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**TÍTULO COMPLETO DEL TRABAJO: Critical Literacy in making meaning out of New Media Discourses**

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| **Español** | **Inglés** | **Español** | **Inglés** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Literacidad Crítica | Critical Literacy | | |
| 2. Construcción de sentido | Meaning making | | |
| 3. Discursos | Discourses | | |
| 4. Nuevos medios de comunicación | New media | | |


**RESUMEN DEL CONTENIDO:** (Máximo 250 palabras)

Este estudio explora cómo la literacidad crítica moldea los procesos de construcción de sentido de discursos en los nuevos medios de comunicación. El diseño metodológico comprende un enfoque cualitativo y el tipo de estudio se trató de una investigación-acción. La ausencia de estudios previos acerca de literacidad crítica en la examinación de discursos en los nuevos medios de comunicación en Colombia nos impulsó a investigar más a fondo estos procesos de construcción de sentido. Teniendo como objetivo poder recolectar datos valiosos en este ámbito, decidimos usar entrevistas con grupos focales como instrumento que nos proporcionaría una mayor cantidad de datos enriquecedores. Análogamente, se les solicitó a los participantes llenar una bitácora o diario que entregarían junto con sus productos (artefactos) cada clase. Así mismo, llenamos unas notas de campo con criterios específicos que nosotros diseñamos tales como la descripción de la observación general, comentarios acerca de la actividad, los procesos de construcción de sentido de los estudiantes y estudiantes haciendo uso de la literacidad crítica. Los resultados sugieren que el uso de literacidad crítica ayudó a los participantes a desarrollar un mejor entendimiento de cómo la educación debe responder a sus realidades sociales y de cómo deben considerar los discursos que moldean estas realidades.

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**ABSTRACT:** (Máximo 250 palabras)

This study explores how Critical Literacy shapes undergraduate students' meaning-making processes about New Media Discourses. The methodological design consisted on a qualitative approach and it was an action research type of study. The lack of previous research on Critical Literacy shaping meaning- making processes propelled us to further inquire these meaning-making processes. Having as our main goal to collect valuable data on the matter, we decided to use focus group interviews as the instrument that would provide use with the most enriching data. Analogously, participants were asked to fill journals and to hand in their work (artifacts) every class. Accordingly, we filled out some field notes with specific criteria we designed such as the description of the general observation, comments on the activity, students' meaning making processes and students and critical literacy. The findings suggest that the use of Critical Literacy helped the participants develop a better understanding of how education should respond to their social realities and how to address the subtle discourses that shape these realities.

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Critical Literacy in making meaning out of New Media Discourses

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And last but not least, we would like to thank our families for their unconditional support and for believing in us.

**Abstract**

This study explores how Critical Literacy shapes undergraduate students' meaning-making

processes about New Media Discourses. The methodological design consisted on a qualitative

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*Keywords:* Critical Literacies, meaning-making, New Media Discourses

**Resumen**

Este estudio explora cómo la literacidad crítica moldea los procesos de construcción de sentido de discursos en los nuevos medios de comunicación. El diseño metodológico comprende un enfoque cualitativo y el tipo de estudio se trató de una investigación-acción. La ausencia de estudios previos acerca de literacidad crítica en la examinación de discursos en los nuevos medios de comunicación en Colombia nos impulsó a investigar más a fondo estos procesos de construcción de sentido. Teniendo como objetivo poder recolectar datos valiosos en este ámbito, decidimos usar entrevistas con grupos focales como instrumento que nos proporcionaría una mayor cantidad de datos enriquecedores. Análogamente, se les solicitó a los participantes llenar una bitácora o diario que entregarían junto con sus productos (artefactos) cada clase. Así mismo, llenamos unas notas de campo con criterios específicos que nosotros diseñamos tales como la descripción de la observación general, comentarios acerca de la actividad, los procesos de construcción de sentido de los estudiantes y estudiantes haciendo uso de la literacidad crítica. Los resultados sugieren que el uso de literacidad crítica ayudó a los participantes a desarrollar un mejor entendimiento de cómo la educación debe responder a sus realidades sociales y de cómo deben considerar los discursos que moldean estas realidades.

*Palabras clave:* Literacidad Crítica, construcción de Sentido, discursos en los Nuevos Medios de Comunicación

## Table of Contents

## Introduction

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the role of Critical Literacy in English III students' meaning-making processes about New Media Discourses at Universidad Cooperativa. For this study, Critical Literacy will be-defined as an approach "which attends closely to the contexts of culture, society and history in order to understand (and critique) the ways we read and write and speak – hence think and are" (Morgan, 2002, p. 9). Besides, this study intended to answer the research question: What is the role of Critical Literacy in undergraduate students' meaning-making processes of New Media Discourses in an EFL context?

The following study is based on the qualitative approach and the type of study is action research. Also, the participants of the research were students aged 20 to 25 from different degrees at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia (UCC) who attended the English courses which are compulsory for all the majors.

Among the many reasons that led us to conduct this study, we feel compelled to mention the key ones: First of all, the number of students' complaints about the use of the platform that focuses on grammar drills for all the language skills. Additionally, the students' lack of tools to critically read and interpret texts (and its multimodal nature) in different activities held in the classroom and also to equip them with abilities to analyze the various situations when they are outside. And finally, some students' suggestions about how the English classes should be, based on their interests and considering what they would like to learn in order to change the average topics covered.

What was mentioned above, however, clearly did not match with the traditional communicative-oriented classes held at the university. In regard to the previous matter and considering that these are issues commonly found in other institutions that teach English, we decided to go in search of a possible solution.

Thus, the content of this document is organized as follows. In chapter one, you will find a finely detailed account of the aspects nurturing the research problem. In chapter two there is a rich explanation of the theoretical constructs that support this study. Chapter three specifies the the main aspects of the methodological design, on the one hand, those related to the research and on the other, those that have to do with the instructional design. Chapter four is devoted to the data analysis and the categories emerging from it. Finally, chapter five states the conclusions and pedagogical implications of this study.

**Chapter I**

**Research Problem**

The following chapter provides information concerning the statement of the problem and also the studies carried out related to Critical Literacy and Multiliteracies at a national and international level. It also mentions how the topic has not been widely studied in Colombia but the constructs (Critical Literacy, New Media Discourses) have been addressed on a separate way. Secondly, it displays a rationale elaborating on the place in which the research was conducted is presented, the participants, some of the topics we addressed in the sessions and finally, the research line the study belongs to.

**Statement of the Problem**

This research looks into the role of Critical Literacies in undergraduate students' meaning-making processes about New Media Discourses. The uncritical acceptance of foreign ELT methods in Colombia such as communicative language teaching, natural approach, grammar translation, etc., (Macías, 2010, p. 188) has privileged inner circle countries' opinions on how to teach English for decades. In spite of the fact that these methods ignore the sociocultural dimension of language that addresses "the role of social interaction in human development" and "learning as a cultural process" (p. 11), as proposed by Paesani, Allen and Dupuy (2015) in their Multiliteracies framework, they continue being widely used in ELT. Unless these methods are challenged and questioned by stakeholders and teacher educators, little can be done to make a shift in English Language Education.

Previous studies on Critical Literacy in Colombia (Rincón & Clavijo, 2016; Medina-Riveros, Ramírez, & Clavijo, 2015) have not dealt with the examination of New Media Discourses. For example, Rincon & Clavijo (2016) carried out a research study on the promotion

of literacies through local inquiry in a multimodal experience. These two researchers place a strong emphasis on community-based pedagogies and literacies, however, discourses are not included as part of their study. By the same token, Medina-Riveros et al. (2015) held a qualitative study in which students had to critically read the assets in their community through the use of a web 2.0 tool (Glogster), but this study also lacks the discursive component.

So far, very little attention has been paid to the role of Critical Literacies in the Meaning-making processes of New Media Discourses in Colombia. However, some studies have addressed these constructs separately. For example, Vargas (2010) advocates for a *discourse of criticism* in ELT "to interpret the intention of the messages sent by the industries of communication" (p. 180). Another relevant study in this regard is the one conducted by Medina-Riveros et al. (2015), in which they draw attention on the use of Critical Literacies and Multiliteracies to read the community critically through a web 2.0 tool (Glogster). Additionally, Losada & Suaza (2017) focus their attention on the implementation of video-mediated listening and Multiliteracies as a means to construct or design new meanings. Furthermore, Gonzales (2007) has discussed the possibilities of implementing Critical Literacies that privilege local knowledge consolidated by professional collaboration between schools and universities.

Now, we will discuss what happened at a local level. After having administered a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to students from Universidad Cooperativa, it was evidenced that throughout most of the English courses, they were not exposed to any kind of approaches other than the Communicative Approach and grammar-based teaching. The questionnaire showed that students have had problems when using the online platform (the one they have to work on during the semester) and this exercise was not meaningful. Students also manifested to the teacher in previous occasions that the subjects of the units were similar to the

ones they had seen at school and at the previous English levels and that it would be appealing if different contents were taken into account in classes.

When taking a closer look to the UCC's curricula *(Un modelo ducativo crítico con enfoque de competencias)* we can evidence that it is based on a Freirean model of education, however as expressed by two teachers during an interview in the needs analysis, the use of the platform is mandatory and the classes do not contain a "critical" component.

**Related Studies**

There is little published data on the field of Critical Literacy-oriented classes in Colombia. This is something we could evidence once we were going through the most renown ELT journals in our country.  Besides, this is something you can evidence from mere experience, by analyzing the way English is still taught, underpinned by communicative-oriented syllabi. Many teachers keep avoiding the use of alternative approaches when they claim that the approach underlying their classes is the Communicative Approach, although some EFL teachers do not have a clear idea of what this approach means or entails (Nazari, 2007). In other words, the Communicative Approach became an excuse for teaching English with no solid ground to do so.

Nonetheless, a number of studies in Colombia have begun to examine the effects of a Multiliteracies-oriented approach in the EFL classroom. A notable example of this type of studies is the one carried out by Losada and Suaza (2017), two teachers from Neiva (Huila) who decided to explore the contributions of video-mediated listening in 11th graders at a private school. After a six-session implementation and a rigorous analysis of the data they gathered, Losada and Suaza (2017) found out that a) the students made references and predictions to past experiences by the exposure to audio-visual material; b) students developed construction of meaning by the ongoing process of reinterpretation; c) they also shared experiences and built critical interpretations of

their own realities. We considered this study to be pivotal for the development of ours, since it is one of the few available studies in our context that integrates different literacies.

Another key study regarding the implementation of Multiliteracies and Critical Literacy in our country, is the one held by Medina-Riveros et al. (2015), a qualitative research study carried out in an online EFL course at a public university in Bogotá. The main constructs which constitute the backbone of this research are Multiliteracies, Critical Literacy and Community-Based Pedagogies. The main findings in this research were: a) students' recognition of the community assets; and b) the critical reading of the community. Crucial for our study was to count with one that has already made use of Web 2.0 tools such as Voicethread, that in one way or another, resembles New Media's multimodality. Besides, the constructs of Multiliteracies and Critical Literacy gathered in this study reassures our desire to combine these two.

A different study that resorted to Critical Literacy practices as its main approach, was the one carried out by Graciano (2016). He implemented Critical Literacy strategies to improve the way students in 11th grade at a private school in Bogotá were interacting with the texts they were asked to read. All of this happened after applying a test, evidencing that reading and writing were the skills which had the lowest degree of proficiency. Thanks to his research, Graciano was able to find that a) students did not enjoy reading about issues belonging to other countries because they were interested in their local reality; and b) audiovisual material is well received in the classroom as a way to complement the readings. We found this study particularly important for us because of the fact that the researcher wanted to develop critical thinking in his students as well as the integration of media.

Another research study related to Critical Literacy and meaning making processes was carried out in Medellín, Antioquia, by Gonzáles (2015). His research is of major importance (and

also different) because he worked with mobile applications to foster critical reading. His study showed that a) using old literacies and the new digital ones was beneficial for students to be creative; b) online reading comprehension strategies helped improve affinity in groups and c) critical reading was enhanced with the use of online tools. This being said, this study was important for ours since we also wanted to read examples of how to integrate New Media in the EFL classroom.

At an international level, there have also been some studies regarding Critical Literacy and New Media. In a university in Brazil, Monte Mòr (2007) conducted a research study with undergraduate students in which her main focus was to discover how they read cinema images and how meaning was constructed by them. This research was relevant for us as it deals with the meaning-making process and the use of different elements such as images to be read.

Another international research to bear in mind concerning Critical Literacy practices is the small-scale study developed in Malaysia by Kaur (2013) with students belonging to tertiary education. This research study sought to explore the reasons behind the students' lack of understanding of how to read text critically. The author found that students do not always question what is written, and that they have difficulties distinguishing facts from opinions, as for them, it was not an easy task. He also suggested that teachers in their university classes should include more critical literacy practices.

Finally, this study is important for us because as teachers, we feel that the English language classes need to be a space to learn and discuss about issues different from the numbers, the weather or the colors. We do not intend to say that those contents are not relevant, but we do believe that there is room for more elements and topics such as gender, immigration and politics to be discussed and analyzed in class.

Having mentioned the most relevant studies in Colombia and outside the country, we will present the rationale for the research.

**Rationale**

The present research study was developed at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia (UCC) with undergraduate students who are currently studying different majors, and whose ages range between 20 and 25 years old. The students belong to the English III course which is mandatory for all the alumni at UCC. The university has a specific place for English classes called *Centro de Idiomas*, which counts with adequate infrastructure and sources such as laptops and projectors to use in class. In the *Centro de Idiomas* operates Open Lingua, which is the university branch responsible for administering the English courses.

As teachers, we are constantly seeking to help and guide our students towards the construction of new knowledge. We constantly look for new ways to equip them with practices that they will find interesting and challenging, even more if those practices are taught in the English class. However, as English teachers we need to be aware of students' particular perceptions and feelings about English classes and English as a language itself, since, on the one hand, there are many students who enjoy learning English, and on the other hand, there are many who manifest their lack of interest towards it. Taking advantage of both situations, teachers reflect on their classes and design them according to learners' needs and taking into consideration English language learning approaches.

Unfortunately, ELT has currently fallen for the common belief that the Communicative Approach is the most suitable one to teach English universally. Students and teachers sit down in the classrooms facing textbooks or rehearsing role plays seeking to teach and to learn language functions (how to greet, discussing time, ordering food, talking about clothes, etc.) in English.

After conducting the needs analysis, we found that the activities proposed in English classes, at the university, lack the critical component and were not raising critical awareness among the students who manifested to the teacher feeling exhausted receiving the same type of classes which topics had been alike during the levels taken so far. Both students and the teacher-researcher also reflected on the fact that in high school the situation was not different (same amount of hours per week, the same topics, the same way of conducting the class) and so far things were not different.

Using the platform was another element to take into consideration. Students were expected to work on an online platform as they were taking the course; the exercises contained there were presented using the same format for many of the units. There was a specific problem when the speaking part had to be solved because the platform asked them to record their answers (which were expected to follow specific structures). As opposed to these communicative oriented practices, we as teachers and researchers proposed an alternative way to learn English at UCC that integrated the use of Critical Literacy to shape meaning-making process about New Media Discourses.

We consider that students need to be capable of acknowledging what occurs around them, but most of all, they need to be able to interpret it and identify the forces that control the information that is shared daily. Also, students at this higher education level have to be able to see critically the social and political situation the country is in, and also to think about possible ways of contributing to that panorama which can turn challenging.

For Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, this research study and its pedagogical implementation was a great opportunity to advocate for something different from the

Communicative Approach that currently underlies ELT. With the design of activities that were context-sensitive and thought-provoking, the students and the teacher as well had the opportunity to tackle New Media-related issues such as fake news, political propaganda, gender stereotypes, Venezuelan immigration, etc., to question and examine the subtle discourses that shape our representations of these as Colombian citizens.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that our study belongs to the Technology and Language Teaching research line, which is one of the suggested by the Masters in English Didactics program   from Universidad Surcolombiana.

**Research Question**

What is the role of Critical Literacy in undergraduates' Meaning-making processes about New Media Discourses in an EFL setting?

**Research Subquestions**: a) how does Critical Literacy-oriented classes influence students' understanding about local issues?; b) how does the use of Critical Literacy-oriented classes change students' perceptions about EFL classes?; c) how do students understand New Media Discourses within a Critical Literacy approach?

**Research Objectives**

**General objective:** To explore the role of Critical Literacy in undergraduates' meaning-making processes about New Media Discourses.

**Specific objectives:** a) To examine the influence of Critical Literacy in students' understanding of local issues; b) to explore the incidence that Critical Literacy-oriented classes have on students' perceptions about EFL classes; c) to establish how students understand New Media Discourses within a Critical Literacy approach.

## Chapter II

## Literature Review

In this chapter, we will elaborate on the theoretical constructs underpinning our study and how they interplay between them. To begin with, Critical Literacy is the approach that boosted participants' meaning-making processes of the discourses surrounding them through new media information. Stated in a different way, students were encouraged to take advantage of the tools offered by a critical literacies approach to face discourses, triggering the possibility of new meaning-making processes and opening the possibility of multiple viewpoints and opinions of discourses in the classroom. Indubitably, to make these constructs as clear and delimited as possible, this study heavily relied on groundbreaking works that have been written in the past two decades on the matter. Thus, the constructs addressed in this study were: a) Critical Literacy, b) meaning-making, and c) New Media Discourses.

### Critical Literacy

The Critical Literacy construct unfolds in this section as follows: firstly, the concept of Critical Literacy will be widely defined through the lens of its most influential authorities. Secondly, we will present the different Critical Literacy practices and their correlation with text analysis. Thirdly, we will elaborate on the concept of voice from the perspective of Critical Pedagogy. Finally, we will describe the main knowledge processes that are emphasized when teaching Critical Literacy.

Critical Literacy is strongly linked to Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 2005; Freire & Macedo, 2005; Giroux, 1997) in the sense that both seek to raise awareness about how power shapes us as social beings. However, Critical Literacy is more concerned with how to bring literacy to a new level beyond from just linguistically reading and writing characters to reading and (re)writing the

world (Freire & Macedo, 2005). Following Kalantzis et al. (2015, p. 74), four major approaches to literacies can be distinguished throughout human history: a) didactic literacy pedagogy; b) authentic literacy pedagogy; c) functional literacy pedagogy; and d) critical literacy pedagogy. In this regard, all these approaches, which are organized in order of appearance, provided great insights and contributions regarding knowledge processes and how, when put together, they conform the basis for a multiliteracies approach. However, for the purpose of this study, the emphasis here is on the Critical Literacies approach and the knowledge processes stressed within this approach.

In a few words, Critical Literacy can be defined as "a set of literacy practices and civic competencies that help the learner develop a critical awareness that texts represent particular points of view while often silencing other views" (Luke & Freebody, 1997, p. 208). According to this definition and as stated by Lankshear & McLaren (1993), the main reason why taking critical literacy into the classroom is crucial to to-day educational practices is to help students become critically literate, enabling for them the opportunity "to understand and engage the politics of daily life in the quest for a more truly democratic social order" (p. xix). That being said, it becomes clearer that there is a compelling need to provide students with the tools to become critically literate, even in the ELT classroom.

By advocating for a Critical Literacy approach within education, we did not seek to privilege any particular set of ideologies or discourses, but we rather sought to help students become aware of about the "oppressive social forces" (Morgan, 2003, p. 6), enticing them to come up with a wider spectrum of perspectives of the different discourses surrounding them. These multiple perspectives are precisely what Ciardello (2004, p. 141) highlights when teaching Critical Literacy to students, considering that these helped learners to "view text as ideologically

constructed" and prone to multiple interpretations depending on people's perspectives. In this sense, Freire and Macedo (2005) invites us to see literacy as something more complex; that is, from reading and writing basic written characters towards critically reading and (re)writing the world.

**Critical study of literacy practices.** This type of studies seeks to expose how "languages, texts, and discourses serve the interests of powerful entities at the expense of marginalized groups" (Fajardo, 2015, p. 39). By studying literacy practices critically, learners are allowed to debunk power from different perspectives and they are invited to challenge any type of text where aspects of inequality and oppression are explicitly or implicitly depicted.

Kalantzis et al. (2015) explain that among Critical Literacy practices, the learner might engage with "asking in whose interests particular text work, examining multiple and conflicting texts, examining the historical and cultural contexts of discourses in texts" (p. 215) and some others of this kind. The end product of these practices is for students to be engaged with Critical Literacy so as to grow awareness of the multiple viewpoints texts can elicit and how texts must be understood within the boundaries of social and cultural practices (Kalantzis et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Janks (2013) explains that Critical Literacy is about "enabling young people to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources" (p. 227); in this sense, Critical Literacy equips students with different devices to question power for both reading the word and the world from a Freirean perspective. Janks is aware here about the convenience of developing Critical Literacy skills among young people, suggesting that this is the age when they start to make more complex representations and interpretations at a sociopolitical level. In other words, adolescence is a suitable stage to start making use of critique as critically literate citizens.

**Student voice.** The concept of voice is a key element underlying Critical Pedagogy and it deals with the importance of hearing all students' perspectives, values, and beliefs they hold as social agents. In Critical Literacy it is important to hear the students' voices around the way they read the world and how they make meaning out of it. This concept is drawn from Giroux's (1997) radical pedagogy, and it deals with the understanding of the "multiple and varied meanings that constitute the discourses of student voice" and the critical engagement in the "polyphonic languages students bring to schools" (p. 141). In contrast with conservative educational discourses, where students' voices are basically reduced to the "immediacy of its performance" (p. 124), the concept of voice reaches the peak in Critical Pedagogy when student voices are finally heard and discussed in an ongoing process of sharing students' representations of the world through communication.

McLaren (2007) argues that "voice is an important pedagogical concept because it alerts teachers to the fact that all discourse is situated historically and mediated culturally and derives part of its meaning from interaction with others" (p. 243). Thus, instead of striving for unrealistic objective knowledge in the class, as students were required to do in a conservative pedagogy paradigm, through the concept of voice, as understood within a Critical Pedagogy paradigm, students are enabled to place their representations and make meaning out of class communication.

**Knowledge processes.** The notion of knowledge processes is borrowed here from the Multiliteracies pedagogy. Multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) is an eclectic pedagogy that seeks to integrate the most crucial literacy paradigms throughout history, namely, didactic literacy, authentic literacy, functional literacy and critical literacy. Three out of four knowledge processes from the multiliteracies pedagogy can be found in Critical Literacy: (a) experiencing

the new, wherein "learners are immersed in new situations or information, observing or taking part in something that is new or unfamiliar"; (b) applying creatively, wherein learners make an intervention in the world that is innovative and creative […] transferring their knowledge to different context; and (c) analyzing critically, wherein "learners evaluate their own and other people's perspectives, interests and motives" (Kalantzis et al. 2015, p. 85). Altogether, these knowledge processes constitute the epistemic actions or the things we do to know (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015) that allow us make meaning in different ways.

Figure 1. Knowledge Processes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015)



Knowledge processes are understood here not only as thinking or cognition but as knowledge actions. Cope & Kalantzis (2015) explain that knowledge processes are epistemic actions, meaning that they are "externalization of thought in action" and "they shape thought

through action" (p. 23). Conceiving knowledge processes as epistemic actions allows the learner to address learning not only from a receptive or passive role but as an active one where participation and involvement is a matter of the utmost importance.

In the following section, we will introduce the notion of meaning-making as a design process borrowed from the multiliteracies pedagogy.

**Meaning-making as a design process**

The meaning-making construct here unfolds as follows: firstly, the basic elements of meaning-making (representation and communication) will be introduced. Secondly, we will present the concept of Design from the perspective of Multiliteracies. Finally, we will explain the correlation between multimodality and new media.

Simply put, "Meaning-making is a process of representation (sense-making) and communication (in which a message prompt is interpreted by another person)" (Kalantzis et al., 2015, p. 211) and "a form of design or active and dynamic transformation of the social world" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 3). Seen from a constructive-developmental psychology perspective, Meaning-making is a process that, most of the times, shape us as humans in ways we are not aware of. In Kegan's (1980) words, the "human being is meaning-making" and "our meanings are not so much something that we have, as something we are" (p. 374). This means that it is through our representations that we come to understand the world and it is through communication that we manifest our representations of it, as we are about to explain.

In other words, meaning-making as a design process and the way we construct meaning is determined by who we are and, simultaneously, it shapes us in the process of the construction itself. The complexity of meaning-making lies in the various representations we can make out of

anything and the forms in which we manifest such representations to others by means of communication. These two elements are further explained in the section below.

  **Representation and communication.** According to Kalantzis et al. (2015) "representation or thinking starts with our interests" and "meaning-makers do not just see things as they are, they […] see things in their mind's eyes in ways that suits them, which fit their preconceptions" (p. 216). Representation is the primary source we use to make-sense out of everything that surround us, but this sense-making is not free or unbounded, it is shaped and built over all our preconceived knowledge to match our worldviews. Once more, this idea of representation as a primary source of our Meaning-making processes resonates with Freire and Macedo's (2005) critical reading of the world; a reading process that goes beyond the understanding of plain alphabetic characters to a deeper understanding of our surroundings.

  Communication, on the other hand, "occurs when a person creates a message that serves as a prompt that impacts upon the meaning universe of another person or persons (Kalantzis et al., 2015, p. 217). A good way to differentiate both representation and communication is Kress' (2009) explanation on the subject when he clarifies that "representation focuses on my interest; communication focuses on the assumed interest of the recipient of the sign" (p. 70). In other words, representation is mostly an individual process, whereas communication implies showing our representations to other people by communicating them.

  **Design.** Kalantzis et al. (2015) point out that "we always create the world in a way that says something of who we are—a way of speaking, a style of thinking, a timbre in our voice, a nuance in our stance, a tone of argumentation, all speaking to the kind of person we uniquely are" (p. 223); this means that all human beings, as meaning-makers, are designers of particular representations and specific ways of communicating what reflects our own uniqueness as

individuals. The former refers to the process that has been coined as Design. In the same vein, Wills Allen & Paesani (2010) briefly define Design as "an active, dynamic process that encompasses the creation of form-meaning connections through interpretation or creation of texts." (Willis Allen & Paesani, 2010, p. 122). In this sense, Design must be understood regarding its dual nature (Kalantzis et al., 2015, p. 223) both as a verb (a sequence of actions) and as a noun (the structure of something). This duality of Design suggests that the meaning we construct can be either seen as the result of a series of actions or as the ready-made structure of something that needs to be interpreted. As a result, the concept of Design here not only denotes agency but form, too.

Collectively, these authors (Kalantzis et al., 2015; Allen & Paesani, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) conceive Meaning Design as comprised by three major elements: (a) Available Design, which "includes all resources – linguistic, social, cultural – that a learner brings to a text to create meaning" (Willis Allen & Paesani, 2010, p. 123); (b) Designing, which "focuses on the way in which every meaning-making utterance is intentional, taking the meaning-making resources available in the world and transforming them" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 147); and finally (c) Redesigning, which is "the result of Designing", that is, "a transformed representation of Available Designs called the Redesigned" (Willis Allen & Paesani, 2010, p. 122). By breaking down these tree elements, these scholars seek to explain the process of learning through Design and the way learners interact with text.

**Multimodality and New Media.**  Kalantzis et al. (2015) argue that "multimodality is the theory of how modes of meaning [written, visual, spatial, tactile, gestural, audio and oral] are interconnected in our practices of representation and communication" (p. 230). In this lies the importance of a multimodal approach for education, where "learning is consequence of a series of

knowledge actions, using multimodal media to externalize our thinking." (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 32) and "all modes make meanings differently, and the meanings made are not always available to or understood by all readers" (Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, & Tsatsarelis, 2001, p. 43). As a consequence of the rising of New Media, we are being constantly exposed to new modes of making meaning. This explains why sometimes it is hard to understand certain content on the Internet, as this is a matter of new modes that are constantly emerging but that we are not familiarized with yet.

In connection with this, multimodality clearly connects with Design in the sense that new forms of Design entail new ways to read text, and thus new multimodal elements emerge. It is thanks to a gradual exposition to new Designs in New Media that we can adapt our meaning-making process and make use of new multimodal forms of making meaning. A clear example of these emerging forms of multimodality is the way in which memes convey similar meanings to many different users on social networks.

We use the word *media* here following Kress et al. (2001) who describe it as the "material substance which is worked on or shaped over time by culture into an organized, regular, socially specific means of representation" (p. 15). In this regard, new media, which involves "digitally mediated text [that] can incorporate multiple-media formats that text cannot" (Paesani et al., 2016, p. 240), that leaves space for a constant emergence of new meaning modes that interact with each other, generating new ways to read text that eventually will be interiorized by the people exposed to them.

In the following section, we will characterize discourse in connection with text, power and literacies.

**Discourses**

The discourse construct is described here as follows: firstly, we will discuss what we understand by discourse in general terms. Secondly, we will explore the relationship between discourse and text. Thirdly, we will elaborate on how discourse legitimates power relationships. Finally, we will explain how discourse can be unveiled through literacy practices (being literate in terms of discourse).

Discourse is a key element to understand how human beings massively construct meaning and inscribe themselves—either consciously or unconsciously—in discursive practices which exemplify their worldviews. In this sense, discourses are understood and defined here in a broad and all-encompassing sense following Lankshear & Knobel (2006) as:

> sets of related social practices composed of particular ways of using language, acting and interacting, believing, valuing, gesturing, using tools and other artefacts within certain (appropriate) contexts such that one enacts or recognizes a particular social identity or way of doing and being in the world (p. 196).

Such definition collects the major elements of discourses (language, context, identity, etc.) and elucidates how these inform social practices that we human beings enact on a daily basis.

Similarly, Lankshear & Knobel (2006) point out that is "through our social engagement with Discourses we each become identifiable as a particular kind of person and learn to be a particular kind of person" (p. 71). It is precisely for this reason that Kress (2003) warns that "nothing escapes the shaping influence of discourse" (p. 47), since we are perpetually being exposed to discourses and it is through the interiorization and reproduction of discourses that we create and shape our social identities.

**Discourses and text.** Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville and Newfield (2013) argues that "when we use language we produce spoken or written texts for others to consume" (Introduction, Section 1, para. 1), and since "communication—whatever the mode—always happens as *text*" (Kress, 2003, p. 47), we need to understand that text is always going to be at the core of our discursive practices. However, it is only when text is regarded as "the result of social action" (Kress, 2003, p. 47) that we become aware of the unneutral nature of text as a result of a wide range of discourses that interact in daily communication.

Based on Janks et al. (2013) "texts are positioned and they work to position their audiences" (Introduction, Section 3, para. 1), thus, making critical reading of texts essential to unveil the multiple interpretations to which texts are subjected. Otherwise, ignoring this unneutrality of text may lead to what van Dijk (2006) refers to as exercised manipulation of minds through text (p. 361) with the intention of privileging certain social groups.

**Discourses and power.** To begin with the issue of power, it is important to get a good grasp of the correlation between power and knowledge. As it is stated by Foucault (1975):

> We should admit […] that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (p. 27).

It is in this behalf that knowledge, which is at the core of education, must aid people to have access to better conditions where they can be part of a regulated practice of power without being excluded or unprivileged.

However, "convincing and persuading people to consent to society's rules is often the job of families, religions, schools and the media" (Janks et al., 2013, Introduction, Section 10, para. 4), and "within schools, discourse produces and legitimates configurations of time, space, and narrative, placing particular renderings of ideology, behavior and the representation of everyday life in a privileged perspective" (Giroux, 1997, p. 121), thus creating and legitimating discourses to maintain power relationships. It is particularly the educational arena what concerns us here, considering that one would assume it is through education and the design of knowledge in schools, colleges, etc. that people may become aware of these discourses of inequality reproduced by social institutions.

**Discourses and literacies.** Gee (1990) argues that "the whole point of talking about discourses is to focus on the fact that when people mean things to each other, there is always more than language at stake" (p. 155). Even in the simplest forms of communication, we are constantly displaying—whether this is done implicitly or explicitly—the pervasive discourses that shape us and reproducing the discourses that are commonly encountered in our contexts.

At the same time, Gee (1990) states that being part of discourse is like "being able to engage in a particular sort of 'dance' with words, deeds, values, feelings, other people, objects, tools, technologies, places and times so as to get recognized as a distinctive sort of *who* doing a distinctive sort of *what*" (p.155). This is what entails to be literate when it comes to discourse practices; being able to deftly read the vast richness of meaning as a spectrum that comprises everything that surround us. This type of literacy can be briefly summarized as mastery of or fluent control over discourses (Gee, 1989, p. 9). In other words, when people understand the practice of discourses that shapes them, it becomes easier to have control over them in the same

way that people can recognize the different types of dances by the steps and the moves

performed.

## Chapter III

## Methodological Design

This chapter is divided into two main sections: On the one hand, the research design; and, on the other hand, the instructional design. The first section will cover all the aspects related to the research design and the data gathering instruments selected. The second section is devoted to explaining the pedagogical intervention and the philosophy, theory, methodology and strategies underlying it.

### Research Design

In this section we discuss the qualitative approach underlying this research and the type of study, in this case, participatory action research, which best fits our purposes. Besides, we define the role of the student and their key role as participants and our role as teacher-researchers. Moreover, we describe the instruments for the data collection which consist of students' journals, teachers' field notes, students' artifacts and focus group interviews.

**Approach.** This research study was built upon a qualitative research approach. According to Hatch (2002), "qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it" (p. 7), which is precisely what this study intended to explore at the level of meaning-making processes about discourses. With the aim of relying on groundbreaking theory from qualitative research authorities, we followed Creswell's (2012) six steps to conduct qualitative research, namely: (a) identifying a research problem; (b) reviewing the literature; (c) specifying a purpose for research; (d) collecting data; (e) analyzing and interpreting the data and (f) reporting and evaluating research. These steps were essential to narrow down the way we planned to conduct our research study and to avoid straying off from the means to conduct qualitative research in general.

**Type of study.** The type of study we employed was action research, briefly described by Burns (2010) as an approach "to intervene in a deliberate way in a problematic situation in order to bring about changes" (p. 2). Several authors (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Frost, 2002; Costello, 2003) agree that there exists a basic action research model outlining four essential processes: (a) planning; (b) acting; (c) observing; and (d) reflecting. Though these four processes seem to summarize the key steps for conducting action research and it is probably the most popular model within this approach, Burns (2010) warns us about the way this model has been widely criticized due to its evident "rigidness" (p. 8) Thus, Burns (1999) advocates for less systematic and rigid models such as hers which involves exploring, identifying, planning, collecting information, analyzing and reflecting, hypothesizing and speculating, intervening, observing, reporting, writing, and presenting (p. 35) which can be easily adapted based on the researcher's needs.

Our research went through these cycles which are evidenced thus: firstly, we explored the situation by carrying out the needs analysis and collected information about the course and participants (their thoughts and beliefs on the English courses). Secondly, the problem was identified and we were able to analyze it and reflect on the possible solutions bearing in mind the context and the participants. Finally, we planned the pedagogical implementation along with the theory underlying the sessions.

The study was held at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia (UCC) in Neiva, Huila. The university offers different majors such as Psychology, Law, Civil Engineering, System Engineering, among others. The UCC follows a competency-based educative model. In order to graduate, students must take four English levels which are offered by Open Lingua. The classes are held at the university or at the *Centro de Idiomas*, which is the place that is equipped with the

necessary resources. Students take a three-hour class per week during sixteen weeks and are expected to complement what was covered in class working on an online platform.

The mission of the UCC states that they seek to form people with the ability to answer to the dynamics of the world and that, as a university, they contribute to the construction and diffusion of knowledge. In addition to this, their vision affirms that by 2022 they will recognize and develop research.

**Participants.** The participants in this research study are English III students from Universidad Cooperativa and two English teachers. Both teachers are teacher-researchers, however one of them was an observer, only because of the fact that she lived far away from the place where the study was held.

*Students*. The participants in this study were students from different undergraduate programs who were taking the third English level from the four levels they are required to take. For this qualitative research, we used a purposeful sampling strategy, which consists of "a quantitative sampling procedure in which the researcher selects participants [as long as they are] willing and available to be studied" (Creswell, 2013, p. 619). Thus, eight students were likely eligible to be part of our sample, but we decided to reduce the number to just six students (five female students and a male one), considering that it would be easier to carry out the focus group interviews this way. These students were aged 20 to 25; three of them were law students and three were majoring in Psychology. In regard to the participants' relevant traits, Marleny is an extrovert student from the Psychology program who had previously acquired a good language proficiency level by visiting some relatives in Canada; Miriam was a good-tempered Law student who was eager to verbally participate every class; Paola was a shy student from Psychology program who enjoyed activities in which she was not required to talk much; similarly, Darío was

a rather reserved and shy Law student who did not talk much, but who always surprised us with elaborated and eloquent contributions; Karla was a shy Industrial Engineering student who enjoyed working on the activities individually rather than working with her classmates; on the other hand, Amanda was a loquacious Psychology student who was more inclined to engage in the discussions held during classes and to openly talk with most of her classmates.

*Teacher-researcher and text developer***.**  As it was previously stated, both teachers were researchers, however one of them was present during the classes as an observer because she lives in a different department. This is why, a weekly video conference via Skype or a WhatsApp call was made by locating the cellphone in a corner in the classroom to record the students. This is how the other teacher was able to write her field notes. The teacher in charge of the class was is the teacher-researcher and students acknowledged him as such. He also took field notes which were shared and compared with the ones taken by the other teacher.

On the other hand, the teachers were also text developers as they designed the materials used in the sessions. After deciding the topics, the teachers started to search for the best options to exemplify them and also, they designed the activities student were going to work on during the sessions. All that information was displayed on Power Point slides and also, a guiding video was recorded.

**Data gathering instruments**. The instruments used to collect the data in this study were semi-structured interviews, students' artifacts, students' journals and field notes. With an eye on gathering sufficient data to have a clearer grasp of how critical literacy may influence students' meaning-making processes, we conducted three semi-structured interviews. Additionally, students' artifacts were collected every class to explore the multimodal product of their work. Finally, students were asked to fill an online journal designed with some questions to trigger

some thoughts about the critical literacy practices performed during the class. Taken altogether, we triangulated the data to better understand the role of critical literacy in students' meaning-making processes about new media discourses.

*Focus group interview***.** Data was collected using two semi-structured focus group interviews which were conducted in session 4 (halfway through the implementation) and one in session 8 (at the end of the implementation). To begin with, focus groups interviews are a form of group interviews (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) that allows the researcher to collect data from interactive talks. In regard to semi-structured interviews, Packer (2011) asserts that in these "the researcher has a general plan for the topic to be discussed but does not follow a fixed order of questions or word these questions in a specific way. (p. 43). McDonough & McDonough (1997) assert that this type of interview "allows for richer interactions and more personalized responses" than the rigid and inflexible structured ones. Besides, Cresswell (2009) invites interviewers—and this invitation is particularly important for the purpose of our study— "to consider how the interview will improve the human situation (as well as enhance scientific knowledge)" (p. 90), considering that meaning-making is deeply built upon communication between the students and the researchers.

The first focus group interview was held during the fourth session of the implementation and it was about 50 minutes long. During this interview, we decided to focus on how students made meaning of the issues covered during the first four sessions (see appendix c). We treated the students some *avena* from a bakery nearby so that we could have a more comfortable conversation about the questions we prepared for them. The interview was recorded using both the researchers' cellphones. Unfortunately, Miriam was absent during this first interview since she was not able to come that day.

The second focus group interview was held at the end of the implementation (eighth session) and it was an hour long. This time, we used the classroom assigned for English III students at *Centro de Idiomas* to carry out the interview. The questions we prepared for this session (see appendix c) aimed to further inquire about the participants' interaction and understanding of discursive practices during the whole implementation. The recording was also done by using our cellphones. All participants were present for this interview.

**Student's artifacts.** We broadly define artifacts here as "intended and unintended residues of human activity" which "give alternative insights into the ways in which people perceive and fashion their lives" (Hodder, 1994, p. 304); in this sense, artifacts may provide a great variety of interesting perceptions and diverse ways of making meaning.  Hatch (2002) asserts that "the main advantage of this type of data collection is that it does not influence the social setting being examined" (p. 25). Thus, in comparison with other instruments such as interviews or surveys, the artifact reflects more accurately the way the learner makes meaning by creating something (appendix e).

Artifacts were collected at the end of every class and they consisted of activities that summed up the whole class. Most of these were collected via e-mail or using a USB flash drive when the Internet was slow. However, some of the artifacts were collected physically (as it was the case of the "Bulllyng Wall" in appendix e) and there was a video on "gender stereotypes" which was uploaded to the Facebook group created for them. By using artifacts, we aimed to analyze the participants' representations about the different issues discussed and observe their use of multimodality for making meaning. All of the participants handed in all their artifacts, except Darío and Karla, who did not upload their videos to the Facebook group.

*Student's journal*. Students have a different way of perceiving how activities develop in the classroom and Hopkins (1985) states that pupils´ journals "provide an interesting contrast to the field notes kept by the teacher on the same topic" (p. 107). Precisely to keep an overall view of the class, students were asked to keep a journal. Also, the journals were intended to obtain "honest feedback" and "feedback on particular teaching episodes" (Hopkins, 1985, p. 107). Every class, we gave the participants a Power Point file (see appendix d) with some questions for them to reflect and write. They filled these at the end of the class and they were free to write them in Spanish. By asking the students to keep this journal, we intended to gather their opinions on the issues we discussed every class. There were some classes in which the students did not fill the journal because they did not come; however, they were asked to fill them at home (most of them did).

*Field notes.* Sherman and Webb (2005) argue that field notes "provide a detailed, narrative description of what has been observed with particular attention to activities, actors, space, physical objects, and the sequence of activities and events (Sherman & Webb, 2005, p. 83). Regarding the purpose of using field notes, Sanjek (as cited in May, 2002) states that *"*field notes […] have long been used to record the feelings, emotions and personal identity work that can come with prolonged research engagement" (p. 314), which is exactly the sort of aspects we intended to collect through the field notes (appendix c) data gathering by portraying, from our perspective, the students' feelings and disposition towards the activities and topics discussed in class. We filled the field notes after every class. We designed these field notes as a Word file with specific criteria which we considered it would lead us to gather rich information about our perceptions about the class and how the participants made meaning out of critical literacy-oriented classes. We stored these files in both our laptops and a USB flash drive.

**Instructional Design**

A major concern we evidenced after conducting the needs analysis was the lack of EFL classes that tackled power-related issues at the university. This concern originated when some students manifested that most of the topics they were taught in the English class were, in a way, irrelevant and foreign to their realities. For this reason, Critical Literacy was considered as a great alternative to the traditional linguistic-laden classes. Critical Literacy brings a lot of opportunities to the table, such as covering social justice that may generate a whole new set of meaning-making processes among the students.

Table 1. Pedagogical implementation lessons

| Class | Issue(s) | Multimodal Text | Knowledge Processes (Epistemic Actions) | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Fake news in mass media. | • "Locura colectiva por falso título para Junior." (Video from *El Espectador*) <br> • "Falsa cadena de Whatsapp sobre posibles sismos genera pánico en las redes." (Screenshot from *El Heraldo*) <br> • "Pánico en Neiva por falsa alarma sobre avalancha" (Piece of news from *El Diario del Huila*). | • Students conceptualize their own criteria to spot fake news in mass media. <br> • Students conceptualize fake news using available theory. <br> • Students inquire about underlying reasons for the creation of fake news. <br> • Students create an online brochure to inform people about the aspects to consider when reading news in new media and share it with the class. | September 13th, 2018. <br><br> Duration: 3 hours. |
| 2. | Political propaganda in Colombia. | • "7 Propaganda Techniques Used on you Every Day" (Youtube video). <br> • Chapters 1 and 2 about "La Experiencia" posted on Vargas Lleras' Facebook page. <br> • Political propaganda shared via whatsapp (pictures, memes, and videos). | • Students discuss some examples of political propaganda in Colombia. <br> • Students conceptualize with theory (7 propaganda techniques used every day). <br> • Students create a semantic web with the overlapping discourses found in political propaganda in Colombia. <br> • Students explain and analyze the decisions they made for creating their semantic webs. | September 20th, 2018. <br><br> Duration: 3 hours |
| | Advertising in mainstream new media | • "POP CULTURE: The clever tricks of advertising" (Youtube). <br> • "Comerciales Canal Caracol Colombia - Enero 2, 2018." <br> • "Tanda de comerciales de RCN televisión – 18/01/2018." | • Students tell specific situations in which they have been exposed to advertising. <br> • Students watch some of the most popular advertisings on Colombian TV. <br> • Students brainstorm about the common advertising strategies they have spotted in new media. | September 27th, 2018. <br><br> Duration: 3 hours |

| # | Topic | Materials | Activities | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. | | • Facebook ads. | • Students conceptualize with theory the tricks used by media to sell.<br>• Students analyze the psychology behind colors in TV commercials. | |
| 4. | Gender stereotypes in mall products | • Pictures taken by the students.<br>• Youtube video "Sex & Gender Identity: An Intro." | • Students watch a video that explains the differences between sex and gender.<br>• Students take pictures of products that show gender stereotypes.<br>• Students analyze some images and determine how gender stereotypes are displayed in these<br>• Students create a video to explain the gender stereotype in the mall product that they found | October 4ⁿᵈ, 2018<br><br>Duration: 3 hours. |
| 5. | Chauvinism in new media users: the hate speech behind comments. | • "Los paisas no le jalaron a la consulta anticorrupción" (*Semana*).<br>• "El trino de Petro que no cayó bien en la costa" (*El Espectador*).<br>Consulta anticorrupción memes. | • Students share in groups the times they have witnessed regionalism to support hate speech among people in Colombia.<br>• Students go through comments on the piece of news from *Semana* and *El Espectador* to identify hate speech.<br>• Students discuss how new media triggers hate speech through political discourses.<br>• Students read some hate comments on Facebook and generate possible answers to counteract such comments, | October 11ᵗʰ, 2018<br><br>Duration: 3 hours |
| 6. | Name calling in educational settings. | • "Gorda, marica, sucio y otras formas de matoneo" (*El Espectador*).<br>• "En una caneca de la basura terminó niño víctima de matoneo escolar" (*Noticias Caracol*) | • Students draw bullying situations they have witnessed or being part of.<br>• Students conceptualize bullying using images to show the different types of bullying.<br>• Students analyze bullies and the reasons behind their behavior.<br>• Students create a "bullying wall" to write ideas to raise awareness about the harms of bullying. | October 18ᵗʰ, 2018<br><br>Duration: 3 hours |
| 7. | Venezuelan Exodus | • Un acto de risa y llanto: la historia de los payasos que huyen de Venezuela. (*Semana*)<br>• Advertising about Colombia becoming Venezuela.<br>• El Éxodo de los venezolanos (Juliphotojournalist – Instagram) | • Students talk about venezuelan exodus and their personal experiences with this migration<br>• Students watch the video called *Un acto de risa y llanto*.<br>• Students analyze the discourse behind advertising about Colombia supposedly becoming into a new Venezuela.<br>• Students create infographics explaining the Venezuelan exodus. | October 25ᵗʰ, 2018<br><br>Duration: 3 hours |
| | The struggle of underprivileged peasants in Colombia | • "¿Ilegalidad o supervivencia? Encrucijada que viven campesinos en Tumaco por cultivos de coca" (Noticias Caracol - Youtube)<br>• "Las clásicas mentiras sobre | • Students watch the videos about peasants growing coca in Tumaco.<br>• Students watch a video recorded for the class by a peasant kid from Cauca.<br>• Students make connections with the ideas brainstormed and the videos. | November 1st, 2018<br><br>Duration: 3 hours |

| 8. | | las drogas en America Latina" (Youtube) <br> • Special guest's talk. | • Students contrast what they saw in the two videos in sticky notes and compare them with their classmates. | |
|----|--|--|--|--|

**Pedagogical intervention.** On the whole, the pedagogical intervention was built upon the Multiliteracies' knowledge processes. Kalantzis et al. (2015) positioned critical literacy pedagogy as the last paradigm that constituted the different literacy paradigms so far in history as follows: a) traditional literacy, b) authentic literacy, c) functional literacy and d) critical literacy. From these paradigms, Cope and Kalantzis (2000; 2015), in their different accounts of these in their Multiliteracies pedagogy, came up with their renown knowledge processes which entail: a) experiencing (the known/the new); b) conceptualizing (by theorizing/by naming); c) analyzing (critically/functionally); and d) applying (creatively/appropriately). These knowledge processes can be identified in the material designed for the pedagogical implementation (editable Power Point slides) as we used the original colors proposed by Cope and Kalantzis (2015) to identify them. These processes were exemplified with: a) green for *experiencing* activities; b) purple for *conceptualizing* activities; c) pink for *analyzing* activities; and d) yellow for *applying* activities.

The way this knowledge processes are used in the pedagogical intervention is quite simple: we followed Allen and Paesani's (2010) suggestions. They argue that these processes should not be used dogmatically in a fixed sequence as some sort of formula. This autonomy led us to create our own critical literacy-oriented classes informed by the four knowledge processes mentioned above. In some sessions, all of the four were displayed, whereas in other classes, some of them were not used, depending on the nature of the activities.

**Instructional objectives**. We laid the groundwork for our pedagogical intervention having in mind the possibility of generating scenarios for students to approach text critically.

Seeking to reach this as our main objective, we decided: a) to expose students to different types of discourses (academic, religious, political, etc.) displayed on new media; b) to examine the meaning-making processes they undergo while scrutinizing the aforementioned discourses through the lenses of a critical literacy approach; and c) to identify the advantages and disadvantages of using critical literacy in the ELT classroom.

**Theory of the nature of language and language learning**. The theory of the nature of language behind the pedagogical intervention is based on Freire and Macedo's (2005) idea that "language and power are inextricably intertwined" and that language "plays an active role in constructing experience and in organizing and legitimating the social practices available to various groups in society" (p. 5). This means that, throughout the different issues discussed during the implementation (fake news, gender stereotypes, political propaganda, marginalization of peasants, bullying in educational settings, and Venezuelans' immigration), language was not thought as something detached from these so-called social practices mentioned by Freire and Macedo. Instead, we decided to let the participants experience language and its pervasive correlation with power by different means displayed in New Media, such as memes, Facebook comments, posts, videos, etc.

**Methodological approach underlying the pedagogical intervention**. After perusing the previous related studies done in the field of critical literacies, we decided to integrate the *learning by design* from the Multiliteracies approach to make use of the different *knowledge processes* that constitute the epistemic actions to construct "knowledges". We believe that it is precisely this *learning by design*, integrated with the overt exposure to local discourses which makes a big difference when compared to other studies. Learning by design gave us a solid ground to aid the

students to make different decisions to approach the local discourses found in text (in its multimodal sense).

This Learning by Design approach is one of the main components of the pedagogy of Multiliteracies and it consists namely of eight knowledge processes (experiencing the known and the new; conceptualizing by naming and with theory; analyzing functionally and critically; and applying appropriately and creatively), which are often seen as activities or "things you do to know" (Kalantzis et al., 2015). *Designing* is all about transforming "knowledge by producing new constructions and representations of reality" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 22), and it contemplates teachers and students as co-designers of their worldviews through the creation of meaning.

In addition to what has been mentioned, the document *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children* written by Vasquez (2004), was taken as a guide on what kind of topics should be chosen and the types of activities that should be developed.

**Relation between the pedagogical intervention and the research question**. Taking into account the research question: What is the role of critical literacy in undergraduates' meaning-making processes about new media discourses in an EFL setting? We decided to design and implement a pedagogical intervention that allowed us to answer such question. To start with, New Media-related tools such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube and other web sources were included to illustrate the various topics addressed in the classes. Secondly, the topics were chosen considering the current political and social situation in Colombia and also, wanting to change the usual areas of interest commonly discussed in the English class. By selecting those topics, we intended to direct the participants' interest towards Colombia's reality

and let them reflect upon it. Finally, the activities at the end of each session were designed for the participants to reflect on the topic that had been presented.

**Instructional phases**. The pedagogical implementation was not separated into stages but into sessions. A total of eight sessions were thoughtfully designed and then divided in two phases. The first phase consisted of the first four sessions and ended with a semi-structured focus group interview. The teacher usually had to wait some minutes as the students arrived, then he took them to the Computer Lab. There, the students downloaded the slides and the video the teacher (and the other researcher) had prepared. Some students did not have a WhatsApp account and in some other occasions the internet connection was too slow, so the material needed to be shared using a USB.

Each student had a computer and started to work on the editable slides. The activities were not timed, so they had the chance to work at their own pace. If any of them had a doubt, the teacher helped them and if more questions emerged, the class stopped and a discussion was started as a group. Once they were finished, the teacher asked them to send the slides to his e-mail and also, he collected them on a USB.

The second phase of the implementation consisted of the four last sessions. Students in general and the ones participating in the research, showed that they were familiar with the mechanics of the class and also, the analysis they were doing of the topics presented was deeper. Students were more curious and participated more in the classes; also they had conversations with the teacher about different topics such as the difference between "gender" and "sex," what is shown on T.V about peasants in Colombia, among others. Solid answers and reflections were evident as we read the journals and during the final interview.

***Proposed material development framework***. As it was mentioned before, as researchers we decided that the social and political situation of Colombia was going to be taken into account when designing the sessions and therefore choosing the topics. Reflecting on the elections and the two candidates, led us to the topics of *Political Propaganda* and *Chauvinism*. Thinking about the amount of information that is send via WhatsApp we decided to teach the students how to *Spot Fake News*. Witnessing the situation of the Venezuelans and knowing that our students have done so too, the topic of the *Venezuelan Exodus* was also selected. Wanting the participants to evidence how some products you buy at the store are "made for boys or girls" by themselves and after asking them to take pictures, the *Gender stereotypes displayed on mall products* was chosen. Finally, taking advantage of the fact that one of the researchers is currently working at a rural public school in Inzá -Cauca where many students work in the field, the subject of *Underprivileged Peasants in Colombia* was also selected.

The topics were sent via WhatsApp and shared in an USB device (for those students who did not have a WhatsApp account). The documents were organized on a Power Point Presentation which contained the pictures, texts, links and a video that explained the steps to follow during the session which was designed by the teacher researchers. In this way, the activities were explained and displayed clearly for the participants to do the work. The slides had a different color: the green ones indicated *Experiencing the Known;* the purple ones indicated *Conceptualizing*, the pink ones indicated *Analyzing* and finally, the yellow ones referred to the activities participants had to do at the end also known as *Applying.* We did not explain these knowledge processes to the participants, as we considered this theory to be too complex for an English class. However, we did provide them with an instruction slide to check in case they needed to know what we were doing in every activity.

*Informed consent.* The head of Open Lingua was informed of the project and what it was about. The process and the stages were explained to her and also the way in which this research was going to contribute to students' developing and gaining knowledge as well as critical ways of looking at different situations in the country. Once she authorized the project to be implemented, the students were given a consent form that contained details on how the research was going to be conducted, why it was relevant and also the way the classes were going to be taught.

*Sensitization.* The teachers printed the consent form and took it to the second class. The teacher explained what the study was about to the students, the reasons behind it and the objectives. Likewise, the ethical aspects of the research, such as that their names were not going to be revealed (they were going to remain anonymous and only that the needed data was going to be used), they could quit to being part of the study at any moment and also that if they refused to participate, their score during the course was not going to be affected. After this, the teacher displayed the chart (see Table 1) and shared with them the activities, the topics and the process that was going to be followed. It was explained to them that topics such as politics, gender, bullying, among others, were going to be the focus of the classes, and also that the activities were going to be different from the ones they were used to in communicative-oriented classes. The consent form was given to students, eight of them signed the consent form and six were chosen as participants.

*Implementation of the materials.* The pedagogical implementation was divided into eight sessions and for each session, different topics informed by critical theory were selected. The topics were chosen thinking about the different situations that Colombia was going through. For each one of the classes, the material was designed by the researchers which included: A Power Point presentation and a video. The video consisted on a recording of the slides and it had the

explanation of what they had to do in the class; this video was in Spanish for a better

understanding of what had to be done. The Power Point files contained the title of the session,

videos or articles selected from different magazines, images to compare and analyze and at the

end, there was an activity they had to do either by themselves or in groups. Those final activities

were about the topic being addressed and they went from making a video and drawing a mind

map, to designing a "Tear the Bullying Down Wall".

**Sample of workshop**

# "SEX & GENDER IDENTITY: AN INTRO"

Watch the video about the differences between "sex" and "gender".



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ago78PhUofI

# SEX VS GENDER

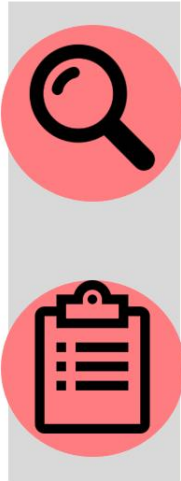Write the differences between "sex" and "gender" using your own words

### SEX

Insert text here.

### GENDER

Insert text here.

# ANALYZE THE GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THESE PRODUCTS

Analyze the images and how gender stereotypes are displayed in these.



[Insert text here]

[Insert text here]

# TALK ABOUT YOUR PICTURE

Create a video to explain the gender stereotype in the product that you found.

## STEPS TO CREATE YOUR VIDEO

1. Talk about how and where did you find the product. For example: "I was in *Éxito* in the food section when I found this product..."
2. Talk about why you think this product displays a gender stereotype. For example: "I think this product displays a gender stereotype because..."
3. Talk about what kind of people buy this product in your opinion: "I think the people who buy this product are mostly women/men because...
4. Do you think people notice these gender stereotypes? Yes/no. Explain your answer. For example: "I believe people do/don't notice these stereotypes in products because..."

## Chapter IV

## Data Analysis

**Data Analysis Procedure**

At the very beginning of our data analysis and as part of the process (Packer, 2011), we had to face the initial anxiety of contemplating heaps of data. The underlying data analysis procedure we employed to analyze the data was Grounded Theory Approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2004; Creswell, 2012). To begin with, we decided to transcribe the interviews after each session. The transcription of the first interview (Int1) was very fruitful, since we were able to analyze it as suggested by Burns (2010, p. 104). Thus, we identified some commonalities in students' answers and we came up with some preliminary categories we compared later on with the other instruments. Next, we analyzed the transcription of the second interview (Int2) and coded it using the preliminary categories we had found previously, and adding the new ones that emerged.

Once we went through the two interviews, we started to code the data in the students' journals (SJ), field notes (FN) and artifacts (Art). The process of coding these three instruments led us to new data which enriched the three categories found in the interviews and suggested new themes that turned into new subcategories. Firstly, we color coded the data (Creswell, 2012), using yellow for everything related to the influence of Critical Literacy; blue for those aspects that showed students' perspectives about ELT; and purple for the moments in which the participants reflected upon new media discourses. As a result of this coding, several themes emerged, which, eventually, turned into the subcategories. We reduced all these subcategories to a smaller number according to their frequency of appearance in the data and their relevance for our study. Then, we started the triangulation by comparing the data we had available with the one

we had collected from the journals, artifacts and field notes to confirm and verify the information

gathered from the other sources (Hatch, 2002, p. 92). Coding the two interviews was crucial to

facilitate this triangulation process. Consequently, the possibility of simultaneously reviewing

general information from the interviews and a more contextualized and specific type of data from

the logs, artifacts and field notes, allowed us to evidence the participants' experiences class by

class. It is worth mentioning that all the data we gathered from the interviews and journals were

translated by us.

**Research Categories**

The categories in this study emerged from using the abovementioned Grounded Theory

Approach to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 2004; Creswell, 2012). Bringing our

worldviews and standpoints, as suggested by Charmaz (2006), was pivotal to interpret the data

collected. As it is part of our human nature as social beings, this flexibility offered by the

Grounded Theory allowed us to feel, ponder, agree, disagree, etc., with the participants,

revitalizing the different inferences and meanings that resulted from these interactions. As a

result, we narrowed down the vast amount of data and we ended up with three main categories

and its corresponding subcategories as seen in table 1.

**Table 1.** Categories and subcategories

| The Influence of Critical Literacy in students' understanding of local issues in EFL | • Students' first approximation to sociocultural issues in Colombia through the lens of Critical Literacy<br>• Students' emergence of critical awareness by reflecting upon local problems in text<br>• Emancipatory practices in the EFL classroom: students voicing their convictions freely and autonomously |
|---|---|
| Challenging Traditional ELT practices from a critical perspective | • Students' transition from passive receivers to critical thinkers<br>• Students' perceptions about authoritarian and democratic teaching |
| Rethinking the concept of truth by examining New Media Discourses | • Identifying marginalization mechanisms displayed by New Media Discourses in Colombia<br>• Calling into question the reliability of ideology behind New Media Discourses |

**The influence of Critical Literacy in students' understanding of local issues in EFL**.

This first category depicts how critical literacy-oriented classes led the participants to engage in new learning practices and reshaped their meaning-making processes related to the discourses that came up during the discussions held in class. The Influence of Critical Literacy has to do with all those specific moments in which participants expressed how Critical Literacy-oriented classes influenced the way they made meaning out of the issues we covered during the pedagogical implementation. This category is related to our first and third ob

jective, in which we sought to examine the incidence of Critical Literacy in students' understanding of local issues, and establish how they understood New Media discourses within a Critical Literacy approach. To put it briefly, in this category, we will look into a) students' first

approximation to sociocultural issues in Colombia through the lens of critical literacy-oriented classes; b) the emergence of critical awareness about matters that were commonly disregarded in communicative-oriented EFL classes, such as power-related matters; and c) the emancipatory practices that led students to participate and collaborate in more adaptable ways.

*Students' first approximation to sociocultural issues in Colombia through the lens of Critical Literacy*. This approximation to sociocultural issues in a critical manner evidences how the participants made sense of their own culture in the ELT classroom. This subcategory is related to our first research objective which is concerned with the examination of the incidence of Critical Literacy in students' understanding of their local issues. This subcategory has to do with the different moments in which the participants started to question the overemphasized focus on sociocultural aspects from inner circle countries that were commonly displayed in the communicative-oriented classes they took at the university. Accordingly, we understand this sociocultural approximation from Lankshear's (1999) perspective as "various forms of textual engagement carried out within contexts of literacy practice that reflect different values, beliefs, power relations, goals, political conditions, interests, and so on" (as cited in Allen & Paesani, 2015, p. 11); this means that, contrarily to what is traditionally considered in communicative-oriented classes —where the focus is on linguistic functions—, in Critical Literacy-oriented classes engagement with text, in other words, being able to read the world, is the starting point to reflect on all the aspects that students need to interact with in EFL classes within the latter approach.

As a result, students were able to discuss the sociocultural issues that may be disregarded in traditional communicative English classes, such as language, power, and diversity (Janks,

2013; Freire & Macedo, 2005) and the "implicit hyperglobalism which envisaged the entire world learning English via one dominant methodology" (Block, 2004, p.76). The influence of this so-called hyperglobalism has influenced ELT all around the globe to comply with the inner circle countries´ interests (Kachru, 1997), which are those English-speaking countries such as the United States and England that have had the power to make decision about ELT in non-native English speaking countries. Eventually, this hyperglobalism became the touchstone of the spread of English as global agenda. In excerpt 1, taken from the first focus group interview, one of our participants stated her perceptions about the English courses in her undergraduate program:

Excerpt 1

I mean, in English class we are always, like, learning British culture and we never see ours. I mean, it's always the same. For me, English classes were super boring, a complete bummer, but now these classes are very cool, because we deal with general issues that we see here on a daily basis (Int1_83/88_Karla).

In this excerpt, the participant explained how the emphasis on foreign sociocultural aspects such as weather, clothing, cuisine, etc., mainly from the British culture, bored her and led her to think there was no room for local ones, when she expresses that "we never see ours." Consequently, for Karla to find "issues that we see here on a daily basis" make English classes more appealing for her. The fact that as English teachers we keep bringing up only sociocultural aspects from inner circle countries to the content of our classes, is the way in which we can spot the "hegemonic effects of dominant cultures and the authority they have in representing and in speaking for the Other" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 9); in other words, the colonial practices adopted in ELT that neglect local values. This so-called hegemonic effects, which subtly seek to impose

inner circle values, representations, beliefs, etc., can also be evidenced in the following excerpt from the first interview, whereby the participant elaborated on why he believed these foreign sociocultural aspects are being spread by material designers.

Excerpt 2

To me, it seems like it is due to the people who design these materials, let's say, the publishing houses from those countries. I mean, generally, they do not possess knowledge about us. For this reason, it would be interesting that, as my classmate was saying, sometimes is boring because of the weather, the seasons… It would be interesting to contextualize these topics a little bit and learn English that way (Int1_113/118_Darío).

In excerpt 2, Darío expressed that the lack of local matters found in the materials (books, booklets, platforms, etc.) used in many EFL settings like ours, may be due to publishing houses' unfamiliarity "about us." For Darío to make English classes more interesting, it is necessary to "contextualize these topics," so that students can feel more familiarized with the content. Additionally, this excerpt clearly illustrates the desire of the most powerful communities to spread their culture. Canagarajah (2006) asserts that "the dominant communities assumed the superiority of their culture and social systems, even that of their language, and attempted to spread their influence at the cost of local traditions" (p. 230), resulting in an industrialization and commercialization of the English language (Mahboob, 2011) that ignores the sociocultural needs of the different communities where the language is taught, which at the same time, can be translated into huge profits for publishing houses.

Additionally, in excerpt 3 from Paola's journal, we can evidence the importance of "knowing these tools" to unveil fake news and question the reliability of news sources to identify any hidden intentions:

Excerpt 3

It is important to know these tools, because it is necessary for our lives, since we live in a social dimension that demands from us being informed with trustable sources, but, mostly, being able to identify those potential pieces of news that are created with evil purposes to damage somebody's image for whatever reasons (SJ_1_Paola).

Paola highlights that the importance of knowing "these tools [and techniques to identify fake news]," discussed during the first session, lies in the fact that we live in a social environment "that demands from us being informed," and not only informed, but properly informed, "with trustable sources." For Paola, being informed about the existence of fake news, is regarded as a commitment as social beings who should be able to identify "evil purposes [that may] damage somebody's image for whatever reasons." Paola lets us know in this excerpt that, by scrutinizing fake news from our country through critical literacy-oriented classes, she has found a more authentic use for the language. Manifestly, such use of the language resonates more with Kramsch and Zhu's (2016) concern about reclaiming English as a language that can reflect the users' diverse sociocultural realities and necessities. Similarly, in excerpt 4, taken from the teacher-researcher's field notes, we identified a different moment in which students reflected upon contemporary sociocultural aspects in Colombia.

Excerpt 4

Students mentioned that, lately, they have noticed how news was, somehow, seeking to spread, by subtle means, an unfounded hate towards Venezuelans. I asked them what kinds of news they had watched. Among the news they have watched, they talked about how some of the Venezuelan immigrants have died during their journey and another student mentioned something about a piece of news where they talked about some Venezuelans that were caught shoplifting (FN_7_CS).

The experience mentioned here by the teacher-researcher, illustrates how students are aware of the different social issues that our country undergoes, as it is the case of Venezuelans' immigration. Most importantly, not only do students know about these issues, but they commented and suggested how "news was, somehow, seeking to spread … an unfounded hate towards Venezuelans." This sort of reflections are the ones which led us to the next subcategory where the participants manifested how critical literacy-oriented classes made them questioned issues they already knew, but, this time, from a more critical position.

*Students' emergence of critical awareness by reflecting upon local problems in text.* The name of this sub-category highlights how the students began to evidence the hidden elements and messages in various texts about local issues. Also, this sub-category relates to our third objective, which is to establish how students understand New Media Discourses within a Critical Literacy approach. The sessions were developed, the participants began to consider, in a different manner, the multimodal texts that were presented in the form of news, Facebook posts, videos and advertisements. This was the starting point for students to become aware of the elements that were (and are) present in a direct or indirect way in the texts they handle on a daily basis. In the following excerpt, taken from the first interview, we evidenced how Paola's thoughts were shaped by inquiring about deeper and more complex issues.

Excerpt 5

I believe it is interesting and important to see how you did to make us think further about problematics and situations that one believes normal because we have adapted to them. (Int1_27/32_Paola).

To elaborate more on this excerpt from the first interview, we can refer to Janks' (2013) asseveration that "we grow up unconsciously absorbing the discourses around us" (para. 14). The participant clearly stated that there are situations people have gotten accustomed to and think of these as normal. This is so because we have grown up in a society that "normalizes" the various elements that compose life, no matter if they are bad or harmful. Therefore, she called this emergence of critical awareness as "interesting" and "important," because it made her reflect upon deeper "problematics." Additionally, she addressed the way the teacher handled the class, thus showing that the activities guided the participants through the Critical Literacy elements presented.

In the following excerpt, the participant mentions the lack of attention she paid when reading or watching a piece of news that was presented to her on social media.

Excerpt 6

I never pay attention to any of that. I looked into a piece of news on Facebook and I thought "This is weird; it is kind of weird". But I said "hey, that must be true" (Int1_136/139_Paola).

In excerpt 6, the participant realized that she was not doing the process of reading a certain piece of news with full consciousness. She was not going through the process of actually

taking a moment to check whether it was true or not; she just assumed that whatever was written, was real. While being in the classes, she started questioning if what was posted on Facebook or spread through Twitter and WhatsApp comes from a trustworthy source, and most importantly, if what was mentioned in the news was true. When participants started resorting to practices in which they consciously examined a text, they turned to what Giroux calls to "intervene the world" (Giroux, 2011) by questioning what implicitly is found in the text and by doing so, it is easier to take action to change it. In excerpt 7, we evidenced this careful examination of text:

Excerpt 7

> (1) The objective of the propaganda is to increase the support (or the reject) to a certain
> position, and not to present it with its pros and cons. The objective of the propaganda is
> not to talk about the truth, but to convince people: it pretends to tilt the general opinion,
> not to inform it. (2) It influences a lot because of this. The information shared is often
> presented with a high emotional charge, commonly appealing to affectivity, especially to
> patriotic feelings and it points to more emotional than rational arguments. (SJ_2_Marleny)

Marleny expressed in her journal her strong view towards the reasons behind political propaganda. She says the main objective of it, is to "convince people" and lead them towards a specific purpose and not to say what is true about a certain candidate. We regard this as a powerful assertion that has derived from a thoughtful reflection on Colombia's presidential elections. Marleny also mentioned that those campaigns usually appeal to the emotional side of the voters as if they needed to love or hate the candidate and not to think about what they are proposing for the country.

In the same order of ideas, the field notes written by the teacher-researchers on the same session about "Political propaganda in Colombia," it was possible to identify a moment in which the students pointed out to words used to refer to certain groups and parties in Colombia, as follows:

Excerpt 8

Students reflected on how new media used techniques and strategies to benefit certain social groups and political parties in our country. I can recall some of the students watching the video of propaganda techniques and making comments about examples they knew about our situation in Colombia. Some of the techniques were striking for them, for example, the one about stereotyping and the use of certain pejorative words like "mamerto" or "uribestia", which is something they felt it was something that usually goes unnoticed by them as consumers of new media. (FN_2_DG)."

The teacher researcher's field notes revealed that the use of terms such as "mamerto" and "uribestia" was done only because they appeared repeatedly on the social networks they use without thinking carefully and reflecting upon the implications that the use of these words have as it "[went] unnoticed by them". Precisely because they are mostly used to insult people who identify with a certain candidate. The participants were also taking part in the development of the class by commenting and referring to specific examples they have seen either on social media or in T.V. Participants were not only reading the slides, but making a reading of what Freire calls "particular world" (Freire, 1987, p. 20). This is, making sense of what surrounds them and what occurs particularly in their country, Colombia.

***Emancipatory practices in the EFL classroom: students voicing their convictions freely and autonomously.*** The following subcategory's name is linked to students expressing their ideas in the class without fearing criticism; also, it is connected with our first objective, which is to examine the incidence of critical literacy in students understanding of local issues.  The classes were designed and developed in a different way from the average (the topic and the way in which it was displayed and exemplified, the activities in which they had to identify, compare, write). This allowed a space for students to have a voice and say what they were thinking. Participants highlighted the fact of not feeling judged (by the teacher nor the others in the classroom) because of the opinions they decided to share. The class became a safe space in which the teacher was not the only holder of knowledge. Instead, all of the ideas were considered reasonable and a space for respectful discussion was created as can be evidenced in the sample that follows taken from Interview 2.

> Excerpt 9
>
> But we have the freedom of expressing ourselves, do you understand? I mean, we gave our opinion. We were not told "you have to write this or that" or "follow the steps, read them, fill yourselves with information and then talk". (Int2_387/390_Marleny)

Apparently, in some English classes, the possibility of expressing their point of view was very limited because of the teacher or the topic handled in class that was not thought-provoking. Marleny highlighted this when she said "But we have the freedom of expressing ourselves, do you understand?" and she even wanted the interviewers to connect with what she felt. Students need to be heard and the English class has to become a place in which there is a space for various issues to be discussed and for the students to apprehend reality through reflection (Freire, 2005).

Besides, being the classroom a safe place where reflection occurs and in which the students are not "told: you have to write this or that or follow the steps". In this sense, autonomy inside the class matters.

The next sample was taken from the Interview 2. Here, Amanda highlights the role that participation had during the sessions of the pedagogical implementation.

Excerpt 10

Interesting that this type of participation was formed. Not only the decisions were made by the teacher but there is a participation component from the students.
(Int2_253/255_Amanda)

Participation was a highly relevant factor during the implementation. As teachers, we all expect our students to raise their hands and do certain exercises or give the correct answer and in this way, we assume they have a voice of their own. As it was mentioned in the previous excerpts, the teacher was not the one who held the truth and this is something important Amanda pointed out when she said that "not only the decisions were made by the teacher but there is a participation component from the students." Instead, all points of view were considered as relevant and the responsibility for developing the class was shared. Thanks to Critical Pedagogy and its social focus, the students were active enough to be taken beyond the world they were familiar with (Giroux, 2011). In this order of ideas, they connected their previous experiences with the new concepts shown in class and it was easier to make sense of them and also, to build new knowledge.

In the following sample taken from the teacher researcher's field notes, a fascinating session is discussed as well as how the students got familiar with the topic and the interest they showed in the final activity that was carried out.

Excerpt 11

The students made an analysis of the British boys' situation and discussed about the possible reasons behind those boys' attitudes. During the last activity, I could see that students were engaged with what they were doing. The teacher explained the activity a couple of times and let them work on their own. They were looking for the different elements such as tape, markers and paper to write the messages and at the same time, they went to where the teacher was to check on some spelling doubts. I felt students were inspired by the topic and had a lot to say about this, perhaps because some of them have suffered from bullying or have bullied others. The wall (poster) they created was nice and I felt they truly connected with it. (FN_6_CS)

The researcher analyzed the attitude the students had during the session and after having read and watched the videos about bullying. The fact that the participants were working on their own called the researcher's attention and allowed her to affirm that students were "inspired" and "had a lot to say". Those feelings and thoughts they wanted to express were shown in the small cards they were writing and the fact that some of them have experienced bullying helped the development of the final task. This showed us that participants felt empowered because they could speak up their minds freely.
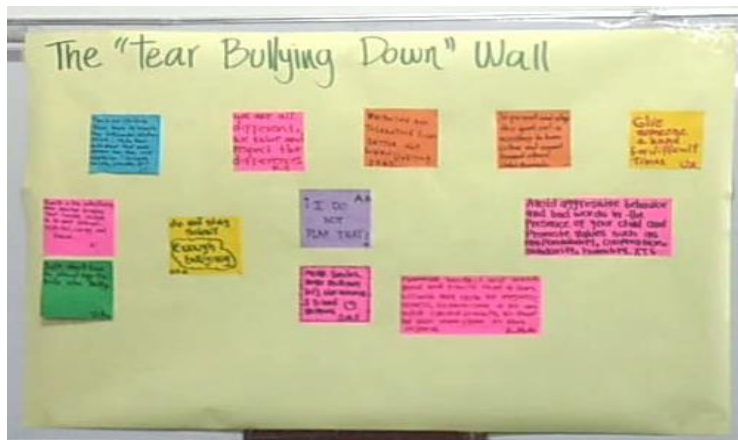
(Art_7)

The three subcategories described in this first category (approaching sociocultural issues in Colombia, students' emergence of critical awareness, emancipatory practices in the ELT classroom) highlight the influence that Critical Literacy had throughout the sessions of the pedagogical implementation. The students became familiar with the sociocultural issues that are present in the Colombian society and analyzed them from a critical standpoint. Finally, the English classroom was the scenario in which the participants and the teacher felt free from restrictions and shared their thoughts. In this order of ideas, the next category presents some of the insights the participants had regarding the way they conceive the English class and the roles they and teachers should assume.

**Challenging traditional ELT practices from a critical perspective.** This category is related to our second objective which is to explore how Critical Literacy oriented classes change students' perceptions about EFL classes. The name of this category refers to the way students spoke critically about the ordinary EFL classes they had received so far. When discussing the development of conventional English classes with the participants, they mentioned that the

English classes they received at the university always addressed the same topics. They wondered

why teachers and materials only focused on numbers, colors, food, weather, and why those

contents had the tendency to be repeated by teachers throughout the different English courses. As

a result of this discussion, we identified the changes in the students' roles during the critical

literacy-oriented classes and we also recorded how they thought the role of their teachers in the

EFL class should be.

**Students' transition from passive recipients to critical thinkers.** This subcategory

receives this name in regards of the fact that students took a different role in the class; also, it

refers to the educative aspect only. This sub-category links with our second objective which is to

explore how Critical Literacy/ oriented classes change students' perceptions about EFL classes.

The sessions had a powerful impact on the participants. We cannot deny the impact the sessions

had on the participants. With the development of the classes, the students began to make

statements about the various topics addressed which also led them to critically comment about

them as can be evidenced in the following excerpt taken from Interview 2.

Excerpt 12

I mean, we are being prepared for being part of a system and following that system.
(Int2_138/139_Marleny).

In this excerpt, Marleny recognized that the education she received at the university (and

the one she received when she was younger) serves a purpose. By mentioning that they have to

"follow a system," she evidenced that students are aware of the political and moral practices

(Giroux, 2011) that underlie education. The participant manifested the feeling of having been

(and still being) educated as a mere piece of a whole without having the opportunity to contribute to society nor question the practices and situations from her professional perspective.

The next sample was taken from the teacher's field notes in regards to curious conversation held with two students who commented about gender stereotypes.

Excerpt 13

The small talks I had with students while they were working on the activities were really enriching to see how students made meanings out of the multimodal text they were reading. Just to mention some examples, I talked with a psychology student who reported that she definitely could see how the video about media and gender was related with the nerf gun (toy for kids) and how boys are taught to be strong, competitive, confident, etc., because "that's how real boys are." She also elaborated on this idea of boys being this way as a fallacy, since she was aware that she also has some of these characteristic and she was completely okay with that, despite of what anyone could say about it. (FN_4_DG).

The topic for session number four was "gender stereotypes in mall products." After analyzing the multimodal texts, the teacher had a "small talk" with a student and another one jumped in. As researchers, we considered this as a crucial moment; the fact that there was a space for students to debate over the issue with their classmates and teacher. The English classes usually have been the place where students sit down and learn the linguistic dimension of the language with no room for debates or questioning. During this session, the teacher and two participants reflected through a dialogue. This situation showed us that they were assuming a different role; from being passive recipients to critical thinkers. By allowing this space for

discussion both the students and the teacher were not only consuming knowledge but also transforming it (Giroux, 2011), which is a need in current times. In this sense, in the following excerpt, one of the participants brings up the issue of bullying.

Excerpt 14

Yes, in high school and it felt like if you did not have any dignity, as if you were only an inanimate object destined to be the fun of your classmates. I think those are profoundly cultural reasons, in many times intrinsic that many People have to abuse others. As years go by we learn that aesthetics is not really interesting and what human being have to offer is really subjective (SJ_7_Darío).

During the seventh session, "Name calling in schools," Darío, in his journal, elaborated on the fact that being called names affected him to the point that he felt he "did not have any dignity." He also goes on and analyzes the reason why some people bully others. Discussing these matters in the way Darío did, with a more critical consciousness, gives us an idea of how the critically-oriented class, allowed him to reflect upon a subject he had experienced and to see it from a different perspective. Students will continue to engage in these reflective and transforming practices if we take into account Hargreaves' (2013) claim that "teaching in many parts of the world is in great transformation (p. 2)." Once we recognize that more efforts from all actors involved in the educational community need to be done, we will be heading towards that transformation and responding to it.

***Students' perceptions about authoritarian and democratic teaching.*** Within the myriad of education discourses shared as a community, we have heard—and interiorized to some extent—the claim that teachers are knowledge bearers, and students are, consistently with this

dialectical relationship, passive containers of this knowledge, as we discussed previously. Thus, this subcategory involves how students perceive and interact within the class with two opposite roles of teaching such as the authoritarian and the democratic one. Additionally, this subcategory connects with our second research objective in the sense that the participants made comparisons between traditional ELT practices (Communicative Language Teaching, Audio-lingual method, Grammar-translation method, etc.) which are more teacher-centered and allow teachers to exercise authority at a higher level; and critical literacy-oriented classes which, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of empowering students to take responsibility of their learning.

In this regard, Heargreaves (2000), argues that "combatting the pre-professional view of teaching means challenging the nostalgia that many policy-makers, members of the public and teachers themselves have for `real teaching' and `real schools'" (p. 157). In excerpt (15), Amanda questions this institutionalized perception of "real teaching" and mentions that the role of the teacher is, very often, an oppressive one:

Excerpt 15

But there lies the difficulty, when one wants to propose something, one says "hey, teacher. It'd be great if we could do this or that," and the teacher may say "no; you're not the teacher, you just make sure you do what you're supposed to do. Then, this becomes a game of power, because teachers think that letting the students to comment on their classes—and many students think accordingly—that if the teacher is very passive, very condescending with the students is because they have no authority (Int1_236/242_Amanda).

Here, Amanda addressed a "game of power," as she decided to call it; as a discursive practice in which teachers position their students as passive recipients. Worryingly, this "game of power" is constantly being reinforced by comments such as "just make sure you do what you're supposed to do," and "you're not the teacher," thus, limiting students' eagerness to participate. These sort of practices can be traced back all the way from the 17th century, in Foucault's (1995) examination of the Gobelins school when he analyzed their master-apprentice relationship as "an overall exchange between the master who must give his knowledge and the apprentice who must offer his services, his assistance and often some payment. The form of domestic service is mixed with a transference of knowledge" (p. 156). Surprisingly, these sort of practices are still in vogue among many teachers who are not willing to let their students take full responsibility for their learning processes, but instead, they position themselves as the only holders (possessors) of knowledge in the classroom. In excerpt (16), Marleny denounces how teachers may obstruct knowledge by resorting to teaching practices that are monotonous and repetitive due to a fixated engagement with traditional teaching (e.g., using the same materials, discussing the same topics, avoiding the use of technology, etc.):

Excerpt 16

But when they [teachers] are there, fixed in front of the blackboard… what I mean is that there are many strategies, many things to do, and teachers, like, they can make us feel bored by doing the same stuff. Sometimes, they're not interested in bringing up anything different, they simply have their ready-made curriculum, and all the activities planned, and they refrain themselves from doing something different because they're also limited [by the institution] to do something different (Int2_453/458/_Marleny).

In this excerpt, Marleny numbered some of the aspects that may inhibit teachers (e.g., "strategies," "curriculum," "institutional policies," etc.) and, in turn, the students' pedagogical development. This is a clear example of how between the lofty lecturer and the intimidated student there are no pedagogical moments, since they have all been practically obliterated (Dussell, 1980, p. 104). On the other hand, in excerpt (17), Amanda reflects upon what she considered to be the features of a "good" teacher:

Excerpt 17

We've noticed that teachers are better when they're less authoritarian, because this is what teachers are supposed to do, well, the teacher's vocation implies orientation, but not doing everything for the students. Then, we as students must have our own reasons, one needs to have personality and be responsible, regardless of the fact that you're being or not being observed by a cop [the teacher] (Int2_243/246_Amanda)

Here, Amanda questioned the role of authoritarian teachers when she expressed that "teachers are better when they're less authoritarian." Therefore, what Amanda suggested was a transformation of the teachers' roles to be more inclined towards "orientation" instead of solely "authority." As a result of this transformation of teachers' roles, students must change their roles too, from passive recipients to active agents of learning. Amanda was unsettled about the idea of students reducing their roles to simply going to class and complying with everything their teachers say. Instead, Amanda argued that students "must have their own reasons," they need to take responsibility for their own learning, even if they are not being observed by an authority who may exercise discipline upon them. In a similar fashion, Darío lets us know, in excerpt (18), how he felt about the role of the teacher in the classroom during the implementation:

Excerpt 18

The teacher was really helpful and guide us through the different parts in the session about propaganda. […] I really enjoyed doing the tasks without feeling rushed to finish, because, thus, I was able to work better. (SJ_1_Darío).

Dario expressed that the teacher being a "guide" in the different moments of the class helped him to feel a little bit more relieved. We could evidence this when he manifested he could work on his activities "without feeling rushed [by the teacher] to finish," as this helped him to feel in a more pressure-free environment. We could also evidence this relief, from the teacher's perspective, as follows:

Excerpt 19

On the other hand, I also talked to another psychology student [Paola] who told me that she didn't understand the example of the nerf gun [a boy displayed holding a gun in the toy's box]. She told me that it was natural to see a boy in the toy box, considering that this "was a toy made for boys." I thought this was an interesting case so I sat and talked to her. I asked her why she considered this toy to be only for boys to make her further question this apparent gender exclusiveness in toys. (FN_4_DG).

This excerpt gave us some insights about the teacher's practices within the critical literacy-oriented class. These critical conversations where the teacher "sat and talked" with the students to help them to "further question" several issues that remained unchallenged, were really enriching and allowed students to feel more opened to ask different questions.

These two subcategories (*Students' transition from passive recipients to critical thinkers* and *Teachers as facilitators or gatekeepers of knowledge*) shed some light on how the participants perceived English classes prior and after the implementation. In the following category, we will discuss how the participants made meaning out of new media discourses.

**Rethinking the concept of truth by examining New Media Discourses**. In this category, we evidenced how the participants rethought the concept of truth by examining New Media Discourses, which responds to our third objective about students' understanding of these discourses withing a Critical Literacy approach. We understand "truth" here from the Foucauldian perspective, that is, that truth is produced inside power and it is reinforced by discursive practices that determine what is true or false (Foucault, 2008). This means that "truthness" in new media is not determined by undisputable facts, as many believe, but it endorsed by power. Bearing this notion in mind, we noticed that students tackled the issue of truth and discourses to question the veracity of these as they are presented in new media.

*Calling into question the reliability of ideology behind New Media Discourses*. Lately, no one has been so concerned with the notion of ideology as Slav philosopher Žižek. For him, ideology can be defined as "a system which makes a claim to the truth – that is, which is not simply a lie but a lie experienced as truth, a lie which pretends to be taken seriously" (Žižek, 2008, p. 27). Thus, in this subcategory we define "ideology" from a Žižekean perspective. Accordingly, this subcategory seeks to further illustrate our third objective about the participants understanding of New Media Discourses by questioning the reliability of the ideologies behind them. In relation to the "truthification of ideology," or the way ideology pretends to be taken as an unquestionable truth, in excerpt (20), Karla mentioned that, through the different critical

literacy-oriented classes, she started questioning, in the various activities involving examining discourse, the veracity of new media discourses:

Exerpt 20

I think it's interesting to see how you, I don't know, led us to think beyond, I don't know, problematics or it may be that one thinks they are normal, that you get used to them. It's like seeing how that has influenced us, see the reactions, to observe what I've believed, to observe if it's true or false, to explore how Facebook posts about politics that I thought were true actually aren't. What else did we talk about? The [gender] stereotypes. You usually go and buy something and you don't even notice the pictures they use. You just say "that's what I need," but you don't see the message behind of what they're selling (Int1_28/35_Karla).

Transposing Vargas' (2010) criticism of mass media discourses, we would like to highlight that this was exactly the kind of thinking we wanted to elicit from our participants. We wanted them to approach these new media discourses to raise awareness that, through these, "people are informed (cognitive level), but they are also persuaded, manipulated and led to feel a particular way (ideological level)" (p. 184), and that it is necessary to analyze these from a more pluralistic and integral perspective.

Another interesting example was evidenced during the first two sessions of the implementation, where participants were engaged with "ideological bubbles," a term that we found in a piece of news from *El Espectador* where we discussed how social networks became the perfect ground for generating opposite ideological perspectives. At the end of the second

session, students had to create a diagram explaining the ideological attacks displayed on social networks from 2018 presidential elections in Colombia. This is what Darío manifested:

Excerpt 21

During last elections, we found high activity of social networks speculating about the proposals of each candidate promoting false information and personal attacks against each candidate, therefore people could not have an objective criterion for the election of each candidate. (Art_2_Darío).

This spread of "false information," related with the so-called fake news discussed in the first two sessions, is what Darío started to question here. He noticed how these "speculations" in new media distorted the image of the different candidates who were running for president in 2018. During these classes, we also were able to capture, in our field notes, specific moments in which participants used different strategies to express how "new media privileged, mocked or tried to force false accusations about [politicians.]"

Excerpt 22

Students found themselves looking at two pictures positioned as political opponents (Petro and Duque). They started inquiring about the material they should use in this part and we let them know they're allowed to add whatever input they want, as long as they explain the way they're using such material. They started using memes, pictures, newspaper headlines, etc., to express the way new media privileged politicians and also mocked them or tried to force false accusations about them. (FN_2_DG)

We believed that this approach to political propaganda by "using memes, pictures, newspaper headlines, etc." to create videos, brochures, walls, and all the multimodal texts used during the implementation in which they reflected and questioned each issues we covered, is clear example of a critical practice used by the participants to rethink and reshape their understanding about discourses in new media. Participants, when interacting with the different new media sources that equipped them with multiple perspectives, allowed them to make meaning out of discourses in a more critical fashion.

Adorno (2005) used to allude to a "multilayered structure" of television and mass media which can perfectly fit the current situation with social networks when he denounces that there are "various superimposed layers [of meaning] of different degrees of manifestness or hiddenness that are utilized […] as a technological means of 'handling' the audience" (p. 166). As a result of an examination of this "superimposed layers of meaning" in social networks, participants were able to interpret and unveil messages that are made with manipulation purposes. This superimposition of meanings was also evidenced in the first focus group interview, where Amanda argues that political image was constantly being inflicted by the different groups subscribed to their ideological bubbles:

Excerpt 23

And that's what happened in the former elections. Thanks to the news, these type of news, there was a winner and a loser. It was thanks to that, because social networks have a big influence in people and if they can influence this kind of things, imagine what other things they might manipulate (Int1_156/159_Amanda).

In this excerpt, Amanda linked the "big influence [social networks have] in people" to the presidential elections and its indisputable discursive divisions into ideological bubbles. For Amanda, the most unsettling issue with this manipulation is "what other things they [new media] might manipulate" and how they might also, for the sake of political ideology, damage people's image and portray false accusations, as in the case of candidates from different parties. Similarly, Karla expressed that, after reading some of the Facebook comments found in some pieces of news about regional issues in Colombia, we need to take into considerations several things "for change to arise," hinting a necessity to rethink the way we think about the Other. In excerpt 24, Karla gave some insights into how hate discourses should be counteracted:

Excerpt 24

For change to arise, you must start with respecting everyone's opinions, cultures, beliefs. We must begin by accepting the diversity that is found in our cultural context and not generate controversy, rejection or comparison because it will only bring discord in a society that is marked by hatred and resentment (SJ_5_Karla).

In Karla's words, this landscape of "hatred and resentment" in Colombia can only be changed through respect, by "accepting the diversity that is found our cultural context." Karla's insights provided us here with more evidence of how students rethought and made new meanings out of the discourses that surround them. Being exposed to these chauvinistic discourses on a daily basis somehow normalize their use and impact; because of this, Karla found a space in the critical literacy-oriented class to ponder and reflect upon these issues that led her to (re)think them.

***Identifying marginalization mechanisms displayed by New Media Discourses in***

***Colombia.*** New media discourses and marginalization in Colombia comprise those discourses

that parade, from an ideological viewpoint, certain social groups which, most of the times, distort

someone's image for the sake of favoring the elite. This subcategory connects with our third

research objective, since it unveils the different strategies or mechanisms displayed in New

Media Discourses to subtly marginalize unprivileged groups.  In excerpt (25), Miriam briefly

expressed how new media "displays peasants as people who generate discord," in an attempt to

downplay their labor:

Excerpt 25

New media displays peasants as people who generate discord in society and, although

they are the ones who produce and provide for the masses in Colombia, we know that

there are some that devote their lives to illegal harvesting, but this does not entail that the

vast majority are like this. Some others are meat or vegetable farmers in their regions to

provide goods for Colombians and their households (SJ_8_Miriam).

This reflection upon marginalization expressed by Miriam was born from a discussion

about some pieces of news that displayed Colombian peasants in Tumaco as criminals who only

grow *coca*. Miriam clarified that she was aware of these peasants' precarious situation who

turned to "illegal harvesting" to ameliorate their conditions, but she also expressed that this does

not justify how the "vast majority" is being affected by new media's generalizations. In this

regard, Foucault (1998) points out that:

Our systems of social security impose a particular way of life to which individuals are

subjected, and any person or group that, for one reason or another, will not or cannot

embrace that way of life is marginalized by the very operation of the institutions." (p. 165).

In other words, what Miriam suggested is that, if it is true that there are several groups of peasants growing coca due to the state's abandonment of this region, not all of the peasants in Tumaco should be displayed as criminals. This is the way the government reassures its negligence and marginalization towards these communities, since it becomes easier for them to ignore their needs by labelling them as outlaws.

Similarly, students were able to discover the mischievous strategies used in new media discourses to marginalize Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia. As it is widely known, our country is currently trying to adapt to the massive immigration of Venezuelans due to the different political and economic issues that this country is facing. Despite the fact that Venezuelans are leaving their country to come here, new media has found its way to subtly marginalize them. When referring to the situation of Venezuelan women in Colombia, Miriam reported that, through the vast proliferation of memes on social networks, these women were objectified and reduced to their instrumental value:

Excerpt 26

Memes only want Colombians to continue damaging the physical integrity, the good treatment, and the respect towards the Venezuelan woman, denigrating their image, under the ignorant insult of *venecas*, treating them the same way everywhere, assuming that they are willing to do certain things by their state of necessity. As foreigners, they arrive in the country, and therefore they can be abused, a subject that is quite demeaning to women in the midst of a country founded on human rights (Art_7_Miriam).

For Miriam, Colombians agreeing upon calling Venezuelan women by using the "vulgar insult [such as] *venecas*" is really demining and it is inadmissible in "country founded on human rights" such as ours. In this sense, sharing this type of discursive practices through something as naïve as a meme, is the best way to represent the triumph of ideology. In Fairclough's (1989) words, "discourse is the favoured vehicle of ideology, and therefore of control by consent" (p. 37), which is the same that happened some years ago in Europe with Syrian immigrants, and the overgeneralization displayed by mass media that they were all terrorists. In this case, we observed a similar phenomenon in the portrayal of Venezuelan women as prostitutes, even to the point of popularizing a pejorative term such as "venecas" as some sort of national joke.

In this category, we observed how participants addressed new media discourses and their ideological pretensions to be taken as truth. We also evidenced how participants discussed marginalization and the subtle ways in which new media create division among their users.

Overall, this chapter answered our research question by giving account of three main categories. Firstly, the influence of Critical Literacy allowed us to see participants' engagement with critical literacy-oriented classes and how these led them to a development of critical awareness. In the second category, we displayed some crucial insights on how participants perceived ELT prior and after the implementation; and finally, the third category helped us to observe how the participants made meaning out of new media discourses. In the following section, we elaborate on the conclusions, pedagogical implications, limitations and further research of this study.

**Chapter V**

**Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

In this chapter, we discussed how the findings led us to a better understanding of EFL students' meaning making processes of new media discourses through the lens of a critical literacy-oriented approach. This chapter includes a) conclusions about the findings and how they answered our research question; b) the pedagogical implications and its impact on both the participants and the researchers; c) the limitations and inconveniences we had during the pedagogical implementation; and d) suggestions for further research and issues that may trigger potential new studies.

**Conclusions**

This study aimed to explore the role of critical literacy in students' meaning-making processes about new media discourses. Moreover, this action research study sought to answer three research subquestions: Firstly, how does Critical Literacy-oriented classes influence students' understanding about local issues?; secondly, how does the use of Critical Literacy-oriented classes change students' perceptions about EFL classes?; and finally, how do students understand New Media Discourses within a Critical Literacy approach? The main theoretical framework underlying this study comprised constructs such as Critical Literacy (Freire, 2005; Freire & Macedo, 2005; Giroux, 1997), Meaning-making (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Kalantzis et al., 2015; Kress, 2003), and New Media Discourses (Foucault, 1995; Janks; 2013; Gee, 1990; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

In regard to the role of Critical Literacy, we found that by students becoming aware of the sociocultural issues surrounding them, they were able to question aspects such as power and how all of our relationships are, inevitably, affected by it. Freire and Macedo (2005) assert that "it is

impossible to even think about education without considering the question of power" (p. 26), and this, of course, does not exclude EFL classes. For this reason, discussing issues that made power more visible, in the different critical literacy-oriented classes, was crucial for students to understand how education is not detached from their immediate realities. This approximation to the sociocultural issues surrounding them facilitated a more critical and integrative way of perceiving the new media discourses (see table 1) related to gender stereotyping in advertising, marginalization of peasants on news, and the demonization of Venezuelan immigrants in memes.

Additionally, in connection with how critical literacy-oriented classes helped change students' perception about English classes, we observed that students questioned the different ELT practices they were exposed to in the English courses they had taken in the past, which denoted an Anglocentric preference in their topics. Foucault (1972) argues that "every education system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it" (as cited in Ball, 1990), suggesting that our education system perpetuates traditional discourses that limit the possibility of democratization and integration of students as active social actors of their educational processes. For this reason, instead of seeking to perpetuate these discourses, during our implementation of the critical literacy-oriented classes, they were encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning, as they negotiated, along with the teacher, the development of their classes.

Finally, in relation to how students understand new media discourses within a Critical Literacy approach, we observed that the participants critically analyzed these and challenged the way ideological tenets are strategically presented as *truth* in new media. Žižek (2009) suggests that "ideology consists in the very fact that the people do not know what they are really doing, that they have a false representation of the social reality to which they belong" (p. 27) and,

following this logic, once we realize the falseness of ideology, we automatically cease being

subjected by it. By being exposed to the different ideological discourses shared in the

pedagogical implementation, the participants were encouraged to carefully examine the validity

and truthness of these, by means of identifying the potential hidden purposes behind them (e.g.,

political agendas, economic interests, social recognition, etc.). The participants recognized that

they should be more careful about what they took for granted in new media discourses, and the

way they were uncritically accepting these discourses without pondering the possible ideological

interests disguised as unquestionable truths.

**Pedagogical Implications**

The findings in this study add significant contributions to the field of Critical Literacy and

stress the importance of rethinking education, not just as an isolated process that happens in a

classroom, but as practices that involve several dimensions such as the social, cultural, political,

economical etc. Among the many valuable lessons we learnt as teacher-researchers in this study,

we would like to highlight the necessity of challenging the nostalgia (Heargreaves, 2000) about

the old days in which schools were regarded as a space where students went and learnt everything

from a teacher who exercised discipline upon them. That being said, teachers need to stop

thinking that they are the only possessors of knowledge and that they attend their classes to

transmit this knowledge to their students. If teachers want to transform their students, then, they

must encourage them to get more and more involved in these pedagogical acts.

Furthermore, the overall response to the critical literacy-oriented classes was positive and

enriching. Democratizing the class and letting students make choices in the classroom, facilitated

the right ambience for students to get actively involved in the different activities held.

Additionally, as a result of the students' involvement in their learning processes, they created

stronger bonds with their classmates and teacher; which allowed them to express their insights and opinions more placidly. Besides, participants manifested that the way classes were carried out enabled them to see themselves positioned in a different way, and it enhanced their understanding about their roles within the class. However, we cannot say our study was devoid of limitations, as it will be further elucidated in the following section.

The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to the ELT community. This study has enhanced our understanding of how Critical Literacy may help us reconceptualize ELT and how all the actors involved may reposition themselves in alternative pedagogies. Critical Literacy in the English classroom not only encourages students to examine power matters critically, it also paves the way to transform this power at an institutional level by giving the students the possibility to see the importance of their roles in their settings and their social responsibility as citizens.

For this reason, there is a question that all ELT teachers need to bear in mind culture-wise: "How can we reclaim English as a language with a heart by attaching it neither to global economic interests, nor to national hegemonies, but to the deep aspirations of socially and historically situated social actors?" (Kramsch & Zhu, 2016, p. 15). Hence, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to address this question, so that it can be answered through the integration of teaching practices that reflect upon sociocultural values, instead of just pondering economic interests. In the case of making students more literate, Critical Pedagogy can offer some tools to reclaim English as a means to inquire and learn more about their local issues.

There are several suggestions that need to be considered when implementing Critical Literacy-oriented classes. Firstly, it is necessary to take into account the population: we noticed that some of the issues we discussed during the implementation (as it was the case of "gender"

and "sex" matters) are harder to understand for students whose majors are not closely related to the humanities. Secondly, it is important to write prompts in every writing activity so that students do not end up using translators all the time. Thirdly, it is vital to contextualize all power-related issues so that students can see a strong connection between these and their realities.

**Limitations**

This study suffered from some unavoidable limitations. The first limitation we encountered was the fact that one of the researchers lived in the department of Cauca and she was not able to be present during the pedagogical implementations. To solve this inconvenience, we agreed that the class was going to be broadcasted via WhatsApp call; however, the connection was not the best and there were always problems with the sound or with the video, which was too slow. Some sessions were observed by the teacher and she was able to make notes, but some others were not.

Other limitations that arose when designing the classes was deciding which topics to address. As our intention was to follow Critical Literacy practices, it was necessary that the issues to be included were thought provoking and also, to avoid making the participants and the other students feel fatigued. As researchers we found this activity to be very challenging because in Colombia many things happen daily and those things deserve to be discussed in class from a critical view point. Also, the way how these news, videos and posters are presented need to be talked through in order to help the learner develop critical awareness since texts represent "particular points of view while often silencing other views" (Ciardello, 2004, p. 138). But we did not want to do it the wrong way or only to talk about the negative side of this matter. So, we found ourselves having deep conversations about what topics would fit best. We would not call

this a "problem" per se, but a challenge which we actually enjoyed, because it made us reflect both as Colombian citizens and as English teachers.

On the other hand, some of the participants did not have a Facebook or a WhatsApp account, and those two social networks were the ones selected to share the materials, videos, magazines and presentations. Therefore, it was not possible to transmit information regarding the classes nor the materials needed. To solve this complication, the teacher in charge of the class, took a flash drive with him and shared what was required for the classes.

Something to add to the limitations is that the internet connection was very poor at the *Centro de Idiomas* and the obsolete state of the computers. Initially, we thought these elements were going to work properly, but we ended up having some technical issues. Likewise, the teacher was not able to give them homework to reinforce the topics, because the participants had to continue working on the platform.

Finally, the fact of having a week of exams was most of the times a complicated issue, because students were too tired to go to a three-hour class. There were times in which only a few showed up (fortunately they were the ones we were getting the data from) and in some other opportunities they arrived too late to class. This made the implementation difficult because we did not have enough time and the students were not fully willing to cooperate or participate.

**Further Research**

The study inquired about the role Critical Literacy plays in the meaning-making processes of a group of students. There is a compelling need to continue exploring and developing Critical Literacy among those enrolled in the different careers at the university. Future research should look more into students getting involved in the selection and development of the topics for their classes, being local-sensitive and thinking carefully about their context situation. In this sense,

one research question could be: How does students' collaboration in the design of Critical

Literacy-Oriented classes affect their understanding of local issues?

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Consent Form**

**Maestría en Didáctica del Inglés**
**Universidad Surcolombiana**

**Formulario de consentimiento**

Título del proyecto: El rol de la literacidad crítica en el entendimiento de los discursos de los medios digitales de comunicación. (The role of critical literacies in the understanding of new media discourses).

María Carolina Santa Monje y Daniel Felipe Gutiérrez Álvarez de la Universidad Surcolombiana dirigen la investigación mencionada previamente.

El objetivo de esta investigación es conocer cómo perciben o entienden los estudiantes los discursos de los medios de comunicación y de qué manera una literacidad crítica puede aportar al común entendimiento de estos discursos.

Si usted acuerda participar en esta investigación, se le pedirá llenar semanalmente un diario y hacer parte de unas entrevistas de aproximadamente una hora para conocer a fondo su entendimiento acerca de los discursos a lo largo del proceso. Las entrevistas serán grabadas y utilizadas como información para la recolección de datos de la investigación.

Su participación en esta investigación es voluntaria y es libre de abandonarla en cualquier momento. No es necesario dar explicaciones sobre su deserción y tampoco habrá consecuencias negativas si decide desertar. Antes de que el reporte final esté listo, se le enviará un resumen de lo que hemos escrito sobre las entrevistas, diarios y artefactos y se le pedirá que comente cualquier descripción o interpretación que usted considere inexacta o errada.

Cuando se reporte la investigación, se le garantizará su anonimidad. Su nombre no será usado en ningún momento. Nosotros somos los únicos que tendremos acceso a los datos recolectados para la investigación. Cualquier información utilizada en reportes o publicaciones será únicamente con fines ilustrativos. Si desea tener una copia del reporte final, podemos hacérselo llegar.

**Consentimiento del participante**

El participante ha recibido una copia de este formulario.

Estoy de acuerdo en participar en esta investigación.

Nombre: _____ Fecha: _____
Firma: _____

**Universidad Surcolombiana**
**Field Notes**
**Observing the Role of Critical Literacies in Students' Meaning-Making Processes**

**Location: Centro de Idiomas**
**Observer: Daniel Felipe Gutiérrez Álvarez**
**Role of the observer:**
**Date: 05/10/2018**                                         **Time:**
**Session: 4**
**Length of the observation: two hours**

| | |
|---|---|
| **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS** | The students showed up a little bit late for this session. I still don't know the reason why. We immediately went to the computer lab and I started sharing the files and information they needed for this session via USB (only for those who didn't have access to WhatsApp). Students are already familiar with the type of activities we're currently doing, so they started by watching the video tutorial I made for them and then I proceeded to clarify any type of doubts they had. As usual, I had to move from one room to the other, making sure I was able to spend equal amounts of time with both groups. There were several times in which I sat to talk with students about certain parts of the activity, because they felt like doing so and I was really excited about seeing how they were kin to discuss the topic of gender stereotypes and the issue of gender vs sex. The class finished a little bit earlier than expected (4:30 p.m.) and I collected all their files and students' journals from the selected sample. |
| **ACTIVITY** | The gender stereotypes in mall products activity was a success in terms of triggering the making of meaning in students. They started by watching a video to differentiate the concepts of sex and gender. Once they finished this video, many questions came up like "what does it mean to be cisgender?" or "can you give us some examples about differences between gender and sex?". I addressed these question and, while I was talking, other students started to participate to add more examples and explanations on the matter. I notice it was a little bit complex at the beginning for them to think about sex and gender as two different terms. In one of these discussions, the subject of sexual orientation came up, considering that for some students was strange to think about male homosexuals with a masculine gender identity or role. After this, they analyzed two toys (a nerf gun with the picture of a boy and a girl playing with a kitchen set) where they analyzed if they displayed any type of gender stereotype. Finally, students created a draft of the script they would use to talk about the product they found in a mall or shop (this was homework assigned since las class), however, it was hard to record them right away due to time limitations, so we agreed to finish the recording at home. |
| **STUDENTS'S MEANING-MAKING PROCESSES** | The little talks I had with students while they were working on the activities were really enriching to see how students made meanings out of the multimodal text they were reading. Just to mention some examples, I talked with a psychology student (from the sample) who reported that she definitely could see how the video about media and gender was related with the nerf gun (toy for kids) and how kids are taught to be strong, competitive, confident, etc., because "that's how real boys are." She also elaborated on this idea of boys being this way as a fallacy, since she was aware that she also was in the possession of such elements or characteristics and she mentioned that she was completely okay with that, despite of what anyone could say about it. On the other hand, I also talked to another psychology student who told me that she didn't understand the example of the nerf gun as she told me that was natural to see a boy in the toy's box since this "was a toy for boys." I thought this was an interesting case so I sat and talked to her. I asked her why she considered this toy to be exclusively for boys and explained that boys have always played with this type of toys. |

**STUDENTS AND CRITICAL LITERACIES**

I didn't have the intention to be some kind of Socrates, trying to make her think she was wrong or anything alike. I decided to ask her how she understood sex and gender as different terms. She told me that she honestly wasn't sure about the differences. One of her classmates jumped in and told her her views on this matter and she was able to understand a little bit better. I added that it was important to understand gender as socially constructed and I mentioned the examples of how women, according to gender rules socially constructed, men are supposed to have short hair and don't wear skirts and women are supposed to have long hair and are "allowed" to wear skirts, but this didn't have anything to do with our sex (the biological nature of our bodies), but more with what society establishes as right or wrong according to gender roles. This talk was helpful to her to understand more about the differences between these two terms (sex and gender) and led her to finish the analysis of the toys.

**Appendix C: Focus Group Interview 1**

Tell us about yourself.

What motivates you to be involved in this study?

Describe the new media you use.

What type of social networks do you use?

How is your interaction with these?

How often do you interact with new media?

In what way are these interactions important to you?

How do these interactions shape the way you think?

Can you mention an example of new media information shaping the way you think?

Describe the purpose of new media for our society.

What do you think is the main purpose of new media in our society?

What do you think about the veracity of new media information?

How can you tell if new media information is true or false?

Talk about news in new media.

How do you get news information from new media?

What are your favorite means to keep yourself updated with news?

What's the main goal of news in new media?

Who do you think benefits from news?

Describe advertisement in new media.

Have you ever been exposed to any type of advertisement in new media? If so, what type?

Have you ever been tempted to acquire any product thanks to advertisement?

What do you think is the main goal of advertisement in new media.

## Appendix C: Focus Group Interview 2

What do you think of the classes and all the activities we held?

Do these classes changed the way you perceived English classes? Yes/no. Explain.

How do you understand political/educational discourses now that we have ended the

implementation?

**Appendix D: Student Journal**

| SESIÓN 3 | OPINIÓN DEL ESTUDIANTE | PREGUNTAS DE APOYO |
|---|---|---|
| Temática: *Advertising in Colombia.*<br><br>Fecha:<br>_____<br>_____ | | • ¿Cuál crees que sea el propósito de la publicidad en los medios de comunicación?<br>• ¿Qué estrategias consideras que utilizan las personas que crean publicidad para vender un producto?<br>• ¿Alguna vez has comprado un producto gracias a publicidad? ¿Qué fue lo que te atrajo de dicha publicidad?<br>• ¿Has visto publicidad realizada por una celebridad alguna vez? Si tu respuesta es sí, explica cuál es la razón para usar a un famoso para hacer publicidad |

**Appendix E: Artifact**