Creative Thinking in an ELT Social practice in Colombia

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to all my past, present, and future students, who by being the true meaning and reflection of creativity, inspire me to pass it on in each aspect of my teaching practice. Never stop imagining. Don't let creativity run away from you.

Also, a special appreciation to all who fight for quality education.

Acknowledgment

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Abstract

Tittle: Creative Thinking in an ELT social practice in Colombia[*]

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Key Words: Creative thinking, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Project-based learning, social practice.

Description: The present document provides a description of the design, implementation, and evaluation of an English Teaching pedagogical project implemented virtually through the ZOOM platform as a social practice that consisted of an English Course at COSMOS Foundation, that had as main goal to enhance critical thinking skills in students through a project-based learning curriculum by connecting it to their context, and to foster creativity through pedagogical activities that made learning more meaningful. The instruments used to analyze the impact of the project were interviews carried out to the director of the foundation and to the relatives of the students to inquire for the satisfaction of the project in connection to the objectives, a student's survey applied to a strategic sample of the focus group (10 first grade students age 7 to 8) to evaluate the impact of the proposal, and artifacts that students produced which were collected throughout the implementation that consisted of 10 weeks, having 2 hours of class each week in total for 2 days each week. The outcomes revealed that the objectives first established were fulfilled and the expectations were exceeded, also that the methodology and activities used in the project engaged learners, fostered active participation and facilitated the acquisition of English language.

Resumen

Título: Pensamiento Creativo en la enseñanza del inglés en una práctica social en Colombia[*]

Autor: Diana Carolina Romero Marín [**]

Palabras Clave: Pensamiento creativo, pensamiento crítico, aprendizaje basado en proyectos, práctica social.

Descripción: El presente documento proporciona una descripción del diseño, implementación y evaluación de un proyecto pedagógico de Enseñanza del Inglés implementado virtualmente a través de la plataforma ZOOM como práctica social de un Curso de Inglés en la Fundación COSMOS. Este tenía como objetivo principal potenciar las habilidades de pensamiento crítico. en los estudiantes a través de un plan de estudios de aprendizaje basado en proyectos conectándolo con su contexto, y fomentar la creatividad a través de actividades pedagógicas que hicieran que el aprendizaje fuera más significativo. Los instrumentos utilizados para analizar el impacto del proyecto fueron entrevistas realizadas al director de la fundación y a los familiares de los estudiantes para indagar sobre la satisfacción del proyecto en relación a los objetivos, una encuesta a estudiantes aplicada a la muestra estratégica de un grupo focal (10 estudiantes de primer grado de 7 a 8 años) para evaluar el impacto de la propuesta, y los artefactos que produjeron los estudiantes los cuales fueron recolectados a lo largo de la implementación que constó de 10 semanas, teniendo 2 horas de clase cada semana en total durante 2 días cada semana. Los resultados revelaron que se cumplieron los objetivos establecidos inicialmente y se superaron las expectativas, así como que la metodología y las actividades utilizadas en el proyecto involucraron a los alumnos, fomentaron la participación activa y facilitaron la adquisición del idioma inglés.

Introduction

The present study gives an account of the experience, the design, implementation, and evaluation of an English language teaching (ELT) pedagogical proposal carried out as a social practice project constructed together with Fundación Para el Desarrollo de la Ciencia, la Tecnología, la educación, el deporte y la Cultura "COSMOS". (Foundation for the development of Science, Technology, Sport and Culture "COSMOS") to students ages three to seventeenth of low incomes, particularly from public institutions. The focus group consisted of kids from first grade, ages 7 to 8.

Foundation COSMOS dates back to December of 2010 when it was founded. It was initially created with the aim of covering several gaps in the education field, particularly with regard to science and technology. Along the way, the foundation has developed different initiatives with regard to health, education, technology, and care of the environment setting a focus on the integral life of human beings, especially of the most vulnerable populations. The mission of this institution is to foster education, culture, sports, and recreation in the interrelation with science, technology, culture, and environment fields through the development of creativity, interactive exhibitions, real-life experiences, and scientific and academic activities of basic and applied sciences.

Regarding education, the institution has developed educational initiatives to fulfill its aims. In this sense, the organization has undertaken literacy programs, research groups, and computer literacy programs that have impacted a large part of the city population. COSMOS Foundation

view aimed at the transforming society in all life processes that include all human beings, and proposed integral and social programs, abiding by their founding principles, that benefit all the local community.

In regard to ELT, English language currently plays an important role for it being the universal language par excellence in the globalized world, therefore, the acquisition of this language is considered to be essential for economic, professional, and academic development. Thus, Colombia has fostered foreign language learning passing several policies to promote English learning. (Fandiño-Parra, Bermúdez-Jiménez &Lugo-Vásquez, 2012)

Despite its relevance and compulsory nature in education, in Colombia learning English is still more accessible for some social groups than for others. The British Council (2015) presented that among the barriers that people encountered, the elevated prices, being unable to take part in programs funded by the government were the more recurring in that order. Besides, they stated how having access to quality English learning opportunities was the main concern in the lower socio-economic classes (British Council, 2015).

With the purpose of solving this issue and mitigating the differences among sectors of the population, several entities both profit and no profit have addressed English education. Particularly in Bucaramanga, there are initiatives from the town hall and also from several foundations and organizations with the aim of making English learning accessible for more people.

In the light of this, COSMOS foundation identifies this problem among its target population and decided to start the project of a Virtual English club (COSMOS ENGLISH CLUB) that allowed more children and young people to access English lessons. With the alliance of Universidad Industrial de Santander (Industrial University of Santander, UIS) and the Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en inglés (Foreign languages with emphasis in English teaching program), the program has the aim not only of offering English lessons for a bigger audience of children, but also to design a teaching plan that is of quality and offers cutting edge methodologies, meaningful learning, and that is structured enough to perdure over time.

In the light of this, the current project seeks to contribute to the field by adding to the research done in the national panorama regarding the learning of English of low-income students, with a unique experience that allows students to learn English, a requirement for today's globalized world, and at the same time to be immersed in a proposal that pursues transforming education. This proposal will also be an asset to the university as it will enhance social practices at the school of languages, it will be a future field to carry out projects and to contribute to a social demand of education and society. Additionally, the project is of relevance for the academic community providing a framework regarding English education for children concerning critical pedagogies, creativity, and project-based learning where little research is found.

Besides the aforementioned, the project seeks to enhance critical thinking through project-based learning and a curriculum that is connected to the context and daily life experiences of the learners. In the same way, it aims to create a unique learning environment and foster meaningful

learning and creativity through pedagogical activities that engage and motivate students to the learning of the English language.

The following text will first present a theoretical framework that contains the main concepts and pedagogical principles that oriented the project as well as its legal and ethical framework. Next, the methodological design of the proposal will be outlined including the research resources and instruments used together with the phases developed. After that, the intervention proposal will be introduced by stating the problematic situation encountered, the action executed during the project, and the evaluation of such. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn along with recommendations for further studies.

1. Objectives

- To enhance critical thinking skills in students through a project-based learning curriculum/ where learning is connected to their context and is applicable to daily life experiences.

- To create a unique language learning environment where creativity is fostered through pedagogical activities making learning more meaningful.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The fostering of creativity and critical thinking is a growing concern in the pedagogical field. It has been argued that the contemporary educational models of standardized tests and merchandise education do not enhance critical thinking and leave the development of creativity behind (Carroll, 2013).

In order to have a clear understanding of the concepts addressed before it is important to state that one cannot separate the ability to think critically and the ability to think creatively (as cited in Carroll, 2008); therefore, it can be argued that critical thinking is a skill that creative thinking comprises.

Against this background, it is important to start by defining creativity. Bonden (2001) explains that creativity is defined as "the ability to come up with new ideas that are surprising yet intelligible, and also valuable in some way" (as cited in Tin, 2013, p. 178). In a similar manner, Robinson & Aronica also define creativity by stating: "creativity is putting your imagination to work. It is applied imagination. Innovation is putting new ideas into practice" (2016, p. 119).

Within this framework, creativity is encouraged in ways of creative thinking. "Creative thinking involves a focus on exploring ideas, generating possibilities, looking for many right answers rather than just one, and sharing of results" (Papalazarou, 2015, p. 37), creativity, then

encourages critical thinking by encouraging a different view of the world transcending basic levels

of thinking. In this regard, creativity can be conceived not only as a product but as a process that

leads to being more open and curious and to relate in a more meaningful world to others and to the

world itself (Papalazarou, 2015).

A current concern is that the emphasis of the educational models is placed on standardized

tests, which leaves little or no space for critical thinking and creativity (Carroll, 2013); as a matter

of fact, several authors have claimed that there is a creativity crisis in education (Lucas, 2001;

Gentry, 2006; Bronson & Merryman, 2010; Kim, 2011; Robinson & Aronica, 2016; Nelson, 2018).

The aforementioned issue is mostly attributed to the significant decrease in results of the Torrance

Test of Creative Thinking, TTCT (1974) in countries like the USA.

The TTCT is the most used tool employed to measure creativity. Through this tool, Ellis

Paul Torrance, the father of creativity, proposed a mechanism to measure divergent thinking and

other skills concerning problem-solving. According to Kim (2011) "the current form of the TTCT-

Figural includes scores for Fluency, Originality, Elaboration, Abstractness of Titles (Titles),

Resistance to Premature Closure (Closure), and 13 creative personality traits that comprise the

Creative Strengths (Strengths) Subscale" (As cited in Kim, 2011, p. 286).

The focus on standardized school tests is corroborated by the matter that while the IQ tests

and SAT in the USA have risen, as shown in Kim's research study (2011), creative thinking

follows a different trend. In this sense, the emphasis lays on rote learning and not on critical and

creative thinking. This is also a global reality where standardized education is now the rule, and

subjects related to the applied sciences are prioritized leaving little room for the arts or extracurricular activities that foster creativity, besides, the focus of teaching is oriented toward learning for the tests which leave aside critical or creative thinking among other important abilities (Kim, 2011); to this issue Gentry (2006) notes that rote learning and repetition have become more important in the classroom than critical and creative thinking.

A research carried out in schools in the United States of America (Kim, 2011) reveals how the scores of the TTCT have shifted over the years. The results portray that creative thinking is worryingly decreasing over time reflected in children giving greater importance to accuracy, losing their ability to generate new ideas, becoming less expressive and having no different perspectives, not thinking reflectively among others, being less curious and open to new experiences, underachievers, among others. Such demonstrates that creativity is being less encouraged by society and mainly by schools.

In respect to Colombia, De Zubiría (2014) makes an overall analysis of the education in Colombia and calls for action stating that Colombia has a lot to work on regarding this topic. Among his suggestions, he concludes that Colombia's educational system requires a major change, and states that the key to improving education includes fostering the ability to think, creativity, problem-solving, and social skills (as cited in Cárdenas et al, 2018). In this connection, Parra et al. assert that in Colombian education, creativity has not had the appropriate importance as part of the learning process in any of the education levels despite the existent national policies for its implementation as it is the case of Law 115 (2015).

Moreover, based on a study they carried out in Bucaramanga Colombia using the CREA test (test created to measure creative intelligence), they concluded that the Ministry of Education and all the governmental institutions in charge of education in the city and the country. should introduce creativity as a basic program in the curricular design, should promote teachers' training and pedagogical support in the subject, and that both schools and educators should include in their practices activities that foster the development of creativity (Parra et al, 2015).

The topic under study has become increasingly important given that creativity is one of the crucial 21st-century skills, thus, it plays an important role in the pedagogical ambit as well as in the ELT field for it helps to improve academic development along with several other benefits (Carroll, 2013). To this matter, Fisher states that creativity can "rekindle the interest of students who have been turned off by school, and teachers who may be turned off by teaching in a culture of control and compliance" (2004, p.11).

Regarding how to include it in the classroom, creativity is composed of 4 dimensions as explained by Richards, " the ability to solve problems in original and valuable ways, seeing new meanings and relationships in things and making connections, having original and imaginative thoughts, using the imagination and past experience to create new learning possibilities" (2013, p. 21), these dimensions are essential skills to be developed in students which are not prioritized in an education-based in learning for the test.

Some of the benefits of including creativity in primary ELT classrooms are emphasized by Read (2015). Firstly, he states that it increases children motivation to study the language,

second, it makes the learning experience enjoyable and memorable, next, it makes children feel successful and full of ownership, also, it fosters divergent behaviors and flexible thinking, additionally, it presents a challenge; lastly, it helps develop patience, persistence and helps students to be resourceful. Likewise, Peachey & Maley add up to this discussion stating that "creativity tends to improve student self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness" (2015, p.9).

Furthermore, Baer & Kaufman (2005) propose that the initial requirements for creativity are intelligence, motivation, and a suitable environment. They affirm that motivation and environment are elements that creativity cannot survive without, and such are important grounds that educators should bear in mind to encourage creativity.

In this line, Wright (2015) states that the most valuable resources to enhance creativity in the classroom are the language teacher, the students, the classroom, the school, and the neighborhood. With this paradigm, he establishes that it is fundamental to take into account the resources the medium has to offer and to recognize the potential of the aforementioned materials.

Additionally, some academics have proposed some guidelines in order to contribute to the demand for creative approaches. A case in point is the set of components proposed by Read (2015), they consist of seven pillars: (1) to build up positive self-esteem, (2) that teachers model creativity, (3) offer choices, (4) use questions effectively, (5) connecting ideas, (6) exploring ideas, and (7) encouraging critical reflection, the author states that such pillars stimulate creativity in the classroom and are also a practical way to address the matter.

In the light of this, Behzad & Showqi (2012) carried out a study to investigate the feasible influence that learning English as a foreign language has in relation to individuals' divergent thinking abilities by using the TTCT model. This research identified that bilingualism indeed enhances the cognitive functions like planning, cognitive flexibility, and working memory present in Torrance model strength and power functions. Therefore, the more vastly the cognitive functions are improved, the greater levels of creativity will be attained. It is important to note that the study concluded that such is not reflected only in bilingualism perse but in the EFL classroom context where fluency, elaboration, originality, and flexibility, components of divergent thinking according to the TTCT model are increased considerably.

In a similar vein, the interrelation between creativity and language learning has also been discussed by some authors. Particularly, in the field of ESL/EFL, some academics have highlighted that this favors, influences and also shapes English language learning (Behzad & Showqi, 2012; Richards, 2013; Papalazarou, 2015; Tin, 2012; Fisher, 2004). In the light of this, Hadfield affirms that "Language use and language learning are inherently creative processes" (2016, p.51).

In the same way, according to Zaker (2016), creativity is considered an influential factor that affects a second language (L2) learning; likewise, ELT resources provide among its advantages, high levels of creativity. In the light of this, Kabilan (2000) affirms that "for learners to become proficient in a language, they need to exercise creative thinking through the language being learned" (as cited in Zaker, 2016, p.176). Tin also adds up to the discussion by stating that "language users/learners must somehow innovate and complexify their language, by reanalyzing and combining known utterances and structures to create new ideas and forms" (2012, p.179).

It is worth highlighting that with the purpose of changing the panorama where important skills are being lost, scholars have called schools and educators into action. They have made emphasis on the need to engage students in problem finding and questioning, to provide psychological support to encourage creativity, to foster teamwork skills, to expose students to real-life situations and positive environments, to allow them to explore the world, and to make room for imagination (Kim, 2011; Robinson & Aronica, 2016 Hadfield,2016).

2.2 Legal Framework

The General Education Law (Ley General de Educación) established some objectives that point to the acquisition of at least one foreign language. In this regard, the Colombian national government, together with the National Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, MEN), has approved passed several policies and implemented different initiatives to promote English learning as the official foreign language (EFL). The main one is the program Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo (National bilingualism program, PNB). The PNB has several aims directed to the enhancement of bilingual competencies in the English language. To achieve and evaluate these goals, the PNB adheres to the Common European Framework of Language (CEFR) standards as established in the "Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages: English (Estándares Básicos en Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés)" (British Council, 2015, p.14) instituted by MEN in 2006. Based on this, students are expected to graduate their media education with a B1 level.

2.3 Ethical Aspects

Regarding the ethical conditions taken into account to carry out the project, it is important to mention that all the parties had knowledge of and consented to the proposal to take place. Firstly, the director of the entity approved the methodology, curricular plan, and conditions of the practice acceding to the requirements of the project and the participation of the pre-service teacher. Secondly, secure platforms (Zoom and classroom) that protected the data of the participants were used throughout the project to carry out the classes and shared the class evidence. Finally, the relatives gave the approval to be part of the investigation phase and the treatment of the collected artifacts through an oral agreement and a written form.

3. Methodology

3.1 Type of Investigation

The current study corresponds to a qualitative research approach for it seeks to understand the meaning constructed in the different learning experiences. According to Van Maanen (1979) Qualitative research is "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (as cited Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.520). A similar definition is that of Creswell (2013), who states that "it is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or

human problem" (p.23). In this regard, a qualitative approach will uncover the understanding people give to their educational processes providing a background for the issue at hand.

Action research-grounded the project proposal for it is focused on the improvement of the pedagogical practice. Ellis (2012) defines action research as "a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by practitioners in their own contexts of action" (p.27), the author states that the objective of it is to improve a certain practice, in this case in point in language teaching.

Action research in education is then a way to carry out research by reflecting on the teaching experiences, gathering data from the practice, and analyzing it in order to come up with new ways to improve professional development or curriculum development (as cited in Griffe, 2012). Crookes adds up to this discussion by stating that research inquiries ought to arise from educators' concerns or challenges (as cited in Mackey, 2015).

Furthermore, action research is characterized by following a model composed of a set of phases. The components outlined by Ellis (2012) are: (1) the initial idea, (2) fact-finding, (3) the action plan, (4) implementation, (5) monitoring, (6) revising. The following project proposal aimed at abiding by this cycle and pursuing a reflective approach to complete each step. Following, each phase was described and associated with the project process.

The first stage sought to "Identify an issue or problem relevant to a specific instructional context" (Ellis, 2012, p.27), anchored to this project, this phase corresponded to the moment when COSMOS foundation noticed the reality of English language learning and the inequality among

the different social sectors of the population to access it, which is a shared concern in ELT in the country, and by the teacher in training carrying out the proposal. This circumstance was considered when the social project started and proposed as the project problematic.

Moreover, the next phase consisted of gathering all the relevant information about the issue being analyzed to support the project. In this step, the project proposal connected the matter being studied to previous research carried out previously in the Colombian context and compiled all the relevant academic resources that could serve to nourish the current project.

The next phase, the action plan consisted of "generating an outline of possible actions to take" (Griffe, 2012, p. 115) was organized. For this stage, apart from establishing the program COSMOS English club which addresses the problem of the project, a curricular design together with the methods to follow were also indispensable. In this sense, some ideas of how to fill the current education gaps regarding English language teaching were examined. After a thorough analysis, an approach was selected and a curricular plan was designed, continuously, the search for the literature review as well as previous studies carried out in the subject to support the approach started.

Then, the implementation stage which comprised putting into practice the action plan was developed in the next part of the project. This phase aimed at implementing the action plan with the population selected following each of the steps there specified.

The fifth phase is the monitoring phase. In this stage, the objective is to collect data through different data collection instruments that will be outlined further, in order to review the effectiveness of the proposal and examine the impact, favorable aspects, as well as improvement areas in the final stage, (revising).

3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Resources:

3.2.1 Instruments

To accomplish the purpose of the pedagogical proposal, three data collection instruments were selected: interviews, surveys, and artifacts (Appendix A). All of them intended to gain a thorough understanding of the participant's experiences supported by relevant criteria. It is worth highlighting that these instruments were implemented and collected virtually due to the character of the project.

The first instrument corresponds to the interviews. In this regard, an interview is a tool that helps consider the experiences, conceptions, and views of a group of people concerning a specific situation (as cited in Foster, Long & Snell, 1999). The interviews in the current proposal were conducted with the relatives of the students participating in the pedagogical proposal and with the coordinator of the organization. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insights into the perceptions of the pedagogical experience and the impact of the project on the students. Also, to corroborate if the objectives of the proposal were being met.

The second instrument was a survey. A survey is understood as a means of collecting information from a large group of participants in order to gather data about a particular matter, including attitude and opinions (Mackey, Gass & Margolis, 2006). This instrument is used in order to gain insights into the students' perceptions and attitudes regarding the lessons and some aspects of the proposal such as activities, tools, lessons and others.

The third instrument consisted of artifacts. Artifacts are "student's documents or productions that allow observation of different characteristics and specific details of a process observed" (as cited in Ruiz Niño, 2013, p. 213). The objective of implementing this instrument was to examine the construction of meaning, feelings, and ideas that students express through the different tasks.

3.2.2 Resources

Table 1 illustrates the resources required to carry out the project. It is important to highlight that most of them were virtual tools given the virtual character of the proposal, nevertheless, since the project offered online classes, the teacher used the resources students count with and have in their residences corresponding to everyday elements. The following resources were a requisite for taking part in the lessons, especially the internet connection and access to the virtual platforms. The parents or relatives of the students were responsible for providing the below-mentioned resources, similarly, the didactic materials were provided by the teacher according to the activities and are accessed by students, most of the time with assistance from their relatives. The teacher also had to guarantee her resources, regarding internet connection and access to the platforms, and prepare the pedagogical support resources that orient the lessons.

Table 1

Resources required for the implementation of the pedagogical proposal

RESOURCES	RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS	RESOURCES FOR TEACHER	RESOURCES FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND TEACHER
Internet connection			✓
Access to an electronic device			✓
Access to Zoom platform			✓
WhatsApp			✓
Interactive worksheet online	✓		
Didactic online platforms	✓		
Worksheets	✓		
Everyday elements	✓		
MEN Curriculum		✓	
Lesson plans		✓	

3.2.3 Operational Phases

In the interest of conducting the project thoroughly, a series of steps were followed before, during, and after the implementation of the pedagogical proposal. The first stage consisted in contacting the foundation and meeting with the representatives to explain the idea of the project and understand the purposes of the institution with regard to the project planned. Secondly, an agreement regarding the way to proceed and implement the practice was established between both parties according to the character of the social practice and the necessities of the foundation. After that, a methodological plan was designed for the target ages and groups the foundation had convened. This methodological plan was implemented with some groups attributed as pilot groups. After studying the results and observing the implementation of such, the curricular plans were modified and adjusted and were also adapted from the national guidelines for teaching English. Following, these plans were implemented with all the groups including the one studied for this proposal. After that, the investigation instruments were implemented in order to study the effectiveness and reach of the proposal. Finally, the impact of the proposal and achievement of the objectives proposed were evaluated and carefully analyzed, comparing the results of all the instruments used to collect data and to the existing theoretical background. From this analysis, some conclusions were drawn reflecting on the impact of the proposal, contributions to the practitioner teaching practice and recommendations for future projects.

4. Intervention Proposal

4.1 Diagnosis of the Problematic Situation

It is well known that English has gained importance over the years and has been positioned as a language for business, education, and communication. Although it is considered an important skill to acquire and in the Colombian context it's a law to acquire it during school, the laws do not agree with the practice and the country still has several deficiencies regarding the teaching of English (British Council, 2015).

In this sense, students from several public institutions encounter the reality of having none or little training in English at school. This is most evident in preschool or primary school where educators have to teach all the subjects and not all of the educators have the necessary knowledge nor training is offered. The aforementioned represents inequality among sectors of the population and further, a restrain in academics or working areas (British Council, 2015).

This initiative intended to shift some paradigms regarding the teaching of English. First, that English teaching for people of lower income should be of less quality as commonly believed and as presented by some programs to the same target population. Next, to portrayed English not as a language required for economic development and better opportunities merely but as a bridge to communicate with other cultures. Also, it wanted to make the learning of English a critical and popular process, so learning is related and linked to its own context and reality so it generates reflection and is constructed through the use of learners' experiences.

4.2 Activities carried out

The course plan exhibited in Table 2 was taken and adapted from the Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN) English teaching curricular plan passbook designed for transition to fifth grade. Both COSMOS institution and MEN plan consist of 4 modules for a year course. The following planning template corresponds to the first module which was carried out in ten weeks, each week with 4 hours of class. Each of the modules corresponds to a project, the first one here described was called "Healthy life". The purpose of this module was to address concepts like food, the body, and sports connecting them to raising awareness of healthy habits.

The final outcome of this project was a healthy day. Such involved the families of the students and the academic community in a morning activity where healthy habits were promoted through first, a physical activity that consisted of a short workout addressed to all ages, with the message of the importance of exercising; the activity was carried out with some instructions in English to make it more appealing for the families. Another activity was a healthy recipe that had the purpose of showing how we can make healthy eating fun and delicious. The rest of the morning activity was dedicated to exhibiting the different tasks prepared by the students which were related to health, they consisted of songs, short presentations, among other activities. It is important to highlight that this activity included all the groups that the English Club has all of the ages.

Particularly, the group studied exhibited healthy food following the alphabet order. In Appendix A you can find the learners singing the alphabet which was practiced almost every day since students were really enthusiastic about learning it and ask for it, this is why this activity suited them perfectly. Besides, after singing the alphabet they discussed words with different

letters which demonstrated to increase their vocabulary. In Appendix B the food that starts with each letter all the alphabet in the voice of the learners is found. Food was also taught using the alphabet which is why they already knew some words with each letter. In Appendix C you will find the complete video that gathers all the student's work for this display.

The plan is then divided into the corresponding ten weeks, each week has some topics assigned, and some examples of the lexicon used are also portrayed. The last week corresponded to the preparation and presentation of the final project aforementioned. Besides, the activities that were carried out each week are described in the 'Activities' column.

During the first topic, 'All about me', students took part in some initial activities to get to know each other and became familiar with the language through routines and songs. As a first topic, the emotions were introduced for students to be able to recognize feelings, also as a healthy practice, and they were able to use not verbal language to express the understanding of the topic. During this topic, students also share personal information about themselves orally and through artistic endeavors, expressing likes and dislikes. Appendix D shows one of the activities carried out called "I am a rainbow" in which they shared physical characteristics using colors, which helped review this topic, and a picture of them, this activity was carried out in class and finished at home so they could share things about them. In this topic, students show interest in participating in songs and doing crafts while learning new words.

The second topic issued was the parts of the face, for this topic the introductory activity was a short story told to students with the aid of pictures that talked about loving your face, after

that, some activities were carried out in order to enhance the vocabulary; some of them are the creations of a face in activities like creating a monster with a different number of eyes, noses, and mouths, create a face using fruits, indicate which part of the face is missing in a Mr. Potato Head and playing domino with the parts of the face which is exhibited in Appendix E. It is worth highlighting that student enjoyed learning this topic using their own body to express they recognized the vocabulary and were always connected with every activity, they participated actively demonstrating they were learning and were always willing to show their work and progress.

The next topic, 'Healthy food - Unhealthy food' discussed the vocabulary of food categorized in which are healthy and which are not. Students learned to categorize the food and learned the names of it in the process as illustrated in Appendix F. During this topic, students were able to use the food they could find in their house for different activities like recognizing the healthy matter of each food and participating in a healthy recipe Appendix G. The activities to strengthen the lexis consisted of riddles or playing or guess the drawings, during these activities, learners used other aspects of the language to follow instructions and understand phrases. Students were very eager to be able to be part of these activities virtually and were excited when being able to use elements in their house and name them in English. Students were also cheerful to express which food their like and which they didn't, at this point of the course they started to say full sentences using like and dislike, so they liked to share using the language although the complete structure needed to be drilled and mentioned repeatedly so they remembered to use it.

The following topic taught was the opposites, this topic was included in order to include more vocabulary during the unit and introduce some activities that included physical movement. The class activities performed were a scavenger-hunt, that consisted in going through the house finding the matching object, and finding the corresponding pairs. Students were really happy about being able to move and bring objects and wanted to share what they found. Some vocabulary of this topic was difficult to learn, however, it allowed to introduce activities where they could use their body and introduce some commands which they learned. Similarly, other activities that were done during the course and they enjoyed were Simon's says and dancing, since it also involved physical activity.

The last topic considered was 'Sports' during which students participated in different physical exercises during the lessons mixed with the vocabulary of sports. In order to reinforce the lexicon studied, some activities like guessing the sport by acting it, or guessing the sport by imitating a physical activity were implemented. Also, they recorded a video where they showed the sports they liked as seen in Appendix H. Activities like this where students could move and exercise motivate them and engage them in the topics being studied.

In Appendix I, you can find the Journals they kept which were decorated by them freely with things they liked. In this Journal they included all the activities that were carried out and they practiced the vocabulary. It is important to note that they participated more actively and completed the activities that were related to speaking, using elements in their house, crafts over the ones that had to do with writing, drawing, or worksheets in general. To this matter, one parent interviewed in additional comments mentioned that they already had a lot of worksheets to complete from

school and that other activities motivate them more (Interviewee 4, August 30th, 2021). This was an element that was taken into account for further implementations and encouraged the use of more virtual platforms that allowed students to review vocabulary as well as practice how the words are spelled which cannot be left behind.

Table 2

Curricular plan corresponding to the first module of first grade.

Objective: To identify in an oral way words and short instruction related to health. Express likes and dislikes.			
Topic	**Activities**	**Resources**	**Week**
All about me	• Emotion's song	• YouTube	
	• What zone are you in?	• Genially	**1-2**
		• Worksheets	
	• I am a Rainbow	• Crafts	
Parts of the face	• I love my face	• Story Books	
	• Create a monster.	• Crafts	**2-3**
	• Face with fruits	• Home elements	
	• Mr. Potato's head.	• Worksheets	
	• Dominoes		
Healthy food -	• My favorite food	• Home elements (food)	
Unhealthy food		• Worksheets	**4-5-6**

	• Healthy/ No healthy food	• Google slides
		• Zoom drawing tools
	• Healthy recipe	
	• Food riddles	
	• Pictionary	
Opposites	• Opposite's scavenger hunt	• Google slides
		• House elements **7**
	• Memory game	• Worksheets
	• Match the opposites.	• Genially
		• Live worksheets
Sports	1. Sports workout.	• House elements **8-9**
	2. Sports I like video.	(sports elements)
		• YouTube
		• WordWall

Final Project: Health Day, students will take part in a healthy day where they perform different activities that promote taking care of their health (exercise class, healthy recipe). Also, their tasks will be exhibited so families can see the ways students learned about how to be healthy during the module.

4.3 Evaluation of the Activities

According to the British Council, the study of English in Colombia is decentralized, which means that covering the education of this foreign language is uneven. They state that "private

institutions generally have more and better resources, including better-qualified English teachers,
language acquisition in these schools - as measured by SABER test scores - is generally more
successful" (2015, p.20). As stated by the director of the foundation, the goal of the recent English
program offered by the institution is to meet, what he established as a national need, the English
language learning demand since it is a requirement in schooling or a desired complement to
education. This need, he affirms is not always fulfilled fully by public institutions; the British
Council confirms this by stating that "the effectiveness of English teaching in public education is
limited by a lack of teacher training, resources and funding, large class sizes and unenforced
standards" (2015, p.20) The director also demands that independently, English training is not
accessible for middle and low-class families due to its high cost (personal communication, July
12th, 2021); in fact, it was reported that an English class in Colombia costs around $10 to $25 US
dollars, consequently, a small part of the population can access this type of training (British
Council, 2015). Therefore, the foundation proposed a program that addresses the stated limitations
by implementing a pedagogical project supported with a structure and methodology that
guaranteed quality and meaningfulness in the English training, which was accessible for medium
and lower-class families.

As stipulated before, taking into account this premise, the methodological proposal was
formulated and implemented on a small strategic sample designated as the pilot group. According
to the director, this initial phase worked as a basis to boost the project and get to more people from
the periphery and other cities. Moreover, they were strong evidence that the program could be
implemented virtually using appropriately the digital tools and creativity and could be
revolutionary in a context where virtual education was not so appealing for its lack of innovation

(personal communication, July 12th, 2021). Hlenschi-Stroie (2015) supports this idea by arguing that using it intelligently, technology can bring several earnings to education. In this regard, the program accomplished the intention of taking advantage of the contemporary necessity to learn online and the recent openness to it of the families, by transforming it into an opportunity to design a model that broke with the traditional conception of moving the traditional classroom to the virtual room and instead, proposed virtual education that was appealing for learners using all the online resources available to make learning more interesting and substantial.

Furthermore, both the pilot and the following groups' programs were welcomed heartily by the families who were part of it. On this behalf, the director of the institution affirms that most of the parents and relatives are delighted with the program and the opportunity to be part of it, particularly with the methodology followed by the teachers and the activities carried out (personal communication, July 12th, 2021). It is important to stress that the program received favorable comments from the parents as well as constructive contributions all of which were taken into account during the classes and the meetings that were carried out, and almost no complaints, which were received by the members of the foundation and the teacher in charge. On the other hand, the director stated that some families have extended some complaints about the program, he claims that they are due mainly to high expectations of learning the language fast, and not taking into account that it is a process that takes time (personal communication, July 12th, 2021). Those complaints were resolved after presenting and explaining in detail both the methodology and the purpose of the program to all the relatives, additionally, how the process could be reinforced at home with the aid of parents' support.

4.3.1 Methodology

An important fact to address is the impact that the methodology developed, which was applied evenly for all the groups, had upon the foundation members, the parents, and the students. In general, it can be affirmed that the methodology was one of the attributes acknowledged as a valuable asset of the project by all parties and recognized as effective and beneficial for the learning of the language. In this connection, the parents of the group under study interviewed contributed by mentioning that they were satisfied with the approach and the didactic used, they all agree that they like the procedures and strategies used, they remarked that they were appropriate for the age of the children: "It is very dynamic, my daughter is happy because all the activities are adapted for her age" (Interviewee 1, August 30th, 2021); "The methodology implemented is spectacular for their age" (Interviewee 2, August 30th, 2021); "I have really liked because the didactic you use is very good" (Interviewee 3, August 30th, 2021); " I think the methodology is appropriate to my daughter's age and it is a good strategy to learn English" (Interviewee 4, August 30th, 2021).

Likewise, the survey applied to the students of the group demonstrated a positive impact with an average qualification of 4.7 points in which 5 was excellent, 4 was very good, 4 was good, 2 was regular, and 1 was bad. How entertained the classes were, the teacher, the teacher's explanation, and what was learned got 4.6,5,5 and 4.6 scores respectively (Table 3). In this regard, Fillmore outlines some strategies to teach English for children which have resulted effective, all of them were used during the project, they are: 1) Demonstrations, 2) Model and role-play, 3) New information in the context of known information, 4) Repetition and 5) Encouraging questions (as cited in Ruiz, 2013).

In this respect, when asked specifically for the impressions about the methodology used for the course, the parents mentioned some key aspects that made the methodology engaging. It was brought up that the classes allowed active participation and continued use of the language (Interviewee 1 & 5, August 30th, 2021). In this respect, the director of the foundation claimed that the methodology breaks with the traditional teaching of the English language and that using projects to teach has been very beneficial since it can be evidenced how kids learn diverse vocabulary and grammatical forms implicitly. It is worth emphasizing that project-based pedagogies and similar approaches to learning have been attributed as an engaging approach to teach as it helps to make learning intelligible, particularly when it comes to children. It has been stipulated that the EFL lessons need a dynamic and student-centered approach and that project-based learning is a helpful way since it can interest students by creating meaningful connections with their contexts (Ruiz, 2013)

4.3.2 Materials and Activities

Classroom materials and activities are equally relevant since they are the way of putting into practice the methodologies and approaches determined. In consideration of the foregoing, the efficacy of the materials and activities used were evaluated by students in the survey. Correspondingly, as evidenced in Table 3 students provided a score of 5 to the activities carried out in class and 4.2 to the materials. To this subject, Hadfield (2016) argues that creative activities engage students actively in their learning process and learners make a better effort while learning.

The interviewed parents also asserted that the materials used were didactic, varied, and useful (Interviewee 1 & 3, August 30th, 2021), the contents were outstanding (Interviewee 2 & 3, August 30th, 2021), and that the activities and classes had made students gain more interest for the language and acquiring it. (All interviewees, August 30th, 2021). The director of the foundation mentioned that learning English will be easier for students in the future since the activities and materials exposed students to the language visually, auditorily, written, and spoken (personal communication, July 12th, 2021), which is stated by one of the parents interviewed too: the activities make use of different learning ways like the visually, the tactile, and the kinesthetic all of which stimulated learning (Interview 4, August 30th, 2021. To support this statement it can be said, that according to the activities and resources displayed in the lesson plan chart, there was visual material such as slides, interactive worksheets, genially games, digital drawing tools, and other virtual games; auditorily exercise like videos and songs used mainly in the YouTube app; written activities in the case of printed worksheets, their personal notebook and other resources; and spoken resources like videos requested, class responses and participation, songs, games and questions and answers during the lessons. It is important to point out that as Bailey & Krishnan (2015) stated, creativity in the activities can be implemented by using existing materials and topics in a novel way to provide a different perspective and allowing students to learn from that, this was implemented in the current proposal through crafts and the use of house materials, and other activities already mentioned.

4. 4 General Evaluation of the Intervention

4.4.1 Critical Thinking

Regarding the mentioned loss of the ability to think critically and to reflect, Kim affirms that "children have become less emotionally expressive, less energetic, less talkative and verbally

expressive, less humorous, less imaginative, less unconventional, less lively and passionate, less perceptive ... and less likely to see things from a different angle" (2011, p.292), the author also indicates that this may be, related to the dependence to technology since such involves impersonal interaction and lack interpersonal communication (Kim, 2011). During the project, these conceptions were defied by using the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to foster critical thinking using everyday life experiences that allowed learners to interact with their environment and with others (their classmates, teachers, and classmates) in the virtual room in a personal and affectionate manner.

Critical thinking was fostered through project-based learning and activities that were related to everyday experiences. In this regard, the person in charge of the institution highlighted that through the projects of everyday life and common activities the learning of English was enhanced, the acquisition of vocabulary was enriched, and it seemed easier for students to learn, similarly, he stated that learning is manifested strongly when students use elements that are around them and are familiar to them (personal communication, July 12th, 2021). Also, as portrayed in table 3 students provided a score of 4.8 to the use of everyday elements for their learning which evidence, they could notice positively these artifacts being included. In the case of the families, they related everyday elements to food, numbers, emotions, the date, greetings, and the weather. They attributed this as being encouraging, and motivational for learning, helping develop an interest in the language, and expanding the vocabulary learned. A case in point is one parent who expressed "They are really good topics because they are varied, related to the things they see every day and, they learn a lot and show excitement when talking about what they learned in class" (Interviewee 2, August 30th, 2021).

4.4.2 Creativity

The project had as one of its purposes to foster creative learning through the different activities and making learning meaningful by doing so. The person in charge of the foundation stated that creativity was present since students interacted all the time with elements around them and use all their senses which made the acquisition process easier (personal communication, July 12th, 2021). Similarly, the parents responded that creativity was fostered through providing diverse options of outputs beyond traditional resources like games, stories, crafts, didactic activities and that the learned could learn the vocabulary, sounds of the language, the expressions but always in a creative way (Interviewee 1, August 30th, 2021); another interviewee (2) stated that the activities developed the artistic and handicraft sense in the student (August 30th, 2021); it was also stated that the classes have raised curiosity and ingenuity (Interviewees 1 & 3, August 30th, 2021) and that learners were eager to realize the activities at home independently and were always full of anticipation for the class when the time for it came; finally, it was claimed that the different projects and activities stimulated learning (Interviewee 4 & 5). It is essential to remark that curiosity, independence, and imaginativeness are attributes of creative people according to the Torrance test (Zaker, 2016). Finally, from the perspective of learners, creativity was positively evidenced given that students evaluated the use of imagination with 4.6 points (Table 3).

Table 3

Results of student's surveys with regard to the project

Questions	Results
1. Materials or worksheets	**1** Los materiales o guías ★★★★ 4.2 ☆
2. Class activities	**2** Las actividades de la clase ★★★★★ 5
3. How entertain the classes and activities were	**3** Lo entretenido y divertido que fueron las clases y actividades ★★★★ 4.6 ☆
4. The teacher	**4** La profesora ★★★★★ 5
5. The teacher's explanations	**5** Las explicaciones de la profesora ★★★★★ 5

6. How the teacher treated you

| 6 | El trato de la profesora contigo |

★★★★★ 5

7. What you learnt

| 7 | Lo que aprendiste |

★★★★★ 4.6

8. Your responsibility with the activities

| 8 | Tu responsabilidad con las actividades |

★★★★☆ 4.2

9. Zoom platform

| 9 | La plataforma de zoom |

★★★★★ 5

10. Your classmates

| 10 | Tus compañer@s de clase |

★★★★☆ 4.4

11. The use of your imagination.

| 11 | El uso de tu imaginación |

★★★★★ 4.6

12. The use of elements around you

| 12 | El uso de cosas de tu alrededor |

★★★★★ 4.8

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the present project was to promote critical thinking by using everyday elements and to encourage creativity, both through project-based learning. The academic community attested that this goal was achieved throughout the pedagogical proposal and that the use of these approaches boosted the acquisition of the language and made it more significant for the children; consequently, students were motivated to learn and engaged with the classes. On the one hand, using elements of the learner's environment as a tool for teaching expanded the lexicon of students and facilitated learning; students were curious about what surrounded them and were eager to be able to connect that to the language. On the other hand, promoting creativity through different activities also motivated students to learn and participate actively, to give their maximum potential in the activities they enjoyed, and to manifest their talents and preferences freely, in this sense, creative tasks also contributed to addressing different ways of learning which are usually not taking into account.

Over and above, project-based learning was a strong point and the protagonist of the proposal. From the director to the parents, including students and teacher, there were only favorable opinions with regard to the approach and it was recognized even without asking particularly for it during the research. The project-based pedagogy allowed for students to make connections among the different topics and kept knowledge updated since it was constantly reminded, it made children reflect on health and have a point of view with respect to it and it made them realize how they could learn from what they experience day by day. This practice along with the general methodology made parents be appealed by the methods used and notice they were

topics that interested the students, such perceptions were shared with the members of the foundation who also shared that these strategies enhanced learning and were attractive.

In this regard, this research confirmed previous findings and contributed to our understanding of the benefits brought by fostering creativity in ELT according to Read (2015) which are increased engagement and motivation, language learning becoming enjoyable and memorable, children developing ownership and independence, divergent responses occurring in classes, and including other areas where students are strong like the arts. Bearing this in mind it is important to stress that even though the motivation was not a prior quest, it was a major result. It was rather unanticipated for the community how motivated the students were concerning the classes and activities, especially how a merely virtual model could generate fascination in the parents and students and how learners were committed and eager to connect online.

This study adds to the body of knowledge around a recent topic that is being examined and considered which is virtual education. The model was implemented in this modality in the conjuncture of a global pandemic, but also for its convenience for the foundation and families. As a result, it attracted the public who were looking, even before the pandemic, for an accessible option to study English and those who had found virtuality advantageous. Also, it demonstrated that virtuality could build rapport and could be a useful tool to study a foreign language taking advantage of all the unexplored and emergent online resources available.

The proposal was also relevant since it approached two crucial skills in education that have been emphasized to be forsaken, critical thinking and creativity, skills that have proved to be

essential for human development and besides, bring numerous benefits for the learning, particularly, when it comes to ELT. Not to mention that are topics not commonly discussed in Colombian education and where not much research can be found.

Personally, as the teacher in charge of the social practice, the project was significant for the professional experience since it allowed the creation of a proposal and methodology from the beginning, it provided the opportunity to put into practice all that I learned during the career, and it was significant for the target population. The creation of the proposal allowed to have the freedom to implement methodologies that demonstrated positive results and to propose interesting and cutting-edge approaches, it also meant a challenge to found all the contents and strategies meaningful for the teaching practice and it required constant reflection in the teaching practice. Moreover, the design and implementation of the proposal reflected the learning during the program which made the results of the project more fulfilling. Finally, it was gratifying the impact it had on the target population since having professionals who were able to design and provide a teaching practice with quality, broke with the paradigm of bad quality at low prices.

The practice presented two additional learnings as future educator, first the fact of inspiring students to learn the language so that they did not perceive studying it as mandatory but were willing to do it because they enjoy it, the attitude of students when such situation is achieved was much different and learning came easily. Using topics and activities that were related to the student's life and that they enjoyed meant a difference in studying the language, they did not only engage and felt motivated, but also felt interested to study independently, the parents mentioned an improvement in the school subject and the interest for watching videos or using the language.

A second gaining, was acknowledging that leaving aside standard tests derived several benefits and had a noticeable effect upon students. For instance, students did not seem to compete to know the answer and instead encouraged each other to learn and participate, also, they were not worried or pressed about the grades all the time and gave their best regardless and on that account, obtained high grades.

The aforementioned suggests a need for further research to be carried out in these approaches, and undoubtedly a prompt use of the skills of creative thinking and critical thinking in the classroom. The study also manifests a need for public institutions and governmental entities to offer more and better social programs concerning English teaching and to improve the current status of English in public schools. It is also an invitation to carry out similar researches to comprehend the effects of implementing project-based learning and creative thinking. Further research could be done extending the time and perhaps implementing the creativity CREA test before and/or after. Also, topics like motivation attitudes and perceptions could be evaluated and would enrich research. It is worth adding that the foundation presents an important research field and that more research could be done in this institution with the same group or others looking to evaluate the progress of students and the changes and improvements that could occur with time. Additionally, other beneficial projects and strategies could be applied and other aspects that were not evaluated could be researched.

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