

A Language-in-Use Study of EFL Students' Social Discourses in Project-Based Learning

Estudio de discursos sociales de estudiantes de inglés en el aprendizaje por proyectos

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Abstract

This article is based on a qualitative research study that was conducted to explore students' discourses as citizens in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course. A pedagogical intervention was proposed in order to bridge the existing gap. The instructional design consisted of PBL sessions with a coeducational group of eighteen undergraduate students, who worked collaboratively to discuss social issues while studying the target language (TL). Student artifacts, transcriptions of project oral reports, and a conference with the participants were used to gather the data. Following a discourse analysis approach, three main discourses were identified to show the learners' social representations, their critical stand on topical issues, and their interest in social transformations. Overall, the findings suggest that the students' views of social reality are diverse, contradictory, and changing, and that the EFL class can become a site for citizenship education when the TL is presented as a tool to facilitate self-expression and critical reflection.

Keywords: EFL learning/teaching, situated learning practices, project-based learning, social discourses, discourse analysis, citizenship education.

Resumen

Este artículo está basado en un estudio cualitativo realizado para promover prácticas de aprendizaje situacional y explorar los discursos de los estudiantes como ciudadanos en un curso de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE). El análisis de necesidades reveló una inconsistencia entre la misión de la universidad de educar profesionales con conciencia social y ciudadanos competentes y el enfoque de las prácticas de enseñanza de ILE. En respuesta, se propuso una intervención pedagógica para llenar el vacío existente. El diseño instruccional consistió en sesiones de ApP con un grupo mixto de dieciocho estudiantes de pregrado, quienes trabajaron colaborativamente para discutir temáticas sociales al tiempo que estudiaban la lengua inglesa. Se utilizaron artefactos de los estudiantes, transcripciones de los reportes orales del proyecto y una conferencia con los participantes para recoger los datos. Siguiendo un enfoque de análisis discursivo, tres discursos principales fueron identificados para dar cuenta de las representaciones sociales de los aprendices, su punto de vista crítico frente a problemas sociales y su interés en las transformaciones sociales. En general, los hallazgos sugieren que los estudiantes ven la realidad social de formas diversas, contradictorias y cambiantes y que el aula de ILE puede convertirse en un lugar para la educación ciudadana cuando la lengua extranjera se presenta como una herramienta que facilita la expresión y la reflexión crítica.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza/ Aprendizaje del ILE, prácticas de aprendizaje situacional, aprendizaje por proyectos, discursos sociales, análisis del discurso, educación ciudadana.



Introduction

As teachers, we may often face pedagogical situations that encourage us to do research both inside and outside the classroom with the purpose of understanding, improving and/or transforming teaching and learning practices. Personally, I found myself wondering how I could help my students to become socially aware citizens and, at the same time, enhance their communicative skills in English, as it was expected at my workplace. The answer to this and other related questions, as well as the process to find those answers, are summarized in this article which condenses the characteristics, implications and results of a qualitative research study aimed at analyzing a group of EFL students' discourses as citizens in PBL activities, a pedagogical strategy to help learners develop both communication and citizenship competencies.

It is my contention that the classroom is not just a site where lessons take place, but an inclusive learning environment in which interaction and negotiation ought to permit the social construction of knowledge and the ensuing building of society. As Norton & Toohy (2004) suggest, the teaching-learning process is a situated social practice (i.e. it is planned and carried out taking into account the context where it takes place) which goes beyond studying a content area in isolation. As Clover (2006) affirms, we require educational processes that incorporate and allow for more creative ways to see, understand, and respond to cultural and social issues. The EFL classroom should also provide learners with tools to comprehend and value their own and other foreign cultures. Accordingly, I proposed a pedagogical intervention in which the participants' social concerns and their desire to use the TL to discuss real-life situations were the basis to engage them in situated language learning tasks.

The research proposal resulted from a needs analysis process that included a questionnaire to know about students' prior learning EFL experience at the university and a revision of institutional documents to better understand how teaching and learning were conceived at my workplace. A major finding was the strong emphasis on the influence of the social context in the professional training process. Both the students and the documents talked about addressing issues in today's world as a strategy to develop the competencies to contribute with the Colombian society (Fundación Universitaria, 2007). Yet, the learners' descriptions of their prior EFL courses revealed that some methodological changes were necessary to make their expectations and the institutional goals match. I saw this situation as an opportunity to do things differently in my own classroom, so I decided to pose the research questions below to address the needs detected:

- What discourses on social issues are revealed in EFL university students' projects that promote citizenship competencies?

In view of the aforesaid, the first part of this article summarizes the theoretical ground of the project and the instructional design used to guide a group of undergraduates in the development of class projects focused on the analysis of social issues – also referred to as “social problems” (Johnson, 2005), “controversial issues” (Oxfam, 2006), “real-life problems” (Gulbahar & Tinmaz, 2006), and/or “topical issues” (Tarasheva, 2008). Afterward, the methodology elucidates how Gee's (1999, 2004) “language-in-use” discourse analysis approach was followed to draw the findings and to show the students' social representations, their critical stand on social issues, and their interest in making transformations. Overall, this is a narrative account of a teaching-research experience in which learners were viewed as agents in the social construction of knowledge and the TL was the



tool for, rather than the sole goal of the learning process.

Theoretical Framework

... It is of paramount importance to make teachers, in Colombia and the world, aware of the potential impact of their work in educating citizens whose universe of obligation needs to expand towards using language as a resource, to bring themselves and others close to the realisation of peace.

(Revelo-Jimenez, 2008, p. 33)

Social Issues: Learning the Language through the Language

My study intended to shed light on the discourses that are co-constructed when students talk about problematic situations in their local context and on the linguistic tools they employ to share those discourses. In order to understand the inclusion of social issues as a key concept, it is pertinent to explain that language was viewed as “a complex social practice [...] in which learners are not only learning a linguistic system [but also] a diverse set of sociocultural practices, often best understood in the context of wider relations of power” (Norton and Toohey, 2002, p. 115). Rather than studying a set of cognitively defined rules in isolation, the language learning process should be situated to make communication possible among the members of a community because “the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and the acquisition of sociocultural knowledge are interdependent” (Ochs, 1988, p. 14). In my classroom, the “acquisition” (or learning) of the TL was mediated by class projects that allowed students to discuss self-appointed social problems as a way to enhance their communicative and citizenship skills in the EFL class.

The discussion of social issues was thus an attempt to engage learners in activities that would encourage them to use the TL to place themselves

as analysts of real-life situations. According to Hulbert & Totten (1992), social issues are those complex problems, sometimes controversial, that a society faces and whose cause and/or solution is not clearly defined. Oxfam (2006) adds to this idea by stating that sensitive or controversial issues are those that have an impact, at a local or global level, on political, social or personal spheres and which provoke questions of value or belief. The above mentioned authors provide theory-based arguments to support the inclusion of these topics in the curriculum. Nonetheless, it is important to look at the experiences of teachers who have accepted such a challenge to understand the potential implications of this pedagogical proposal in the students’ development of cognitive, linguistic, and interpersonal skills.

At the local level, Mendieta (2009) developed a study in which the English classes “became an excuse to start posing issues that affect young girls and women around the world” (p. 124). (Using an inquiry-based approach, she carried out a project with a group of advanced female seventh graders to enhance language learning while promoting the co-construction of knowledge around discrimination and violence against women. In general, the author acknowledges the positive impact of her engaging students in tasks in which the TL was not just the aim but the means to boost learning. Furthermore, she states that issues outside the classroom should not be overlooked in our classes for they can contribute to the social construction of knowledge in unexpected ways, regardless of our students’ proficiency level in English.

At the international level, but within the same line of research, Lopez-Robertson (2010) reports on the experience of five young Latinas discussing critical social issues in a bilingual second grade classroom in the United States. In an attempt to position her Latino students as valued members



of the school community and prepare them to deal with social problems inside and outside the classroom, the teacher-researcher conducted and analyzed contextualized based discussions to give an account of the girls' capacity to relate the class topics to their own life experiences. As in Mendieta's study, Lopez-Robertson's findings suggest that a socially-constructed and contextually-based curriculum can contest social inequities. The authors concur that language learning practices can enhance linguistic as well as social skills.

Drawing on the ideas and individual experiences of the abovementioned authors, I was able to conceptualize social issues as complex situations that affect the way in which individuals from a community relate to each other and to their shared environment, and which are likely to generate discussion about their potential causes and solutions. As stated by Oxfam (2006), exploring social issues enhances more situated pedagogical practices. Yet, we need to be aware that "facilitating productive discussions about divisive issues is one of the most challenging tasks that college educators face" (Ezzedeen, 2008, p. 230). Despite the anticipated challenges, I strove to give my students the chance to learn English and to use this foreign language to learn about their social environment. It was a demanding process, but gradually they began to feel more comfortable to share their *discourses* with their peers, discourses that I decided to observe in the light of theory and research-based principles.

Discourse(s) as Students' Representations of Reality

The manifestations of our thoughts, feelings, and needs in a specific context and for particular purposes reveal how we see and relate to the world surrounding us. *Discourses* are "ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes,

and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (Gee, 1989, p. 6-7). The multiple social situations in which those discourses are co-constructed have a profound impact on the way individuals act, think and represent reality. In the classroom, the analysis of discursive practices offers new possibilities to explore situations in which language mediates social interaction and to understand how realities are constituted and how learners make sense of the world (Sunderland, 2004). We talk about discourses to mean practices that are not independently but historically and socially constituted, which shape people and can only exist in social interaction in specific situations (Talbot, 1998).

The EFL classroom is one of the formal settings where interaction, negotiation, and/or socialization processes occur and learners are expected to participate actively in them. If we educators distance ourselves from traditional teacher-centered approaches and aim to help our students to become agents in their learning process, we need to know and value their different "ways of being in the world". In this study, Discourses are seen as 'meaning-full' (intentional) acts resulting from both our need to communicate and our understanding of the way the world functions. Bearing that concept in mind, I decided to observe how the participants were using the TL to take up different societal discourses and present themselves as members of a community affected by different problems. At that moment, the concepts of 'citizenship education' (CE) and 'citizenship competencies' (CCs) became focal points in the examination of the data.

Citizenship Education to Enhance Socially Situated EFL Learning Practices

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the main objectives at my workplace was to educate socially aware professionals and citizens with



high critical thinking and social skills. Although I had been working at the same college for over two years when the study began, I decided to revise key concepts contained in the mission of the university to make sure that the teaching intervention I had proposed was consistent with the institutional goals.

According to Rodríguez, Ruiz & Guerra (2007), instead of having a lecture on civics at school, each class should open a space for introspection and discussion to foster students' citizenship competencies. Citizens need to take responsibility for themselves and their communities, but training is necessary as ordinary experience is not enough to prepare them to face the challenges of today's world. There is a need to incorporate CE into the teaching and learning processes in any field of study in order to contribute to the construction of a better society. The realization of this type of learning practices is still a challenge that educators are called to take in their lessons.

The Colombian National Ministry of Education (M.E.N, as abbreviated in Spanish), asserts that CE in our country seems to be taken for granted and has not been considered to be developed across the curriculum. Huddleston & Kerr (2006) add to this idea by stating that citizens need to be willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities, but training is necessary as ordinary experience is not enough to prepare them to face the challenges of today's world. In response to that phenomenon, the M.E.N (2004) has proposed a typology for CCs in an official document entitled "*Estándares de Competencias Ciudadanas*" (The Standards, hereafter), as well as some criteria to assess those competencies with students from elementary, middle, and high school. It is said that being a citizen involves, among other skills, respecting other people's rights, favoring collective over individual welfare, and participating actively and

responsibly in social processes (Mockus, 2004).

In a nutshell, there is a direct relationship between the learning practices that take place in a formal educational setting and the inclusion of CE. If learning is viewed as a social practice, neither subject-based skills nor CCs must be disregarded. As an EFL teacher-researcher interested in having situated learning practices (Norton & Toohey, 2004), I took into account both the principles of PBL and the typology suggested by the M.E.N (2004) as a framework to choose the focal citizenship and linguistic skills in the development of the project. These criteria were helpful to have a clearer idea about both the types of activities needed to enhance and, later on, examine my students' communicative skills and CCs. Rather than judging the participants' beliefs, my intention having a typology was to account for the moments in which they positioned themselves as members of society. With these specifications in mind, below I describe the instructional design that made it possible to move from theory to practice.

Pedagogical Intervention

Most of the learners manifested their interest in developing a class project focused on the analysis of social issues during the needs analysis stage, thus I endeavored to propose innovative PBL activities to make that happen. As Stoller (2002) asserts, PBL is "a versatile vehicle for fully integrated language and content learning [...] in a variety of instructional settings" (p. 109). It is a learner-centered teaching approach that can be adapted to the level and content of the class, so there are more chances for students to give opinions, make decisions and engage more actively in different activities that are traditionally defined by the teacher (Bas, 2008).

Briefly, the pedagogical intervention consisted of twelve project-based lessons (See Appendix), which provided students with new



tools to communicate in the TL and to learn with and from peers by means of discussions, oral presentations, and written workshops. The class project was an excuse to read, write, and talk about *drug abuse, domestic violence, kidnapping, children's addiction to video games, and antisocial behavior in public places*. After selecting their research topic, the students agreed on presenting the final results of their project to their peers in the form of a short radio program in English. It was a participatory planning process in which the whole class had a say in the tasks proposed for the entire PBL experience.

My goal was to have activities that valued students' background knowledge and encouraged them to use the TL to explore their social environment, under the idea that "language and content need to be articulated in order to promote meaningful cross-disciplinary communication among language learners" (Dlaska, 2003, p. 103). Although the whole set of lessons were planned in advance, it was necessary to make some changes to the initial plan in order to adjust it to the "emerging" needs and the time availability we had. Nevertheless, the changes were consistent with the initial proposal and carefully made to optimize the progress and final results of the project. Altogether, this was a challenging, innovative, and enriching pedagogical experience for the students and for me as a language educator. In what follows I synthesize the steps followed to draw the findings and the main results of the research study.

Methodology

Research Participants & Setting

The study was framed within the qualitative paradigm of educational research and a discursive approach was used to describe "the complex and dynamic relationships among discourse, social practices, and learning" (Gee, 1989, p. 119).

The participants were a coeducational group of seventeen undergraduate students from different majors (psychology, engineering and graphic design) whose ages ranged between 17 and 20 years, and who had taken two other English courses at the university by the time the study began.

Data Analysis: Gee's 'Language-in-Use' Approach to Discourse Analysis

The data gathering and the preliminary data analysis occurred in the midst of teaching. Student artifacts, transcriptions of students' project oral reports, and a conference with the members of each project-based group were the tools selected to obtain the data and answer the research questions. Progressively, I became interested in examining how different societal discourses were unveiled and how the participants saw themselves as members of a community affected by different problems. In addition, I decided to pay attention to the social skills evidenced in those discursive practices to see if what we were doing in class would bridge the initial gap between the university's intention to educate critical citizens and the EFL lessons.

Gee (1999, 2005) talks about the analysis of discourse, with a lower case "d", and Discourse, with a capital "D", to distinguish between a mere linguistic and a sociolinguistic study of how language is used to enact activities and identities in situ. I used Gee's approach to deconstruct the students' Discourses (although I did not make a spelling distinction) and to understand how their opinions, beliefs, concerns, critiques, etc. about social issues revealed their identities as citizens. Broadly, the 'language-in-use approach' is a two-way process that involves a movement from context to language and from language to context to observe how discursive practices are constructed.

As suggested by the author, any DA starts by selecting an extended piece of data that



illuminates an important issue or question. Having chosen that “raw material”, we begin asking questions about how language simultaneously reflects and constructs reality at a given time and place, a property of language that Gee refers to as *reflexivity*. The next step involves describing seven building tasks (i.e. Significance, Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics, Connections, and Sign systems and knowledge) to analyze the contexts in which language is put to use to construe situations in a particular way. For the sake of the data analysis, I used that list of tasks and questions to focus on specific discursive elements when I started reading the data. Later on, I narrowed down the analysis by using another element in Gee’s model: The *tools of inquiry*.

Gee provides a list of aspects to focus on during the analysis of specific instances of language in use, namely: situated meanings, social languages, Discourse models, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations.

In order to understand more clearly the working of those tools, I took into account Van Sluys, Lewison and Flint (2006)’s DA proposal; a model that uses some elements from Gee’s (2005) model and proposes some focal questions to discover

how socially situated identities and activities are constructed during conversation. By combining Gee’s and Van Sluys et al.’s DA approaches, I created the matrix below to systematize my interpretation of students’ discourses prior to identifying the categories (salient discourses).

Each research instrument was carefully read to write a detailed description of the syntactic and semantic composition of written and spoken data. Afterward, an interpretative analysis of the discursive elements of those excerpts was the key to answer, first, the guiding questions in the matrix and, subsequently, the main questions addressed in this study. At the descriptive level, I focused on explaining the structure and the meaning of some words and phrases in the context in which they were produced and I also described the speech acts and linguistic choices of the participants. At the interpretive level, on the other hand, I examined the same excerpts from a more critical stance to identify recurrent and salient themes that contained potential information about my students’ social discourses and citizenship competencies.

Tools of Inquiry for DA based on Gee's (2005) & Van Sluys et al.'s (2006) Proposal					
What discourses on social issues are revealed in EFL university students' PBL activities?					
What do those students' discourses tell us about the EFL classroom as a site for citizenship education?					
<u>Research instrument:</u>					
Participant's Name	Excerpts from the data	Situated Meanings	Social Languages	Cultural (Discourse) Models	Situated Identities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key words or phrases? • What do particular words mean in this context? • What do these words mean in this time and place? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the grammar and function of this language? • What type of person speaks like this? • Is the grammar appropriate for the setting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the speaker's underlying assumptions and beliefs? • What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense? • What cultural models does the speaker believe? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Discourses are produced here? • Who is the speaker trying to be and what he or she trying to do? • What institutions maintain this type of Discourse? • How does one think act like, dress like a _____?
Descriptive Level of Discourse Analysis					
Interpretive Level of Discourse Analysis					

Figure 1. Matrix with tools of inquiry used for analyzing the students’ discourses



Findings and Discussion

The result of the two levels of analysis is graphically represented in Figure 2, which also condenses the discourses that were identified and grouped together to answer the main and specific research questions. The tools of inquiry chosen helped me (a) to unveil students' views on topical issues and (b) to analyze the relationship between those views and the inclusion of CE in the EFL classroom (For a sample of the type of DA conducted see Appendix C). Although the original document contains instances that were chosen as "significant moments" (Baxter, 2003) in the three research instruments, for space constraints in this article I only display one or two excerpts per category to exemplify the discourses recognized.

Verbatim quotes from the students and key ideas from my connotative analysis were used to name the three main discourses, keeping in mind that "discourses are often verbally qualified [and] need to be separately identified, described and differentiated [for clarity purposes]" (Sunderland, 2004, pp. 7, 27). Spotting the most salient topics in the data was essential to establish a relationship between the ideas endorsed and/or subverted by the participants and their capacity to position themselves and others in a particular situation. It is important to clarify that rather than generalizations, this analysis gives possible interpretations of the excerpts and thus my findings are a plausible but not the only valid reading of the instruments. Having this overview I proceed to discuss the first of the three discourses taken up by the learners.

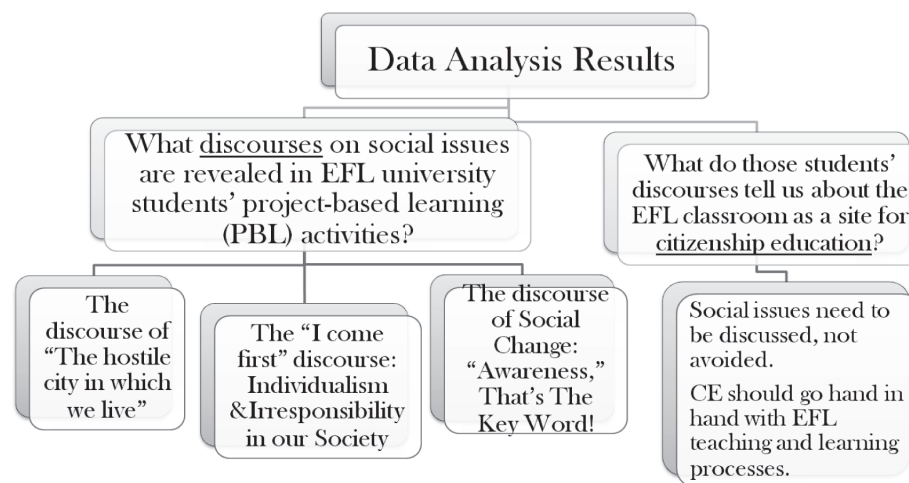


Figure 2. Categories (Discourses) Derived from the data analysis

The Discourse of "The Hostile Society in Which We Live"

Using the tools of inquiry suggested by Gee, I took an in-vivo quote from one of the artifacts (See Table 1: SA1.E1.9) as the name of the first category to show the idea of "the hostile city" as one of the recurrent topics in the students' discourses. Table 1 displays ideas from three students whose texts presented the city

as a chaotic place. An individual reading of the excerpts revealed each participant's stance on situations that affected their lives as members of society. As a group, the same samples were characterized as discourses of disapproval in which the students assigned negative attributes to the concept of *city* to condemn some issues (e.g. indifference, materialism, and corruption) that they had experienced, either directly or indirectly,



and that they found deplorable because of their social repercussions.

The denotative analysis of the data showed that the participants learned to use the simple present tense to make statements, express opinions, and evaluate different critical situations in their social environment. Their language choices allowed them to self-position as knowledgeable citizens, which is evident in the bits of data in Table 1. Giovanni states that “we live” in a hostile society in which “everybody is” indifferent to others’ welfare; Nashua affirms that “there is no difference between the jungle and the city;” and Leonardo suggests that “the jungle is a territory very similar to the city”. In general, the language forms and the vocabulary employed in most PBL activities demonstrated that the students were able to use the English language communicate their individually and socially-built knowledge of the world.

One of the cultural models that emerged from the interpretative reading of the data was that of success as something you have to compete for to get it. As stated by Nashua in the first PBL activity, “everything has a price if you want to become something” (i.e. make something of yourself). In the same vein, Leonardo mentioned that we need to face adverse situations of authoritarianism, social insecurity, and social discrimination in order to survive in our society. Yet, he added a new point to the discussion: the idea of coexistence as a required condition for that type of life. According to this participant, the jungle and the city are similar territories where we have to coexist to survive. These and other related statements revealed that the notion of coexistence and, consequently, the concept of “the other” were constantly present in the participants’ discourses. Interestingly, “the other” was perceived either as a peer or as an opponent, depending on the perspective adopted to discuss a topic.

Tabla 1. Excerpts from S.A. 1 to illustrate the first discourse identified- [sic]

Table 1. The discourse of “the hostile society in which we live”		
SA1. E.1. 9- Giovanni “I think the video shows the hostile society in which we live where everyone thinks of himself and is indifferent to the problems of the other many times trying to circumvent the limitations dipping into drugs, alcohol, among others.”	SA1. E1.4- Nashua “There is no difference between the jungle and the city that we’re becoming animals and that we are entering a world in which we will have a certain death, where nothing is free, everything has a price if you want to become something... we seem to fight in a concrete jungle”	SA1. E.1.12- Leonardo “In my opinion, it is the reality that one lives in the city, the abuses of authority, the thefts, the social discrimination, and especially the survival in this... The jungle is a territory very similar to the city, autosustainable where we have to coexist. In my opinion, we live in the jungle for which we have every day to survive in this great city.”

This duality was examined through the lenses of CE to understand how the participants thought of and related to other people in their social environment. At times, feelings of rivalry and discomfort prevailed, but most students

concurred that talking out problems, respecting differences, and gaining support from social networks, such as friends and relatives, were effective strategies to overcome difficulties. As Carlos mentioned during the conference



tolerance is necessary in every social sphere in order to with and/or establish a relationship with others (CF1. G4. L.97-99). Taking into account the CCs typology, this attitude has to do with a person's cognitive and communicative citizenship competencies, that is, the capacity to carry out mental processes that are essential in the practice of citizenship and to establish constructive dialogue with others to solve problems.

By and large, the first category showed how connections between prior experiences and cultural models emerged in the analysis of students' discourses in the study. The participants' oral and written texts revealed, on the one hand, their disapproval of different social situations discussed during the project-based lessons and, on the other hand, their progress in the use of the TL as a tool to take a stand and support it with arguments. People's individualistic and careless attitude acted as a catalyst to generate other social problems, such as drug abuse and alcoholism. Neglect, as well as chaos and belligerent behavior were therefore viewed as common traits of our "hostile society". Moving from an individual to a more collective dimension in the analysis, in the second major discourse I focused on moments in which citizens put particular interests over common interests.

The "I Come First" Discourse: Individualism & Irresponsibility in Our Society

The data grouped into this category characterized the participants' views of themselves and of their peers in relation to their social environment. Several passages from the student artifacts and from the conferences were purposefully chosen to illustrate a pattern in the discourses about a society formed by self-centered individuals. Drawing on the ideas of Sunderland (2004), I made a pun to name this the "I Come First" discourse in order to acknowledge the participants' criticism against individualism, irresponsibility, and other "antisocial" behaviors,

as well as the conflict between the ideal and the real society, which I identified in their discourses.

To explain this category I analyzed the excerpts in Table 2 and some more data from the group conferences. The integrative analysis allowed me to point out new elements in the research process and to find commonalities and differences among the social discourses encountered. Briefly, the student's linguistic choices suggested changes in people's social behavior and relationships throughout time. Some of them positioned themselves as citizens aware of the importance of work and education opportunities to maintain a civilized and non-destructive society. They also related the existence of social issues to the lack of an equally accessible educational system in our country, and although they did not refer to a particular institution or legal mechanism, their statements showed their appropriation of political discourses about basic social rights that should but are not always granted.

The group of EFL learners relied on their background knowledge to analyze situations that impeded social growth in their local context from a (self-)critical perspective. Some participants stated that the chaos in our society is our fault for perpetuating violence and individualism and they accepted their responsibility in the reproduction of dysfunctional social behaviors. This criticism revealed their sense of social awareness and a feeling of despair and grievance towards society. As displayed in the first and second excerpts in Table 2, Natalia and Lorena affirmed that "we" are individualistic and careless people. They both used first-person-plural constructions to show that we all are to blame for our social problems because "we don't matter the consequences, we do the things" (i.e. we act and do not think about the implications of our actions) and "the only thing we [care about] is our welfare."



Table 2. Excerpts from S.A.1 to illustrate the second discourse identified

Table 2. The “I Come First” Discourse: Individualism & Irresponsibility in our Society		
<p>SA1. E.1.1- Natalia [W]e used to be humans but actually we seem animals, we are wild and don't matter the consequences, we do the things, we live like in a jungle without job, study and rules to apply. Just instinct.</p>	<p>SA1. E1.3- Lorena [W]e sometimes live in the jungle, not saw the consequences of our actions, the only thing what we import is our welfare.</p>	<p>SA1.E1.6: Stella In the world of the humans the money, power and sex is very important without think in the other people, only in benefit own.</p>

In addition to the abovementioned topics, issues of domestic violence and the absence of the parent figure at home were also identified in the second category when the participants wove a discussion about the family as the basic institution to structure a society. This cultural model became apparent in the project reports and in the conferences at the end of the pedagogical intervention. Interestingly, while parents were found guilty of problems like disruptive behavior and other psychological disorders in the younger generations, children were positioned as vulnerable and sensitive to their social environment. According to the participants, lack of family planning and a busy and materialistic lifestyle in which work and money seem to prevail over the family have gradually deteriorated the quality of the home environment and, consequently, the construction of successful interpersonal relationships for many individuals.

In a nutshell, the first two discourses identified led me to conclude that the participants knew of different social realities, could identify the factors that generated problems in their social context, and understood the impact of those problems on their community. The integrative descriptive and interpretive levels of analysis displayed showed how the use of Spanish and English linguistic structures gave an account

of the social languages, cultural models, and situated identities enacted to discuss topical issues. In general, the participants were able to nominate themselves and others as responsible for the conflicts existing in our current society, which showed their level of awareness and critical reflection about their social reality.

Using Gee's (1999) DA model, I found that in their projects the students focused on the influence of different social issues on their own and on other people's lives. Although they did not explain in detail what needed to be done to prevent those situations from happening, the data analysis made it clear that the students understood how and why problems like violence and addictions had permeated their social environment and why such problems required political action and social transformation to be solved. To expand on this last theme, in the final discourse identified I condensed the learners' ideas and messages about the challenges to face to overcome our current social crisis.

The Discourse of Social Change: “Awareness,” That’s The Key Word!

The need to raise awareness about the causes and consequences of social issues as a first step towards achieving social transformation was common to most of the discourses. The descriptive analysis of the information indicated



that the students deemed social awareness, tolerance, and respect essential to solving conflicts in our local context. Taking these findings into consideration, I included social change and awareness in the name of the third category to acknowledge the relationship that the students established between social conscience and transformative actions when discussing societal problems. I used the transcriptions of a project oral report done in class and two excerpts of the group conferences to support my interpretation of the information and correlate the participants' discourses in English and in Spanish.

This analytic category derived from the idea that social sensitivity, defined by García (1996) as the capacity to comprehend the need to attend to the well-being of society, is essential to eventually effect positive changes in our local community. Within this framework, I analyze a fragment of a conference (See Table 3) in which two students explained how they intended to sensitize their

classmates about kidnapping as an issue that can affect anyone at any time.

From a descriptive standpoint, it was observed that the two speakers considered three different elements, namely: other people (you, people), themselves (we, us), and their local context (many Colombian families) in the rationale of their project. C.V. employed different language forms in Spanish to show how *kidnapping* was part of our local reality –*this problem has affected many Colombian families*–; how the group wished that this situation would receive more attention –*that we weren't insensitive/ careless about it*–; and how this problem could affect anyone in Colombia –*it could happen to us or to a close friend at any time*–. C.V. also used repetition as a linguistic resource to emphasize the phrase “*tomar consciencia*” and the word “*awareness*”, in English, as key concepts in his discourse.

Most of the participants made reference to the close relationship between understanding a

Table 3. Transcription of Conference with students to illustrate the third discourse identified

C.V.: La intención (del proyecto) era que las personas se sensibilizaran sobre este problema (secuestro entre familias) que le ha pasado a muchas familias colombianas, que nosotros creyéramos y supiéramos que en cualquier momento nos podría pasar a nosotros o a alguien cercano, que no fuéramos insensibles con eso y que entenderíamos el problema (...)	C.V.: The intention (of the project) was to sensitize people about this problem (family kidnapping) that has affected many Colombian families, that we believed and knew that it could happen to us or to a close friend at any time; that we weren't insensitive/ careless about it, and that we understood the problem (...)
I: ¿Qué es sensibilizar para ustedes?	I: What is to sensitize for you?
M.C.: Es tomar consciencia y saber que el problema es grave, que le pasa a mucha gente así no nos pase a nosotros y que no se debería presentar.	M.C.: It's to become aware and know that the problem is serious, that it affects many people even if it doesn't affect us, and that it should not happen.
C.V.: Sí. Es tomar consciencia, esa es la palabra clave: ¡Awareness! (CF1.G3. – L. 76-89)	C.V.: Yes. It's to become aware. That's the key word: Awareness!



problematic situation and doing something to improve it. To explain how this connection was made and how I analyzed it to unveil cultural models and situated identities, I include a verbatim part of the transcription of the second project oral reports (P.O.R.2) in which Stella (S.J.), Natalia (N.S.) and Lizeth (L.S.), as well as Bibiana (B.S.), Lorena (L.Q.) and Claudia (C.Z.) talk about the potential solutions for children's addiction to videogames and domestic violence, respectively. Briefly, Table 6 shows that the students position themselves as experts to discuss the topics they inquired about to develop their class projects.

Table 4 displays the *storylines* that were assumed to make sense of the participants' oral discourses following Van Sluys et al.'s (2006)

DA proposal. In this discussion I include both an individual reading and a cross-sample analysis of the quotes selected. Interestingly, the two excerpts begin with a statement in which one of the speakers maximizes the degree of frequency of the problem of domestic violence as "*very common*" and "*very frequent*" and the degree of simplicity of the solution to the problem of children's addiction to videogames as "*very easy*". Bibiana's statement is descriptive and is intended to classify the issue in question as ordinary within our social context. In Stella's case, there is an explanation of how that "very simple" solution to a complex problem lies in parents' increased attention to their children. Both interventions are straightforward and provide the context for the rest of the oral report presented.

Table 4. Transcription of project oral reports to illustrate the third discourse identified

Table 4. The Discourse of Social Change: "Awareness," That's The Key Word!	
<p>(min. 2:24) B.S.: The problem of violence is very common in the actual society and is very frequent. It's a big problem in all the circle social, not import the social extract or study level. I: Ok. Is there a difference in the type of violence if people are poor or rich? B.S.: The difference is relative because the verbal and physical violence has the same consequences. L.Q.: It's the same because the violence is bad in all the moments. C.Z.: Not important the level of education. B.S.: That's why is a social problem, because in a moment any person have reaction violent and not import anything. And we need change that. L.Q.: The people are very impulsive and not have conscience of this problem. The things that happen in your house affect the relation with the other people (...) (P.O.R.2 - G.4)</p>	<p>(min. 4:19) S.J.: The solution is very simple. The parents should pay more attention to the children; teach your children new forms of recreation. (min 8:03) N.S.: It's with a schedule. You have... the parents have to organize the time of their child. I: So, do you think that parents are responsible for their children's addiction? Choral response: Yes! I: Why? L.S.: The parents have to education the children (...), be conscious that the children need other activities. In this project we want that the parents raise awareness about use of videogames and spend more time with their children because affect the behavior, the relationship, the environment. (P.O.R.2 - G.2)</p>

In sum, the third major discourse identified was grounded on the notion of social awareness as the basis for individual, political, and social transformations to fight against, and make students aware of societal problems. The students referred to social sensitivity, high-quality education for everyone, and family care as the missing elements for building a more egalitarian society. In their opinion, social awareness has to do with our capacity to take into account and

understand the other's point of view, education is a tool for generating social responsibility, and family care is required for society building. Having displayed the data analysis framework employed and the results of the two levels of analysis, the last sections of this article summarize the conclusions, the pedagogical implications and the limitations of the study. Table 5 illustrates a sample of how the study above was carried out.





Appendix O
Sample of Data Analysis Matrix

What discourses on social issues are revealed in EFL university students' project-based learning (PBL) activities? What do those students' discourses tell us about the EFL classroom as a site for citizenship education?	Descriptive level of analysis INSTRUMENT: Video activity: THE JUNGLE Selected questions for DA: 1. What do you think about this ["Welcome to the jungle"] video? / 2. Based on the 2 vids, what is the "JUNGLE"? / 3. Do WE live in the jungle? YES ___ NO ___ (Explain) * Secondary data: Images selected by S. & their interpretations.	Interpretive level of analysis	Situational Meanings	Social Languages	Cultural (Discourse) Models	Situational Identities
<p>DA MODEL BASED ON J.P. GIES'S SOCIAL THEORY OF DISCOURSE & Van Sluys, K., Fensholt, M. & Fiml, A. (2006)'s proposal</p> <p>QUOTES/TRANSCRIPTION PARTICIPANT</p> <p>1. The video is about the society, we used to be humans but actually we seem animals, we are wild and don't matter the consequences, we do the things, we live like in a jungle without job, study and rules to apply. Just instinct.</p> <p>2. Based on the videos I can say that the jungle is a wild place, with animals, where the most dangerous command, if you have to kill to survive, does it. Simply do or die that is the jungle. It can also be our city, our home, it depends on that how we live, how we relate to others</p> <p>3. YES. In my opinion, we live in a jungle more than "animals' jungle", we kill each other and we are destroying our world little by little, we behave more animals than the animals themselves, we being humans should be more reasonable.</p>	<p>Situational Meanings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key words or phrases? • What do particular words mean in this context? • What do these words mean in this time and place? <p>N. uses different nouns such as jungle, city, home, Sheet(2) and world as synonyms to explain the relationship she establishes between the jungle and the city. False cognates: Actually – Currently / Reasonable – Rational Use of inclusive pronouns (we, our) to explain the concept of jungle. N. associates words like animals, wild, instinct, Kill, and destruction to human behavior. N. compares humans to animals in terms of behavior, relations, and life conditions to explain why she does not see us as a civilized society.</p>	<p>Social Languages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the grammar and function of this language? • What type of person speaks like this? • Is the grammar appropriate for the setting? <p>Use of temporality markers, past and present tenses, action, state and modal verbs, and comparisons to make a point about changes in people's social behavior and relationships. N. makes a difference between animal and human "wild" behavior. Animals, she explains, kill to survive but people do it to destroy our world. Contradictory statements when explaining whether or not we live in a jungle. Avoids overgeneralization by using modals (can) and expressions to show possibility (depends on).</p>	<p>Cultural (Discourse) Models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the speaker's underlying assumptions and beliefs? • What are the simplified storylines that one must assume for this to make sense? • What cultural models does the speaker believe? <p>Natalia uses comparisons to show opposite sides of the same situation term she is talking about. In excerpt 1, she compares the past and the present; in excerpt 2 she gives two possible (but different) interpretations of the word "jungle"; and in excerpt 3, she compares the wild to the "human jungle" and the human and animal behavior. In excerpt 1, N. contrasts the past (used to) and the present (actually [currently]) to express her discomfort about our current social situation and she supports the idea of "the good old days". She mentions that the worsening of our social situation has occurred progressively (little by little). N. knows what the expected ideal human social behavior should be and she disapproves of the way people act now. Humans should be civilized and rational. The way N. presents her ideas reveals that her discourse of human evolution involution and social improvement differ from the idea that the more evolved the better our society can be. For N., evolution seems to be associated with having opportunities to work and to study. She values the existence of rules in order to maintain social order*. The way N. finishes her text in excerpts 1 and 2 shows her interest in questioning the idea of superiority of the human over other species. N. aligns with the discourse of rationality (we being humans should be more reasonable) but makes a point to evaluate the validity of such an idea nowadays. Citizenship competence: "Specific knowledge"</p>	<p>Situational Identities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What discourses are produced here? • Who is the speaker trying to be and what is he or she trying to do? • What institutions maintain this type of Discourse? • How does one think, act like, dress like a _____? <p>N. associates animal behavior with lack of rules and norms. Likewise, she sees people's animal-like behavior as the result of lack of opportunities to study and work. The need to have norms and laws to regulate and govern is a political discourse, while the idea about the importance of education in the construction of society is supported by educational institutions. In N's opinion, the absence of these social mechanisms, in combination with lack of opportunities to study and work, has contributed to our process of involution. As an undergraduate student, N. acknowledges the value of education and professional development in our society. N. positions herself as a young citizen who is aware of the importance of education to establish and maintain a civilized and non-destructive society.</p>		

Table 5. Sample of Discourse Analysis

Conclusions

This classroom-based study was conducted both to unveil the social discourses that emerge when university students participate in situated language learning practices and to analyze the possibilities for citizenship education (CE) in an EFL academic setting. Three main discourses were identified and described to condense the students' social representations as well as their positions and concerns about their social environment. With the projects, the learners had more opportunities to discuss matters in which their specific knowledge as well as their cognitive, emotional, and communicative competencies became apparent. As a result, the data portrayed the interplay of social discourses and how that had an impact on the EFL learning process practice by presenting the TL as a tool for *meaning-full* (purposeful) communication and the language classroom as a site for co-construction of knowledge to undergraduate students.

Multiple discourses became apparent as the students had the opportunity to talk about topics that they found '*unusual but cool* to discuss in the EFL class,' as one of the groups mentioned during the conference (CF1. G.4. L. 41-42). According to Gee (1999), multiple discourses account for multiple socially situated identities. Throughout the research process, the participants discursively positioned themselves as citizens, as learners, as family members, as future professionals, as potential victims of social issues, and as critical individuals able to understand and discuss their changing social reality. The analysis of the linguistic choices, the cultural models, and the social identities displayed in salient themes in the data were thus helpful to see how students view their social environment and themselves as members of a society which they are expected to know and transform (MEN, 2004).

I analyzed "the fluid social identities of language learners" (Castañeda-Peña, 2008a, p.

315) to understand how they were constructing, modifying, and/or endorsing several discourses in different situations. In the first discourse, the students compared their city to a jungle and described it as a hostile place inhabited by individuals who wield power and violence to dominate others. In the second discourse, they continued to talk about people's social behavior, but this time focused on the prevalence of individual interests over the collective well-being. Instead of wild and aggressive, people's behavior was depicted as individualistic and irresponsible. Finally, in the third discourse, the students took a critical but non-judgmental stance on everybody's responsibility in the realization of social changes.

If learners' social identities are fluid, so are their social discourses. My analysis elucidated that students held different, often conflicting, and also changing discourses that were "under construction". These unfixed ideas represented the different ways of being in the world that Gee (1999) mentions in his definition of *Discourses*. Furthermore, this finding implies that although students have appropriated certain discourses based on their prior life experiences and on their perception of reality, that reality and those discourses are not static but likely to be modified as a result of new experiences. As Cameron (2001) affirms, there is a twofold relationship between language and reality in which the latter is formed through the discursive practices people have access to in specific contexts.

Assuming that reality is discursively constructed, this study demonstrated that when a range of discourses are embraced in the EFL classroom, students have greater chances to hone their communicative and citizenship skills. Lobron & Selman (2007) talk about an overlap between literacy and social awareness skills in children's education to explain that "while usually thought of as two distinct fields, the worlds of literacy and social awareness are actually closely linked"



(p. 535). This overlap can be transferred to the field of EFL as learners are becoming literate in a new language. The analysis of the context-based and sociolinguistic approach employed in my pedagogical intervention evidenced how learners self-positioned as citizens with social rights and responsibilities. They managed to overcome language barriers to convey messages of tolerance, dialog, respect, social sensitivity, and family care, which remind us that the EFL class can also be a space to make social transformations happen.

Pedagogical Implications and Applications

I drew on Duff's (2002) insights into language socialization, participation, and identity in the classroom to describe the impact of my pedagogical intervention on the students, on my teaching practice, and on the field of EFL education. One of the major changes perceived was a higher level of learners' class participation as the students became agents in the EFL class. More participation, in turn, had an impact on their ability to make decisions and work collaboratively in the TL. The PBL experience was described as *unusual, challenging, interesting, and productive* by the students, and as *a chance to do something different with the TL* (CF1. G3. L. 51-53). In that sense, the students' perception of the EFL class was positively affected, for they were able to use English as a tool for self-expression (Tudor, 2001) and real communication purposes.

My pedagogical intervention also effected an important change in the learning environment. Gradually, I realized that some of the most valuable lessons in my class were taught by the students, so I learned to view them as peers and strove to guide and listen more and to teach and talk less. From my experience, more consistent teaching practices are viable if there is careful planning informed by an ongoing process of reflection and change that incorporates "non-academic" issues

into the EFL class. Given the characteristics of my teaching setting, the DA framework employed to yield the results was suitable to comprehend more clearly the linguistic and sociocultural elements that are in play when learners use the TL to build arguments and express their understanding of reality.

Limitations and Final Remarks

Dealing with time constraints to carry out the project-based lessons and getting students acquainted with the methodology were the biggest challenges I faced at the beginning of the course. I also had to adapt my instructional design to the academic calendar of my teaching setting, so it was necessary to modify the number of sessions initially planned. Finally, I had to allot more time to provide students with input and develop activities in which they could learn to construct and give their opinions about topical issues using the TL. Yet, each challenging situation turned into an opportunity to do things differently and to learn some valuable lessons that I have tried to summarize in the findings of my study as a way to acknowledge the power of language, the importance of valuing students' voice, the social responsibility of educators, and the need to put those three elements together to raise awareness, the first step to make changes.

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Appendix

Pedagogical Intervention Weekly Schedule

R. Questions	What discourses on social issues are revealed in EFL university students' project-based learning (PBL) activities? What do those discourses reveal about EFL students' citizenship skills?	
Title of the project:	ULL Voices On-Air	
Methodology:	Project-based learning -PBL (Stoller, 2002)	Project driving questions (for students): How do young people see themselves as citizens?
Objective:	By the end of the project students will have created a radio program to discuss a social issue in their local context.	Outcome: A radio program about current social issues in our city.

Date	In-class activities * Language structures and functions based on the text book	Ss' independent work
Sep9th	Video analysis workshop: "Welcome to the jungle" *Talking about animals. Making suggestions. Discussing a problem.	Compare & analyze two videos.
Sept 16th	Project topic choice: Ss will form project-work groups and choose a topic of their interest to create their radio program.	Find a recent news story related to the social issue chosen for their projects.
Sept 20th	Project driving question writing session * Talking about the past. Making questions.	Write the first project written report.
Sept 23rd	1st project written report due *Talking about future plans. Making an invitation.	Design a poster for the oral report.
Sept 27th	Poster exhibition session *Talking about future plans. Making an invitation. (Review)	Create a short questionnaire to know other students' opinion about the topic of their projects.
Sept 30th	Final version of the questionnaire *Asking for and offering help. Asking for and expressing opinions.	Questionnaire results: "What did you learn from your peers about your topic?"
Oct 4th/ 7th	Radio program outline *Review of the language functions and forms studied in class.	Design a chart with new vocabulary and useful expressions to include in the radio program.
Oct 4th	Script-editing & final presentation rehearsal	Final presentation preparation.
Oct 7th	Final project presentation/ evaluation	Self- and co-evaluation of the whole process and final products.



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