

Reflections on Decolonization: an Alternative to the Traditional Classroom¹

Reflexiones sobre la descolonización: una alternativa al salón clase tradicional

Mariana Ibáñez Galindo

prof.mariana.ibanez@gmail.com

Institución Educativa San José de la Florida - Zetaquirá, Colombia²

Gabriel Fernando Sandoval

gabriel.sandoval@uptc.edu.co

Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia - Tunja, Colombia³

Received: March 13, 2015

Accepted: October 18, 2015

How to cite this article (APA, 6th ed.): Ibáñez, M., & Sandoval, G. (2015). Reflections on decolonization: an alternative to the traditional classroom. *Enletawa Journal*, 8 (2), 103 - 123.

Abstract

The concept of colonization in education has multiple characterizations and is related to many teaching fields and theoreticians. It is commonly related to how teachers are colonizers of students' minds with knowledge and how, sometimes, teachers are not aware of this responsibility. This article presents some reflections about decolonization processes underlying structured education and discusses the need to create teacher awareness and understanding of decolonizing practices

1 Reflection article, motivated by the seminar on Pedagogy and Culture from fourth semester of the MA in Language teaching program.

2 Mariana Ibáñez Galindo holds a B.A. in Foreign Languages and postgraduate Diploma in Learning Needs. She is an M.A. candidate in Language Teaching the UPTC. Currently she is a full time Teacher with the Secretaria de Educación de Boyacá at Institución Educativa San José de la Florida in Zetaquirá, Boyacá. Email: prof.mariana.ibanez@gmail.com

3 Gabriel Sandoval holds a B.A. in Modern Languages, and he is an M.A. Candidate in Language Teaching from the UPTC. Currently he is a full time teacher at the Instituto Internacional de Idiomas of the UPTC in Tunja, Boyacá. Email: gabrielfsandoval87@gmail.com

and, in time, to spread it to other members of the academic community. The article presents a reflection process in five stages, based on different authors and the reflection from the discussion between this article's authors.

Key words: Awareness, colonizing, critical pedagogy, reflection, responsibility.

Resumen

El concepto de colonización tiene muchas dimensiones. Comúnmente, se relaciona con cómo los profesores son colonizadores de las mentes de los estudiantes con el conocimiento y cómo, en ocasiones, los profesores desconocen tal responsabilidad. Este artículo expone algunas reflexiones sobre procesos descolonizadores subyacentes a la educación estructurada y discute la necesidad de crear conciencia sobre prácticas descolonizadoras y eventualmente extender esta comprensión a otros miembros de la comunidad académica. El artículo presenta un proceso de reflexión en cinco pasos cíclicos, basado en diferentes autores, y la reflexión producto de la discusión entre los autores de este artículo.

Palabras clave: Concientización, colonización, pedagogía crítica, reflexión, responsabilidad.

Introduction

Being a teacher in this century is a challenge, ever-changing media and modes of communication and teaching make constant shifts in society. Those changes have grown to be swifter and more disruptive as new points of view are brought together and emerge as a response to this process of adopting and interacting with foreign cultures, cultural practices and even teaching processes. From these reflections, the authors of this article came to the understanding, that the traditional way in which many people were taught is no longer a suitable option for 21st century.

Nowadays, there are more technological possibilities and students are closer to the globalized world. They can learn from different cultures in an easier way. According to Cakir (2006), the development of people's cultural awareness leads students to a more critical thinking, which guides students to decolonization. Following this idea, culture is a way of life (Brown, 1994, as cited in Cakir, 2006). Culture is the setting within which we live, think, feel and share with others. Due to this situation, the authors of this article realized that students from the 21st century can develop multicultural awareness through their language learning process, which will allow them to see the world surrounding them from a different perspective. In this way, teachers can help students to

understand that the learning process is not conformed by a list of rules but, by the continuous discovering of new ideologies and the importance of respecting others and their points of view.

This understanding came from the different readings and discussions, as well as from academic events, where it was seen that students, from diverse Colombian contexts (private, official, rural and non-rural areas), display a set of differences when compared to students fifty years ago. Those differences and changes implied that the methodology that teachers used fifty years ago probably would not fit the current education.

Fifty years ago, complaining was not an option for students. For this reason, conformity was the rule, as was the low awareness of being a colony, which guided many people's lives at the time. According to (Mendez, 2010, p. 47), "the educational processes are places for colonization and liberation"⁴; nevertheless, the liberating aspect was overlooked due to the influence of colonization and the fact of having been brought up in a similar, non-problematizing, traditional environment.

However, we think it is until higher stages of professional development, for instance, in postgraduate programs

⁴ Translated by the authors for publication purposes.

that many languages teachers have the opportunity to comprehend that the classroom is a synonym of change and liberation. The intent of this article is to reflect upon how using the hidden curriculum (Sager, 2013) can be useful to formulate ideas which enable learners to cope with “domestication” as mention by (Freire, 1993). This can guide educational communities to learn about the role that students play and the one they should play in the educational and social layout. In this article, the authors reflect about how students can find freedom within the boundaries, understanding freedom as new alternatives to avoid perpetuating the current myopic vision of educational policies, evaluation criteria and mandatory teaching strategies.

Consequently, the writers reflected on how important it is to be conscious about the fact that educational regulations and policies have been designed and decided by others who are not active participants in the educational context where those policies are implemented, thus projecting an unaware sense of disembodiment from reality (Mendez, 2010, p. 51). This is to say, that most of the policies and standards designed for Colombian children do not match the context in which those policies must be applied. Sometimes, students and teachers do not have the resources to fulfill those policies, and in other cases, those policies do not really fit

students’ needs. Moreover, taking into account that most of the guidelines intend to prepare students only to pass tests without considering students’ contexts or backgrounds, the polices and standards do not allow teachers to take a deeper look at language, life, culture, or encourage students to develop critical thinking. Bearing in mind, the above aspects, it is relevant to say that these new perspectives require a challenge to the paradigms teachers once used in their teaching, in order to guide the new generations to a more informed construction of the self.

The authors of this article believe that in order to really have an impact in education, it is necessary to accomplish two different objectives, the first one is: to “remember all the things that the school made us forget, through educational processes oriented to training profitable and productive men and women: remember life.” (Mendez, 2010, p. 53). It is not fair that only a small percentage of teachers are aware of these decolonizing practices, nor the fact that teachers inadvertently carry a colonized mind.

The second objective comes from the social responsibility that the writers feel as languages teachers, which is to share knowledge about decolonizing practices. For this reason, the main

5 Translated by the authors for publication purposes. “Recordar aquello que nos hicieron olvidar mediante los procesos educativos orientados a la formación de hombres y mujeres productivos y rentables: recordar la vida”

purpose of this paper is to reflect and discuss decolonizing practices, in order to spread awareness of these phenomena, in all academic stances, as a strategy to change traditional perspectives toward teaching, learning and the role of structured instruction.

In other words, this article makes efforts to problematize and re-think the very foundation of academy as people know it, lingering particularly on the role that teachers play, with the idea of transforming it from mostly instructional to active, that is, using the hidden curriculum to tackle traditional aspects of education from a critical perspective (Sager, 2013).

Theoretical Background

Kumaravadivelu's Language View

Being a language teacher implies the challenge of making students understand that language is not only the subject you take in order to pass an exam or the requirement to get your diploma, it is also necessary to let students understand that language is everything. According to (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 3). "Language permeates every aspect of human experience, and creates as well as reflects images of that experience". However, the current educational system and policies in Colombia forego the richest aspect of language and prioritize learning in terms of grammar, rather than communication or ideological purposes.

After reflecting on our previous knowledge and beliefs, analyzing personal teaching experiences and reading Kumaravadivelu's principles of macro and micro strategies (2006), it was possible for the authors of this article to determine that their conception of language should go (and now it actually does) beyond the simple fact that language is a grammatical system taught and learnt as a requirement in an institution. Instead, as the authors of this article are already doing, the objective should be to build different positions about language, society and language teaching and learning.

In the first place, authors understand language as a complex unit, as a system in terms of grammar, structures, and linguistics aspects; Chomsky (1965) provided the fundamental facts about language as a system; he affirmed that everybody is born with a language acquisition device (LAD), as well as a universal system, which he denominated universal grammar. However, his linguistic theory contradicts a holistic vision of language; he fails to acknowledge that language represents a world that is diverse, and that it is loaded with discrimination practices, social differences and social positioning, among others.

This is the first conception of language and it is considered that this is the first step required in the process of teaching a language; according to (Walsh, 2006), there are three

parameters teachers should comply with when teaching a language: first, knowing the language (being able to use it), second, knowing how to teach it (pedagogical training) and finally, knowing how it works (as a system). However, this definition disregards the concept of using language in context with communicative purposes, which lead the authors to take into account the pragmatic language competence concept, rather than the repetition of artificial formulas that are supposed to always function in specific linguistic situations.

In this second concept, language is discourse, from the point of view of the communicative and sociolinguistic competence; it is considering language as meaning with a communicative purpose or function (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, p. 4, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 7). All those concepts can be translated as the use of language in a real context to communicate points of view, feelings and thoughts. According to Halliday (1973) language gives us the power to communicate effectively with others about what people feel, what people think, and to share opinions.

Similarly, there is a third conception, language as an ideology; regarding the idea that language is power and a way to understand the world, that is, people teach a foreign language because through language people can understand this globalized world and

can comprehend new cultures. This third notion of language as ideology is one of the most powerful conceptions that is important to take into account in daily teaching in order to give a first step to the decolonization of teaching practices.

People can communicate different ideas, opinions, by using language in a determined way and with a specific purpose. As (Thompson, 1990, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 12) mentioned “language as ideology is meaning in the service of power”, language gives the power to communicate what one person wants other people to know, that is why teachers’ words are so important for students, because of the power of their words and their ability to communicate and interact with others.

Likewise, language can be used “to persuade people to act voluntarily in the way you want” (Thomas, Wareing, Singh, Stilwell, Thorndorow & Jones, 2004, p. 38), that is, to create the illusion of freewill in others and with it, exercise power upon them by the transaction of one’s own ideology; a strategy often used in politics and marketing with much less negative implications than physical coercion as it can occur in many smooth verbal transactions. The thought that ideas are theirs when they have actually been implanted by someone else, can guide people to defend them with greater enthusiasm and commitment, which is, in many cases, profited by those exercising power.

Teachers can get their students to do what they want them to do only by using the correct words, and the right speech, because, everything is possible through language. According to (Fairclough, 1995) language as ideology is power from the point of view of asymmetries (Fairclough, 1995; as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006). For example one person can convince thousands of people through language, which is why politicians can get many followers due to the discourse they use.

Teachers have the gift of the word, and teachers have to use this power with students, in order to open their minds. They can teach them and show them the world through language, by using appropriate classroom discourse in the teaching practice in order to obtain the best results in the learning process.

Based on these conceptions of language, the authors of this article have to say that language is not a disconnected structure, an isolated morpheme, or phoneme, nor an artificial situation to be memorized; it is all of these things, which can generate a change of thought, in a determined context and with a purpose, because language is discourse Halliday (1973). In being so, it represents and varies depending on the user; in many situations two people can mean the same thing using very different expressions and series of words, which depends on their internal structures and are a manifestation

of individual realities and carry in themselves meaning by convention, which others are able to decode. This last idea is particularly important because it portrays how language can mean different things for different people and can be used for different purposes, and in this particular case as a tool for decolonization.

Taking into account these reflections about language conceptions and teaching, the authors of this article realized that, in the moment teachers enrich their own vision of language learning, their teaching practice improves, making it easier for students to understand the real purpose in learning a second language, that is, the possibility to develop grammatical, communicative and sociolinguistic competences, which allow them to interact with other people.

In this proposal, the writers intend to generate reflection upon the fact that educators need to stop teaching the language only to cover a requirement, or for industrial purposes and for commercial objectives, but instead should teach for life improvement. Language learning and teaching do not need to be connected to marketing and competitiveness where accomplishing schedules, submitting assignments and passing tests are the main goal of the process.

According to Alves (2005, p. 86), it is also necessary to teach our students to dream, “de los sueños salen pajaros

salvajes que nadie puede domesticar” (from dreams fly wild birds which cannot be tamed⁶). This idea means that teachers ought to give their students more questions than answers and situations to problematize the world surrounding them (Shor, 1996) and to foster their critical view of the world. In order to go beyond this concept, a short discussion about critical pedagogy has been included in the article.

Taking into account that in this article there are two main concepts, which are decolonization and critical pedagogy, it is necessary to explain how those two concepts are connected. First of all, decolonization is a mental process, in which students and teachers can dream about things that have not been done, because of limitations or policies (Alves, 2005). Critical pedagogy gives people the power to recover the discourse of those who have been silenced in the classroom, in order to reclaim the intellectual heritage, and to work based on the contexts and the needs, not on the policies and on the standards (Tejada & Espinosa, 2009). In this way, Critical pedagogy and decolonization work in tandem in the process of reminding people about what they had forgotten, Mendez (2010) and beginning work on what people really need to learn, using both the traditional curriculum and the hidden curriculum. Hidden curriculum

understood as the lessons that are not intentionally planned and written in the traditional curriculum; however, those lessons have a big relevance in terms of values and standpoints that students should learn at school (Sager, 2013). An example of this hidden curriculum is the lessons and activities that teachers develop, in which students learn how they should interact with peers, educators, and other adults; how students should perceive diverse races, groups, or classes of people; or what ideas and behaviors are considered adequate or undesirable (Sager, 2013).

Shor’s View on Critical Pedagogy

In the book, “When Students Have Power”, written by Ira Shor (1996), he documented his personal successes and failures with critical pedagogy; he stated the idea of a collaborative environment with minimal traditional hierarchical authority. This theory supports the reflections about problematizing used in this article, since Shor (1996), asserted that it was necessary to create a more equitable system of “power sharing”; he affirmed that teachers need to democratically restructure all pieces of the educational environment, starting from the simple physical organization of the room, to the system used to evaluate students’ work.

According to Shor (1996), it is necessary to change the organization of the classroom, for that reason his students were in circles or in rows,

6 Translated from Spanish by the authors for publication purposes.

depending on their preference. Shor (1996) avoided the front of the room and “back loaded” his own comments to avoid interrupting students’ discussions. This is to say, that teachers need to give enough time and space to students to let them think and reflect about their realities, problems, difficulties and ideas without making decisions or offering answers.

At this point, Shor (1996) proposed that teachers should give students the opportunity to follow extensive processes of negotiation, as well as tools to problematize the world around them. These processes cover everything from grading criteria to the exact number of minutes that can pass before students are considered late in the class as well as giving students the opportunity to give their opinion about the needs for each class and capacities required.

Consequently, Shor (1996) states that students should have democratic ideals of critical pedagogy in order to allow them to challenge the authority granted to an individual’s “voice” or opinions. Letting students exercise and choose their actions allows them to judge between right and wrong thus giving them the power to problematize things around them.

Based on the theory about language view, critical pedagogy, and teaching parameters from different authors, a reflection about a process has been proposed by the authors of this article in order to help teachers think of

alternative activities to the traditional classroom.

Kumaravadivelu’s Pedagogic Parameters

For this teaching reflection, the authors of the article took into account two of the pedagogic parameters provided by (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The first parameter, the parameter of *practicality*, relates broadly to the relationship between theory and practice and narrowly to the teacher’s skill in monitoring his or her own teaching effectiveness. For this association between theory and practice, writers intend to connect actions with thoughts and thoughts with actions, that is, professional theories generated by experts with personal theories emerging from the article’s authors reflection based on insights and intuition.

A few examples of strategies used by this article’s authors are included here. The first example, English wall, is used in a public school in order to foster communication and motivate students’ practice rather than product knowledge. This wall consisted on a wall with English messages inside the classroom; this wall was updated every day with commands and useful sentences students required and emerged during the class, linked to daily life situations. Every time the situation arose, a student could have a piece of colored paper so s/he would

draw the object of his inquiry and then post it to the English messages wall, and finally, students could communicate their ideas.

Another example of a strategy consisted of using expressions from a textbook to establish strong, meaningful connections which are need to write letters. This helped them practice how to use language to express their support or concerns about aspects of their urban surroundings such as infrastructure, politics, gender discrimination, public transport, green spaces, crime or any other topic they felt strongly about in the city where they live.

The second parameter, the parameter of *possibility*, is needed by teachers in order to acknowledge and highlight students' and teachers' individual identities and "the need to develop theories, forms of knowledge and social practices that work with the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting" (Giroux, 1988, p. 134, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 72).

Here, in this part of the article, the writers want to relate possibility to the educational philosophy stated by (Freire, 1993) about the inequalities, which are perpetuated by the social models, established long ago and that the majority of people fail to contradict. Based on this, the possibility principle appears as the (real or yet to come) opportunities students and teachers can find during the educational process,

including knowledge about individual roles and positions within society.

Likewise, (Mendez, 2010, p. 53) states that "learning occurs in function of life: human beings learn to increase our possibilities, to live better, to be happy". Nevertheless, his statement does not dwell exclusively in structured, academic learning, but covers, in addition, all sorts of learning for life. The development of all the skills people require for being successful members of society, regardless of the time they have been in a structured educational system; the true sense of possibility. In the same line of thought, "education is always intervention, a way to have an impact on people's lives for specific endings and intentions. It can therefore become invasion-colonization, but it can also be a visit which enhances the possibilities of their actors" (Mendez, 2010, p. 53).

The third parameter, *particularity* however is not quite adapted here; to narrow the scope of a thought seems to undermine the applicability of these principles, which can be adapted and adopted by any teacher to any classroom in any setting.

Class Topics and Syllabus

Application

In terms of class topic and syllabus application, it is necessary to highlight

7 Translated by the authors for publication purposes.

that talking about one specific theme is not relevant, what is important is what teachers do to make students use any topic and reflect about “the political, economic and social environment in which they grow up” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 174). For instance, Orwell (1946) states that nowadays it is not possible to leave out politics, on the contrary everything we do and live is related to politics. Addressing students’ attention towards these facts is certainly a gateway to the acquisition of a more global perspective and the understanding of how different perspectives come into contact in regular aspects of their lives. “Even the most everyday decisions can be seen in a political light” Thomas et al. (2004, p. 36), and these kinds of exercises are susceptible to being developed with functional, grammar-based, topic-based activities or whatever constraint set by policy makers or material designers.

Teachers need to make sure students “learn” the same topics, even in different levels (pre-school, primary, secondary, college, language institutes). All, or at least a great deal, of Colombian-designed syllabi are designed based on grammatical perspectives, so the main objective is to check whether or not students have internalized the structures guiding the parameter of language as a system and this is particularly true for the standards of English Language Teaching (MEN, 2006) which have been

implemented in Colombia. As posed by (Quintero & Guerrero, 2009, p. 140). “The way the descriptors were written suggests that the activities held in class have the purpose of mastering patterns, structures, and format” but only with the intention of understanding and following orders, rather than actually using them for communicative purposes.

Likewise, many syllabi are constructed around textbooks the reason behind this fact is that one single syllabus and textbook is distributed in several countries and even continents. Conversely, “our realities are shaped by our context, and we need to be critical about this situation because the problem is, it often happens unconsciously, without awareness, and without critical reflection on these contexts” (Parr, 2005, 2006; Freire, 1993; hooks, 2003, cited in Sager, 2013, p. 9) and students are active participants who gain from and at the same time shape this reality and nurture it to reinforce or destroy paradigms.

Methodology

This article presents five stages for a pedagogical exercise, which are recommended to be followed and developed by language teachers as a never-ending cycle from the stage of syllabus design to the course evaluation phase which once completed is started over again. Whenever the cycle is completed, it should be enriched with

the products of the process, which at the same time should be shared with as many people as possible. These five stages were identified in a need analysis process that the authors of this article conducted by means of a non-structured interview applied to third semester students from a Languages Teaching Master program. The needs analysis was conducted in order to learn what activities they used to teach the language and what steps they followed to plan their classes and how they could be oriented towards the issue at hand.

Activities

In the traditional classroom teachers control speaking turns, answers, questions and activities and sometimes encourage students to talk. In most cases, teachers manage almost everything that happens in the classroom; sometimes, the teacher plans and tries to execute the syllabus, and it is his/her responsibility to see students through the learning process.

When teachers have this possibility, they are supposed to make all the decisions, but even if s/he has to follow policies, s/he can also adapt strategies to achieve what is set by the institution in the authors of this article's words "Teachers may not be able to change what they teach, but they can decide how to teach it".

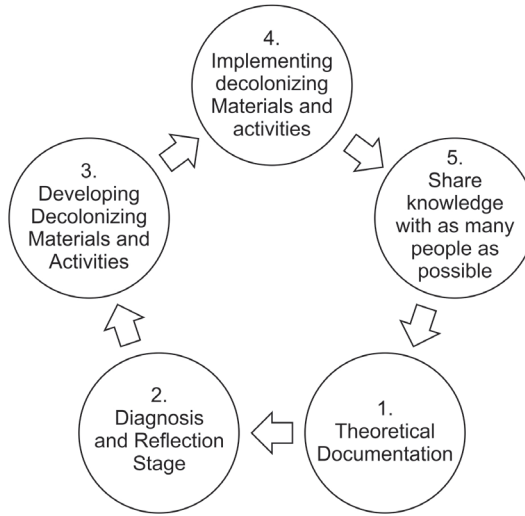
Teachers need to see every situation as an opportunity which arises from the very fact that they hold the power to

innovate their practices and the power to forever scar students or guide their minds along a favored path. Teachers have the responsibility to cover a set of established topics and will likely follow a slightly different approach, based on personal features and learning experiences. It is in these variations that students can generate empathy and feel drawn to whatever matter discussed in class or definitely become disengaged and demotivated by it.

Hence, the authors of this paper do not provide specific activities for specific topics, but rather a manner of analyzing how these activities can be designed and/or adapted in order to gain and foster awareness of how colonization features affect our practice. The activities included in the annexes are a compilation of possibilities provided by other authors and are not per se the focus of the paper, but rather an example of how to apply these principles in teaching activity design.

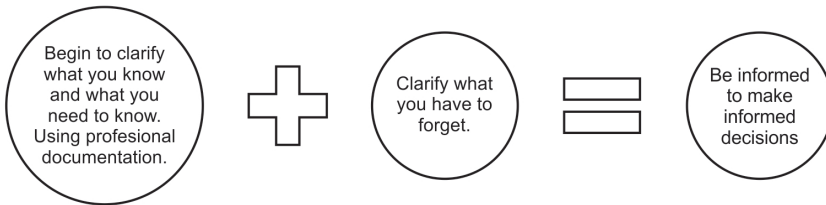
What the authors of this paper propose is a process, which is suggested to be conducted in five stages, applicable to every and any activity a teacher is expected to follow in order to start a decolonization process, as well as any and every activity a teacher would use to cover the topics required by the curriculum. This process starts with theoretical documentation and ends with sharing the knowledge attained from the experience. (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Stages in the Development of Colonization Awareness



First Stage: Theoretical Documentation

Figure 2. Steps in the Theoretical Documentation Stage



Though in this case the process of discovering the patterns of decolonization has just recently begun, authors of this first article do believe it is important to continue exploring, since there is already a number of people delving into the matter of decolonizing pedagogical practices and recognizing this process as necessary for their own context.

The writers of this paper have paid close attention to the theory provided by (Kumaravadelu, 2003, & Mendez, 2010), and they have discovered as well

that there are a large number of studies and proposals around the world, (in China, Singapore, Costa Rica, US and Britain) which seek to raise awareness about this matter. People are sharing ideas and proposals, through papers and conferences in order to spread ideas and awareness of the concept of colonized minds and the need for decolonizing practices, particularly, but not restricted to academy.

Although theoretical documentation is the first step as to clarify terms, it is also necessary to use this theoretical

knowledge in a more practical manner. That is, to see how these theories are evident and not so evident on a daily basis in all of the gradients of society and thus prepare to have students, colleagues and PTA (parent-teacher

associations) members (and anyone who can) reflect on it. In order to do so it is necessary to go through stages of careful analysis and planning, which the writers now discuss.

Second Stage: Diagnosis and Reflection

Figure 3. Steps in the Diagnosis and Reflection Stage



In this part the topic is not important. Instead what really matters is understanding the other and valuing others in order to truly know, value and understand ourselves (Sager, 2013). In the same light, the writers highlight (Kumaravadivelu's, 2003, p. 269) statement that "even if a group of learners, as in most educational contexts, appear to belong to a seemingly homogeneous national or linguistic entity, their life values, life choices, lifestyles and, therefore, their world view may significantly vary". This statement is particularly appropriate, although not exclusively, for the Colombian context, where teachers can find so many variations, from one region to another, in language, folklore, religion.

The traditional language classroom "ignores multicultural and subcultural variations within national or linguistic boundaries" Kumaravadivelu (2006, p.

268). Other examples of this situation include the lack of sense of connection to indigenous communities which long pre-date colonization and the process of disembodiment fostered through processes such as adopting foreign educational models, such as Pruebas PISA, and competition with other countries. One final example is the general sense of achievement when reaching foreign standards in whatever field of knowledge or industry (MEN, 2006).

As a result of these situations, policies are created based on these standards, which are covertly chosen and set with no or little assessment, assistance and/or involvement of the academic community (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009). These top-to-bottom policies intend to train students to pass exams such as BEC, PET, FCE – administered by the British Council,

in order to certify “proficient” users of the language. Mostly passing these exams is the only justification provided for students to learn what they learn; factual applications of this knowledge, as well as real participants are left aside, ignoring that students’ thoughts and attitudes greatly affect what they are able and willing to learn.

Krashen’s (1987) theory tells us that “acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (1987, p. 1). The previous idea is a major aspect of learning any topic and what a student is willing to learn is undeniably determined by what s/he knows and his/her way of looking at the world.

For the particular case of languages, it is impossible for a person to engage successfully in the path of learning a second or foreign language if passion and dedication are not there. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that “some of the established classroom strategies fail to use students as cultural informants and thus fail to capitalize on the cultural capital they bring to the classroom” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 193). So it is not only a matter of motivation, but also methodology and classroom strategies. Most teachers fail to see cultural wealth as a learning opportunity, and rather ignore students’ personal history and

former experiences and in some cases they even see that background as an obstacle in the learning process.

For this reason, it is important to make a diagnosis based on students’ needs, previous knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes and then analyze their context and identify their weaknesses and strengths. Being as resourceful as possible and seeing everything as an opportunity to learn and allow students to explore, problematize and discover different points of view of the topics they believed familiar. In Kumaravadivelu’s (2003, p. 193) words “the task of the teacher is to show how these familiar themes have unfamiliar dimensions when looked at from a global perspective”. It is here where the true process of decolonization can begin.

Based on all of the above, the writers firmly believe most “classrooms are decontextualized from the learners’ point of view when the learner’s feelings, their beliefs and what is important, their reasoning and their experience are not part of the assumed context of the teachers’ communication” (Young, 1992, p. 59, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 192). For this reason, the process of spreading the words of decolonization has already started by echoing (Brice & Mangiola, 1991, p. 37), who pointed out how they wanted “to urge teachers to make schooling equally strange for all students and thus to expand the ways of thinking,

knowing and expressing knowledge of all students through incorporating many cultural tendencies” as cited in (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 267).

This process starts with the intention of fostering social and cultural empathy; recognizing themselves as members of a community is only the first step, it is also required that they see and learn about other cultures, not as better or worse, but merely as different and functional within their own established paradigms and rules. Likewise, it is important that they see how the interaction of these different cultures has a history of conquer, defeat, subjugation and overpowering, whenever two of them have come into contact.

Third Stage: Developing Decolonizing Materials

This section is divided in two sub-stages; the first one dealing with the development of decolonizing materials and the second one with decolonizing activities. Hence, the authors of this article propose to develop the material based on each specific activity to make sure it serves the purposes stated and at the same time to avoid choosing the material and, from it, trying to make the activity fit in. This process will unavoidably imply thinking and determining the materials required to achieve the said goal and the corresponding activities.

“All teachers develop theories of learning and teaching which they apply in their classrooms even though they are often unaware of doing so” (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 24). The unwilling and unnoticed development and change of such theories is a part of the individual process of professional growth of a teacher. “It is useful for teachers to try to achieve an articulation of their theories by reflecting on their practice” (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 24), but more than that, it is helpful for others as for themselves, to share the reflections stemming from the process.

For instance, this article brings into consideration the Colombian case, where the Ministry of National Education has provided schools with tablets for students to use, as well as textbooks, which now replace the syllabus. This process has been carried out paying little attention to what teachers and learners need, believe and see as necessary in each one of their particular contexts.

Therefore, what is projected to point out is the necessity to address professional improvement of the teacher towards the development of materials which foster decolonizing practices, that is, to find new alternatives in daily teaching practice, without breaking educational policies or rules. If development of materials is not possible due to policies, restrictions and time/ place/ administrative constraints, it is recommended to use these materials

after applying a filter of adaptation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1995). For this process to be carried out smoothly this article adopts and presents a compilation of some proposals by other authors Sanford, (Hopper & Starr, 2012), as well as our own voices to put forward the following criteria:

- Bring together the ideas that you have, bearing in mind how many times teachers follow a spiral process.
- Look at the topic you have to teach establishing an alternative point of view.
- Connect reality, daily life experiences and students' voices with the language.
- Design materials in which you can acknowledge origins, indigenous practices through experiential involvement.
- Design materials, such as cards with questions for debates about real situations, role-plays about citizenship competences, or that make students wonder about life, giving them reasons to ask questions instead of giving them answers.

As the writers of this paper have discussed, most of the materials currently used in schools and universities are provided by publishing houses, which usually include and take as a basis culture from countries within the inner circle. To clarify, the inner circle refers to those countries such as

Australia, New Zealand and North America, where English was spread across the world in the first migration of British people (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). Thus, unawareness about decolonization can make teachers fail to see and analyze the social, economic and historical components, such materials bring into the classroom and consequently to students' blossoming critical competence. Therefore, the authors of this article believe that careful assessment and adaptation of such materials can be used to create such awareness, firstly in teachers and consequently in students and the societies they are members of.

Third Stage: Developing Decolonizing Activities

In this third stage, we have taken into consideration the principles by Sanford et al. (2012), which serve to develop decolonizing activities.

- Be conscious that learning is emergent.
- Focus on teacher-student interaction rather than unidirectional communication.
- Be ready to let students learn inside and outside the classroom, let them be noisy.
- Give students information for them to summarize it and use it for a purpose.
- Let students work in groups, pairs or individually to build the self and the other.

- Guide learners to find their own solutions and answers to their own questions.
- Let students evaluate their own learning and evaluate them in different ways.
- Give students the opportunity to choose topics and activities (Teacher does not need to be the only one deciding what happens in the class)
- Focus on inter and multidisciplinary approaches.
- Teach them to cooperate, to be supportive and collaborate with others.

These activities can be easily implemented in any and most classrooms and classes. The writers believe empowering students is a way to make students responsible for their learning and thus to face in a more focused and critical manner the concept of empowerment Truscott, Tejada & Colmenares (2006). This concept of empowerment can be understood as the process by which the participants of a project become aware of their capacities, potentialities, knowledge and experiences in the area to assume responsibilities in the development of autonomy and the total participation to make decisions, not only about research topics but other topics related to their life.

Fourth Stage: Implementing Decolonizing Materials and Activities

Although at the beginning it might be frustrating, teachers must remember that Rome was not built in a day. Real changes take time, and they require perseverance and effort and changes can sometimes surprise us by having a greater impact than what was expected.,

No matter where you are:

- Be careful and be patient. Decolonization is a long -term process.
- Do not give up. We need students who recognize and problematize reality rather than blindly follow rules and parameters.
- Change the rules of your teaching practices. No more rows in the classroom. Have challenging activities instead of evaluations. Practice the language instead of teaching for exams. No more answers but instead questions.
- No more Hollywood stars on your study guides, but instead everyday people, indigenous people, common people from all over the world. Make students feel like they own the language.
- Be aware that you are an agent of change. Probably your salary won't increase, but what matters is the change you can do from your place of work.
- Do not follow rules. Create your own rules.

- Bear in mind that language is not a restriction but an opportunity.

Fifth Stage: Share

Once you have completed the process, it is expected you will have discovered and breached new postures and points of view (from students and teachers) on many of what you may have believed to be irrelevant or relevant aspects of classroom practice. Every positive or negative aspect that you observe from your students should be shared with other teachers, sometimes you can just be heard, and sometimes you can get feedback from your colleagues. Other peoples' experiences might prove valuable for your own practice. Even if this knowledge is only experiential, though theoretically nurtured by the first stage, it is valuable not only for you, but might also prove useful for other teachers who are attempting to enter the process of decolonization of young minds.

Conclusions

Decolonization can happen at any time because it is a lifelong process and it entails processes of "unlearning" things that may be rooted within the deep culture (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) of a society. Since colonization has been present for a long time, more than 500 years in the Colombian context, decolonization proposals and ideas are just sprouting up and therefore still

require support in order to grow and expand.

It is crucially important to let people know about decolonization proposals as well as to start sharing this notion in all academic events possible, in order to create awareness in those who will then have the social responsibility to spread these ideas. It is difficult to make policy makers change their minds. However, if one of the young minds present in a classroom develops a decolonized perspective, then the whole country might have an opportunity to acquire an educationally informed representative, who actually cares and contributes to view academy as a space for "educating" people rather than a factory fabricating domesticated assets.

The new and old generations of teachers hold in their hands the future of the country. For this reason, it is the responsibility of teachers, students, parents and policy-makers to subvert the way education is carried out, in order to achieve a wider, deeper change in society. This change is not expected to be automatic. In time, teachers from all subjects and fields should not be seen as babysitters or experts, but rather as those in charge of pointing out the things that create polemics regarding teaching, learning, academy, education and daily life while transmitting knowledge in a particular field.

To sum up, the writers of this article would like to highlight this quote by (Freire, 1993) as the motto that guides

teachers' practice: it is necessary to be aware that education probably would not change the world, but it will change the people who are able to change the world.

Pedagogical Implications

Firstly, undergraduate programs oriented to teacher training should include a component of decolonization from their very beginning as one of the main lines of development and professional preparation, rather than waiting for graduate programs to offer these alternative perspectives of incorporating decolonizing practices in teachers' daily professional performance. The process of unlearning could be avoided if pre-service teachers were given this alternative.

Secondly, decolonization concepts and activities should be included not only in language learning and teaching programs, but those decolonizing processes should be incorporated, as well, in all secondary school subjects and university education. Due to the fact that decolonization practices can be tackled at any point in the education process, the important thing is to create spaces inside the classroom, as well as in evaluation processes, where students are allowed to make mistakes related to the systematic aspects of the language but favor the ideological aspect of the language like communicating ideas, thoughts, and fragments of their lives while disregarding grammar mistakes.

Finally, students should be educated on the importance of life-long, meaningful learning, rather than just cramming for a test. However, this would also require teachers to take a slight detour from tunnel-vision pedagogical agendas filled with grammar-based syllabi, as well as from the need to fulfill all the content requirements set for a term. These situations greatly limit students' critical potential, as they prevent deeper thinking and further application of the teaching that is supposed to be occurring within the classroom. Likewise, opening spaces for student discussion on their points of view is a practice space that allows students foster the development of argumentation and critical thinking skills.

References

- Alves, R. (2005). *A alegria de ensinar*. São Paulo, Brasil: Ed. Papirus.
- Cakir, I. (2006). Developing the Cultural awareness in Foreign Language Teaching. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 7 (3), 154-161.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Guerrero, C., & Quintero, A. (2009). English as a Neutral Language in the Colombian National Standards: A Constituent of Dominance in English Language Education. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 11 (2), 135-150.

- Halliday, M. (1973). *Explorations in the functions of Language*. London: Edward A.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1995). *English for Specific Purposes. A learning - centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kachru, B., & Nelson, C. (2006). *The handbook of World Englishes*. Singapore: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Krashen, S. (1987). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. United States of America: University of Southern California.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003) *Beyond Methods: Macro-Strategies for Language Teaching*. New haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Post-method*. New Jersey: ESL & Applied Linguistics Series.
- Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia. (2006). *Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés*. Serie Guía No 2. Revolución Educativa. Colombia: MEN.
- Méndez, M. (2010). La educación mediada por el mundo. Pistas para la promoción de prácticas educativas descolonizadoras. *Revista Electrónica Educare*, 14 (1), 47-58.
- Orwell, G. (1946). *Political writings of George Orwell*. Bookyards library of the world. Retrieved from <http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/orwellpol.pdf>
- Sager, M. (2013). *Understanding the Hidden Curriculum: Connecting teachers to themselves, their students, and the earth*. United States of America: Portland State University.
- Sanford, K., Hopper, T., & Starr, L. (2012). Transforming Teacher Education Thinking: Complexity and Relational Ways of Knowing. *Complicity. An International Journal of complexity and Education*. 12 (2), 26-48.
- Shor, Ira. (1996). *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Tejada, C., & Espinoza, M. (2009). *Toward a decolonizing pedagogy: Social Justice Reconsidered*. Retrieved from: <http://arelosangeles.pbworks.com/f/Tejada+-+Decolonizing+Pedagogy.pdf>
- Thomas, L., Wareing, S., Singh, I., Stilwell, J., Thornborrow, J., & Jones, J. (2004). *Language, Society and power*. (2nd ed). London and New York: Routledge.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013). *Developing materials for language teaching*. London, Great Britain: Continuum.
- Truscott, A., Tejada, H., & Colmenares, S. (2006). *Empoderamiento y Procesos de construcción Curricular Bilingue*. (1ra Ed) Universidad Del Valle, Cali, Colombia: Unidad de artes gráficas, Facultad de Humanidades.
- Walsh, S. (2006). *Investigating classroom discourse*. London: Routledge.