

**Critical literacy development in an EFL classroom**

Liliana María Gil Cipagauta

Thesis Director: Álvaro H. Quintero Polo PhD.

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Note of acceptance

Thesis Director:

Álvaro H. Quintero Polo PhD.

Juror: \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Juror: \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Acuerdo 19 de 1998 del Consejo Superior Universitario.

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative research aims to interpret the students' statements about what actual social issues represent for them. The study took place in a private bilingual school where the development of literacy has been at the core of its academic concerns. Traditional literacy and critical literacy, and the relation between them are the main theoretical pillars discussed. The participants were 10 senior students, who got involved in a pedagogical innovation for eight months, and whose purpose was to make them gain awareness of the social issues that surround them through the writing of argumentative essays. The instruments used for data collection were discussions and the students' papers. The findings suggest that the students assumed social agency roles as a result of their sensibility and sensitivity towards issues such as bullying, discrimination, and mistreatment, and reading and writing helped them fight back and grew personally. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to experience literacy as an act where they could rediscover themselves and in turn, make sense of the world around them. The study concludes with the idea that the development of critical literacy ought to be promoted among students so they can access the reality beyond the classroom in a dynamic, engaging way, and respond accordingly to the social present demands.

**Key Words:** Literacy, traditional literacy, critical literacy, argumentative essay writing.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, the complexities of society demand from the students to act knowingly about issues they might face in their academic, family, or social contexts such as bullying, mistreatment, or discrimination. Schools should embrace pedagogies that help students develop the academic, personal, and social skills they need to face the XXI century challenges. Pedagogies that account for the full development of the individual and whose contents become relevant to the learners' situations, inviting them to develop critical thought and action on various subject matters (Shor, 1999). Students are able to “develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society” (UNESCO, 2004, p. 13), which is exactly what critical literacy is about.

As an English teacher and as the Head of the Foreign Languages Department, I am concerned about my students' literacy processes, and the way these have been developed. The present research study is a way to respond to the students' needs and at the same time an opportunity to contribute to the advance of the literacy processes carried out in the Trinidad del Monte - School of the Sacred Heart, since they have been a focus of permanent discussion among the teachers, with the students and the administrators.

Teachers in the school have stated repeatedly how important is to leave traditional teaching approaches behind, which are content-based that rely on mechanical tasks that are seldom related to the students' lives and contexts. Below I will refer to the way literacy has been developed, to provide a wider panorama of the practices exercised in the school and that are directly related to its development.

To begin with, reading comprehension goes in many cases around recalling information provided in the texts. Even though primary and high school teachers know the existence of the various levels of comprehension, they have found it difficult to make students go beyond the literal understanding of the contents of the readings. For instance, in several term exams designed for primary and high school courses, students must show how much they remember of the texts they read, and the teachers want students to grasp the information contained in the readings to have the knowledge of the topics set up in the planning. Teachers ask few questions to students to make their own interpretations. This makes students assume a passive role in their learning process because they cannot reflect upon what they are learning.

Another aspect about literacy is the language teachers' conception of the text. From direct observation, especially in high school, and after checking some short plannings, I have noticed that educators work too much with the written text and little with the interpretation of images or graphs. This means that these ones are undervalued in the teaching practices. Teachers use images basically to make descriptions in warm-up or assessment activities to check the kind of vocabulary and grammar structures students can use to refer to the pictures. The tables 1 and 2 show the way pictures including in the readings are ignored or approached superficially. When teachers use graphics, if used, is to make students find out data in them, in other words, to develop skimming and scanning techniques, forgetting about the implications of the figures within the topic they appear. Sometimes students look at statistics just to extract information from the charts but they do not discuss what the numbers mean in the context they are presented. The Table 3 illustrate a lesson where a graph is studied. In any case there is further reference to the pictures or the graphics and the teachers move on with the next lessons.

Table 1. Short term planning of year 5.

Class Objective: Read a text and discuss contents and new vocabulary.	OUR WORLD	Oct 23	SS take turns to read a text. Teacher makes oral comprehension questions and SS take turns to answer. Teacher explains new vocabulary. SS answer written comprehension questions and complete a sequence organizer with the text events.	STUDENTS BOOKS
Class Objective: Write a summary	OUR WORLD	Oct 24	In pairs with the info of the sequence organizer, SS write a summary of the text.	STUDENTS BOOKS

Table 2. Short term planning of year 7.

EVALUACION (Indicadores)	ENSEÑANZAS (¿Qué?)	TIEMPO (¿Cuándo Y Cuánto?)	DIDACTICA (¿Cómo?)	RECURSOS (¿Con qué?)
Understand the main points in texts on a grow range of unfamiliar general and curricular topics, including some extended texts.	Tongue Twister Catacombs of a Tortured Mind The Cask of amontillado Spotlight	Aug. Thu 14-2	The teacher gives to the girls a new Tongue Twister that they <u>have to</u> memorize. The teacher asks if they know about Edgar Allan Poe, who is the author of the story. The teacher asks the girls to look at the illustration: "What seems to be going on in that place? Then we begin reading and ask questions about the story.	Spotlight, notebook

Table 3. Short term planning of year 10.

Understand contents of a chart	Part 1 Reading statistics	Oct 24 – 2 Thu	Warm up. Girls are asked about the reading skills they have practiced so far in the course; they mention skimming and scanning. They are introduced about the reading of charts and tables. They look at one and see the main parts of it: title, subheadings, figures, etc. Then they answer individually some open questions. They share their responses and make corrections if necessary. After that they are assigned a part of the table and they <u>have to</u> make a pie graph of the data given. They do their chart in a graph paper and they can use a protractor and a calculator.	Coursebook Graph paper, protractor, calculator
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Additionally, the incorporation of technology in literacy practices seems sometimes to be more an obstacle rather than an aid. I have also seen that some teachers lack knowledge or confidence to work with multimedia texts. Consequently, they prefer to rely on the physical texts instead of using platforms or online sources. Furthermore, there is a sense of dread about the effectiveness of working with online texts. Teachers think they do not have control over what their students are doing, which in turn, makes them believe students might not be learning enough, despite some of the platforms used in the school include tools to follow up their tasks and give feedback to their assignments. Although

students are willing to work with modern technologies, is the teachers' fear what prevails, making the classes go around the textbooks and the board.

Methodologically speaking, teachers from all areas had, in the beginning, the freedom to deal with students' writings as they wanted. This allowed teachers to use diverse pedagogical strategies in the classroom, without forgetting the purposes of the assignments for the subject. Later, some students complained and affirmed that they were not sure of what the teachers wanted them to write – referring to the form and the content. Teachers had different conceptions of what an essay should have, so students felt confused because they followed the guidelines provided by a teacher but a teacher from a different subject would not agree with them. Subsequently, the Academic Council agreed to ask the teachers to model the type of texts they expected from the students.

Regarding assessment, teachers use rubrics when reviewing the students' writing assignments. They have changed them over the years. Some years ago, teachers used two standardized rubrics, one in Spanish and one in English. Even though they adjusted them for the grades, they affirmed they did not fulfill their needs in their subjects. Therefore, the Academic Council asked teachers belonging to the different content areas such as, Math, Social Studies, and Science to design their own rubrics, which they shared and refined. Nonetheless, when they were shared, several aspects in the rubrics addressed linguistic features of the texts including the use of capital letters, punctuation, or accurate grammar rather than the content of their field.

Summing up, literacy is still viewed mainly from a structuralist perspective, which means that the students' reading tends to be seen as an individual activity more focused on the content and writing as an individual production focused on the form.

### **Statement of the problem**

This study spins around the observation and interpretation of the way students developed critical literacy in an EFL classroom, paying special attention to the social issues they were concerned about. To conduct the needs analysis, which I present below, I considered elements such as, the gathering of school documents, the description of the social context, and the way assessment was carried out, proposed by Benesch (1996).

The information contained in some documents of the school point to the idea that reading was focused on the content and writing was a product. For instance, some of the objectives in 2014-2015 in the English program for year 9 included: *'To select and organize material relevant to specific purposes. To recognize, understand and distinguish between facts, ideas and opinions. To employ and control a variety of grammatical structures. To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of appropriate vocabulary.'* Consequently, the goals proposed in the lesson plans might involve, for example, *'Classifying information of a chapter of Crime and Punishment or Making descriptions by using compound adjectives'*. The tables 4 and 5 are the annual planning and a short-term planning of year 9. In them, it can be seen the strong focus the teaching process had on the form of the texts.

Table 4. Annual planning of year 9.

PERIODOS	UNIDADES Y TEMAS	LOGROS
1	1. <u>PET preparation</u> 2. <u>Grammar</u> : Unit 1 Beginnings Unit 2 Issues 3. <u>Literature</u> : Chapter 1. The Con Science of Conscience 4. Reader: The Fruitcake Special and Other Stories.	1. Listening. To understand and respond to information presented in a variety of forms. 2. Speaking. To communicate clearly, accurately and appropriately. 3. Reading. To understand and respond to information presented in a variety of forms. 4. Writing. To communicate clearly, accurately and appropriately.
2	1. <u>Grammar</u> : Unit 3 Downtime Unit 4 Stories 2. <u>Literature</u> : Chapter 2. Sugarcane, Bittersweet. 3. Reader: In the House.	1. Listening. To recognize, understand and distinguish between facts, ideas and opinions. 2. Speaking. To convey information and express opinions effectively. 3. Reading. To select and organize material relevant to specific purposes.
		4. Writing. To convey information and express opinions effectively.
3	1. <u>Grammar</u> Unit 5 Ideas Unit 6 Age Unit 7 Media 2. <u>Literature</u> : Chapter 3. Harlem, Baby, Harlem 3. Reader: Man Hunt.	1. Listening. To select and organize material relevant to specific purposes. 2. Speaking. To employ and control a variety of grammatical structures. 3. Reading. To recognize, understand and distinguish between facts, ideas and opinions. 4. Writing. To employ and control a variety of grammatical structures.
4	1. <u>Grammar</u> Unit 8 Behaviour Unit 9 Trouble Unit 10 Culture 2. <u>Literature</u> : Chapter 4. The Age of Tom Sawyer. 3. Reader: When Summer Comes.	1. Listening. To infer information from texts. 2. Speaking. To demonstrate knowledge of a range of appropriate vocabulary. 3. Reading. To infer information from texts. 4. Writing. To demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of appropriate vocabulary.

Table 5. Short term planning of year 9.

EVALUACIÓN	ENSEÑANZAS	TIEMPO	DIDACTICA	RECURSOS
Extract specific information of a poem and interpret it	Poem: <u>Since you went away</u>	Feb 3 -2 Mon	Listening workshop. Girls listen to the poem once and say the kind of poem is it. Then they listen again line by line and transcribe one by one. The audio of the poem is repeated in this way several times until the students say they have written it all. After that they open their books and read and listen. They compare their versions. Then they read the poem aloud in pairs, some volunteers read it in front of the class and pronunciation is corrected. Finally, girls are asked to answer comprehension questions about the poem; no. of lines, stanzas, explanation of subject, description of speaker, effect of repetition, and interpretation of each stanza, explanation of the title related to the contents. <b>Homework.</b> Prepare the poem to recite.	Literature book Cd player
Write a touchy but elegant short composition about someone one admires	Unit 5 Word formation, linkers of addition	Feb 5 -2 Wed	Warm-up. Girls are asked about the qualities of their friends. They write a short composition of her partner saying she admires her and why. Then they read some posters with opening sentences of a description of someone and choose the less effective. They read an article and choose the best title for it from a list of options. After that they mention the qualities in the text. Next, they complete of a chart (noun, verb, adjective). They compare their responses and correct them. Afterwards they are shown a list of connectors and join sentences using the appropriate one. Finally, they write a <u>short description</u> of a friend they admire mentioning her qualities –with nouns, such as generosity, and linking ideas with the connectors seen.	Student's book



In the same content/product-oriented line, the questions asked in the term exams had instructions that penalized language errors. These demanded from the students' limited responses or answers where they had to care about the way they used the language, forgetting about the purposes of the texts. A sample of this is shown below.

Writing. To control a variety of structures and demonstrate knowledge of a range of appropriate vocabulary.

Set phrases. Complete the sentences with appropriate words. (1 mark each, 0 if spelling error)

1. He always likes to voice his \_\_\_\_\_.
2. He doesn't listen and he never pays any \_\_\_\_\_.
3. He fell into the swimming pool and now he's \_\_\_\_\_ wet.
4. Hopefully the children will form good \_\_\_\_\_ at school.
5. I am much better now. I feel \_\_\_\_\_ fit.
6. I was so worried about the exam I was \_\_\_\_\_ awake all night.
7. I'm going to tell him what I think and speak my \_\_\_\_\_.
8. It was \_\_\_\_\_ hot when we were in Egypt in August.
9. She got home late but she found the door \_\_\_\_\_ open.
10. She helped me and I feel I should return the \_\_\_\_\_.
11. These clothes have been in the sun for an hour but they are \_\_\_\_\_ dry.
12. They're \_\_\_\_\_ idle. They won't do anything.
13. Things went wrong and we've suffered a \_\_\_\_\_.
14. We weren't happy with his work so we've taken \_\_\_\_\_.
15. We're working hard to resolve the \_\_\_\_\_.

Describing places. Replace the **underlined** words in bold with the adjectives in the box. There are two more words than you need. (5 points, 3 marks if there is spelling error)

affluent    captivating    cosmopolitan    deprived    remote
---------------------------------------------------------------

16. The scenery is absolutely **beautiful**. \_\_\_\_\_
17. The city is definitely **full of people from many cultures**. \_\_\_\_\_
18. The area is **in need of financial investment**. \_\_\_\_\_

19. Write an article describing two touristic places in Bogota. Remember to use beyond basic vocabulary.

Score: quality of the contents = 6, structure of the text and organization of ideas = 6, accuracy and structure of sentences = 5, punctuation and capitalization = 4, appropriate vocabulary and correct spelling = 4. Total = 25

*Figure 1. Sample of questions of a term.*

Testing and assessing go hand in hand. That is why the comments teachers made about the students' strengths and weaknesses of each term, described up to which point they mastered the language at a phonological, syntactical, or lexical level. These

observations were not intended to be shown to parents but to keep the record of the students' processes. The following report shows the little interest teachers had in informing the quality of the contents of what the students said or wrote, or their perceptions and opinions of what they listened or read.

Table 6. A teacher's comments on the students' strengths and weaknesses.

	LOGROS.	FORTALEZAS	RECOMENDACIONES
BIMESTRE 1	1. Listening. To understand and respond to information presented in a variety of forms.	Students are able to classify general and specific information presented in short talks using graphic organizers such as a Venn's diagram. In addition, they can extract details and take notes accordingly with some accuracy.	Although the students are able to recognize the information they are request in an audio, it's important to work more on the accuracy of their responses. Sometimes they misspell words which affect their answers.
	2. Speaking. To communicate clearly, accurately and appropriately.	Students can take long turns to talk with fluency and confidence. Students are able to tell a fable being aware of the tone needed. They can make vivid descriptions by using compound adjectives (broad-shouldered, thin-legged).	Speaking is the strongest skill at the moment. Girls need to continue working on pronunciation, especially sound patterns of past regular verbs (-ed) and stress of long words.
	3. Reading. To understand and respond to information presented in a variety of forms.	Students are able to follow the sequence of events in a short story. They can relate its contents by looking at the causes-consequences. They can establish how linking devices (e.g. despite, in fact, although) affect the meaning of the storyline.	Reading is at this point the weakest skill. Students need to work much more on inference. They still attach to literal reading. For some girls, the mere comprehension of the question is a hard thing to do. In this sense, rephrasing has been used to help them understand the texts.
	4. Writing. To convey information and express opinions effectively.	Students are able to write a composition, fable and film review following a plan. They can develop their ideas in paragraphs presenting details with good word choice. They can punctuate a dialogue and support their opinions with descriptive words. They can use basic and some advanced linking devices with confidence.	Some of the drawbacks found in their written assignments have to do with sentence structure and mechanics. Accuracy in syntax, especially when attempting compound sentences, tense and quotations usage need to be improved.

All this illustrates the fact that literacy was seen as an instrumental skill, where the unidirectional comprehension of the texts and the accuracy in the use of several aspects of the language such as syntax, spelling, and punctuation, seemed to be prioritized over the students' ideas and opinions.

According to the marks obtained by ninth graders, in 2014-2015 two students out of ten, which was the total number of students in the class, reached 4.0 over 5.0, or more, in the Writing standard. The rubric below was used to determine their scores.

Table 7. Rubric to assess writing (2014-2015).

<b>CONTENT TASK</b>	<b>TEXT ST. OR. LINKS</b>	<b>SENT. ST. LENGTH</b>	<b>PUNCT. CAPITAL.</b>	<b>VOCAB. SPELLING</b>
Task is fulfilled completely AND Presents ideas clearly and develops them fully AND Text of appropriate length 6	The text is properly structured according to purpose, including some formulae AND Paragraphs are well organized and smoothly connected using a wide range of linking devices 6	All sentences well structured AND Tense and agreement is accurate AND Sentences length varies, and complex are used confidently AND Uses a variety of structures, e.g. passive, reported, emphatic, inverted order, etc. 5	All words are correctly capitalized AND A wide range of punctuation marks is used appropriately and for effect, including quotation marks, semicolons, dashes, etc. 4	Register and vocabulary usage according to audience, i.e. formal/informal, as well as jargon used for effect AND Spelling is handled accurately even for long words 4
Task is properly fulfilled OR Good ideas are introduced but not totally developed OR Most of the paragraphs at appropriate length 4/5	The structure of the text is appropriate; certain formulae may not be present OR Most of linking devices are properly used 4/5	Sentences are properly structured, mainly simple and compound OR Minor grammar mistakes 4	Most of the words are properly capitalized OR Punctuation marks are well used but no attempt to sophisticated ones 3	Vocabulary usage is correct but not for effect OR Most of the words are properly spelled. Minor mistakes 3
Task partially fulfilled OR Some ideas mentioned but partially developed OR Some paragraphs at appropriate length 2/3	Text has paragraphs but they are not appropriately linked or structured OR Basic linking devices are used, such as also, but, and, etc. 2/3	Some sentences are not well structured or mainly simple OR Some grammar mistakes regarding tense usage and agreement 2/3	Some words are correctly capitalized OR Some sentences are not appropriately punctuated 2	Some mistakes in the use of vocabulary or repeated words OR Some words are misspelled, even common ones 2
Doesn't fulfill the task OR Ideas are not clear OR Too short to fulfill the task 1	Text lacks structure OR Ideas are not linked at all 1	Serious errors in sentence structure. Run-ons or incomplete sentences OR Many grammar mistakes 1	Many errors dealing with capitalization OR Basic punctuation marks are not handled properly 1	Common vocabulary is not handled OR Many errors in spelling 1

Although some importance was given to the students' ideas, the rubric was mostly centered on the linguistic features of the text. Only one trait dealt with *Content Task*, while the others addressed *Text Structure*, *Sentence Structure*, *Punctuation and Capitalization*, and *Spelling and Vocabulary*. An assessment instrument like this demonstrates that in the

writing assignments the way the students mastered the language was more important than the quality or relevance of what they wrote in their papers.

At the beginning of the academic year 2015-2016, some changes took place. The discussions held in the area meetings highlighted the need of changing that instrumental perspective of the language. Instead, a cognitive view was approached. The Academic Council agreed about the necessity of making students develop higher-order thinking skills, and work collaboratively, a fact that had to be evident in the proposal of the objectives in the different school subjects. There was, and still, there is, a desire of leaving behind traditional methodologies and embracing modern ones that can make students face and respond assertively to the challenges of this century. Therefore, words such as, '*identify or accurately*' were taken off the programs. The objectives stated in the annual planning were related with the development of critical thinking skills, and '*comparing and contrasting, arguing and developing ideas, and stating own positions*' were introduced to guide the students' processes.

However, because of a case of malpractice, teachers, especially the language ones, suffered a sudden setback. At the end of the first semester 2015-2016 the Academic Council ordered that writing assignments had to be done 'individually'. In other words, writing was seen once more as an individual production rather than a social practice, and that meant going back to the structuralist underpinning position. Although the program objectives suggested working within a cognitive perspective, the fact of demanding individual writing tasks seemed contradictory to the methodologies adopted, which were meant to be active, collaborative, and learner-centered.

Furthermore, the changes in the objectives did not mean a substantial improvement. Although these pointed to cognitive processes, some activities and assessment tasks carried

out in the classroom remained within the traditional perspective of literacy. Thus, some of the goals reached by the students about literacy had to do again with the recognition of information and the creation of texts based on linguistic criteria. Workshops and quizzes were about identifying main ideas and details in a reading or writing letters having as the main instruction to use the appropriate formulae as illustrated below in Figure 2.

FOREING LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT  
LETTER WRITING WORKSHOP

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Writing skills practice: A letter to a friend – exercises\***

Look at the exam question and letter and do the exercises to practise and improve your writing skills.

Write the phrases in the correct group.

How’s everything going?	Hope to hear from you soon.	Take care.	Thanks for your letter and telling me all your news.
Say hello to your family and friends.	Sorry I haven’t written sooner. I’ve been away on holiday.	Please write back soon.	It was great to hear from you the other day.

to begin a letter	to end a letter

\* Note: exercises taken from: <https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org>

*Figure 2. Extract of a letter writing workshop.*

Getting away from exercises like these, required more Teacher Development Program sessions so teachers could plan, develop their lessons, and assess their students according to the approach proposed in the Academic Council. The head of areas or someone outside the school could open a space for these sessions, given the weekly time teachers had for general or area meetings. Some modifications had to be done in the documents and in the daily teaching practices. Rephrasing the learning objectives in the

annual planning or in the lessons did not necessarily mean that what was done in the classroom was aligned with the literacy cognitive perspective.

Moving from the institutional documents, the literature about writing shows that scholars are concerned about the students' performance in different educational settings. Two studies illustrate the idea that in some educational contexts writing is conceived instrumentally and in others, teachers are attempting to see it beyond the linguistic aspect.

First, Ochoa and Medina (2014) report that students' writing at a private school was exclusively focused on the linguistic aspects of the language. Learners were asked to write, for example, a series of sentences using a specific grammar tense without providing a context or a purpose to write them. Ochoa and Medina (2014) were concerned about their students' writing process and proposed the use of a virtual room where they could carry out authentic communicative activities. They intended to explore the extent to which the use of the virtual room could shape the students' writing in a private school. At the end of the action research, Ochoa and Medina (2014) found firstly that the students widened their vocabulary (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) to express their ideas, feelings, and opinions. Secondly, students engaged more in the writing tasks by working cooperatively and by participating in various interactive exercises. Thirdly, students shaped their writing skills by giving sense to what they wrote keeping their texts coherent and cohesive, and moved from the reproduction of grammar rules to the more spontaneous participation in chat rooms, achieving several communicative goals. This study shows that through the pedagogical intervention students stopped writing isolated sentences to produce a variety of texts to reach different communicative objectives. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that the perspective about writing continues to be mainly focused on the language. This is evident

when Ochoa and Medina (2014) affirm for instance that the students were able to use a wider range of vocabulary or connectors to give meaning to what they wrote.

Second, Nanwani (2009) detected that her students had difficulties when writing academically in English in a private university in Bogota. Nanwani (2009) points that the initial obstacles relied on the fact that the academic writing course followed an Anglo-American style and additionally, the curriculum had been defined by a small number of faculty members, who left aside the students' cognitive and socio-cultural assets. Nanwani (2009) admits they were developing programs based on a limited view of literacy. The teacher-researcher affirms, "academic writing requires greater grammatical and morphological accuracy, a formal tone or register, appropriate rhetorical structure, knowledge of the audience (readers), critical thinking and a number of principles such as coherence, concision, cohesiveness and simplicity" (2009, p. 142). Furthermore, Nanwani (2009) endorses Grab and Kaplan's idea that members of different cultures use different rhetoric strategies. This became an important matter since their students were learning under an Anglo-American style and they felt constrained by the rigid essay structure they had to follow. The teacher-researcher makes five pedagogical recommendations to help students deal with their academic writing. Firstly, instructors should see writing as a process; consequently, the evaluation should look at the students' work in the various stages not only the final version of their essays. Secondly, the instructors' role ought to be as facilitators rather than authorities of knowledge. Thirdly, instructors should equip students to convey meaning by using different strategies, including reading academic texts. Fourthly, academic writing should not be treated as a subject but as a lifetime productive professionally activity. Fifthly, the feedback provided should be done in a positive way. That is to say, errors can be seen as learning opportunities rather than failures. Nanwani's

remarks (2009) reveal her concern to make students develop their academic literacy in a more meaningful successful way. Finally, Nanwani demands to not approach academic writing as the ability to produce essays following a systematic pattern but give the students the option to find their own way to tackle affairs linked to their academic interests.

Moving to the participants of the present study, I will proceed to profile them from the literacy point of view. On the one hand, from direct observation, I detected that half the students enjoyed reading on their own. Between the classes or when a teacher was absent, some students spent their time reading books. They were fond of stories related to fantasy, classic and modern novels. The other half was not particularly used to reading, and they did it for the school assignments.

On the other hand, a questionnaire responded by them shows their interests in learning English and their opinions about the difficulty and usefulness of some types of texts. It also shows their learning preferences (See Appendix 1).

Their interests to learn English were related to finding a job and studying abroad, which in turn could be connected to learning English for specific and academic purposes correspondingly. Additionally, seven out of ten think writing was the area they had more trouble with, and although seven believed that reading and writing essays were relatively difficult or difficult, nine agree on the idea that reading and writing them was relatively useful or useful.

When they were asked about how they felt about reading and writing, half of them had a positive view of them, while the other half felt uncomfortable about them. Nonetheless, interestingly, to the question why they felt that way, some of the students that felt confident, argued they would feel much better if they handled the language more accurately.



These results show that students were aware of the importance of literacy in their lives. Nevertheless, even though they felt self-assured towards literacy, some of them related it to the master of language itself. This also shows the way they perceived literacy. In this case this matches with Ochoa and Medina's conception described above. The students seemed concerned about their spelling and vocabulary, as the figure below (Figure 3) illustrates it. In other words, they appeared not to identify themselves as critical readers/writers in the academic setting.

However, this does not mean they were not concerned about societal problems or that they were not critical. The school provides other spaces where students develop their sensitivity towards some social issues. These moments are usually part of the homeroom teaching or preparation for religious celebrations (See Chapter III). This means that the students assume a social agent role in a non-academic context. Hence, I urged the need to provide the students an academic space where they could exercise their agency while learning different subject matters.

Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent	<input type="checkbox"/> Bad
Why?	<u>Because I read a little stop.</u>				
Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent	<input type="checkbox"/> Bad
Why?	<u>Because I need to have more vocabulary and tenses.</u>				

Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent	<input type="checkbox"/> Bad
Why?	<u>Because the text advanced writing and hard for me to understand completely.</u>				
Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Very good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent	<input type="checkbox"/> Bad
Why?	<u>Because in general terms I can write well but I don't have overly good spelling.</u>				

Figure 3. Self-view about reading and writing.

Bearing this problem statement in mind, I intended to develop a pedagogical intervention where my students could use a series of reading and writing tasks to make them gain awareness about social issues, something they expressed and cared about in other entourages.

Simultaneously, it was my duty to cover topics such The Civil War in the US, The Olympic Games and Essay Writing, as they were included in the annual planning. The latter was of great importance, as the administrators considered the writing of formal papers essential in the students' preparation for their performance in college. Therefore, under

these circumstances, I planned and designed a whole instructional unit to make my students work with various written and oral texts and write argumentative essays critically.

Working with the students on the writing of argumentative essays was at the core of the pedagogical intervention. As explained above, the planning demanded that I teach them how to write an essay. However, that was not the ultimate objective of the present research. During the implementation of the pedagogical intervention I worked with my students so they could develop reading and writing tasks using them as a practical dimension of their own social dimension. One of the challenges I saw ahead was to implement the use of ICT tools to serve the purpose of the study. Moreover, I followed a writing process model so that the pedagogical intervention were successful (See Chapter IV).

In sum, the institutional documents and the literature have made me realize that literacy has been a common interest for students, teachers, and institutions, and yet it has been approached from a perspective that in many cases has prioritized formal aspects of the language, as well as the individual production. The school I work at is not an exception and this phenomenon is present too. Having said that, students might not have been given the opportunity to be critical when they read and write.

As this study deals with critical literacy, the practices carried out by learners and educators are necessarily in constant change, seeking for improvement at a personal, academic, and social level at a specific situated context. Based on the above premises I pose the following research question and objective:

### **Research Question**

What do students' critical literacy practices in an EFL classroom inform about their concern for social issues?

**Research Objective**

To interpret the students' declarations about what constitutes real social concerns for them.

**Rationale**

I believe that this study can contribute to different instances at various levels. Primarily, I consider that the students at the school need the opportunity not only to develop high-order thinking skills as it has been proposed in the program but to assume responsibly stances about social issues within academic contexts and project them to other contexts as well.

As the social beings they are, I expect them to express openly their social agentic dimension during the English lessons because as explained above students approach and respond to diverse social issues in non-academic spaces but within the school context. In my view they should be equipped to comprehend and react towards their day-by-day societal problems they might be involved in all sort of contexts. As daughters, friends, students, and as the global citizens they have become, they are likely to face situations where they have to make decisions and stand for them, which is what critical literacy is ultimately about. They should be able to act for the welfare of themselves and the ones around them.

Critical literacy will help the students be aware and get a deeper understanding of the different curricular areas, which they can approach from multiple angles. The students will also benefit in the mid and long run because writing academic papers critically will certainly help them in their future studies and careers.

As for the teachers, this study will serve as an example that through the implementation of non-traditional teaching methodologies, our students will be able to

respond to the new challenges of the XXI century, an expectation that has been expressed in many occasions in different teachers' meetings. In turn, the Foreign Languages Department will have a ground where a curriculum can be implemented assuming language, learning, classroom, and bilingualism from a critical perspective. This will give us the possibility to develop meaningful and purposeful lessons based on the students' real needs and interests sensitizing them about the diverse social issues present in their daily life. Furthermore, the school will advance in the achievement of its vision of *'being recognized for the academic excellence, leadership, and social responsibility of its alumni'*.

The development of critical literacy practices is essential in a society. Reading and writing done critically opens a window to a wider world, providing the individuals more possibilities to look for alternatives and solutions to social problems. Our country and others in the region need to count on sensible and sensitive citizens who can judge between what is good and what is not. Countries whose populations can make better decisions and leaders with the political will to make the necessary changes that can put a stop to the inequality lived among us. We cannot pretend to have a democracy if our students are not ready in the first place to recognize hidden messages and agendas and if in the second place they do not manage to resist oppressing discourses delivered by people who want to perpetuate their power.

Finally, the MA research emphasis on Literacy in Two Languages will get some new insights about the way students perform various social practices at distinct levels to fulfill academic writing tasks in a second language, unveiling hopefully the complexities of these and their relationship with the level of criticality reached by students while writing argumentative essays.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

In the previous chapter, I described the statement of the problem. I posed the research question and stated the objective of the research study. I also explained the justification for the study. In this chapter, I will compare and contrast two theoretical pillars, traditional literacy, and critical literacy. Through the literature review and the description of the state of the art, I will explain the need of developing critical literacy in an EFL classroom, transcending conventional literacy, and the way this serves as a means to gain sensibility and sensitivity towards social issues. To achieve this, I will start by pointing to what literacy refers to. Then, I will present the relation between both approaches of literacy. Afterwards, I will account for the objectives of conventional and critical literacy. Next, I will proceed to explain the role of the text in literacy. Finally, I will describe the development of writing and academic writing.

#### **Core definitions**

To begin with, I would like to present the changes in the conception of literacy and its presence in the society. On the one hand, the traditional literacy approach remains mainstream. About this phenomenon, Norton (2007) points, “The dominant conception of literacy among governments, policy-makers, and many members of the general public is that literacy references the ability, on the part of individuals, to read and write” (p. 6). This means that traditional literacy continues to be developed in our present society.

Furthermore, Nasution affirms that traditional literacy is “the product of time. It refers to a historical evolution” (1971, p. 22). In other words, literacy here is given the attribute to be

traditional because it is rooted in the past and it continues to be unchangeable or with few changes.

In the 1960s, literacy was conceived from a print-based world as the mere skill to read, write, and calculate (UNESCO, 2004) without giving second thoughts to the types of teaching texts nor methods that would be used to achieve such goal. Moreover, traditional literacy refers to the capacity to handle the different disciplines associated with the language. These components might include morphology, syntax, semantics, text linguistics, which tend to perpetuate a focus on printed communication (Young, 2012).

Nonetheless, as any other discipline, literacy has developed since its origins, despite the strong presence of the traditional approach, turning into a complex, yet note-worthy practice. It has been defined by the UNESCO as

The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. (2004, p. 13)

This definition encompasses somehow the complexities of the processes carried out by the individuals in different scenarios. Its demands in terms of the way people are expected to handle and interact with the information available in a variety of modes, and its direct connection with the individuals' personal development, show the new learning necessities and social dynamics we all are immersed in.

Additionally, literacy is no longer a one-direction passive skill. According to Freire, reading is more than decoding the written word. "Reading is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected. The

understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context” (Freire, 1983, p. 5). Freire declares that reading and writing does not consist on merely reciting a text or memorizing the governing rules of a language; on the contrary, Freire recognizes reading and writing as an act of knowing and creating (1987), and understanding the underlying significance of the words. Freire’s re-known words, “Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (1983, p. 10) highlight the vitality of the act of reading and writing.

The interpretation of reality through the reading of words is permeated by the individual’s background and experiences. This means that it is not possible to understand a reading without making sense of it because of what has happened around us. This also implies the idea that is possible to look at the same phenomena from different angles. Every time one reads or writes, one is given a ticket to swim and dive in a sea called ‘reality’, where many other subjects are present and help you live, think, and respond effectively to that act.

In this train of thought, Menezes de Souza (2007) asserts that

If literacy is no longer seen as a technology or a set of cognitive skills to be developed in individual minds, but as a socio-situated practice involving the on-going negotiation of meaning in continuously contested sites of meaning construction, then all literacy in a certain sense ought to be ‘critical’. (p. 4)

This means that words do not possess single meanings, but they are constructed permanently, and they challenge the individuals to not take for granted what they read or write; meaning is constant movement as the readers/writers themselves.



On this matter, Rosenblatt (1994) points to the reading process as a mutual transaction. The meaning of the text is not rooted in the reading itself or in the reader, is the result of the transaction between them. Additionally, Rosenblatt (1994) states that the reader can choose the predominant stance he/she wants to take towards the text. An aesthetic reader, for instance, participates actively in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions as they are unfolding. In other words, the reader gets involved in the reading and this constitutes part of the response and interpretation of the text.

Personally, I feel more identified with the critical approach. I acknowledge the importance of using the language accurately, especially in the academic world. However, as I see it, literacy is a transformative act since it moves the affective, cognitive, and more importantly, the social dimension of the human being, striving the individuals for the better in settings they usually settle.

As can be seen, literacy has been understood in two ways. Critical literacy goes beyond the significant-significance of words; farther than the traditional view. In sum, conventional literacy is focused on the language while critical literacy sees beyond the system; it goes around the reader/writer as a social individual.

### **Traditional and critical literacy: Opposite or complementary?**

Although traditional literacy and critical literacy have been portrayed as divergent, we have to admit that critical literacy relies on the conventional approach. Critical literacy would not be possible to develop if the knowledge of the codes were not mastered in the first place. This means that when the learners achieve to develop critical literacy, they necessarily make use of the traditional literacy in an initial stage. However, the inverse process does

not take place. In other words, students can develop literacy skills, but this does not mean they are critical literates.

Multiliteracy is understood in the existence of other modes of meaning closely related to culture and context. The textual element is associated with some others, such as the visual, the audio, the gestural, the spatial, and the multimodal. The New London Group invites educators and students to “see themselves as active participants in social change, as learners and students who can be active designers – makers of social futures” (1996, p. 64). On the other hand, in the teaching context, the use of new literacies does not necessarily mean that literacy is becoming critical. At some point, both can be addressed in a learning environment as I explain below.

Quintero (2008) states

The writing task is much more concerned with the form rather than with the abstract thinking capacity to construct meaning and put it into words [...] writing is a difficult skill to develop since it requires not only syntactic and lexical knowledge but also the capacity to generate and organize ideas and thoughts in a way that can be clearly and coherently communicated to a potential reader. (p. 8)

Nevertheless, Quintero clarifies that

Certainly the focus of this study was not on the accurate use of linguistic features, but of course, they were tools that clearly helped writers to shape and express their thoughts. It is often seen that problems with grammar, punctuation, lexical choice and the like can have a very negative impact on content and general understanding of a text. (2008, p.13)

In this research study, Quintero’s aim was to “gain insights about the development of writing in EFL and to explore to what extent feedback from the teacher and from peers

shape students' writing" (2008, p. 9). Students from Canada and Colombia participated regularly in three types of blogs – a personal one, a group one and a blog for debate. The findings of this action research suggest that students' writing is enhanced because they interact with people who have similar interests and language expectations. Quintero (2008) also found that students used writing as a self-expression means. Regarding feedback, the study shows that the teacher's role is one of a coach, seen as the 'expert and knowledgeable' person in the group. Quintero's feedback included comments about the organization and the content of the texts along with the Canadian's replies to the Colombian students' posts, which included some explicit and implicit feedback. Such comments and observations played a scaffolding role and helped students improve their writing process. Students moved, according to Quintero (2008), from writing simple short texts to longer and more complex ones at the end of the pedagogical intervention.

This study portrays that literacy is to some extent addressed from the linguistic perspective. Students improved while feeling part of a community and could express their feelings and opinions, and the sort of feedback provided to the students contained language and content elements.

### **Purposes of literacy**

If literacy is conceived differently, consequently, its goals should be divergent too. As traditional literacy deals with the ability to, first, identify, and understand the rules under which the language is structured, and second put into practice these rules, the teaching and learning of the language become mechanical. Therefore, and giving the fact that such linguistic rules are limited, drilling and memorizing are essential to guarantee the development of the reading and writing skills, where there is none or little space for

innovation. Because the master of the language components is its primary objective, this type of literacy is also called structuralist. This means that the individuals have to demonstrate their knowledge of the way the language is structured at the different levels, e.g. morphological, syntactical, etc.

In addition, in education, the empty vessel theory (Lock, as cited in Rodríguez, 2012) takes part of the learning process. This states that the teacher is the holder of knowledge while the pupils are passive receptors of it. Again, about literacy, what matters here is the capability to manage the language as a system, thus the context where it occurs is irrelevant. The setting, users, and purposes, among other things, are not essential at the moment of looking at the principles that are the core of the organization of the language. The learners' needs and interests are not considered either. Literacy, in other words, is the end itself.

A study in Colombia suggests the idea that literacy continues to be developed around the formal aspects of the language. Lizarazo (2012) found that their sixth-grade students

[...] have difficulties using adjectives when they write a description. It means that they write the adjective after the noun as we do when we write in Spanish, without taking into account that some structures are formed differently in English. For this reason, some activities were designed to take advantage of the use of blogs and different worksheets, which allowed the students to understand and use the adjectives in English. (p. 188)

Lizarazo (2012) intended to analyze the way his students used adjectives when they wrote descriptions in a blog. He explains that the students did not handle the structure of a

sentence at the moment of referring to somebody's characteristics. Hence, Lizarazo (2012) developed a pedagogical innovation and used the students' artifacts – their exercises in their notebooks and in worksheets, and the blog. The categories that emerged from the data analysis were *Exploring the use of adjectives to describe people* and *Role of the blog*. Lizarazo (2012) argues that in the beginning, the students did not know the concept of adjective and consequently its grammar function. However, after the pedagogical intervention, most of the students succeeded in using adjectives to describe people's appearance. In addition, the blog was a tool that engaged the students in the tasks and helped them advance in the management of the English syntax.

This study demonstrates the permanent concern for the language itself. Lizarazo's main goal was to generate the linguistic awareness among their students in regard to the syntactic order of words in a sentence, specifically when combining an adjective with a noun. The activities the teacher-researcher proposed prompted the learners to start mastering noun phrases that contained adjectives.

On the contrary, among the different conceptions of what critical literacy entails, other scholars refer to it as a social practice, with common notions about discourse and text. Let us examine the shared understanding of what literacy is by looking at what is not.

Literacy is not an isolated activity. Although apparently reading and writing is something the individual does himself without the intervention of anybody else, what he reads and or writes is permeated by a series of aspects that make his practice take one shape or another. This means that traits such as, personal backgrounds, cultural ideologies, and social values, among others, are there to determine the way in which the reading and writing is experienced and assumed.

Street (2003) defines literacy as

[...] a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts. (p. 77.)

Street's (2003) conception of literacy focuses on the readers/writers as social individuals whose practices depend on and derive from the contexts they are immersed in. That is to say, the reading/writing practice occurs in other multiple places different from the classroom. The family entourage, the neighborhood and the online communities are, for instance, spaces – not necessarily physical, where literacy takes place without the direct intervention of the teacher.

Likewise, Lea & Street (2006) show three different models in the development of literacy. The first model is the study skills and it approaches writing as an individual cognitive skill focusing on the features of language and accuracy in the usage of it. The second model Lea & Street (2006) mention is called academic socialization which "is concerned with students' acculturation into disciplinary and subject-based discourses and genres" (p. 369), which means the possibility of using different genres and discourses to construct knowledge in certain ways. The third one refers to academic literacies model, which according to Lea & Street (2006) has to do with "meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any

particular academic context” (p. 369). In the latter, power relationships, authority, meaning-making, identity construction are privileged over the knowledge of the disciplines.

Shor (1999) concurs with Street (2003) and Lea and Street (2006) when observing that “critical literacy is language use that questions the social construction of the self. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it” (n. p.).

Additionally, Beck (2005) asserts,

Questioning why some constructions of knowledge are legitimated while others are not encouraging individuals to develop the critical awareness necessary to challenge the status quo and discover alternatives to existing social inequalities; critical theorists thus highlight the individual as the agent of social change. (p. 393)

Thus, literacy advocates for social change. However, this change is not exclusively inserted into big-scale social interventions. Social change refers here to the resistance one can make to the conformity of the social norms and to the small acts, which by being firm and sustained can generate over time a change of mind or behavior. As social individuals, change can occur at all levels, from home to society.

About the educational context, Norton (2007) affirms, “Educators who are interested in critical literacy are interested in written text, or, indeed, any other kind of representation of meaning as a site of struggle, negotiation, and change” (p. 6). Norton recognizes the existence of the inherent component of critical literacy, which is social change, but she additionally points to the presence of new types of texts. At this point, this is a crucial feature of what critical literacy has in mind.

As aforementioned, literacy is a dynamic practice experienced by individuals as part of a community, along with their partners, not in isolation, as it occurred in the traditional literacy. Critical literacy becomes a two-way act, where meanings go back and forth and are co-constructed with others. This allows learners to realize the variety of perceptions and interpretations a single reading can drive. These, in turn, open a room for reflectivity and consequently, people become more aware of the diverse opinions others have on the same text. Some studies suggest all of this.

Firstly, Kuo carried out a study to answer the questions: “1) How did the students respond to an activity designed from a critical perspective? and 2) How did the students compare their learning in this activity to their prior experience?” (2014, p. 110). The pedagogical implementation consisted of the reading of a picture book and the development of different learning tasks. The tasks included among others, answering questions from someone else’s point of view, profiling a character and discussing the book. The participants were 34 students who were taking a General English class and the instruments for data collection were classroom observations, students’ artifacts and assignments, their reflection papers, and follow-up interviews.

To the first question, the emerging categories were *Forming a critical stance*, *Investigating multiple perspectives* and *Re-examining their familiar world*. To the second question, Kuo (2014) identified three recurrent themes: *Picture books as alternative teaching materials*, *Relevant materials and issues*, and *Interactive and learner-centered tasks*. Kuo (2014) concludes that his students behaved as social agents when they moved from the personal to the social level. Besides, the researcher affirms they acted as critical literate because they were able to relate their learning in the class with their own lives. This study shows the possibility to make students aware of other realities and connect them with



their own. To develop critical literacy, the kind of learning tasks proposed to the students must be purposeful and socially related.

Secondly, Lopez-Robertson (2010), a bilingual Latina teacher, explored how two second-graders Latinas, responded to a critical literacy curriculum while participating in literature discussions. The implementation involved the presentation of guest speakers, and home and class discussions about migrant workers. Through audiotapes, transcriptions, artifacts, informal interviews and field notes, Lopez-Robertson (2010) found that the students linked the contents of the books they read with their lives and made meaning of the readings. The emerging category was *Border Issues*. The students felt touched by the readings as they looked similar to their own stories. Their narratives illustrate the way they associated the characters in the readings with their own relatives. Through the discussions of the readings, the two students were able to contest social inequities and position towards the others, the ones who were involved in their own stories. As a teacher-researcher Lopez-Robertson (2010) wished her students feel identified with the curriculum and that is why she opened up a space where their voices could be heard. In fact, they took an active role in the construction of the curriculum and more importantly, the discussions they participated in, helped them turn their own experiences into knowledge.

Thirdly, Pérez (2013) conducted a study in a public school in Bogota. The research questions he posed were: “What do EFL students’ written reflections reveal about their social awareness when inquiring about verbal and physical aggression at Tejares Public School and how do students develop their EFL writing skills when inquiring about verbal and physical aggression inside their institution?” (p. 185). Pérez decided to carry out this study since he was concerned about social issues such as the verbal and physical aggression

students faced in the school. The researcher selected 40 tenth graders as participants and used questionnaires, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews.

Pérez (2013) by means of an inquiry cycle, established two categories. *Building consciousness from unpredictable human behaviors in the community context* was the first category. This social awareness is tied with four main reflections. In the first place, students recognized that aggression could arise at any moment derived from apparently unimportant matters. In the second place, aggression occurred in external settings, not necessarily in the school and they were not responsible for them. In the third place, at some point aggression was seen as a liberating act. In the fourth place, aggression was partly generated because of their lack of control and it should not happen in a learning environment.

The second category was *Aggression is a human condition to dominate, subjugate and survive*. In this case, the students felt that in a case of aggression they were somehow forced to take sides and assume a role. This implied they became part of the passive, aggressive, or victims' groups. In other words, although students knew that being aggressive was negative, sometimes they needed to behave that way to survive in their community. If not, they might become victims of the aggressor. Their awareness here is linked to the students' emotions and their contexts.

The last emerging category was *Writing as a means of growing as citizens*. Through writing, students made connections with their own realities and were able to make propositions to solve their cases of aggression in the school. They became social agents when they pointed to adults and themselves as the responsible people to reduce the aggressive behaviors in their institution. All in all, this study evidences the students' social awareness, personal growth, and transformation of their futures.

Kuo (2014), Lopez-Robertson (2010) and Pérez (2013), illustrate the way critical literacy advocates for social change within and from learning environments. In these studies, the position of the individual to the reality that surrounds him is essential, as the possibility to look for alternatives that might change the kind of experiences they were facing. The fact of raise awareness about the situations students were immersed in, and making their voices be heard, allowed them to consider other behaviors and actions as options in their lives.

### **The role of text**

Texts have been at the core of education for decades; these have been widely used in literacy teaching and learning. Regarding this, Eaton asserts that “language learning has emphasized the written forms of the language, focusing on grammar and structure. Although communicative teaching and learning methods are used today, there is still a heavy focus on written forms” (2010, p. 15).

Since texts are linked to reading, and in turn, traditional literacy is conceived as the skill to read, write, and calculate, let us explore what reading is about in this approach. Reading is focused on the literal comprehension of written texts, leaving aside other types of interpretations. Through the text, the writer sends the message and the reader receives it. This makes reading an individual, passive, and unidirectional process. Consequently, the reader must understand what the text says. In other words, there is only one correct way to understand the reading, and the reader’s opinion is not considered.

Nonetheless, critical literacy does not rely exclusively on the written form and is not a single entity. The New London Group (1996) understands multiliteracies as the numerous ways texts are being disseminated within the globalization phenomenon. The New Literacy

Studies (NLS) and multiliteracies are new ways of looking at literacy, to which Gee explains that “NLS are based on the view that reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural practices of which they are but a part” (2000, 180).

A study conducted by Vargas (2016) suggests that the way we read and write has changed dramatically due to the use of digital technologies and social networks. Vargas carried out the study with two informants, using in-depth interviews and his study reveals that the participants of the social network Facebook, show an intense literacy activity. Additionally, they pose as critical individuals fighting back to not being seen as interchangeable pieces of a hegemonic puzzle. Vargas affirms that their construction of identity is a strong component of their literacy activity.

This study depicts the way people are using other forms to communicate, to express themselves and to show who they are and what they want. Vargas (2016) portrays the use of technology not only as a new means of communication but as an alternative for individuals to binding with others, to examine the way they are developing as members of diverse communities and to contest openly to situations they are interested in. Having the possibility to use language in such a way is what makes literacy critical.

Considering the advances in technology and communication, it can be seen there is still a gap between the way we communicate and interact with one another by using images such as emojis, and audiovisual texts, sending audio messages and video chats, for example. Language learning should include these other ways as they are part of our daily life and using a language implies the practicality of it in our day-by-day tasks. Nonetheless, the mere use of new technologies and devices does not guarantee the development of

critical literacy. What matters is the way the technology is used, and the purpose behind its usage.

### **Academic writing**

In conventional literacy, writing deals with the capacity to produce texts making accurate use of the linguistic structures. The literate person must know how words are spelled, how verbs are conjugated, how simple, compound, and complex sentences are structured, how a paragraph is organized and how a longer text, such as an essay is composed, among other things. Byrne (1988) describes writing as “the production of graphic symbols which have to be arranged, according to certain conventions to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences” (p. 98).

Nevertheless, the notion of academic writing has evolved. Macedo (2003) explores the need of working with literacy from a critical view. In dealing with academic writing, he highlights “A “de-contextualized” language is a figment of our imagination, socially constructed to present the academic discourse as a superior discourse” (p. 13). Furthermore, Macedo (2003) stresses that “the mastery of dominant academic discourse through literacy for cultural production should be understood as a weapon for subordinate students to defend themselves” (p. 13).

How are the views of academic writing evident in the teaching context? Thoman (2003) recognizes that literacy “meant having the skill to interpret “squiggles” on a piece of paper as letters which, when put together, formed words that conveyed meaning” (p. 6). The main concern seems to be how letters and words are put together to convey meaning rather than what kind of message is being transmitted. This perception is palpable in two studies.

Robayo and Hernández (2013) observed that at a private university, second semester students, “showed difficulties in terms of organizing their ideas, identifying different kinds of texts, providing arguments to support their opinions, as well as employing a range of basic and complex grammar structures” (p. 131), when facing academic written production. In this study, Robayo and Hernández (2013) explain that “when students are not used to reading and writing, we cannot expect that they will produce texts and master their writing skills without the appropriate instruction” (p.131). And they continue to define writing “far beyond a skill but rather a means that helps individuals to communicate according to what influences their lives. Nevertheless, it is expected to be used formally if we write for academic purposes (at a university level)” (p.131).

Robayo and Hernández intended “to identify the changes (if any) in the formal aspects of language students have when they develop academic writing through project work. To identify features of collaboration that are recurrent while writing. To describe the role of project work in the academic writing process” (2013, p. 134). The participants were 18 EFL students and the instruments for data collection were video recordings and written papers. The two categories that emerged from the data analysis were *Collaboration features in academic writing* and *Understanding how to write an essay*. The first category suggests the role that participants took while working on the project. This involved dissenting and agreeing and getting external aid to carry out the tasks assigned. The second category refers to the ability of the students to convey meaning, develop critical thinking and gain awareness about the mechanics of academic writing, including the use of capital letters, punctuation marks, and syntax.

Although Robayo and Hernández (2013) acknowledge writing as a means of communication and mentioned the development of critical thinking skills, they perceive

academic writing as an ability whose main requirement is the level of formality achieved. This takes us back to the conception that language accuracy is over content quality. In fact, the term ‘academic purposes’ reaffirms the need of mastering the language at the desired level, so it is worth reading and accepted within the academic context.

Rivera (2011) identified fourth-semester students’ poor writing production noting that their papers had “incomplete, broken, and meaningless sentences” (p. 12). Rivera’s intention was to make her students develop writing skills so that they could make better word choices to express moods, emphasis, development, choice of effective words and word combinations by following Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (1987) stages model. Rivera (2011) affirms, “This process must be learned and supported by principles to guide that writing in an effort to increase cognizance of the writing skill and expectations from repetition” (p. 15). In this case, Rivera needed her students to go through the same process over several times, so they could write complete meaningful sentences as she expected.

As part of her pedagogical intervention, Rivera (2011) describes,

With the aim of starting the process to improve writing, the participants uploaded their pre-writing to receive feedback on form and content. Then, they had to improve their writings based on the comments provided by the teacher, who emphasized to them the language they needed to master and content or expressions they wanted to know and to go over the next stage and, as such, scaffold the students’ process through written feedback.

Finally, their papers were returned so that they could make final adjustments (re-writing) based on the teacher’s comments, thus completing the cycle of stages. (p. 17)

Rivera's instructional unit reveals that the knowledge is held by the teacher. Even though she mentions that content was checked at some point, it seems that the stages were focused on the correct use of certain expressions. In addition, feedback came from top to bottom because the teacher made the comments, and these were the only ones considered so that students could improve their writing.

Rivera's (2011) study portrays the idea that in English teaching lessons, language, and structure continue to be privileged, which is evident in three facts. The first, learning the language is the aim, not the means to learn something else; the second, the teacher is the holder of knowledge of the language, which means that students assume the role of passive learners, not being able to contribute to their own learning process; and the third, although some importance is given to what the students write, the priority during the assessment is the form, leaving the process of writing behind.

Within critical literacy, Williams (2006), considers that if there are diverse ways to create knowledge is just obvious that it exists diverse ways to look at academic writing. In this train of thought, Williams (2006) argues that "Academic writing is a form of literacy that has everything to do with identity" (p. 712). He supports this idea by stating, "Identity is present in the best academic and scholarly writing as a positive force". And then Williams (2006) moves on to say that "We have all read work by scientists, politicians, business executives, and others in which the power of what they have to say comes in part from the power of the identity they perform on the page" (p. 712). Williams (2006) finishes by underlining that "The identity of the writer is clear here in ways that illuminate for us what is at stake for him and for the world outside of his lab" (p. 713).

Identity is a social construction (Goffman as cited in Carbone & Orellana, 2015, p. 294). It provides meaning to who people think and feel they are and it is not freely adopted



by the individuals. Moreover, it “is not socially determined but constructed” (Ivanič, 1984, p, 12). This means that it is negotiated and influenced by the discourses situated in the social groups people belong to. In other words, subjects do not have solely one identity but several, depending on the settings they are and the individuals they interact with.

Ivanič (1984) describes three types of identity related with writing: the autobiographical self, the discursal self and the authorial self. In the latter, the self as author is particularly significant when discussing academic writing, since writers differ considerably in how far they claim authority as the source of the content of the text, and in how far they establish an authorial presence in their writing. (p. 26)

Similarly, Hyland (2002) stresses that in academic writing, “like all forms of communication, is an act of identity: it not only conveys disciplinary ‘content’ but also carries a representation of the writer” (p, 1092). In Hyland’s view, the use of first person pronouns makes it explicit the desire to highlight the author’s personal stance and contributions, claiming himself as an authority in the subject matter he is writing about, which is an essential component in the writing of academic papers.

Ivanič and Hyland’s perspectives on the writer’s identity seem opposite to the traditional academic writing, which claims to be impersonal. This viewpoint is still shared and spread across the schools and among the students.

In general, academic writing aims at being ‘objective’ in its expression of ideas, and thus tries to avoid specific reference to personal opinions. Your academic writing should imitate this style by eliminating first person pronouns ... as far as possible. (Arnaudet & Barrett as cited in Hyland 2002, p, 2).

Our duty as teachers is to equip our students with the necessary linguistic, rhetorical and discursive resources so they become aware of the identity choices they have when writing an academic paper. Ivanič (1984) explains that literacy practices are “both shaped by and shapers of people’s identity: acquiring certain literacy practices involves becoming a certain type of person” (p. 67). Educators should guide learners so they are not afraid of assuming new roles, new positions and responsibilities, which are the ones they take on when they write.

Likewise, Rosenblatt conceives writing as “an event in time, occurring at a particular moment in the writer’s biography, in particular circumstances, under particular external as well as internal pressures. In short, the writer is always transacting with a personal, social, and cultural environment” (1994, p. 1072). According to Rosenblatt (1994), when an individual writes about a reading, the meaning or the state of mind becomes the starting point, making this more relevant than the physical text. And she goes on to affirm that having an absolute single meaning for a text is not possible. The interpretation of the texts acquires several meanings depending on the transactions done by the reader, even if the reader is situated in different contexts or times.

Additionally, Correa (2009) explores the reasons why the EFL/ESL academic writing courses have not helped successfully the students to meet their demands at university and the way instructors can help students succeed in their undergraduate courses. Correa refers to academic writing as a social practice that varies according to contexts, communities, and situations. Correa explains that texts in the postmodern era are polyphonic since these are permeated by the personal voice – and this voice, in fact, is the speech of other speakers, situations, and contexts the writer has gone through and come across with.

In the literature review Correa (2009) provides, three factors explain the failure to help students: “First, the lack of situatedness with which instructors have been approaching writing; second, the important role that context, purpose, and audience have played in writing exercises; and third, the political nature of academic writing” (Correa, 2009, p. 123). As alternatives of solution, Correa suggests instructors should see the students as active participants in the construction of knowledge. Secondly, instructors ought to assume their responsibility for the students’ process. Thirdly, instructors need to be aware of the meta-cognitive and pedagogical requirements to deliver their lessons. And finally, instructors ought to make of the writing experience less about the paper composition as the ultimate aim, and turn it into an opportunity to join the students in a community of writers where their contributions to the field can be taken into account.

Studies describe academic writing as a social practice, which I will refer to below. In the first study, Chapetón and Chala (2013) intended to “identify and describe how the students approached argumentative essay writing when it was understood as a situated social practice” (p. 26). From Chala’s and Chapetón’s (2013) point of view “Writing as situated practice takes place at a specific moment in time and history and at a specific place in society; it makes up part of the world and acquires meaning within the context where it occurs” (p. 27). In the findings, Chala and Chapetón (2013) show that first, the six-semester students could bond with an audience that went beyond the classroom connection in at least two ways: “By building a relationship of contact and by considering the purpose of the essay” (p. 31). Second, the students established a personal involvement with the text, which was possible, when students situated their texts in personal contexts and when they built the free expression in their essays. Third, they stepped on steady ground to build solid arguments. This was possible thanks to the use of a variety of sources and to the students’

ability to use previous and specific knowledge. All in all, Chala and Chapetón (2013) argue through this study “it was also possible to transcend the classroom practice and integrate external readers in this literacy practice, making it both purposeful and meaningful for the students” (p. 41).

In the second study, Gemmell (2008) found her students’ essays alike and lifeless. The teacher-researcher “wanted students to think critically and to share their perspectives through their writing” (p. 66). Gemmell (2008) incorporated the use of writer’s notebooks, a kind of occasional paper or reflective essay in her English class with senior students (12th grade). In the beginning, the students resisted the new focus of the class as they considered inappropriate to express their opinions. As part of the pedagogical innovation, Gemmell (2008) provided a series of prompts before or after the study of a piece of British Literature, some of which she herself used to model the kind of responses she expected. Those assignments and the discussions prepared the students to answer more challenging academic tasks.

The study suggests that the students  
wrote thesis statements that presented a clear stance. Used personal experience and observations as evidence to bolster their arguments. Showed awareness of their audience. They worked to hook their readers by beginning with personal anecdotes and quotations. Saw the bigger purpose of writing to effectively communicate their ideas and opinions and to engage with the ideas in the text. (Gemmell, 2008, p. 67)

At the end of the semester, students noticed  
we have always learned to write about the author's opinion and not give our own.  
Oh, but how that changed [...] In this class, we did not always write about books

and their underlying meanings. We wrote about real issues and gave our opinions on them. (p. 65)

Gemmell (2008) concludes by saying

Putting students' ideas and opinions at the center of our classroom has freed students' voices. They know that I care about what they have to say, and in turn, they care more about what they write. They produce better writing - writing that sounds like them and that I enjoy reading. (p. 68)

In the studies described above, Chala and Chapetón (2013), and Gemmell (2008) show that writing as a social situated practice implies the direct personal engagement of the students with their text where their immediate context plays a vital role.

The literature review and the revision of the state of the art allowed me to find relevant connections between what has been done nationally and overseas and my research study. I realized that in the field of literacy academics are concerned about the role critical literate people play in the communities. The development of critical literacy since school stages can contribute to the changes we want to see in ourselves and our society. And this is a never-ending process that every time empowers us and gives us the opportunity to see things differently and act accordingly.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Research Design**

In the previous chapter, I addressed the state of the art and the literature review regarding critical literacy. I exposed the complexity literacy has reached, the new dynamics that are currently taking place in the EFL classrooms.

As described in Chapter I, despite the efforts done in the Trinidad del Monte – School of the Sacred Heart, writing in L2 continued to be approached mainly from a structuralist perspective. This means that on the one hand, it prioritized formal aspects of the language such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. On the other hand, it demanded that students work individually not leaving space to other types of practices in the classroom. From this panorama, the question to be answered in this research was: What do students' critical literacy practices in an EFL classroom inform about their concern for social issues? And the objective of this study was: To interpret the students' declarations about what constitutes real social concerns for them. In this chapter, I refer to the type of study, setting, instruments, participants, and ethical considerations.

Prior to the presentation of the aspects that constitutes the research design, I would like to highlight that in the making of it, I felt identified and followed the lessons shared by Bowen (2005). Reading extensively, consulting the experts, adhering to the guidelines provided for the making of the paper and being rigorous with the writing have made of this chapter the result of a thoughtful careful process, which I expect can illustrate the way the research study was conceived.

**Type of study**

The present research was framed within the qualitative paradigm. The term qualitative, according to Denzin and Lincoln, looks into processes and meanings that “are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (1998, p. 8). In addition, the qualitative research explores attitudes, behavior, and experiences (Dawson, 2002) in a ‘multimethod’ way that includes the study of a collection of a variety of first-hand materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Furthermore, the qualitative research focuses on the way people make sense of their reality and give meaning to it (Flick, 2009).

The qualitative research has some features, which Creswell (2014) and Hatch (2002) agree on. First, the qualitative research takes place in natural settings. Second, the researcher is considered as a key instrument. Third, it gathers multiple sources of data. Fourth, the data are analyzed from bottom up (inductive process). This means that “the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton as cited in Bowen, 2005, p. 217). Fifth, it gives full credit to the participants’ meaning of their reality. Sixth, it has an emergent design. In other words, its design may change along the research process. Seventh, it has a sense of reflexivity where the researcher’s personal background might shape the direction of the study. And eight, it accounts for a holistic view of the phenomenon studied.

The qualitative researchers have some features as well. Denzin and Lincoln point that “they stress the socially constructed nature of reality [...] emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry and [...] seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is

created and given meaning” (1998, p. 8). Additionally, qualitative researchers rely heavily on rich descriptions of the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Bearing in mind the definition of what qualitative research is, and considering its features and the ones of the researchers, this research was accountable to be qualitative for a number of reasons. To begin with, it was situated – an EFL classroom, a context where the way the students attached meaning to their learning experience was the core of the study. Additionally, as a researcher, I inevitably got involved in that process. Besides, the methods of data collection included emergent forms such as discussions not only the traditional ones such as interviews and observations. Also, during the data analysis process, the categories emerged depending on data and the analysis was filtered through my personal lens as a researcher. Finally, the study was not prefigured. This means that some aspects were subject to change. In short, the context, the role of the participants and the researcher, the handling of the data collection instruments and the analysis process were addressed from a qualitative perspective.

This descriptive and interpretive research interpreted the learners’ statements of what they considered issues of concern. These interpretations accounted for the subjective meanings assigned by the participants to their social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) while they performed reading and writing tasks. The interpretive research aimed at providing rich insight of the phenomena relevant for the setting where it occurred, therefore, it did not intend to generalize the interpretations constructed. However, this does not mean that the explanations suggested could be relevant for the educational context. Through these interpretations, I gained in-depth understanding of the students’ experiences. Additionally, the interpretive research accounts for multiple subjective realities and multiple



interpretations (Flick, 2009). This means that what the students established as a real social concern was the product of the individual or collective construction.

Since the details of the methodology are not just necessary but essential (Bowen, 2005) I will proceed below to describe in detail the setting, instruments, and participants.

### **Setting**

The study took place in a private school, on the outskirts of Chía, Colombia, where literacy has played a vital role. That is why the directives have made efforts to keep it at a high level. On the one hand, the institution has an intensive reading plan in the English class from pre-kinder to eleventh grade to make students get used to reading different genres since they are little. In pre-school, students go to the library on a regular basis, so they can be familiarized with the books, especially tales, and stories. In primary, students read at least four books a year at home, guided, and assessed in class, besides the short readings they do in the classroom. The students from secondary (middle and high school) have access to a platform where they can read as many books as they want. On the other hand, a policy created many years ago, called '*plan operativo*' (operative plan), intends to make students improve the way they express themselves in English and Spanish. To achieve this, writing is assessed in almost all subjects taught in English and Spanish. Teachers use rubrics to assess the students' assignments and these rubrics include different traits depending on the subject and the grade.

Furthermore, the way this has been implemented has changed over the years, different teaching methodologies regarding writing have been approached and the instruments of assessment have been revised and adjusted. The number of subjects where writing assignments have been assessed has decreased. Subjects such as Religion, Art, and

ICT adopted the policy for some years but currently, they do not. Likewise, year 2 was not considered in the policy some years ago; however, second graders are now expected to create short texts fulfilling some international examinations standards.

One characteristic of the population in the school is the sizes of the groups, which range from 7 to 24 students. This makes the relationships among teachers and students close and therefore, knowing every single student of the school by her name is not strange at all. Besides they belong to high socioeconomic strata.

About the philosophy of the school, this depicts the importance of certain values and beliefs. The institution mission, for instance, spins around the integral education of children and youths with leadership skills. The vision seeks the academic excellence, leadership, and social responsibility of its alumni. Moreover, the school offers a values-based education (VbE) whose core values are respect, responsibility, honesty, and solidarity.

Academically speaking, some facets of the pedagogical model might illustrate the way the academia was understood. A salient aspect is the pursuit of the development of competences and skills by incorporating active teaching/learning methodologies. Regarding foreign language teaching, the school adopts the functional additive view. This approach, as published on the school website, is a way to develop the students' cognitive skills. In addition, due to its bilingual nature, the hourly intensity of classes taught in English, besides the EFL class, could reach up to 16 periods per week, including Math, Science, Social Studies, and Art.

Having said this, it is worthy to mention that I carried out the pedagogical intervention in a span of eight months because the instructional unit was designed to fulfill both the objectives stated in the syllabus and the ones of the research. In that way, I devoted

all the sessions –five hours per week, to the project to have plenty of time to develop the intervention.

About resources, I consider that the ones offered by the school are valuable and even essential for the development of the lessons. Every classroom has a video beam connected to AirPlay and iPads are available for teachers and students. They can access the Computing room by booking it and students are allowed to use their own electronic devices in class if necessary.

This study contributed to the school in two ways. On the one hand, this represented an innovative way to work with VbE, which is present in its mission and vision because it sought to enhance the learning environment valuing the individuality of the students. Moreover, it opened a space for students to boost their relationship skills in an academic setting.

On the other hand, it showed the community – administrators, teachers, and students, the benefits that awareness about practices carried out in the EFL classroom and the sense of reality brought to the academia. This consciousness, in my view, complements the development of cognitive skills. Thus, the academic excellence continues to be achieved, not only in getting knowledge about issues of common interest but using it to reflect upon them through the lenses of the students. Reflexivity, at this point, became a crucial factor to make them improve their academic skills; the more they knew about the world that surrounded them, the more competent they became to face their daily problems.

## **Instruments**

For this study, I used two instruments for the collection of data: discussions and the students' papers -essays. Below I will mention each one and define what each instrument is about.

**Class discussions.** A discussion is a group interaction where teachers and students 'discuss' what they do not know, being an alternative to recitation (Cirillo, 2013). Class discussions was a good instrument to find relevant data. In them, I found the students' opinions, thoughts, and feelings about the issues stated as the theme of discussion. "Within discussions, assessing students' subject-matter knowledge is not necessarily the primary and sole objective" (Cirillo, 2013, p. 1). In fact, class discussions call for complex thinking processes and attitude change (Gall & Gall as cited in Dillon, 1984). Since Critical Literacy calls for critique, comments, and understands social issues (Green, 2001), the design of the discussions and the planning of the questions was essential (Kempe, 2001).

In the sessions when a discussion was held, the questions were designed to achieve some aims. Furthermore, one of the purposes when holding class discussions was to look for the students' opinions and thoughts rather than expecting right/wrong answers (Stodolsky as cited in Dillon, 1984). A crucial element to bear in mind when organizing discussions, besides the designing of the questions, was to guarantee that the students felt at ease, so their participation was active and spontaneous. If students were engaged and stress-free, their contributions would be probably more fruitful.

For the present study, the transcripts proved to be useful to gather the students' opinions and ideas said during the discussions. Transcription is a widely employed practice

in qualitative research and it transforms sounds or images from recordings to texts (Davidson, 2009).

**Artifacts - essays.** The type of artifact used in the present study was the argumentative essays written by the students. On the one hand, essay writing was one of the topics I had to teach as it was included in the annual planning. On the other hand, I found the students' essays provided insights into the phenomenon I was interested in (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In them, they could provide details and explain the connections they saw between the chosen topics and their opinions. Hence, I saw the convenience of the use of them. In other words, I could comply with the directives about the topics and units to be covered in the lessons, and simultaneously I could collect the data I was looking for. They were also useful because the examination of them was “an unobtrusive approach to qualitative research” (Ary, Jacobs Sorensen & Razavieh, 2013, p. 473). The students would not feel intimidated if I made comments or questions about their papers. This also meant that the students would not have to take extra time to provide the information I needed. I knew that some of the lessons would be devoted to the planning and rehearsal of the Art Show, and that meant that the time I had for the pedagogical intervention was limited and I had to take advantage of the lessons we had.

As explained above, I can affirm that the instruments chosen provided good descriptive information and allowed the triangulation of data, so this became reliable and trustworthy. Triangulation is

not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation [...] The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers

in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation. (Jolly & Bolitho, 1998, p. 4)

### **Participants**

The participants in the present research were 10 high schoolers aged between 16 -17 years old. In regard to their process of bilingualism, I can say it has been heterogeneous, partly because they started it at different ages and in other cases because they entered the school in different years. It means that for some of the latecomers, although not all of them, came from schools whose English language lessons were not intensive – considering the class hours (per week). For example, five students entered the school since preschool, while two entered in fourth and fifth grade, one entered in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and two more entered in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

About their literacy, briefly described in Chapter I, students were used to experiencing literacy in two main ways. On the one hand, I found students who were eager readers who spent part of their free time reading novels. They would carry them with them at all times and read them while the lessons started or in lessons whose teachers were absent. Among the novels, the students were interested in titles about adventure fiction and fantasy fiction such as vampires, zombies, wizards, and dragons. They also enjoyed reading about conspiracy theories and psychological thriller novels. Few spent their spare time writing and the ones who did address personal issues. As for the reading and writing assignments of the school, the students showed high interpretative levels and presented good arguments when developing their ideas and opinions. They searched a lot when they had to write. Nonetheless, the sources of information they used were not always reliable – i.e. they relied on blogs or they did not take into account other sources such as audio, or audiovisual.

It is worth pointing that students do develop their social agency outside the academic context. Within the school, the students participate regularly in social service activities, for example, campaigns, or exchanges with other population – especially children, female vulnerable teens and the elderly. These are planned and organized by non-academic instances, e.g. the dean and her homeroom teachers or the Department of Religion. In other contexts, several participants of the present research study have volunteered to work in foundations during their vacation. They have offered to accompany children, elderly population and some have worked to provide the most defenseless a decent home.

Regarding the sampling, I used a purposive and convenient one. First, because in a non-probability sampling, I did not intend to make generalizations but rather describe in detail what happened with a small group of people (Dawson, 2002). That also allowed me to make my own decisions as a researcher based on the data provided by the participants. Second, it was convenient mainly because I was assigned to teach that group. Additionally, they were similar ages and they had known each other for some years now. They had good relationships with each other and with the teachers, so managing the discipline in that group was not an arduous task.

### **Ethical Issues**

Regarding research ethics, defined as the “need to make sure that we treat both the participants and the information they provide with honesty and respect” (Dawson, 2002, p. 146), I considered four codes. The first one was to make this research an overt research (Berg, 2001; Dawson, 2002). This means that I acted honestly about who I was and what I was doing along the project. The second one was anonymity, which refers to keeping the

names of the participants unnamed (Dawson, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The third one was confidentiality (Berg, 2001; Dawson, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) and data protection (Berg, 2001; Dawson, 2002) which means that the data collected were exclusively handled by me and with research purposes only. The last one was the use of a consent form (Berg, 2001) where the parents of the participants made an informed choice to make them take part in the project and authorized me to use the data I collected for research purposes (See Appendix 2).

As noted, this chapter has presented a detailed description of the type of study chosen – the qualitative one, due to the way it fitted and contributed to the development of the research. It has also described the context and the benefits the research brought to the institution where it was carried out. Besides, it has informed about the selected instruments for data collection explaining their usefulness. Furthermore, it has explained the procedures for data collection to guarantee the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. Finally, it has referred to the participants that took part in the research clarifying the ethical considerations that were made.

The next chapter explains the design and development of the pedagogical intervention. It illustrates the way the instructional unit was framed within the methodological approach, and it shows the way the pedagogical innovation was articulated with the research process.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Instructional Design**

This chapter explains the instructional unit. First, I introduce the curricular platform, including the visions of language, learning, and classroom. Second, I explain the methodological approach the intervention was framed in. Third, I describe the proposed methodology for the innovation.

#### **Curricular Platform**

**Curriculum.** The curriculum as a continuous process that covers both theoretical (vision of language) and practical issues (vision of learning and vision of the classroom), must be designed having the individual as a social being at the core. The curriculum cannot be conceived as an abstract entity. Its elements concerning education, in this case, EFL, have to be updated regularly, so it satisfies the needs of the subjects who are involved in it. In other words, and as Pineda points it out, “In order for a program to be effective it needs careful analysis and continuous revision and modification. A program that operates on the assumption that it is immutable could become obsolete and irrelevant” (2001, p.10).

To make a curriculum successful, this has to be situated. Therefore, political stances have necessarily to intertwine in the development and reforms of it (Medgyes & Nikolov, 2005). Having a curriculum that 'fixes' anywhere to anyone is risky if not unfeasible because firstly, it will probably not satisfy the learners, teachers, or the community needs, and secondly because the outcomes might be even counter-productive not only for the learning process itself but for the sociocultural implications it may have.

**Language.** Understood as a social situated practice that allows the individuals to approach, examine, and reflect upon different phenomena and realities occurred in different contexts, including their own, so they can act politically and ethically accordingly to generate change.

In this train of thought, the language "is never independent of the social world, as it always occurs within and is shaped by a cultural context" (Perry, 2012, p. 52). These set of practices empower the individuals who seek social change for which in Bourdieu's terms, they 'invest' in.

In this continuous questioning and construction of the meaning of the own and other's entourage, critical literacy rises "to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it" (Shor, 1999, n.p.). In consequence, language has to be critical (Menezes de Souza, 2007) and its owners have to be the protagonists and designers of their social futures (The New London Group, 1996).

**Learning.** Defined here as a never-ending cycle (Short, 2001) which involves active processes of questioning (Shor, 1999), co-construction and collaboration. These processes are permeated by the social world, and learners are empowered to dispute the existent power relations and seek for their own identity. Learning goes beyond storing information or developing abilities and it is accompanied with a teaching process as well. In a school setting learning occurs along with teaching. Kumaravadivelu (2006) asserts that

the postmethod pedagogy must take into account the pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The first relates to the advancement of a context-sensitive pedagogy based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. The second seeks to enable and encourage

teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. And the third emphasizes the importance of larger social, political, educational, and institutional forces that shape identity formation and social transformation. The boundaries of the particular, the practical, and the possible are blurred as they shape and are shaped by the others. (p. 184)

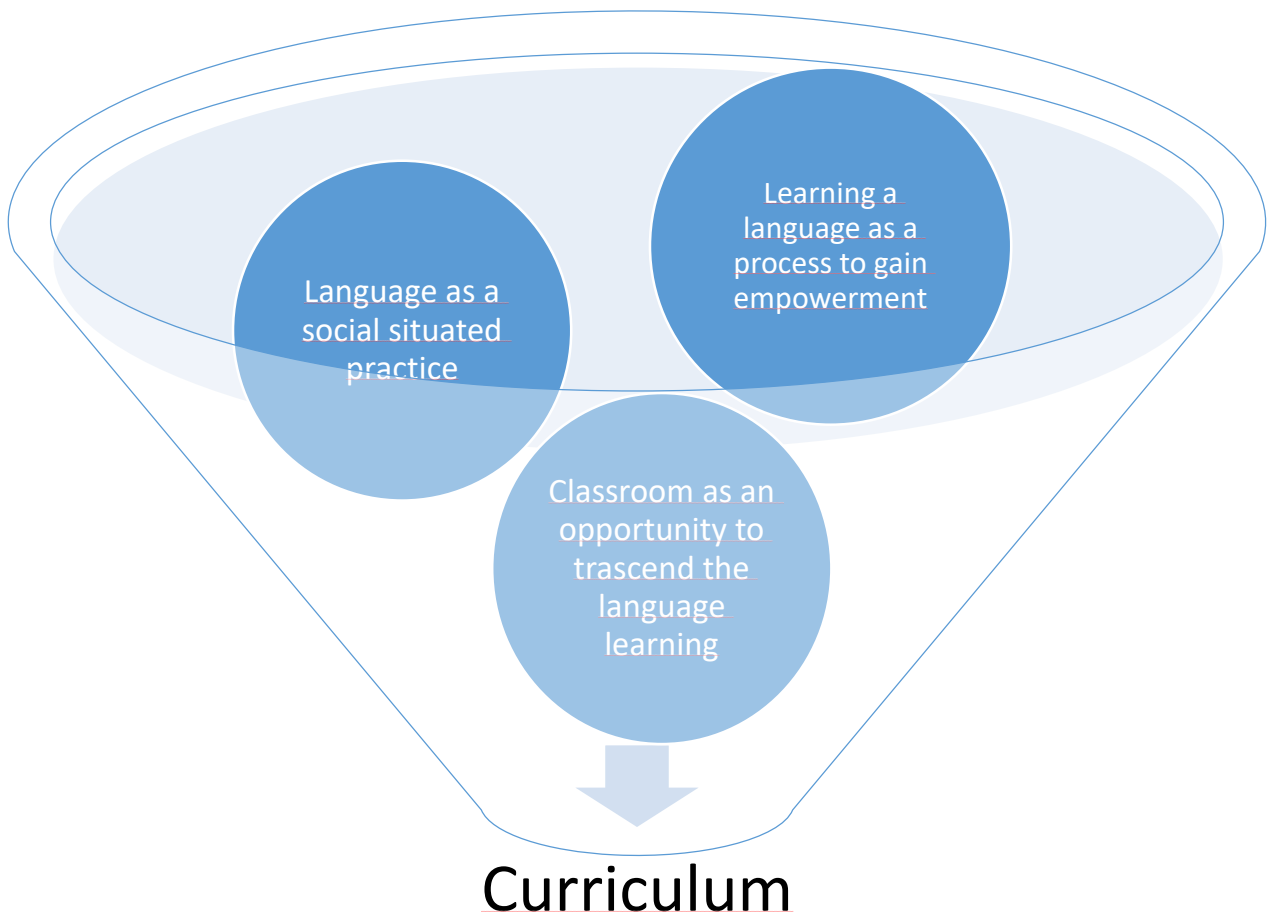
Thus, the learning of the language transcends the linguistic, functional, and cognitive perspectives. It invites learners to think and act about what happens around them in their immediate and also global context, and a sense of citizenship is co-constructed in the interaction with others.

**Classroom.** If criticality is expected to be promoted in the classroom then "students and teachers together work to (a) see how the worlds of texts work to construct their worlds, their cultures, and their identities in powerful, often overtly ideological ways; and (b) use texts as social tools in ways that allow for a reconstruction of these same worlds" (Luke, 2000, p. 453).

In this sense, the classroom is not a barrier imposed to focus the learners' attention but the opportunity to expand their horizons, so they can link the content of the curriculum with their lives and even the communities they live in (Clavijo & Sharkey, 2011). Furthermore, the classroom is also the input for the exploration of learners' identities (Haneda, 2006) and the role of the teacher is critical who claims for democracy (Shor, 1999; Short, 2001). Norton stresses that "we cannot ignore the imperatives of the material world and how resources are distributed, not only nationally, but internationally" (2010, p. 9). To accomplish all of this, the macro strategies proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2006) facilitate

negotiated interaction, integrate language skills, and raise cultural consciousness among others.

To summarize, a curriculum is in my opinion, more than the list of topics and contents. It is a combination of the visions of the language that is being taught, the view of the kind of learning process the students carry out and the understanding of what the classroom is and what it is for. Below, I illustrate in Figure 4 the way I see the components of a curriculum.



*Figure 4. The components of a curriculum.*

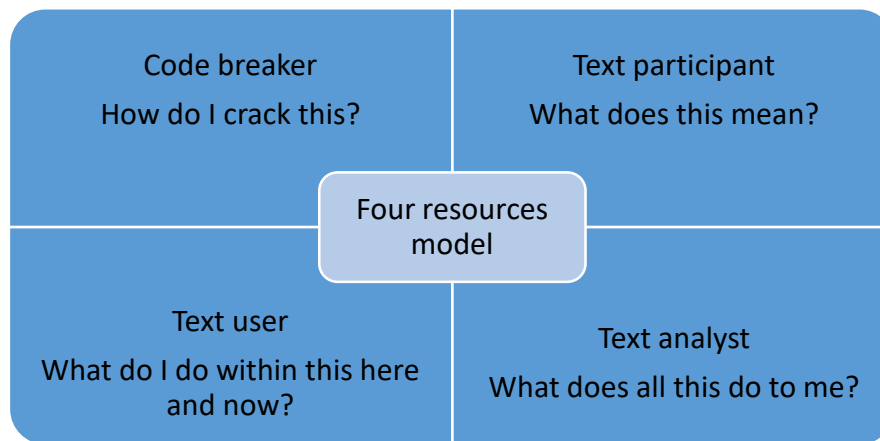
### **Pedagogical Intervention**

The needs analysis carried out revealed important data about the conception of literacy in the EFL classroom. It showed how some literacy practices were rooted in old views and that was evident in the design of the planning and deliverance of the courses. Considering this, and without forgetting the importance the administrators gave to literacy, especially writing, I saw the need of having a pedagogical intervention to help students develop their academic writing from a critical perspective. I expected my students to be able to write their papers whose contents went beyond the description of topics presented in the assigned readings or of issues of their interest. I wanted them to address what they were concerned about by engaging in the topics and showing a deep personal comprehension and interpretation of what they had chosen to write about.

The development of critical literacy during the pedagogical intervention considered various principles. For instance, it included “repositioning students as researchers of language, respecting minority culture literacy practices, and problematizing classroom and public texts” (Green, 2001, p. 7). It also involved “a number of objects of critique [...] viewing particular texts critically, and/or having a critical perspective on the social practices involved in literacy use” (Green, 2001, p. 8).

Freebody and Luke (1990) propose a model that encompasses four resources: Code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst (See Figure 5). A successful reader needs in the first place to be able to decode linguistic elements such as phonics, spelling, grammar, and so on. These abilities make the reader assume the role of ‘code breaker’ in the learning process. In the role of ‘text participant’, the reader shows comprehension of the text by making connections in two directions, within the text, and with the personal

background. Thus, the inferences drawn by the reader are inevitably permeated by his cultural knowledge. The role as ‘text user’ means that the reader/writer is capable to use the text for a specific purpose bearing in mind the context he is in. In the role of ‘text analyst’, the reader is aware of his ideological position towards the text, its meaning, and implications. Literacy is clearly seen here as a social practice.

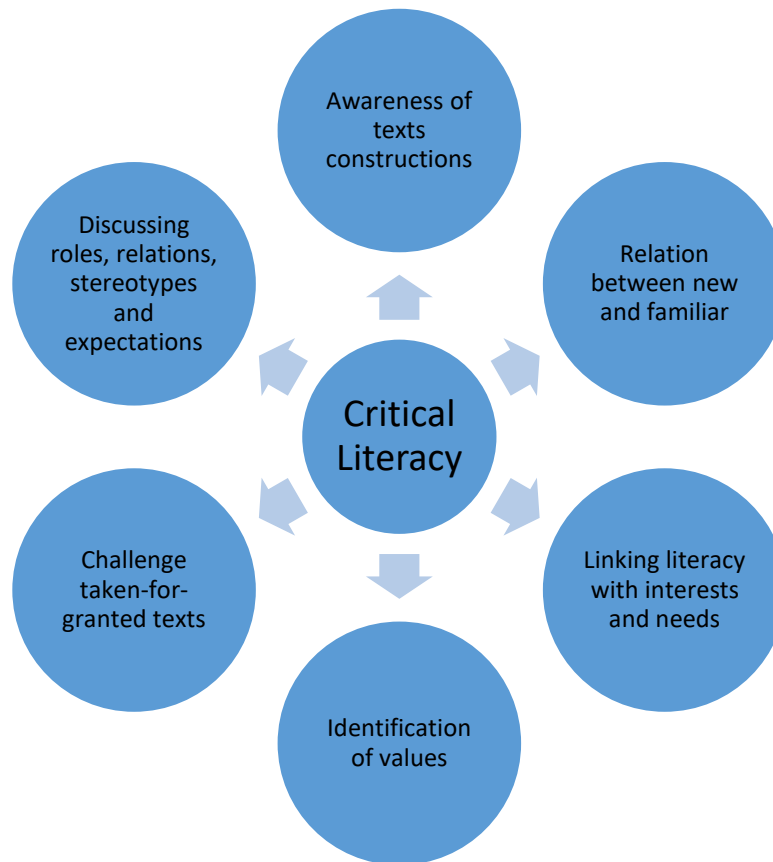


*Figure 5. Freebody & Luke four resources model (1990).*

Following Freebody and Luke model, Kempe (2001) shows an alternative approach to develop a more critical classroom practice (See Figure 6). The Critical Literacy demands according to Kempe (2001), expect from the readers: a) to build awareness of how texts are constructed and how these constructions position the reader. b) to relate what is new and familiar. c) to bound literacy with students’ interests and needs. d) to identify values and whose interests they serve. e) to challenge taken-for-granted readings. f) to discuss roles, relations, stereotypes, and expectations.

Working in the classroom with these considerations in mind facilitate the students to construct their own readings. Kempe also highlights “The successful implementation of these kinds of strategies is dependent upon the use of appropriate questions” (2001, p. 45).

Thus, Critical Literacy in this sense, demands from the students not only to provide personal responses about the text but it expects in the end that these responses are the result of the interaction with their contexts.



*Figure 6. Alternative approach to develop Critical Literacy (Kempe, 2001).*

For the pedagogical intervention, prefiguring which of the demands from above would appear along the sessions was difficult. These depended on the dynamics of the group and the way the proposed tasks unfolded. Therefore, I had to be ready to guide the discussions prior to the written assignments so students could think about what their interests were. Despite having the different lessons planned, with specific activities to be

developed, what came from the students in terms of their contributions to the writing of the essays was uncertain.

Given the proficiency the students had, the tasks were designed in two ways. On the one hand, the tasks to make them assume the roles as ‘code breakers’ and ‘text participants’ were not exhaustive. Since most students were proficient, and Freebody and Luke (1990) place this resource in the early years of schooling, the activities went around the understanding and spelling of specific words and the recounting of the events of the readings done. On the other hand, the tasks to make them be ‘text users’ and ‘text analysts’ required an active thoughtful participation from the students. At this point, discussions were essential because they offered the opportunity to the students to relate the contents of the texts to their contexts and based on the questions posed to them, they gave their opinions at various levels. The discussions were also held by answering some of the questions Kempe (2001) proposes in her model. Additionally, the students’ participation in online tasks was equally important because they served as a mirror where they reflected upon the others’ and their own views of the topics addressed.

Regarding writing, it was understood as a social construction practice, thus this was developed in a more holistic way. In this train of thought, spaces for interaction were also a key component because the moments when the co-construction processes took place led in turn to the writing of their essays. Therefore, learning was an unceasing process (Short, 2001) which involved the recurring questioning of the self (Shor, 1999), the co-construction of their identities and the collaboration among them to overcome the obstacles they found along the way.



Hyland (2003) establishes seven theories in the teaching of writing as curriculum options. These are language structures, text functions, themes, or topics, creative expression, composing processes, content, genre, and contexts of writing. Hyland clarifies that these must not be viewed as options that can replace each other, but as complementary and even overlapping perspectives. I decided to implement the pedagogical intervention under the process approach given the characteristics of it as described below.

Looking at writing as a process, I will present two main standpoints; and I will focus on the second one. The one that establishes a linear sequence of stages (Nanwani, 2009; Rivera, 2011; Zúñiga & Macías, 2006) and the conception of writing as a more dynamic process (Curry & Hewings, 2003; Díaz, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Zamel, 1983).

Zamel (1983) proposes that “proficient ESL writers like their native language counterparts experience writing as a process of creating meaning. Rather than knowing from the outset what it is they will say, these students explore their ideas and thoughts on paper, discovering in the act of doing so not only what these ideas and thoughts are, but also the form with which best to express them. Moreover, they recognize the importance of being flexible, starting anew when necessary, and continuing to rework their papers over time as they take into account another reader's frame of reference” (p.168). In other words, writing is not something individuals construct in the same way, following the same steps in the same order and at the same time, every writer must find his/her own way.

This consideration was particularly important for the pedagogical intervention. Most students were used to writing any kind of texts once, sometimes having a little planning stage, therefore the act of refining ideas and deepening into the explanations of their arguments was difficult for some of them while they had to rewrite their papers. At the beginning, they felt

uneasy when having to draft, rewrite, or edit, but later they felt the need to revise their essays several times before handing their papers.

Curry and Hewings (2003) define the argument as a perspective, a position or stance on something. Nonetheless, they show a list of conceptions of argument in writing (See Figure 7). In the same way, Hyland (2003) presents what could be overlapping and complementary curricula of the writing teaching; for this pedagogical intervention the options listed below were not necessarily independent and exclusive from each other. This means that when students worked on their writings they were not only adopting a perspective or just developing an idea, but they did some of them simultaneously according to their personal purposes.

- Students are commonly told to:**
- take up a position
  - adopt a particular perspective
  - put forward points for and against a particular position
  - explore possible positions
  - link theory and evidence
  - draw a conclusion
  - analyse
  - be critical
  - develop a central idea
  - use evidence to support an argument
  - express personal opinions
  - use personal interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

*Figure 7. What students can do in an argumentative academic writing (Curry & Hewings, 2003).*

Curry and Hewings (2003) also show the way the process approach is developed (See Figure 8), noting that as some stages might be more helpful or difficult, students can go over them at different points, which make such a process ‘iterative’. Curry and Hewings (2003) include the stages of prewriting, planning, drafting, reflection, peer/tutor review, revision, editing and proofreading. Furthermore, they include a moment for additional research or idea generation. Besides, they stress as key aspects the peer review and collaborative writing because they are useful for the students in their roles of readers or writers.

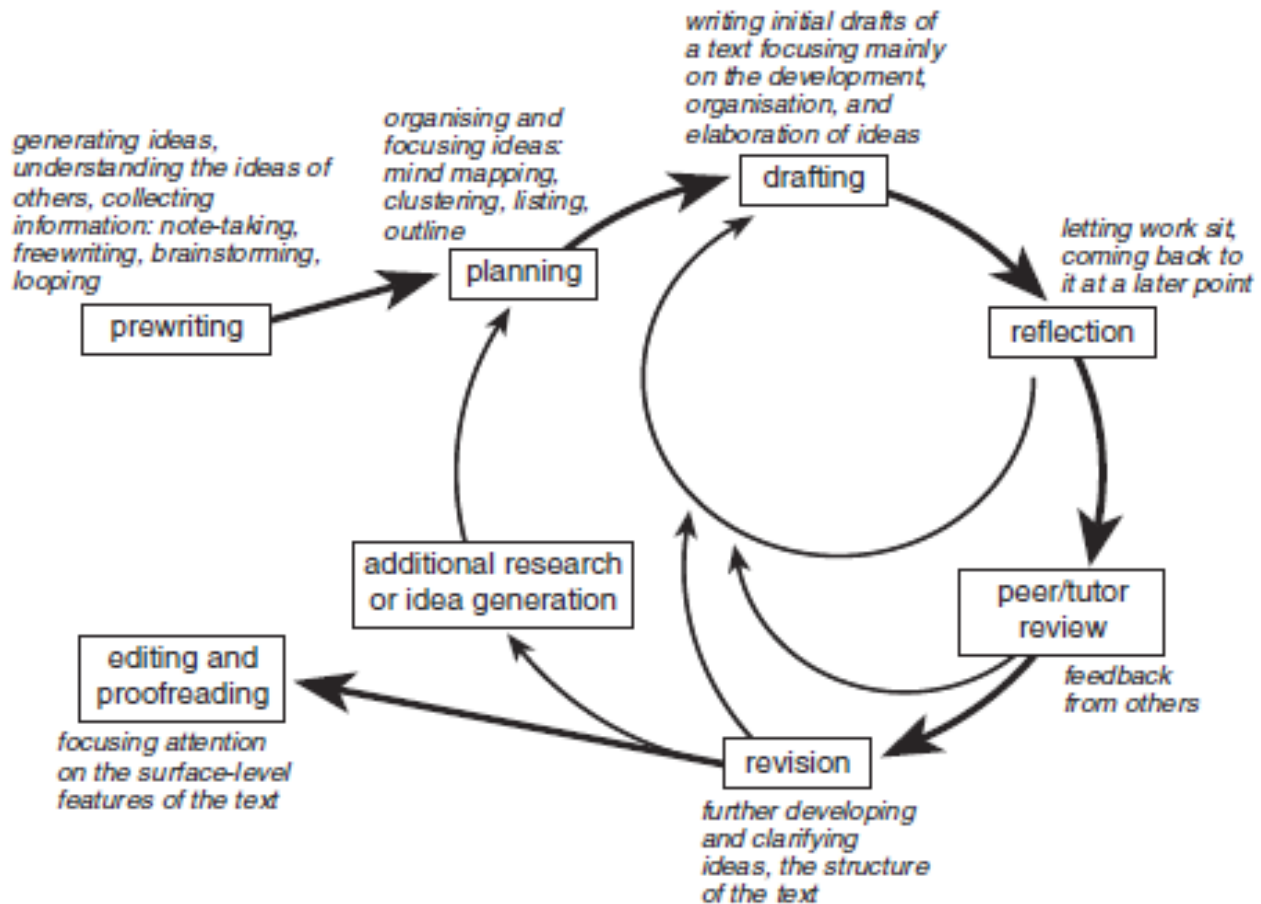
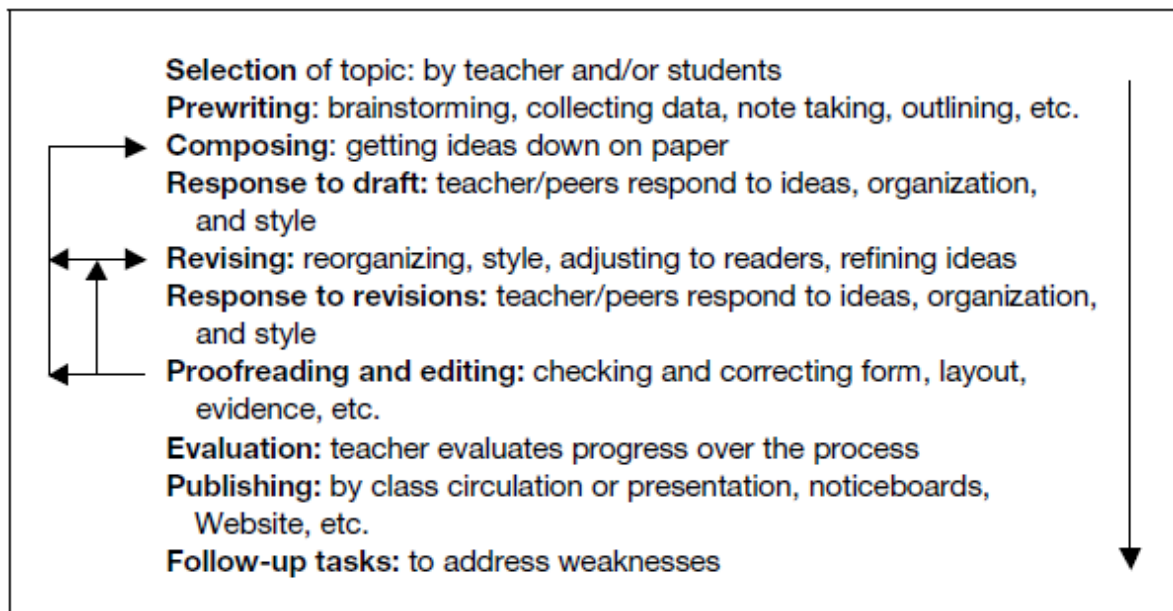


Figure 8. Writing process approach (Curry & Hewings, 2003).

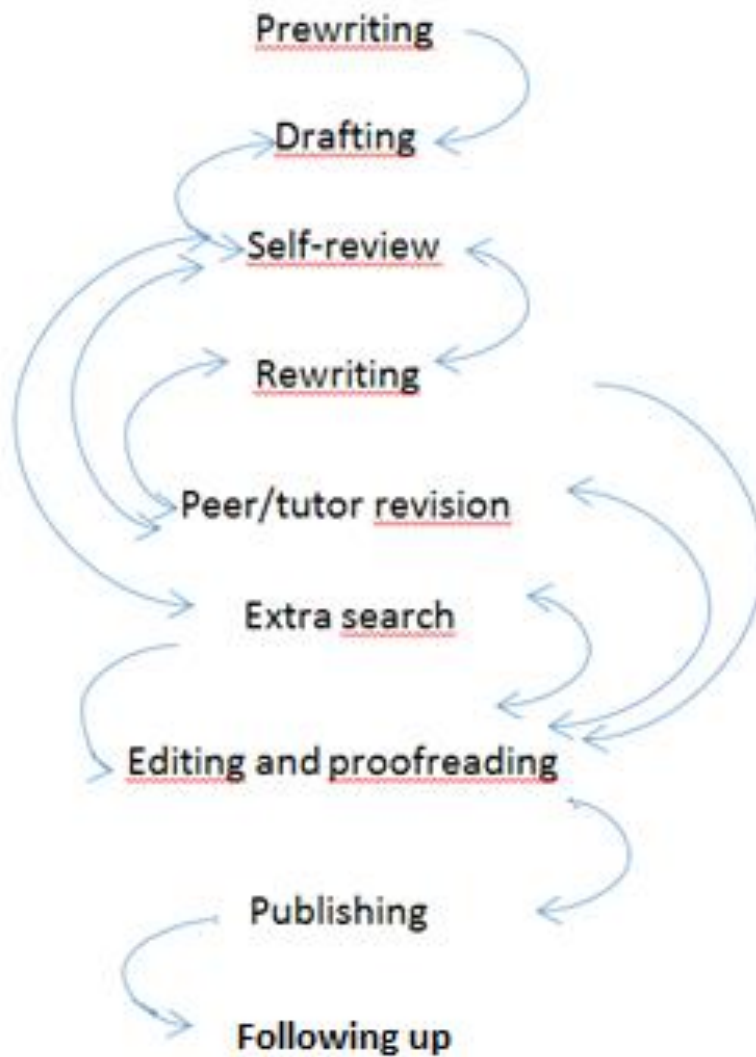
Similarly, Hyland (2003) refers to the composing process as a non-linear one (See Figure 9) but as “recursive, interactive, and potentially simultaneous” (p.11). This model includes the selection of a topic, prewriting, composing, drafting, peer revision, proofreading and editing, evaluation, publishing, and follow-up tasks. Unlike the Curry and Hewings’ proposal, Hyland (2003) includes a follow-up stage, which I found interesting. Many times, we teachers think that when students hand out a paper, the process is finished, without taking into account that the observations and comments made as feedback may actually serve as material for their coming assignments. That is why I decided to include it in the process model I adapted and is explained below.



*Figure 9. Composing process model (Hyland, 2003).*

The two models shown above contain stages that are carried out in a similar dynamic way. I propose a model (See Figure 10) that covers the stages of prewriting, drafting, self-review, re-writing, peer/tutor revision, extra search, editing and proofreading, and finally publishing, and following-up. Moving to a certain step during the pedagogical intervention

depended on the students' personal choices. They could take different roads while they worked on their argumentative essays according to their immediate needs. In turn, the roles they assumed were different even if they were in the same session, which implied the negotiation between students to decide what roles they would be assuming. Thus, the proposed scheme rather than being cyclical or linear looks more dynamic at certain points.



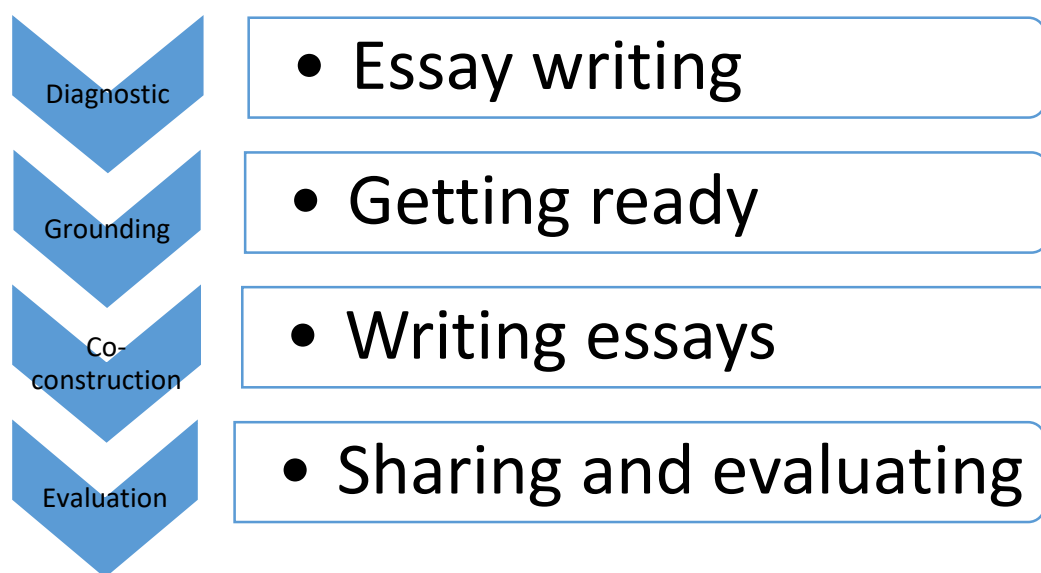
*Figure 10. Adapted writing process from Curry & Hewings (2003), and Hyland (2003).*

As can be seen in Figure 10, there was a common starting point followed by a series of stages where the students decided how they wanted to proceed afterward. That happened after they wrote and self-reviewed their first draft of their essays. At this point, the students had different choices. If they were satisfied with what they had written at first, they asked someone – who could be one of their mates or the teacher, to review their draft. If not, they searched for texts (written or oral) to get further ideas of what to include (if the problem they encountered dealt with this), or they wrote a second version of their essays to improve things they noticed they had to work on, or they also asked somebody to help them out with their paper (who could be a peer or me, the teacher).

They went through this process a couple of times, depending on their personal needs and then they worked on the editing and proofreading of their paper. To do this, students worked on some basic APA norms related to the use of in-text citations and how to insert references. Afterwards, they edited their paper by using some conventions and they handed in their final paper. At the end, they were given the final feedback that contained observations and comments about form and content from peers and the teacher. That helped the students to write their next paper because they knew what their strengths and weaknesses were, so they could pay attention to those at the moment of writing.

The pedagogical intervention lasted 8 months and had four cycles (See Figure 11): Diagnostic, grounding, co-construction, and evaluation. During the first cycle, students read a text, more specifically a speech, discussed it, searched for further information and wrote an essay. Students were free to address any of the topics tackled in the reading. In other words, they did not necessarily write about the main topic of the speech which was slavery. Additionally, they were encouraged to check a variety of sources and forms of texts, including videos and news. In the second cycle, some grounded information about

argumentative essay writing was provided based on the results of the diagnostic phase, whose last part was providing feedback of their argumentative essays to see the students' strengths and weaknesses in the writing of this kind of academic paper. In the third cycle, students discussed some readings and topics of their interest regarding the Olympic Games. For the discussion of the texts, I used the Luke and Freebody (1990) model, as well as some of the questions proposed by Kempe (2001) so the students could reflect in a deeper way about the readings and the topics. For the writing of the essays, the students followed the adaptation of the process approach described above. And in the fourth cycle, the students chose their own topics and wrote the last essay. They also shared them, and they evaluated the intervention.



*Figure 11. Cycles of the pedagogical intervention.*

Below I present in more detail the pedagogical intervention, including the contents, the learning objectives, the tasks, and the resources. I also added the assignments left as homework (HW), which I consider essential because with these tasks students could get ready for the lessons and move on faster in the learning process. Additionally, I had to give

some sort of initial motivation about the intervention so that students could engage better in the proposed activities, specifically in the written assignments (See Table 8). Furthermore, the diagnostic phase provided useful information for the students regarding their personal performance in the tasks and their upcoming needs. Thus, this was taken into account to design the sessions belonging to the other phases.



Table 8. Pedagogical Intervention by sessions.

Research question. What do students' critical literacy practices in an EFL classroom inform about their concern for social issues?

Research objective. To interpret the students' declarations about what constitutes real social concerns for them.

	No.	Learning Objective	Critical Literacy Development tasks	Content	Tasks	Resources
Diagnostic	1.	To identify the features and purpose of an argumentative essay	Ss as code breakers and text participants (Freebody and Luke model)	The argumentative essay 4 periods	Webquest. (e.g. Purdue writing lab) Pair work. Searching info, making ppt and sharing relevant information about features and purpose of an argumentative essay.	iPads or Pcs
	2.	To determine criteria for assessing an argumentative essay		The rubric for an argumentative essay 4 periods	TPS (Think, Pair, Share) to design rubric of assessment and making a poster. HW. Reading the speech <i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> by Sojourner Thruth and making a graphic organizer of main ideas and supporting details, inserting quotes of the author's points of view.	iPads or craft paper and markers
	3.	To understand the contents of a speech	Ss as code breakers and text participants (Freebody and Luke model)	Speech <i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> by Sojourner Thruth 2 periods	Checking homework. Literal: recalling the contents of the speech in two teams.	Literature book

	4.	To make inferences in a speech	Ss as text users (Freebody and Luke model)	Speech <i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> by Sojourner Thruth 2 periods	Inferential: Kahoot quiz (in pairs). See Appendix 4.	iPads, video beam, speakers
	5.	To interpret a speech critically	Ss as text analysts (Freebody and Luke model) Ss answer questions (Kempe model)	Speech <i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> by Sojourner Thruth 2 periods	Critical: whole class discussion HW. Thinking of possible thesis statements to write an essay based on the discussion of the speech.	Literature book
	6.	To establish a thesis statement		Speech <i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> by Sojourner Thruth 2 periods	Pair work. Exchanging ideas and writing thesis statements. Individual tutoring session to refine and approve them.	PCs
	7.	To write an argumentative essay	Ss as text analysts (Freebody and Luke model)	<i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> By Sojourner Thruth 6 periods	Writing an argumentative essay.	Literature book Electronic devices
	8.	To identify strengths and weaknesses when writing essays		<i>And Ain't I a Woman?</i> By Sojourner Thruth 2 periods	Feedback session. General comments, individual talk. Peer feedback	Rubric
Grounding	9.	To interpret a biographical text	Ss as code breakers, texts participants, users, and analysts (Freebody and Luke model) Ss answer questions (Kempe model)	Autobiography Frederick Douglass	Reading workshop. Answering literal, inferential and questions of critical understanding.	Literature book

	10.	To interpret a film related to a reading	Ss answer questions (Kempe model)	Film The Help	Watching the film and answering discussing questions in groups.	DVD player, video beam and speakers
	11.	To write a good thesis statement		The argumentative essay 2 periods	Purdue lab. Reading explanations, comparing samples, writing own thesis statements and giving feedback on them.	iPads, video beam
	12.	To use linking devices when developing an idea		The argumentative essay 2 periods	Workshop. Written exercises (completion and rewriting). Small group oral presentations (developing topic sentences) HW. Reading History of Olympics <a href="http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/all-about-the-olympic-games">http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/all-about-the-olympic-games</a> Posting 2 facts (with links) on the Schoology platform.	photocopies
Co-constr.	13.	To get familiar with stories about the Olympics	Ss as code breakers, texts participants and users (Freebody and Luke model)	The Olympics 2 periods	Kahoot. Team quiz for literal and inferential comprehension HW. Read Factsheet <a href="https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Documents/Olympic-Legacy/Factsheet-Legacies-of-the-Games-May-2016.pdf#_ga=1.183307809.640990908.1472009878">https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Documents/Olympic-Legacy/Factsheet-Legacies-of-the-Games-May-2016.pdf#_ga=1.183307809.640990908.1472009878</a> Article news	iPads, video beam and speakers

					<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/08/07/how-to-put-an-end-to-the-dark-side-of-the-olympics/?utm_term=.af949fd710d">https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/08/07/how-to-put-an-end-to-the-dark-side-of-the-olympics/?utm_term=.af949fd710d</a>	
14.	To relate information within a reading	Ss as code breakers, texts participants, users, and analysts (Freebody and Luke model)	The Olympics 2 periods	Making glossaries (15-20 words) and designing a mind map of each reading. See Appendix 5.	iPads	
15.	To show understanding of the contents of readings by assuming different roles	Ss as code breakers, texts participants, users, and analysts (Freebody and Luke model)	The Olympics 2 periods	Sharing and exchanging ideas of the mind maps. Preparing announcements or questions (depending on roles). Press conference. Assuming roles based on readings (representatives of the IOC or journalists) HW. Writing a double-entry journal for both texts. See Appendix 6.	iPads	
16.	To discuss the contents of a factsheet and an article news	Ss as texts analysts (Freebody and Luke model) Ss answer questions (Kempe model)	The Olympics 2 periods	Sharing homework. Group work. Discussion of the readings on Schoology. HW. Answering the left questions (on-board discussion) on platform Schoology. See Appendix 7.	Electronic devices	

17.	To establish possible topics to write an argumentative essay		Social issues regarding The Olympic Games 2 periods	Group work. Listing issues/concerns based on the readings. Socialization HW. Defining thesis statement of the chosen topic.	iPads, Craft paper and markers
18.	To outline the first version of the essay		Social issues regarding The Olympic Games 2 periods	Pair work. Refining thesis statement. Outlining argumentative essay. HW. Drafting the essay.	Electronic devices
19.	To cite sources and insert references using APA style		APA norms. In-text citations and references. 2 periods	Small groups. Webquest.	PCs, headphones
20.	To write an argumentative essay.	Ss as texts analysts (Freebody and Luke model)	Social issues regarding The Olympic Games 6 periods	Self-assessment of the draft. Writing essay	Electronic devices
21.	To proofread and edit essay		Social issues regarding The Olympic Games 2 periods	Editing essays. HW. To print the final version.	PCs
22.	To identify strengths and weaknesses in essays about issues regarding The Olympic Games		Social issues regarding The Olympic Games 2 periods	Pair work. Exchanging final papers Giving feedback on others' papers. Class discussion. Sharing learnings about the social issues addressed in the essays.	Essays Rubric

Evaluation	23.	To show understanding of a social issue	Ss as texts participants, users and analysts (Freebody and Luke model)	Different social issues 2 periods	Reading books on the MyON platform and answering quiz. HW. Choosing a social issue of personal interest.	PCs, speakers
	24.	To write an argumentative essay	Ss as texts analysts (Freebody and Luke model)	Different social issues 6 periods	Exam: Writing an argumentative essay of a social issue of personal interest. See Appendix 8 and 9.	Electronic devices
	25.	To evaluate personal attitudes To assess the intervention	Ss answer questions (Kempe model)	The writing of an argumentative essay about social issues 2 periods	Class talk: attitudes towards literacy processes and concerns for social issues.	Digital recorder

## **Chapter V**

### **Data Analysis**

In the previous chapters, I presented the literature review, research methodology, and pedagogical platform as the foundations to interpret the students' statements about their actual social concerns. In this chapter, I present the data analysis of this study to answer the research question: What do students' critical literacy practices in an EFL classroom inform about their concern for social issues? I first describe the framework and the process of data collection and analysis. Afterwards, I explain the categories that respond to the research question and I provide an interpretation of them. Finally, I illustrate the categories by showing and explaining some excerpts of data.

The data were gathered throughout the implementation of the pedagogical intervention between May and October 2016. The data collection instruments were the transcriptions of discussions and the students' writings – essays. These primary documents were processed and analyzed with the use of the software Atlas.ti v. 6.2. The main reason to use this program instead of other ways to undertake the coding procedure (with colors, numbers, or other programs such as Excel), was mainly that the data collected came in a digital format, including the students' artifacts, which in this case refer to the essays written by the students. Therefore, it seemed to me that handling the data that way was easier because this software allows a careful, systematic, and rigorous analysis of the information. In addition, the researcher can compare, rename, and connect the data in a fast and efficient way, making possible go back and forth into the data without losing track of the analysis that is being conducted.

### **Data Analysis Framework**

I will proceed to describe the framework of analysis of the present research study and the procedures for validation of data. To begin with, the data collected were analyzed using some procedures from the grounded framework, especially the codification one.

Codification refers to a set of operations to take the data, break them down into smaller components so they can be conceptualized and putting them back together in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998), propose four factors to judge the goodness of the qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility has to do with the researcher's confidence in the truth of the findings. Special relevance must be given to these methods because they ensure the in-depth comprehension and interpretation of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Transferability refers to the possibility for other researchers to use the findings of one research on their own. This is plausible when thick descriptions about the phenomenon of study are provided.

Dependability means the stability of the findings over time and confirmability deals with the internal coherence of the data in relation to the findings, and interpretations.

### **Procedures for data analysis**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest the following stages to proceed with the analysis of data: Open coding, from which descriptive results emerge. In this case, to continue with the open coding I uploaded the primary documents, which were 33 in total -including 30 essays and the transcriptions of three discussions. I had to read all the data collected with the instruments, line by line and several times, and while reading the data, I found pieces of



information which were potentially relevant to answer the research question. I, therefore, selected the text (phrase, sentence, or passage) and gave it a name as shown in Figure 12.

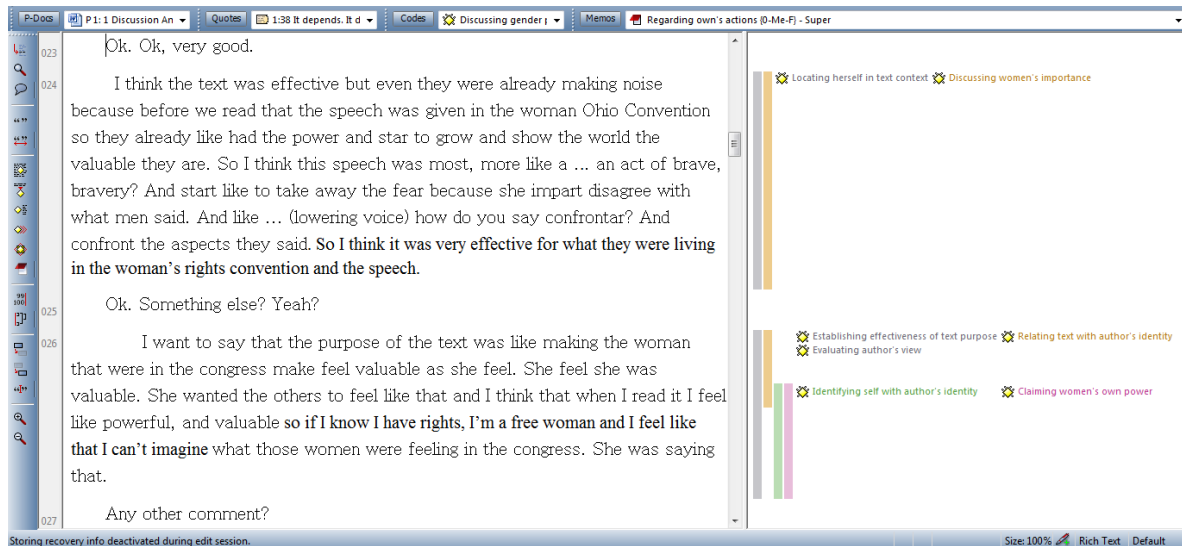


Figure 12. Open coding procedure.

The names of the codes reflected what I intended to look for, always having in mind the research question and objective. Coding a *quotation* -as called in Atlas.ti “a segment from a primary document which has considered as interesting or important” (Muhr, 1997, p. 10), had to be done carefully. On some occasions, I renamed some codes because the original name was too broad or too specific. At the end of this stage of analysis, 78 open codes emerged, which are shown in Figure 13.

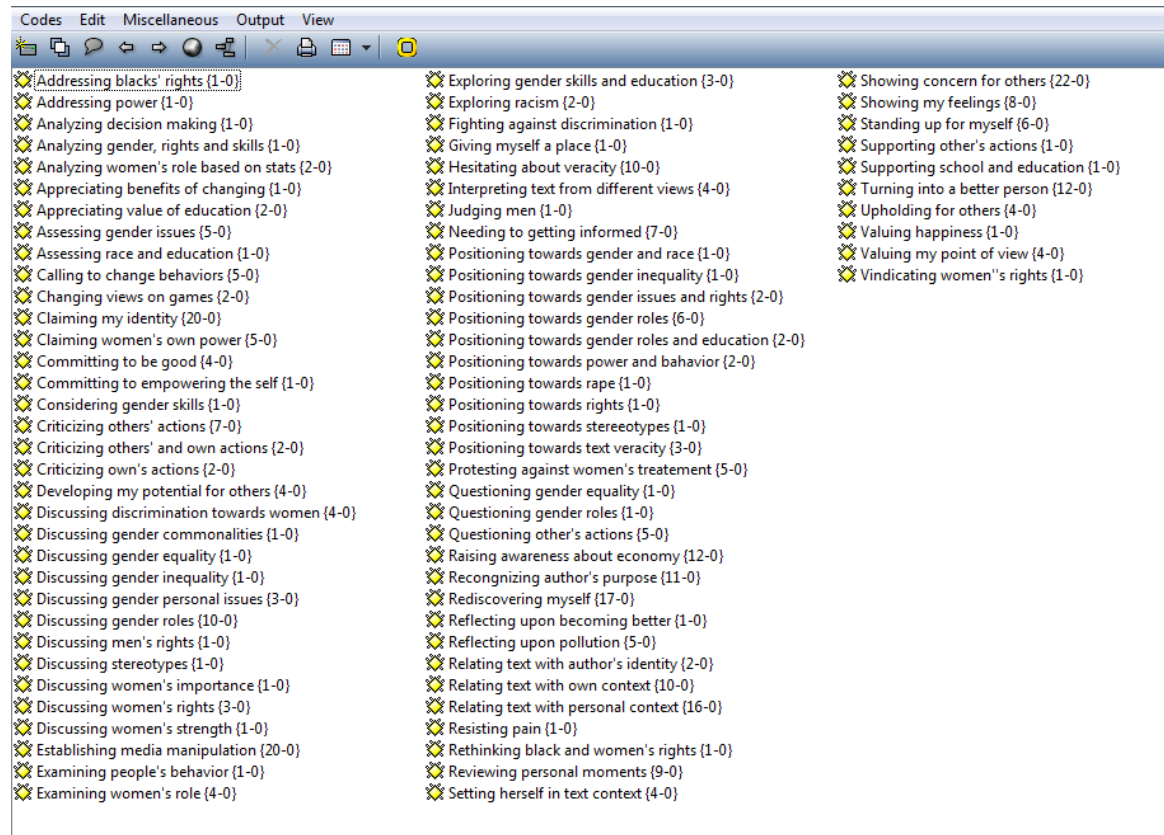


Figure 13. List of open codes.

The software also allows the researcher to see the quotations linked to each code as illustrated in Figure 14. By doing this I could notice the commonalities among the students' comments and writings. It also helped me see to which primary documents – discussions or essays, were the quotations and codes most associated with.

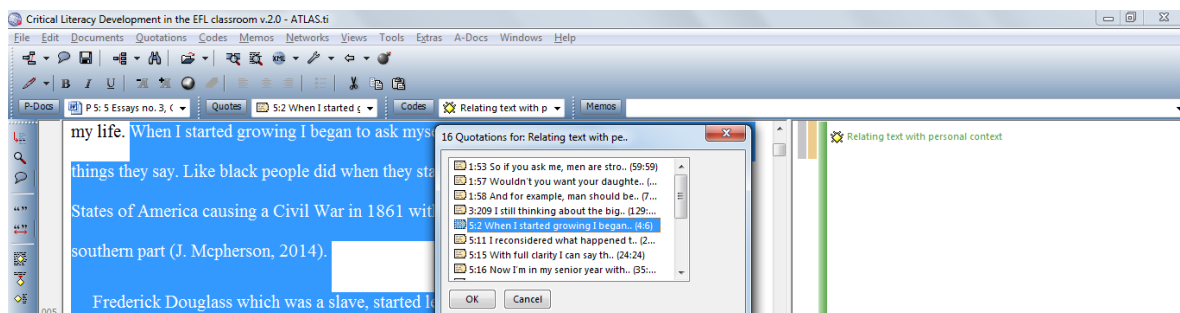
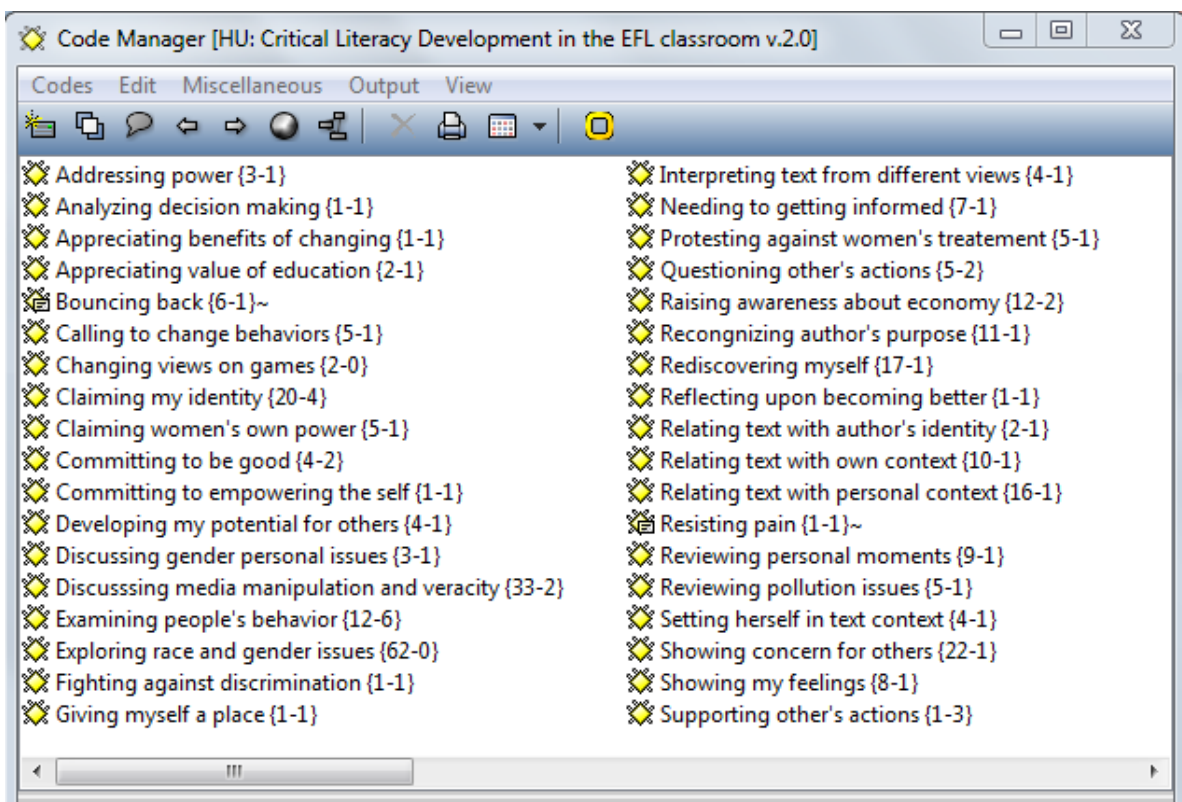


Figure 14. Quotations linked to codes.

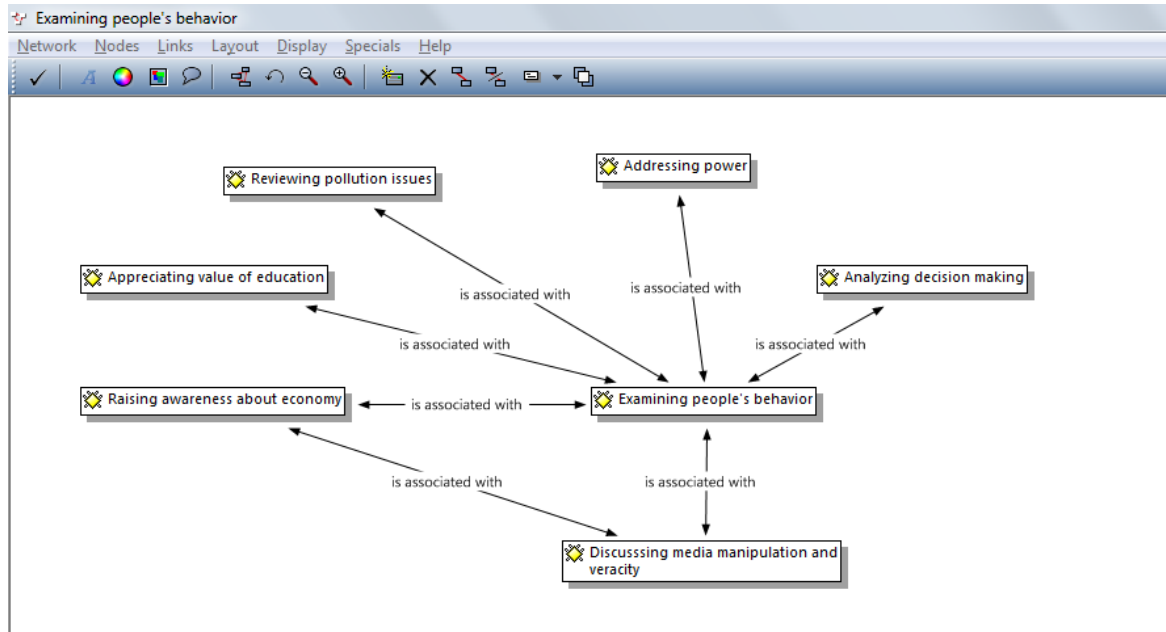
Having done the open coding, I realized some codes referred to specific actions and were somehow similar to other codes. I went ahead then to merge them because even though they pointed to specific actions and particular topics, they shared commonalities, which if put together did not alter the meaning of the heading code. By merging the initial codes, I obtained 42 codes as seen in Figure 15; these codes were the ones I analyzed to establish the possible connections among them. By looking at the way they bonded and the kind of quotations they contained, the subcategories and categories emerged.



*Figure 15. List of codes after the merging procedure.*

Once having established the open codes I would work with, I proceeded to find relationships between the codes. This procedure helped me understand the phenomena in a deeper way. Therefore, despite the open coding refers to the breaking of the data, at this

point, I was also able to look at a broader picture of what the data meant. An example of this is illustrated in Figure 16.



*Figure 16.* Network view of related codes.

The next step was axial coding that refers to the acting of grouping open codes that might share some commonalities (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As aforementioned, the naming of the code, under which the open codes were related to, could potentially become a subcategory. Atlas.ti provides the groundedness of every code as seen in Figure 17.

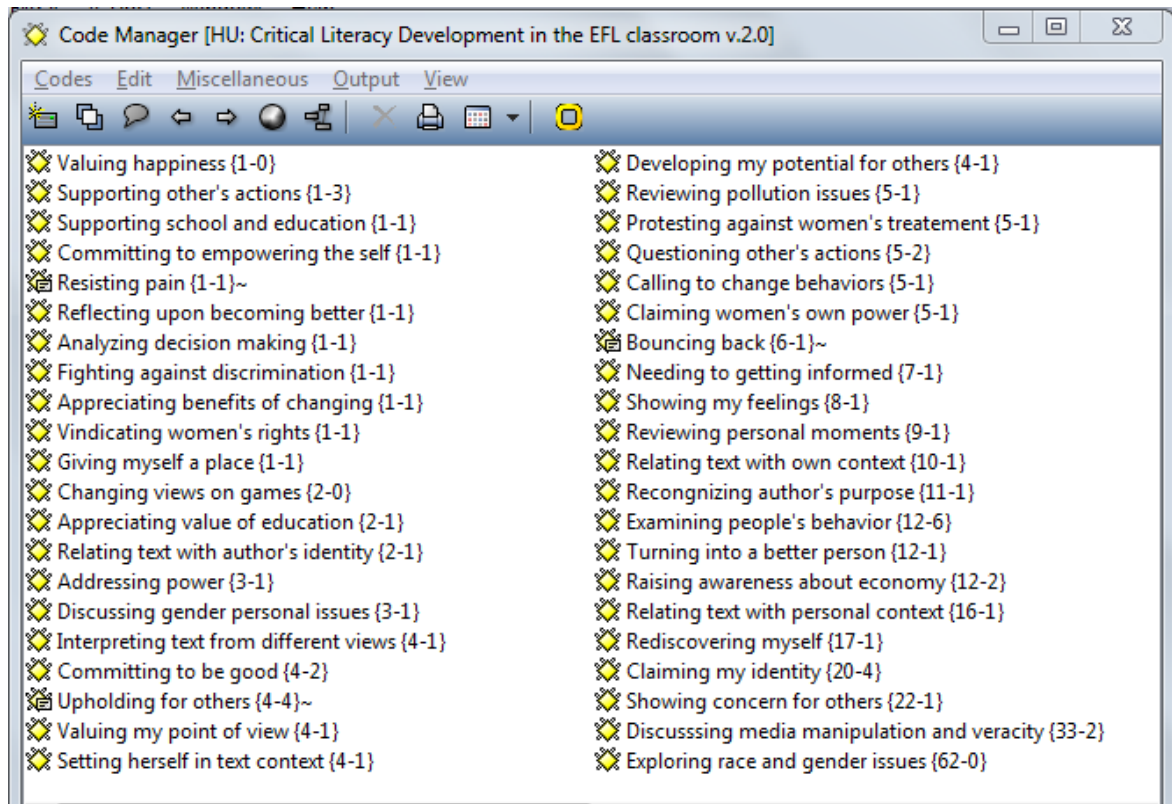


Figure 17. Groundedness of the codes.

Nonetheless, given the qualitative nature of the study, I noticed that some codes were semantically meaningful and relevant because their quotations were directly linked with the focus of the study, even though they did not have the groundedness other codes had. To not leave them aside, I used other elements that helped the process of analysis such as asking questions and making comparisons about the data, and I attached comments and memos to these codes and their quotations as a reminder of their significance (See Figures 18, 19, and 20).

Asking questions was a useful way to start the inquiry process. Some of the questions served the purpose of sensitizing about the data themselves. In this case, some of the questions I asked were for instance, what is happening? How, when, or and why is the

phenomenon occurring? What does it mean to the participant? Making comparisons is a technique to think about the properties and dimensions of the categories, which may imply the examination of suppositions and definitions. It also promotes the discovery of variations, decreasing the tendency to focus on a single case, concept, or category.

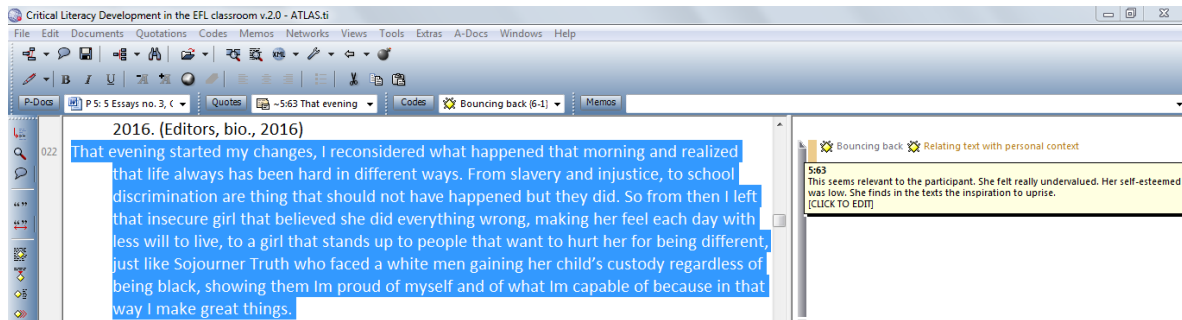


Figure 18. Comments attached to quotations.

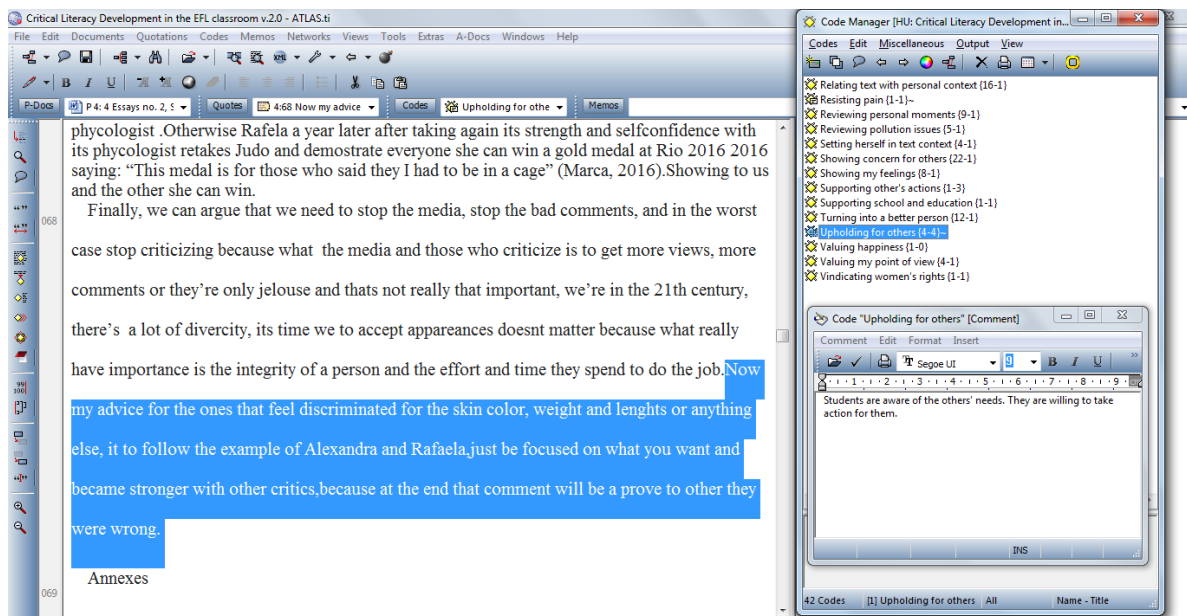


Figure 19. Comments attached to codes.

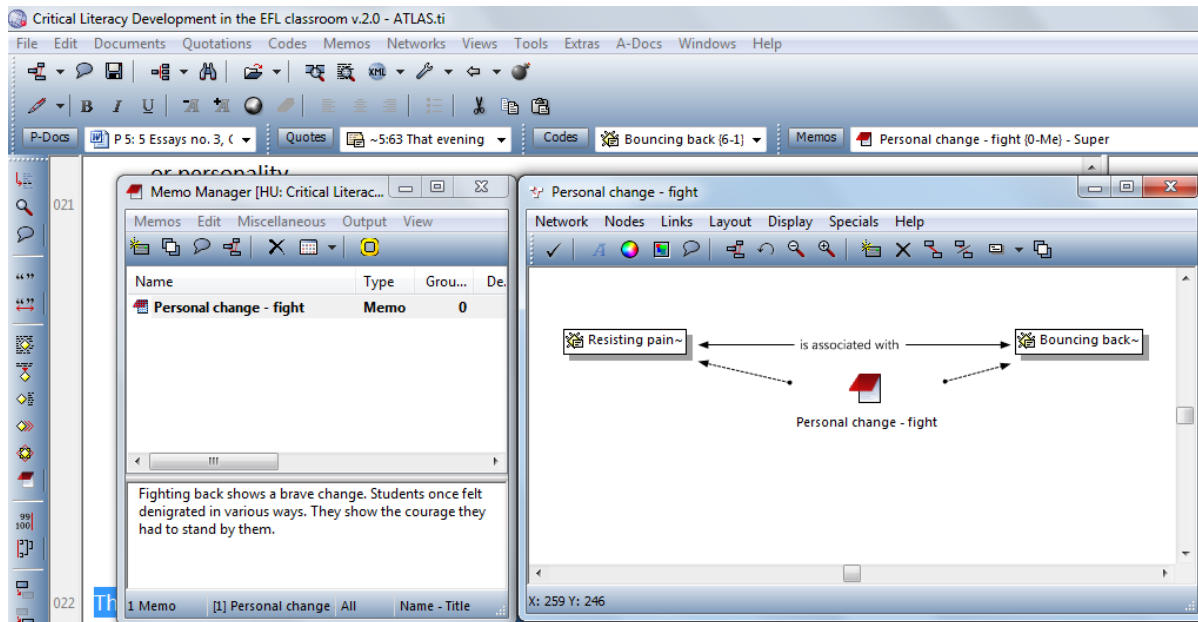


Figure 20. Memos attached to codes.

Thus, I took the interrelated codes into account when forming a subcategory or a family, known in Atlas.ti as “a device to form clusters of those entities for easier handling of especially large number of those interpretative objects” (Muhr, 1997, p. 12).

The selective coding, which originates analytical or relational results allows the statement of networks of categories or concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Nonetheless, this does not mean in any sense that codification is a linear independent process. It is closely related to the data collection and sample selection. Therefore, the data obtained in the coding procedure were constantly compared and corrected based on the results in the other types of codification.

Because of the comparisons made, I established relations between a particular set of codes that ended up becoming a subcategory, which in turn were related with another

subcategory, and consequently, they composed a *family* or category. Additionally, I found several connections among codes belonging to different subcategories and even categories.

Along with following the coding procedures to analyze the data, I had to validate them. To do that, I triangulated them, so the findings were reliable and trustworthy. This means that, to corroborate the findings, I crossed them between the instruments used to warranty they were not contradictory.

## **Findings**

After carrying out the various stages of the coding procedure of the data, the following categories emerged: *Becoming a social agent to change my world* and *Experiencing literacy differently*. During the pedagogical intervention, the students felt empowered and became authors of their own texts bringing to surface their sensitivity and sensibility towards what for them represents real social concerns. They realized the active role they played in the construction of themselves and the way their little actions may have a bigger impact on the world around them. Furthermore, I found that when the students carried out literacy practices, they could see several events from different points of view and used reading and writing for a variety of purposes. All of these actions performed by the students let me establish the development of critical literacy as a dynamic process that linked various elements simultaneously. In this stream of consciousness, I decided to represent the categories and subcategories as a gearwheel system. The categories and subcategories are shown in the visual display below (Figure 21).



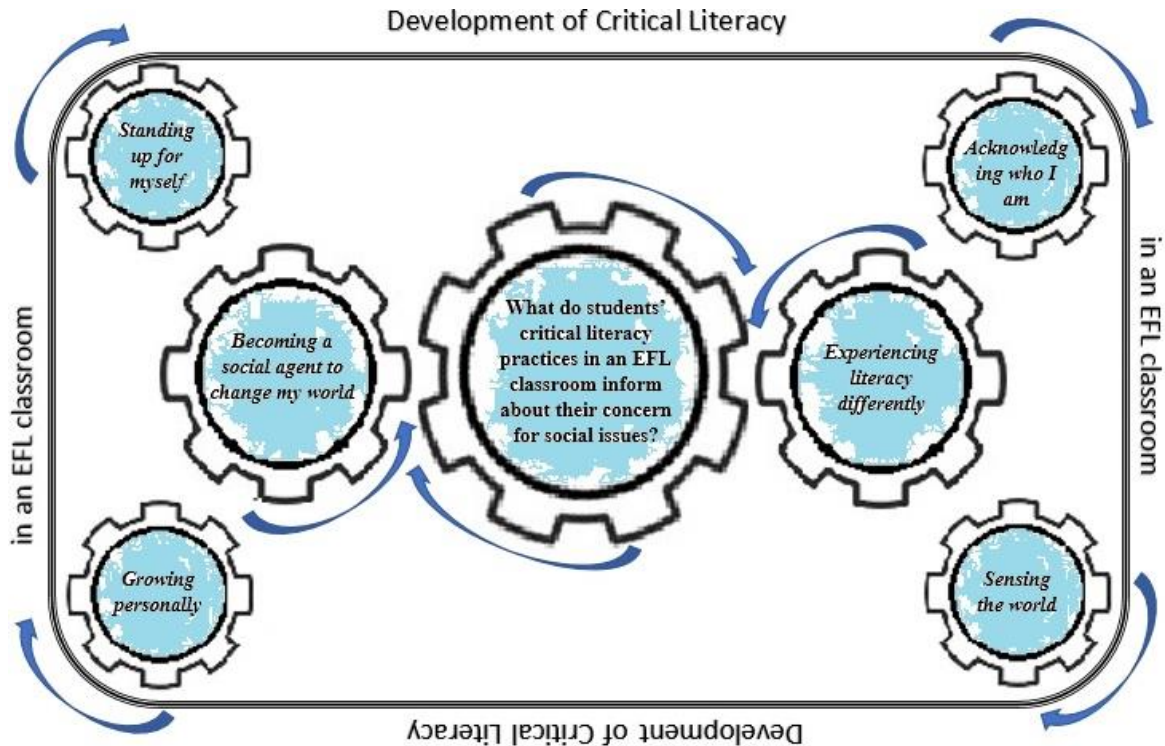


Figure 21. Categories and subcategories.

**Becoming a social agent to change my world.** According to the data, the students came to realize that they had lived awkward and unpleasant situations that tormented them in the past. While discussing the readings and writing their essays, they noticed the only ones who could fight back was them. They empowered themselves and allowed themselves to explore their weaknesses, their opportunities, and they discovered that things could be different if they took the first step, that being better did not depend on the others. It was their duty to act upon what they knew was making them feel uneasy.

*Standing up for myself.* This subcategory accounts for the way students found through literacy practices a way to back others' behaviors and attitudes that made them feel troubled. Some students revisited moments of their lives and gave a fresh look at their actions, words, and behaviors. They gave themselves the opportunity to overcome their

problems by means of transformative processes, which turned to be a relief and a healing act.

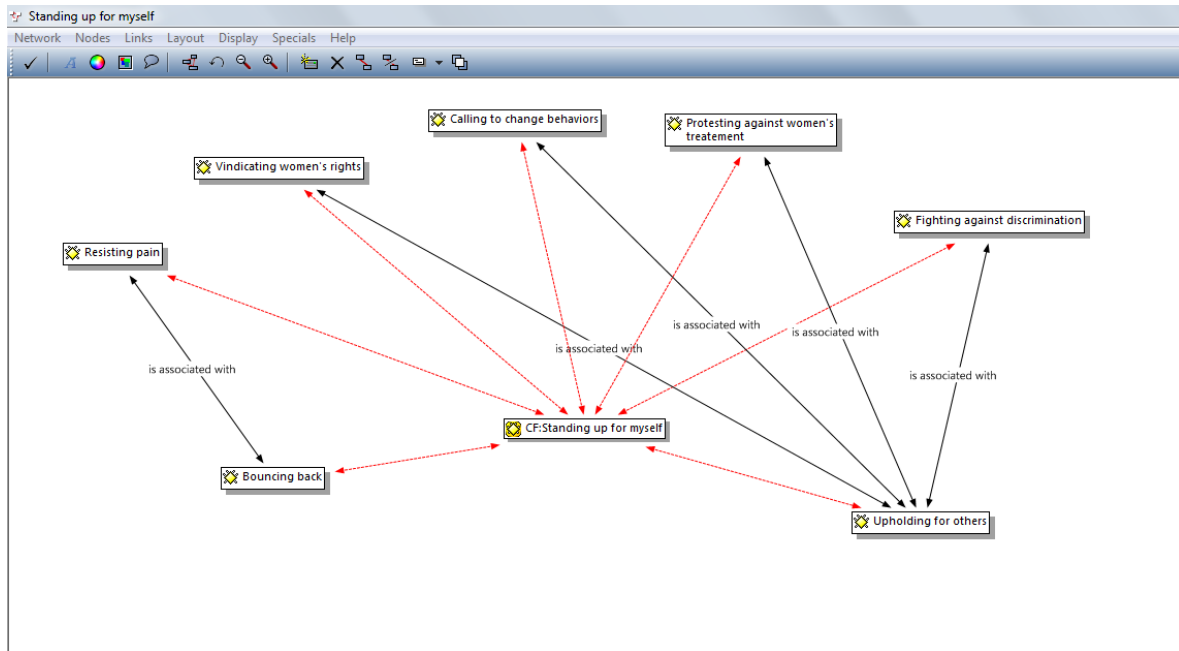


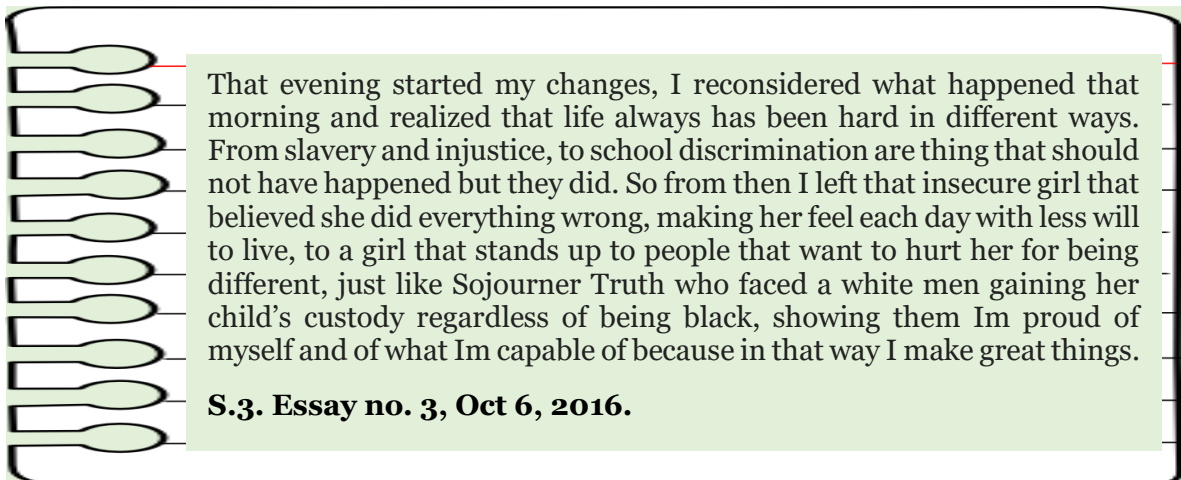
Figure 22. *Standing up for myself.*

Some students used narratives as an argumentative strategy. The recollection of their own memories and the reference of cases of their own lives intended to make their points on matters such as slavery, mistreatment, or discrimination. This means that in order to address an issue, they draw upon personal stories, usually paralleled with someone else's life.

Critical literacy can be developed in several ways. During the pedagogical intervention, the students read a series of texts. One of them was the speech *And Ain't I A Woman?* by Sojourner Truth (as cited in Jamestown literature, 2009), a formerly enslaved African American woman who spoke out for women's rights at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in 1851. Another one was an excerpt of the *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which is the autobiography of Frederick Douglass (as cited in Jamestown literature, 2009),

another enslaved African American person who became the leader of the abolitionist movement in the mid-1800s. Although these readings might look pure American-literature-centered, critical education endorses the linkage of the curriculum with the students' experiences including the ones they have had in the communities they are (Clavijo & Sharkey, 2011). Thus, the students were encouraged to approach this Civil War Era topic in a non-synchronic way. That is to say, they explored topics of interest while they read and discussed those events and established connections with their own contexts.

In the essay entitled *Back in Time*, the student tackled the importance of bouncing back social issues such as slavery, injustice, or discrimination. The student 3 described significant changes she had seen in herself, comparing her strength to overcome her problems with the determination Truth and Douglass had. As Macedo (2003) affirms literacy “should be understood as a weapon for subordinate students to defend themselves” (p. 13), something which is portrayed in the fragment below.



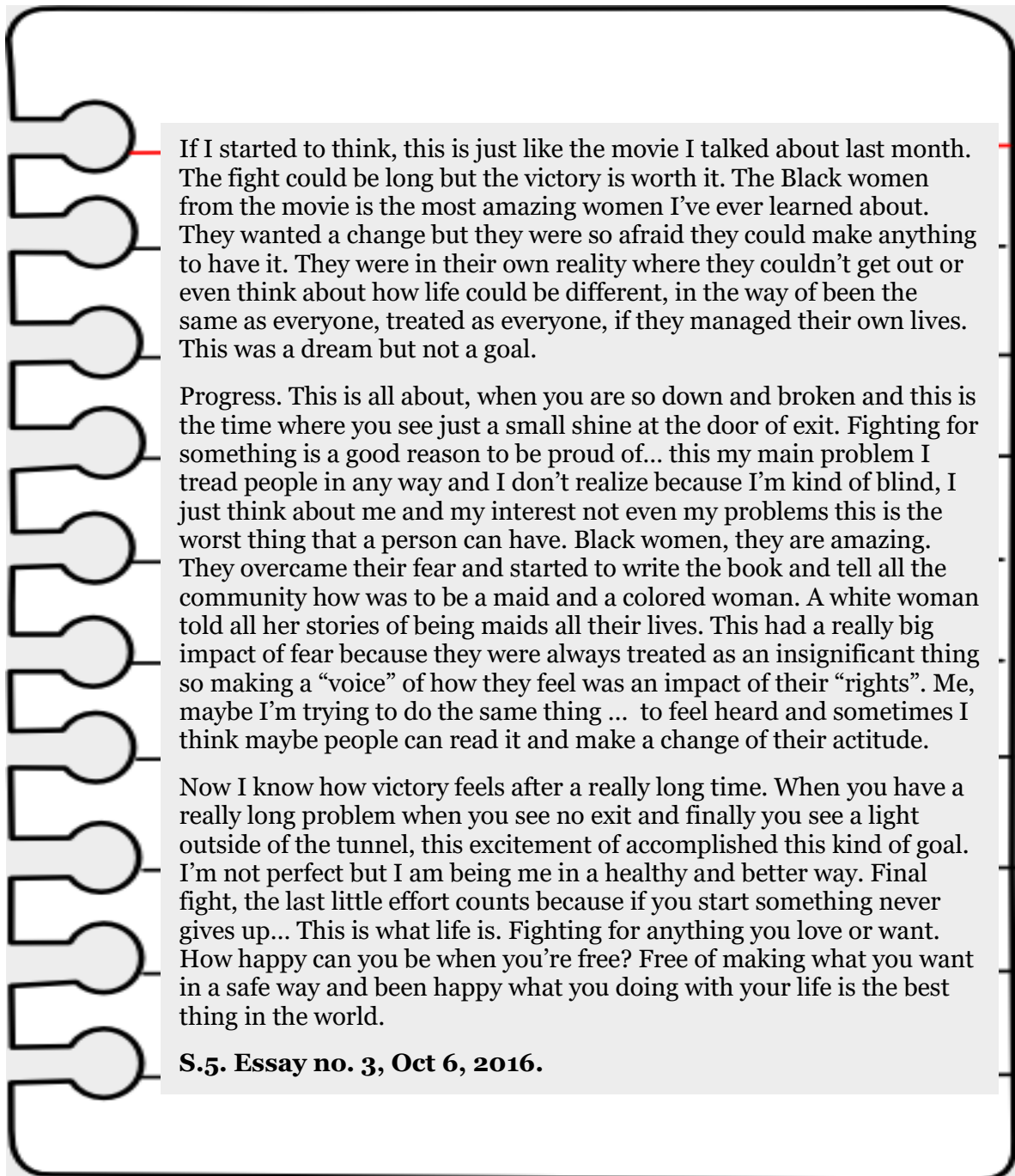
In this extract, after looking close to her own self, the student 3 knew then how to defend herself as she felt strong, determined, and focused. According to Beck (2005), the development of critical literacy allows the construction of the self, challenging the *status*

quo, and finding new options for the social inequalities she mentions, just as she did. She was sure her social interactions were modified; she seemed not to be afraid anymore by what the others may think or say about her, and she decided to upraise.

Freire (1989) asserts that through literacy, the reader/writer focuses on issues of power, promoting an inner reflection, generating, in the end, her transformation. In short, critical literacy makes individuals agents of social change (Beck, 2005; Shor, 1999; The New London Group, 1996).

In addition to the readings, the students also watched the film *The Help* (Columbus, Barnathan, Green & Taylor, 2011). This movie is set in Mississippi in the 60's and depicts the maids' point of view, servants who pass down from generation to generation, of the white families for which they work. The excerpt below is a fragment of an essay entitled *Dear Diary*. In it, the student 5 described the process she went through while trying to get what for her meant freedom.

Furthermore, along the essay, she made an analogy of some of the main character's evolution (the black maids) to her own. The way she handled this concept and related it with her, was possible because one of the aims of critical literacy is to make relations between new realities – in this case, the plot portrayed in the film, and familiar contexts – that is to say, her own life (Kempe, 2001).



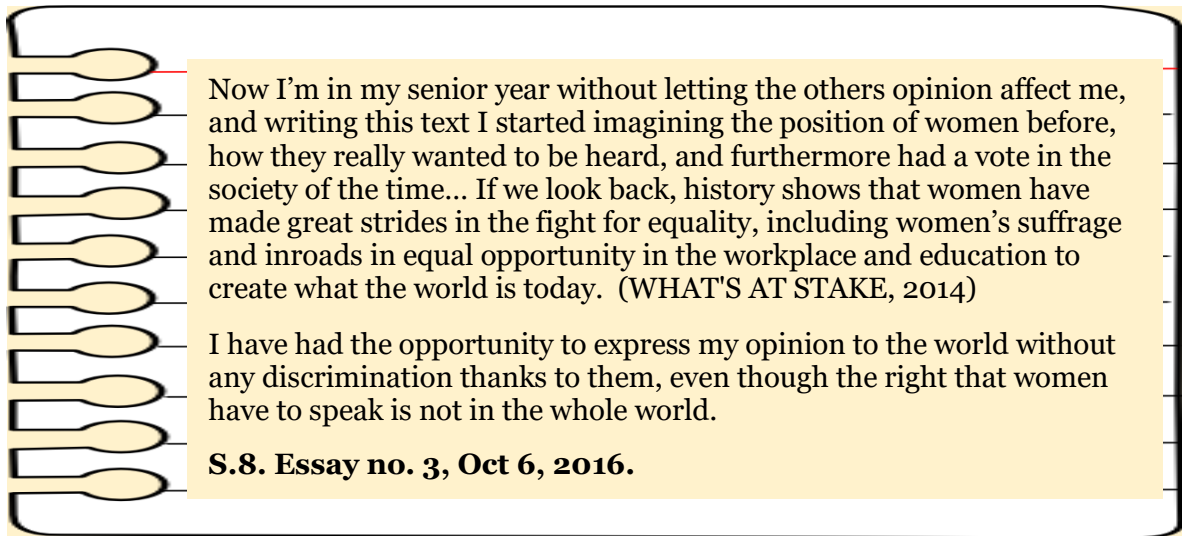
The boxed text shows first, the awareness of the student 5 about her initial feelings. She described how she realized she had the opportunity to feel different – even though this looked not feasible, and she decided to embrace that change. Her most important change had to do with the enjoyment of herself. She decided to do something about the way she was feeling. She mentioned changing was a process that demanded perseverance and she

was eager to move on with her life, which was not easy for her, and she saw that process as a well-worth fight. According to Tudor (2000) “language is the medium by which we build up personal relationships, express our emotions and aspirations, and explore our interests” (p. 65) and literacy allows the examination of the ongoing development of the self (Shor, 1999). That is why her paper showed that writing helped her looked at herself as an individual, discovering her flaws, fears – as she called them, and capabilities.

Additionally, because literacy is directly rooted in conceptions of identity (Street, 2003) and this identity is a powerful force within academic writing (Williams, 2006), the reconstruction of it in the essay becomes relevant. The student 5 felt apprehensive about her relationships with the adults, especially with her parents who apparently seemed to not notice her feelings. She felt trapped and lonely but then she started a therapy to express what she felt. She tried hard to get closer to her parents and finally, she succeeded. Her transformation meant to her an inspiration for the others, so they could change too. Her fight and change went beyond her personal boundaries as she wished to have a positive impact on others, which is an evidence that as Rosenblatt poses, writing is a transaction with the personal, social, and cultural environment (1994).

An example where a student found in the women’s fight for their rights a mirror of her inner fight is in the essay entitled *Words Slowly Coming Out*. In it, the student 8 explained the big effort women had to do to get their rights, making emphasis on how they found a way to be heard and simultaneously, she described her struggle to not get affected by her classmates’ words and beliefs, and highlighted the importance to voice her opinion. She used academic writing to take up a position (Curry & Hewings, 2003), and she assumed a “practical attitude toward texts and the social world” (Luke, 2000, p. 454). The

following extract illustrates how the student 8 found in speaking a powerful tool of transformation.



Chapetón (2007) defines the act of reading as “a way to understand our worlds and it as a way to foster changes” (p. 31). This can be seen in the excerpt above as it shows that the student 8 related the efforts made by women before, so we could be heard and in that way, we could start gaining rights such as voting. She recognized there were still places in the world where women's opinions were not taken into account. Besides, she considered people's ideas were more heard, and admitted that she was not taking advantage of what women did in other times. She also thought it was worthy to speak up and she said she did not feel threatened by what the other people might think. Knowing what other women did in past moments in history, which were hard and even jeopardizing, encouraged her to open and talk to the others. Consequently, writing became transactional with the personal, social and cultural environment (Rosenblatt, 1999).

Rosenblatt also affirms that the readers make sense “of a new situation or transaction and make new meanings by applying, reorganizing, revising, or extending

public and private elements selected from our personal linguistic-experiential reservoirs” (1999, p. 1061). In these writer/reader transactions, it is possible to agree and find in others’ words – in this case, the ones of the writer, a reason to fight back gender discrimination, as shown in the next sample. This fragment of a discussion depicts the way women’s actions inspired the student 3 to do whatever necessary to accomplish her personal goals.

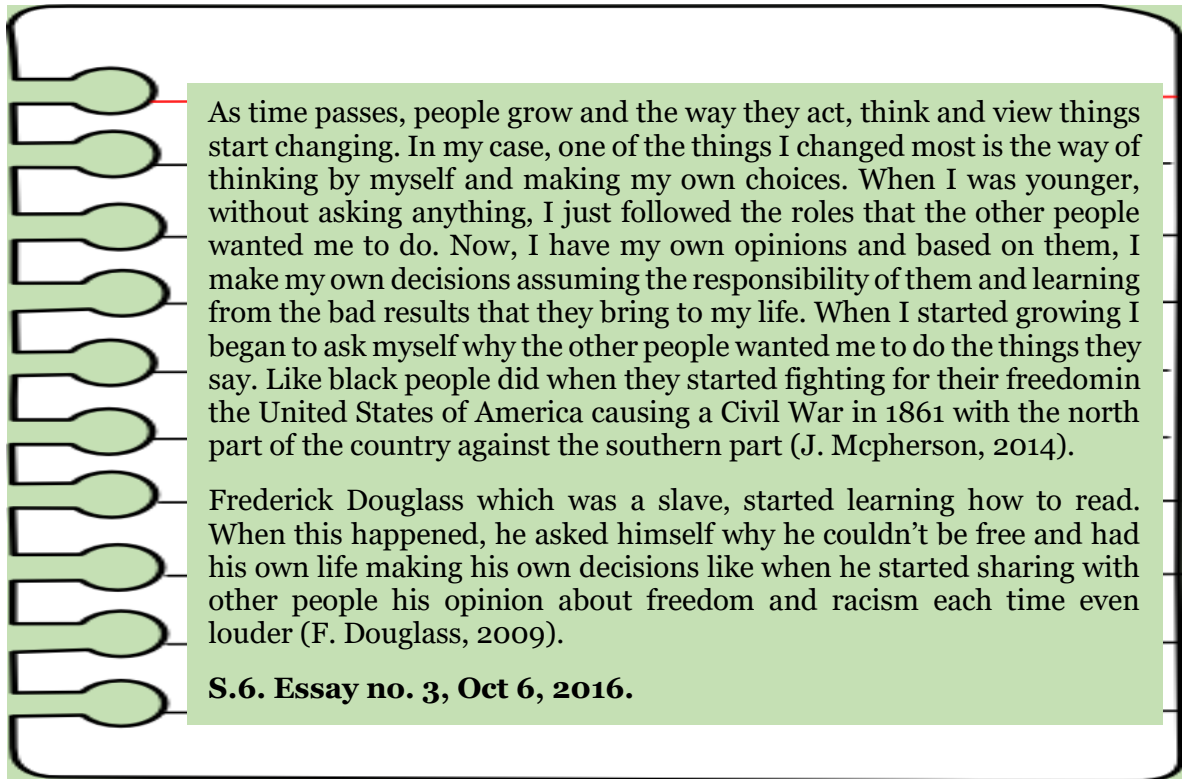
The author in all the speech want us to think the reasons why woman is the same as men. That woman make exactly the same as men. And she wants to make us think that we don’t need any help of anyone and that make me feel like I can do anything I want, being a woman. Because if you think at that time women can, can’t, yeah can’t do anything and you think it was possible. So if in that time she think it was possible; right now I can do anything I want. I think is like that. She want us to think we are powerful.

**S.3. Discussion no. 1, May 16, 2016.**

In the snippet above we can see that the student 3 exercised literacy with the willingness to achieve her goals (UNESCO, 2004). She felt empowered and with the belief she could perform things people consider unlikely. She had the strength to overcome whatever situation in the role of being a woman. She supported her idea by referring to the women’s achievements decades ago, and that encouraged her to fulfill her dreams and aspirations.

Critical literacy can be also developed by questioning the way we behave making us eventually act knowingly (Beck, 2005, Freire, 1983; Shor, 1999). The fragment below taken from the student’s 6 essay entitled *Changing decisions*, which sought to illustrate the need to take a time to ponder our actions and assume the responsibility of them, compared the contents of the reading about Frederick Douglass’ life with a moment in hers.





This excerpt portrays the idea that taking responsibility for our actions is a demonstration of maturity and strength. The student 6 was aware that not all decisions were good; they may bring unfortunate moments. Even though she did not explicitly affirm she challenged the people around, she decided to act on her behalf. The ability to make decisions was closely attached to the concept of agency and therefore, social change. This allowed the writer to act and make choices freely and independently (McDonald & Thornley, 2009).

These choices and actions do not dwell exclusively in the individual, since literacy practices exist in the relations with people and within the communities (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Hence, writing, as described in the following passage, served as a means to the student 5 to act thinking about herself and the others. She saw in writing the possibility to fight her own fears and in turn be a helping hand to the ones that needed her.

In Rosenblatt's words (1999), writing at this point embodies the personal and social factors. The students' long turn intervention showed her real concern about depression. She felt identified with other teenagers who suffered depression. Because she had suffered it and was a little bit older, she knew how it felt like, and she wanted to share her experience with others who needed to know how to overcome it. The student 5 showed her satisfaction with the paper she wrote because she saw it as an aid for others.

For me this is like a big change because I'm talking about me and I never talk about me...like how can I make a change like in my world or with people and I'm really happy with this. Because, I don't know. My big dream, my little dream is I want to be a writer to move people like... if I publish this I can change a teenager's mind. Because if I talk to anyone that are passing like... I don't know... fifteen years old, they always feel like alone and we just notice these things when we are older. So, I don't know... I can change those things and I'm too happy. I was thinking about this in a depression way from the kids. Always the kids were depressed and they want to kill themselves and we are thinking like "Why is this happening?" So maybe this can be my change because I feel that way when I was little. I didn't try anything but it really makes me feel so sad when I think about this. So, when I talked to my mom and she didn't understand me because she wasn't in my shoes. So, maybe this can make a change to all the kids that are like feeling like this. So, I can understand them because I passed through that. So, maybe this could be like a hand to them, like to grow up and pass these awful moments that happen in life.

**S.5. Discussion no.3, Oct 6, 2016.**

So far, I have shown the way literacy practices served the students as a means to face and overcome their personal issues. Even though in all cases literacy established a two-dimension relation instead of a one-way development (Freire, 1983), I have made emphasis on the individual fighting, for it was my interest to examine what they thought and did through the development of reading and writing experiences.

*Growing personally.* For the participants of this study, personal growth involved a series of actions which became visible while they read and wrote. In this subcategory, self-esteem and the appreciation of the kind of people they were, became the keystone in the process of growing personally. For instance, they reflected upon the advantages of doing good, the implications of offering their qualities to help the others and committing themselves to change. In other cases, they recognized the way they had changed for good and they showed their satisfaction in doing so because their behaviors could have a positive impact on their relations with others and because they felt better with themselves.

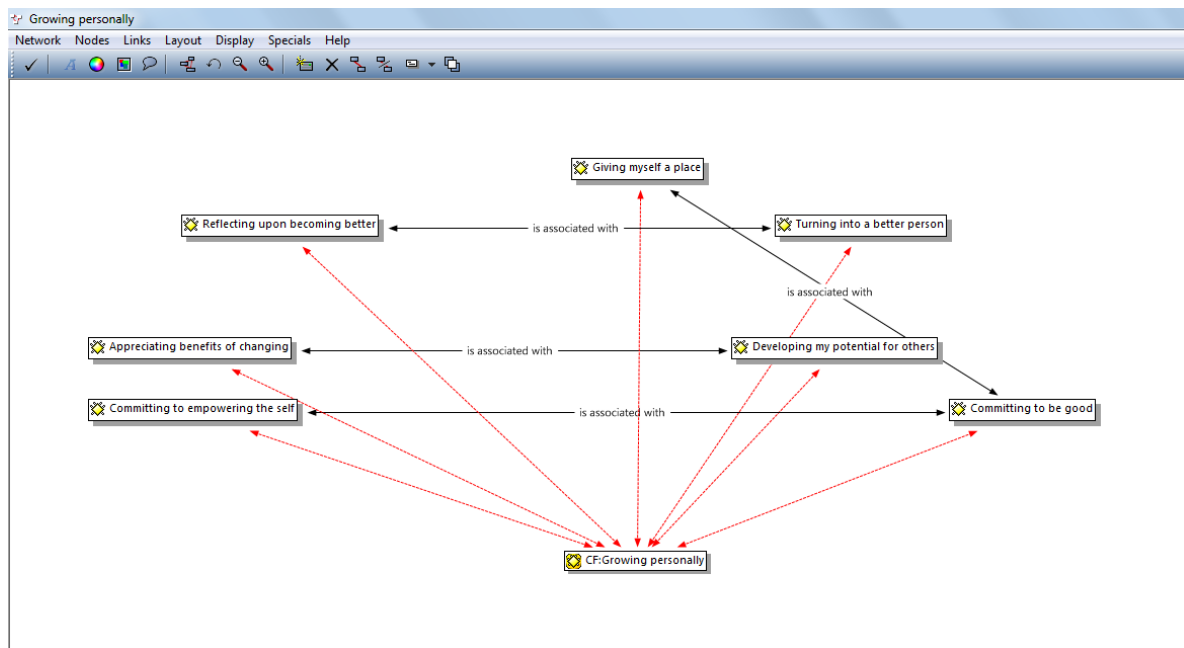
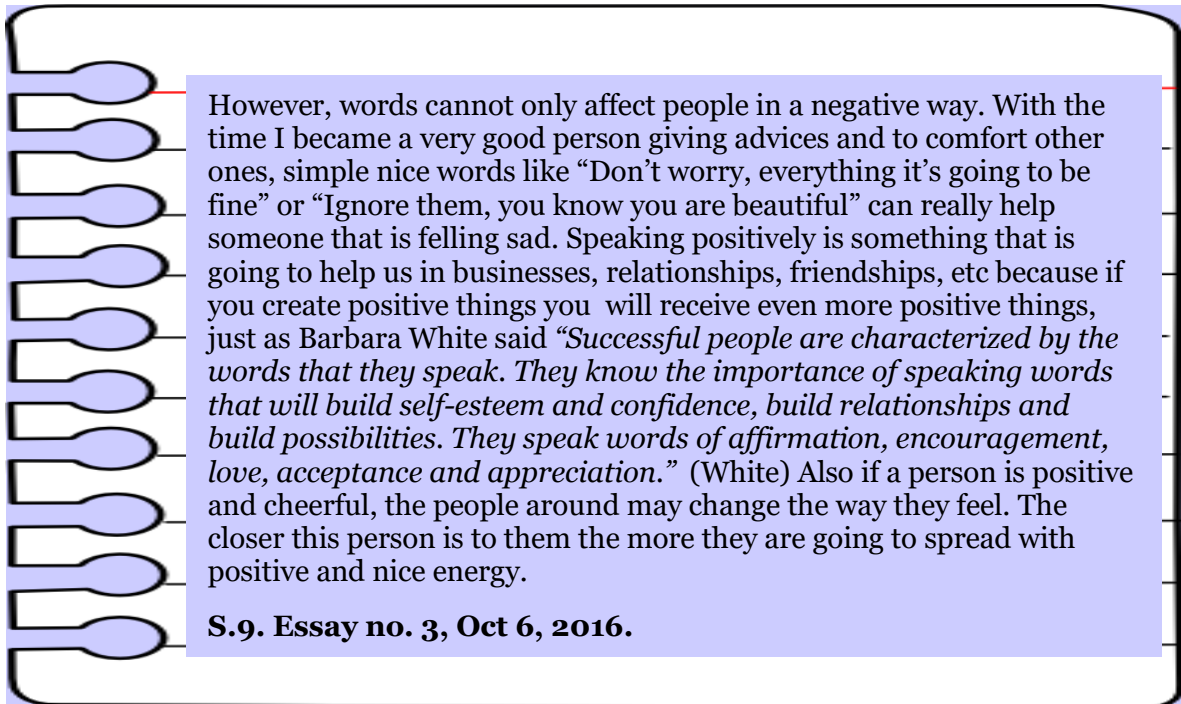


Figure 23. *Growing personally.*

During the pedagogical intervention, students were committed to using “textual practices for social analysis and transformation” (Luke, 2000, p. 454), where transformation is understood here as personal growth. Some of the students showed personal changes after experiencing unpleasant situations. In most cases, in the discussions or in the essays, they portrayed themselves as the victims of others’ mistreatment. In this

case, however; the student 9, whose essay is entitled *If it doesn't help, don't say it*, addressed the power of words, and supported the idea that by criticizing people they just do not hurt others but themselves too, something she used to do before. Additionally, she noticed that when she changed her attitude towards others, she felt good too.



The student 9 showed in her essay a critical perspective on the addressed social practices (Green, 2001). That was possible because language is attached to the social world and shaped by the context of its users (Perry, 2012), in this case, the student. The student 9 talked about giving and receiving, which means that the way people behave towards others, will be the way they will be treated later. By doing little actions, such as speaking positively to others, people can actually create bigger things. It can be seen that writing facilitated the student’s exploration of her deeds and she used evidence to support her argument (Curry & Hewings, 2003).

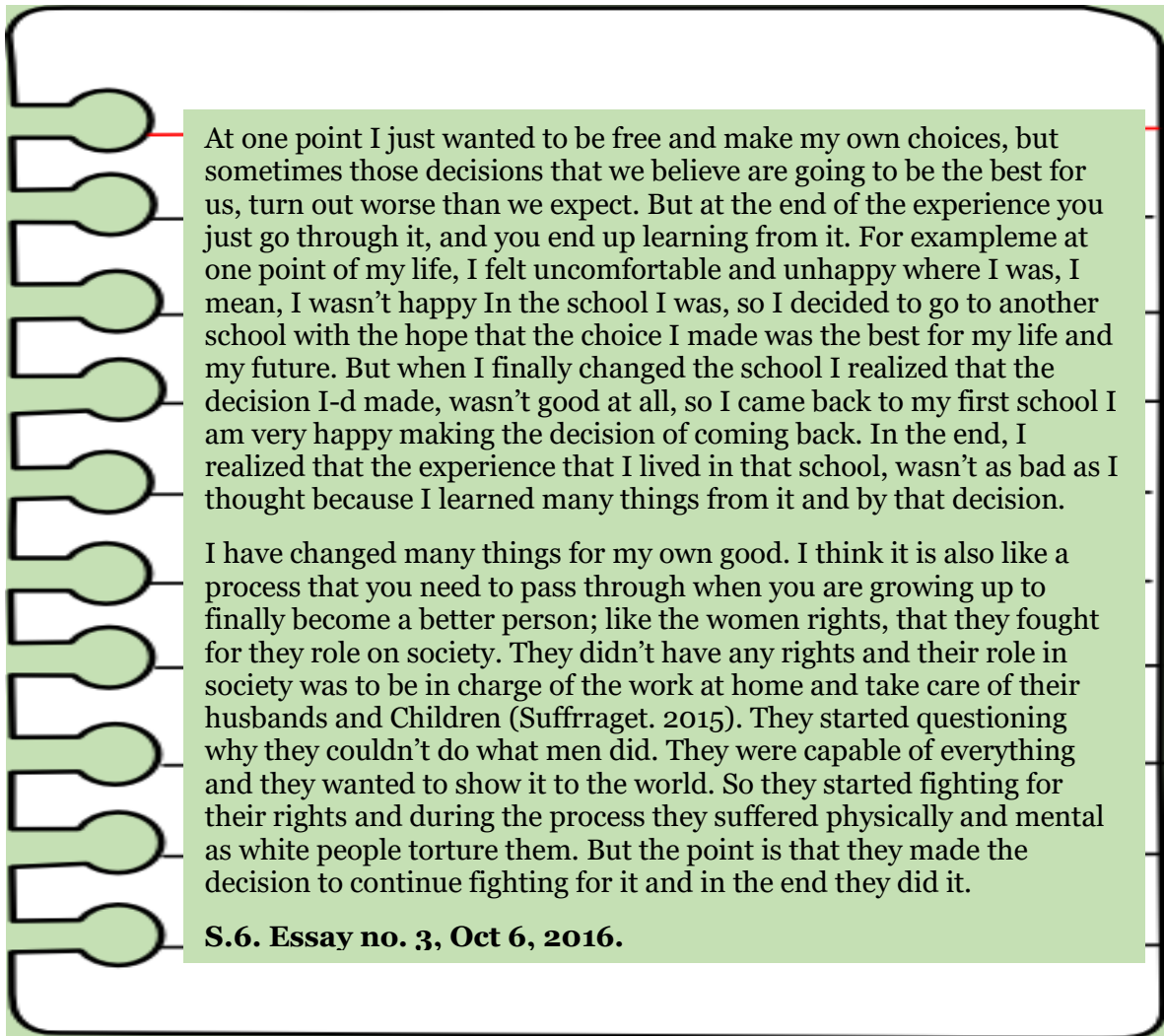
Provided that critical literacy advocates for change (Beck, 2005; Freire, 1983; Luke, 2000; Norton, 2007; Shor, 1999; The New London Group, 1996), it takes place within the individual, and in turn, it occurs in society. During a discussion, the student 3 realized the interconnection between her outside world and her personal context. The fragment is as follows:

If you aren't good inside of yourself you couldn't do good things outside yourself. So, if I want to make anything, first, I need to be good, I need to be positive, I need to be creative, I need to be me, I need to be good with myself, then to build better things and to help others make that change and be like, successful in their lives. It's like helping each other, but first me, then others. Buda said that. And we are going in a good way.

**S.3. Discussion no 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

The student 3 was aware that social change was possible, and it had to start with personal changes. She insisted on the idea that, by reaffirming the identity and assuring the well-being, people will be able to generate a transformation (Lea & Street, 2006; Norton, 2010; Street, 2003). She understood the importance of the self and the impact one can cause on the society.

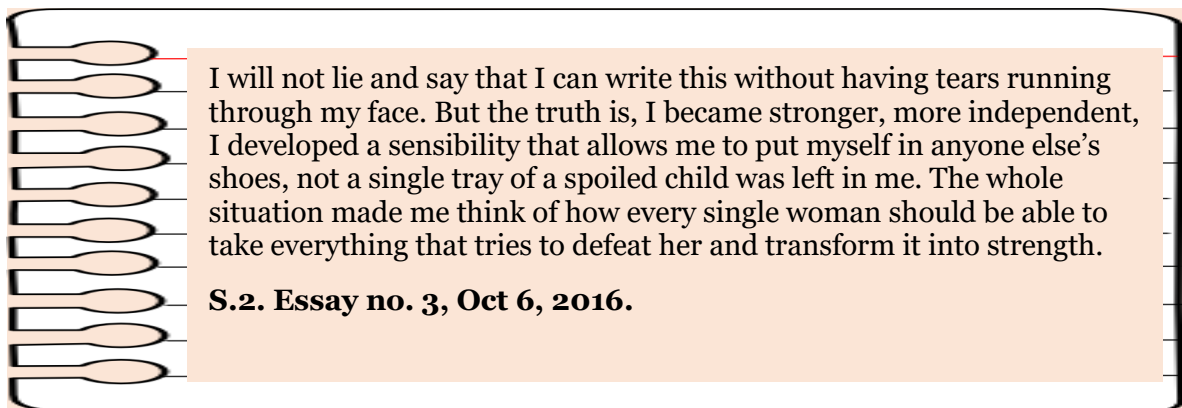
Shor (1999) asserts that critical literacy rises "to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it". In the essay *Changing decisions*, the student 6 compared what women went through when they were fighting to get their rights, which despite the suffering was in the end, a good thing to have happened, with her own process. In her paper, she adopted a particular perspective (Curry & Hewings, 2003) about changing schools and she deepened into herself within a broader context (Shor, 1999) which were the schools. The student 6 intended to show that sometimes achieving things was not an easy task. The excerpt below depicts the way the student saw her reality:



Succeeding and feeling good implied work and sacrifice. The student 6 also mentioned that changing demanded willingness, perseverance, and the need for learning from our own mistakes. She saw herself as a more mature person who through the experience could recognize her errors, learn from them and act accordingly.

Since literacy is a social practice embedded in “in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2003), it has everything to do with the reader/writer self. The sample below, which is an extract from the essay *How I became happier and unspoiled*, depicted three important aspects regarding her being. The first one was the

demonstration of how writing was used by the student 2 as a way to sensitize herself about the issue she was addressing in her essay, which was living with a close relative with a serious health condition. The second one was the fact that writing allowed her to rediscover and reaffirm her personal changes. A third aspect dealt with the vindication of others' actions, in this case, women's fight to be treated fairly. In here, the student 2 used writing as a means of the ongoing negotiation of meaning in continuously contested sites of meaning construction (Menezes de Souza, 2007) as she called on fighting in favor of women. The extract is as follows:



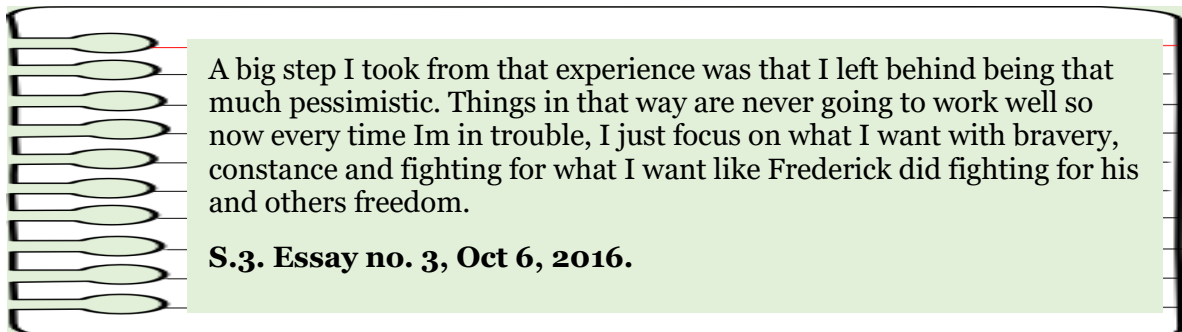
Similar to the previous sample, in a discussion the student 1 expressed how she saw herself. This was possible since language embodies and expresses aspects of the culture and worldview of its speakers (Tudor, 2000). She mentioned what she went through while bullying took place, and the time she overcame the situation.

I think that being more open. Because of the bullying and everything I just closed. So, I always expect people to show me things but I never show people about mine. Because I don't like that. And with my family there was like that. Everything was given to me but I never show anything and didn't smile for a while. And they always just like "She's sad or what's she thinking". I don't know. But now I felt more comfortable with myself so, now I can show what I think or what I am in like, to the others like that are close to me.

**S.1. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

Here, the student 1 showed her change from being oppressed and down to be open and have a positive view of herself. Even though she was surrounded by her family, it seemed they did not fully understand what was happening. The material things she received were not enough to feel better. It was her own decision to open to others to show who she really was. She could express her opinions or feelings to the people, especially to the ones she related more to. The student 1 found in self-esteem a way to bounce back the bullying she was a victim of and she felt she was a more authentic person.

According to Luke (2000), texts can be tools used to reconstruct the world of the individual. In the next excerpt taken from the essay *Back in time*, the student 3 compared Douglass' fight with her personal struggle. She illustrated the idea that to achieve what she wanted, she required effort and perseverance.



Because academic writing has everything to do with identity (Williams, 2006), the sample portrays the change in the student's character. The student 3 recognized she used to have a pessimistic point of view when she found herself in trouble. She also acknowledged a change towards her attitude, comparing it with Frederick Douglass' fight to get the freedom of himself and his people.

Critical literacy also expects the individuals to bind the texts with their needs and interests (Kempe, 2001). After students wrote their last essays, I asked them in the last discussion about their reading and writing experience. The student 2 affirmed that through



the making of this assignment she had bonded with others. The next excerpt depicts the way literacy became a touching practice for her.

I believe I am more sensitive. I can relate more to everything that I read and to everything that I write. I believe I don't write anymore like with my hands but actually from the heart and well, that's something I like. I suffer a lot when writing but I also enjoy it. I don't know. Writing this essay, I wanted to include testimonies from people in Colombia that have to live with that disease and I couldn't. Like, I would start crying and I felt like very related to everything that I write. I like finding about things that I didn't know. And I like feeling that I have a connection with people that I don't even know. Like, I can get what they feel and that's nice. Like, being able to put in someone else's position. Like, it makes you more aware, more sensitive, more like smarter. I don't know. I like it. And I really enjoy writing. I can have a word for me. I really like it. I've become a more patient person from this and I believe in the world we live in what we need most is patient people and someone that can really understand like, the different ... I mean... Like, the world is too diverse. And when you're patient and tolerate and you're able to tolerate other things because you understand them, then you won't mistreat other people.

**S.2. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

Her words allow us to see that literacy, specifically the act of writing became a transformative experience for her. Writing, despite being poignant, allowed the student 2 to see the world differently. She insisted that writing was for her an enjoyable experience, where she could let her emotions run. As can be seen, the student 2 affirmed she had changed and we can say she identified herself as an agent of social change. As aforementioned, critical literacy implies social change (Norton, 2007). The student 2 believed writing made her realized the needs we have in the world and she decided to respond to them. Literacy allowed her to examine her world and act knowingly (Freire, 1983). She could have noticed those needs and did nothing about them; instead, she chose

to become more patient, an attribute she thought was key to make the world a better place to live in.

Another example where literacy let the writer questions and constructs the self (Beck; 2005; Shor, 1999; Street; 2003) is shown below.

I see writing as an opportunity to say what I want. Even though now I can speak more it is difficult to me and writing helps to improve and be better. The world is like... you don't have discrimination so every person is important now. And probably --- and me have different view but to improve the world and be better the important of every opinion is good. If we are together we are gonna be better and communication is the basis of the world.

**S.8. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

The response of the student 8 shows the way writing was a mediator to transform the student's life. She found in writing the power to speak her mind, opposite to what she felt about speaking. Moreover, for her, having the opportunity to know what people thought, opened the possibility to join forces to work for a common cause, and for her, the path to get to people's minds was writing.

Personal growth was manifested in several ways, settings, and contexts, after the students went through disagreeable situations, with classmates, relatives, showing changes of attitude at school and home. Nonetheless, a commonality among them was the way literacy served as a means to explore their past experiences and achieved those transformations.

**Experiencing literacy differently.** Based on the data, I can say that the students viewed themselves as different literate people. As explained in Chapter IV, students behave

sensitively towards social issues in formative experiences rather than academic ones.

During the pedagogical intervention, literacy was used to deepen into social matters.

Although students advanced in the formalities of essay writing, this was not the concern here. The students truly showed appropriacy of elements such as punctuation and capitalization, and improved in the use of in-text citations and sources. However, those linguistic components are not what we are looking at.

Literacy here is understood as a means to discover themselves, in other words, as a way to self-representation towards social phenomena. On the one hand, reading and writing allowed the students to make retrospections and introspections of themselves and examine their self-on-going development, including their expressions of feelings. On the other hand, literacy served as the window to see their surrounding reality and make sense of the world they have been in (Freire, 1983).

*Acknowledging who I am.* Through the reading and writing of texts, students reviewed and weighed some personal moments they had thought were not important but in fact, they found them relevant to understand the sort of people they had become. Likewise, the assessment of their thoughts, words, and actions, allowed them to de-construct and re-construct their identities, giving a new meaning to themselves. Ivanič (1984) points that the individuals' identities are constructed, negotiated, formed and transformed according to the people they have exchanges with, the settings they move in and the kind of discourses they are situated in. by and shaped by the literacy practices they are involved in. Similarly, the literacy practices they take part in, shape and are shaped by their identities.



S.1. Because I think that like we are like...that's like our nature. You're not going to like your father saying like... "Daddy um, I have my period." This is just like...ok?

S.10. I told my father.

S.1. Like it's your first period. Like...you're not going to say like... "Father..."

S.3. Because that's you.

S.10. But any person can do it.

S.3. If you don't have mom. Who do you talk to?

S.1. You don't go to your father, you go to a woman because that has passed through that. Your grandmother, your uncle, or a friend. But you're not going like for the first to your father because is something that is for women. It's something that you have to say to a women.

S.1. You talk to a women when you get your period you are not going to your dad to ask for a tampon that's something you do. Women understand women.

S.10. And men. I asked my father.

S.1. No, you don't.

S.10. Yes, I did.

S.6. It depends on the person.

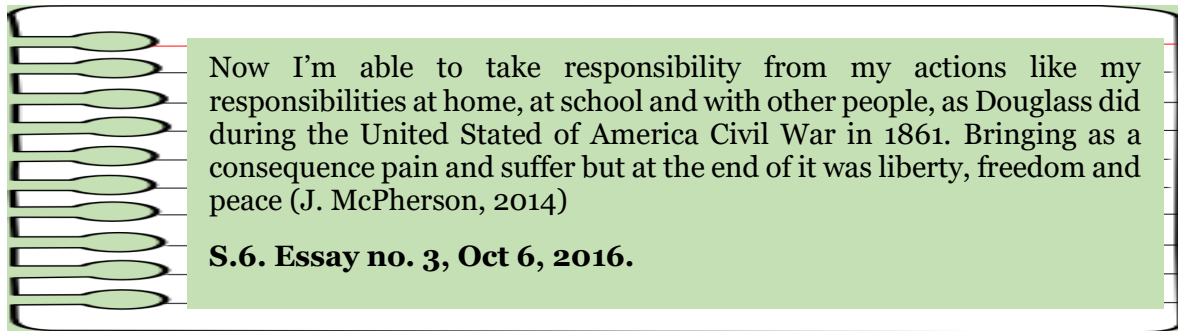
S.10. Yeah it depends on how close are your father or with a man. It depends.

**Discussion no. 1, May 16, 2016.**

In this case, literacy served the students to discuss roles, relations, stereotypes, and expectations (Kempe, 2001). It can be seen that the student 10 had a close relation with her father. This made her do things her partners think were to be done exclusively with a female relative. The kind of families they had and the types of relations they set up, unfolded their particular ways to see the gender roles within them. That is why for the student 10 her actions towards her male and female relatives seemed perfectly normal, and to the student 1 they looked awkward.

Literacy also allows the individuals to explore themselves and react towards the world they live in (Shor, 1999). In the essay entitled *Changing decisions*, the student 6 stated that the ability to make choices and assume the consequences of them is a learning experience

that enriches the human being. Along the essay, she made a parallel between the consequences assumed by Frederick Douglass' actions, whose excerpt of the autobiography they read, and the consequences of her decision to change school. In the excerpt below the student 6 depicted the kind of person she became in several scenarios.



The student 6 identified herself as a responsible daughter, student, and probably as a friend. That was a clear change she saw in herself because from her point of view she was not that responsible before. The student looked convinced that despite the difficulties, in the end, success will come. It is worth saying that when the student wrote the essay, it had been almost eight months since I started the pedagogical intervention. For this last essay, the students read some books of their preference, which dealt with diverse social issues, and then wrote their paper. Nevertheless, it was interesting to observe that the student 6 cited the author Frederick Douglass, to whom they had read more than 7 months ago.

The snippet of the discussion below portrays the changes the same student 6 had towards decision-making. It shows that even though she counted on the other peoples' opinions the one who finally decided what she wanted to do was herself. This is an example of empowerment because she took the time to assess the situation, contrary to what she used to do before, which was to act without questioning the implications of her actions.

When I was younger I just did what people told me to do and I didn't think about why and is that what I really want to do? So, I don't know. I think that nowadays I made decisions by myself and analyzing more the situation. Like, I don't know, I ask more the opinion of others but I take the final decisions.

**S.6. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

The author's voice is essential in the development of critical literacy (Williams, 2006). Some students did not believe their ideas were valuable and appreciated, therefore, they thought that expressing their points of view when referring to a reading or writing their papers was pointless. Nonetheless, while discussing the readings and writing their essays, they realized this was an enriching experience for their academic and personal lives.

In critical literacy, the reader/writer is expected to make connections between larger contexts and the personal one and give meaning to them (Gee, 2000). This also makes the individuals reflect upon their identities within their own reality and fosters them to change (Chapetón, 2007). The extract of the last discussion presented below shows that the student 3 felt identified with the authors of the speech and the autobiography.

I want to present the bravery both Frederick and Sojourner have like at the moment to say, "I'm going to make this because I am different and if I am different I am going to make the things good because that's me". And I say like, I am different but that difference could be good to make something great, like both people did. That's the center idea of my paper.

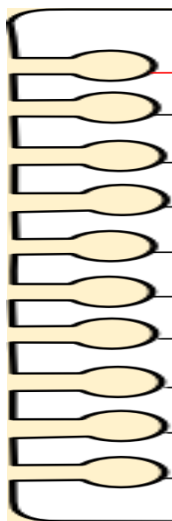
**S.3. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

This fragment reveals the relationships the student 3 made between the readings and her own life. The texts made her think about the kind of person she was. An important feature

she highlighted was being different; however, for the student feeling and being one of a kind was not a matter of concern, but a matter of opportunity. The way the student 6 decided to assume the difference as a positive quality is remarkable.

The student 8 who felt uneasy when she had to talk. In fact, she used to participate in class only if the teacher asked her to do so. She considered that what she had to say was not that important and due to her fear of speaking she avoided any type of confrontations with her partners.

A fragment of her essay and an extract of a discussion illustrate the reflection she made around the idea of being heard, and additionally she recalled the words people told her when she was in her previous school. The student 8 depicted how she suffered because of the things others told her. She recalled how hurtful was for her to be compared with a guy because of her preference for a sport. She also knew that those words were sexist and unfair. The student 8 recognized she would have loved to say something about it, but she was unable to, which shows that she did not have the tools to fight back despite she was willing to do it. This passage was taken from the essay *Words slowly coming out*.



Many times I was hurt by what other people said or believed. I remember one time I said I love the basketball and what the others said was: "That game is for men so you are one", and even I wanted to defend myself that time, for some strange reason inside of me I couldn't do it.

If I suffer, imaging all the pain that women before may have felt not only because they could not talk or be heard, but also for the abuse they had to endure to become someone in society. Now in this world the point of view of every single person counts and I was wasting the power to speak and say what I feel in this new culture when that was why they were fighting for.

**S.8. Essay no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**



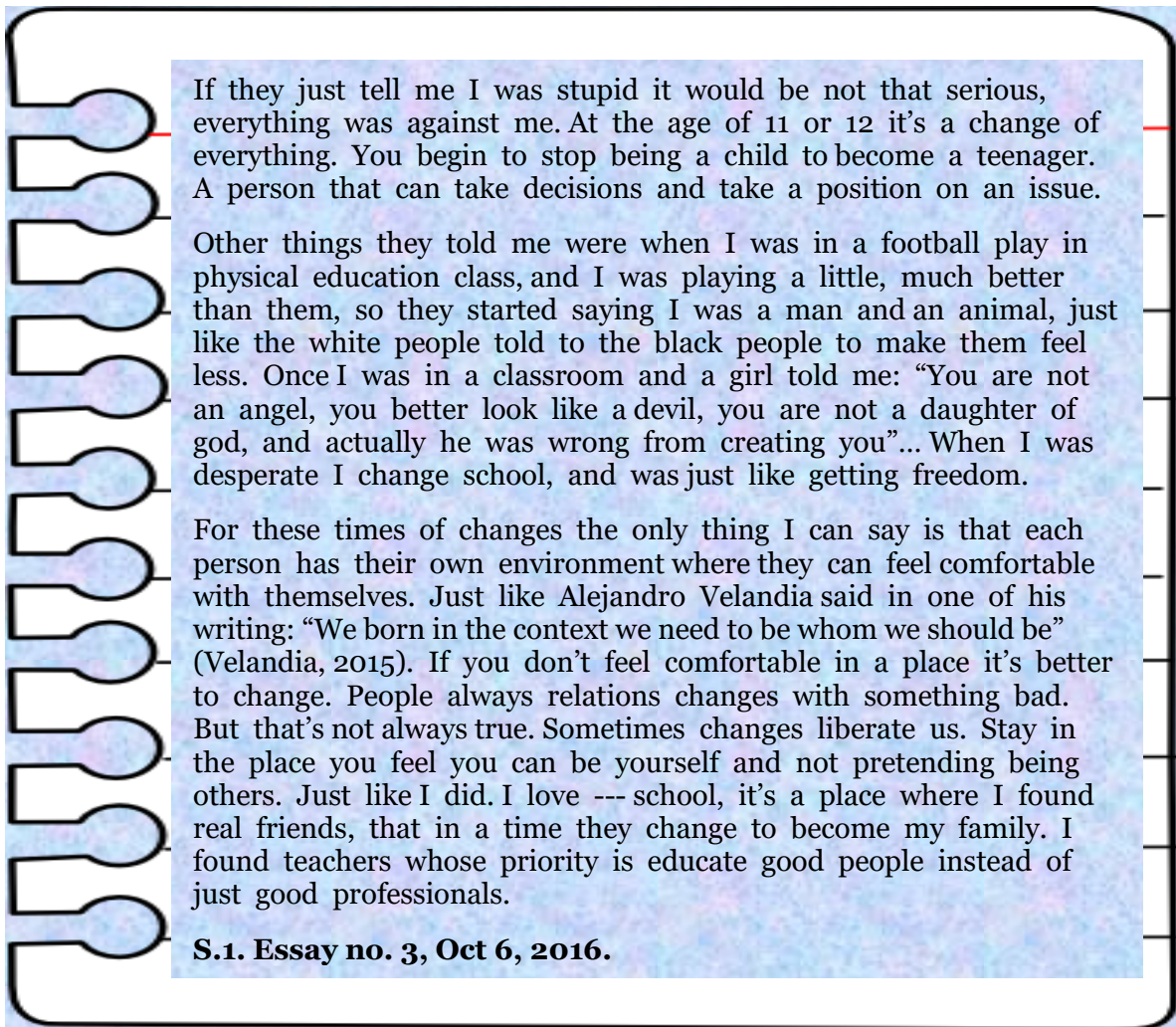
And in the discussion the student 8 stated:

It's important to speak and say your opinions. Now the world is so big and new and you have the opportunity to say what you want without discriminations and I like it. I start feeling like, I was wasting my opportunity to speak 'cause women fight a lot, a lot for be heard, and when I start searching more about it I was like "I'm a dumb because I have the opportunity. Why not?"

**S.8. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

Some people might find this event irrelevant or easy to sort out. However, for the student 8 those words were painful and because of that, they were stuck in her memory. Suffering is not something people can take away or overcome easily, it requires time, effort, and certain skills that in this case, the student lacked. Hopefully, she found that by speaking up she could bounce back discrimination and bullying. The student 8 chose to give herself a try, and assumed a different position towards her own voice in the group.

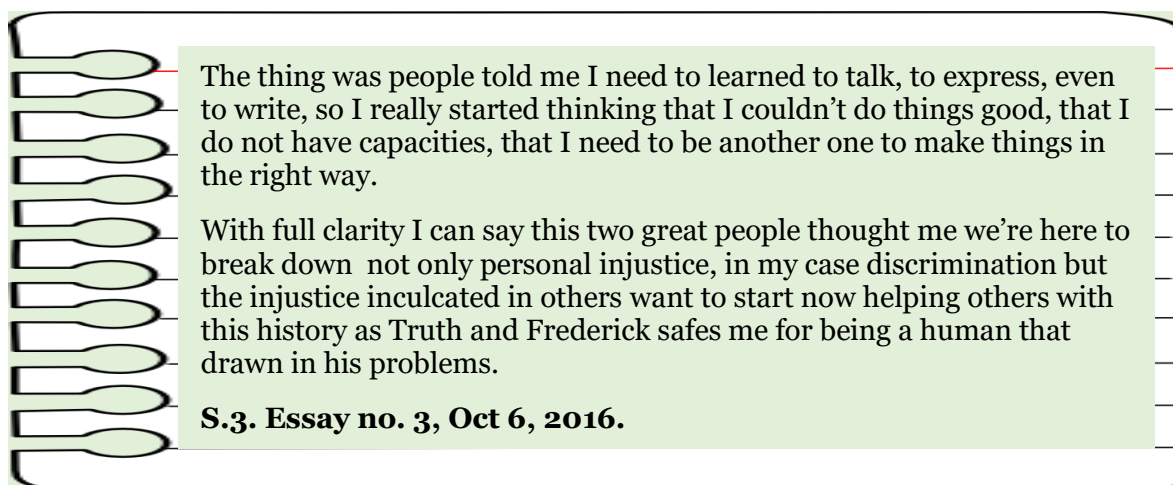
In the next sample, a fragment of an essay entitled *Dear Camille*., the student 1 recalled some personal moments she experienced in her former school. She made a parallel between the treatments she received there with the way white people mistreated slaves. Once again, the student 1 linked the contents of the reading regarding slavery with her personal life, something which is promoted in critical education (Clavijo & Sharkey, 2011). The student 1 felt so apprehensive in her former school that when she changed school she described her relief by affirming she felt free.



Literacy here served to examine power relationships issues (Lea & Street, 2006) and boosted the reader/writer to react. In the beginning, the student 1 had a normal life sharing her daily life with her classmates with no major trouble. For her, turning into an adolescent came along with power relationships issues with her classmates. She felt mistreated recalling the words the other students told her, and she compared them with the verbal abuse the African American slaves suffered. She decided to change school and realized how different the environments were. She referred to her new school as a place where she could be herself.

The writing of the essay allowed the student 1 to revisit past moments and in turn, it helped her reconstruct her identity (Shor, 1999) as a unique valuable person. According to Ivanič (1984), the authorial self, which is one of the identity aspects related with writing, allowed the writer to claim authority of the contents of their paper as far as they want. Furthermore, Hyland (2002) states that through the use of first person pronouns, the authors empower themselves underlining his positions and personal contributions. In this case, the student 1 embraced and shared her experience assuming fully the authorial self-role.

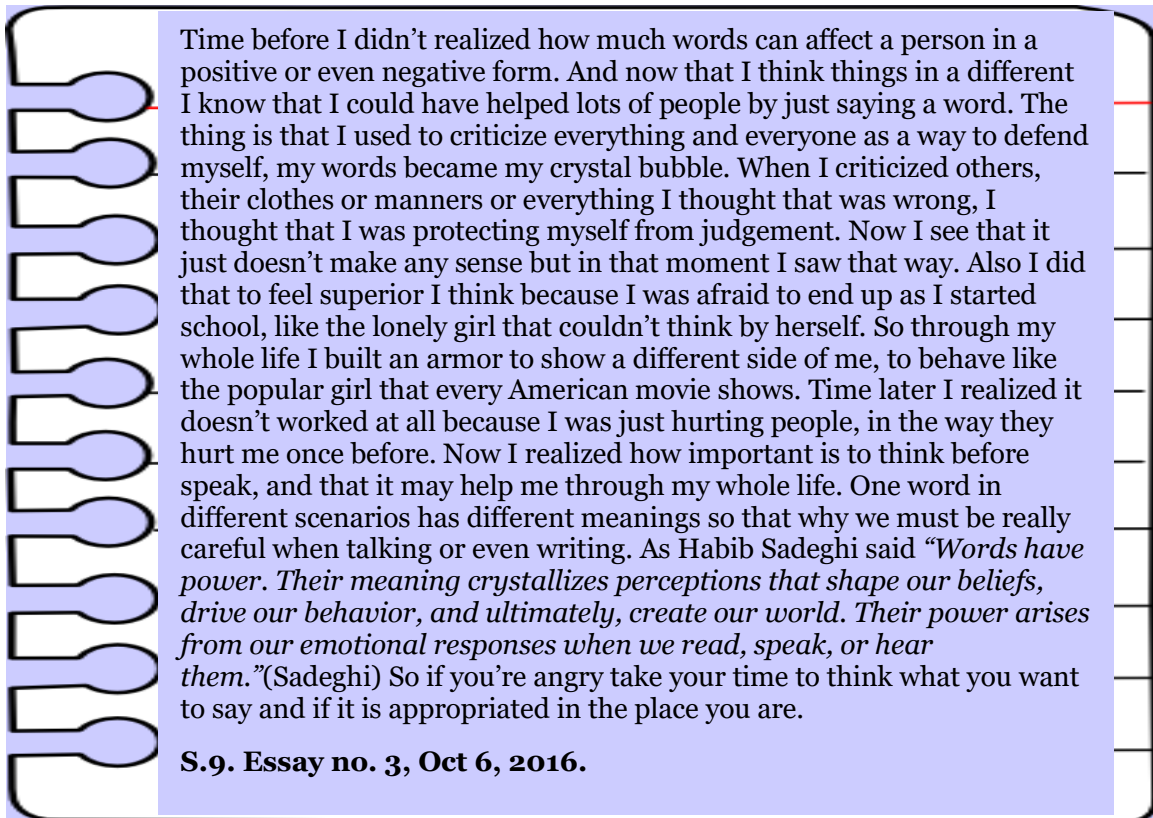
Another case where literacy was exercised to relate different contexts (Rosenblatt, 1999) and review some personal moments (Shor, 1999) and contest to them (Macedo, 2003) is shown below. Extracted from the essay *Back in time*, the excerpt explains the case of the student 3, who felt inspired to see herself differently and fought back against the discrimination she suffered previously, and in turn, found the strength to help others who might be under similar circumstances.



Previously in her essay, she mentioned the setbacks these two African Americans faced at their time and compared them with her own obstacles. The student 3 explained that the others thought she did not have good communicative skills and she began to believe that it was true. She explained she felt undervalued by the bad comments people made

about her performance, although it is unclear if she referred to her classmates, teachers, or family. She felt less than the others and started to perceive herself differently because of those words. Besides, due to the importance she gave to people's comments, she showed concern for the kind of person she was and needed to be. The fact that she doubted her own capabilities made her integrity undermined because she did not feel comfortable with the girl she was. Finally, the student 3 found in the readings the tools to bounce back.

Recognizing the self through literacy practices includes acknowledging the positive and negative qualities one may possess. Part of that recognition process, consists according to the data, on exploring the motives that triggered certain behaviors as well as the review of the implications of them. In other words, the way they impact positively or negatively on others.



Time before I didn't realized how much words can affect a person in a positive or even negative form. And now that I think things in a different I know that I could have helped lots of people by just saying a word. The thing is that I used to criticize everything and everyone as a way to defend myself, my words became my crystal bubble. When I criticized others, their clothes or manners or everything I thought that was wrong, I thought that I was protecting myself from judgement. Now I see that it just doesn't make any sense but in that moment I saw that way. Also I did that to feel superior I think because I was afraid to end up as I started school, like the lonely girl that couldn't think by herself. So through my whole life I built an armor to show a different side of me, to behave like the popular girl that every American movie shows. Time later I realized it doesn't worked at all because I was just hurting people, in the way they hurt me once before. Now I realized how important is to think before speak, and that it may help me through my whole life. One word in different scenarios has different meanings so that why we must be really careful when talking or even writing. As Habib Sadeghi said "*Words have power. Their meaning crystallizes perceptions that shape our beliefs, drive our behavior, and ultimately, create our world. Their power arises from our emotional responses when we read, speak, or hear them.*"(Sadeghi) So if you're angry take your time to think what you want to say and if it is appropriated in the place you are.

**S.9. Essay no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

In the passage above, taken from the essay *If it doesn't help, don't say it*, the student 9 tackled the power of words and in it, she argued why we must be careful with the way we address people. This extract illustrates that the student 9 identified a past behavior and along with it she analyzed the reasons behind it, pointing the use of power as a defense mechanism. In addition, she admitted she wanted to show herself following the stereotype of acting like the 'popular girl' portrayed in American films. Finally, she broke down that stereotype, noting the damage she had caused. She shared the lesson she had learned and embraced that change, which she declared might be useful for the rest of her life. The excerpt demonstrates first, that literacy transcended the individual and it was defined within a larger context (Norton, 2010) because the student reflected upon herself in relation with the people she interacted with, in this case, her classmates. Critical literacy also allowed her to discuss issues such as relations and stereotypes (Kempe, 2001), let her position towards the world around her, and took action towards those issues (Freire, 1983).

In sum, when the students had the possibility to read and write, they opted to relate the texts with their personal experiences, revisited them closely and represented themselves in a new transformative way.

*Sensing the world.* Students were used to reading about several facts and recognized specific events that had occurred. Additionally, they were somehow 'trained' to analyze the phenomena from certain perspectives, sometimes forgetting or avoiding looking at the big picture of events; they were used to giving the responses the teacher expected from them.

When they had the opportunity to explore the events from different angles they noticed that apart from having right/wrong answers there were plenty of stances towards

them. Consequently, literacy took them to unknown times and places, helped them raise awareness about issues they were interested in and moved them to react towards them.

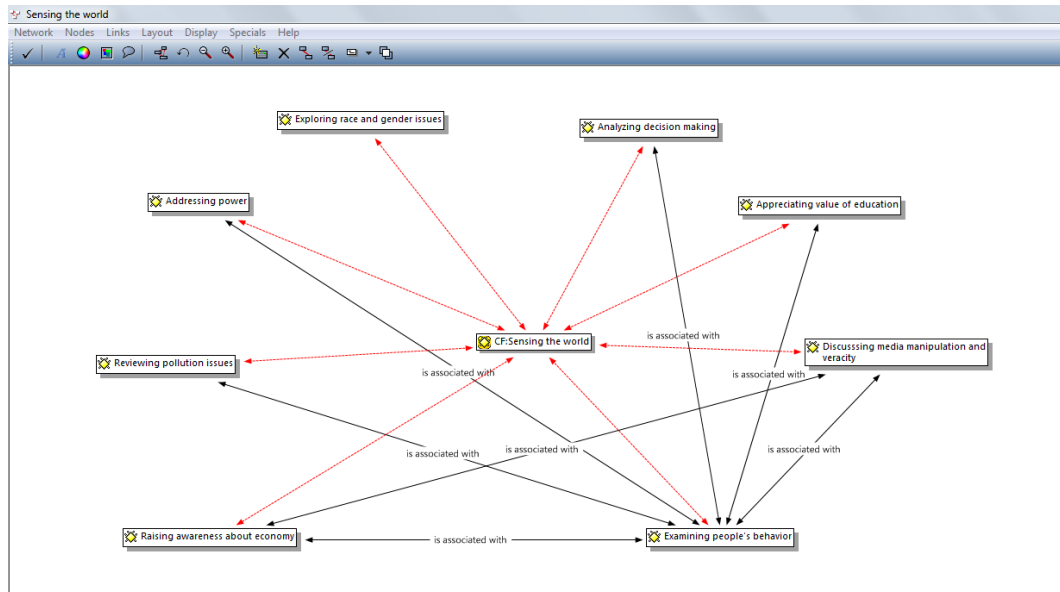
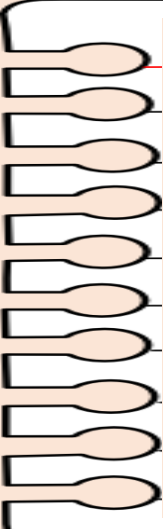


Figure 25. Sensing the world.

As Freire (1983) states, critical literacy is an invitation to read the world, dispute power relations and respond to them. The extract below is part of an essay entitled *Being like men: Is it worth it?* and in it, the student 2 expressed her views on gender inequality.



So far it has not been even taken in consideration if women feel as strong as they really are, and that is definitely a key part in all this process, because women cannot expect to be seen as the strong sex if they in the first place cannot see themselves as such thing.

Let's take a look at a very close example: Our thoughts when we hear the phrases "you run like a girl" or "you kick like a girl". As a woman, I must admit I do not even feel offended by this and truth is I should. Women grow with the idea that whenever they are told they are doing something the way a girl does, then they can be sure they are doing it the wrong way. And following this idea, then the way to do things is to do it the way a guy would. This short sentence that may seem so innocent is just the first of the steps into making a woman believe that men are simply better.

**S.2. Essay no. 1, Jun 8, 2016.**

In the snippet, it can be observed that the student 2 referred to the issue from two angles. Firstly, she addressed gender inequality as an outsider. She doubted about the

legitimacy for women to demand equality towards men when they naively did not react to disparaging comments about them. Secondly, she included herself in that group of women. Afterwards, the student explained a plausible reason to make women consider inferior to men. As can be seen, the act of writing let the student reflect upon the matter, looking at it with new refreshing eyes, in Quintero's words "the act of giving meaning and substance to our thoughts" (2008, p. 10).

As stated above critical literacy helped the person to see the world with a particular view (Freire, 1983). Through literacy, students could examine their interests from a closer distinct perspective. In the next sample, the student 7 admitted she used to follow her family stances towards politics. Nevertheless, literacy gave her options regarding political matters and dealing with her personal choices for her future studies.

It changed a lot my views on politics, like... Usually I just believed what my family said. Now, I try to have my own opinion. And in general that made me realize what I wanna study and what I wanna defend. That made me like, more focused on the future is like child... child care. Through my career, try to help childs. Yeah. And that I really started reading and being more critical and questioning what's going on in the world and questioning what is the government doing for the people in general, made me realize where and when I wanna start doing a changes.

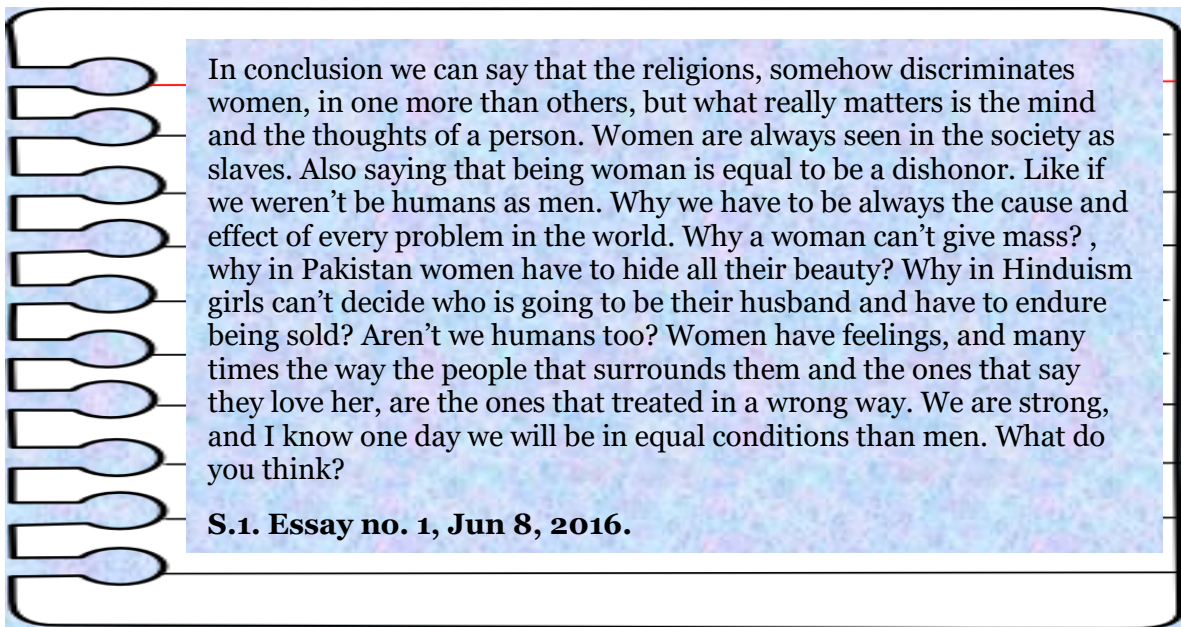
**S.7. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

It can be observed that literacy was experienced here in larger contexts and practices (Norton, 2010); it made the individual transcend the role of student and it went beyond the classroom (Clavijo & Sharkey, 2011), so the student could reach her goals (UNESCO, 2004). The student used literacy for her different purposes (Haneda, 2006) and personal interests (Kempe, 2001), and developed a practical attitude towards the social world (Luke,



2000). Based on her questioning about the others' behavior the student 7 established the role she wanted to assume in society to help in it.

Questioning is in fact, a way to better understand the world through the words we read (Freire, 1983). The passage below depicts the way the student 1 questioned the role of women in religion. In her paper entitled *Religion as discriminator*, she discussed the tasks and treatment women have suffered as members of different creeds.

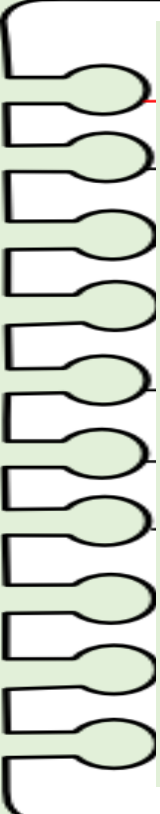


The student 1 tried to make sense of the different situations women had gone through, when they belonged to one religion or another by providing a series of examples, even Catholicism, the faith she professed to believe in. In the fragment, the student vindicated women's identity, which seems shaped by others' discourses (Ivanič, 1984) and argued her point by expressing her opinion (Curry & Hewings, 2003) and used the making of questions as an argumentative strategy.

When individuals become social agents, they are able to act in contested sites of meaning construction (Menezes de Souza, 2007) and take an active participation in their



communities (UNESCO, 2004). In the essay entitled *The media effects on Olympian athletes*, the student 3 supported the idea that actions should be more important than the personal appearance. She went on to describe the way people criticized two female athletes because of their looks rather than their performances. A fragment of her arguments is displayed below.



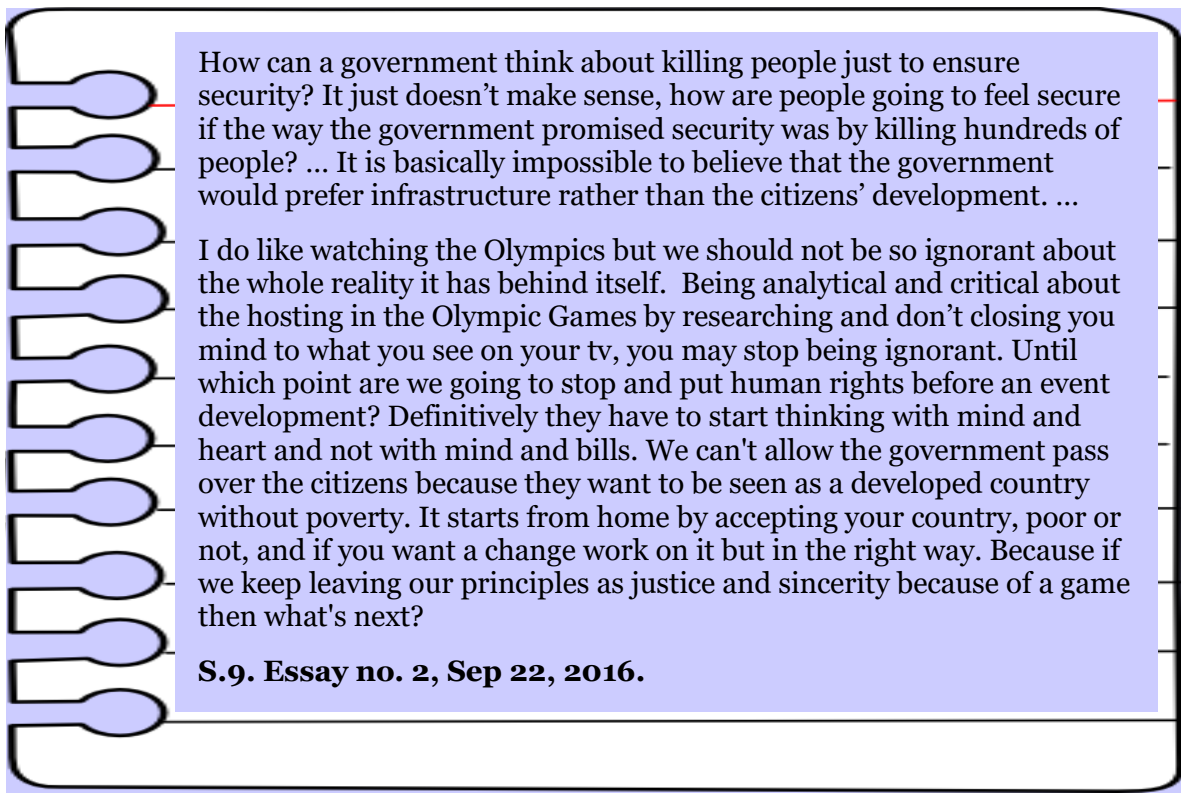
Rafaela is an example that the critics of the media can get at the point a person feel useless in what it believe is good causing the feeling it can't make anything needing then help from a phycologist .Otherwise Rafela a year later after taking again its strength and selfconfidence with its phycologist retakes Judo and demonstrate everyone she can win a gold medal at Rio 2016 2016 saying: "This medal is for those who said they I had to be in a cage" (Marca, 2016).Showing to us and the other she can win.

Finally, we can argue that we need to stop the media, stop the bad comments, and in the worst case stop criticizing because what the media and those who criticize is to get more views, more comments or they're only jelouse and thats not really that important, we're in the 21th century, there's a lot of divercity, its time we to accept appareances doesnt matter because what really have importance is the integrity of a person and the effort and time they spend to do the job.Now my advice for the ones that feel discriminated for the skin color, weight and lenghts or anything else, it to follow the example of Alexandra and Rafaela,just be focused on what you want and became stronger with other critics,because at the end that comment will be a prove to other they were wrong.

**S.3. Essay no. 2, Sep 22, 2106.**

The snippet above shows a calling on stopping harmful behaviors towards others. Furthermore, the excerpt evidences the polyphonic character of the text since the writer's voice represent the voice of others (Correa, 2009). The student 3 got involved and engaged in this endeavor as she knew that the social media was at everyone's hand. She finally reaffirmed the value of women and stood by them.

As illustrated in the previous sample, upholding for a cause is one of the aims of critical literacy. Bonding larger texts with the personal one is also one of the features when exercising critical literacy practices. The essay entitled *Not everything is as awesome as it should be*, discussed the corruption behind the organization and development of the Olympic games. The student 9 analyzed the social situation lived in Rio during the preparation of the city to host the Olympic Games. In the fragment presented below, she questioned the actions of the government, which seemed contradictory and then, she invited the readers to get informed and act wisely as citizens and family members.



The excerpt above illustrates how reading and writing allowed the student 9 to assume a position (Kempe, 2001) towards an issue she considered important. Although the topic addressed dealt with the Olympic Games in Rio, in the conclusion of her essay, the student linked the situation occurred in Brazil to what happened in Colombia. Street (2003)

affirms that literacy is about knowledge embedded in social practices and it depends on the context within it is exercised. In the passage, the student 9 let the readers see her views on the government in the country, which she considered corrupt, at the same time she referred to the values she believed the population had, and the people's power to reverse the situation.

Language encompasses cultural aspects of the speakers of a community (Tudor, 2000), and what individuals express make sense when examined in the social context and practices they are part of (Gee, 2000). The extract below belongs to a discussion about two readings regarding the Olympic Games, a factsheet written by the Olympic Committee and an article news denouncing the social damage the organization of the games had caused on some areas of Rio.

Yes, I agree with you. I never heard about the Olympics in this way, we always watch the Olympics and get excited about the competitions but these texts kind of open our eyes and I think that from now, we are going to see the next Olympic Game different.

**S.4. Discussion no. 2, Sep 1-17, 2016.**

The student's comment is a demonstration of the way literacy is carried out as the lenses we use to look at reality (Freire, 1983). The student 4 compared the way of enjoying the games before and after doing the readings. At this point, the student had other elements to appreciate this event and she stated that because of what she read in the factsheet and the news. She noticed that behind the organization and development of the games were positive and negative aspects. The readings allowed the student 4 to have a wider view of what before was simply a reason to have some fun.

Being able to look at texts from different perspectives is one of the goals of critical literacy. When we are critical we may “reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world” (Shor, 1999, n.p.). This allows the reader to understand the actions of the ones involved in the readings. During a discussion about a speech about slavery delivered by Sojourner Truth, a black American woman, in 1851 in a Women’s Convention in the US, students discussed its contents from different points of view. This discussion did not intend to verify the literal understanding of the reading, but gather the students’ views on the contents of the text. One of the issues addressed was racism. The boxed text shows the response of the student 10 to the question, “How different would you have seen the text if you were someone else, lived somewhere or sometime else?”

I have many different points of view. I think that if I were a black man in that time I would felt or a white man I would feel offensive because they are saying that they are better than me. And it’s like... They didn’t have the vote or the power to say that they are more so I think it’s like, a bad thing about the speech. And I think that if I were a white woman I would felt like offensive too because they are like... She’s saying that woman can’t make many things but she didn’t talk about rights of black, of white women. And if I were a black woman I would felt like scared because is different like... if something is saying something that we think is wrong it’s like can get us problems and make us look better.

**S.10. Discussion no. 1, May 16, 2016.**

The student’s remark lets us see she recognized that the interpretation of a text depended on the sort of reader. In this case, the message given by the author could be read and assumed differently depending on the gender and race. The student 10 went on to explain the implications of the speech for men, women, and black women. In either case, she considered the speech was loaded with a heavy message for whoever read it.

The student 10 read the speech from three perspectives. In the first one, she said that Truth's words would have sound belligerent to male as they considered themselves better positioned than us, women. She also recognized that our voices were not taken into account at the time. In the second one, the student placed herself as a white woman seeing the author's speech invasive. White women according to the student were useless because they did not do anything different than staying home; however, the speech does not refer to the white women's rights but rather the lack of rights for the black women who were enslaved. And in the third one, the student placed herself as a black slave, affirming that in that case she would have been terrified by Truth's message.

Critical literacy considers the reader/writer as an active participant, which means the authors are decision makers of the form and content of what they write (McDonald & Thornley, 2009). The following passage taken from the last interview portrays what a student thought of reading/writing practices. For the student 3, the act of writing including her opinion was vital. Moreover, she valued other people's views as much as hers. Without them, her paper would look untrustworthy.

Like one. It's like. It's bound. If you don't have the basis or things to write you can't write about a thing. I'm going to write about... I don't know, like discrimination, what I talked in my paper. But if I don't have my point of view, well, it's not going to be like a paper that other people said, 'Ok. Yeah. That happened. I don't know. It's not only my view but others.

**S.3. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

Similar to the previous example, the extract below shows the importance of including the writer's opinion.

I think in every writing we do we put also a part of us, like what we think. We can change of thinkings like... I thought this at the beginning, but now in searching and everything, now I think this because now I know more. So, I think that we put like... is not always mechanical because we always have to put always something of us in the writings. In the writings I like to put my point of views because that's the idea of the writings.

**S.1. Discussion no. 3, Oct 6, 2016.**

The students 3 and 1 decided to approach writing in a different way, valuing their own views and opinions of what they wrote. Regarding the writer, Williams asserts that the readers can know “what is at stake for him and for the world outside of his lab” (2009, p. 713). This means that writing is more than referring to a topic, it is an act permeated by the many voices, contexts, and situations the writer has experienced (Correa, 2009).

As illustrated above, exploring the world implies assuming clear stances towards a variety of matters and act knowingly. As a social practice, reading and writing surpass the personal context, it covers larger contexts where the individuals can reconstruct the meaning of the same worlds they are reading.

In this chapter, I have explained the findings showing samples from different participants and instruments that answer the research question. In the following chapter, I present the conclusions of the research study and I describe the pedagogical implications of it. I also refer to the limitations of the study and I pose some questions for further research.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

As this research looked into the students' concerns when developing critical literacy practices, the categories that responded to the question, "What do students' critical literacy practices in an EFL classroom inform about their concern for social issues?" were *Becoming a social agent to change my world* and *Experiencing literacy differently*. This means that the students could develop their social agency through the practice of critical literacy, showing meaningful changes for their personal lives and for their individual growth and approaching literacy as a means to discover and rediscover themselves and the reality around them.

To begin with, students generated alternative options for personal change. These strategies went according to their personal features because not everybody decided to take action in the same way. Furthermore, not all the students who participated in the study took action (See Limitations of the study). Nonetheless, the students who did, saw that self-recognition of identity served as a first step to bounce back the issues where they had been involved. It was the students' own initiative to observe closely what had happened to determine what kind of behaviors were the most appropriate to be used as a response. Although their past experiences had been unpleasant and hurtful, the actions chosen were not driven by negative desires of avenging them; rather, the students preferred to choose peaceful but determining ways to resist and manifest. Those experiences became learning opportunities for them. That means, students assumed the problems they had to face positively, and their difficulties gave them the tools to become better people.

In addition, the students determined the reasons why what they had pointed as a critical social issue was of relevance to them and to the people that surrounded them and even to the ones they did not know. Moreover, they were willing to do small simple acts that in their views would not help them in an isolated way but that would have an impact on the people they treated daily. In a hopeful snowball effect, they would someday contribute to the decrease of actions associated with matters such as, bullying, mistreatment, and discrimination, among others.

This occurred thanks to the students' acknowledgment of the existence of these problems in the society they live in and which affected them somehow. In this exploration, students knew themselves better, making them able to recognize the type of people they were, the kind of behaviors they had, and the reasons behind them. This self-discovery and rediscovery gave them the opportunity to understand how they presented themselves to the others, including the values they owned, the expectations they transmitted, and the assumptions they made when they interrelated.

In this process, students de-constructed, constructed, and co-constructed their identity with each other. They showed that as senior students they were decisive not to conform to the norm, which in many cases led to prejudices and unethical behaviors they did not wish to replicate as grown-ups. They explored their personal and social dimensions. In other words, students observed and positioned themselves towards the others in particular settings, such as the school.

Once they located themselves in that context, students established concrete actions to resist or fight the acts of inequality they had suffered. They decided to trust themselves, to speak up their minds and voice their opinions. They started to see themselves and the others differently as explained in Chapter V. This looks particularly relevant to our



Colombian context since more than ever, we are urging young people to be able to look around and act accordingly to what they have established as morally correct.

I believe this positive reaction came from the pedagogical intervention. Along the lessons I highlighted the idea that being critical required the reflection and the day-by-day action towards the social phenomena that surrounded us. Additionally, I reminded the students that what we did should contribute to the welfare of everyone. I mentioned that our actions should not only pretend to pursue the individual benefit but help in the construction of a better society, where justice and the moral responsibility ruled and prevailed. That is why, the guided questions were carefully chosen, including, for instance, the way their behavior would help or affect them and the ones around them (in their family, school, neighborhood, etc.) in their near future. The students were able to foresee them and based on what they expected or wanted for them and the others they made their own decisions.

Pérez (2013) points out that his students could take critical positions by enhancing their personal growth, social awareness, and future social transformation. Pérez' study aimed to look for what students' writings revealed about social awareness when inquiring about physical and verbal aggression in a public school. Besides, Pérez (2013) intended to describe the way this process contributed to the teaching and learning practices in EFL. In that case, students developed sensitivity towards the violence they experienced in their school. Similarly, in the present study students developed their abilities to reflect upon themselves, analyzed the troubling moments they had encountered, and writing about them helped them consider the reactions they had had and the alternative ways to fight them back.

The findings obtained could be explained by the literacy practices students carried out. There may be, however, other benefits for the students. The new forms in which

students developed their literacy practices allowed them to approach knowledge and relate to their realities in several ways. The development of new literacies or multiliteracies was not at the core of the present study. Nonetheless, it was observed that the incorporation of technology helped the students inquire, deepen, and exchange ideas in an easier way by using a variety of sites and a platform. Although they were given specific texts, they were encouraged to search further information in various sources and formats, for instance, videos, infographics, and images. When the students were given the opportunity to check those websites, they inevitably compared the information.

The students also showed progress in the language usage and other linguistic aspects such as connectors, usage of a wider range of vocabulary, use of in-text citations and citing using APA style; however, this was not the aim of the study although it was part of the pedagogical intervention.

The essential aspect of the pedagogical innovation was to guide them, so they could analyze the way the information was presented and developed, making them think about the purposes behind those texts. To do that, I adapted the model of Freebody and Luke (1990) and I also followed the proposal made by Kempe (2001) (See Chapter IV). At that point students started having their own criteria towards the topics and towards the authors of the information.

Therefore, they no longer performed automatic senseless readings or did writing tasks simply to fulfill a requirement. In other words, they ‘lived’ the texts in all possible ways, and they saw in the act of writing, the opportunity to look at who they were, to question how they behaved towards the others and found a place where they were not afraid to voice their opinions and speak their minds. This study established that my students found in the critical literacy practices an incentive to write meaningfully. This also illustrates that

when students were engaged with what was proposed in the classroom, they could put them into practice in other moments, with other people and with other purposes in mind.

All this leads us to the idea that literacy should be promoted among the students as a practice to be performed beyond the classroom. Teachers must go beyond reading and writing practices that intend to homogenize students, which is what traditional literacy seeks. Questions such as true/false, completion, gap filling, multiple choice or exercises to summarize or recall should be used in an initial stage. Nonetheless, activities that ask students for their feelings, opinions, and ideas about the texts should be included. The writing assignments ought to be closely related to the texts and designed to involve the students. These tasks could make them realize they can be themselves while they read and write. This implies a series of changes about planning, instruction, and assessment.

Teaching literacy cannot longer go around language topics or the texts for the sake of them. Literacy and language teaching should be directly linked to the students' lives and realities. In the same way, teachers need to modify the way they evaluate students; they ought to find other tools to measure the performance of students and they have to incorporate other components in the assessing process.

Regarding assessment, besides the summative one, spaces for formative assessment should be opened. This can be done by talking or writing to students and pointing their strengths, weaknesses, and even by asking them why they responded the way they did in the assigned tasks. Although doing this is time-consuming and demanding, it is worthy. When students notice that the teacher pays attention to what they respond, they feel heard, important, and more willing to work. The use of specific rubrics is also helpful, moreover, these can be created with the students, so they know exactly what is expected from them. In

them, language aspects must not be the only ones to be included; traits dealing with content must be also considered.

Finally, a contribution of this study to the field of Critical Literacy in two Languages relies on the importance of the work done by the students at the personal level when regarding social issues. When change is advocated as a way to fight inequity, we usually think of the necessity of acting towards others. However, in the present study inner transformation has proved key in that process. No single outer change takes place if the individual is not capable of realizing the need of changing, starting with the self.

### **Limitations**

During the research process, the limitations had to do mainly with the pedagogical intervention. Unlike other teacher researchers who must apply their planned instructional units for the study at different moments, and in separate periods of class they must teach their assigned syllabus, I had the opportunity to adjust the academic program. Thus, I managed to teach my lessons complying with the requirements of the school regarding the syllabus and simultaneously, I implemented the pedagogical intervention. Nonetheless, I had some setbacks, especially with time management and the use of ICTs.

Time was probably the biggest constraint. As the participants were senior students, they were required to plan, organize, and prepare the Art Show, which is an important institutional event. This show involves the whole community. Teachers and all the students participate in it in one way or another. Even though the total number of students in the school is not high – about 250 from pre-schoolers to seniors, my students were in charge of many tasks. Under the supervision of the head of the Arts Department and with the support of the

Foreign Languages Department, they had to propose the theme for the show, which is usually a musical, write the script, choose, and edit the songs to be sung/and or danced by the other classes and the teachers, and work on the making of the props for the setting. Since the show is performed almost in English with some fragments in French and/or Spanish, from the four periods of class we had weekly, my students spent half the time on it during two of the three terms.

The show was a demanding activity, as a consequence, sometimes they seemed to be more concerned about it than the lessons. They behaved and fulfilled all the tasks and homework given but occasionally, they were absent-minded or anxious or overwhelmed. In some other cases, I had to give them additional homework, especially with the quest for information, otherwise, I would not have been able to assess them in time for the end of the terms. Another task they had to do at home was some of the discussions, which were carried out by using Schoology, which is the platform they used to send their writing assignments.

The other issue was the use of ICTs in the school and at home. Along with the platform, I demanded from my students to use a word processor such as Word, following a general regulation established in the school pedagogical model. The regular and adequate use of technology is one of the dimensions of the students' learning process that must be present in the long and short planning. I realized it became an obstacle for two reasons. Firstly, some of my students were not used to rewriting their papers and saving the different versions; therefore, they found difficult to organize the files when they were writing their essays. I had to help them to keep the versions of the essays they were writing because I asked them to send them to me, so I could check their progress. Secondly, some other students had trouble using Word. Despite they were skillful using the internet and handling online websites, they were not that confident when they had to write their assignments on the PCs. Sometimes they

would spend more time than I had planned because they typed slowly or did not know shortcuts of certain commands. They had to learn how to use a template, how to insert a citation, references, and use other tools they were unfamiliar with.

Another limitation was the fact that not all the participants got involved as actively as I expected in the pedagogical intervention. Therefore, few of them did not have the changes I would have wanted, and which is mentioned in Chapter V. However, all my students showed progress in the writing of essays, which was the main learning objective proposed.

### **Further research**

Bearing in mind the findings obtained in the present study, I consider it would be worthy to do further research posing the following questions:

- How are critical literacy practices done in EFL evident in other content areas taught in English?
- How does the use of ICTs influence the development of literacy?

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Questionnaire.

Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Read the questions below and answer according to your personal experience.

Why do you study English?

- To get better marks at school -----
- To pass an examination in English -----
- To speak to foreign people -----
- To understand songs in English -----
- To understand films or TV programs in English -----
- To understand books, magazines, etc. in English -----
- To study abroad when I leave school -----
- To find a good job -----
- Because I enjoy learning English -----
- I don't know why I'm learning English -----
- My parents want me to -----
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Which area(s) of English is/are the biggest problem for you? (The lower the number, the bigger the problem)

- Listening -----  Reading -----
- Speaking -----  Writing -----

How do you feel about each of the following? Explain why.

Listening  Excellent  Very good  Good  Indifferent  Bad

Why?

---

Speaking  Excellent  Very good  Good  Indifferent  Bad  
 Why?

Reading  Excellent  Very good  Good  Indifferent  Bad  
 Why?

Writing  Excellent  Very good  Good  Indifferent  Bad  
 Why?

**How easy-difficult do you find the following texts to read/write?** Tick the option for each case.

	EASY	RELATIVELY EASY	RELATIVELY DIFFICULT	DIFFICULT
articles -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
blog entries -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
brochures -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
emails -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
essays -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
forum posts -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
journal entries -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
letters -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
poems -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
reviews -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
stories -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
news -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify) -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**How useful-useless are the following texts to learn to read/write?** Tick the option for each case.

	USEFUL		RELATIVELY USEFUL		RELATIVELY USELESS		USELESS
articles -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
blog entries -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
brochures -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
emails -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
essays -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
forum posts -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
journal entries -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
letters -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
poems -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
reviews -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
stories -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
news -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify) -----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>	-----	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Appendix 2. Consent form.**

Chía, 18 mayo de 2016

Querida familia \_\_\_\_\_:

Como Coordinadora del Área de Idiomas Extranjeros y docente de inglés, estoy muy interesada en indagar sobre las prácticas de escritura específicamente la de ensayos argumentativos de su hija \_\_\_\_\_ pues como ustedes saben ha sido una preocupación permanente del colegio. Por eso les solicito amablemente su autorización para documentar dicho proceso y me permitan hacer una revisión sistemática de los trabajos y procesos de su hija con respecto a la escritura de dichos ensayos, incluyendo el análisis de sus aportes en discusiones y debates. Por razones éticas la identidad de \_\_\_\_\_ será protegida haciendo uso de seudónimos, además la información recolectada será confidencial y utilizada con fines netamente investigativos.

La información que brinde \_\_\_\_\_ será de gran valor para entender el tipo de prácticas que se llevan a cabo dentro y fuera del aula y que aportan al proceso de escritura. Espero que su hija sea la primera beneficiada de este estudio pues las actividades realizadas le dará las herramientas para fortalecer este proceso de tal manera que se sienta más preparada para enfrentar una escritura académica en la universidad. Como resultado de esta indagación pretendo escribir una tesis de maestría en Lingüística Aplicada para la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, documento que espero aporte asimismo al quehacer metodológico que se planea y desarrolla en el colegio.

Su firma en la parte de abajo indica que autorizan la participación de \_\_\_\_\_ en este estudio. Cualquier duda o pregunta que tengan al respecto no duden en contactarme a través de la agenda o correo electrónico.

De antemano muchas gracias por su colaboración.

Cordialmente,

Liliana María Gil Cipagauta  
Coordinadora CIE  
Trinidad del Monte  
School of the Sacred Heart

-----  
Autorizamos la participación de nuestra hija \_\_\_\_\_  
en el estudio sobre Escritura de Ensayos Argumentativos.

Nombre de los padres: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de los padres: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3. Webquest. The argumentative essay.**


zunal.com Home Browse Help Questions Login Register

WebQuest

# The Argumentative Essay

Add to Favorites

Welcome



**Welcome:** The Argumentative Essay  
**Description:** This webquest was designed to help you understand the purpose, features and structure of an argumentative essay.  
**Grade Level:** 9-12  
**Curriculum:** Foreign Language  
**Keywords:** argumentative essay, thesis statement, points of view, evidence  
**Author(s):** [Liliana Gil](#)

**Process**

Work with a partner. Visit the sites below, read or listen to the information and do the corresponding tasks.

Create a PPT and insert the responses to the tasks in different slides.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/>

<http://homeworktips.about.com/od/essaywriting/a/argument.htm>

<https://www.kibin.com/essay-writing-blog/argumentative-essay-outline/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAmgEa1B1vI>

1. What is an argumentative essay and what is its purpose?

Write your answer in your own words and make it as brief and complete as possible.

2. What's the structure of an argumentative essay?

Make a table to show its parts and what it should be included in each one.

3. What is a thesis statement? Record your answer.

4. What kind of evidence can be used to support your arguments? Insert images as a response.

5. Design at least two outlines to illustrate the way you could present the information in the body.

6. Upload your ppt on the padlet wall.

Appendix 4. Kahoot quiz to check comprehension of text.

**New K!** My Kahoots Find Kahoots FAQ Support lilihill **Kahoot!**

[← Back](#)

### All About The Olympic Games [Edit](#)

#History of the Olympics

[Play ▶](#) [Challenge 🏆](#)

Challenges are coming soon! [Learn more about it.](#)

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[f](#) [🐦](#) [📌](#) [g+](#) [✉](#)

Or, copy & share this link: <https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/f9919ae3-b86a-41d8-a11b-a5ffa3cebf93>

Type: Quiz Visibility: Public Created: 11 months ago By: lilihill Audience: School Language: English

<b>9</b> Questions	<b>5</b> Plays	<b>54</b> Players	<b>0</b> Favorites	<b>0</b> Shares
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### Questions [Hide ALL answers](#)

 1. Where were the first Olympic Games? [Hide answers](#)

[▲ 776 BC](#) [◆ Olympia](#)  [● Athens](#) [■ 396 AD](#)

**20**  
Seconds **4**  
Choices



2. Who could participate in the Ancient Games? [Hide answers](#)

- Handsome athletic men.
- Men who did many sports.
- Young free men who spoke Greek.
- Experienced men.

20 Seconds 4 Choices



3. What about women in the Ancient Games? [Hide answers](#)

- They ran after their husbands.
- They had to oiled their men.
- They prayed for their husbands.
- They couldn't participate.

20 Seconds 4 Choices



4. Why did Coubertin think of the Modern Games? [Hide answers](#)

- Because he liked sports.
- Because he had money.
- Because he spoke many languages.
- Because he had a Greek wife.

20 Seconds 4 Choices



5. When and where were the first Modern Games? [Hide answers](#)

- Paris, 1984
- Bern, 1683
- Athens, 1896
- Rome, 1894

20 Seconds 4 Choices



6. Why couldn't women compete in the beginning? [Hide answers](#)

- Because they were not good athletes.
- Because they couldn't show their bodies.
- Because they didn't like sports.
- Because men could hurt them.

20 Seconds 4 Choices



7. Which languages must members of the IOC speak? [Hide answers](#)

- English and French.
- English, French and German.
- French or English. ✓
- English and German.

20  
Seconds

4  
Choices



8. What is an Olympiad? [Hide answers](#)

- The place of origin of the Games.
- The most difficult sport.
- The set of rules of the Games.
- The four-year period. ✓

20  
Seconds

4  
Choices



9. What do the rings in the emblem represent? [Hide answers](#)

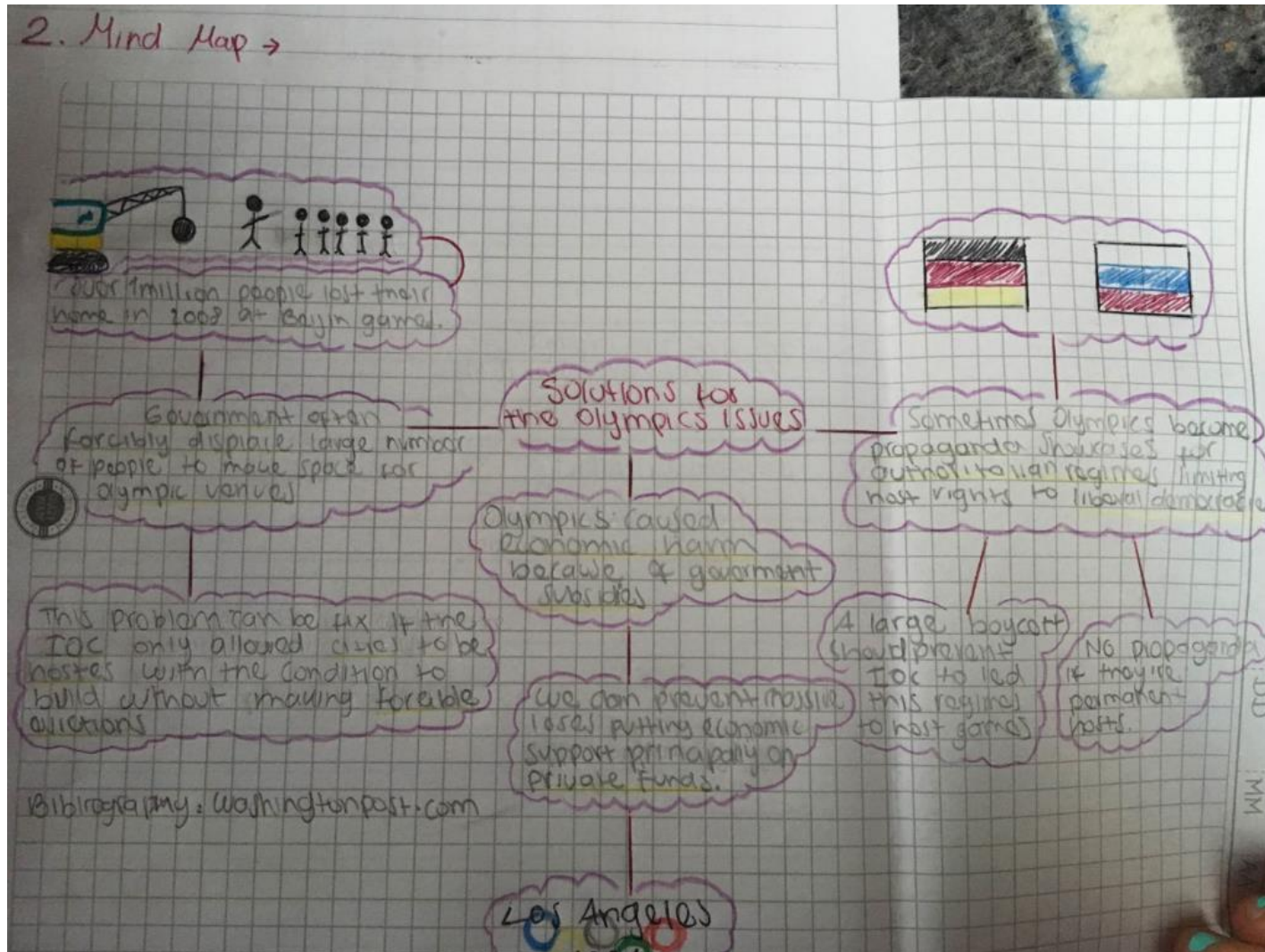
- The original number of sports.
- The LGBTI sportspeople.
- The five continents. ✓
- The original number of participating countries.

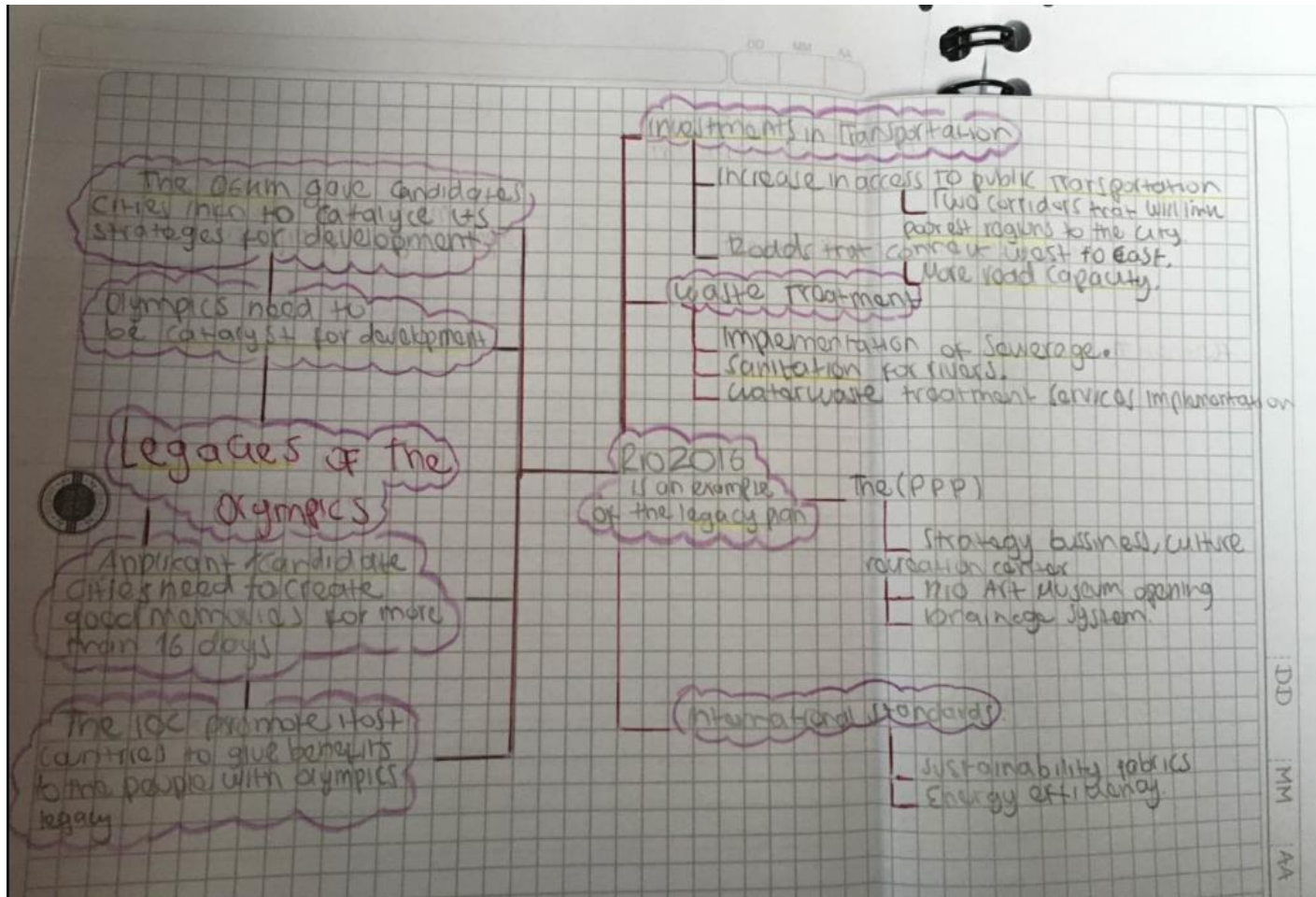
20  
Seconds

4  
Choices



Appendix 5. Mind maps of the readings assigned. Factsheet and article news.



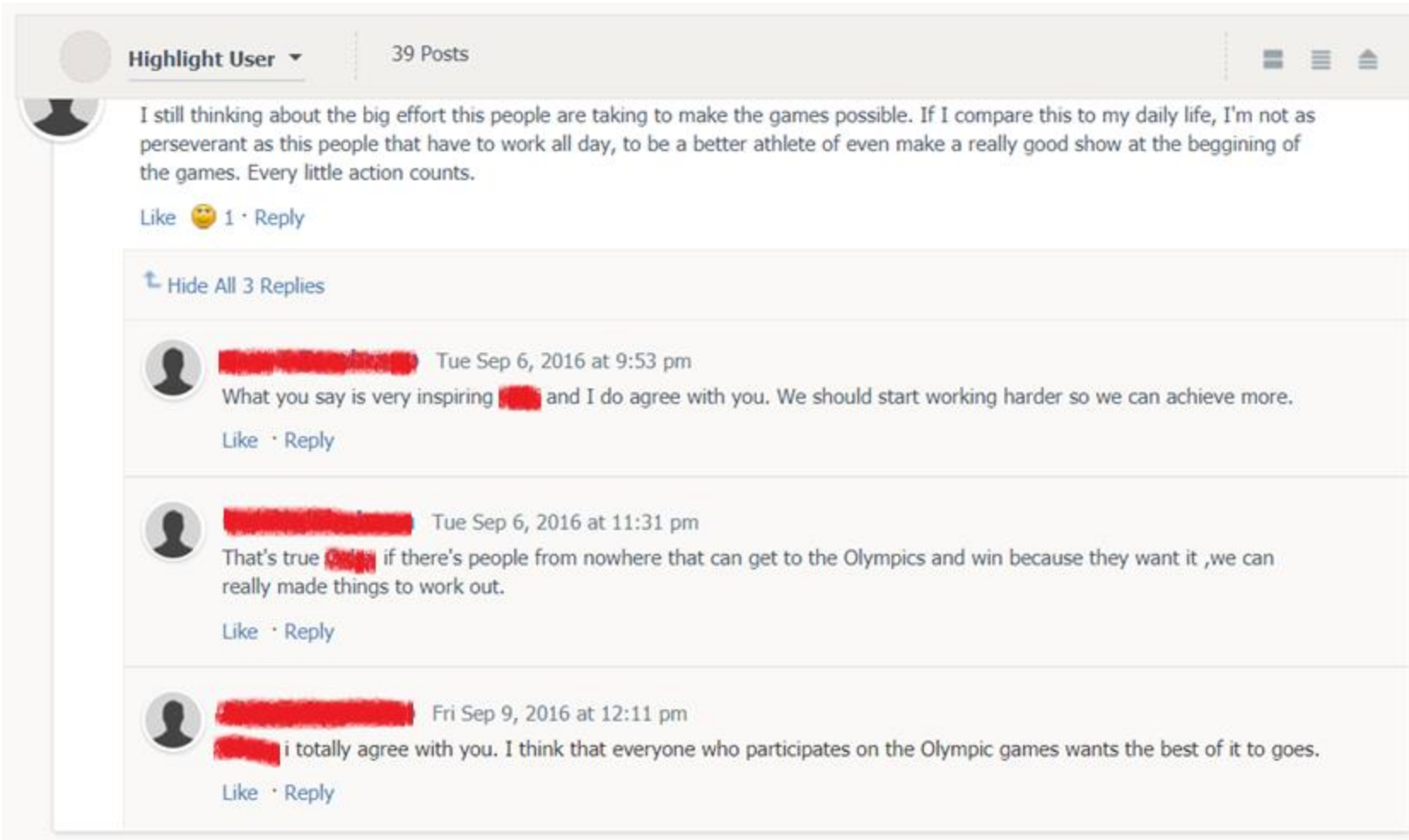




**Appendix 6. Double-entry journal.**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Quotes taken from the article news</b>	<b>My comments could be about ...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How do these words make me feel? (Explain)</b></li> <li>• <b>What do these make me think? (Explain)</b></li> <li>• <b>Do I relate these words with some sort of experience? Personal or from others? (Describe)</b></li> </ul>
1	<p>“<a href="#">Over 1 million people</a> lost their homes for the 2008 Beijing games alone. Brazil has similarly evicted large numbers of people for <a href="#">the currently ongoing Rio Olympics</a>.”</p>	<p>Its supposed that there’s a comittee that ensures that the displaces of people shouldn’t happen so we can get to think that Olympic committee is full of corruption.</p>
2	<p>“instead of rotating to a new city every four years, the summer and winter Olympics <a href="#">can each be held at a permanent host site</a>.”</p>	<p>The reading saids that a permanent host city can really be the solution of the econimic harm and political propaganda but I have the idea that the Olympics arent in a permanent city because is an oportunity to the country of showing what beautiful and diferent culture are from the rest.</p> <p>In the other hand it would be better to have permanent host cities because only those countries that are capacitated would envest only in restaurations and there wouln’t be a chance another uncapacitaded country repeat the mistakes.</p>
3	<p>“If the IOC again awards the games to authoritarians, the West <a href="#">should boycott</a>.”</p>	<p>When I read that authoritarians host contries sometime used propaganda to show their government is better than other, represing liberal democracy I think that our wolrd is too contaminated with power ambition because its unbelievable that political believes are trying to be imposed and Olympics aren’t a matter of politics is a matter of unification with out the importance of religión,color, or polical believe.</p>

**Appendix 7. On-board discussion on platform Schoology.**



The screenshot shows a discussion thread on the Schoology platform. At the top, there is a header with a 'Highlight User' dropdown menu, a '39 Posts' indicator, and navigation icons. The main post is by a user with a black profile picture and contains the following text: 'I still thinking about the big effort this people are taking to make the games possible. If I compare this to my daily life, I'm not as perseverant as this people that have to work all day, to be a better athlete of even make a really good show at the beggining of the games. Every little action counts.' Below the main post are three replies, each with a redacted profile picture and name. The first reply is dated 'Tue Sep 6, 2016 at 9:53 pm' and says 'What you say is very inspiring [redacted] and I do agree with you. We should start working harder so we can achieve more.' The second reply is dated 'Tue Sep 6, 2016 at 11:31 pm' and says 'That's true [redacted] if there's people from nowhere that can get to the Olympics and win because they want it ,we can really made things to work out.' The third reply is dated 'Fri Sep 9, 2016 at 12:11 pm' and says '[redacted] i totally agree with you. I think that everyone who participates on the Olympic games wants the best of it to goes.' Each reply includes 'Like' and 'Reply' options. A 'Hide All 3 Replies' button is also visible above the first reply.

Highlight User ▾ 39 Posts

I still thinking about the big effort this people are taking to make the games possible. If I compare this to my daily life, I'm not as perseverant as this people that have to work all day, to be a better athlete of even make a really good show at the beggining of the games. Every little action counts.

Like 😊 1 · Reply

Hide All 3 Replies

[Redacted] Tue Sep 6, 2016 at 9:53 pm  
What you say is very inspiring [redacted] and I do agree with you. We should start working harder so we can achieve more.  
Like · Reply

[Redacted] Tue Sep 6, 2016 at 11:31 pm  
That's true [redacted] if there's people from nowhere that can get to the Olympics and win because they want it ,we can really made things to work out.  
Like · Reply

[Redacted] Fri Sep 9, 2016 at 12:11 pm  
[redacted] i totally agree with you. I think that everyone who participates on the Olympic games wants the best of it to goes.  
Like · Reply

Appendix 8. A student's draft and peer's feedback.

**Importance of school**

→ Think of a more interesting title, and that goes more with the principal idea of the text.

It can sound better like *When you are a baby your parents...*

When a person is Little the parents are the ones who <sup>takes your</sup> ~~makes~~ decisions, however <sup>IF</sup> they affect the child, the consequences are going to be solved by them. <sup>FOR</sup> As the person grows what they gain ~~is~~ independency and responsibility [so that they don't have to be dependent of someone and learn to solve problems by themselves] <sup>be</sup> as we do this we have to ~~make~~ more informed decisions and have in account all the aspects this decisions has. *In the future, there are many ways of independency: be more specific*

As we grow up we become more critical about the information we are told every day and we start creating our own opinion of the situations that occur in the daily bases, we go to a process to school. this is what we are thought and trained to do. *↳ you could go deeper. How where you trained through your life?*

As my personal case the biggest change I have seen in my self is that I got the ability of being <sup>very</sup> more critical about my everyday life and I started questioning things <sup>like</sup> as important <sup>as</sup> how my country works... *↳ More examples*

One thing that the school thought me was to be conscience about the others, now I try to include in <sup>as I want</sup> ~~desertions~~ the others and think of the consequences this decisions has. *↳ Like when or how?*

By watching the news we can see a lot of times how the owners of this can change information in their reports for a personal reason or an economic reason, we as the ones that watch have to be informed to catch how much of that information is true. *↳ not very clear*

Another big example of this is how when something happens I learned to say if a do not agree and defend my point of view by arguments, speaking up is really important to my growth and my person because it has helped me not to stay in my comfort zone

*These are similar, try to relate them*

When you speak up and see what is wrong in society you can try to make a change and do something for solving that problem. it doesn't matter what I study I still will have in account

all the values I learned in school and will stand up at university or work because is something people have lost and is very valuable.

The most important thing I learned in school and that I've changed in time is to speak up, to question and to be critical so that in that way I can help to make a change and to contribute to the world, by standing up for injustice and trying to make a change.

↓ how?

- How did the school helped you?
  - Which situations helped you to learn?
  - Is this new learning related with what you want to study, who? how
  - Remember that when you were little you used to speak very softly. How have this changed?
  - There is needed more relation between the introduction and what you have learned.
  - A conclusion may be more deep, in that way the reader may keep thinking on your text.
- 
- You have clear the ~~way~~ <sup>idea</sup> but it doesn't seem so clear at the begging, work on it.
  - You have <sup>very</sup> similar ideas in some 'arguments' try to relate them.
  - Be more expresive and deep in the conclusion.
    - ↳ What does it mean to you?
    - ↳ How do you feel?

**Appendix 9. A student's sample essay.****Changing decisions**

As time passes, people grow and the way they act, think and view things start changing. In my case, one of the things I changed most is the way of thinking by myself and making my own choices. When I was younger, without asking anything, I just followed the roles that the other people wanted me to do. Now, I have my own opinions and based on them, I make my own decisions assuming the responsibility of them and learning from the bad results that they bring to my life. When I started growing I began to ask myself why the other people wanted me to do the things they say. Like black people did when they started fighting for their freedom in the United States of America causing a Civil War in 1861 with the north part of the country against the southern part (J. McPherson, 2014).

Frederick Douglass which was a slave, started learning how to read. When this happened, he asked himself why he couldn't be free and had his own life making his own decisions like when he started sharing with other people his opinion about freedom and racism each time even louder (F. Douglass, 2009).

In my case, I think I started when my responsibility at home and at school doing my homework, and when I didn't do it, I needed to respond for my mistake being honest. Now I'm able to take responsibility from my actions like my responsibilities at home, at school and with other people, as Douglass did during the United States of America Civil War in 1861. Bringing as a consequence pain and suffer but at the end of it was liberty, freedom and peace (J. McPherson, 2014)

At one point I just wanted to be free and make my own choices, but sometimes those decisions that we believe are going to be the best for us, turn out worse than we expect. But at the end of the experience you just go through it, and you end up learning from it. For example at one point of my life, I felt uncomfortable and unhappy where I was, I mean, I wasn't happy in the school I was, so I decided to go to another school with the hope that the choice I made was the best for my life and my future. But when I finally changed the school I realized that the decision I made, wasn't good at all, so I came back to my first school I am very happy making the decision of coming back. In the end, I realized that the experience that I lived in that school, wasn't as bad as I thought because I learned many things from it and by that decision.

I have changed many things for my own good. I think it is also like a process that you need to pass through when you are growing up to finally become a better person; like the women rights, that they fought for they role on society. They didn't have any rights and their role in society was to be in charge of the work at home and take care of their husbands and Children (Suffraget. 2015). They started questioning why they couldn't do what men did. They were capable of everything and they wanted to show it to the world. So they started fighting for their rights and during the process they suffered physically and mental as white people torture them. But the point is that they made the decision to continue fighting for it and in the end they did it.

I just want to say that every decision that we make counts, because even though the intention of it is good or bad, you will learn. From it and based on that experience, you will become more prepared to make even harder decisions even harder what I am going to study and in which university I am going to do it, or how I am going to react when I'm passing through a difficult situation, and this way I will become a better person. Because everything is a process and sometimes to be better, you need to learn unfortunately in a bad way, based on bad experiences. But in the end of it, the decisions that we make will be better for our own good and little by little we are going to be able to make our own choices and be more independent and responsible for the actions we make.

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