Using feelings and emotions in the EFL classroom to improve writing skills through story writing workshops[1]

El uso de los sentimientos dentro de la clase de Lengua Extranjera para mejorar la habilidad escrita mediante el uso de Talleres de Escritura de Historias

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the role that feelings and emotions play when they are utilized inside the EFL classroom with eighth grade students. They were encouraged to talk about their feelings and emotions through the development of ten workshops based on writing short stories from their own life experiences. The results showed that feelings and emotions are a part of students that cannot be ignored because they are a factor in the learning process. Self-directed learning and a positive classroom environment are also key factors that should be considered in addition to the students' emotional side when learning English as a foreign language.

Key Words: Feelings, Emotions, Short stories, Writing skills.

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Resumen

Este trabajo pretende analizar el papel que juegan los sentimientos y emociones cuando son traídos dentro del salón de clase de la lengua extranjera, inglés con estudiantes de grado octavo. Los estudiantes fueron alentados a dejar aflorar sus sentimientos y emociones a través del desarrollo de diez talleres basados en la escritura de historias cortas a partir de sus propias experiencias de vida. Los resultados dejaron ver cómo los sentimientos y las emociones son una parte de los estudiantes que no puede ser evitada en el proceso de enseñanza- aprendizaje, porque son parte de su desempeño en el salón de clase. También se concluye que el aprendizaje auto-dirigido y un ambiente positivo en el aula de clase son parte de la influencia observada al tomar esta parte emocional de los estudiantes dentro del salón de clase durante el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera inglés.

Palabras clave: Sentimientos, Emociones, Historias Cortas, Habilidad Escrita, Taller.

Introduction

In Colombia, the MEN (National Ministry of Education) (2012) stated that the *Citizenship Competences* are cognitive, emotional, and communicative abilities. These abilities, alongside emotions, are important in a classroom because they help students construct a real democratic community.

They refer to these abilities as the changes that are necessary in order to improve the quality of education and student's emotions. However, what we see in the classroom is that emotions are relegated to just being inner aspects of students. Of course, they are part of a student's intimate life, but they also affect the student's actions inside of the classroom. Calle, De Cleves and Velásquez (2011, p. 95) stated that "the emotion is stronger than the thought." Students' thoughts are managed by their emotions: what they feel, the problems they have, and the situations they live though. Therefore, these life experiences are the catalyst for their emotions in class, including how they talk or act.

This article describes a project that introduced ten writing workshops, which involved eighth graders using their own life experiences and emotions. During the development of the workshops, students received guidelines on grammar and writing from the teacher. At the end of each workshop, a story describing their experiences from the point of view of a fictional character was to be turned in. Finally, each story was collected in a portfolio, and a video was created based on the story they wrote.

These students were observed and interviewed for four months during the workshops and volunteered to share their stories with their classmates at the end. It was an approach which resulted in the improvement of their writing skill and self-directed learning method. Moreover, it allowed students to work collaboratively, look for tools to help themselves writing in English, and feel English closer to them.

Justification

The purpose of this project was to encourage students to write in a foreign language about their own life experiences using their emotions. In a global context, emotions and feelings are not commonly considered in an EFL classroom. According to Perry (2014), teachers must consider feelings inside the classroom because motivation depends on a students' emotions, needs, problems, and life experiences. This is what makes every student unique, and consequently, makes it very difficult for us to know every aspect of a student's life. It is very easy to forget about these problems and continue teaching what is established in the curriculum.

As stated by Cherry (2014), "emotions definitely can control us as human beings with different feelings and lives." Emotions can make us act or react in a positive or negative way in the classroom according to what we live and feel. Children who are always acting out with violence inside the classroom may have many problems that make them behave this way. A teacher's job is not to solve a students' life problems, rather it is to comprehend

and teach with empathy. Teachers can use these crises to help students make the change by themselves. This project demonstrated a way in which students' emotional side could be considered. In doing so, students could be encouraged and motivated to learn and take ownership of their own learning process.

Problem Statement

There are many public institutions in Paipa, all of which have English as a subject. A survey given to eighth grade students showed that students did not care about learning a foreign language. As a result, their level of English was very low, and they are not motivated to learn. Moreover, students are accustomed to receiving English classes in Spanish. Therefore, they do not like it when someone speaks to them in English. This led to students misbehaving in class and affirming that they did not understand English. They did not feel that English was something they really needed to learn.

Current research underlines the need to start looking at foreign language learning motivation from a different perspective (Dörnyei, 2007; MacIntyre, 2002; Meyer and Turner, 2006). The suggestion to include motivation should be considered as an important factor in promoting students' success in their language learning process. The main purpose of education is the student and their emotions and life experiences. These become an undeniable part of each student in the classroom that can connect students to their foreign language learning

process. After analyzing these issues, it was necessary to establish a strategy to motivate students to write about themselves and their experiences. This aimed at improving their writing skill by making English more personal for students, as well as motivating them to learn the foreign language from their own experiences and feelings.

According to the prior information, the research question that emerged was:

What happens when students bring their feelings and emotions into the classroom through workshops on writing stories?

Literature Review

Emotions and Feelings

Simonsen (2007) made a comparison between Power and Damasio´s theories on emotion and feelings. Powers (2005, cited by Simonsen, 2007) expressed that there is a cognitive side to each human being, and that this side is where we place our state of emotions. This theory assumes that experiences are fixated memories, and their results become behaviors displayed by the individual. Behaviors do not arise solely from the way people think, but from how people learn and face certain life experiences. In order words, our thinking is shaped by the way we live and our experiences; the combination of both constitutes behavior. Damasio (2003, cited by Simonsen, 2007) also expressed that behaviors can be visible. Meanwhile feelings are always hidden, unseen by anyone other than the one who experiences the feeling. As

Damasio stated, emotions are actions or movements, which can be mostly visible to others as they occur in facial expressions, voice, and in specific behaviors. These feelings are expressed as the emotions shown when you are sad, happy, surprised, or in love. The emphasis of this project was to look at the emotions that students showed during the classes while completing the activities based on their feelings during each workshop. Emotions were recorded as observable data, while experiences were used as the means for which students shared their feelings in the classroom.

Writing Skill

This project used short stories to evaluate the writing ability of students. Coe and Rycroft (1983, p. 1) stated that "writing skills concentrate on the skills that are specific to the writing of English." They refer to the skill of writing as the ability of "learning by doing" and provide us with many reasons that help us explain why writing skills would work for our approach. The first reason is that it is more interesting doing something with a hands-on approach. In other words, the best way to teach someone how to do something is by letting them do it (Schank, Berman & Macpherson, cited in Reigeluth, 1999). Thus, if you write on your own, you retain the information better than if you write what is already stated. The second reason is that students have achieve greater awareness and better understanding when they need to find solutions to their own problems. Therefore, this process becomes a meaningful way to retain the knowledge that they acquired

themselves. The third reason they give is that by writing, teachers have a clear picture of the misunderstandings of students and what to focus on in future lessons.

Writing can be approached as a product and as a process. Writing as a product looks at writing as a final text which must be checked without considering the process that led to that text. Meanwhile, writing as a process regards writing as an expression of the mental process it entails as a means of communication. This view sees successful composition as an interaction between the writer, the text, and the reader (Osterholm, 1986). The teacher becomes a facilitator rather than a judge. The teacher must understand writing as a series of drafts following some writing stages. According to Cuesta and Rincón (2010), these stages are: pre-writing, first draft composition, feedback, second draft writing, and proofreading. The first stage prepares students to write by showing models and developing activities that encourage them to write. The second stage is the first production draft produced by students. The third stage emphasizes the teacher's role as a guide in the writing process when giving feedback. The fourth stage provides an opportunity for learners to revise and produce a new draft based on the teacher's comments. The final stage is for students to focus on the use of appropriate vocabulary and grammar.

Short stories

Broks (2003, p. 41) claimed that a "human being is a story telling

machine", that each individual is a story. In fact, we tell stories about what we live through every day. Damasio (2000) stated that narratives are a human instinct because we start telling ourselves the story before we even speak to anyone else. In the past, indigenous people transmitted their stories by talking to keep them alive. We continue to do this; narratives or short stories come from our experiences, our beliefs, and feelings. Telling stories is not easy for everybody, much less when we have to talk about ourselves instead of imagining a story. Writing a story, however, can be more comfortable for students because they present their experience indirectly.

According to Mubarak (2013), the use of short-stories in the foreign language classroom has various personal, educational, and emotional benefits. Educational benefits include helping learners to foster their foreign language skills. Emotional and personal benefits include a connection with the characters in their stories, which can also contribute to the emotional and personal growth of the students as a way to prepare and cope with conflicts successfully.

Research Design

This project was based on a qualitative research method because, according to Carr and Kemmis (1986), the interest was to gain understanding of the world and meaningful experiences lived by the students. In this case, the context was the classroom, in which feelings are not regularly considered as part of the class. Patton (1985) stated that qualitative research

aims at understanding the situations and interactions between people in a particular context. This project relied on the analysis of emotions and behaviors that students showed individually or in a group, while working on short stories in writing workshops.

Furthermore, this research study utilizes a descriptive approach because it requires the perceptions and opinions of the teacher. This project follows the case study method because, according to Yin (1994, p. 13), it is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life-context." One specific classroom was the setting for this project, which took place during a span of four months. Here students' emotions were described and recorded though classroom observation. These observations were strengthened with surveys, which could unveil how the students' felts towards the activities and their own work on life experiences.

Setting and Participants

This research study took place in a public educational institution in Paipa with 28 eighth grade students, whose ages ranged from 13 to 16 years old. Some of these students are repeating the year or have been rejected from other institutions. This educational institution is focused on tourism, as Paipa is one of the most widely known tourist destination of Boyacá. This is also the only school in Paipa where English and French are taught as part of the city's touristic emphasis. As seen in the diagnosis survey, students are not motivated to learn English. They do not

see it as useful subject. English classes are given in Spanish, which is also the reason why students have a very basic level of English.

Instruments

Students' artifacts. For the purpose of this project, students´ artifacts are the papers that students write during the workshops, and the videos they create from those written papers.

Surveys. Fink (2003, p. 1) stated that a survey is "a system for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior." These surveys were conducted after each one of the workshops with students in order to get information about their thoughts, experiences and emotions during the workshops. (see Annex 1)

Video recordings. Marshall and Rossman (1989) defined observations as a systematic process which describes the events, behaviors, and artifacts in the setting of the project. However, as the teacher is involved during the workshops, Bowman (1994) suggested the use of video recording, due to the flexibility and possibility of looking at context, dialogue and actions more profoundly. In this case, classes were video recorded to assess the emotions that could have escaped the teacher's eyes during the workshops, such as attitudes, gestures, and students' actions inside the classroom.

Teacher's diary. The teacher wrote a diary and kept notes on what happened during the class, after the class, and a reflection about students' performance. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010, p. 56), we must consider two different kinds of field notes. The first are descriptive notes, where the teacher must describe what happens in the classroom: actions, reactions, gestures, movements, and classroom progress. The second are reflective field notes, where the researcher can express her point of view about the situation. Both kind of field notes are relevant for this project because they enriched the situation and provided a different view on what occurred inside the classroom.

Unstructured interviews. Interviews were used to understand the feelings and emotions of students during their participation in the workshops, as well as their experiences in foreign language classes. According to Punch (1998), unstructured interviews are used to understand complex behaviors in a natural flow of conversation. Many unstructured interviews were conducted with students in order to understand the experiences and feelings they had before, during and after the workshops, from their own perspective.

Pedagogical Design

This project aimed at understanding what happened when students used feelings and emotions inside the classroom as a tool to learn English through writing. To achieve this, ten workshops were developed with eighth grade students in a public Colombian educational institution. In these workshops, students were

encouraged to use their most important life experiences to deal with their feelings inside the classroom. During the workshops they were told to focus on a question or activity, which led students to recall specific memories and feelings.

Workshop names	Feeling or emotion	Guiding question
Countryside flowers	Every feeling shown by students	Can everyone be a hero?
Who I am?	Every feeling shown by students about themselves	Who I am?
I am a hero	Self esteem	If I could be a hero, what would be my superpowers?
My funniest memory	Laugh	What was the funniest memory of your life?
The best day of my life.	Happiness	What was the best day of my life?
What scares me?	Fear	What was your most frightening memory?
My regrets	Sadness, hate	What do you regret about in your life?
Everyone can be a hero.	Courage	What do you think about you being a hero?
My story, my life	Security	Do you want to share your story?
I am a Hollywood superhero		Creation of the videos

Table 1. *Description of the workshop names, feelings, and guiding questions (see Annex 2).*

As dealing with emotions and feelings can be very difficult, teachers must be extremely sensitive. At the beginning, a sensitization workshop was done, which aimed at catching the students' attention on different people who have become heroes in the real world. Then, they created a super hero, which represented themselves and with the possibility of having superpowers. Therefore, they started writing about the description of their own character and the setting of the story. After that stage, they looked at a question posed in each of the workshops (see Table 1). The purpose of this activity was for students to remember previous life experience. Later, the teacher gave the students her own answer to the question with three objectives in mind: to teach students grammatical aspects and new vocabulary, to give students an example of what they were supposed to do, and to gain the students' trust so that they would share their stories.

Following the example given by the teacher, students were encouraged to start imagining their own experiences and write about them, keeping grammatical aspects in mind. To highlight, these grammatical aspects

were chosen in consideration of the school's curriculum. The teacher's role was that of a guide and helper during the students' writing process. This is because the students were the only ones who had information about their life experiences and how they wanted to tell their story. After writing their own answer, they had to draw their character's lived situation on a blank piece of paper, which was kept in a portfolio with the written text.

Consequently, the next stages were part of the students' feedback and assessment. The papers delivered by the students were corrected in terms of grammar and coherence. This helped students improve their papers. However, grammatical aspects were not the focus of assessment, rather the completion of the activity in the workshops was graded (Table 1).

In the next class, they received individual and group feedback. There were some common grammatical mistakes and suggestions that were done, while other suggestions were given individually depending on the students' language level. During this stage, students kept all of their texts in their portfolio. This was done in such a way that when all of their work was put together, the three parts of the short story was developed. According to Lucke (1999), the characters, action, and plot are organized within a text containing a beginning, middle, and end.

In the last workshops, an additional activity was presented to motivate students to share their stories. Students, with the help of the teacher, took photos of the images that they kept in their portfolios. Then, they created an image-audio video using *Movie Maker*, a Windows program. The students read their own stories for the audio, and they were recorded by the teacher. As they were timid about reading their own stories, I tutored students who wanted to practice pronunciation or needed help with the usage of the program. By using this program, they were able to create a movie on their own. These movies were shared by each one of the students in front of their partners. This phase of the project was not made mandatory, as some of the stories were difficult to share.

Findings

The answer to the research question (see Chart 1) for this project was obtained in using by the grounded theory approach. According to Strauss and Corbin (1997), it allows for the use of a comparative method analysis and coding procedure. Thus, the information gathered was placed into a chart for analysis of interactions and commonalities found in the surveys, interviews, teacher's diary, video recordings and students' artifacts. By doing this, four categories presented themselves:
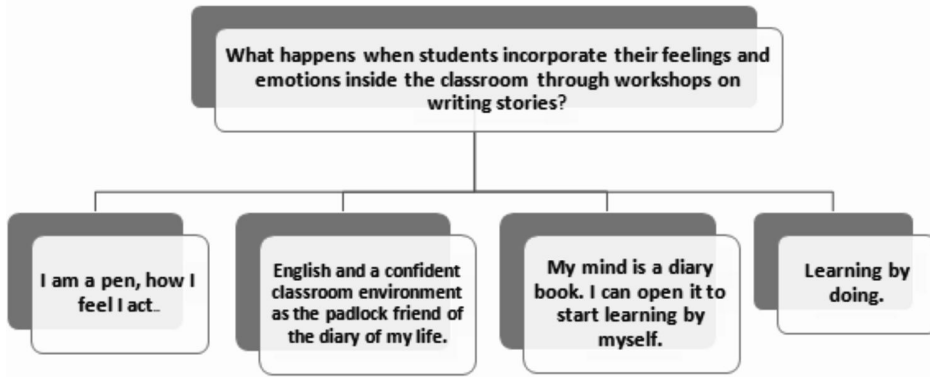
Chart 1. Research categories and questions that emerged from the results.

I am a pen, how I feel I act

As teachers, we cannot manage feelings. In fact, the students showed many feelings in just one class. For example, in the lesson plan on sadness, they did not show just sadness. They showed anger, frustration, and also happiness. Students' performance depended on the way they felt. If they are sad, they do not like to work, or they are disruptive in class. We can assume that they are badly behaved students, however, it goes beyond that. Their actions are reflections on what they are living inside and outside of the classroom. From the surveys, 70% of students affirmed that they do not pay attention in class when they are having problems. This is evidenced in the following statements:

"Al estar furiosa, yo grito a mis maestros y compañeros" (Excerpt from interviews, VR 2.3)

[When I am furious, I yell at my teacher and classmates]

"Si porque mis sentimientos cambian mi humor" (Excerpt from Surveys 5,7)

[Yes because my feelings change mood]

"me acuerdo de esto y de tal cosa y me pongo triste"

[I remember about this or that, and I become sad]

These answers demonstrate how students bring different feelings with them into the classroom. These feelings become actions, as Damasio stated (1994). These are the same actions that are punished by teachers, who have not listened to their students first. This can provide and answer as to why students come into the class with a bad attitude. If students do not feel good inside the classroom, they will not act in the best manner. In the workshop on the feeling of sadness, the teacher stated:

"I was surprised when some of my students called me to show me their stories, I could see their sad expressions, I could the feelings and emotions they were showing me. Even a girl when to show me and she started crying and gave me a hug." (Teacher´s diary 6).

Students' feelings can be refocused in the classroom. The teacher can find ways to motivate students to use feelings with a purpose. Moreover, the aim of the workshop was reached because students showed sadness and wrote about their sad experiences. Sadness is a feeling that teachers often avoid, even if they recognize that the student is sad. This is because it is difficult to decide when it is appropriate to intervene. However, it is evident that by using writing, students can express their feelings, giving them the opportunity to decide if they want to share what they feel or not.

Additionally, the students' behavior changed remarkable during the workshops. change in the behavior of students is remarkable along the workshops. After the first workshop, 70 % of the students stated that they liked to tell their stories in the classroom, and 30 % answered that they did not like to do it. Among the reasons to justify their negative answers are:

"No me gusta, son mis cosas personales" (Student 12)

[I don't like it, it is my personal business].

"No me parece divertido" (Student 9)

[I don't think it's fun].

"No me gusta contar mis cosas personales" (Student 13, Excerpts from suvey 1.1)

[I don't like to share my personal things].

"No porque no me gusta estar contando lo que me sucede y nadie lo podía comprender" (Student 4)

[No because I don't like to tell people what is going on and nobody can understand it].

"no porque no me gusta que sepan que estoy triste" (Student 16)

[No because I don't like people knowing that I am sad].

"porque en los salones de clase hay estudiantes inmaduros que se burlan de lo que uno dice o piensa o de aquellas cosas que le han pasado" (Student 5, Excerpts from survey 3.4)

[because in the classroom there are immature students that laugh at what one says or thinks, or even about things that have happened].

However, at the end of the workshops, the last survey inquired about what they liked and thought about the workshops they had developed. The following answers are highlighted below:

"por fin algo diferente a escribir en inglés" (Student 10)

[Finally something different to write about in English]

"con estos talleres contaba mis historias de vida" (Student 1)

[With these workshops, I was able to tell my life stories].

"uno se podía expresar con todas las actividades" (Student 7)

[You can express yourself in all of the activities].

"porque saqué todo lo que llevo en mi corazón" (Student 13).

[because I took out everything that I was carrying in my heart].

"no sé tal vez es una forma de expresarme sin que nadie lo supiera" (Student 6)

[I don't know, perhaps it is a way forexpressing myself without anyone knowing].

"expresé mis sentimientos… y algunas veces pude desahogarme" (Student 17)

[I expressed my feelings, and at times, I could let it go].

"se divierte y aprende muchas cosas" (Student 27)

[It is fun and we learn a lot of things].

"me gusta son fáciles de hacer y se entiende" (Student 18)

[I like it, they are easy to do and I understand them].

"pues un poco raro porque casi uno no trabaja de eso en otras clases" (Student 21)

[It is a bit weird because we rarely work on these things in class].

"me sentí muy sentimental al recordar todo lo que me había pasado" (Student 8)

[I felt really sentimental remembering what had happened in the past].

(Excerpts taken from survey 5.1)

The results changed at the end of the workshops. Of the students surveyed, 95% showed empathy towards the activity, and only 5 % did not like the workshops. It is important to write this here because it shows how the students' empathy towards the workshops increased significantly compared to the first survey. Additionally, in one of the last workshops, the teacher stated:

> *"I don´t know but I now I am really happy to go there and find my students and they are acting in a very good way inside the classroom and with me. This experience is becoming so amazing."* (Teacher´s diary 7)

It shows how if students feel good, their emotions are managed in a positive and useful way. They act effectively towards the tasks they are supposed to do.

English and a confident classroom environment as the padlock friend of the diary of my life

Almost all of the students completed the entire activity proposed in the workshops, just one student, out of 28, showed apathy towards it. Nonetheless, he was not forced to participate. However, the fact that almost all of the students participated willingly demonstrates that this strategy was effective. Students felt comfortable talking about their own life experiences when they feel confident in their learning environment. This can be evidenced in the following statements:+

> *"Sí porque puedo expresarme en clase"* (Excerpt from interviews, VR 2.13)

[Yes, because I can express myself in class]

"*uno se relaja y se siente más motivado*" (Excerpt from survey 5.7)
[You relax and it feels motivating].

"*jamás había visto mis compañeros tan unidos...*" (Excerpt from survey 5.5)
[I have never seen my classmates so united].

"*la profe nos entiende y me siento bien porque todos escuchan, se siente libre y es de una forma divertida*" (Excerpt from surveys 1.7)
[The teacher understands us and I feel good because everyone listens, I feel free and it is fun way to learn].

This showed how students used this activity as a way to express themselves inside the classroom. They had the possibility of conveying their voice without being judged.

Moreover, English became their friend, a tool they could use to release their most important memories and share them with their classmates without fear.

> "*Es que igual nadie va a entender lo que digo, porque está en Inglés*" (Excerpt from interviews, VR 2.22)
> [Well, no one is going to understand what I say because it is in English].

> "*Bien, pues me iso {hizo} recordar esos momentos que en verdad me han marcado, pero muy bien porque nadie lo supo*" (Excerpt from survey 5,6)

[Well, it made me think of those moments which have truly marked me, but it's good because no one found out].

These comments imply that these workshops would not have worked in the same way if they had been done in Spanish. They felt free to share their stories thinking that their classmates were not going to understand everything since it was written in a foreign language. Thus, English became a security tool that students used to write about their experiences.

One of the scariest expectations for this project was the journey of delving deeper into the academic relationship between the teacher and student, such as the loss of authority, indiscipline, lack of responsibility, etc. However, this situation was not observed. On the contrary, the students' discipline and follow-up improved:

> "*My students were very attentive, I was too happy because they were following my instructions although this class I tried to speak more in the foreign language.*" (Excerpt from the teacher's diary 7.3)

> "*I was surprised and I realized that when your students can feel confident with you, when they feel they can trust on you because you are a human being, just like them so they can open their minds and hearts*" (Excerpt from teachers´ diary 7.5)

"pues nada la profe…. Es la mejor se da a entender excelente, explica súper, y no solo es muy buena amiga" (Excerpt from survey 5.10)

[Well, nothing, the teacher….is the best. She makes herself understood in an excellent manner, she explains super well, and she is a good friend].

The previous statements confirm that a positive environment was created in the classroom. In this way, English class became the space where they could talk about their lives and say what they felt. The teacher became a listener more than a knowledge giver, without losing authority or setting the principal's objectives aside.

One additional tool that appeared during the development of the project was music. Relaxing music was played in the classroom during the students' production stage. It became a very useful tool which helped students concentrate. Although it merits further investigation, it seemed to noticeably influence the construction of a positive environment inside the classroom. This is evident in the teacher's notes regarding this aspect:

"I could feel what my students were feeling and this day I could say was the best one. Everyone was working on the same thing at the same time. I am so happy, it is working and now the environment in the classroom since the beginning of the project has changed until now." (Teacher´s diary 7)

It shows how a positive environment is an essential factor in promoting learning, as well as generating better work spaces for teachers. Students, as well as teachers, are human beings with feelings that can influence his/her work. If teachers are motivated in the classroom and students see that, they can also change their attitude.

My mind is a diary book I can open to start learning by myself.

Students felt more comfortable to write about their life experiences in English, as explained in the previous category. In the writing process, each one was the story teller, as stated by Brooks (2003) stated. This time, the storytelling was about themselves, which means that they had a lot to say. As they were motivated to write, they were encouraged to use the dictionary to look for new words in order to write what they wanted. After doing this, the teacher reviewed the work and provided feedback. For some of students, the activities required a greater effort because they did not share the same English language level. However, each student was able to work at his/her own pace, thereby, avoiding pressures associated with the writing process.

In the last workshops, there was an important fact about the students' performance in the classroom that should be recognized. This was evident in the way the students constructed a self-directed learning environment during the application of the workshops. Hiemstra (1994) stated that self-directed learning involves empowering students in many decisions associated with their learning process. It does not imply learning in isolation during the development of

different tasks, such as writing reflective activities. Students can learn from other students with the guide of the teacher. The role of the teacher turns into one that promotes continuous dialogue, secures resources, evaluates outcomes, and promotes critical thinking. This can be evidenced in the following excerpts taken from the teacher's diary notes throughout the process:

> *"My students were so attentive; many of the students who didn't want to work easily started working without saying a word."* (Excerpt from teacher´s diary 7.5)

> *"I gave them the resources they needed and they started to work."*
> (Excerpt from teacher´s diary 7.6)

> *"I could see today my students working together, sharing their work and helping each other."*
> (Excerpt from teacher´s diary 7.6)

Students also stated in the surveys how they worked easily and peacefully during the development of the workshops, and how they learned with this process:

> *"…jamás había visto a mis compañeros tan unidos..."*
> [I have never seen my classmates so united] (Survey 5,6)

> *"Algunos personas pueden aprender inglés y hasta yo que puedo aprender inglés".* (Survey 5,6)
> [Some people can learn English, even I can learn English]

> *"Uno puede viajar a sí mismo, desenrollarse uno solo".* (Survey 5,3)
> [You can travel yourself, develop yourself]

> *"Uno se relaja y se siente mucho más motivado".* (Survey 5,17)
> [You relax and feel much more motivated]

When students use their feelings in the classroom, there can work by themselves given that they are the only ones who have knowledge about their own life experiences. It is a strategy that gives students power in their own learning process.

Learning by doing.

Finally, the students' artifacts also demonstrated their work and learning progress. One student said in one of the interviews: "*Yo no pens*é *que fuera capaz de hacer esto*" [I didn't think I was going to be able to do this] (Excerpt from Interview 2.5). Moreover, they believed that they had learned writing and some pronunciation. As one student declared, *"hasta aprendimos a pronunciar algunas palabras"* [We even learned how to pronounce some words] (Excerpt from Interview VR 2.3). As Coe and Rycroft (1983) stated, you learn when you do. Students were happy with their final work because they did not feel like they were able to do it before starting. However, they did it all by themselves; the teacher was always in the classroom, but the ones who knew which stories to tell were them. Finally, the students' artifacts showed the students' progress in the foreign language learning

process. They could learn English by using their feelings and life experiences inside the classroom.

The students' writing skills improved, as observed in all of the short stories. To analyze some examples, there was grammatical comprehension, mainly of to be verb, past progressive, and simple past structures. However, students also used other grammatical tenses.

> *"He is fat, he is nineteen years old and he lives in a Castle."* (Student´s artifact, 2)

> *"Pepito lives in a little hut with his brothers. Pepito likes chocolates, plays soccer in the pars and he has many favorite sports."* (SA, 4)

> *"In a very sunny day, children were playing soccer when a ball hit a kid on his head."* (SA, 1)

> *"One day Pepito´s father told his son: you grandmother has dead…It was a really sad day for Pepito and his family. Pepito helped his father to keep calm in that moment."* (SA, 4)

Although in the last version of their short stories they presented some spelling and grammar mistakes, they also showed how they have improved remarkably in their writing skill. This is taking into account the low level they had at the beginning of the intervention, as well as the apathy they showed towards English.

> *"One day Nike he was walking on the street, but didn´t see light post and crashed he hit his head and he feel down on ground". (SA, 5)*

> *"Lather his fathe for about the sadness of this bad moment although he never forgets about his mother. Pepito gave to his father many hugs and the support he could and finally his dad was better".* (SA, 4)

These previous excerpts show some spelling mistakes. However, one can also notice the coherence and transitions words utilized in giving order to their ideas. Nonetheless, it also shows the lack of punctuation.

Conclusions

Using students' feelings inside the classroom is a useful strategy in motivating students to learn what you want to teach, in this case English. Students' perceptions about the English language changed during the development of the project. At first, they avoided any situation in which they had to write and express themselves in English. However, as this project underlines, students have a lot to say and want to be heard. Thus, the findings show how considering students' lives in their learning process result in a positive environment for students and teachers, too. When students are in a positive environment, they feel powerful in their learning process. They take on a participating role in their own learning process. Moreover, the role of the teacher also changed from being a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator and guide throughout the students' learning process.

In fact, this research clearly shows that motivation is associated with authentic student engagement

(Newmann, 1992). When they feel they are important, confident, and motivated to take part in their own learning, students concentrate and try harder in the foreign language process. As a result of students' engagement in self-directed learning, attitudes also developed throughout the project. Moreover, students improved their writing skill in the foreign language by showing retention and use of the grammatical contents taught in class.

Finally, Sylwester (1994) mentioned that emotions simply exist, and although we cannot control them, we do not have to ignore them because our emotional system plays a role in our learning process. Definitely, students' performance is affected by their feelings and the attitudes and emotions that come from this. This project showed that by letting students' feelings and emotions participate inside of the classroom, students' writing ability, attention, and efforts increased in their learning process.

Pedagogical implications

Writing about their own life experiences by creating short stories was meaningful for students and teacher. Students strengthened their writing ability, while feeling confident and heard in the classroom. The findings also showed how teachers can develop close relationships with his/her students by considering their feelings and experiences, without losing his/her authority in the classroom.

Teachers should also reflect on their own practices and make changes.

They should consider strategies and instruments that can make English useful, practical, and fun for learners. We can do so by making use of what we have in our own context and considering students as integral human beings and not just empty entities. However, teachers' beliefs about teacher-students relationships continue to be very traditional. The teacher's role needs to transformed depending on the context and learning needs of the students. Therefore, listening to students' feelings can change the way they feel inside the classroom, and consequently, how they act. Education is not just what you transmit or teach on a board, it is the way in which your mark on a person. Moreover, a student is not just brain tissue and a body. Rather, what we, as teachers, see inside of the classroom is just the tip of the iceberg.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Survey 3.5

ENCUESTA 3

Dirigida a niños y niñas entre 13 y 16 años de grado octavo de la **Institución Educativa Técnica Tomás Vásquez Rodríguez.** El objetivo de esta encuesta, es conocer la opinión de los estudiantes en cuanto a que sus emociones y sentimientos sean tomados en cuenta dentro de su proceso académico dentro del salón de clase del área de inglés, cuando escriben acerca de sus experiencias de vida.

Escoge una o varias respuestas cuando sea necesario.

1. ¿Has tenido experiencias de vida en las que te has sentido muy triste? ☒ No. Si
2. ¿Cómo has reaccionado ante estas experiencias?
   a. Gritas.
   b. Corres.
   c. Lloras.
   ☒ Otras: te ríes de estas o lloras ante ellas.
3. ¿Alguna vez has experimentado sentimientos de tristeza dentro del salón de clase? ☒ No.
   ¿Cuándo? cuando los compañeros aborrecen o maltratan al estudiante
4. Si experimentas esto dentro o fuera del salón de clase, esos sentimientos y emociones de tristeza viene de:
   a. Las cosas que haga yo y mis compañeros dentro del salón de clase que me puedan afectar.
   ☒ Mis experiencias de vida, lo que me haya pasado, los problemas que tenga en mi casa y mis relaciones personales, etc.
   c. Es mi deseo, si yo quiero estar triste lo estoy, yo soy la que elijo.
   d. Yo nunca estoy triste dentro del salón de clase.
   e. Otras: _____.
5. ¿Cómo crees que reflejas tu tristeza dentro del salón de clase?
   a. No pones atención a clase, porque estas triste.
   b. Te pones de mal genio y no quieres hacer nada.
   c. Te enojas por todo y puedes responder feo o incluso violentamente.
   d. Nunca experimento tristeza en mi vida, y no lo reflejo dentro de un salón de clase.
   e. Lloro.
   ☒ Otra: se siente una gran tristeza en el salón y el lloro alegrimas delos ojos y se pone poca atención.
6. ¿Cómo notas que tus compañeros están tristes? (por como actuan)
   e. Porque están enojados y hacen gestos.
   f. Porque puedo leer sus mentes y veo sus sentimientos.
   ☒ En sus acciones.
   h. Otra: _____.
7. ¿Recordar momentos tristes de tu vida que tipo de sentimientos y/o emociones trajeron a tu mente?
   felicidad, nostalgia, tristeza, Alegría y emociones
8. ¿Te gusta que puedas contar tus experiencias de vida en la materia de inglés? Sí ☒ ¿Por qué?
   Por que en los salones de clase hay estudiantes inmaduros
   que se burlan de lo que uno dice o piensa o de aquellas cosas que le
   an pasado.
9. ¿Crees que este tipo de experiencias de vida que son tristes también pueden ser incluidos en tu proceso académico a la hora de aprender inglés u otra materia? ☒ No ¿Por qué?
   por las experiencias que uno como persona ha tenido que
   pasar en las diferentes situaciones que se presentan

GRACIAS!!!