diarios y temas de su interés.

**Palabras clave:** literacidad, escritura, lectura, habilidades de pensamiento crítico, historias de vida.

1. Información General	
<b>Tipo de documento</b>	Tesis de grado
<b>Acceso al documento</b>	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Biblioteca Central
<b>Título del documento</b>	Life stories: a way to develop critical thinking in EFL sixth grade learners (Historias de vida: un camino para desarrollar pensamiento crítico en aprendices de inglés como lengua extranjera de grado sexto).
<b>Autor(es)</b>	Acero Hincapié, Maryer Andrea.
<b>Director</b>	Núñez Camacho, Vladimir Alfonso.
<b>Publicación</b>	Bogotá. Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2015. 163 p.
<b>Unidad Patrocinante</b>	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.
<b>Palabras Claves</b>	LITERACIDAD; ESCRITURA; LECTURA; HABILIDADES DE PENSAMIENTO CRÍTICO; HISTORIAS DE VIDA.

2. Descripción
<p>Tesis de grado de Maestría en Enseñanza de Lengua Extranjera Inglés que presenta una investigación acción de tipo cualitativo desarrollada con el grupo de sexto grado de un colegio privado en Bogotá. La investigación busca determinar cómo es posible desarrollar el pensamiento crítico en los estudiantes por medio de la lectura y escritura de historias de vida en inglés como lengua extranjera. De este modo, el estudio pretende resaltar la importancia de tener en cuenta los fondos de conocimiento de los estudiantes, que constituyen sus historias de vida, como material desde el cual se puede desarrollar la lecto-escritura de una manera crítica, que va más allá de codificar/decodificar mensajes, visión instrumentalista de las habilidades de lectura y escritura. El estudio sugiere la importancia y el valor de la interacción que se lleva a cabo en clase tanto entre estudiantes y sus pares, como entre ellos y el docente. Se resalta entonces la necesidad de promover, en esta interacción, un cuestionamiento crítico que lleve a los estudiantes a construir significados y argumentar sus construcciones de manera inteligible.</p>

3. Fuentes
<p>Clavijo, A. (2007). <i>Prácticas Innovadoras de Lectura y Escritura</i>. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas.</p> <p>Elder, L. &amp; Paul, R. La Mini-Guía para el Pensamiento Crítico: Conceptos y Herramientas.</p>

Fundación para el Pensamiento Crítico.

Ennis, R. (1996). *Critical Thinking Dispositions: Their Nature and Assessability*. University of Illinois UC.

Facione, P. (2011). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It counts*. Measured Reasons and the California Academic Press, Millbrae, CA.

Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogía de la Esperanza: un Reencuentro con la Pedagogía del Oprimido*. México: Siglo Veintiuno.

Freire, P. (1999). *Pedagogía de la Autonomía: Saberes Necesarios para la Práctica Educativa*. México: Siglo Veintiuno.

Lerner, D. (2001). *Leer y Escribir en la Escuela: Lo Real, lo Posible y lo Necesario*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

McEwan, H. & Egan, K. (1995). *La Narrativa en la Enseñanza, el Aprendizaje y la Investigación*. Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Ochs, E. & Capps, L. (1996). *Narrating the Self*. Annual Review of Anthropology, 25: 19-43.

Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*. Yale University Press.

La bibliografía del proyecto está compuesta, en total, de treinta y siete (37) referencias que van de 1985 a 2011 y corresponden a distintos tipos de documentos, entre los cuales están libros, artículos de revistas académicas, tesis de maestría y artículos de investigación disponibles en internet.

#### 4. Contenidos

Esta investigación busca explorar el desarrollo del pensamiento crítico en los estudiantes por medio del uso de historias de vida en el proceso de lecto-escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera. El proyecto se divide en seis (6) capítulos, así:

El capítulo 1 incluye las generalidades de la investigación. Este consta de la introducción, la situación problema y el planteamiento del propósito de la investigación. Así mismo presenta los objetivos, la justificación y las preguntas de investigación que dieron base al estudio. Finalmente también presenta una descripción y discusión de los antecedentes de la investigación, permitiendo así determinar el aporte de la investigación a un tema de interés académico trabajado anteriormente. La investigación tiene como objetivo principal promover el pensamiento crítico en estudiantes de sexto grado a través del uso de historias de vida para el desarrollo de la literacidad crítica. Para esto, es necesario que la investigación identifique los procesos y estadios que los estudiantes siguen en la construcción de sentido sobre las historias de vida leídas y en la escritura de sus propias historias de vida. Estos objetivos se alcanzan con los estudiantes de

grado sexto del Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor.

El capítulo 2 expone y discute los fundamentos teóricos que iluminaron la investigación. Primero discute los presupuestos de la pedagogía crítica como paradigma contestatario en educación. Luego, expone las ideas de la literacidad crítica y cómo la lectura y la escritura son concebidas a partir de ella. Acto seguido presenta los postulados del pensamiento crítico, sus disposiciones y habilidades a alcanzar y finalmente, expone y discute la definición y características de las historias de vida como narración.

El capítulo 3 presenta el diseño metodológico de la investigación. Primero describe las características de la investigación cualitativa y sitúa el estudio dentro de la investigación acción. Luego describe el lugar de implementación del proyecto, los participantes y el rol del investigador. Por último presenta y explica los instrumentos utilizados para la investigación y los procedimientos llevados a cabo para la misma.

El capítulo 4 se centra en describir la intervención pedagógica llevada a cabo en el contexto de la investigación, explicando los presupuestos teóricos que fundamentan la propuesta, tales como las visiones del currículo, la lengua y el aprendizaje. Así mismo, caracteriza las etapas que se desarrollaron para llevar a cabo la implementación pedagógica.

El capítulo 5 presenta los hallazgos de la investigación como emergieron de los datos recolectados y los contrasta a la luz de los constructos teóricos presentados en el segundo capítulo. De igual manera expone los procedimientos que permitieron el análisis de la información y que dieron pie a los hallazgos encontrados.

Finalmente, el capítulo 6 discute las conclusiones del estudio de acuerdo con los resultados encontrados y así mismo, expone las implicaciones que el estudio tiene tanto para el docente-investigador, como para el lugar donde se llevó a cabo la investigación y más ampliamente, para la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera en Colombia.

## 5. Metodología

La investigación presentada en esta tesis se desarrolló en cuatro (4) etapas:

1. Acercamiento a la población y reconocimiento de la situación problema. Diagnóstico con base en la aplicación de un cuestionario y planeación de la intervención pedagógica, como primer ciclo.
2. Implementación del segundo ciclo de la intervención en el cual se hizo la lectura y discusión de tres (3) historias de vida.
3. Implementación del tercer ciclo de la intervención en el cual se hizo la escritura, corrección y edición de cuatro apartados de las historias de vida de los estudiantes.
4. Implementación del cuarto ciclo de la intervención en el cual los estudiantes leyeron las historias de vida de sus compañeros y realizaron actividades de escritura en respuesta a ellas.

5. Cierre de la intervención y entrevista sobre el impacto de la implementación de las actividades. Análisis de datos y escritura del reporte final.

### 6. Conclusiones

1. El estudio permitió evidenciar que el uso de historias de vida en el desarrollo de la literacidad en los estudiantes fomentó habilidades de pensamiento crítico tales como interpretación, análisis y explicación o argumentación.
2. En lo que concierne a la habilidad de interpretación, los estudiantes evidenciaron el uso de ésta en la lectura de historias de vida en tanto las comprendieron y construyeron significado de las mismas. En esta construcción jugaron un papel importante la interacción en clase entre estudiantes, y con la docente. Y así mismo, en esta interacción, la lengua materna y la comunicación no verbal permitieron la negociación de sentidos para construir significado de las historias leídas.
3. En cuanto a la habilidad de análisis, para llegar a considerar elementos más profundos en las lecturas, el cuestionamiento reflexivo que se hizo jugó un papel importante. Éste tuvo lugar en las discusiones orales y actividades en las sesiones. Las preguntas surgieron de los mismos estudiantes y otras fueron diseñadas y guiadas por la docente, lo que denota la importancia del papel del maestro en la promoción del pensamiento crítico.
4. En lo que respecta a la habilidad de explicación o argumentación, los estudiantes hicieron uso de la misma tanto en el ciclo de lectura como en el de escritura, al ser capaces de argumentar o explicar sus construcciones de significado, en cuanto a las historias de vida. En cuanto a sus propias historias, los estudiantes pudieron explicar ideas y argumentos sobre sí mismos al describirse según las entradas dadas para cada escrito del portafolio “mi historia de vida”.

<b>Elaborado por:</b>	Maryer Andrea Acero Hincapié.
<b>Revisado por:</b>	Vladimir Alfonso Núñez Camacho.

<b>Fecha de elaboración del Resumen:</b>	03	06	2015
--	----	----	------

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the problem .....	3
Research questions .....	8
Rationale (Justification) .....	8
Objectives .....	10
Previous Research (Precedents) .....	10
Previous Research Done at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional .....	11
Previous Research Done in Colombia .....	15
Previous Research Done Abroad .....	20
CHAPTER 2 .....	23
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	23
Critical pedagogy: a Bet for an Emancipatory Curriculum .....	23
Critical Literacy: An Approach to Address the Actual Actor of Discourse .....	29
Reading from the Critical Literacy Approach .....	32
Writing from the Critical Literacy Approach .....	34
Critical Thinking: A Search for Becoming High-Order Skilled Individuals .....	37
Life Stories as Personal Narratives to Spring up Awareness On Subjects´ Realities .....	42
CHAPTER 3 .....	48
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	48
Research Paradigm .....	48
Research Approach .....	49
Setting .....	52
Participants .....	54
Sampling Type .....	55
Researcher´s Role .....	56
Data collection instruments .....	57
Field notes .....	59
Artifacts .....	61

Questionnaire .....	61
Interview .....	64
Data Collection Procedures .....	65
CHAPTER 4.....	67
INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN.....	67
Curricular platform .....	69
Vision of curriculum .....	69
Vision of language .....	70
Vision of learning .....	72
Vision of classroom .....	74
Pedagogical Intervention.....	75
CHAPTER 5.....	85
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS .....	85
Data Analysis Approach .....	85
Data Analysis Procedures.....	87
Findings.....	89
Category 1: Students understand the text through class interaction.....	91
Category 2: Asking questions allow students understand the text. ....	101
Category 3: Clear, specific prompts are useful to provide students with ideas for writing....	116
Category 4: Writing life stories let students expand on ideas about them.....	122
CHAPTER 6.....	126
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS .....	126
Conclusions .....	126
Implications .....	128
Limitations of the Study.....	131
Further Research .....	132
REFERENCES .....	134
APPENDICES .....	138

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking comprises a set of abilities that individuals should develop in order to be able to learn, question knowledge, take a position towards it and argue their viewpoints in regards to it. However, language teachers maybe have thought that it is not their responsibility to develop those skills on students. I lived this in my experience as a school student and I have seen this also as a teacher. We tend to consider that first, students must learnt the language as a ruled system, it is they have to acquire a linguistic competence, but also communicative competence so that they can communicate efficient and effectively. Certainly, this is important. Nevertheless, the EFL learning classroom can also be a place that supports the students' cognitive development. Then, what is mandatory to assess are the kinds of lessons that are being carried out so they can let the teacher plan the development of critical thinking skills in his/her class while students learn the language too.

In the same line of thought, students' background knowledge in terms of their experiences and life-time occurrences has often been excluded of the curriculum (Giroux, 2003) and therefore, of the English class –the one I am concerned about. I have seen this from my experience as a teacher since the schools where I have worked in base their curriculum in textbooks, moreover, in grammar and semantic fields they suggest for teaching so that students can communicate accurately. Despite teachers have made an effort on taking into account students' interests, needs and likes, few attention has been paid to students' life stories as such, being ignorant of the potential they might have as materials for the class while developing specifically, reading and writing skills. As a consequence, literacy could be seen as a social practice that enables students to take part

within society, being able to make their voices be heard and becoming critical citizens able to reflect upon their realities and those of others with the purpose of transforming them.

Accordingly, this research project presents a qualitative action research which aimed at exploring how critical thinking skills could be promoted in EFL students when developing literacy through life stories. Therefore, you will find six (6) chapters in the document which will let you know what the problematic situation that gave basis to this study was. You will also see the research questions, objectives and methodology that allowed the development of the study. Besides, you will know the population under study in this research. In addition, you will read a discussion of the views and ideas underlying the theoretical constructs that support the present study, namely, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, critical thinking and life stories. You will also observe the implementation that took place in the research setting. Moreover, you will find out the findings that emerged from the implementation of the project and how they relate to theory explained before. Finally, you will have the opportunity to see the conclusions of the study and how they are discussed taking into account the limitations of the study and the suggestions the study state for further research

## Statement of the problem

As a teacher of sixth graders at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor in Bogota, I saw that when using the foreign language to read, students focused on the basic stage of interpreting and reporting ideas. One can figure this out by looking at the textbook tasks students must work on. Once they have read a text, they go back to it and look for some general information so that they can report the main idea of the passage. If they are asked some comprehension questions -viewed as merely responding about the message understood and its structure- they just take a look at a piece of the reading to say the answer, even without paraphrasing; that is to say, they use the same words the author of the text did. Despite each one of the students can have a different interpretation on the same text, they are not aware of that since they are not able to state their own opinions, but to repeat someone's else instead.

**1 Read and Listen**

**a** ▶ **CD 119** Read and listen to the dialogue between Emma and Olivia. Who knows the tennis player's name?

Emma: This queue's long, and I'm bored.  
Olivia: Emma, look!  
Emma: What?  
Olivia: Look – there, in the queue!  
Emma: Where?  
Olivia: There! It's that famous tennis player!  
Emma: Is it Fernando Torres?  
Olivia: No, it isn't! Fernando Torres isn't a tennis player. He's a footballer.  
Emma: Well, who is it? What's his name?  
Olivia: It's a Spanish name.  
Emma: Kaká?  
Olivia: No! Kaká's Brazilian, and he's a footballer too.  
Emma: Oh, wait ... is it Rafael Nadal?  
Olivia: Yes, it is! That's right. He's gorgeous. Who's he with?  
Emma: Oh! She's an American actress ... Angelina, er ...  
Olivia: Jolie? Angelina Jolie!  
Emma: Yeah.  
Olivia: Wow! Oh. No. Look. She isn't Angelina Jolie.  
Emma: No. And look ... he isn't Rafael Nadal. But I'm not bored now! This



Figure 1. Sample reading from Unit 1 of the textbook for sixth grade.

As it can be seen in figure 1, students are given a text with the purpose of introducing a topic and a content, namely, celebrities and the use of verb to be. Nonetheless, if one tries to find out a reading comprehension purpose as such, one can see that the only question stated at the beginning of the task asks for identifying who says something in the text. Therefore, students will only look for that specific answer, but they are not challenged in terms of analyzing the content of the passage beyond the lines.

### 1 Remember and check

Read the sentences about Julie Baker. Underline the correct words. Then check with the text on page 22 of the Student's Book.

1 Julie <u>is</u> / <u>isn't</u> from England.	6 She <u>loves</u> / <u>hates</u> flying.
2 She wants to be a <u>pilot</u> / <u>teacher</u> .	7 Julie's father is happy when she <u>takes off</u> / <u>lands</u> in the helicopter.
3 She goes to the Flying School by <u>car</u> / <u>helicopter</u> .	8 Julie's parents <u>want</u> / <u>don't</u> want her to stop flying.
4 Her lessons <u>start</u> / <u>finish</u> at 8 o'clock.	
5 She <u>enjoys</u> / <u>doesn't enjoy</u> her lessons in the classroom.	





Figure 2. Sample of reading assessment from the workbook.

The sample above illustrates how students' comprehension is assessed in reference to memory and basic interpretation. In other words, students are evaluated in terms of decoding the text and being able to confirm statements taken from it. It means that they are not called into question about the content of the text, but they are merely asked to report what it says, as I claimed before. This situation can also be seen in their school exams; in tests that are applied by the government and even in class activities. See another example below, where a text is used as an excuse for students to recognize the use of adverbs. This is not bad for learning grammatical structures and vocabulary, but what I insist is on the fact that the potential of reading is left behind.

I. How often do they watch their favorite TV programmes? Complete the text choosing the best answers below, according to the given percentage.



Television is very important in a lot of British homes. We talked to one family, the Parkers from Leeds, about how often they watch TV.

Peter Parker, the father, doesn't watch a lot of TV, but he (70%) 1. \_\_\_\_\_ watches the news and he (50%) 2. \_\_\_\_\_ watches a football match on Saturday. The two children love TV. Jamie watches TV (100% in a week) 3. \_\_\_\_\_, usually for about three hours a day. Kim watches soap operas. She loves them. The Parkers (0%) 4. \_\_\_\_\_ watch documentaries. They don't like them.

1. a. never  
b. usually  
c. hardly ever

2. a. sometimes  
b. always  
c. once a week


3. a. always  
b. twice a week  
c. everyday

4. a. hardly ever  
b. sometimes  
c. never

Figure 3. Sample fragment of a final test for sixth grade, third term.

Then, reading becomes the product of reproducing ideas and this happens because the school does not attempt to do something different from the curriculum, or at least, it is not stated explicitly because, on the other hand, teachers must work based on a text book for the class. A proof of this can be seen in the “year plan” as the school calls its curriculum as well as the planning for each term and which are done based on the textbook requested for the corresponding school year, as it can be seen in the figure below:

Figure 4. Sample fragment of bimonthly planning for sixth grade, second term.


**COLEGIO CRISTIANO GRACIA Y AMOR**  
 Fundación Educativa Cristiana Gracia y Amor  
 NIT 830.113.827-0  
 Licencia de funcionamiento 110213 del 6 de Noviembre de 2009.  
 Educando ciudadanos para el Reino de Dios y las naciones

**FORMATO GENERAL DE PLANEACIÓN 2013**  
 GRADO: 6th      PROFESOR: Maryer Acero  
 AREA: Humanities & Arts      ASIGNATURA: English      PERIODO: Second (2<sup>nd</sup>)

<b>HILOS CONDUCTUALES</b>	Fostering the development of the four language skills in English so that students can use it both effectively and understandingly				
TEMAS COMPONENTE	TÓPICOS GENERATIVOS	METAS DE COMPRENSIÓN	INTEGRACIÓN BÍBLICA	DESEMPEÑOS DE COMPRENSIÓN	RECURSOS
Unit 4 Talking about places in the city April 8 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup>	Talking about places that we can find in the city, what is in there and how they can be found (directions)	Ss' will describe what there is in a city and say where they are located, ones in relation to the others  Ss' will give directions to find a place in a city	Psalms 127: 1  [...]Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain"	Ss' will read a text about places in London to find directions, location and descriptions  Ss' will make a brochure about cities they choose to apply all the learnt content	English in Mind, starter, student's and workbook  CD player  Videos  Worksheets
Unit 5 Describing people's physical appearance April 22 <sup>nd</sup> to May 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Using the simple present tense (verb "to have") to describe people	Ss' will describe people's physical appearance	1 Corinthians 6: 19  "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"	Ss' will do a poster with their own body shape to name its parts  Ss' will write sentences on what they look like  Ss' will bring photos of people they like to describe them	English in Mind, starter, student's and workbook  CD player  Photos

In the case of writing, students are worried the most about their correctness. They are concerned about how good they are at structuring statements, using suitable vocabulary; in other words, they are privileging grammatical accuracy. Although these linguistic features are essential, making sense and communicating go beyond that. Students are forgetting about the expression of their views, for example. A sample of this can be clearly seen in figure 5, which is a fragment from first field notes, taken from the diagnosis stage.

Figure 6 shows the activity talked about in the field note excerpt in figure 5.

<p>I asked them to use the paragraph we had just read as an example for them to make one about themselves. I told them to write in on their notebooks, but being careful of not using the same</p>	<p>When students are asked to follow a model just as an example for doing something, for the case, writing a paragraph, some of them feel comfortable of copying some things from it to avoid making</p>
<p>words, but using their own style as well as adding something important about them, I meant, an interesting detail. However, when some students were writing, they made some mistakes such as telling they were from Manchester, as the girl in the text. They just copied. Some others make an effort on doing it by their own. For example, instead of starting by "Hi! I'm Susan" they used a different structure such as "Hello! My name is..."</p>	<p>mistakes. Their philosophy would be "if it is well done, why shouldn't I copy from it just changing some words, orders or ideas so that I am not mistaken at all?"</p>

Figure 5. Excerpt from field notes entry #1, first cycle (diagnosis).

**10 Write**

- a** Read the example. Where is Joanna from? How old is she? Who is her heroine?

*Hi! I'm Joanna. I'm 14. I'm English. I'm from Manchester. My address is 4 Brooklands Road, Sale, Manchester. My mobile phone number is 07715 201523. My heroine is Alicia Keys. She's from New York. This isn't Alicia, this is me!*



*Figure 6.* Sample of writing from Unit 1 of the textbook for sixth grade.

As it can be observed, students tend to replicate others' ideas, not only in the case of reading and showing understanding later, but also in writing, even without examining if it fits the needs and purposes of their discourse. It can be inferred then that students are not given the freedom at all to write about themselves, and even when they are given that chance, they find it hard to take distance from standardized, "correct" texts. Moreover, a high percent of students say that they write mostly answering to questions about a text or about a topic that was told to be consulted for the class, which again shows how narrow their possibilities for writing are (see appendix 5, questionnaire data analysis).

For all of the reasons presented before, I consider these practices as a problem because they have taken students to the idea of language as a static unit and communication as a formal process only. And what I worry the most about all this is that we, as teachers, are perpetuating those assumptions and I drew this conclusion reflecting upon my own practice. It also occurs because the national standards for teaching English as a foreign language in Colombia do an emphasis on the communicative competence and interculturality, leaving the development of thinking skills, more specifically, the process of critical thinking, on the teachers' initiative, though it is mentioned as a guideline. Therefore, an action research to work on a critical perspective towards literacy becomes an opportunity to contribute to the issue.

In this line of thought, the problem of leaving critical thinking behind is that it affects not only the conception of language students assume and use in communicative situations, but it also makes them misunderstand literacy as the process of learning the written code to reproduce static ideas. To fix it, a critical thinking approach to literacy

would result on an aid for fostering students' capacities to interpret, analyze, evaluate and argue points of view about the reality. In the present research study, life stories are thought as a tool or resource for the development of EFL literacy. Moreover, this goes hand in hand with the educational approach of critical pedagogy which aims at enhancing students' abilities to use the knowledge, in this case, the reading and writing skills, to state their voices and influence on the realities surrounding them. In brief, the problematic situation presented here can be worked from the view of reading and writing as social practices that might promote students critical thinking.

### **Research questions**

#### Main question:

How can sixth graders at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor develop critical thinking while they read and write life stories?

#### Sub-questions:

1. How do students construct meaning on a text (story) they read in the class?
2. How do students write their stories to communicate their lives to the class?

### **Rationale (Justification)**

Critical thinking is an issue authors have dealt with recently, which means there is a high interest in the development of it by students. For Facione (1990; 2011), critical thinking takes place when individuals can do a purposeful judgment on an idea, issue or theme based on a process of interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, inferring and arguing.

Therefore, the importance of promoting critical thinking lies on the fact that it demands students' awareness of the ideas they think and a position towards the views they defend. In the case of the setting of the present proposal, this attempt is worth doing since there is not a guideline in the curriculum for working on high thinking skills, at least, as far as the English class is concerned because it is based on the text book contents and they do not seem to foster those abilities, but they do concern mainly in the language skills. In this sense, it would contribute to the school policies.

It is also relevant to consider that in this setting, there is not a defined procedure on how to work on literacy because of the same reason that I mentioned before: any skill is developed as the text book for the class suggests and with the strategies it also recommends. Of course this is something that depends too much on the teacher's visions and enterprises, but it would be of great contribution to figure out the way(s) students read and write and how the development of these skills may situate them as social actors in and outside the classroom who take part in the construction of meanings and the transformation of them in the communities they belong to. This is the ideal of authors such as Lerner (2001), Freire (1996), McKay (1993), among others, and this might be of aid in the realm of social issues since literacy empowers students not only for academic purposes, but also for their everyday lives, as also said by critical pedagogy promoters such as Giroux (1997) and Grundy (1987).

Finally, the use of life stories in the English learning class becomes a tool to work with in order to promote critical thinking and therefore, a critical perspective on reading and writing. This may provide teachers at the school as well as other colleagues with the idea of using students' experiences and funds of knowledge (Clavijo, 2007; Gutiérrez,

2010) for learning in the classroom because they are more significant for students than using material they may not be interested in and they do not know a lot about. However, it is not pretended to persuade teachers of the use of life stories as the right resource when reading and writing, but, instead, to reflect upon the value and relevance of the role the teachers play when using materials for enhancing certain students' skills. All in all, this could be a contribution to the language teachers' practices in regards to designing reading and writing tasks as well as choosing a variety of resources that can strengthen students' critical thinking.

## **Objectives**

### General objective

To develop sixth graders' critical thinking skills when reading and writing life stories.

### Specific objectives

- To identify the processes students follow to construct critical meaning on a life story read in class.
- To recognize the stages students step to write their life stories while enhancing critical thinking.

## **Previous Research (Precedents)**

This is a section devoted to explain some research that has been done previously and whose variables have to do with the ones that shape the present study, namely, critical literacy, life stories, critical thinking and critical pedagogy. It is necessary to clarify that

the studies presented have to do with one or two of the variables, but not with all of them and also, they have dealt with the topic with their own perspective. This is why, later, you will find the literature review where the main concepts are explained from the view they are seen in this research.

This section is divided into three main parts. The first one shows some studies done at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, to which the present study is submitted. The second one presents studies done in Colombia at some other universities and the last one displays important research done abroad. All in all, the purpose of this segment is to deal with prior researches to contrast what they have done with what is presented here and to find out how worthy the present study is to contribute to the academic field, specifically, to the ELT realm as well as how this research approaches concepts from its own perspective.

### **Previous Research Done at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional**

As follows, you will find two studies done by teachers-researchers as a requirement to get their master's degree at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. The first one responds to an action research carried out at Centro de Lenguas of Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, it is, the languages center attached to the university. It was done with a group of conversational level students. The second one is also an action research, but it was complete at a public school in Bogotá, with third graders. I chose to talk about these two projects because they concern about dialogical pedagogy, critical didactic units, writing process and critical thinking. Therefore, it is important for me to bear them in mind in order to consider not only the way they conceive core concepts of my study such as critical thinking, but also how they develop the research process and its implementation.

**CUEVAS, Claudia. (2012). “Critical Didactic Units for EFL Learners: A Dialogical Learning Perspective”. Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Master in Foreign Language Teaching, Bogotá.**

This research obeys to an action research carried out at the Languages Center of Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. It is an institution attached to the university and which offers different language courses such as English, Italian, French and German, among others. In regards to this study, it was done with a group of students at a conversational level, which means they have a good proficiency in English skills. The aim of this project was to propose ELL (English Language Learning) through dialogical pedagogy for critical didactic units to help students position their voices. In here, dialogical pedagogy is seen as an approach that relates social issues with the foreign language learning class, so it takes into account students as subjects who participate in the creation of the curriculum and whose voices -built by their viewpoints, knowledge and experiences- are considered.

In the same way, critical didactic units, which the researcher proposed as the mean for empowering students to be heard, consisted of a reflection, discussion and interpretation of the old didactic units suggested by the institution in order to select and design them again for the course at the students’ own learning processes. To achieve this objective, the researcher used questionnaires, interviews, field notes and artifacts as the instruments for her intervention. Thus, she found out that implementing the dialogical perspective promoted students’ open minds and motivated them to learn the foreign language. In the same line of thought, she figured out that in the process of negotiating the

units, students enhanced awareness towards social topics as well as about their personal issues. She suggests that collective-reflexive learning was developed.

As far as I am concerned, I see this study worthy knowing about since it was developed bearing in mind students' voices within the learning processes that took place in the classroom. It means that dialogical pedagogy is understood as a strategy to let students interact not only with the teacher, but also among them as peers in order to figure out their needs and preferences when learning a language. This led the researcher to conclude that students were able to assume their possibilities and opportunities to reflect on their learning processes, to express their opinions and to perform accordingly. Moreover, students were taken to a level that permitted them to gain self-confidence, autonomy and commitment regarding to their learning. For these reasons, I take into consideration this study as it agrees with the concept of critical pedagogy I deal with in my proposal. Moreover, I also see that in certain way, taking students' voices into account is not only a matter of methodology, but a material to be used and taken advantage from in class, which is what I intended to do with the life stories in the English class.

**RUIZ, Sandra. (2012). *“Working by Projects: a Way to Enrich Critical Thinking and the Writing Process in a Third Grade EFL Classroom”*. Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Master in Foreign Language Teaching, Bogotá.**

This study was conducted at José María Carbonell I.E.D (which in Spanish stands for Institución Educativa Distrital) which is a public school in Bogotá. It was done with thirty-three students of third grade. Its main purpose was to analyze and document if

working by projects could foster students' critical thinking skills and EFL writing processes. Therefore, the objectives to accomplish were, first, to find out the critical thinking skills evidenced in the implementation of project work as well the role of this last one in developing writing skills. To achieve this goal, the researcher implemented an action research and used field notes, audio-recordings and artifacts to gather data.

It was discovered through the implementation that project work promotes peer monitoring and scaffolding in the writing process. It also evidenced the emersion of some critical thinking skills such as recalling information, interpreting, using previous knowledge, making connections, applying knowledge, assessing own and others' ideas, correcting and associating. These abilities were identified, based on Bloom's taxonomy (1956) in regards to thinking skills as well as some other authors like Moore & Stanley (2009). In terms of the development of writing, students were able to express using poems, graphics and illustrations. They also used their own previous knowledge to create texts, checked vocabulary, reinforced the use of pronouns and promoted the use of the dictionary in class as a tool. Finally, the researcher concluded that teachers have a big responsibility in asking students questions that promote higher thinking skills, so that they can develop them, as the participants of this study could do.

Regarding my study, I think I have to consider the concepts and results found in this research because alike mine, it understands that students' needs, likes and expectations must be borne in mind when developing a plan of action so that learning becomes meaningful for them. This is what I aimed at doing when I asked participants about the kind of life stories they would like to read and know about as well as I proposed them

writing their own ones. Definitely, this was not the only way I used to establish their needs, which corresponds to the questions and suggested items in the diagnosis questionnaire, but also, and very important, through observation. As suggested by the researcher, these “projects” are worthy of students’ attention and efforts because they have to do with their daily life. In addition, I find interesting the concept of critical thinking the study deals with because it points out the importance of reflection to gain a better understanding of reality and to construct knowledge. Finally, I also like the definition the project gives of writing as a complex process of expressing the self and which involves language, thought and interaction with the context because I want the participants to see it like that, beyond an instrumental ability to create a message; in other words, one of my purposes was to make students consider writing as a situated social practice rather than a static production skill.

### **Previous Research Done in Colombia**

This subdivision concentrates on dealing with previous, recent research done in Colombia, mostly, at public universities. They have been carried out by teacher-researchers as a result of their doctoral or master degrees. They have worked with different levels such as university students and primary school ones. The first one presented is a case study done at Universidad Externado. The second one is an action research effected at a public school in Bogota and the last one is an ethnographic study conducted at a school in Sucre, a department in the north of Colombia. This one was done with indigenous learners. These studies have to do with mine because they approach elements of my study such as critical thinking, life stories and literacy. The ones I take into consideration the most are the ones about life stories and funds of knowledge as first, it is not that easy to find literature on this issue and second, since they open the door to see students’ lives as a resource worthy

thinking of in class, view which I want to conceptualize and consent.

**PINEDA, Clelia. (2004) “Critical Thinking in the EFL Classroom. The Search for a Pedagogical Alternative to Improve English Learning” ÍKALA, Vol. 9, No. 15. Universidad de Antioquia.**

This research is a case study conducted at Universidad Externado de Colombia, with a group of thirty-three students from different English levels at the School of Economics. It was undertaken by a group of three teachers-researchers who work there. They wanted to implement a set of didactic units based on the principles of critical thinking, not only to help students to develop higher mental skills which would provide them with reasoning to face current concerns, but also to encourage them to participate actively in order to develop their communicative competence in the English class. Therefore it is worth taking into account this study.

The researchers found out that the construction of knowledge done by students had to do with an association of emergent ideas with their prior knowledge, it is, with knowledge they already had based on their areas of expertise as well as their own beliefs and thoughts. This first category responds to the first research question they had, which says “How do students construct meaning when engaged in tasks that involve the application of critical thinking skills?” (Pineda, 2004: 48). They also determined that when teachers promote students’ critical thinking through the tasks suggested in class, they become to develop these skills, while at the same time, they are learning and using the foreign language, even when making some linguistic mistakes. This finding answers to the second and fourth research questions they had which dealt with the development of

metacognitive processes when performing critical thinking tasks and the impact of these kinds of tasks on the development of the English language competence.

In the same line of thought, they could see how the students' writings showed their incipient critical thinking and finally, they realized that students were applying self-regulation strategies they had been provided with at the beginning of the process, this aiming at interacting with the material and seeking for reaching the goals. Based on these findings, I consider it is important to know about this research because it helps me to understand the different strategies and tools students make use of when developing the foreign language through solving a task –for the case, of reading and writing- and how those procedures, at the same time, enhance their criticism when thinking. It is also relevant to highlight that learning a language is not a matter of learning only structures and vocabulary, but also learning how to think in a different code and how to achieve higher mental abilities.

**GUTIÉRREZ, María del Pilar. (2010). “*Funds of Knowledge in Written Text Production*”. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. Masters in Applied Linguistics to TEFL. Bogotá.**

This action research was carried out at a public school in Bogotá with a group of thirty-four students from fourth grade using a task-based approach. The researcher wanted to promote meaningful writing practices in her students because she had seen it was reduced to dictation and copying from the board and students lacked interest in writing. Thus, she aimed at identifying the funds of knowledge students drew upon when writing their personal narratives and consequently, finding out what the role of the students' funds of

knowledge was in the development of their written text production.

In here, the researcher defines funds of knowledge as the knowledge that individuals have gained through daily life experiences, which have been underestimated in schooling. Taking into account other authors' views, she suggests that funds of knowledge are powerful tools in order to promote mediation among elements of life such as the individual, his intellect, the society and the culture. In the same line of thought, she understands writing as a vehicle a person has to let his/her inner voice express. She says it is a process which lets the individual create and rethink the world. Thus, after the implementation of her project, she found that the funds of knowledge which more recurrently stood out of the students' narratives were the socio-cultural and affective ones which have to do with their interrelation with other people as well as their customs and beliefs. These funds of knowledge could be identified in topics the students wrote about such as their families, their school and entertainment. Finally, she figured out that students were able to express their feelings and emotions when writing.

In regards to my study, I take into consideration Gutierrez' research as it deals with writing as a social practice, a complex process that takes students to emancipation, which is a variable I also work on my research. Besides, it also deals with funds of knowledge as the cultural background and experiences students bring with them and can be used as tools within learning process, in this case, as material for writing. I agree with her when she points out this kind of knowledge has been minimized in schooling and that is why I would like to value it in classes so that students assure that they have what to express, what to talk about and what to use when interpreting and criticizing readings. These points are better discussed in the theoretical framework of the present study.

**JARABA, Diana Luz., ARRIETA, Adolfo. (2012). “*EtnoEnglish: Trenzando Palabras, Historias y Proyectos de Vida del Pueblo Zenú*”. ÍKALA, Vol. 17, No. 1. Universidad de Antioquia.**

This was an ethnographic study conducted at Institución Educativa Indígena San Antonio Abad, in the municipality of San Antonio de Palmito in Sucre, Colombia. It was carried out with a group of English learners. The focus of the research was to identify forms to motivate students to learn the foreign language making it meaningful for them, by taking into account or associating the learning processes with their culture and background as an indigenous group. Besides the lack of motivation, another factor found when observing the setting was the segregation of rural indigenous children by those from urban places, who had thought they were better people.

Therefore, the concern of this study was stated as how to take advantage of the zenu ethnic group's hand-crafting discourse to awaken indigenous students' interest in learning English and to bring about meaningful pedagogical and communicative processes, preserving their cultural identity. As a result, the teachers-researchers found out that the cohesive element for students to communicate was the arrow cane weaving process as well as the agriculture because these are the main activities the community do and consequently, social relationships are based on them. Therefore, the researchers concluded that knowing a lot about this topic enabled students to talk about, to narrate, to communicate, to reproduce discourses and speeches and this is how they could interact in and outside the classroom. For this reason, integrating their culture, background and idiosyncrasy to their English classes succeeded in terms of motivation and learning.

As far as I am concerned, I see this study important to be taken into account for my research since it highlights the relevance of the learners' background information and personal experiences as the basis for learning, for constructing knowledge. It becomes easier for students to use their own previous knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, ideas and life events as the material for learning than using other kinds of resources which are not meaningful for them. All in all, in this sense, personal narratives become also a tool for developing reading and writing in the L2.

### **Previous Research Done Abroad**

This section shows an study done in Taiwan by a teacher-researcher who did an in-depth analysis for knowing the implications of implementing a content language approach in high school to develop both, critical thinking skills and reading and writing abilities in the target language. He takes into account what authors have said about this methodology and about critical thinking. Also, he bears in mind the characterization that has been done about Asian EFL learners because of their cultural conditions.

**LIAW, Meei-Ling. “Content Based Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Skills in an EFL Context” English Teaching & Learning Journal. National Taichung University, 2007.**

This paper corresponds to a qualitative study done at a high-school in Taiwan with a group of thirty-two students. This study attempted to design and implement a content-based junior high-school EFL syllabus and examine the effectiveness of such a program in

the promotion of both learners' critical thinking skills and EFL skills. To carry out this project, a five-unit syllabus including different subject areas was designed. Data were collected by means of a critical thinking assessment instrument, class assignments, a questionnaire and a language proficiency test designed by the teacher-researcher. Based on the findings, instructional suggestions were given to the institution.

In terms of concepts, this study discusses the importance of enhancing critical thinking in an L2 classroom. The researcher points out that teachers have the responsibility of helping their students to acquire higher-order thinking skills while learning English. He even asserts that this might lead students to be proficient in the target language. Also, the researcher states that content-based approach not only integrates language instruction and subject matters, but also challenges traditional methodologies and meets students' interests, likes and goals. All in all, he proposes an approach that could make his students more active and creative English speakers.

In the implementation, students' gains in critical thinking skills were assessed by calculating their scores in pre and post-tests. Also, samples from class work were analyzed as well as an end-of-project questionnaire. As a result, it was found that students actually engaged critical thinking skills when reading and writing to accomplish their tasks. Also, their performance in English was significantly better. Besides, students answered that they could see their own progress because the approach had led them to self-confidence and motivation to learn not only the language, but also to use it in other contexts and areas. In brief, it was evidenced that the integration of content and language took students to a level of reflection and thinking in English to understand topics from other school subject.

As far as I am concerned, I consider this study important to be taken into account since it reveals that critical thinking can be promoted in students counting on teachers' effort. It also highlights the importance of being aware of the fact that cognitive development and language learning cannot be separated. As it can be seen, this project deals with critical thinking as mine does, bearing in mind what authors have said about reaching higher thinking skills. On the other hand, despite my study does not deal with the content-based approach, I think that the use of life stories within the L2 learning classroom can motivate as well to learn English for more purposes than learning a code itself and how to use it accurately.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The present literature review you are about to read concerns about the exploration on the areas of critical pedagogy as an education philosophy for emancipating students as social actors. Then, it deals with the concepts of reading and writing as social practices, framed in the perspective of critical literacy. After that, it works on the definition and characterization of critical thinking and finally, it explains the understanding of life stories as personal narratives. The trends worked in this review aims at exploring more recent perspectives on the issues mentioned before, which contrast with well-known previous theories. In brief, this chapter has the purpose of examining the literary works which are suitable for understanding the focus of the present research study, namely, the implementation of life stories in a foreign language learning classroom as a mean for enhancing critical thinking while developing literacy.

#### **Critical Pedagogy: A bet for an emancipatory curriculum**

Critical pedagogy is an approach to education which has been discussed by authors such as Freire, Giroux, Grundy and McLaren during the last two decades. It has some basis on Dewey's ideas of a democratic education in America during the first half of the twentieth century. However, nowadays, the concept of critical pedagogy goes beyond that. It is a proposal which looks for the recognition of the learners' realities, possibilities and cultural background into the curriculum construction so that they can become active, critical citizens, able to change the circumstances within the society of which they are part of.

Because of his experiences and involvement in educational projects, Freire (1992) got interested in those people who were low class and whose interests and needs were not being taken into account in the educational policies of his country. He thought that the students' families had some troubles and difficulties that impeded or even atrophied their learning processes at school. Due to these observations, he considered that families had nothing else to do different from subjugating themselves to the interests of the higher classes and therefore, students had to learn what they were told, that is, the ideology of the majority.

All these features made Freire think of the need of making public schools a democratic space where the education was at hand of both, teachers and students, but at the level of their necessities. In this sense, Freire saw education different from the classic perspective of putting knowledge into the students' mind. Instead, he struggled for the idea of an educational model in which the whole community had to get involved in the learning process, including their different experiences, needs, interests, backgrounds and realities.

Thus, Freire (1996) said, in regards to the teachers training programs, an educator needs to know that he/she is not someone who transfers knowledge, but the one who creates or builds the appropriate environment for learning. Subjects then become social actors who intervene in their construction and therefore, that of the reality surrounding them. Accordingly, Freire's ideas become suitable for the objective of promoting critical thinking since it requires certain abilities which are not something I can teach students as simple as a content, but skills they have to experience in order to learn. At the same time, they share their lives while writing their stories and they can also be aware of others' realities when

reading theirs. All in all, this process would make students reflect upon narratives in higher-order thinking while developing their literacy skills as well.

Some years before, Grundy (1987) had dealt with the topic of transforming the curriculums at schools, where education was given the wrong emphasis. Based on the philosopher Habermas, she talked about the interests of education, the ones which influence the way of constructing knowledge. First, she considered the curriculum with a technical interest. At this respect, she stated that it focuses on having control over the learning environment as well as managing the objectives of education, and therefore, the accomplishment of them. This is mainly what the traditional, transferring education did and what Freire's ideas opposed to.

Then, Grundy considered a second type of curriculum as the one with a practical interest. Here the emphasis is on understanding, but, the kinds of understanding proposed here refers to the ability the learner has to gain to interact properly with the environment he is in or must be part of in a specific moment in life. However, from the lenses of Freire, this would correspond to the subjugation subjects must do to what the majority of the society or the higher classes want. Again, this approach does not match with the idea of the critical pedagogy since this is a poor evolution of the traditional model.

Finally, Grundy (1987) suggests a third type of curriculum which agrees with Freire's ideas of liberation and autonomy. She calls it a critical curriculum, which as she says, obeys to an emancipatory interest. She argues that the curriculum should be done by both teachers and students; in other words, the curriculum would be negotiated by the

subjects who participate in the teaching-learning process, in an egalitarian relationship that lets the power be held by the two parts; therefore, they two become as responsible as each other and also, both of them have opportunities of growing. To sum up, what she proposes is a curriculum based on the sharing of power among members of the community at a school as well as a negotiation of contents and processes so that learning is achieved.

Meanwhile, Giroux (2003) also declares that the school must be a place that allows students to take a position in society in terms of aspects such as ideology, politics and economics, instead of making them learn and reproduce the ideas that benefit the needs and requirements of the enterprises. He argues that a radical pedagogy should be developed so that it identifies the real problems of everyday life of students in order to implement strategies and carry out actions on them. Finally, he states that it is necessary to promote a critical dialogue among the actors of education which empower them to produce changes in their environments.

As far as I am concerned, I consider Grundy and Giroux's statements appropriate to the present research project since they open the possibility for students to bring their own lives, stories, realities and experiences to classes to be the material of the curriculum. In this sense, topics, contents and goals do not keep being the ones imposed by someone else, someone unaware of their contexts, but they would be the ones that let them take a position in life, in all issues surrounding their lives, no matter how young they could be. Consequently, this could help them to be conscious of their role both, as learners in education and subjects within the society.

On the other hand, one of the aspects the mentioned authors before are also concerned about is the role of language and therefore, of discourse in the aim of transforming the curriculum. Giroux (2003) asserts that discourse, that is, the actual product of language, determines what has to be taught at school at the same time states certain kind of relationship members in school have. He argues that power is the result of the polyphony, in other words, the different voices of the ones who command and the ones who obey. He means that those who have been privileged to rule education say what to do and how to do it, they are the ones whose voices are heard, while students' voices have been silenced and this is something that needs an urgent change.

In the same line of thought, Grundy (1987) said that the content which teachers are supposed to teach at schools must be subject of selection among educators and learners. They are the ones who should discuss what counts as important to be learnt and why is a truth to know. In this sense, I can see authors are aiming at the importance of analyzing the diversity of discourses that permeates our curricular ideologies so that decisions can be made. This, in words of Giroux, deals with the idea of an open, liberal discourse, instead of a traditionalist which assumes knowledge as something built, finished, static and canonical.

The concerns here are: What to teach? Why? What for? These claims open the possibility for me to see life stories as a pedagogical tool, as the material to enhance students' participation and autonomy. Of course, this would lead them to take the risk to state their desires, needs and worries, something they are not used to expressig. In this sense, Grundy argues that we, as teachers, must share the power we have with our students so that they can emancipate: "[...] el profesor en ejercicio comprometido con la praxis

educativa tiene posibilidad de compartir el control del contenido del curriculum con los alumnos y de asegurar que ese contenido esté al servicio de intereses emancipadores”

(Grundy, 1987, p.175)

Life stories are not only narratives, but they are also the way people have read the world, have interpreted and constructed reality. Giroux (2003) is one of the authors who defend the idea of valuing students’ life stories into the schools curricula. He said that the traditionalist discourse in education ignored how useful students’ life stories could be as a resource in class. He argues that the actual content of the curricula had nothing to do with the everyday episodes of the students and that is why they do not get interested in learning, but bored. For this reason, personal narratives could be an opportunity for students to see the development of skills meaningful for them as they become the result of reflecting upon their everyday lives and working with them as means for using the language to comprehend and produce discourses.

This is why Giroux, based on Freire and even Bajtin’s ideas of language, proposes a radical, emancipatory pedagogy which endeavors to appreciate the “texts” of everyday life as the material to know culture at school, to take into account the multiple voices that shape knowledge so that a critical dialogue on what to study could be held by social actors in education. What is more, he sees this also as a possibility to help students construct their identities based on responsible decision making. Hence, polyphony comes to reach a place inside the classrooms since things are seen from the different perspectives of the subjects implied in education. For me, these ideas let me work not only on literacy seen from the angle of the critical approach, but also to handle with life stories as a strategy and resource in the curriculum for promoting critical thinking.

To sum up, based on the authors' claims just discussed, I must say that my study sees critical pedagogy as an approach which lets students be active subjects of their learning taking into consideration what they previously know, are interested in and like the most so that developing skills results meaningful for them. Therefore, this approach also opens a great door to make students become reflexive thinkers who can reach a level of arguing, explanation and self-regulation rather than interpreting only, which is only the first step in enhancing critical thinking.

### **Critical Literacy: An approach to address the actual actor of discourse**

Traditional linguistic theories and models have seen language learners as abstract entities who communicate using language just as a ruled system. This view is based on Saussure (1913) and Chomsky's (1972) ideas. However, this understanding does not match to the actual traits of people as subjects who act in social life through discourse. Therefore, newer trends have tended to find a point in which language users can be seen from their complexity. For this reason, I will discuss some issues on critical literacy as an approach to understand reading and writing skills as empowerment mediums for language learners-users.

To begin with, it is necessary to state a definition of literacy. Since it is not an easy task due to the various meanings authors have attached to it, I will deal with a combination of ideas different authors have had to come to a better understanding of such a complex language learning phenomenon. Clavijo (cited by Clavijo, 2007) says that the process of reading and writing means "a complex interaction among the individual, the written language and the environment which surrounds him/her, in which values, experiences, the

socio-historical context and the culture are present” (p. 21). As it can be seen, the author does not refer to reading and writing as skills in which learners decode/code messages. She goes beyond that, giving an important place to all factors that influence the reading/writing process in the producer.

In the same line of thought, Gutiérrez (2010) asserts that reading and writing are interactive processes which demand background subjects have about the world. Therefore, she states that for language learners to write and read efficiently, these practices have to find a relationship with students’ prior knowledge so that they can become meaningful to their lives. As one can see, both authors agree on the fact that experiences one has had in life are at hand at the moment of reading and writing. That is why I see this proposal valuable doing since life stories become the basis for students to read and write, the raw material they will need to deal with to interpret and create compositions.

In addition, Lerner (2001) says that reading and writing are social practices rather than contents that can be easily taught at school. She states that schools are teaching students how to read and write just for academic purposes within the school itself, but they are not learning how to use them outside the classroom, in everyday real life and for that reason, they cannot be aware of the possibilities these practices can give to them. She states that reading and writing must be seen as instruments children and youngsters at school may learn to rethink the world and reorganize their own thought. At this respect, Clavijo (2007) says that school must “educate reader and writer citizens who can be autonomous, critic of what happens around them, and able to transform their realities” (p. 18).

McKay (1993) agrees on the fact that literacy implies more than simply dealing with the written word. She states that “literacy then entails a range of practices and the social uses of these practices” (p. 5). In regards to this, what she means is that reading and writing are not only language in use, but that that use also depends on the way a community understands it. Therefore, she says that textual organization, conventions and relationships between writer and reader differ from culture to culture. Having this in mind, I must say that since my students read others’ life stories as authentic material for them to become familiar with the cultural knowledge of the English speakers, this would help them make decisions and take actions when writing their own life stories so that they can both, convey meaning according to their culture and respect and use the conventions of the target language.

Alike, Cassany (2006) asserts that literacy implies managing ideologies carried by discourses when reading and writing. He states that being literate requires knowledge, abilities and attitudes towards the general, historical, individual and social uses of the written word. In order to do that, language users must know about the code (grammar, vocabulary and orthography), the discourse (genre, structures, form, style), the roles both authors and readers may have (and their purposes) and the values and representations of the world articulated in texts. Once a language user has gained these elements, then, he must be able to place discourses into a socio-cultural framework, identify the kind of discourse expressed and even, figure out the effects/consequences the discourse may cause. In brief, Cassany suggests that no discourse is neutral, and therefore, we as teachers must lead learners to be aware of that.

Learners are socio-historical, creative and transformative beings, and literacy is the process through which these learners can come to critically reflect on reality and take actions to change oppressive conditions. The ultimate goal of literacy is thus empowerment and social transformation. (Freire, cited by McKay, 1993, p. 18-19)

As it can be seen, authors are concerned about the use that students can give to literacy. It must not be literacy which subdues subjects to serve to dominant interests, to reproduce others' ideas and practices, but subjects who make good use of literacy to their own benefit, even when it does not please the educational system for whom, as Gutiérrez (2010) suggests, people's experiential knowledge is underestimated. Moreover, Lerner (2001) says that "interpreting texts and producing them would be rights that are legitimate exercising and responsibilities which are needed to be assumed" (p. 26). All in all, schools must be places where students learn awareness towards the use of language they can make to mediate, create and transform reality.

### **Reading from the Critical Literacy Approach**

Scholes (1985) states the ultimate goal we as teachers have is to make students aware of the "textual power". What he means is that language learners must be conscious of the fact that literacy empowers them to select and suppress information from texts as well as shape and present human life's experiences as they want to. He also says that learners have the power to narrate, to tell stories or to turn them into fiction. In this sense, our role as teachers is to help students develop their own textual skills so that they can be able to use literacy for themselves, for their real life instead of teaching them how to use it for academic tasks only.

In order to help students accomplish this goal, Scholes (1985) asserts that we have to make them learn a textual competence that consists of *reading, interpretation* and *criticism*. First of all, he sees reading as dealing with the codes of understanding schemas and context of a composition. In other words, reading is seen as a primary process in which readers decode a message to get its structure and know the kind of text it is. Scholes (1985) asserts that the more a person has read to know different kind of texts, the easier he will identify a type of text. However, this definition basically matches with an old understanding of reading a text only as an instrumental skill, it is, as decoding a message, but it does not have anything to do with conveying meaning.

Secondly, interpretation, as defined by Scholes (1985), moves from a simple summary of events, as done while reading, to a discussion of the meaning of the text. He says that when reading, a person has already used his/her knowledge to merely understand the structure of the texts and its type. He has also come to have an idea of the content of the text. But when he has faced the unknown, he has to start the process of giving the text his response, his understanding, his interpretation of what is said by the author. As it can be seen, this new stage goes beyond decoding the message. Now, the language learner is seen as an active subject who employs his knowledge in the construction of meaning.

Finally, criticism has to do with the moment in which the reader confronts his/her understanding and interpretation with that of the author. Here, culture, schemas, values and ideas take place since author's differ from reader's. Therefore, there must be dialogue and interaction, even when the two people are not present neither in time nor in place at the same moment. These definitions in terms of the process of reading are important for my

project. I want to bear them in mind since I want my students not only to read life stories as a text within the class and to report their understanding, but to have a dialogic interaction with the author so that they can state their own opinions towards texts. As Lerner (2001) suggests, I want my students to feel in the other's shoes, to identify similarities and/or differences between other's experiences and their own, so that reading becomes meaningful for them. Moreover, it can be said that Scholes' steps for reading agree with the critical thinking process which moves learner from interpretation to an argued judgment.

### **Writing from the Critical Literacy Approach**

Torres (cited by Gutiérrez, 2010) says that writing is a "mode of representation of thoughts and means of personal expression and communication among human beings" (p. 27). This definition of writing has to do with the idea of a process that goes beyond the skill to code a message. It gives importance to the action a writer carries out when writing, letting his/her own needs and views come alive in a text. In this sense, writing is "used to redefine relationships with one's context and with the world" (Gutiérrez, 2010, p. 21). One can see these definitions aim at stating writing as a process that enhance the reinforcement or even transformation of one's perceptions of the world.

In the same line of thought, Lerner (2001) says that writing must be used as a means for users to reflect upon their own thought and interpreting that of others. Then, writing becomes a tool for mental development and personal growing. McKay (1993) says that these ideas agree with the perspective of writing as an individual skill whose development produces great cognitive benefits. This perspective also deals with levels, that is to say, it explains how learners develop their process in different stages. However, I would not like to emphasize on

those levels to classify the participants of my study since I prefer a socio-historical perspective. Nevertheless, I care about my students' personal development through writing their life stories and of course, to how they become critical thinkers.

On the other hand, McKay (1993) asserts that there is a second perspective authors have dealt with when talking about literacy, namely, a socio-historical perspective. From this view, a political vision shapes writing as something that positions individuals in society and opens him means to avoid being marginalized. Rather, they can get empowered to change their lives by writing and reading. Thus, language learners may question and challenge the current social order through their compositions. They may also question scholar knowledge so that it becomes more useful and meaningful for them. Moreover, writing becomes a basis for acting upon surrounding contexts.

Finally, I would like to deal with human beings' language needs that could justify writing. Ramírez (2007) says that the first need a person has, when living with others in the world, is the need to interact. He says that one needs to establish a kind of relationship with others in terms of social, intellectual and affective networks. Therefore, writers assume a role when writing to "talk" to others, to relate them and to put into dialogue their different schemas within society. Ramírez says: "the social things are the others' conditions lived by each one" (my translation) (p. 84). All in all, the need to interact is a basic necessity individuals have but, as Ramírez (2007) criticizes interaction needs to go further than formulas. In this research project, interaction means sharing life stories in a free way, producing each one his/her own, personal discourse.

Then, the need of expression appears to be the interaction with others in which

individuals reveal their thoughts, feelings and emotions. In this sense, subjects become unique writers who have their personal experiences, circumstances, views and knowledge that shape both the form and the content a discourse has. Therefore, for this research project, participants must be seen as individuals who will use language to express their uniqueness through their life stories, feeling free to have the power to articulate the text and events in the text based on their decision-making, not to please others' rules or to reproduce others' ideas (Ramírez, 2007), although some prompts are given as a guideline.

Lastly, the need of knowing has to do with the opportunity individuals have to explore others' worlds when reading their texts. However, as regards to writing, this need becomes the chance to create worlds, to write narratives based on one's experiences. As Ramírez (2007) says, these phases of exploration and creation "promote the development of the individual's knowledge" (p. 86). In the case of this study in which language learners are going to be the writers of their life stories, they will need to explore others' narratives so that they can become aware of their uniqueness, realize otherness to reinforce their personalities and be able to tell things from their personal view. All in all, writing is seen here as it was said before, as a medium for one's expression within a social world.

To summarize, I must say that in the present research study reading is seen as the discussion of meanings readers arrive to when they not only understand texts, but interpret them and give opinions as well as make judgments in regards to them. This view agrees with the development of critical thinking too because it lets students come to the ultimate goals of high-order thinking skills which are evaluating and creating their own perspectives, which at the same time has to do with developing argumentative discourse. In

the case of writing, it is seen here as the opportunity students have of satisfying their need of communicating their worlds and experiences and the ability they have to convey meanings based on language patterns, text structures and of course, audience's context and expectations.

### **Critical Thinking: A Search for Becoming High-Order Skilled Individuals**

In education fields, nowadays, there is too much discussion on *critical thinking* which means there is prior attention to develop such ability; it does not matter whether they are in elementary, high school or at university. This seems to be a reaction against the traditional model of education, so that students can better reflect upon knowledge than memorizing data which are not meaningful for them. In this sense, there is a need for defining what critical thinking is and what it implies.

Facione (2011) states that critical thinking is understood as “purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as the explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based” (p.2). This definition implies the skills which need to be built in order to say someone is a critical thinker. These are the conditions for a person to think critically. But what I see relevant to highlight at first sight is that thinking needs a purpose to take place in individuals. In other words, it is based on someone's need for explaining something such as a concept, idea, assumption, etc. In the case of the present research study, critical thinking would deal with the way students see both their life stories and those of others and how they come to understand and reflect on them in order to give their own viewpoints.

On the other hand, Ennis (1996) points that critical thinking is “reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do [...]” (p.2). From this perspective, it needs to be considered that critical thinking connotes a decision making on what someone thinks. As far as I can see, it is not to assume as true all knowledge one learns, but to take a position towards it. Therefore, the emphasis becomes on teaching students to think by doing an aware process of analyzing, evaluating and building ideas as well as arguing those ideas in an intelligible way. In regards to the use of life stories as a pedagogical tool in the foreign language learning classroom, the process consists of reading a life story and analyzing it in order to come to an interpretation of it, based on the sense the reader made of it, not only because of what it says, but also in relation to his/her own experiences. In terms of writing, on the contrary, the procedure would be the opposite, that is to say, students must make sense of their experiences and events in life in order to convey meaning others can read meaningfully. This process is better explained in chapter 4, where the pedagogical intervention is developed.

Ricketts and Rudd (2004) found that it is easier to promote critical thinking in students when they are curious, it is, when they are interested in seeking for information on an issue they are working on at school. Therefore, what one can infer from authors is that there are some conditions which can facilitate the implementation of critical thinking within classroom contexts. It does not mean that students learn how to think critically just to do it when solving problems in the academic realm, but, instead, it is an ability they must build up for life, for reacting to experiences they will have to face. Facione says that previous authors have called this a “critical spirit” people cultivate, in a positive sense, which means it is

different from criticizing all things without arguments.

Critical thinking, as defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking (1987), consists of an intellectual disciplined active process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information in order to trust it and act upon the reflection made. Thus, it is asserted that critical thinking involves elements of thought such as purpose, problem, questioning, representations, conclusions and objections. Therefore, being a critical thinker means that a person does not merely receive information and decode it for understanding, but he/she responds to that information in a set of steps which lead him to arrive to his own conclusions, make a judgment on that knowledge and decide what to do in regards to it.

Another definition of critical thinking states that it is the process we use to reflect on assessing and judging the assumption underlying our own and others' ideas. It is said that it involves critical questioning. And in regards to the components or conditions for critical thinking, they point out that it implies identifying and challenging assumptions; recognizing the importance of context; imagining and exploring alternatives and finally, developing a reflective skepticism. This last step is the one I would like to highlight the most because it means that students must develop an argumentative competence too. In other words, students cannot say they disagree on certain idea or some concept is not valid, without explaining how they drew on that conclusion, what their view point is concerning that issue and therefore, how they can contribute on the topic.

Concerning the conditions for critical thinking, Ennis (1996) makes an outline on

dispositions for critical thinking. Thus, critical thinkers can be identified when they, first, are well informed on issues; second, care about others' opinions; third, state a position; fourth, seek for reasons to be offered when arguing their viewpoint, their opinion, and fifth, mind others' welfare in the situation of confronting positions. In this line of thought, critical thinking needs to be seriously developed so that learners, even if they are children, can do all this by themselves at a moment in the process of carrying out the curriculum.

For Facione, the conditions for critical thinking are wider and require a more detailed explanation, which results in the procedure to think critically. To begin with, he talks about *interpretation*. By this word he refers to understand and report what is said about an issue. It deals with concepts and beliefs. I see this is the first step we as teachers ask our students when they are given a topic. In the case of reading a life story, it would be the main ideas, events and even feelings they can get from someone's personal narrative. Secondly, *analysis* appears to be the way in which learners are able to find correlations among concepts and the implications they have. In other words, it is how students confront to those ideas said by someone else.

On the third place, *evaluation* is the way students "assess the credibility of statements" (Facione, 2011, p.6). It can be seen as the first position learners take towards the concepts on a topic. They decide, as suggested by Ennis, whether to believe or not when reading the world through a topic or subject matter. Based on what they understood or interpreted and what they evaluated, now they can have a first judgment on knowledge. Then, *inference* deals with thinking of the implications of what people have said about an issue. It is, once students have decided whether to agree or not with authors' viewpoints,

they must think of the consequences of thinking the way they did or have done throughout time.

Beyond being able to interpret, analyze, evaluate and infer, strong critical thinkers can do two more things. They can explain what they think and how they arrived at that judgment. And, they can apply their powers of critical thinking to themselves and improve on their previous opinions. These two skills are called “explanation” and “self-regulation” (Facione, 2011, p 6).

These are the last two stages in the process of critically thinking, as the author states. He points out that once students have done the previous processes, they must come up with their own perceptions, ideas, opinions on the issue of study, but certainly, they must argue how they constructed that knowledge, it is, how they came to those conclusions. When they explain their arguments, they must do it in a coherent way so that anyone can see it is the outcome of a reasoning process. There is an evident need of devoting time to the training on argumentative discourse since students lack the patterns to argue their ideas. “Critical thinking, then, is [...] an integral part of argumentative discourse” (Trujillo, 2002, p.115).

Finally, it is necessary to say that critical thinking does not have the same influence on students of all levels and even the procedure has to be adapted to ages since the way teenagers, for instance, see and think of the world, is not the same children do. To start implementing it in the case of lower grades, the process is slower and implies an emphasis on helping students to start by being determined for an intellectual interest, it is, to enjoy

knowing and reasoning towards knowledge, as well as doing it humbly and as whole (Elder & Paul, 2003).

All in all, the importance this theoretical framework has to my research project is that I aim at developing critical thinking skills in students when they read the experiences that build up one's life story, so that they do not assume an only perspective, but many depending on diversity of situations people have been put through. They should do the same reasoning process when narrating their own personal stories. I see this as an ethical objective too since students have to take an active part on reasoning while keeping in mind that the position they take in regards to life stories will determine what they are going to do to contribute to society and even to transform it.

### **Life Stories as Personal Narratives to Spring up Awareness On Subjects' Realities**

From the perspective of the forementioned authors who point out literacy to deal with a social practice, there is a need for discussing what life stories are and how they are understood for the focus of the present research study. To begin with, there has to be a reason why life stories become worthy writing and reading in a language learning classroom. Goodman (cited by Clavijo, 2007) conceives literacy as a practice which comprises aspects of the personal history of an individual as well as his/her culture and the social environment in which his/her life takes place. In this sense, one can see that people's real lives are at the core when reading and writing discourses. For this reason, it is necessary to expand on what life stories are in order to get their usefulness as the basic material students have for reading and writing.

First of all, life stories have to be understood as narration. Quevedo (2009) considers that narrating is one of the most basic things humans do. Herrenstein-Smith (cited by McEwan & Egan, 1995) agrees on this claim because he asserts that narrating is an inner characteristic in the human being. McEwan & Egan (1995) also state that a narrative has to do with telling events that involve people. This seems to be a very basic definition, but it is the basis for understanding the elements it comprises. They say that people have experiences to tell so they make an effort to understand those happenings first and express them then. In the same line of thought, Ochs & Capps (1996) point out that a “narrative is a fundamental means of making sense of experience. Narration is both born out of experience and gives shape to experience” (p.19). Here, narration is seen first as a means to communicate events people have lived so others can know about them.

Besides, Quevedo (2009) claims that when narrating, people express their feelings and thoughts by means of their own words. To do so, people must be aware of what their beliefs are and how these conceptions shape their social behavior. Consequently, when narrating their lives, people are making sense of all the experiences they have had. All in all, narration lets people explore what is inside them to transmit it through the written word -for the case of this study which does not aim at oral narrations. Alike, Ochs & Capps (1996) say that narration takes the self to life. However, telling the personal story goes beyond expressing the self. As said by discourse theoreticians, text carries an action; in the case of narration, it is to recognize the own social view from a critical perspective which could lead the individual to transform his/her reality.

On the second hand, there is a need to comprehend that through narratives, people

represent their realities to show how they are part in it and how the beings they are, have developed as social subjects dependent on a specific environment (Quevedo, 2009). In this line of thought, it can be said that when writing life stories, individuals interact both with themselves and with others, attaching meaning to the lived experiences. When narrating, an individual enforces an order on disconnected events, creates a continuity and thus, he socializes feelings, attitudes and identities (Ochs and Capps, 1996). Since the present research study is conducted with sixth graders –who are not more than 12 years old mostly- I see the process of writing and reading life stories useful doing to make them aware of who they are and how they take part within society. This is something that has been excluded of the foreign language learning classroom throughout years.

As said before, authors have stated that the action of narrating comprises feelings, perceptions and thoughts as well as personal experiences on someone's life story. In this sense, all what is written down on a personal narrative comes out from the perspective of the author and then, when read by someone else, there are two realities which come to face each other, to be confronted in a dialogic outlook. Thus, everyone is taking a role in his/her life, context and reality and this is the aim of the critical pedagogy as discussed previously. Therefore, using life stories as the main source for learning to read and write become an opportunity for enhancing students' recognition of their participation in life and the effects of all the decisions they have made, the actions they have carried out and the things they have omitted. In regards to this, Ochs and Capps (1996) say that “we come to know ourselves as we use narrative to apprehend experiences and navigate relationships with others” (p. 21). Thus, the self is seen as a reflective consciousness of being in the world and recognizing one's past and future.

Accordingly, life stories are seen as social instruments to portray people's realities. In this process of portraying realities, writers have their voices heard and therefore, they realize the power of expression (Quevedo, 2009). Once they have put their voices on a paper, writers come to make awareness of all the events that have taken place in their lives and how those actions have affected them. In other words, writers not only write their narratives, but they also revise them, read them and thus, they reinterpret their stories and attach a new understanding on them. Finally, Quevedo (2009) states that writers experiment a social sensitivity when writing their own life stories since they "feel more comfortable using known facts or familiar information to incorporate themselves into their culture [...]" (p. 134). All in all, when reading and writing life stories in the language classroom, students are getting conscious not only of their social realities and how they have made them be who they are, but also they can estimate others' stories as living realities.

In the same line of thought, Gutiérrez (2010) argues that knowledge gained through daily life experiences makes up the "funds" subjects have for real communication. I like this view since I want to highlight the importance of taking into account students' experiences as the material they have for writing. Alike Quevedo (2008), Gutiérrez (2010) states that when writers have at hand their background about the world, for writing, the literacy practices become more significant to their lives. In other words, Gutierrez' view agrees with the one I tend to state in the sense that personal narratives result from the affective, socio-cultural experiences that must be estimated for reading and writing at school.

Gutiérrez (2010) explains that “every single human being has a body of cultural, cognitive, social and spiritual knowledge, among others, that he or she has gained from his or her contact with society” (p. 12). She gives this definition for *funds of knowledge* and I dare to take it as the basis for writing and reading life stories in the classroom. Moreover, I am in agreement with her idea, which is also similar to Quevedo’s, and it is that when using these funds of knowledge in developing literacy processes, life experiences and thoughts are shared, enriched and transformed. In short, life stories as personal narratives become tools for communicating the inside of people as well as for transforming it by means of interacting with the written word and with others.

It is also important to bear in mind two more aspects about narratives which are not less relevant than the ones mentioned above. First, in order to express their life experiences in a text, individuals must outline a sequence of events. It can be done through a sequence of pictures (like scenes of a movie) or they can be condensed into a single frame (Ochs & Capps, 1996). It means that narratives obey to a temporality. In most of the cases, narratives of personal experiences are told in past, so they are about what happened to someone; even though they are linked to the present and future. However, the narrator can move back and forth when telling his story and this happens because of his purpose with the narration (Ochs & Capps, 1996). It can also be told in a historical present which means that although the events took place in the past, the narrator uses a present tense in order to make events more vivid and captivating for the reader.

Secondly, it is necessary to say that the narrators include some things in their stories while they exclude some others. It means that narratives are restrictive depending on the

author's purpose, social context, textual competence and expected audience (reader). In this sense, personal narratives mold the way in which we attend to and feel on events because they are a partial, subjective representations of reality since the author evocates the world as he sees it. At this respect, Ochs & Capps (1996) that narratives are fragmented imitations of experience and sometimes they look like having different protagonists, but it happens because the author attempts to show he is a unique being, but shaped by diverse facets.

To conclude, I must say that for this research study, I conceive life stories as understood by Ochs & Capps (1996) who say, summarizing, that they are a genre of personal narratives which let individuals actualize themselves and which are transformative in the sense that they let interlocutors see the world from a different perspective and get new meanings from experiences. Also, I take into consideration what McEwan & Egan (1995) point out about reading a life story. They say that the reader must interpret narratives by putting in the other's shoes. All in all, for me, a personal narrative goes beyond telling events and experiences that happened in a setting and were lived by someone. Rather, I consider they are powerful tools for conveying meaning about our worlds into the written code, with the purpose of expressing ourselves and confronting them with the selves around.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This is a section devoted to describe the type of research which supports the present study. It also deals with the research approach, the setting where the project takes place, the instruments used in gathering data, the participants in the project as well as the kind of sampling used and finally, the role I play as a researcher. All these aspects become too relevant to understand the key concepts and perspectives which give basis to the purpose of the present research study.

#### **Research Paradigm**

The present project belongs to the *qualitative research*. Marshall & Rossaman (1999) suggest, when defining qualitative research, that “one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions[... ]”(p.57). In the same line of thought, Burns (2003) states that scientists have argued qualitative research to be a different view when looking at human being in their interaction with the world. Therefore, when doing a qualitative study, a researcher must get involved with his/her participants so that he/she can figure out the significance they give to the situations they live, the way they think and act. All in all, qualitative research has to do with the study of human behavior in their natural, actual context so that meaning for interactions can be understood and seen from participants, insiders’ eyes.

In this sense, qualitative research fulfills the following characteristics, as Burns (2003) proposes. First, it encloses subjective interpretations of the phenomenon being

studied, this because of the participants as well as the researchers' meaning given to issues. Second, it examines cultural setting in their natural contexts, without pretending to control variables. Third, it collects rich data so that very complete description of the phenomenon under study can be done and finally, it makes sure of doing a valid study by using different sources of data collection. All these features are what make the essence of qualitative research.

Therefore, my study belongs to the qualitative paradigm of research as I must be inside the context of study so that complete account of what participants actually feel, think, and mean by their realities, can be interpreted. In other words, interpretations should be thought of from the participants' perspective. Since interpretations both, from me and my students can vary, subjectivity becomes an essential part of my study, which makes it a qualitative research in essence. Then, I do not attempt to find what I would desire or what would match up with my interest in researching, but what the context can show me. This makes a lack of control over the findings evident, which is typically done by the quantitative methods instead.

### **Research Approach**

Authors such as Johnson and Christensen (2004) argue that action research falls under the bigger approach of educational research as it concerns about advancing knowledge and solving problems teachers confront in their workplaces, in their immediate realities and all of this is on the basis of undertaking planned actions. Lewin (1946) and Stringer (1996) (cited by Johnson & Christensen, 2004) state that "action research is focused on solving specific problems that local practitioners face in their schools and communities" (p.10). "In

action research practitioners in the local settings also have major roles in the design and conduct of the research study” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p.10).

As far as they are concerned, Nunan (1992) and McKernan (1996) (cited by Burns, 2003) point out that “the major focus of action research is on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups and communities. It is conducted in naturally occurring settings, primarily using methods common to qualitative research” (p.24). As it can be seen, authors coincide with the nature of action research in the sense that it is particularistic and aims at solving specific problems which take place in teachers’ context. Burns (2003) adds also an important point which is the benefit of doing action research for teachers, who can professionally grow and develop since they must reflect upon their practices to identify issues of study.

Thus, action research considers some characteristics authors have explained. Somekh (1995) says that action research comprises five main features. First, it focuses on a specific social situation. Second, there is a participatory nature between researcher and researched. Third, data is collected systematically, analyzed and triangulated. Fourth, it leads into theory building and last, findings are put into practice, not only in the researcher’s context, but also in other context where they can be applicable. In addition, authors (Burns, 2003; Crookes, 1993) have said that one of the most relevant characteristics of action research is that it endeavors for going beyond the practices which are taken for granted in the studies setting in order to find out the mediation of these practices through the assumptions, values, beliefs and ideas behind. In the case of my study, it aims at getting to know the development of critical thinking when reading and writing life stories and taking into account, as well, the processes that underlay these skills.

These practices are everyday routines, but we have not cared yet about those processes behind and how they are understood by language learners/users. Moreover, to reach these goals, action research is participatory and collaborative, which means that the participants as well as some other people such as colleagues might get involved in the development of it.

Finally, I must say the present research project has elements that match with an action research because, first of all, it is thought for a real social context, a localized setting, namely, a classroom at the school where the study was conducted. In this sense, the findings of the study are primarily applicable at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor and, to be specific, with young EFL learners. Secondly, there was no way to carry out the research unless the participants, their parents and the school principal gave me consent on their involvement in the study (see appendices 1 to 3). However, this is not the only level students participated at. It must be taken into account that in the first cycle, students were administered a questionnaire in order to know their insights about the literacy processes taking place at the school and also, their ideas and suggestions about working with life stories. And also, at the end of the last cycle, students had a space for talking about their experience taking part in the project so reflections and suggestions for following-up research could be considered. Thus, the study becomes participatory as it is “conducted by and with members of the actual community under study” (Bailey, 1998, cited by Burns, 2003, p.24).

Also, data were collected in a cyclical, systematic process by means of more than one instrument. Nevertheless, this study is flexible in the number of sessions and stages it

followed, without losing perspective of the research approach as such. In addition, in regards to theory building, more than that, the findings of this research are conceptual categories which pretend to portray the reality of the classroom under study and suggest the applicability of these claims within the setting and of course, in other contexts which may result similar to the one researched.

Moreover, the study can lead some other teachers and novice researchers to think about their practices so that reflection on realities to transform them may come out of my research, which also agrees with the nature of the action research approach. To sum up, the present study agrees with an action research to certain extent since it implies an intervention as well as involves and enhance reflection, not only improving and changing the particular situation under study, but also my own practices as an educator in any other context I might be.

## **Setting**

The present research was held at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor. It is a small private institution located at the north of Bogotá city. This school offers basic education as well as high school, in other words, all grades suggested by Colombian educational policy. It has been working for about 15 years, as the coordinators and some teachers, who have worked since then, say. I assert that this school is small since it has no more than 250 students at all. Most students come from neighborhoods at the north of the city and most of them have a good social position or economic status as seen in my observation working there and also, as students confirmed in a questionnaire they were administered in the diagnosis phase of the study, as said before (see appendix 4).

As its name suggests and the student's handbook says (2012), the main purpose for this institution is to teach the children and youngsters the gospel of Jesus. This is the reason why students have, at the very beginning of everyday, a moment of fifteen minutes to read the Bible, reflect on its teachings and pray, this guided by teachers. In the same way, every Friday, both, elementary and high schools, at a different schedule, have an hour for the purpose of singing hymns and praising God, reading the Bible and reflecting on it. This session held by the school chaplain, who is a Christian pastor. Besides, in every single subject student study at school, they are supposed to receive biblical integration on the topics they are studying; it is how those contents relate to what God says in the Bible, in a specific verse or passage. In order to do this, teachers must prepare it in advance within their lesson planning. For all these reasons, teachers who are not Christian cannot apply to work at the school.

Finally, it is important to say that besides all academic areas are very important so that students can develop integrity and a good academic status, English has been given a very relevant place since the school plans on getting bilingual. Therefore, students have five English lessons a week, it is, they have an hour every day, from preschool to eleventh grade, which opens a possibility to make emphasis on its teaching –learning process and which, at the same time, demands updating, commitment, professionalization and language proficiency from those teachers who aim at teaching the foreign language. Lastly, it is precise to say that I got entry to the setting first because I work there and second because participants as well as authorities, namely, the school's principal and the participants' parents, were given an informed consent form to ethically count on their collaboration (see

appendices 1, 2, and 3).

## **Participants**

This research project was held with sixth graders at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor. There were ten girls and seven boys in this class, who were aged between 9 and 12. These students could be characterized as children who liked obeying their authorities and following the school rules to succeed and who loved learning the Bible. In terms of academic success, it can be said that there was a high percentage of quality in regards to the results they got in the different areas. They were enthusiastic for learning and they loved learning by playing. They preferred classes where they were given the opportunity to participate in different activities. They did not enjoy classes in which teachers just wrote down things on the board, so they complained when it happened.

In relation to English, there were five students whose skills were under the average while there was one with the highest level in the class. The other eleven were almost in an average position. What I refer to when talking about average is to the level of language proficiency they should have for the grade they were in, it is, knowledge and ability for using basic grammar structures, a range of vocabulary about everyday situations, fluency at some extent and awareness on pronunciation. In this subject, they enjoyed learning with images and different materials that could result as aids for them to comprehend topics. They also liked working by pairs so that they could help each other in case they needed. Although they were not proficient users of the foreign language, they liked participating in class, at least by telling a word as answer for a question or reading a paragraph aloud. They said they liked English and they had learnt something. All this information was

observed and evidenced throughout the time I worked with them.

### **Sampling Type**

As regards to the selection of this sample, I must say first of all the population corresponds to a convenience sampling type since I have easy access to the site (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p77). These authors also say that a convenience sampling “saves time, money, and effort but at the expense of information and credibility” (p.78). In my case, it means that I do not have to move so far to a place where I can do the research, so that it becomes a saving of time and money to invest. Instead, I can have easy access to the information gathering. Since I worked there, it was not difficult to entry to the place, to have contact with the participants and to have their consent for collaborating in the project.

Also, I would say this sampling fulfills the requirements of a typical case because it “highlights what is normal or average” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.78), in terms of the problem under investigation. Merriam (1998) confirms this when she says that” a typical sample would be one that is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p.62). In other words, the students chosen for the research could fully satisfy the expectations of the research. Since I aimed at promoting critical thinking while students read and wrote, students were supposed to be the ones who had not enhanced this thinking yet and whose learning is in development. Therefore, they were the group which needed what was about to be implemented, as shown in the statement of the problem.

## **Researcher's Role**

The researcher's role has to do with the interrelation between the investigator and those who are under research (Merriam, 1998). As an instrument for research, the presence of the researcher in the setting is fundamental (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In my case, I am a participant as observer in the study. In regards to this type, Merriam (1998) asserts that "the researcher's observing activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant" (p.100). First of all, it means that I am a participant in the setting since I am a teacher for those students under research. Therefore, I gained access to the setting naturally as well as I have the responsibility of keeping on teaching. And secondly, since being immerse in the context, I can observe at the same time I do my job. Moreover, what is most important to highlight is that research activities are revealed to the participants.

On her behalf, Merriam (1998) says, while talking about a participant observer, that "the researcher is a member of the group being studied and conceals his or her observer role from the group so as not to disrupt the natural activity of the group" (p.100). The point here is that, since I am a teacher for the participant students, I can do the pedagogical intervention for my class, which helps me as well as the researched ones to feel comfortable during the process, it means, they feel in a familiar environment and do not change their current behavior due to the investigation. Thus, the point is not to hide the purpose of the study and the research itself, but to ease the situation so that it can be done naturally.

## Data collection instruments

In any research project, the importance of collecting information during the process to get to findings is something evident. Nevertheless, what does not seem that evident is the fact that finding must be supported from different sources so that they become reliable and valid. Thus, triangulation is a strategy, used by researchers, which consists of using a variety of data collection instruments, at least three, to determine the truth of a finding (Sagor, 2000). In other words, it is so important that by inspecting different data sources, the researcher can justify his/her claims when analyzing and interpreting findings (Creswell, 2003). In the present study, I will use four data collection instruments, namely: field notes, artifacts, a questionnaire, and an interview, as they are going to be explained as follows.

To justify the use of the four instruments mentioned above, it is necessary to link them to the research questions so that they become suitable to the inquiry of the study. Also, there are some of these instruments which are more relevant than the others; it means that some of them can provide richer information and for that reason, they are classified by recurrence, being #1 the most recurrent and suitable instrument. See the table below.

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Data Source</b>
	<b># 1</b>	<b>#2</b>	<b># 3</b>
How can sixth graders at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor develop critical thinking while they read and	Field notes	Artifacts	Questionnaire Interview

write life stories?			
How do students construct meaning on a text (story) they read in the class?	Field notes	Artifacts	Interview
How do students write their stories to communicate their lives to the class?	Artifacts	Field notes	Interview

Triangulation matrix for real world advocacy project research question (Sagor, 2000)

### Field notes

“Notes [...] are descriptions and accounts of events in the research context which are written in a relatively factual and objective style” (Burns, 2003, p.87). As it is seen, notes are the written record of *observation*. Thus, *field notes* are supposed to be detailed, it is, as complete and rich as possible so that one can see a clear, accurate picture of the observed event on them. They must also be focused on what the researchers want to see within the interaction of participants. Besides, they should be written down in a format, hopefully designed by the researcher, which must be easy, understandable, and with key information on it, such as date, number of participants, setting, etc. Moreover, they could include the researcher’s comments, opinions and preliminary interpretations but all of this based exactly on what data reveal (Merriam, 1998).

In this sense, field notes constitute a source which provides lively portraits of ordinary episodes taking place in the research setting. And since they are focused on specific aspects, they permit the researcher work on reflection of those things which are

not paid attention at the daily spaces (Burns, 2003). What is more, observation lets the researcher find and realize issues that participants would not be able to reveal when being directly asked (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, this instrument became useful to my study since I was interested in seeing how students interpreted and produced text, namely, life stories and it was a process which needed observation to be followed and gathered. Also, I see this source flexible to use, though memory and immediateness play an important role since one, as a researcher, must record episodes as soon as they happen so that an accurate description can be done (Burns, 2003). I found it both interesting and helpful to reflect on everything that happened in a series of sessions so that recurrent patterns could be found for analysis and interpretation.

In regards to the limitations of using field notes, it must be said that unless the researcher keeps objectivity when recording situations, he/she might lose the perspective of the study by looking at all occurring around (Merriam, 1998). I consider that looking at the research questions always when writing down the note and keeping in mind what is it that one looks into, is a way to avoid a loss of perspective. On the other hand, memory also plays an important role when accounting an observed session since if there is not time to do it immediately when things have just happened, one must trust on memory to call all remembrances of what occurred, especially those issues relevant for the investigation. It can be handled by means of using time through the session to write the most remarkable points of interaction, utterances, among others so that one can do the whole description based on it, as soon as possible after the event has taken place (Burns, 2003).

I designed a field notes format to be used through the research process (see

appendix 6). It consists, first, of a heading with key information on field notes number, place, date, number of participants and type of activity held at the moment of taking the record. It also has a square for a picture of the setting arrangement to be done. Then, it has a two column chart. The first column must be used for the detailed description of events which can include quotations from participants and a narrative of what happened. And the second column is to be used for making comments which constitute the reflexive narrative of recurrent patterns found in the observation and which needed to be analyzed.

### **Artifacts**

Artifacts belong to a broader data collection instrument group known as documents. These documents are of different type and they consist of public and personal papers as well as physical evidence, material that should be relevant for the study under investigation (Merriam, 1998). In the case of artifacts, these ones are understood as personal documents, while doing action research at a school context, because they refer to students' products done throughout the pedagogical intervention. For this last reason they are a primary source (Bell, 2005) since they are a first-person type of material.

Artifacts, as personal documents, are useful in order to get into experiences, to come up with inner meanings of everyday life. They are also thought to be the reconstruction of life experiences held by the author of that material. In this sense, they are supposed to reflect the participant's 'perspective when being involved in a pedagogical intervention, for the case of action research. In the present study, the richest personal documents or artifacts under study were the participants' life stories and their responses to reading others' life stories. Their helpfulness to the present study lies on the fact that they

inform how students writing and reading processes occurred as well as how their critical thinking skills came out.

On the other hand, regarding the limitation of personal documents such as artifacts, they might not provide a generalizable pattern; in other words, when taking some artifacts as samples, it is possible that findings could not be generalized to the whole setting or group of participants. In the case of my study, this might be avoided by analyzing all participants' products so that recurrent patterns could be found. Thus, as I said before, narratives, namely, life stories and responses, were the artifacts to be analyzed in the present study because they could reveal not only some information to corroborate students' profile gotten from another source, but they would also unveil students' processes in reading and writing in EFL.

## **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is built up by a set of questions which have structured answering categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). They are commonly used when the researcher wants to know participants' opinions, ideas, experiences and assumptions (Wallace, 2006). Questionnaires can include questions of different type which, by being structured ahead of time, participants can answer by their own. Sometimes they are responded by ticking responses given in a ranking or checklist, for example, while there may be some open – ended questions type (Wallace, 2006). Bearing in mind the previous features, it can be said that questionnaires are useful to get a variety of information, but it depends on the researcher's focus of study (Wallace, 2006).

Bell (2005) asserts that when a researcher works with questionnaires in his investigation, he must be disciplined when choosing the questions, writing them, designing the questionnaire itself, piloting and, administering it. Also, he has to think of the way responses will be analyzed. In this sense, questionnaires can be done in a flexible format. The more questions are spent time, structured in advance, thought of, the easier the analysis and interpretation stage will result (Bell, 2005). Therefore, in order to see whether they were well prepared, they are understandable for participants to answer and they actually look into what the researcher aims at, they must be piloted (Wallace, 2006).

With respect to the limitation of using questionnaires for research, subjectivity seems to be the most problematic issue. One cannot assess whether a reply to a question, asked to a participant in a questionnaire, is true or not. Participants may have some interest or intentions to answer in a way rather than in any other one. Therefore, the researcher's role is to trust the participant's replies (Wallace, 2006). However, once the researcher has started getting in touch with the population under study and therefore, he/she knows a little bit more about them, it will be easier to evaluate data in terms of truthfulness. Also, questionnaires can be an intrusive technique to collect data as well as something that takes time from participants (Wallace, 2006). Nevertheless, one can deal with this by being as concrete as possible as well as avoiding questions which can hurt people or touch their feelings.

I designed a questionnaire (see appendix 4) which let me move from different question type both while asking participants about their personal data so that a profile of them could be done and about their interest and needs in the EFL class. This last section of the questionnaire aimed at finding their ideas, assumptions, and opinions and for that

reason, there was more space for students to write their thoughts to add more information to their selection of an answer. In this sense, this instrument becomes a more qualitative like technique to enrich the research. It was useful for the study since it could provide information on what students did in their development of EFL literacy as well as what they thought they were doing.

## **Interview**

Merriam (1998) asserts that interviewing is a common instrument of collecting data in a qualitative research. He also declares that the most popular form of interview is the one in which two people have an encounter face-to-face. In this encounter, the interviewer elicits information from the interviewee. The purpose of conducting an interview is to search for information that cannot be observed, it is, feelings, insights and thoughts people may have of the happenings that take place around them. In the case of a research study, the researcher interviews his/her participant(s) in order to know, corroborate or discover the person's perspective in regards to the study being carried out.

There are three basic kinds of interview, namely, *highly structured interview*, *semi-structured interview*, and *unstructured or informal interview*. For the present study, it is important to explain the features of the semi-structured interview because it was the one that was used at the end of the study. In this type of interview, all of the questions are worded in a more flexible way so that it can be modified and re-organized depending on the respondent's replies. "The largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (Merriam, 1998: p. 74). In short, the semi-structured interview

allows the researcher deal with the situation at hand in the moment of speaking with the participant under interview.

In regards to the present study, I designed a semi-structured interview to be conducted at the end of the last cycle of the intervention so that I could get more ideas and confirm my hypotheses in relation to the impact of the implementation in students (see appendix 7). It looked to know student’s opinions, feelings and suggestions in terms of the activities of the implementation.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection procedures deal with the stages to implement the research process in which information of the setting and participants must be collected (Creswell, 2003). In this sense, to execute the process of data collation, dates, instruments and activities must be proposed in a plan to follow. The plan is presented in the diagram below.

<b>Cycles</b>	<b>Weeks (sessions)</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Instruments for data collection</b>
Identifying cycle	4	February 11-15 February 18-22 February 25-March1 March 4-8	Questionnaire Field notes
Collecting cycle 1	3	April 15-19 April 22-26 April 29-May3	Artifacts Field notes
Collecting cycle 2	4	May 14-17 May 20-24 May 27-31 June 4-7	Artifacts Field notes
Closing cycle	3	June 11-14 July 2-5 July 8-12	Artifacts Semi-structured interview

The first phase, which I call identifying cycle, consisted of observing the participants in their natural setting to get evidence on the research idea. Thus, I had three different sessions with students in which they had two reading and writing tasks as well as

a speaking one so that I could record their performance. These sessions were recorded by means of the field notes. Second, I administered a questionnaire in order to characterize the participants of my study and then, make decisions in regards to activities for the implementation which would fit their likes and interests.

The second cycle, called *collecting cycle 1*, consisted of three sessions divided in two parts. In each one of them, students read a life story in the first part and worked on analysis and interpretation on the second one. Data were gathered through field notes, in regards to observation. In addition, artifacts became very important since they were the source from where I could analyze students' responses in regards to the tasks and which could not be seen or heard when observing.

The *collecting cycle 2* was the time in which the writing tasks took place. It consisted of four sessions of two parts each. In the first part of the sessions, students were given the guidelines and prompts for writing. They were also provided with the vocabulary and structures required. They wrote a draft of what was asked and in the second part, they had to rewrite the paper, that is, edit it. For this reason, artifacts were the main instrument for analysis since they were the students' products. However, field notes did not become less important because I used them for recording the way students came up with their writings, that is, how they interacted with me as well as their peers to do what they were supposed to, among other occurrences.

Finally, the *closing cycle* consisted in three different sessions. The first two were devoted to read each other's life stories and work on responding to them by means of

certain activities. After that, I chose a random sample to interview in order to gain insights on students' view towards the implementation just carried out. Also, the artifacts were taken into account in this cycle since they were students' outcomes to the last phase of the pedagogical intervention.

## CHAPTER 4

### INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The present chapter has the purpose of contextualizing the reader about the pedagogical implementation of an action research done at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor, with sixth graders, in order to develop critical thinking skills while working on literacy through life stories. For that reason, based on the students' needs and interests which were figured out both by means of a questionnaire administered to them as well as an observation phase through field notes, a description on the students' profile will be done as well as a discussion on the language, learning, curriculum and classroom views that support this proposal.

In this sense, it is necessary to have a look at the setting where the research project is carried out. First of all, I must say that the present research was held at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor. It is a small private institution located in the north of Bogotá city. This school offers basic education as well as high school, it is, all grades suggested by the Colombian educational policy. This school was founded in 1992 by group of members from Iglesia Cristiana Gracia y Amor. The school is small since it has no more than 250 students in total. Most of the students come from neighborhoods at the north of the city and most of them have a good social position or economic status, as I had not only seen while working there, but I also found out by means of the questionnaire I administered to them.

As its name suggests and its student's handbook (2013) says, the main purpose for this institution is to teach the children and youngster the gospel of Jesus. It says "El Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor es una institución educativa privada que se caracteriza por

fundamentar su orientación filosófica en los principios absolutos de la palabra escrita de Dios (La Biblia)” (p. 7). It says then that their philosophy is based on the Bible. This is the reason why students have, at the very beginning of everyday, fifteen minutes to read the Bible, reflect on it and pray, this guided by the chaplain of the school who is the spiritual leader. In the same way, every Friday, they both, elementary and high schools, at a different schedule, have an hour for the purpose of singing hymns and praising God, reading the Bible and reflecting on it. This session is held by the school chaplain too, who is a Christian pastor. Besides, in every single subject students study at school, they are supposed to receive biblical integration on the topics under study, that is to say, how those contents relate to what God says in the Bible, in a specific verse or passage or in a general, inferred principle. In order to do this, teachers must prepare it in advance within their lesson planning. For all these reasons, teachers who are not Christian cannot apply for a job at the school, as I already explained in Chapter 3.

In regards to the participants, this research project was held with sixth graders at the school. They were 21 students, consisting of 13 girls and 8 boys. Most of them were between 10 and 12 years old. However, there were two students who were new at school that year and were older than their partners, namely, a boy who was 13 and girl who was 15. These two teenagers were not part of a school the year before because of problems at home, so they were getting used to the habits and rules of studying again. There were also two students who were in sixth grade again because they had failed the year before. Nevertheless, they were doing better. In general terms, most of the students liked learning new things, but what was most important for them is to learn about the Bible to put it into practice in their lives. Most of them went to Christian churches, as I could know by being their teacher for three years.

In terms of the English class, it is important to say that they liked learning by doing since they enjoyed when they had to solve tasks on their notebooks; they also liked going around the classroom to ask their partners about something being talked about in the class; they liked reading aloud and holding conversations in pairs or group, which they prepared in advance on their notebooks. In regards to the research project, a 66% of them said in the questionnaire that they sometimes wrote in the English class, but most of the time that activity consisted of writing some sentences, ideas as answers for some given questions, for example, based on a text. However, they considered important to write paragraphs in the class for them to improve their English and to learn better. In this sense, bearing in mind the research purpose which was to develop critical thinking skills when reading and writing life stories, they would like to share their life stories, but the most recurrent topic they wanted to write about were their experiences knowing God as a 52% of them said so as well as their preferences in terms of music, sports, etc., as a 48% of them said so. Finally, they would also like to read others' life stories such as those of other youngsters as a 35% of them said so and those of their favorite famous people as a 32 % said so.

## **Curricular Platform**

### **Vision of curriculum**

It must be said that every belief we as teachers have and the way we conceive our practices, shape the way we teach our learners. In regards to the vision of curriculum, it must be said that since the present research project aims at promoting critical thinking skills in EFL learners when reading and writing life stories, an emancipatory curriculum is the one which best supports the pedagogical implementation done with participants. This curriculum was proposed by Grundy (1987) and it consists of a

negotiation of contents and processes in teaching and learning by the two parts that are implied, namely, the teacher and his/her students. In the case of this research, to exemplify, students decided, by means of the questionnaire, what they would like to work on when reading and writing life stories.

In the same line of thought, this type of curriculum aims at promoting the integration of students' personal knowledge (Short, 2001). Authors such as Grundy (1987) and Giroux (1997) have said that students bring their own lives, stories, realities, and experiences to school as sources of learning in the classroom. In this sense, not only contents are being negotiated for the class processes, but also power is at hand of both, teachers and students, since the latter are not imposed what to work on, but they have the chance to make decisions about it. In regards to this, Short (2001) says that personal and social knowing consists of "the knowledge that learners bring from their personal experiences of living in the world and being part of specific cultural groups and social contexts" (p. 24). In other words, each student has something different to contribute in the learning process at school and this is how personal life stories become important, useful and suitable when developing literacy and promoting critical thinking.

### **Vision of language**

In terms of language vision, I must say that it has not been an easy task for me to teach language from a different perspective than the one which sees it as a system. I was taught, both at school and at university with an emphasis on grammar and form. However, at the end of my undergraduate program, I was told, by my thesis advisor, not to do it, but to think of giving students interesting topics to talk about, so that in the use of the language they

could infer grammatical uses. That is what I have tried to do during these six years of work.

Nevertheless, to make sure that learning a language becomes meaningful for learners, students' needs, interests and learning styles have to be taken into account. For the case of this research project, students were observed and administered a questionnaire in order to find out their needs in regards to the purpose of the study being carried out. Based on that as well as on foundations of the literature review that supports my study, I must say that one of the language views that support my study is that of *language as self-expression*.

Seeing language as self-expression means that it is a medium through which individuals construct their personal relationships and express their feelings, desires and interests (Tudor, 2001). Since I wanted my students to write their own life stories as a means to enhance their critical thinking skills, it was important for me that students express themselves as much as they could since each one is a unique person with a story to be told. Tudor (2001) also says that "when language is viewed as self-expression, learning goals are defined by what the learner wishes to express" (p.65). As I mentioned before, students were administered a questionnaire to discover the topics they would like to write about and as it was found, they were interested in talking about the experiences they had lived while knowing and learning about God as well as their likes in regards to free time activities. Of course, the study was not only participatory at the level of making in-advanced decisions, but also in the development of the implementation were they could interact in order to draw conclusions on their readings, for example.

However, I did not want my students only to recognize themselves as unique human

beings, but also as social actors who are part of a culture and society and who must learn on ways to interact with others, respect and understand them. Therefore, I also see *language as culture and ideology* because communication is not constructed on isolation, but in relation to others. At this respect, Tudor (2001) says “full communicative competence in a language therefore entails an understanding of and an ability to interact with the culture and world view of the speakers of this language” (p.70). Since my students were going to read others’ stories such as those of their favorite famous people and those of their classmates (as I explained in the chapter before and as will be better developed later), they would have to interpret someone else’s life story and to put in the other’s shoes to understand the way he/she conceives the world due to the experiences that person has lived. Also, they would learn from other when comparing their viewpoints.

All in all, these two visions of language support the accomplishment of the research objectives since it lets students work on writing their own life stories as a means to express themselves. In the same way, they were going to interpret others’ life stories taking into account the socio-cultural circumstances that have surrounded them and for that reason, have shaped their stories, that is, have made them who they are. This is one of the things the critical literacy approach aims at when being developed by language users.

### **Vision of learning**

As the present research project was carried out on the development of thinking skills through the use of life stories in EFL, students would need to interact both with others facing the classroom situation and with the texts, which are also written by others. This means that learning is seen as something that does not occur without social interaction. This idea belongs to Vygotsky’s scaffolding theory. In here, others play an important role in learning

because they become facilitators for students to interiorize knowledge and skills. However, learners have their potential and prior knowledge which has to be taken into account in the process of interaction with others so that individuals learning can be assured by the contribution of all those experiences, knowledge and skills each one has (Littlewood, 2004).

In the case of this research, students would learn both from the teacher as “an expert” in dealing with literacy skills and their partners as people who bring to the classroom their “personal and social knowing”. In reading others’ life stories, students would be able to find examples which could contribute to their understanding of the world. And since they had their own story, they could write and tell it having in mind the others first. Therefore, students would not only state their own viewpoints in comparison to those of others, but they would also carry out their own writing process and develop their own writing skills having others’ writings as examples. This is then the basis of the social learning by interaction.

It is important to state that here reading is seen from the stages of understanding the message, interpreting it and criticizing it or confronting with their own opinions and thoughts (Scholes, 1985). In the case of writing, it is seen as an autonomous process of reflecting upon own thoughts to express them in such a way that drafts and corrections can be done before a final written discourse appears (Lerner, 2001). As one can see, these views which see literacy in general as a complex process of interaction among the individual, the text and the context (Clavijo, 2001), are also supported by the experiential learning theory where students have to assume roles in their scholar processes and work on collaborative modes to achieve learning objectives (Tudor, 2001). Moreover, critical thinking, which is at the core of this project, also points out the importance of taking a responsive, argued position towards ideas (Ennis,

1997), so this agrees with the theory stated.

### **Vision of classroom**

Since I worked with critical pedagogy's ideas in which learners must be given the opportunity to democratically negotiate curriculum with their teachers (Grundy, 1987), classroom must be seen as a place where they can have a dialogue with others, not to please others' interests, but taking their own positions, that is to say, expressing their own world vision (Giroux, 1997). In this sense, what I mean is that my research project is founded on the vision of classroom as a school of autonomy. There, students could communicate effectively although they were at basic English level of learning since their knowledge went beyond the linguistic system. They took their own viewpoints and experiences to the classroom to be shared with others in a dialogic environment and that was the way they could construct both, knowledge and self-direction (Tudor, 2001).

When reading others' life stories and writing their own, students would be provided with a new approach to literacy in which they could develop their abilities in the classroom to critically reflect upon reality and also to be empowered to act in real social circumstances outside the classroom (Freire cited by McKay, 1993; Lerner, 2001). Therefore, students would not only come to the classroom to learn something established in advance in terms of language knowledge, but they would also learn how to use the written word in order to interact with the world, with others, to state their own positions towards realities, this increasing their autonomy of learning for life.

“[...] The vision of the classroom as a school of autonomy can support the practical realisation of the vision of the communicative classroom by providing an

explicit learning process-internal communicative goal to classroom interaction” (Tudor, 2001: p.118). As it can be seen, it is not only the classroom place where students can become autonomous learners, but also a place where they can develop their communicative skills and awareness in regards to their use by exchanging their opinions freely among them and of course, having the role of the teacher as someone who facilitates their learning and takes part of their dialogue as another human being having something to be told.

### **Pedagogical Intervention**

In this section, the reader will find the description of the set of activities which were carried out as the pedagogical intervention for the present research study, which aimed at developing critical thinking skills in sixth graders when reading and writing life stories in EFL. Activities in this section are related to general pedagogical goals as well as specific objectives.

<b>Pedagogical goals</b>	<b>Linguistic/Communicative goals</b>
<u>General:</u> Student will develop critical thinking skills when reading and writing life stories in the English class.	Students will enhance their literacy skills by using life stories in the English class.
<u>Specific:</u> 1. Students will follow some procedures to construct meaning on a life story.	1. Students will understand, interpret and discuss about life stories read in class.
2. Students will step some stages to write	2. Students will write their life stories in

their life stories.	short paragraphs using the appropriate vocabulary, structures and devices for making sense.
---------------------	---

During the implementation of the pedagogical intervention, students engaged in a series of activities related to reading and writing life stories. The first collecting cycle as well as the last one dealt with reading others' life stories, while the second cycle was devoted to writing their own ones. The reading activities were designed taking into account, mainly, the stages of reading to become critical as explained in Chapter 2, stated by Scholes (1985). Thus, students had, in the first collecting cycle, three different stories to read. The three stories the students read were: first, one about a poor, ordinary Venezuelan girl; second, one about Adele, a famous singer from the U.K and finally, one adapted from Tom Sawyer, the main character of Mark Twain's book.

For reading each one of them, they had two sessions in which they were supposed to follow a process of first, getting to know the text and understand main events to answer questions about it, which I called *stage 1*. Secondly, they had to discuss their insights about topics of concern from the reading, which I called *stage 2* and third, they were guided to compare the read life stories with those of their own, which was called *stage 3*. As I said before, these stages were planned with the purpose of achieving the reading levels proposed by Scholes (1985) as well as some other ideas authors such as Clavijo (2007) and Lerner (2001) have claimed, as developed in Chapter 2.

In the case of the writing activities, they were designed in a way that could let

students follow a process of brainstorming ideas based on some given prompts, examples, vocabulary and grammatical structures provided, writing a draft, receiving feedback and corrections in terms of both, content and form, and finally, rewriting their paper. They had to write their life stories that way in four different entries so at the end of the process, they could have a folder with all their papers called “My life story portfolio”. This writing process agrees with Lerner’s claim (2001) when she says that writing has not to be seen as an easy product to do, as something static that is done in a class within a short time and is finally ready. Instead, it must be seen as something dynamic that needs to be tried, revised and edited and for that reason, more than one class is needed, in the case of schools.

The four entries that their portfolio comprised were developed as follows: the first one was about themselves. They had to write about the origin of their name, their birth, their talents and the kind of relationship they had with God. The second entry was about their families. They were supposed to reflect and write about their weaknesses and strengths, it is, their virtues and defaults. The third entry was about themselves again, but this time, they had to write about their likes and dislikes. And finally, the fourth entry was about their future plans, what they would like in their future to happen, in personal and professional terms. To complement their writing, students could also draw pictures or stick some photos related to the topic of the entries.

Once students had worked on all of the above (see the whole plan in detailed in the charts below), they had two more sessions in which they had the opportunity to exchange their life stories with the class to read each other’s as they were assigned. They gave feedback on that reading by means of a mind maps and comments summarizing and

interpreting what they had read. Thus, students read their classmates' first two entries of the portfolio and made some mind maps for showing their understanding of events said in there. And for the other two entries, they wrote a note to their classmates, telling them their opinion about their texts, that is to say, about their content and what they had liked the most knowing about their lives, as the striking points in their stories.

<b>Session</b>	1
<b>Reflective Objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To express opinions on the story of a girl with a difficult life by means of interpreting and analyzing the text.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To read aloud in order to negotiate understanding on the story.</li> <li>To answer wh comprehension questions based on the story read.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand the use of present perfect to talk about actions that are still going on.</li> <li>To answer wh-questions in the present tense.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students are given the story of a Venezuelan girl named Yuleini, who has parental care problems and economic difficulties, but who has the chance of studying with the help of a foundation. After reading aloud by turns, students must answer 6 questions about the story. These first questions are on a basic understanding of the story.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session as well as artifacts which are the students' responses to the questions. In here, interaction among students and with the text as well is seen. The artifacts and the field notes can make evidence of the students' reading comprehension processes to get to an interpretation on the story.
<b>Session</b>	2
<b>Reflective Objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To discuss about poverty and teenage pregnancy as issues seen in the previously read story by means of evaluating the character's assumptions and making inferences.</li> <li>To reflect upon feelings with regard to Yuleini's story as well as a comparison between her story and students' own story as a process of confronting situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To write down ideas for an oral discussion based on some given reflective questions.</li> <li>To write a journal as a means for reflection on the story read.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To use the simple present tense properly to express ideas.</li> <li>To make full sentences and use linking words to explain ideas.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	<p>Students are given two questions for an oral discussion on issues present in the story:</p> <p>a. Poverty: what is it? Is it only about material things or money? Explain</p> <p>b. Teenage pregnancy: what do you think about it?</p> <p>After students have written their notes to answer these questions, the oral discussion is held. Finally, they are given a piece of paper to write a journal with the following content on it:</p> <p>Journal</p> <p>By: _____</p>

	Date: _____ Activity: _____ 1. How did I feel reading the story? 2. What do I think about my story in comparison to Yuleini's story?
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session which could reflect how students analyze and evaluate the text to make inferences and prepare arguments to state their ideas.
<b>Session</b>	3
<b>Reflective objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To analyze the life story of a famous person.</li> <li>To evaluate the thoughts of a famous person about her talent and physical appearance.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To read individually to increase autonomy</li> <li>To underline important ideas from the story read based on a general understanding of it.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand the use of present perfect to talk about actions that are still going on.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students listen to the song "Someone like you" by Adele, a famous, young English singer. They must guess whose life story is going to be read. Once students have gotten the name of the person, they start giving ideas on what they know about her. Then, students are given the story of Adele. They must read alone and underline ideas they consider important to share them later.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session, mainly pointing at discovering how students do an independent reading and what kinds of strategies they use, if so, to understand the text.
<b>Session</b>	4
<b>Reflective objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To think about a famous person's points of view about her.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To fill in a summary chart on the main facts on the story read as a basic level of understanding the text (scanning it).</li> <li>To write down an opinion on the story read.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To write specific details using the correct spelling.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students read the story of Adele again, but this time aloud for the class. They take turns to read paragraphs. Clarifications on ideas and vocabulary are done. Once students have read again, they are given a "life story summary chart" which they must fill in. At the end of the chart, they must say what the singer's ideas are about life and also, they must provide their opinion on the reading.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session as well as students artifacts to see how students interact with the text, among them as well, how they scan and text and finally, how they negotiate meaning when reading aloud in the class.

<b>Session</b>	5
<b>Reflective Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To provide arguments orally on the consequences of being a mischievous kid by having done a reading, analysis, evaluation and inferences on a story read.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To read in pairs to negotiate the understanding of the story of a fictional character.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify and learn new vocabulary in context.</li> <li>To reinforce the use of present simple tense.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students are given a short text in which the famous fictional character Tom Sawyer tells them some mischiefs he has done. They must read in pairs and write down the mischiefs they find in the reading. They must think about the possible consequences of these actions and share their ideas with the class.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session as well as students' artifacts.
<b>Session</b>	6
<b>Reflective objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain what one should do in certain situations instead of mischievous.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To express what I would do if I were Tom Sawyer in the situations he lived by means of a comic strip.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To use simple statements to communicate ideas.</li> <li>To represent ideas using pictures.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students are given a paper in which they are supposed to draw some pictures to represent what they would do if they were Tom Sawyer living those situations he faced. They share the comic with the class for the others to guess what they wanted to mean. Authors of the comics state their interpretations.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session to unveil students' representations through pictures and simple statements as well as to get informed on their criticism towards situations one can be put through.
<b>Session(s)</b>	7-8
<b>Reflective objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To reflect upon oneself in terms of characteristics, experiences and beliefs so that a description can be done.</li> <li>To provide arguments when describing.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To write the first entry of one's life story.</li> <li>To check, correct and rewrite the first entry of one's life story.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To use full sentences appropriately, in the present and past tenses, to write in first person.</li> <li>To support ideas using simple linking words.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students are given a paper in which they must write the first entry of their life story in a paragraph or two. They must take into account the following prompts

	<p>for a brainstorming before starting to write.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do I know the story about my name? What does my name mean?</li> <li>2. Where am I from? What do I think of my city?</li> <li>3. How am I? What characteristics, talents and abilities did God give me?</li> <li>4. Am I a Christian person? Why? How did I become a Christian person?</li> <li>5. What are the most beautiful moments I have experienced with God?</li> </ol> <p>Next class, students must read carefully what they wrote, with the help of the teacher, to improve their first draft.</p>
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session to identify students' processes and activities to do the task. Also, students' artifacts are analyzed in terms of organization and content.
<b>Session(s)</b>	9-10
<b>Reflective Objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To think about one's family in terms of their qualities and weaknesses.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To write the second entry of one's life story.</li> <li>• To revise the second entry of one's life story, both in terms of form and content aimed at expressing.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To use full sentences appropriately, in the present and past tenses, to write in first person.</li> <li>• To support ideas using simple linking words.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	<p>Students must fill in a diagram on the qualities and weaknesses people in their family have. Once they have done this, they must start writing the second entry of their life story, taking also into account the next questions:</p> <p>Who do I consider being part of my family?  How are people in my family?  What kind of activities do we like doing together?  What are the best moments we have experienced together as a family?</p>
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session to identify students' processes and activities to do the task. Also, students' artifacts are analyzed in terms of organization and content.
<b>Session(s)</b>	11-12
<b>Reflective Objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reflect upon own likes and dislikes and how they define personality.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write the third entry of my life story.</li> <li>• To revise the third entry of the life story, both in terms of form and content aimed at expressing.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To write full sentences using the verb "like" as well as the negative form "don't like".</li> <li>• To support ideas using simple linking words.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students must bring pictures of themselves doing their hobbies and favorite activities. They must make a poster in which they show the things they like, the

	ones they dislike and how they define who they are and the way they act. They must write ideas on it to explain it.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session to identify students' processes and activities to do the task. Also, students' artifacts are analyzed in terms of organization and content.
<b>Session</b>	13-14
<b>Reflective Objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To think about future plans.</li> <li>To reflect on what is being done in order to achieve those plans.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To write the fourth entry of one's life story</li> <li>To revise the fourth entry of the life story, both in terms of form and content aimed at expressing.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To express future plans using "will", "want to", "plan to".</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students must make a list of ideas they have about the future, it is, what they plan to do. They must write a two-paragraph text in which they explain what they want for their future in terms of academic, material and personal achievements. They must also explain what they are doing in the present to achieve those plans.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session to identify students' processes and activities to do the task. Also, students' artifacts are analyzed in terms of organization and content.
<b>Session(s)</b>	15-16
<b>Reflective Objectives (C.T)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To consider a partner's life story as a text to be explored.</li> </ul>
<b>Literacy Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To read a partner's life story to get to know him/her.</li> <li>To write view points and feeling towards a partner's life story.</li> </ul>
<b>Linguistic Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To use verbs as "say" and "tell" to report main ideas said in a life story.</li> <li>To use present tense, coherence and cohesion in simple tenses to tell write opinions on a partners' life story.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity</b>	Students are given a life story of a partner for them to read. They must read the first two entries and report the main events said by the autor. They are suggested to use a mind map to summarize ideas. However, they must go beyond this stage and when they read the other two entries, they are supposed to write a note to their partner telling their opinions and feelings in regards to his/her story.
<b>Data collected</b>	Field notes based on the observation of the session to identify students' processes and interaction to do the task. Also, students' artifacts are analyzed in regards to organization and content.

Finally, an interview was administered to a sample of the class in order to find out

their ideas and thoughts about the intervention carried. In the next section, you, as a reader, will find the chapter of analysis where a discussion and explanation of the findings is done.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Doing research implies a tough part, which I dare to say is the hardest in the process, that is called *data analysis*. Freeman (1998) states that it is the process of discovering responses from collected information which is related to the inquiry. In the same line of thought, Patton (2002) asserts that data analysis is the process in which the researcher makes sense of data and transforms it into a comprehensible whole. In this chapter, the reader will find the analysis procedures explained and supported and finally, the findings are shown in the categories construction and development.

#### **Data Analysis Approach**

The data analysis process followed in this research has elements which match with the *grounded approach or theory*. This is a type of inductive method in which findings arise from data by means of the interaction the researcher does with them (Patton, 2002). In the same line of thought, Glasser & Strauss (cited by Patton, 2002) focus on the importance of the immersion in data researchers must do in order to let meanings and relationships come out. Therefore, the purpose of applying the grounded approach is to build theory after analysis has been done, instead of testing any pre-established theoretical framework. Of course, a research as the one presented in this report has a literature review explained before the implementation was done, but the purpose of that theory is to illuminate the findings and suggest a way to label them in the interpretation process which let categories emerge from data.

In the process of doing research, one of the most important things analysts must deal with is objectivity or avoiding bias. In order to do so, researchers must follow systematic procedures. These procedures are offered by the grounded approach as a framework to be taken into account (Patton, 2002). The theory built once the analysis has been done must resemble the reality under study. In regards to this, Patton asserts that grounded theory “[...] operates from a correspondence perspective in that it aims to generate explanatory propositions that correspond to real world phenomena” (p. 489).

In this sense, the findings that will be presented as follows, show the construction of categories which were found out looking deeply at data so that the research questions could be approached. Therefore, findings gotten from analysis in here describe how students read and wrote and whether the processes they followed could promote critical thinking or not. This description becomes a review of the phenomenon. However, it is necessary to clarify that although the theoretical framework is not proved, it is taken into account and related in order to discover the correspondences this phenomenon has with what authors have said before about it.

Creswell (cited by Marshall, 2002) suggests that there is certain suppositions theorists share in regards to the grounded approach. These suppositions are what characterize the grounded theory. First of all, and as it has been said before, the grounded approach aims at generating theory gotten from data. Secondly, this emergent theory focuses on the way individuals interact in terms of the phenomenon being studied. Third, the data from which the theory comes out are acquired by means of fieldwork. Fourth, the

analysis starts as soon as data is available and keeps on during the whole data collection process. And the fifth, among other characteristics, has to do with the constant comparison and questioning that takes places in the process of analyzing data.

In the case of the present study and as it was said before, the analysis discussion that the reader will find in this chapter corresponds to a corpus of hypotheses gained through the data gathered. Of course, this analysis aims at revealing how students followed certain processes in the EFL sixth grade class to achieve specific skills. The data were gotten by means of different instruments (see Chapter 3) which all belong to the observation method. This analysis started with memos or preliminary reflections written as soon as possible, after the data collected was at hand (see appendix 8). Finally, the categories constructed are related to the research questions so that answers, implications and contributions can be discussed.

Finally, it is necessary to say that the grounded approach gives researchers some steps which need to be followed so that pieces of data become findings and findings become a constructed theory or interpretation narrative, as I prefer to call it. Thus, one begins with preliminary descriptions of patterns found in the data. Then, conceptualizing must be done. After that, categories must be explained in terms of their properties and dimensions and finally, those categories have to be organized in a logical system that stands for an interpretation to explain the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). These procedures will be explained for the present research in the next section and they all will build up the findings.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

To start a data analysis process, it is important to take into account some steps, as said before, to get to a comprehensible theory drawn out of the collected information. In regards to this, Merriam (1998) says that the first thing a researcher must do is to organize raw data. All data collected must be put together and then, it is supposed to be classified by a certain way which lets the analyst easily access to them. In my case, what I did first was to organize field notes apart from artifacts. In this sense, the classification I made to data was in relation to the type of instrument and therefore, kinds of data which could be gotten from it; in other words, interaction, utterances and involvement in the intervention could be seen from the field notes, while students' individual responses were gotten from the artifacts. This was the criterion I had in mind for arranging the data. Thus, field notes were put in a folder from the first to the last and then, artifacts or students' products in another folder for documents. They were also organized by date and in regards to the intervention cycle they belonged to (see data collection procedures in Chapter 3 for the cycles of the intervention).

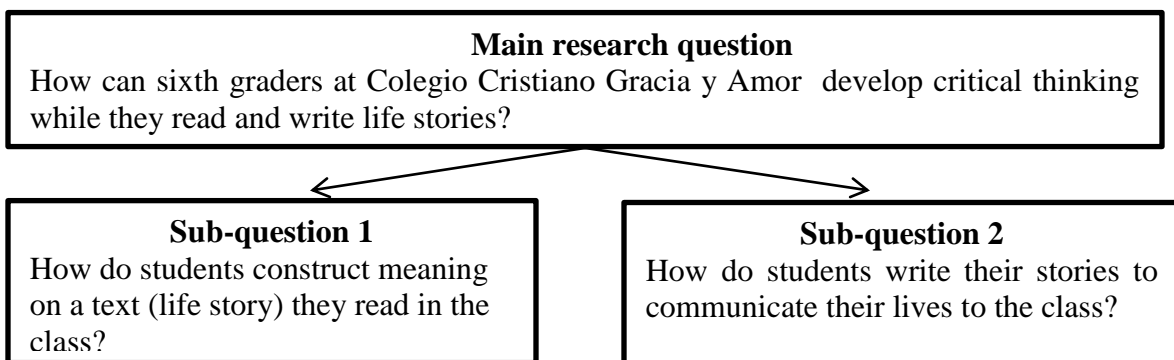
Then, according to Strauss & Corbin (1990), microanalysis needs to be done in order to find initial categories. To do so, I started reading the field notes I had collected cycle by cycle to find out repeated patterns such as students' responses to tasks or at least, to name meaningful events, for instance, how they interacted in class. Once I had done this, I started to write some *memos* in order to explain my thoughts about the emergent concepts. In regards to this, Strauss & Corbin (1990) propose that memos are the researcher's record on preliminary analysis and therefore, initial interpretation. This is basically what I did as the second step in the process of analyzing data from field notes and I did it by trying to group the repeated patterns under a name which could let me describe how things happened. These memos first appeared in the column for reflection and

thoughts as designed in the field notes format (see appendix 6). Then, after analysis had also been done from the artifacts, memos became simple notes under a tentative label.

After writing the memos, I started analyzing the emerging categories deeper as they appeared in the data. I had to work on explaining them in terms of their characteristics (called properties) and the extent of variation they present under certain circumstances in the studied phenomenon. Strauss & Corbin (1990) call this the development of categories. In the same line of thought, they call axial coding to the process in which sub-categories (if there are so) are developed and relationships among categories are found and explained in order to reduce the amount of data at hand. In this sense, I had to read and read again the preliminary categories I came up with in order to find any relationships to group and explain them. These categories will be presented in the next section, where they are related to the research questions in order to answer them and of course, aim at responding to the main research question.

## **Findings**

The categories that build the present analysis of findings are explained in the chart below, showing their correspondence to the research questions and the subcategories they suggest. After that, they will be explained and supported, one by one, taking into account the triangulation technique (see Chapter 3).



**Category 1:** Students understand the text through class interaction.

**Sub-category 1.1:** When interacting with others in the class, students make use of non-verbal communication to understand the text.

**Sub-category 1.2:** When interacting with others in the class, students use the L1 to clarify the understanding of the text and express their ideas.

**Category 2:** Asking questions allow students understand the text.

**Sub-category 2.1:** Students' questions allow them to understand the text.

**Sub-category 2.2:** Teacher's questions foster students' critical understanding of the text.

**Category 3:** Clear, specific prompts are useful to provide students with ideas for writing.

**Sub-category 3:** Prompts guide students to organize their ideas for writing.

**Category 4:** Writing life stories let students expand on ideas about them.

The present study sought to explore how practicing literacy through life stories could promote students' critical thinking skills development. However, since literacy deals with both, reading and writing, it is, to how individuals relate to the written word and the context that surround texts (see Chapter 2), it was necessary to divide the main question into two sub-questions, namely, one for reading and one for writing. For that reason, the findings are organized according to the sub-question they answered so that the main research question can be responded in relation to critical thinking; in other words,

explaining how the processes and steps students followed when reading and writing life stories took them to high order skilled thinking.

Thus, to find out how students constructed meaning on a life story read in class, which is the first sub-question, two categories were identified. The first one says that *students understand the text through class interaction*, which one comprehends, responds to the “how” of the question. In the same line of thought, the second category claims that *asking questions allow students understand the text*, which also explains how students came to comprehend, interpret and even, criticize a text. Accordingly, these categories have some sub-categories which develop them, taking into account different variables from the context that build them.

In the same way, to determine how students wrote their stories to communicate their lives, two categories emerged as well. The first one states that *prompts are useful to provide students with ideas for writing*, which develops thoughts on how those prompts are used for students as clues that lead them to outline their ideas and to think of more. This category therefore is explained by two subcategories. Finally, the second category aiming at responding to this sub-question declares that *writing life stories let students expand on ideas about them*. This last category will be explained at the end of the chapter and it does not have sub-categories because of its generality.

### **Category 1: Students Understand the Text through Class Interaction.**

First of all, it is important to remember that this category responds to the first research sub-question. However, it is also necessary to clarify, from the theoretical

framework presented in Chapter 2, that when the question refers to “construct meaning”, it means to how students read, understand and interpret a text so that they can have their final construction of meaning in regards to that text (Scholes, 1987). In the same line of thought, the critical thinking theory asserts that once a thinker has interpreted a piece of information, he is able to analyze it, evaluate it, make inferences and explain how he arrived to the conclusions he did in regards to that information (Facione, 1990). For that reason, the first category to explain findings was named the way above.

Once these clarifications have been done, I must explain what the category introduced above means. Students in the present study worked with life stories as the material for reading. The reading tasks, of course, took place in class. However, students did not read individually at all. Instead, they read together as a class, taking turns to read, reading aloud and sharing ideas when reading. For this reason, I call the type of reading they did an “interactive reading” since it occurred while interacting with others in the class, not only with their peers, but also with me as the teacher. Nevertheless, it must be clarified that it was not interactive just because they took turns to read or read aloud, but also, and most important, because discussions about meanings, examples and general understanding took place while reading. If they had read alone, they could not probably have had these possibilities.

In this sense, the analysis of data showed that students could get an understanding of the text by taking advantage of the fact that they were in class with other people who were able to help clarify things, share ideas, negotiate meaning, contribute to unveil the meaning of words, phrases, quotations, etc., (as it is going to be substantiated later on when

justifying the sub-categories). More specifically, the help students had for understanding the texts in class came from two different sources, namely: the use of non-verbal communication and the use of the mother tongue (that I will call L1 from now on) when clarifying ideas. In regards to this, Clavijo (2007) asserts that literacy demands a complex interaction readers/writers do, not only with the written word, but also with the environment that surrounds them in the moment of dealing with these skills. From my viewpoint, others are present in the environment that surrounds students when they read in the classroom and for that reason, they become influential in the process of understanding the text. Now, after having done a general definition of the category, I will make a description of the two sub-categories, defining them, illustrating them with data samples and discussing the findings in regards to theory.

**Sub-category 1.1: When interacting with others in the class, students make use of non-verbal communication to understand the text.**

Non-verbal communication has to do with the use of other systems to express and convey meaning, which are different from the written language. It includes, among other types, gestures and body movements. As stated before, there are certain behaviors such as asking questions, translating, laughing, etc., which appear only in interaction with others. Therefore, non-verbal communication appeared when students were reading the given texts because I was there, as a teacher, to make use of something different from the English written word to make them understand ideas from the text. In the next fragments from field notes, it can be seen how non-verbal communication was an aid to help students understand something they saw incomprehensible in the text.

“A girl read the first paragraph. We stopped to understand the general idea. A boy read the second paragraph [...] I added some explanations both, orally and with gestures for the third paragraph which I read. From then on, other students read. They asked some words, from time to time, whose meaning they did not know” (field notes, entry #4, April 18 2013).

The excerpt above corresponds to the reading of the first life story introduced to class, so it belongs to the collecting cycle 1 (see data collection procedures in chapter 3), session 1 (see pedagogical intervention, chapter 4). This example seems to be something very common in the EFL classroom and in actually it is, but, as I said before, the importance of this event lays on the fact that students need to understand a text and by interacting among them as well as with the teacher, they can have extra information, such as non-verbal signals, to comprehend, at certain point in the text, something they are not getting. It can be seen, again, in another excerpt from a field notes entry.

“David was interested in knowing why Adele talked about “Playboy” since there was a quote at the bottom of the paper, by Adele, which said something about this. David said “¿cómo así profe lo que dice ahí: *I make music to be a musician, not to be on the cover of playboy?* ¿Osea que ella hace música para Playboy o cómo así?” He laughed. Others did too. Andrés said “¿luego qué es Playboy?”. Santiago answered “una revista de mujeres [...] yo la he visto cuando voy a comprar juegos”. He seemed nervous because of the topic. I said “ya voy a explicar”. I read the quote and explained it both, verbally and with gestures. I made them know, in English, that what the singer meant is that she just interested in showing her talent, not her body. She wants to do very good music instead of being a model with a beautiful body. They showed their understanding by nodding” (field notes, entry #6, April 25 2013).

The fragment presented before is taken from the field notes which recorded what was observed in the reading session of the second life story introduced to class (collecting cycle 1, session 3). As it can be seen, non-verbal communication played a very important role in making students understand what a quote meant. I had to use hand movements, body posture and facial expressions so that students could figure out what was it that the singer from the story wanted us, the readers, to comprehend and know about her. The excerpt above supports the second sub-category as well, since it deals with the relevance and need

of L1 when getting to understand a text. Moreover, it also corroborates the influence of class interaction in the process of reading comprehension.

But how does one know that those explanations led students to understand the text? As it was stated in Chapter 2, reading as such deals with the ability to get the structure of a text as well as to get an idea of the content, as being able to summarize events (Scholes, 1985). In this line of thought, students were able to understand the main idea of the stories since they could answer the comprehension questions that followed the reading task, as seen in the samples below. However, it must be born in mind that comprehension is not attributed to non-verbal responses only, but they constitute an essential tool in the process.

**1. Stage 1: What did you read?**

- a. How old is Yuleini? 13 years old
- b. What does she do during the day while her mother and stepfather work? care for the four children and cook their meals.
- c. What does Light and Life Foundation provide her? At school
- d. What does she like from school? the best teacher
- e. What is the difficulty Yuleine has to access education? the birth registration
- f. What does she think about life? What does she want? she doesn't like married in the future

[Briyita M. Excerpt of student's artifact, First stage on reading story 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 18<sup>th</sup>]

**Life Story Summary Chart**

<b>Full name:</b>	Addie Laurie Blue Adkins
<b>Birth date:</b>	May 5
<b>Place of Birth:</b>	north london
<b>Parents:</b>	Penny and Mark
<b>Education:</b>	Brit School for performing
<b>Occupation(s):</b>	Mother and singer
<b>Physical appearance:</b>	in a fat girl
<b>Achievements:</b>	She won a grammys and golden globe
<b>Difficulties:</b>	Her father had problems with alcohol
<b>Ideas about life:</b>	She likes her
<b>My opinion about that story:</b>	her story is sad and fantastic

[Santiago T. Excerpt of student's artifact, First stage on reading story 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 26<sup>th</sup>]

As it can be seen in the samples above, which were the second stage in reading the first and second life stories (collecting cycle 1, sessions 1 and 3), students could get to a simple understanding of the text not only because of the decoding process they did, but also due to the help they found of assuring ideas were clear by using different mechanisms, in this case and what I want to highlight, the non-verbal communication, as shown from the pieces of field notes. It is also relevant to bear in mind that for showing their understanding, students took parts from the texts to explain their ideas or even paraphrased what it said.

In regards to the first sub-question this sub-category aims at responding, I must clarify, once again, that data showed how students arrived to a simple understanding of a text when reading it. For that reason, in order to arrive to a judgment on the texts, which implies more elaborated thinking skills so that students could dialogue with the stories, an explanation and exemplification of the second category must be done, in the light of theory. All in all, this first sub-category of category 1 showed how students reached the first step in the reading process as discussed in Chapter 2. The second sub-category of category 1 did as well, as will be shown as follows.

**Sub-category 1.2: When interacting with others in the class, students use the L1 to clarify the understanding of the text and express their ideas.**

In the EFL learning context, the use of the L1 has been demonized to certain extent because it seems to interfere when getting proficient in the target language. Nevertheless, when beginners are learning a second language, it usually happens that they turn to the basis system they know in order to get the meaning of a piece of information or to find a correspondence in terms of structures. When students read alone, they commonly turn to their bilingual dictionaries to do so or in the case they are good levelled, they do it in mind. But in the case of this intervention, where students read interactively with their peers and their teacher in the class, they looked for translation from others. So, when other possibilities such as non-verbal communication and paraphrasing have been used, the mother tongue appears and becomes a bridge to clarify ideas. In regards to this, McKay (1993) says that according to research, once learners have acquired certain literacy skills in

their mother tongue, it is easier for them to develop the second one. And for me, this is the reason why students switch from one code to another and this helps them in their comprehension process meanwhile they become better users of L2.

“Spanish was used sometimes when it was necessary to clarify ideas. We finished reading the first story. When we had just finished, I asked “what do you think about the story? What’s your opinion?” Someone said “muy triste”. A boy said “tremendo porque uno tiene a los papás y no los valora, los trata mal y mire esa niña sin papás que la quieran” (field notes, entry #4, April 18 2013).

In the example above, which is a response given in regards to the first life story read in class (collecting cycle 1, session 1), at the beginning, there is a clear statement about the use of L1 for clarifying ideas which means that the students took advantage of me as a teacher when reading the text and therefore, they asked for clarification in Spanish when they definitely did not get certain ideas although some extra aids had been used. But what I want to highlight here, as this sub-category claims, is that students use the L1 also to show their understanding by giving their comments, opinions and concerns about what the text suggests. As seen in the sample above, the student wanted to express what he interpreted from the text though he did not have maybe neither the words nor the structure to say that in English and for that reason, he naturally used Spanish. What is more, here it can be seen how the student, to certain extent, reaches a second step in the process of reading, as explained in Chapter 2, Scholes (1985) states that when a reader is able to discuss the meaning of the text, to give the text his response, he has stepped the field of interpretation, which goes beyond reading itself.

Besides, this excerpt also shows how reflective a student can be in regards to a text because he takes his prior knowledge and experiences to the reading task in order to relate

his own reality to what the text says. In regards to this, Clavijo (cited by Clavijo, 2007) as explained in Chapter 2, claims that when reading, the language user interacts with the context that surround the text and those surroundings include values and experiences. This is what this student is putting into practice in here. Also, Gutiérrez (2010) states that when approaching a text, readers use the background knowledge they have about the world to interpret discourse. This characteristic is seen in the sample presented.

“After that, Isabella asked “¿cómo digo, tiene, pero no de *tiene un carro* sino de *tiene pelo largo*” I said “*she has... sea pelo, carro, o lo que sea, igual es de posesión*”; she said “ah, OK, gracias, profe”. Finally, Sofía C asked “¿cómo digo que *a ella le gusta su apariencia?*” I told her “pues así”; Sofía said “*she likes...*” I said “Aja, *she likes...what?*” Sofía said “*her...*” I said “*her...appearance, así como dice en el cuadro*” (field notes, entry #7, April 26 2013).

In the sample shown above, the students were trying to confirm the correct grammatical use of verbs and sentences so that they could express their understanding on the second story read in class (collecting cycle 1, session 3), because they had to fill in a summary chart. Here, in interaction with me as the teacher, they gained a better understanding of the text and the comprehension task by asking how to explain what they wanted to about the story. From this example, one can see again that students are in a basic level of reading and reporting what they got from the text, as seen in the examples of the first sub-category presented before.

“After having read the story in pairs, students are given some questions to answer. The first one I wrote on the board was “what is it to be mischievous”? A girl asked “profe, ¿qué es eso “mischievous”?” “Look up in the dictionary”, I said [...] The girl said “profe, ¿digo “travieso”, “malicioso” y ya?”. “No”, I said. “Explica en ingles qué es ser traviseo; no sé, desobediente, por ejemplo” (field notes, entry #8, May 8 2013).

In this sample, regarding the third life story read in class 8 (collecting cycle 1, session 5), it can be seen how the student was concerned about a word whose meaning she

did not know, but her worry consisted of getting the understanding of the word in order to explain why this word was in the text and how it described the character of the story. Therefore, one can see here that L1 is used not only to comprehend the use of a word, but also, to be able to express own ideas, own construction of meaning from the text. Also, I, as the teacher, used the L1 to make her understand the purpose of asking for that word, not to translate it, but to be able to explain it. After I had clarified that, this is what the student and her mate answered:

① What is it to be "mischievous"?

② Give examples from the story where the boy is mischievous.

③ What can be the consequences?

Solution

① Is a person who is not quiet and play all the time.

② When aunt Polly told he paint the fence in white.

③ The person that not obey

[Alejandra P. & Sofía C. Excerpt of students' artifact, First stage on reading story 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, May 8<sup>th</sup>]

As it has been observed, students were able to express their ideas, their construction of meaning related to the questions asked about the text, because first, they had asked about what they were demanded, which in L2 was not clear for them. To sum up, students' use of their mother tongue here is seen as a bridge to gain understanding in the target language and according to the samples presented, it contributed to the reading comprehension of students, first, at a literal level or what Scholes (1985) calls *reading* as such. Now, regarding interpretation and criticality, the second category found must be explained and developed.

## **Category 2: Asking questions allow students understand the text.**

To begin with, it is important to bear in mind that this second category still responds to the first research sub-question which asks about how students construct meaning on a life story read in class. Therefore, it is also necessary and precise to define what a critical understanding of a text means for the present study, as discussed in Chapter 2, in order to show evidence from the data collected. From Scholes' model (1985), criticism is the third stage in the process of reading in which readers are able to confront their understanding of the text with that of the author. However, in the case of my implementation, students do not only confront with assumptions in the text, but also with their classmates and even teacher's understanding of the text. In Lerner's words (2001), reading becomes a meaningful practice when readers can put in the others' shoes, finding similarities and differences between the author's -I would say character's because of the stories-experiences and their own. For me, this is also a critical perspective towards reading because it moves from merely getting an idea of the content of the text and summarizing its events, to a stage in which the reader is able to unveil outstanding thoughts from the text as well as compare and contrast them with his.

In the same line of thought, Ennis (1997) argues that critical thinking implies reflection on static ideas. Among other characteristics, he also says that critical thinking requires individuals being able to state their position in relation to issues. Facione (2011) says that when individuals have been able to interpret, it is, report information on an issue they understand and know, they can give a step to analysis, which consists of finding correlations among concepts and the implications they have. Finally, it is also said that

critical questioning is a requirement for becoming a critical thinker. All in all, a critical understanding of a text, for me and as it was evidenced in the data, means that readers were able to ask and answer questions which demand a deeper analysis and evaluation of ideas which led them to reflect upon them, instead of assuming superficial thoughts as such. This definition is what will be argued in detail while explaining the sub-categories that build this category.

### **Sub-category 2.1: Students' questions allow them to understand the text.**

Taking into account the first category explained here which deals with reading in interaction with others in the class, it is plausible to say that questions appear only when we act with others upon a text, but these questions have a purpose, not only of making our understanding of the text easier because we clarify/confirm ideas, but also of promoting critical reasoning towards issues present in texts because we can ask about things not given explicitly in them, that we can infer and read between lines. It means that we can be able to uncover hidden meanings and assumptions from the texts. On the contrary, we can also discuss about things given in the text, but aiming at doing a deeper reflection in relation to them.

“Then I told them to work on answering the reading comprehension questions posted at the end of the story and that I had called *Stage 1*. They made groups and worked on that. Some people asked me for clarification since they could not understand what a question was about. I made some clarification even in Spanish. They discussed among them to answer properly” (field notes, entry #4, April 18 2013).

In this fragment from a field notes form, -which corresponds to the first life story read in class-, it can be seen how students used questions not only asked to the teacher, but also among them in order to make clear what they were asked about in relation to the story just read. Also, they used their discussion so that they could solve the task properly in

relation to the text. Despite students here do not show a critical thinking towards the text, it can be confirmed that their questions helped them understanding. However, in the example that follows, it is shown how students moved from a basic reading and interpretation, to a more analytic step in the process.

“A girl came near me and told me “¿cómo así la segunda pregunta, profe, si mi historia no tiene ningún parecido con la de ella, cómo la comparo?” I told her “precisamente, comparar no es sólo encontrar cosas parecidas, sino diferentes entre una cosa y otra” (field notes, entry #5, April 19 2013).

From this excerpt, which is from the same reading as said before (collecting cycle 1, session 2), it can be seen how the student was seeing only the obvious in the question she was asked about the text. She had to do a journal about the first story read and the question she had to answer was “What do I think about my story in comparison to Yuleini’s story?” Yuleini is the name of the girl whose story we had just read. Her story was difficult because her life was marked by having no access to education, being poor, having to care her little brothers and having to do housework most of the time. She had been the first child of a teenager (see appendix 9). According to this panorama, Yuleini’s story seemed that it could hardly be similar to my students’ life because of their familiar environments and economical possibilities (see Chapter 3, participants’ description) and this is why the student in the sample above said so. From my viewpoint, asking helped her and even all the class because I elucidated the purpose of the question for all of them, to go under a deeper analysis of what comparing and contrasting mean as a reading strategy.

Juleini's story  
stage 3

By: Laila Maura Mateus

Date:

Student's Journal

- 1 how did I feel Reading The story ?
- 2 what do I think about my story in comparison TO Juleini's story ?

Solution

1 me senti triste al leer que ella vive en pobreza y no puede estudiar por que no tiene Registro CIVIL y ademas tiene que cuidar a sus hermanos y tambien le toca cocinar.

2 Juleini piensa salir adelante apesar de su pobreza pero mi vida es feliz y le doy gracias a Dios por que yo no estoy en medio de la pobreza.

[Lala M, student's journal. Third stage in reading life story 1, first collecting cycle]

The sample above can be seen as a piece of substantiation for many purposes that are developed in the present report of findings. First of all, looking at the student's answer, one can corroborate the claim that I said before in regards to the deep difference between

Yuleiny's story (the girl from the first life story read) and my students' living conditions. Secondly, it also confirms how the use of L1 allowed students state their opinions and feelings in regards to text, as explained in the sub-category 1.2. Third, it shows that the student could move from a literal reading stage to interpretation one, giving his response to the text (Scholes, 1985). Moreover, the student was able to analyze the character's living conditions and evaluate them in comparison to her own. These steps are framed within the critical thinking conditions, as explained in Chapter two, according to Facione (2011).

“David said “¿cómo así profe lo que dice ahí: *I make music to be a musician not to be on the cover of Playboy?* ¿Osea que ella hace música para Playboy o cómo así?” He laughed. Others did too. Andrés said “¿luego qué es Playboy?”. Santiago answered “una revista de mujeres...yo la he visto cuando voy a comprar juegos” (field notes, entry #6, April 25 2013).

From the sample above, which was already used in supporting the first category, it can be seen, in regards to this category, how the question of the student, at first sight, seemed to be asking about the literal meaning of the statement from the reading because he tried to translate it in order to understand it. This episode took place when reading the second life story, which was about the English pop singer Adele. The quotation the student referred to was said by her. However, this question brought the opportunity of discussing what students knew. But, anyway, this could not solve their inquiry. Therefore, I had to explain them because even, they got nervous due to the topic. Thus, I read the quote and explained it, both verbally, in English, and with gestures, that what she meant is that she is just interested in showing her talent, not her body; in other words, that she wants to do very good music instead of having a beautiful body to show. All in all, it was evident that student's question led them search for information which could help understand not only the literal meaning of the text, but also the deeper connotation it had. Of course, it must be

clarified, once again, that this happened because of reading in interaction. The fragment of sample below shows, to confirm this claim, how my explanation guided students to an analytical interpretation of the text quote.

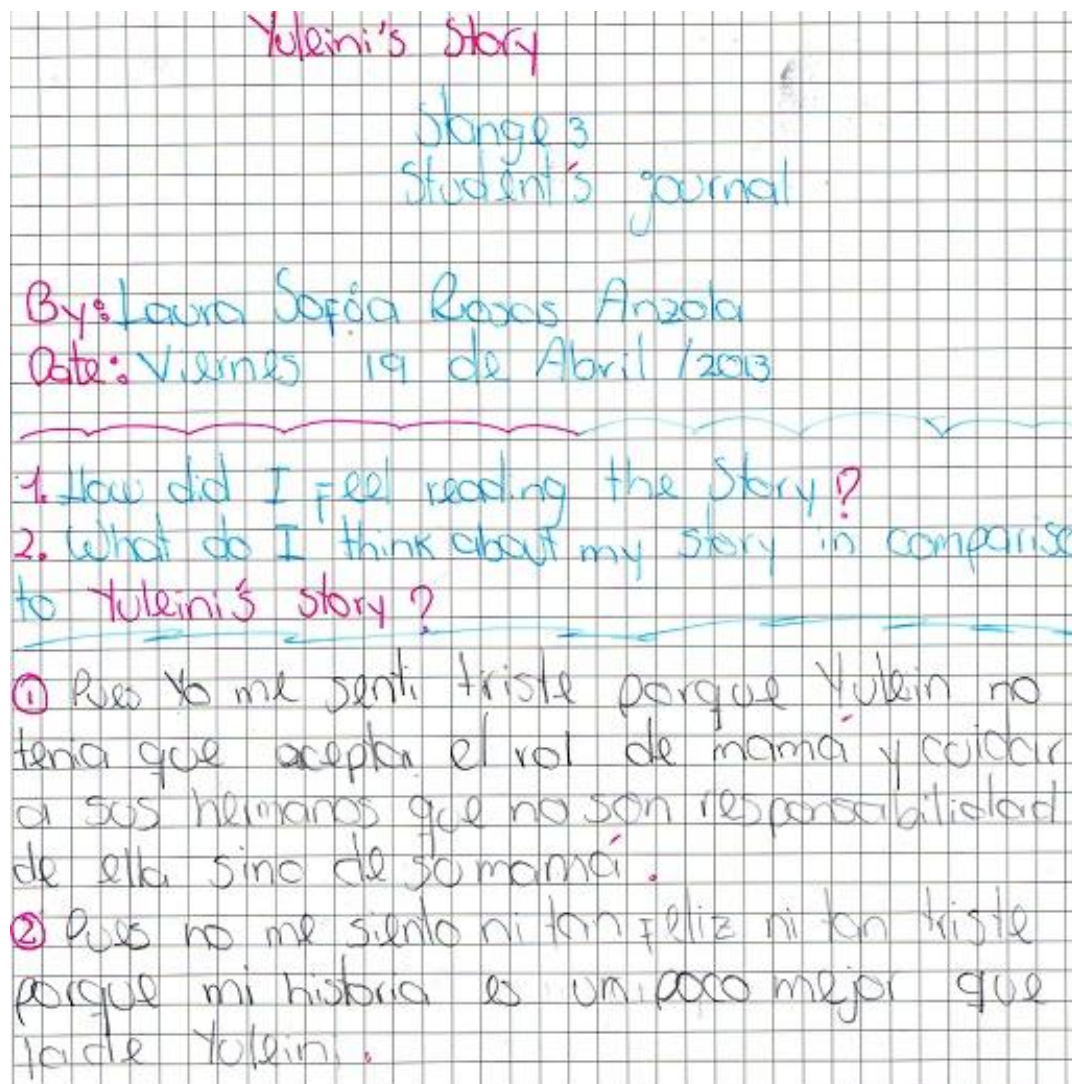
<b>Ideas about life:</b>	She like appearance because she is musician or model.
--------------------------	---

[Isabella Ch. Excerpt of student's artifact, First stage on reading story 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 26<sup>th</sup>]

### **Sub-category 2.2: Teacher's questions foster students' critical understanding of the text.**

As it was said before, the role of questions was important in the process students carried out when reading life stories in class because it benefited their construction of meaning and what is more, it aided them to come to a critical understanding of text. Once more, I must say that for the present research proposal, a critical understanding of a text implies readers to go beyond reporting what a text says. It presupposes confronting own ideas and experiences with the ones presented in the text. It also requires uncovering striking assumptions from the text, commenting about them and being able to argue own opinions in regards to them. However, what is needed to highlight at this point of the analysis is that this time, I will be addressing to the questions asked by the teacher, which provoked students' critical understanding of texts. In regards to this, Clavijo (2007), Cassany (2006) and Lerner (2001) agree on the fact that schools, and to be more specific, teachers, who are the ones responsible for students' learning at the institutions, must promote awareness and criticism in learners so that they can read the world through the

words and go beyond sentences, paragraphs and texts to denude ideologies, viewpoints and visions.



[Student's journal. Third stage in reading life story 1, first collecting cycle]

From this other sample of student's journal, one can see how the questions asked by me as teacher led the student to comment about the text. The kind of questions that I proposed for the journal promoted analysis, evaluation and arguing from students, since they had to explain their ideas and beliefs in regards to the story read, going beyond the

simple retelling of events. In the case of this student, one can see from her first answer that she not only said that she felt “sad” because of the girl from the story, but she also explained why, developing an idea that comes from her own experience and lifestyle. . From the critical thinking literature, as explained in Chapter 2, critical thinkers can interpret, analyze, evaluate, infer and explain what they think (Facione, 2011). In this sense, it can be said that because of the question demanding to respond about her opinion and feelings in relation to the text, the student followed these mental steps to explain what she said.

f. What does she think about life? What does she want?  
I want to ~~work~~ change the story

[Tatiana G. Excerpt of student's artifact, First stage on reading story 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 18<sup>th</sup>]

The sample above corresponds to the last question asked in the reading comprehension stage of the first story, which took place before the journal task just presented above. I took this example because I consider this question that I designed in advanced, demanded students to analyze and make inferences from the text in order to discover what the vision of life of the girl from the story was. As aids or clues in the texts, students had some direct quotes where the girl explained that she wanted to work and study, she did not want to get married and have children soon and she did not want to be a pregnant teenager. She also said that she had seen awful things that happened to kids like her who did not have education, but then, she was taking advantage of having education. With this context in mind, one can see how this student came to a conclusion based on what she read and understood, but with a critical perspective, explaining it with her own words, instead of copying the exact fragment from the text. Despite she used the first

person pronoun –which linguistically should be better replaced by a third person because she is reporting- she is still making a judgment that goes beyond the superficial understanding of the text. It can be confirmed in the excerpt below, taken from the field notes of the session that followed the one above, where the answers to the questions were discussed:

“A girl read what she had written “I don’t like married in the future” I asked her for correction because it was not her, but the girl from the story. I told her to use “she” instead of “I”. Some other did almost the same. There was a girl’s answer which was different. She said “she changed her life”. I took this example to explain students that the girl from the story wanted to change her life, not to repeat mistakes other people in her family or neighborhood had made” (field notes, entry #5, April 19 2013).

Since students worked as a group (as explained before), helping each other to read, understand the text and solve the questions, probably these two girls worked together, it is, the one from the sample before and this one, since their answer is almost the same. Nevertheless, what is important to highlight here is that first not only the question as it was asked in the sheet guided the students to go under a deeper analysis on the text, but also the way I, in my teacher’s role, approached her answer, highlighting then the fact that one should see more in the text that the words themselves and also, that own words must be used to express own constructions of meaning, as these two girls did.

“Then I asked the second part which said “Is it only about money or material things? ¿la pobreza solo tiene que ver con lo material y el dinero?” A boy who had read before, said “No is only money or object, is poverty spirit, poverty moral, poverty intellect” I said “¿qué tal esa respuesta? ¿a qué se refiere la pobreza moral, qué sería la pobreza moral? A girl said “que no saben qué hacer en la vida o cómo actuar” (field notes, entry #5, April 19 2013).

This situation took place immediately after the reading comprehension questions of the first story had been discussed. In there, what I wanted my students to do was to analyze

poverty and teenage pregnancy in the light of problematic social issues since they were present in the story. First, I asked them to define poverty as such and most of them agreed with the idea that it has to do with economic difficulties, lack of money and material things. However, then I asked them to reflect whether poverty only had to do with those kinds of things. According to the boy's answer, it can be seen that he went beyond in his reflection and therefore, he suggested that a person can be poor in many different aspects. What is more, his answer also led another reflective one as it can be seen at the end of the excerpt, where a girl said that being morally poor means being unable to make decisions for life.

In short, I would like to say that it is not only the teacher's responsibility to give students some prompts to go beyond words in order to have a more critical understanding of texts, but it is also his role to guide discussions in class in order to elicit more meaningful, critical opinions. In this way, we will be empowering our students not only to read for their classes, it is, for academic purposes, but we will also give them tools to become critical literate people who can confront discourses in any circumstance as Lerner (2001) suggests. Thus, I would say these samples lead me to think that we, as EFL teachers, are sometimes being static in an interpretation level of reading because we are afraid our students do not have the enough level to go further, it is, to be more analytic when constructing meanings. In other words, we are more focused on linguistic aspects than on higher comprehension skills.

In the samples that follow, which are fragments from students' journals regarding to the first story read, as the ones presented before, I want to focus again on students' answers in relation to the questions I asked to them. I asked them to write a journal in

which they could freely express how they had felt reading the story and what their opinion was in comparing/contrasting Yuleini's story (the girl from story 1) to their own lives. I gave them the questions in English and despite they used Spanish to answer because they felt more comfortable, I want to highlight that proposing these kinds of reflections headed students to follow, to certain extent, some of the steps of critical thinking as Facione (2011) suggests, namely, interpretation, analysis, evaluation of concepts, and explanation of their viewpoints.

1 How did I feel reading the story?

- Yo me senti mas o menos porque su historia impacta, no es facil leer una historia donde habla de pobreza, de embarazos no deseados, donde la vida de ella es frote porque tiene que mentir para que tenga estudio.

2 What do I think about my story in comparison to Yuleini's story?

- Mi historia no es que sea dificil pero tampoco facil. En mi historia hubo dias que no aguantaba pero teniendo a Dios en mi corazon fue que calmarme.

yo	Yuleini's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No fui pobre pero hubo epocas que no fueron faciles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>para ella no es facil, porque esta sola.</li> </ul>

[Angie D. Excerpt of students' artifact, Third stage on reading story 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 19<sup>th</sup>]

1 How did I feel reading story?

Answer: me senti muy conmovida con la historia, ya que a Yuleini le quedo toda la carga del error que cometio su mama

2 What do I think about my story in comparison to Yuleini's story?

Answer: mi historia no es muy parecida porque mi mama me tuvo luego de casarse y no me toco cuidar de mis hermanas

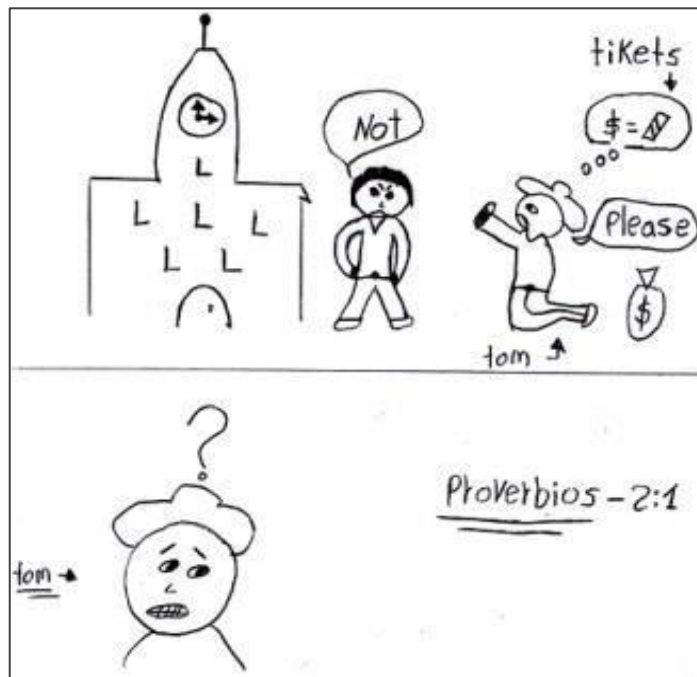
[Julián C. Excerpt of students' artifact, Third stage on reading story 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 19<sup>th</sup>]

1. How did I feel reading the story?  
- me senti impresionado de como le a tocado vivir a Juleini y como le a tocado economicamente

2. What do I think about my story in comparison to Juleini's story?  
- Pues Acomparacion a mi historia mi vida pues que no me he sufrido tanto como ella o mejor dicho no he tenido esos problemas economicos. por ejemplo yo si estoy registrado cuando naci ella no, yo no e sufrido haci economicamente ella si etc. y pues no e tenido tantos problemas como ella.

[Daniel A. Excerpt of students' artifact, Third stage on reading story 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, April 19<sup>th</sup>]

According to the samples above, students had to *interpret* because they had first read the story and were informed about it. Then, they had to *analyze* because they were able to confront their feelings and thoughts with the ones reflected in the text. After that, they *evaluated* the text and its underlying assumptions and events. They did this by means of defining their feelings towards the text; they said it made them feel “sad”, “impressed”, and “touched”. Finally, they could explain, support and develop their ideas through arguing why they felt and thought so. In this final step, students made use, as suggested in the activity, of a comparison between the girl from the story and themselves. This took them, as Scholes (1985) and Lerner (2001) assert, to a stage of reading where they could confront their views with the ones of the text and also, their reading became meaningful since they could contrast experiences and felt “in the other’s shoes”.

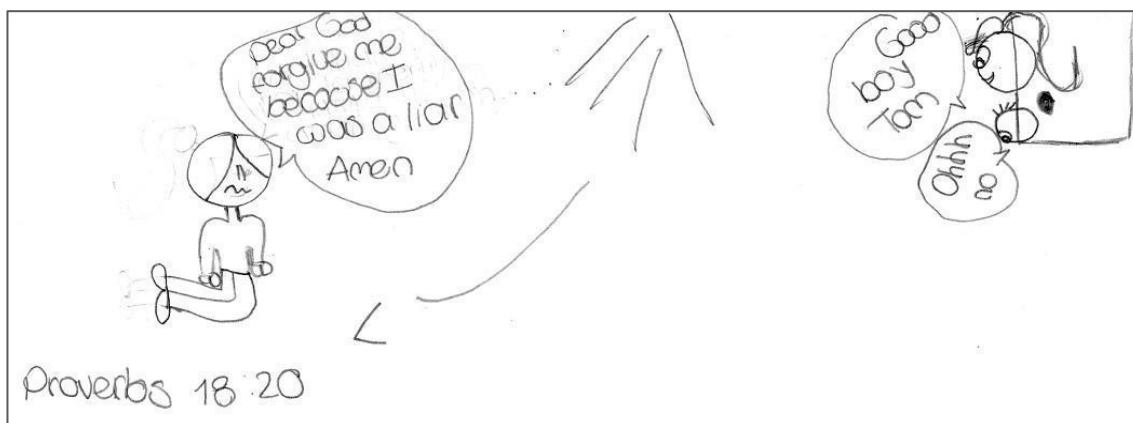


[David V. Excerpt of students' artifact, Third stage on reading story 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, May 9<sup>th</sup>]

The sample above took place in the second session after having read a short adapted fragment from Tom Sawyer. In the first part of this activity, I had asked the students to identify the situations in which Tom misbehaved, or was mischievous, as explained with another sample before. After that, I told them to choose one of those situations and draw how they would behave if they were Tom. In other words, I asked them to rethink of the situation, reflect upon it and the consequences it had and finally, represent graphically what they considered should be done. When suggesting this task, I pushed my students to interpret the events they had read in the story, but from their views so that they could change that reality, as Freire, Giroux and other authors discussed in Chapter 2 say that we must do with learners at school. Scholes (1985) also talks about this and he calls it the “textual power” we must make our students aware of.

From the text, this student chose an episode where Tom had to memorize some Bible verses to get a Bible on Sunday school. However, he did not memorize the verses, but

got the tickets for that prize, lying. As one can see, the student wanted to express that he would ask for the tickets, but he would know that they were not given to him, even if he had money to suborn. What is more, this student also suggested that when trying to do so, God would talk to him through the Bible by giving him this verse “My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you [...]” (Proverbs 2: 1). From this, it can be said that the student aimed at suggesting that if one listens to God’s commandments and obey his word, keeping it in heart, this person will do right, instead of getting in trouble. In here, the student used the Bible verse to argue what he wanted to explain with his picture. At this respect, Trujillo (2002) states that argumentative discourse is part of critical thinking.



[Sofia C. and Alejandra P. Excerpt of students’ artifact, Third stage on reading story 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, May 9<sup>th</sup>]

From this sample, I want to highlight that students were able not only to propose what they would do in a situation like the one Tom was, but also, they used a Bible verse too, to support their thinking. This verse says “From the fruit of their mouth a person’s stomach is filled; with the harvest of their lips they are satisfied” (Proverbs 18: 20). This claim plus what the students drew and what the character said in the bubble of their drawing, mean that if Tom had been honest, he would have felt better. To conclude, it



From: Tatiana Paola Garcia C.  
TO: Santiago Torres.  
Dear - I like to the history, because you have good plans, I like too  
the ice-cream, I don't like too the broccoli, Best regards.  
i Bye!

[Tatiana G, student's artifact, closing cycle, session 16, July 22<sup>nd</sup>]

The sample above belongs to the last session of the closing cycle, in which I told students to write a note to a classmate whose story they had read. I told them the note had to do with expressing their views in regards to their stories as well as comparisons they could make between their stories and those of the others. As seen in the second part of the sample, the student focused on explaining a similarity she found between her name and that of her friend. I insist them on the fact that my questions and in this case, prompts or general guidelines for writing fostered students' analytic and explanatory skills, as stated by Facione (2011), towards the text and provided them with a chance to express things of importance for them, as found as categories 3 and 4.

This last sample show that the student analyzed her mate's story focusing on his likes and compare what she found with her own. These comparisons for me are what I call "putting on the other's shoes" which means that there could be a dialogue between readers and authors. Although, this is something that was facilitated by means of the activity since both, writers and readers were in the same place, at the same time, and authors of stories could read their readers' comments, I want to point out once again the importance of pushing students to read beyond the lines by means of the activities we must design.

**Category 3: Clear, specific prompts are useful to provide students with ideas for**

## **writing.**

To begin with, it is important to bear in mind that this third category responds to the second research sub-question. This one asks about how students write their life stories to express them to the class. For this reason, it is necessary to remember that life stories are seen here as narration and this is understood as telling events that involve people (McEwan & Egan (1995)). These authors also consider that life stories comprise experiences people have lived, understood and conceived so that they can express them to others. Since the question asks about how students could write their life stories, I must support data showed that the prompts I gave my students to write their entries to their “life story portfolio” (as we informally called it within the class sessions) guided them to organize their ideas before starting to write and also elicited more ideas from them so that they could complement their compositions.

Besides, I must also define what prompts are for me and how they are understood in the present study. For Gutiérrez (2010) and Lerner (2001), writing is a skill that let individuals communicate their thoughts and assumptions through words. It means that people have material to talk about, in this case, to write about. However, from my point of view, a writer needs some guidance in order to write; in other words, he requires some clues, cues or prompts which are the basis that tell him what the text must be about. In the case of schooling, languages teachers are the ones responsible for organizing writing sessions in which the student can know what is the purpose of writing a certain composition. Accordingly, for me in this research, prompts correspond to the questions and topics I gave the students to think about and plan to write each one of the four entries they did for their “life story portfolio”.

In here, I also want to highlight Lerner’s view (2001) in regards to writing since she

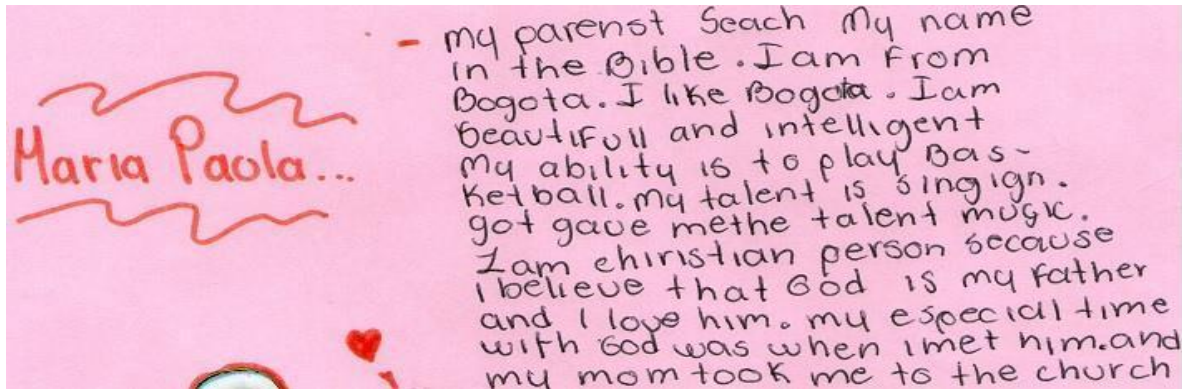
conceives that it is a process, not a static skill one acquires and develops in a single day, but on the contrary, it takes time improving. She also says that teachers must show students this by following a written process in class that let students do an outline, write a first draft, make corrections and rewrite a final version. Consequently, prompts gain importance since they are placed at the beginning of the writing process. Having done a general description of this category, I now proceed to explain each one of the tow sub-categories it involves and I will support them with data collected from the pedagogical intervention.

### **Sub-category 3.1: Prompts guide students to organize their ideas for writing.**

As I explained before, students need some guidance, both in terms of form and content so that they can start writing a composition. Since the objective of the present study was to use life stories in the development of critical thinking skills, students had to write their own stories. Nevertheless, this is not an easy task doing because, as Quevedo (2008) asserts, narrating the self means making sense of own experiences and person´s experiences can be a bunch. As a result, I, as the teacher enrolled in these sessions, had to make decisions on what to ask my students to write. Despite how young they were (12 years old, approximately), they had a lot to say, but I guided them with the prompts so that they could write about what I considered the most important things and moments in their lives.

Thus, in order to write the first entry of their life story and that it became the introduction of the portfolio, I gave students a set of questions which would lead them to do a brainstorming before starting to write. These questions asked about the meaning of their name, their home town, their characteristics and talents and they personal relationship with God (see Chapter 4, p. 75). These prompts headed students to organize their ideas in such a

way that they could put them together. They also gave them confidence for writing because they knew they had to focus on some specific things. Finally, they provided them fluency for writing since they could use the simple grammatical structures and little vocabulary they had at their level (6<sup>th</sup> grade). Then, I would say that my students followed a process in which first, they needed to interact with others since writing implies an audience. Then, they needed to express themselves. In order to express themselves, they needed to have knowledge about what they were going to say and finally, they constructed meaning in the form of a written piece. These steps are Ramírez' model (2007) discussed in Chapter 2.




[María Paula B. Excerpt from student's artifact, first entry on writing own life stories, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, May 15<sup>th</sup>]

In the sample above, it can be evidenced that the student followed the prompts given so that her paragraph kept the sequence of talking about the suggested aspects. She did not hesitate on what to write about. She did not write more things than the asked, either.

However, what I want to emphasize is on the fact that despite language mistakes and lack of transition words, for instance, she made an effort on following the given patterns so that the content she wrote really talked about her in essence. In regards to this Ochs & Capps (1996) claim that narrating the own life stories brings the self to life. In relation to form and the process of writing so that a final paper can be done, I must highlight that, according to

Lerner (2001), students should develop certain autonomy to make corrections of their own compositions. They should also realize, at school, that writing is a process that takes time so that a good text can be written. The sample above corresponds to the final version the student did of this first entry to her life story. I made her corrections in class and told her to incorporate them before rewriting the text. All in all, what she did was to focus on the content, but she also took into account language improvements, to certain extent.

DO I KNOW THE STORY ABOUT MY NAME?  
The story of my name came when my mom wanted  
Isabella, but neither my father nor my brothers  
so my sister suggested I was called Isabella and  
really like it and so I was called "Isabella"  
What does my name mean?  
My name means the one who loves God  
Where am I from?  
I'm from Bogota Colombia  
What do I think about my city



How am I?  
I am Isabella Chavez F I'm 10 years old and my birthday  
July 24.  
What characteristics abilities and talents did God give me?  
I like draw and play a bass, listen a music and see the  
and spending time with my family and friends  
Am I a Christian person?  
yes I consider myself a Christian person  
Why?  
Because I like going to church and I like spending time  
How did I become a C.P?  
was born in Christian home  
What are the most beautiful moments I have experienced  
Once when I was 4 years I wanted a baby sister and I  
ask my parents they said that no baby the when I was 8

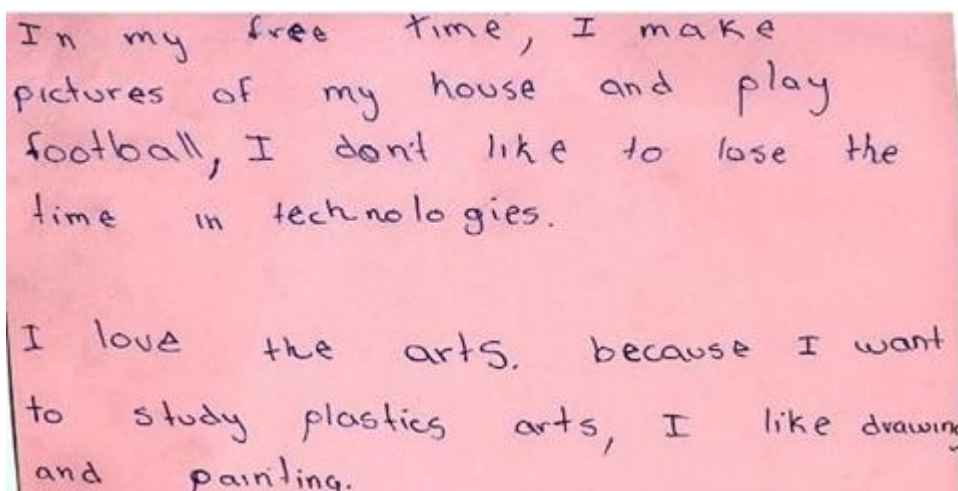
[Isabella Ch. Excerpts from student's artifact, First entry on writing own life stories, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, May 15<sup>th</sup>]

In the case of the student above, she not only used the prompts for organizing her ideas before starting to write, but, instead, she used them for giving the sequence to her final composition. Despite I had told them not to write the questions in the text, but just to take them into account in order to know what the text should include, she preferred to write the questions and answer them and the excerpts above belong to her final “life story portfolio”. Accordingly, it can be said that the student developed autonomy, as suggested by Lerner (2001) since she did what she considered better for her understanding of her story. Maybe, one can speculate also that she determined it was better for her readers to see the organization of her text that way so that they could understand why she said so. In respect to this, Ramírez (2007) asserts that when an individual meets the need to express him/herself, he is able to make decisions not only on the content, but also on the discursive schemas he follows in order to convey meaning.

“[...]Then, I asked them “what’s a like?”. A boy said “gusto, algo que a uno le gusta”. I said “o.k, something one prefers”. He nodded to show agreement. Then I asked again for the class “what kinds of things can we like?” in order to elicit their ideas. They started speaking aloud, naming things such as food, sports, TV programmes, music, school subjects, among others. I wrote them on the board. Then, they had to choose some of them, and did a brainstorming in order to start their writing” (field notes, entry #11, May 29, 2013).

From the excerpt above, it can be seen how the prompt “likes and dislikes” just provided students with the enough ideas to make a list and organize their thoughts in order to write their third entry for their life stories. In here, prior knowledge, as suggested by Gutiérrez (2010), plays an important role because it gives students the background they require for choosing what to talk about in their compositions. Consequently, once they had

the list of events and issues they would write about, they enforced to make a continuousness and thus, they could socialized the feelings, assumptions and happenings that define them, as discussed in Chapter 2 according to Ochs and Capps (1996). This claim can also be substantiated through the sample below, where the student rather than obeying the prompts, he was also able to argue his ideas, explaining why he liked the kinds of things he did.



In my free time, I make pictures of my house and play football, I don't like to lose the time in technologies.

I love the arts, because I want to study plastics arts, I like drawing and painting.

[Julián C. Excerpts from student's artifact, Third entry on writing own life stories, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, May 29<sup>th</sup>]

#### **Category 4: Writing life stories let students expand on ideas about them.**

From data and from the whole implementation as such, it was evidenced that life stories provided students with an opportunity to express themselves, not only in terms of the prompts given and therefore, topics suggested, but also in terms of the things that they wanted to share when writing about them, going beyond the teacher's instruction. In regards to this, Ochs and Capps (1996) claim that narrating life stories make individual conscious of themselves by means of recognizing own experiences. This lead subjects to apprehend who they are and how they have been defined by the happenings that have taken place in their lives. This occurred because as Gutiérrez (2010) suggests, every single person

is equipped with *funds of knowledge*, which consist of a body of background information they have gained through experiencing in and with the world.

Thus, the sample below shows how the student felt free to express his ideas. He chose to follow the prompts given for the paper, but he also decided to use pictures in order to make his description more vivid. He also reflected upon the topics asked, using adjectives to highlight his thoughts and arguing his ideas, feeling that he was being honest with himself as well as with the reader. I say this because, as explained in Chapter 3, the implementation of this project took place in a Christian school, so he could maybe feel obliged to say that he was a Christian at all because of his environment. However, he conceived his “life story portfolio” as a “place” where he could express freely, without social constrains.

Who am I?

- My name means: male name of greek origin that defends man, the protector.



- I am from Bogota, Colombia. It is very big, it is very fantastic, unfortunately, there are many thieves and garbage on the street.

- I am a boy, I like Soccer, video games and Naruto, English and the twilight.



- Do not consider myself a Christian because I don't have baptized me yet.



- I learnt to praise god in the church.

[Andrés R. Excerpts from student's artifact, First entry on writing own life stories, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, May 15<sup>th</sup>]

Quevedo (2008), as discussed in Chapter 2, also declares that when writing their own life stories, individuals experiment a “social sensitivity” because they feel more at ease dealing with known, familiar information that serves as a vehicle to incorporate them into the literate culture. In agreement with her, Gutiérrez (2010), as said before, confirms that the individuals' background information makes him see the social practice of writing more meaningful for his life since he has to enforce in cognitive and linguistic terms to convey meaning in an intelligible way, but the material for doing that is inside him, making it easier and more motivating. See the sample below, where the student used the linguistic patterns explained, but he focused on accenting his ideas through pictures, once again.



[Andrés R. Excerpts from student's artifact, fourth entry on writing own life stories, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, June 12<sup>th</sup>]

5. T: O.K. ¿Te gustó entonces participar en el proyecto?
6. S2: Sí, sí me gustó mucho.
7. T: ¿Por qué te gustó?
8. S2: Porque me pareció interesante (...) porque pude expresar lo que yo quería o contar lo
9. que mi familia hacía y (...)

[Semi-structured interview, August 2, 2013]

From the fragment above, it can be seen that the student declared she likes having participated in the project because it gave her the opportunity to tell what she wanted to, for example, about the things she is used to doing with her family (second entry of the "life story portfolio"). In there, the student reflected upon what she did and was able to argue, in a single phrase, why she liked taking part in the implementation.

1. T: S4, ¿qué opinión tienes acerca del proyecto en el que participaste?
2. S4: Sí, me pareció interesante ya que pudimos expresarnos y decir...y decir qué
3. sentíamos y nuestra historia
4. T: O.K. ¿Te gustó participar en el proyecto?
5. S4: Sí profe
6. T: ¿Por qué te gustó, qué te llamó la atención?
7. S4: Porque (...) eh, me llamó la atención que me (...) podía contarle a otras personas y
8. más en otro idioma, qué había sentido en mi vida

[Semi-structured interview, August 2, 2013]

Alike the comments from the sample discussed before, this student also asserted that he liked to be part of the project because it let him be able to express and say what he felt, to tell his story. He also highlighted that it caught his attention that he could explain to readers the things he had felt in his life by using a foreign language. To conclude, data showed that through writing their life stories, students could expand on ideas about them, ideas that they had not dealt with before, at least, not in the form of a written paper they could work on at school. Finally, I must also say that by writing their life stories, students also developed critical thinking skills in the sense that they did a reasonable, reflective process of appreciating their participation in the project by means of arguing its pros.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter presents the main conclusions I drew from the findings of the study. It deals with the implications of the project for the ELT community in Colombia and the field of cognition in EFL and literacy. It also discusses the impact of the project on the institution where it was carried out and therefore, on the participants. Lastly, it presents the limitations of the study and gives some suggestions for further research in the areas of concern.

#### **Conclusions**

This qualitative action research aimed at exploring how the use of life stories for reading and writing in the class could develop critical thinking. The questions that led the study were:

- How can sixth graders at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor develop critical thinking while they read and write life stories?
  - How do students construct meaning on a text (story) they read in the class?
  - How do students write their stories to communicate their lives to the class?

In order to respond the first, main question, data were analyzed from the other two questions which divided the literacy process into the two skills it comprises, namely, reading and writing. Thus, in response to the first question, the data showed that the use of life stories had an impact on students' enhancement of critical thinking skills such as interpretation, analysis and explanation, mainly, since they were the more recurrent patterns in students' performances.

First of all, students applied their interpretation skill when reading the life stories on the second cycle. They read the texts and got informed on the issues and events they

presented. However, in order to do so, they took advantage of reading in class in interaction with others since they could negotiate the understanding of the texts with them. In that interaction, non-verbal communication as well as the mother tongue played an important role so that students could clarify ideas for getting to understand the texts. Indeed, these two elements helped them to come to comprehend the texts and express their comprehension.

Secondly, analysis appeared also as a skill students developed when reading the stories. Once they had read the stories, students did some oral discussions and written tasks, guided by the teacher, which required them to go beyond the texts to unveil assumptions, meanings and thoughts. Thus, students were able to think critically towards the issues presented in the stories they read, this through reflective questioning which moved them from reading and basic interpretation to analysis and explanatory statements. However, there are some conditions for critical thinking claimed by Ennis (1996) and Facione (2011), presented in Chapter 2, that were not observed because of their nature, such as, evaluating others' claims and deciding what to believe. The questions that guided their understanding and analysis of the text were both, asked by them and also by me as a teacher. Accordingly, it can also be said that students could be analytic because they read interactively in class.

Finally, students were also able to make use of the explanation skill both, when reading and writing life stories. In the cycle of reading, students could explain how they constructed meaning of the stories by means of their answers to questions, which had an argumentative character. They also explained their conclusions through drawings and oral discussions held in class. In the case of writing, students use the explanatory skill when

they expanded on their ideas, going beyond the teacher's instructions and given prompts. They argued their ideas and complemented them. Besides, they could also explain how the project contributed them in terms of self-reflection and expression.

In brief, working on literacy through life stories promoted three main critical thinking skills in students as data showed which were interpretation, analysis and explanation. However, it could be evidenced that the advancement of these skills was more present in the reading sessions than in the writing ones and this is why, in the limitation section, I will discuss that there must be a stronger emphasis on reading tasks at school that can promote students' critical thinking towards issues of social concern.

## **Implications**

After conducting an action research such as this one, certain implications in regards to the ELT in Colombia; the institution in which it took place; the participants who were part of the project and I as a teacher-researcher arise.

First of all, it must be said that in Colombia, policies towards ELT are stated in terms of purposes, methodologies and expectations. However, these guidelines are sometimes far away from what happens in real schools because of many limitations and external factors (Cárdenas, 2010). In this line of thought, programs within institutions have, to some extent, autonomy to decide what to do and how to do things to achieve the proposed standards. Thus, as far as the results of the present study showed me, one of the first things we have to modify in our practices are our beliefs in terms of language vision.

The Bilingual National Plan in Colombia tends towards the development of communicative competence in language learners, as adopted from international standards. However, in our classes, we as teachers are still worried about language as a system. From Sarem & Qasemi's perspective (2010), linguistic knowledge is only a part of the set of abilities the communicative competence implies. Therefore, what we language teachers must do is to promote activities that let learners face authentic material, no matter how proficient they are, so that they cannot focus on form, but get understanding and interpretations on meanings as I saw my students did when reading life stories which seemed to me difficult for them to comprehend.

In the same line of thought, we as teachers have a big responsibility in terms of the cognitive development our students may accomplish when learning English. McKay (1993) says that from an individual skill perspective, literacy evolution has an influence on cognitive development in language learners. In this sense, if literacy development occurs in an educational context where we as teachers are the leaders, we must help our students to develop critical thinking skills that empower them to go beyond the written text. This is what I saw in my students' responses to my requests. That is to say, when I asked them to reflect, give opinions and argument their ideas towards texts, they were able to do more than decoding a message. Therefore, if we teachers demand our students to be critical in simple class tasks, they will keep on doing it as a habit, hence developing their cognitive abilities, and therefore, being able to apply critical thinking by their own, in any context.

On the one hand, the school where the project was implemented can have two main

benefits in terms of their practices and their relationship with national policies. To begin with, the national standards for TEFL emphasize on the fact that all skills have to be worked on so that language learners may develop them for effective communication. Thus, schools must develop syllabuses in which an integration of the four language skills is evident and certain criteria for their promotion in the class are stated. However, in Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor, there is not any official document which guides the process of developing literacy in students because all classroom practices are based on a text book and what it offers. In this sense, the present study might contribute to the school policies so that a reading plan based on life stories and other types of text can be implemented to support students' learning of this skill. It can also be an aid to elaborate a plan to enable students in the writing skill.

On the other hand, Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor adopts the Bilingual National Plan in the sense that it emphasizes arbitrarily on privileging English over Spanish as the mother tongue in so that its used is demonized with the purpose of making the former more effective. Cárdenas (2010) says that is not reasonable if we are talking about bilingualism; instead, the two languages should have the same position and importance. What I want to point out at this respect is that L1 must be seen as a bridge to learn the L2. In the case of developing literacy in English, McKay (1993) argues that once someone has developed literacy processes in L1, it is easier for him/her to advance his/her skills in the second language.

As to the participants of this study, it is important to say that a type of research as the one conducted with sixth graders at Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor empower them to

have a real participation in the curriculum design. Since students were assessed in terms of their needs and interests, these aspects were taken into account so that teaching-learning practices could become meaningful for them. In the specific case of using life stories in the classroom, students' personal knowledge is taken into account. According to Short (2001), this knowledge consists of all the experiences students have lived in interaction with the world and which they bring to class. Therefore, this knowledge becomes the authentic material students take to their classes to actively participate in their learning process; to be precise, to produce texts in which they have a story to tell while developing their writing skill.

Finally, in regards to me as a teacher-researcher, I must say that this study made me open my mind in terms of my beliefs towards reading and writing development in the English class. I have a more critical view in relation to these abilities since I see possible to work on them from a program negotiated with students, thinking of their necessities and likes and of course, promoting their improvement in regards to critical thinking. Now, I think I have to keep on doing classroom research. I have seen that if I observe my practices every day, if I reflect on them and work collaboratively with my workmates, we can improve our teaching practices so that they can become more meaningful as well as enjoyable for the language learners we are in charge of.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Despite this research project was worthy doing and was also gratifying for me as a teacher, I must say that there were certain constraints that limited me. To begin with, time and organization of sessions were difficult to handle so that a deeper exploration of the life

stories read in the second cycle was done. I think that I could have done more with students not only in terms of the reading skill as such and the critical thinking skills I aimed at promoting, but also in regards to language. Despite it was not my concern, I could have taken more advantage of using this kind of material for making students aware of language structures and rules. I realized they did, but more explanations could have contributed to linguistic awareness also.

On the other hand, time was also a limitation for the writing cycle. Since I had to make students correct their drafts so that they could have a final paper revised and edited for their life stories portfolio, I did it one-on-one, which was time consuming and sometimes it looked like I was caring some people more than others. However, this was because some of them wrote longer than their classmates. In short, developing the writing skill following all the process that it entails is a hard task doing, which could be devoted just one single research project.

As a consequence of the limitations explained above, I would like to say that carrying out a project that included both reading and writing was an daring decision I made because trying to deal with both would finally lead me to emphasize on one of these skills. For that reason, the results of this study showed that students could enlarge their critical thinking skills more when reading than when writing.

### **Further Research**

This study provided relevant thoughts to think about the ways in which critical thinking can be developed in students. It also gave ideas on how to approach reading

and writing going beyond schemas and linguistic rules. For these reasons, this research has advised issues that deserve further research.

On the one hand, taking into account that the data showed development on some of the critical thinking skills as outlined by authors, it would be good to explore how students can acquire all of the skills by means of designing a project which systematically worked on tasks that provide learners with the opportunity to follow all the process. According to the results of this study, it would be interesting to explore then the impact that reading different kinds of texts can have in the development of conditions for being a critical thinker.

On the other hand, it would be also very fascinating to explore the role of narrating life stories in the process of uncovering assumptions, visions, insights, and thoughts students may have in regards to topics of social interest. In order to do so, research on writing would have been done and it would have to be limited to specific issues that could also promote critical thinking towards them so that students could contribute to the reflection upon and transformation of surrounding realities, as the critical pedagogy states.

In summary, further research on exploring critical literacy as well as critical thinking need to be done so that teacher-researchers can find new, innovative ways to approach the second language learning and teaching practices so that they could also contribute to educating people for life, for being critical citizens able to use the written word to express themselves, to unveil hidden agendas in discourses and also able to argue their viewpoints in a persuading, respectful way.

## REFERENCES

- Bell, J. (1999/2005). *Doing Your Research Project*. Open University Press.
- Burns, A.(2003). *Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cárdenas, M. L. (2010). “Encuentros y Desencuentros en la Formación de Profesores de Inglés en Colombia: Una mirada a las Políticas del “Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo””. En T. Gimenez & M. C. de Góes Montero (orgs.). pp 19-44.
- Cassany, D. (2006). *Literacidad Crítica: Leer y Escribir la Ideología*. Universitat Pompeu Fabra.
- Clavijo, A. (2007). *Prácticas Innovadoras de Lectura y Escritura*. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Elder, L. & Paul, R. *La Mini-Guía para el Pensamiento Crítico: Conceptos y Herramientas*. Fundación para el Pensamiento Crítico.
- Ennis, R. (1996). *Critical Thinking Dispositions: Their Nature and Assessability*. University of Illinois UC.
- Facione, P. (2011). *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It counts*. Measured Reasons and the California Academic Press, Millbrae, CA.

- Freeman, D. (1998). *Doing Teacher Research*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogía de la Esperanza: un Reencuentro con la Pedagogía del Oprimido*. México: Siglo Veintiuno.
- Freire, P. (1999). *Pedagogía de la Autonomía: Saberes Necesarios para la Práctica Educativa*. México: Siglo Veintiuno.
- Giroux, H. (2003). *Pedagogía y Política de la Esperanza*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Grundy, S. (1987). *Producto o Praxis del Curriculum*. Madrid: Ediciones Morata.
- Gutiérrez, M. (2010). *Funds of Knowledge in Written Text Production*. Master in Applied Linguistics to Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas.
- Johnson, B.& Christensen, L.(2004). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Approaches*. USA, Pearson Education Inc.
- Lerner, D. (2001). *Leer y Escribir en la Escuela: Lo Real, lo Posible y lo Necesario*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Littlewood, W (2004). *The Second Language Learning*. In Handbook of Applied Linguistics. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Marshall, T (2002). *Grounded Theory Research and Theory Building*. In Advances in Developing Human Resources Journal, Vol. 4, No. 3 August 2002 277-295. Sage Publications.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- McEwan, H. & Egan, K. (1995). *La Narrativa en la Enseñanza, el Aprendizaje y la Investigación*. Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- McKay, S.(1993). *Agendas for Second Language Literacy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ochs, E. & Capps, L. (1996). *Narrating the Self*. Annual Review of Anthropology, 25: 19-43.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Education Methods*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Public.
- Quevedo, Y. (2009). *Children´s Narratives: A Mirror of Their Social Sensitivity*. Master in Applied Linguistics to Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Universidad Distrital Franciso José de Caldas.
- Ramírez, L. (2007). *Comunicación y Discurso: La Perspectiva Polifónica en los Discursos Literario, Cotidiano y Científico*. Bogotá: Cooperativa Editorial Magisterio.
- Ricketts, J. & Rudd, R. (2004). *Critical Thinking Skills in FFA Leaders*. Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research 7, Volume 54, Number 1.
- Sagor, R. (2000). *Guiding School Improvement with Action Research*. Virginia: ASCD.

- Sarem, S. N. & Qasemi, K. (2010). *Towards Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching*.
- Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*.  
Yale University Press.
- Short, K. (2001). *Curriculum as Inquiry: Inquiring into Inquiry by Examining our Beliefs and Practices*. Colombian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Volume 3/1 July pp. 21-31.
- Somekh, B. (1995) The Contribution of Action Research to Development in Social Endeavours: a position paper on action research methodology. British Educational Research Journal 21(3): 339-355.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques*.
- Trujillo, F. (2002). *Towards Interculturality through Language Teaching: Argumentative Discourse*. CAUCE, Revista de Filología y su Didáctica. No. 22: 103-119.
- Tudor, I.(2001). *The Dynamics of the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wallace, M. (2006). *Action Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

-Institutional Consent Form-

**Bogotá, Febrero 15 de 2013**

**Señor(es)**  
**Junta Directiva Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor**  
**Ciudad**

Apreciados señores

Por medio de la presente quiero pedir a ustedes su consentimiento para desarrollar en el colegio, para ser precisa, con el grado sexto, mi proyecto de maestría. Este proyecto de investigación obedece al requisito y fundamento de mi grado de maestría y dado que trabajo con ustedes como docente, el colegio constituye mi escenario de acción y por lo tanto, de inquietud en torno al mejoramiento de las practicas docentes.

Es preciso que sepan que durante el desarrollo de mi proyecto, el cual ya tiene unas bases teóricas, voy a intervenir pedagógicamente, desde mi clase, para recoger información, datos, útiles para mi propósito de investigación los cuales deben ser analizados a la luz de la propuesta. Esto no va a ocasionar ningún daño moral, ético o político ni a los estudiantes ni a la institución, dado que se desarrolla en busca del conocimiento mismo y no de otra cosa. Por el contrario, es importante saber que los hallazgos de la investigación están a su disposición como contribución al desarrollo institucional, y por qué no, a la evaluación prospectiva. Claro está es su derecho decidir sobre los aspectos a no divulgar en el proyecto, a favor de proteger la privacidad institucional. Por último, quiero aclarar que tanto los niños con los que se va a trabajar el proyecto así como sus padres, están también siendo informados de la situación.

Finalmente, también quiero que sepan que el proyecto no acarrea ningún costo para ninguna de las partes y que el proyecto puede ser publicado en un futuro, por ejemplo, como artículo en una revista académica.

Agradezco su atención y respuesta a la presente solicitud de aprobación, no sin antes recordarles que , si precisan mayor información al respecto o tienen alguna inquietud sobre los fundamentos que hasta el momento lleva el proyecto, pueden hacérmelo saber a mi correo personal, a saber: [maryer30@yahoo.com](mailto:maryer30@yahoo.com) o por medio de la secretaria del colegio.

Bendiciones.

Atentamente:

---

MARYER ANDREA ACERO HINCAPIÉ  
C.C. 1.032.387.028 de Bogotá

Docente de lenguas y estudiante de maestría en enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

## APPENDIX 2

*-Parental Consent Form-*

### **Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor Educando Ciudadanos para el Reino de Dios y las Naciones**

Apreciados padres de familia, grado sexto:

Antes que nada reciban un cordial saludo. Por medio de la presente quiero hacerles saber mi propósito de trabajar con sus hijos en mi proyecto de maestría en Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras, el cual adelanto en la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional en el momento. El proyecto tiene como propósito desarrollar el pensamiento crítico en los niños mientras leen y escriben historias de vida en inglés.

Es así que por medio de la presente quiero solicitar su autorización para trabajar con sus niños como población de mi proyecto de investigación. Para este fin, debo desarrollar una implementación pedagógica que será llevada a cabo en mis clases y de la cual debo tomar información como datos de muestras para el proyecto. Esta información puede ser tomada por escrito o grabada en audio y/o video, pero ello no implica riesgo para sus hijos dado que es confidencial y sus identidades serán guardadas, si ustedes así lo desean, con nombres ficticios o sobrenombres que los mismos niños escojan. El resultado del proyecto no perjudicará el devenir académico de los estudiantes, más por el contrario, podrá contribuir a su diario desarrollo. El interés de la investigación no es más que el conocimiento mismo.

Si usted está de acuerdo con la participación de su hijo en el proyecto, agradezco firme y entregue devuelta la autorización que se encuentra a continuación. Si su respuesta es negativa, no se preocupe, su niño será tenido en cuenta como los demás, en la realización de distintas actividades, sólo que no hará parte de la observación, análisis y resultados del proyecto. Por último, quiero aclarar que la participación en el proyecto no tendrá ningún costo y así mismo, su niño podrá dejar de participar si así lo desea en algún momento.

También es preciso que sepan que el proyecto puede ser publicado en un futuro, por ejemplo, como artículo en revistas académicas. Si desea mayor información, no dude en hacérmelo saber por medio de la agenda escolar o a través de mi correo electrónico [maryer30@yahoo.com](mailto:maryer30@yahoo.com)

Atentamente:

---

MARYER ANDREA ACERO HINCAPIÉ  
C.C 1.032.387.028 de Bogotá

---

Yo \_\_\_\_\_, padre y/o acudiente del (la) estudiante \_\_\_\_\_ de sexto grado, autorizo a mi hijo a participar en su proyecto de investigación y estoy de acuerdo con que su participación (verbal o escrita) sea tenida en cuenta en el desarrollo y análisis de los hallazgos del proyecto.

Firma: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 3**

*-Participants Consent Form-*

**Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor  
Educando Ciudadanos para el Reino de Dios y las Naciones**





Apreciados estudiantes, sexto grado:

Por medio de este formato quiero solicitar su aprobación para participar en mi proyecto de investigación de la maestría; ¿recuerdan lo que su profe estudia? Bueno, al tener en cuenta esto, quiero que sepan que el proyecto tiene como fin promover en ustedes un pensamiento crítico mientras desarrollan la lecto-escritura en inglés a través de la elaboración de sus propias historias de vida, en un ambiente pedagógico que los equipe para la vida.

Ahora, entendiendo de qué se trata el proyecto, me gustaría saber si están dispuestos a hacer parte de esta bonita aventura que no les quitará más tiempo que el de su clase de inglés y que traerá como beneficios mejorar lo que hacemos juntos en esta clase. Si estás o no de acuerdo, por favor marca el siguiente formato con un (x) en cada casilla, sea negativa o afirmativa tu respuesta y firmas al final la hoja. Si tus respuestas son negativas, no te preocupes, entenderé y no te molestaré en el desarrollo de mi proyecto. Por último, recuerda que el proyecto no tiene ningún costo y que puede ser publicado en el futuro, por ejemplo, como artículo en una revista académica. ¡Mil gracias y bendiciones!

Atentamente: profesora Maryer Acero

Acuerdo	Respuesta afirmativa 	Respuesta negativa 
1. Quiero hacer parte del proyecto		
2. Quiero que mis escritos y participaciones orales sean incluidas en el desarrollo y final análisis del proyecto		
3. Permiso que mis participaciones en clase sean grabadas en audio/video		
4. Quiero que mi nombre propio sea cambiado por siguiente apodo, alias o seudónimo _____ para la investigación.		

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 4

### Cuestionario



¡Hola! Quiero informarte que las preguntas que vas a encontrar en este cuestionario buscan conocerte más como participante en el proyecto. Lee cuidadosamente cada una de ellas para que puedas responder de la manera más sincera posible. Siéntete libre de contestar a las preguntas, haciendo tus propios comentarios. ¡No olvides que toda la información que presentes será confidencial, es decir, sólo entre tú y yo!

**I. Mi perfil: ¿quién soy?** El primer grupo de preguntas busca conocer quién eres. Contesta con una (x) según cada caso.

1. Soy:

Hombre ( ) Mujer ( )

2. Tengo:

10 años ( ) 11 años ( ) 12 años ( ) 13 años ( )

Más de 13 años ( )

3. Vivo con: (Puedes marcar varias opciones)

Papás ( ) Sólo papá ( ) Sólo mamá ( ) Papá y madrastra ( )

Mamá y padrastro ( ) Hermanos ( )

Otros familiares ( ) Otros ¿quiénes? \_\_\_\_\_

4. En las tardes, cuando salgo del colegio, paso el resto del tiempo;

Solo ( ) Con mi mamá ( ) Con mi papá ( ) Con mi(s) hermano(s) ( )

Otro(s) ¿quién(es)? \_\_\_\_\_

5. El nivel económico de mi hogar (personas con las que vivo) puede considerarse como:

Malo ( ) Regular ( ) Bueno ( ) Muy Bueno ( ) Excelente ( )

**II. Mis necesidades: ¿qué me gusta, quiero, deseo y necesito de mi clase de inglés?** El siguiente grupo de preguntas busca identificar las necesidades que tienes en la clase de lengua extranjera. Contesta con atención según la forma de cada pregunta.

El siguiente grupo de preguntas busca identificar las necesidades que tienes en la clase de lengua extranjera. Contesta con atención según la forma de cada pregunta.



1. ¿Se escriben textos (párrafos, como mínimo) en la clase de inglés? Sí ( ) o No ( ). Si tu respuesta fue afirmativa ¿con qué frecuencia se escriben estos?

Rara vez ( ) Algunas veces ( ) Muchas veces ( )

2. Cuando has hecho escritos para la clase de inglés ¿te ha gustado esta actividad? Sí ( ) No ( ) ¿por qué?

Explica tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3.** ¿Qué tipo de textos has escrito para la clase de inglés? Puedes marcar varias opciones

Oraciones que responden a preguntas de un texto ( )

Oraciones de tus opiniones acerca de un tema ( )

Párrafos sobre temas de tu interés

Párrafos sobre un tema de consulta para la clase ( )

Resúmenes sobre lo comprendido acerca de una lectura ( )

Otros ¿cuáles? \_\_\_\_\_

**4.** ¿Cómo consideras la actividad de escribir textos en clase de inglés?

Muy importante ( ) Importante ( ) Poco importante ( )

¿Por qué? Argumenta tu respuesta \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5.** ¿Te gustaría compartir tu historia de vida a través de un portafolio en la clase de inglés? Sí ( ) o No ( ). Si tu respuesta fue no, has concluido el cuestionario. Si tu respuesta fue sí, ¿qué temas te gustaría que tratásemos? Puedes marcar varias opciones.

Infancia temprana (primeros años de vida) ( )

Experiencias conociendo a Dios ( )

Experiencias en el colegio ( )

Momentos familiares ( )

Gustos y preferencias (música, hobbies, deportes, etc.) ( )

Planes futuros ( )

Otros ¿cuáles? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**6.** Antes de escribir tu propia historia de vida, ¿te gustaría leer la de otros personajes? Sí ( ) No ( ) ¿Cuáles?

Otros niños/jóvenes ( )

Famosos favoritos ( )

Personajes de ficción ( )

Otros ¿cuáles? \_\_\_\_\_

¡Has concluido el cuestionario. Muchas gracias por tu participación!

## APPENDIX 5

### QUESTIONNAIRE Data transcription

Questions	Answers
<b>I.</b> 1. Soy:	Hombres: 8      Mujeres: 13
2. Tengo:	10 años: 5 11 años: 12 12 años: 0 13 años: 1 Más de 13 años: 1
3. Vivo con:	Papás: 11 Sólo papá: 0 Sólo mamá: 4 Papá y madrastra: 2 Mamá y padrastro: 1 Hermanos: 12 Otros: - Tíos: 1 - Abuelos: 2
4. En las tardes, cuando salgo del colegio, paso el resto del tiempo con:	Solo: 6 Mamá: 5 Papá: 1 Mamá y mi papá: 3 Hermanos: 6 Otros: - Abuelos: 2 - Tíos: 1
5. El nivel económico de mi hogar (personas con las que vivo) puede considerarse como:	Malo: 1 Regular: 3 Bueno: 5 Muy bueno: 4 Excelente: 6
<b>II.</b> 1. ¿Se escriben textos (párrafos como mínimo) en la clase	Sí: 18 No: 1  Rara vez: 0

de inglés? ¿con qué frecuencia?	Algunas veces: 12 Muchas veces: 5
2. Cuando has hecho escritos para la clase de inglés ¿te ha gustado esta actividad? ¿por qué?	<p>Sí: 19 No: 0</p> <p>Argumentos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Porque puedo aprender más” 7</li> <li>-“Porque es divertido lo que nos pone a hacer la profe” 4</li> <li>-“Porque me gusta mucho el inglés” 4</li> <li>-“Porque a veces uno habla de lo que le gusta”</li> <li>-“Porque desarrollamos más nuestro conocimiento en inglés”</li> <li>-“Me parece interesante el inglés”</li> <li>-“Son textos que buscan ayudarnos con nuestro vocabulario”</li> <li>-“Porque colaboro”</li> </ul>
3. ¿Qué tipo de textos has escrito para la clase de inglés?	<p>Oraciones que responden a preguntas sobre un texto: 14 Oraciones de tus opiniones acerca de un tema: 9 Párrafos sobre temas de tu interés: 6 Párrafos sobre un tema de consulta para la clase: 11 Resúmenes sobre lo comprendido acerca de una lectura: 4</p> <p>Otro:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Oraciones sobre mí y mis gustos”</li> <li>-“Sobre nuestra biografía”</li> </ul>
4. ¿Cómo consideras la actividad de escribir textos en clase de inglés?	<p>Muy importante: 10 Importante: 9 Poco importante: 0</p> <p>Argumentos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-“Porque si lo podemos hablar, lo podemos escribir”</li> <li>-“Porque eso ayuda en el hablar del inglés”</li> <li>-“Porque aprendemos a realizar párrafos”</li> <li>-“Porque se aprende más inglés” 2</li> <li>-“Con eso me acuerdo”</li> <li>-“Porque tenemos en nuestro cuaderno todo para después estudiar”</li> <li>-“Porque necesitamos hacer un texto extranjero”</li> <li>-“Porque nos enseña sobre lo de la clase”</li> <li>-“Porque podemos desarrollar nuestro entendimiento con nuestras propias palabras”</li> <li>-“Porque si no escribimos, no nos quedan claras las cosas”</li> <li>-“Porque es interesante las cosas importantes de uno”</li> <li>-“Porque en el examen cuando se estudia, se puede ver y completar el estudio”</li> </ul>

	<p>-“Porque así no sólo aprendemos lo oral sino también lo escrito”  -“Porque es muy interesante”  -“Porque me ayuda a comprender y para estudiar los textos”</p> <p>-“Es importante porque es bueno aprender otro idioma”  -“Para comprender las lecturas y para adquirir más conocimiento y desarrollo del inglés”  -“Porque no es tan muy importante pero es importante para la clase a mi parecer”</p>
<p><b>5.</b> ¿Te gustaría compartir tu historia de vida a través de un portafolio en la clase de inglés?  ¿Qué temas te gustaría que tratásemos?</p>	<p>Sí: 14  No: 4  No responde:1</p> <p>Temas:</p> <p>Infancia temprana (primeros años de vida): 5  Experiencias conociendo a Dios: 12  Experiencias en el colegio: 6  Momentos familiares: 11  Gustos y preferencias (música, hobbies, deportes, etc.): 13  Planes futuros: 10</p>
<p><b>6.</b> Antes de escribir tu propia historia de vida, ¿te gustaría leer la de otros personajes?  ¿Cuáles?</p>	<p>Sí: 15  No: 1</p> <p>Otros personajes:</p> <p>Otros niños/jóvenes: 8  Famosos favoritos: 7  Personajes de ficción: 4</p>

## APPENDIX 6

### FIELD NOTES

#### **Field Notes # 1**

**Place:** Colegio Cristiano Gracia y Amor, 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom

**Date:** Wednesday, February 27<sup>th</sup> 2013

**Number of participants:** 21 students

**Activity:** reading a short paragraph from the textbook as an example on how to write on personal information

Setting arrangement:

<b>Observations (detailed description of the class)</b>	<b>Recurrent Patterns (reflections)</b>
<p>The class started with an activity which could not be finished the day before. It consisted on a listening on some people talking about their heroes and heroines to match parts of a sentence about them. There was a discussion on these words: I said "are they heroes as we understand the word?" A girl said: "no, no tienen nada de héroes. Sólo son famosos"...</p> <p>Since the school has a Christian philosophy, I said to them that for us, Jesus should be the real <i>hero</i></p>	<p>The class took some time for a nice discussion on a false cognate, namely, the word "hero/heroine". It helped us to reflect upon differences in meanings (denotations and connotations) in the two languages, that is, the mother tongue and the target language.</p> <p>There is a bible integration of the topic due to the school's philosophy. Students'</p>

because of what He did for us. They agreed. A boy said “¿podemos llamarlos *celebrities* o *famous people*? “Claro, eso son, para acercarlo más a nuestro idioma”. We finished the book activity. It had information such as where those people were from and what their jobs were (singers, actors, actresses, sportspeople).

After we had done the activity, we read a very short paragraph on the book in which a girl introduced herself. I read the text aloud while the students followed me. Then I asked: “what information does she mention?” Students started telling things at random “name, age, address, nationality (...) the heroine”. “Yes, that’s it” I said. But since I wanted them to realize that those kinds of data do not let us know too much about people’s personalities, I said “does it show us something about her personality? ¿En verdad nos muestra algo de cómo es ella, más allá de mencionar cuál es su famoso favorito?” They said “no”. The text said, for example, “*I’m from Manchester*”. I told students “si una persona lo lee y no conoce nada de Manchester, ¿qué idea se lleva? A boy said “ninguna, sólo que es el nombre de la ciudad de ella”...

I asked them to use the paragraph we had just read as an example for them to make one about themselves. I told them to write in on their notebooks, but being careful of not using the same

awareness increases on how to use the language for a specific purpose, so that its uses can be more familiar for us. They apply previous knowledge by doing suggestions.

Students are aware of linguistic content. Also, they have an inferential reading in which they understand just what is there, but probably they do not see anything beyond. They need someone to make them aware of some things worthy analyzing. Once they have that person, they start looking at the text more carefully.

When students are asked to follow a model just as an example for doing something, for the case, writing a paragraph, some of them feel comfortable of copying some things from it to avoid making

## APPENDIX 7

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

¡Hola y bienvenido(a)! Esta entrevista tiene como objetivo conocer tus opiniones, sentires y pensamientos en torno a la investigación. Es muy importante para mí que te sientas libre de responder según lo que piensas y sientes. Recuerda que siempre tu identidad será guardada por tu seguridad y respeto.



#### Preguntas:

1. ¿Qué opinión tienes acerca del proyecto en el que participaste?
2. ¿Te gustó participar en el proyecto? ¿Sí o no? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Crees que el proyecto te aportó en el aprendizaje del inglés? ¿Sí o no? ¿Cuál fue el aporte?
4. Si tuvieras que cambiarle algo al proyecto ¿qué le cambiarías?
5. ¿Hubiese sido igual otros tipos de textos, que usar historias de vida en el proyecto?
6. ¿Cuál fue tu experiencia o cómo te sentiste al escribir tu propia historia de vida? Explica.

Muchas gracias por tu tiempo y tus respuestas a esta entrevista pues es de mucho valor para la investigación.

## APPENDIX 8

*-Sample on data analysis memos-*

---

2nd cycle readings – How do students read? Which stage are they in?

Reading 1, stage 1

- Literal reading (do not even paraphrase) IIIII  
Quotation
- Paraphrase I
- Try to interpret a world visión IIII (worked together: Briceño, Mateus, Orjuela, Lim)
- Try his/her own conclusion IIIIII (Carrero, Torres, Católico, García, Gómez, Rosas, Chávez)
- Most of them even don't change the personal pronoun "I" for the third person. They do not use any question marks (sometimes they change it)

Reading 1, stage 3

- "Feeling sad" = putting in the other's shoes – give arguments
- Comparing other's life with their own (identify certain similarity)

**Yuleini's Story****Name:** *Yuleini***Age:** 13 **Country:** *Venezuela*

During the day, when Yuleini's mother and stepfather are at work, it is up to the 13-year-old to care for the four children: cook their meals in an old stove, wash their clothes and hang them on the metal sheets that double as walls and play with them amidst the rubble that surrounds their home.

Since 2004, however, Yuleini has been able to do something she had never done before: go to school. A joint project of the Light and Life Foundation (Fundacion Luz y

Vida), UNICEF and UNILEVER, has enabled her to attend community classrooms especially designed to provide excluded children from Petare with an education.

"Going to school has changed my life, I've learnt many things and made friends," says Yuleini. "But what I like most is my teacher, because she listens to me and is very loving."

The classroom has become a safe haven for Yuleini and for the 5,000 boys and girls who are currently benefiting from the project. So far, 60 per cent of the children attending the community classrooms have been integrated into the formal education system.

Having access to school was not easy for Yuleini. When UNICEF first reported this story, Yuleini said that her parents were dead and that she lived with her sister, her brother-in-law and her nephews. As the story was being edited, Yuleini's mother (whom we then believed to be her sister) revealed that she

and Yuleini had lied about the true nature of their relationship. As it turns out, Yuleini's mother gave birth to the girl when she was herself a 16 -year-old teenager. She never registered Yuleini's birth and left her with her own mother, Yuleini's grandmother, in Colombia while she looked for work in Caracas.

Following the grandmother's death in 2002 Yuleini's mother brought her to live with her, her new husband and their four children. Having no birth registration, however, meant that Yuleini could not go to school and so her mother decided to say that Yuleini had no documents because she had no parents. Thus, what began as the story of a poor, orphaned girl became a much more complex account of how poverty, teenage pregnancy and lack of birth registration affected the lives of several generations within one family.

The many difficulties that Yuleini has faced in her short life have made her wise beyond her years. "I've seen what happens to other kids in my neighbourhood who don't go to school," she says. "They spend their days sniffing glue, begging for money and getting into trouble. I feel sorry for them."

She is especially mindful of what can happen to young girls who live in poverty and have little access to education "I don't want to get married and have children, at least not anytime soon," she declares. "I want to work and study. I don't want to be like another girl I know who is 13 years old and already pregnant."

**1. Stage 1:** What did you read?

- a. How old is Yuleini? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. What does she do during the day while her mother and stepfather work?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. What does *Light and Life Foundation* provide her?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. What does she like from school?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. What is the difficulty Yuleini has to access education?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. What does she think about life? What does she want?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Taken from <http://www.fightpoverty.mmbriico.com/stories/stories.html>