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Using Literature in the English Class: Outcomes Through Action Research with 8th grade EFL Students in a Bilingual Private School in Quito

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my whole career and this research project to God that has given me the strength and wisdom to pursue this objective, to my life companion that taught me that no matter what, we can still be brave, to my mom that has been my role model of tenacity and positive attitude, to my family that have showed me that hard work is the only way, to my friends that believed in me and always thought I could do it even when I didn't, and to my Sara and my Francisco that are my love source and who I admire mostly.

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RESUMEN

Los antecedentes de este estudio giran alrededor de encontrar una manera de mejorar mi práctica como profesora de Inglés como lengua extranjera en el 8vo. nivel de un colegio bilingüe. Cuando fui profesora de 1ero. de Básica en Educación Inicial, los niños tenían mucho interés por aprender Inglés y al no tener un libro de texto, yo planificaba las clases alrededor de varios textos literarios acorde a su edad. En base a estos se introducían vocabulario, gramática, comandos y demás contenidos del currículum. Los chicos no leían aún pero aún así tenían mucho interés en tomar los libros, hojearlos, simular su lectura a través de las ilustraciones y disfrutaban del aprendizaje. Cuando fui profesora de Inglés de 4to. y 5to. de Básica y ahora que soy profesora de 8vo. de Básica, veo una falta de interés constante en los alumnos en aprender Inglés y en la lectura. A través de una investigación de Acción Participativa, cambié el libro de texto que se utiliza como parte del currículum para introducir los contenidos y destrezas y puse en su lugar un texto literario. No pude deshacerme del libro de texto pero lo pude utilizar para practicar los conceptos en actividades asincrónicas. Mientras tanto al introducir el texto literario en el aula, que anteriormente era leído por los estudiantes como actividad asincrónica, observé y apunté en un diario el comportamiento, reacciones y comentarios de los alumnos para encontrar si este interés por aprender el idioma por medio de la lectura de un texto literario mejora en los alumnos.

Al ser yo la profesora, este cambio en mi manera de introducir las destrezas y conceptos puede convertirse en una mejora en mi práctica como docente si puedo encontrar un cambio de actitud de los alumnos frente al interés del aprendizaje del idioma. Los resultados de la investigación mantienen ciertos patrones que se pueden resumir en interacción visible del alumno con el texto literario, el incremento de interacción entre alumnos para discusión del texto literario, el trabajo autónomo del alumno.

Palabras clave: Inglés y Literatura, Enseñanza de Lengua Extranjera, Educación de Literatura en Lengua Extranjera, Investigación de Acción Participativa para enseñanza de Inglés.

ABSTRACT

The background of this study revolves around finding a way to improve my practice as an English as a Foreign Language teacher in the 8th grade in a bilingual school. When I was a teacher in Early Childhood, children had interest in learning English and because we didn't have a textbook, I planned my classes around many age-appropriate literary texts. Based on those, I introduced vocabulary, grammar and all the contents from the curriculum. Children didn't know how to read, but in spite of this they were interested in taking the books, scanning them and pretending they were reading them through picture reading. They enjoyed English learning when I was a 4th and 5th grade English teacher. Now that I am in 8th. grade, I can see a constant lack of interest in my students in learning English and in reading literary texts. Through Action Research I changed the textbook that is used as part of the curriculum to introduce contents and skills, with a literary text. I couldn't get rid of the textbook, but I could use it as an asynchronous concept practice activity. Meanwhile, by introducing the literary text in the classroom that was read before this research by the students as an asynchronous activity, I observed and jotted down in a journal the students' behavior, comments, and reactions to find out if their interest to learn English through literature increased.

As a teacher, this change in my way of introducing skills and concepts, can turn into an improvement in my teacher practice if I can find a change in the students' attitude towards their interest in learning English. The results of the research convey in certain patterns that can be summarized in a visible interaction with the text, an increase in the interaction within classmates to discuss the text, and students' autonomy.

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INTRODUCTION

Being regularly in front of a class for many years makes a teacher wonder what changes in methodologies, approaches, materials, or class management, must be done to improve teaching and learning. I am an 8th grade English teacher and I want to do something to grab my students' attention and make them feel interested in English. I have observed frustration and boredom in the use of textbooks and repetitive material, a decrease in class participation and interaction within students, mechanical student performance, difficulties in capturing students' attention, lack of commitment, and total disinterest in reading any type of material. When I worked in Early Childhood, I did not have any textbooks and my planning was built around children's literature. Young children loved reading aloud activities and felt excited about learning English. Through my experience in primary school and now in middle school, the students' interest in learning English has decreased in a considerable way.

In the school where I work, which for the purpose of this project will be called CJE, we use textbooks as the main material in the classroom from first grade to tenth grade. These books, great expensive textbooks with content, methodology and built-in activities, are designed according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These books have a generalized spectrum of contents based on the general needs of English Language students. They have a very focused objective that consists in developing the competences necessary to be able to reach the required levels in standardized tests. For this purpose, they follow a sequence of contents and exercises that concentrate on language mechanics but not in students' interests or needs. The topics of the units presented throughout the book are as general as can be to be able to reach foreign language students around the world. They include reading of articles which are used to introduce the unit topics with the vocabulary and grammar functions. The books are professionally developed, but what I

perceive in the classroom is that students start getting bored and become uninterested in them because of their monotony. My 8th grade students have used them for six years in a row now. The textbooks have a similar sequence in their presentations and practice activities. As a teacher, I also experience monotony because I have to follow the guidelines, sequence, material and activities of the book as the central resource of the class.

I am responsible for bringing variety into the class, so I usually combine the textbook with other activities, but the content of the textbook is extensive and requires many hours to be able to finish in an appropriate way for the students' benefit. That limits the number of additional activities that can be included. The textbook is used during class time. Class participation is done around these exercises using deduction of concepts. It is not easy to motivate students voluntarily. Games and contests are done around the execution of the activities presented in the textbooks every now and then. It is unusual that students interact in the English language to share opinions or even to ask about the activity. They often try to interact with the teacher in Spanish. I try to elicit language usage by telling them I don't understand what they are saying, and I somehow force them to communicate in English. But it is always a struggle, and students' interaction is almost nonexistent in the English Language.

From these experiences, I wonder if the lack of communication is a result of the uninterest of the topics of the book that do not connect with the students' interests or needs. It might be that the mechanics of the textbook make students focus on completing the exercises rather than finding new vocabulary, sayings, and idioms that help them communicate in a more natural way just as they listen or watch in the media. Therefore, I worry that my students are focused on completing the formative assessments that are predictable and repetitive instead of focusing on using the language they have learned in a practical way.

These exercises give students confidence to approach the assessments. They have the same format as the standardized tests of the CEFR. This design assures students to be prepared for this purpose and it is positive but turns out to be a mechanical exercise and repetitive exercise. The existing format fulfills the need for knowledge and analysis but comes along with monotony.

As additional material, I use a literary text for students to read as an asynchronous activity to practice extensive reading. I make reading assessments to ensure they are completing this task and we have no additional class time available to discuss it in the session. As a result, I can see that students are no longer interested in reading or in learning English. What I have seen is that there are few students that read the literary texts at home, and these are the ones that retell a short summary to the others. When I used to work in Early Childhood, I did not have any textbooks and my planning was made around children's literary texts which appropriate not only for the age in its language and vocabulary level but also on the topics discussed. The themes had to be interesting for them and they even used literary devices such as rhyme, rhythm, repetition, onomatopoeia, etc, lots of imagination and great illustrations. Young children loved reading aloud activities and felt excited about learning English. We read authors like Eric Carle, Leo Lionni, and Bill Martin Jr. Through my experience in Primary School and now in Middle School the interest in learning English and reading has lowered in a considerable way. In Early Childhood, children used to finish their tasks as soon as possible because they wanted to sit on the rug and grab any book off the shelf to start picture reading because they did not know how to read yet. They tried to recall what I read and started to retell the story following the sequence of the illustrations. Some of them even memorized the words and tried to trick me. At the end of the school year some of them read better in English than they did in Spanish. They knew the names of their favorite

authors, and their faces lit up if I started saying "... written by…" and could even guess whose book it was by the illustrations. They also knew how to express their needs by heart- they had a good comprehension of oral English.

When I started teaching fifth grade, I met with my Early childhood students again. They did not have books in the classroom, and when I started taking them to the library they weren't as excited as they were to read. We had an online platform with digital books but not even then were they too enthusiastic about reading them. Some of them still liked their English classes. Some of them were shy to speak in English to the teacher and of course they did not do it with their classmates. In middle school the story is not so different. They even have the liberty to go to the library and pick any title they want, but there are not many students who do it. And on top of all, a large number of students are just not interested in English classes.

After years of struggling with bored students, I recalled my years as an early childhood teacher, before my curriculum was bound to textbooks. What was it, I wondered, that I presented as a teacher, in my approach, methodology, material, sequence, lecture, that made those kids so excited about learning English? Would it be possible to capture some of that same excitement again with the older kids that I currently teach?

As a teacher and research, I developed this project because I wanted to experience that student excitement in English classes again, but with older kids and the only way to do it was to include something I did in the past, which was to teach through literature. I decided to include the literary text in my classroom, instead of using it for homework, I wanted to read it in the class. For the purpose of this research, the literary text is *Number the Stars* written by Lois Lowry. It is a short novel set in an important historical event as World War II, in which the characters are around the same age as the 8th. grade students. This is a book designated by

the English Department in CJE school because it is language level and age appropriate. It is rich in description through which students can have a personal image of the characters and somehow perceive their feelings in each situation they live in. It has a large quantity of dialogues with the use of vocabulary, idioms and phrasal verbs that can be understood through the context of the events.

I wanted to find through observation if some of that excitement of my Early Childhood students could be restored in my Middle School students. Instead of using the textbook in the classroom, I wanted to use it as a complimentary and supporting material for students to practice as an asynchronous activity. I wanted to use the literary book in the classroom and turned this into the context from where to learn the content required. I wanted to use *Number the Stars* as a theme to introduce competencies and contents in the English class. My initial research question was focused on how would the perception of English and Literature change in eighth grade students by replacing the textbook from the center of the class and changing it with a literary text? However, as the project developed, I have reframed the question as the following: How can my teaching practice be improved by changing the perception of English in eighth grade students by replacing the textbook from the center of the class and changing it with a literary text? The focus of this project therefore shifted from my students to reflecting on my own teaching practice.

The objective of this research is to improve the positive outcomes of my work. If I have unmotivated students that come into the English class as a requirement, there are things I have to change to make them interested in learning English. Motivation is an important aspect to be academically successful. (Williams, 1972, pp.136). This research aims to identify how through the improvements in my practice, I can engage my students in a better way in order to increase their interest and success in English. So to do this, based on my past experience, I

want to include Literature into my class to observe if this captures my students' interest in literature as a means of teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Literary texts are an extensive source to develop language skills too. According to Tsang & Paran in their article: "Learners' views of literature in EFL Education from Curricular and Assessment Perspectives", through Literature, students developed improvements in: their level in English, their interest in the language, their literature knowledge, and their opportunities to practice the language. (2021, p.470). I have chosen to include a literary text in the classroom because through it, students can have exposure to vocabulary, grammar, and communicative competencies. According to Netcoh et. al. teachers working with adolescents have to continually refine strategies through action research to improve professionally in order to engage students (2017, p.25). The process enables a "conduit for actionable changes" (Stringer, 2014, as cited in Netcoh et. al., 2017, p.26) so as to improve teachers practice. My final goal is to find out if by putting a literary text in the class I will improve my practice as a teacher measured through the students' results in their learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the objectives of this study, I have looked for research on how students react when literature is the main material to approach language in the class. I focused my search on Teaching Foreign Languages through Literature. To be able to analyze the data and to compare the results found in my study, I focused on the following contents. The first thing I have to find out are the important details to consider as a teacher to implement literature in the EFL classroom. The next thing to get to know was if other teachers had already found pedagogical benefits in using literature in the classroom. In addition to all these, the students' perceptions of the benefits of learning English through literature are fundamental to try to answer the research question.

Putting literature in the class also requires deep preparation in literature teaching in EFL, clear objectives of the role of literature in class, background knowledge, appropriate training in literature, and use of pedagogically designed material (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014). Viana and Zyngier (2019) agree that teachers need to be prepared to integrate literature in the foreign language (FL) class and on how to look for evidence of the results of this integration. This is a very important fact that needs to be considered because the success of Literature use depends on the teacher's knowledge and preparation as it does in any other approach with the use of any other material. While instructing through literature teachers should avoid the "chop-chop philosophy." (Kelly Gallagher, 2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). This means that when the literary text is read out loud, it should be read without interruptions throughout each chapter. Gallagher also mentions the importance of the balance of underteaching and overteaching. She calls it the "sweet spot," where the teacher has to promote that the book is used wisely to engage students through discussions, conversations, evaluate thinking, share personal judgments and learn to listen to other points of view, being

careful not to overstep and lose the liberty of the students to express. The teacher has to be able to measure the correct amount of guidance to accompany students to make them feel supported, but maintain the appropriate distance to let them develop a personal deeper connection with the book (Rosenblatt, 1978, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). On the opposite side, teachers should not leave the students to read all by themselves at home (underteaching) and fend for themselves in this important competence. Teachers should also be able to give space for discussion. As Allington mentions, rereading and discussing different points of view gives familiarity, and lets them get into a deeper level to think about the characters and events of the book. (2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). Moley et.al. highlights the importance of letting them debate, consider diverse viewpoints, role-play solutions, is a way of letting them engage with the literary text and promoting interest (2011, p.253).

Another important thing that a teacher has to be aware of when introducing literature in the class as Howard Sage mentions are, the type of literature, the purpose of it, and the appropriate time when introducing it. (Sage, 1987, p.10) In other words, the book has to be age and level appropriate, and has to have an attractive and interesting topic to the audience. He defines literature as "human" because literature reflects human concerns and needs and that makes it universal. (Sage, 1987, p.12) While the students read pieces of literature, they empathize with one or more characters and this is what normally motivates them to read. But still as this author says, this is why it is extremely important to choose the correct book in order to assure the interest of the reader. The same author adds that literature is the way to make the students get closer to the culture of the target language (Sage, 1987, p.14). In this aspect, the interest of the reader might be raised if they found that culture interesting to be known. Sumara et. al. share the desire of the students to take the book home to discuss it with their parents like a cultural instrument that will produce conversation (1998, as cited in Moley

et.al., 2011). Fountas and Pinnell (as cited in Moley et.al., 2011) expressed that correct leveling is not a fixed formula but some features are observed to somehow assure understanding: it has to be age appropriate, have vocabulary that can be defined through illustrations or context, have an appropriate length, be curriculum related, have an appropriate language structure for students' level and vocabulary repetition, have a topic background that is understandable and interesting for the readers, and have an appropriate page layout and format (Fry, 2002, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011).

Free choice of the literary text also contributes to students' motivation and engagement (Guthrie and Humenick, 2004, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). The ideal scenario is that students choose the book to assure interest, as Guthrie & and Davis say. Motivation and engagement can also come with cognitive competence and social interaction that comes through discussion and debate (2003, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). Going further, Schussler says that students' engagement happens when in the classroom they develop an interest because they create a bond with the topic (2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). This can be made with background information to convey familiarity of the setting. Intellectual engagement is also developed with classroom instruction, challenging activities, and teacher support, to ensure students' success (Yazzie Mintz, 2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). If we already know some of the things that are important to introduce literature in the class, we should also be aware of what are the benefits that we should expect when doing so, through the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching literary texts.

The scholarship has found some benefits in teaching English through literature. Babaee and Yahya proved through research that skills like listening and speaking were improved through literature, "Activities such as oral reading, dramatization, pantomiming, discussion, and group activities can be considered as the ways through which language

teachers can improve the students' listening and speaking" (Babaee & Yahya, 2014, p.80). Speaking is an important skill that can increase student interaction in discussions about topics of interest. The important thing is that those discussions can be held spontaneously in spite of the use of L1, idioms, vocabulary, and even grammar forms start to be used by them independently through student interaction. Literature provides real life samples of language application. "Authentically, drama helps the learners develop their understanding of the verbal as well as nonverbal features of the target language" (Babaee & Yahya, 2014, p.81). Idioms and their meanings, for example, are used in literature and its meaning can be inferred through context.

Other authors like Warford and White also state (2012, as cited in Bloemert et al., 2016), that extensive reading increases exposure to the target language, exposure to its social forms. Through literary texts, students are exposed to real life language that are often used in native English language environments which EFL students are not exposed to on a daily basis. They interact socially on a daily basis in their L1 and not in the target language. As mentioned by Nance (2010 as cited by Bloemert et al., 2016), "Literary texts can be a potentially rich source of input for language learners." This makes me think again about the exposure to foreign language students. Literature can be an important source of bringing L2 to the class and making students interact with it. Sage stressed the usefulness of literature as a tool to learn the linguistic aspect of the language: communicative strategies in literary, and conventional language; syntax, vocabulary, listening skills when used aurally, and speaking skills when literature is being discussed (Sage, 1987, p.14). Rabb Khan et al., in their article (2018) stress the importance of literature as an authentic material and as a way to expose students to real life language, which helps students to communicate using lexical and syntactic items. As a result, the cultural, linguistic, and communicative skills are improved.

According to Pardede (2021), "the main goal of EFL teaching is to enable students to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways." This means that not only linguistic competences such as in the acquisition of vocabulary, and grammar correctness are improved, but most importantly they develop knowledge of the sociocultural environment and practice intercultural skills. This is possible through literature. For Ghosn (2002) and Savvidou (2004) (as cited by Pardede, 2021) the use of literature in EFL classrooms develops communicative competence, increases cross cultural awareness, and principally makes learning interesting, enjoyable, and encouraging- the one thing teachers look for to motivate students. Bloembert et al. talk about the importance of building the appropriate strategy that conveys students' perspectives about teaching through literature to improve learning. In the last decade, teachers have admitted that using literature in the class can be beneficial in L2 cultural awareness, development of L2 vocabulary, lexical phrases, and expressions.

Other authors like Viana and Zyingier (2019) worked on a study where literature was included in the classroom. They differentiate three different stages throughout the years of including literature in the English class. The first stage happened when literature was used as means of translating language accompanied by memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary. The second moment where literature was discarded because the main focus was around teaching and learning methods. Consequently, literature was found irrelevant and therefore was banned from the classroom. In the third moment literature was seen as a source of everyday language communication. Paesani (2011, as cited in Viana and Zyngier, 2019) surveyed literature once it was included in the curriculum and concluded that it should be included specially in Foreign Language classrooms. Literary Awareness (LitAw) helps students engage into the literary piece letting them explore language and literature. They start making connections between both of these aspects. The question of teaching literature in the

EFL class concerns not only the potential benefits for language learning, but what students really experience by doing so and how this experience can change their perceptions of learning English and reading.

The point of view of the students is very important, especially if we focus on the motivation of students to learn English. According to the Tsang and Paran research, "Learners' views of literature in EFL Education from curricular and Assessment Perspectives", the perception of students when reading Short Stories was that they improved in what is called instrumentality, meaning the improvement in English proficiency. They also perceived that the psychological aspect, related to the level of students' interest in the language, was also improved. Literature is directly involved in the enrichment of curriculum and the pedagogy used in class. The enrichment in the classroom also includes the different literature genres that can be approached with this methodology. Finally, literature can also be included in assessments to measure students' formative development. (Tsang & Paran, 2021, p.470). Students thought that the use of literature improves English proficiency, and students' interest in the language. They think that there is curriculum enrichment and is useful as an assessment tool. They sense that there is enrichment of topics to be introduced and discussed in the classroom. The same authors mention that 30% of students perceive improvements in English proficiency in reading, writing, listening, speaking, thinking skills, creativity, and knowledge about the world. In another study Nguyen (2016, as cited in Viana and Zyngier, 2019) states that even though students were excited by teaching through literature, they were also uncertain of the effectiveness of it because, as it was a new approach, they were not familiar with it.

Viana and Zyngier (2019) looked for more empirical analysis of the evidence of the benefits of literature integration on FL classes, but they are scarce. They are concentrated in

undergraduate students and there are few studies in high school to be able to compare it with my study. (Bloemert et al., 2017) (Tsang & Paran, 2021, p.467) Students' voices in research are not considered, and according to Bloemert et al. (2020), they think students should be a primary source on this type of research to learn about their perceptions. It is possible that teachers' and students' perceptions of the approach do not align. So far, the results of the existing research are just on the teachers' point of view and what matters the most is students' perceptions. A limitation is the lack of peer reviewed literature of studies done in Ecuador. The information found about other countries is very valuable but it is better to compare or complete information according to our reality, our students' specific profiles.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In this project, I used Action Research, a qualitative research methodology used to look for new approaches, or materials to improve teaching practice in the classroom. Carr & Kemmis & McTaggart in *Teacher Action Research and Classroom Improvement,* describe this methodology as gathering information from the participants, as in a research to make a personal reflection in educational or social environments in order to make a metacognitive analysis of the events to improve a practice. (as cited in Bell & Aldridge, 2014.) May W. explains in her paper, "Teachers-as-Researchers" or Action Research: What Is It, and What Good Is It for Art Education?" how action research can make possible for teachers to explore in the classroom. Inquiry attaches us teachers to our classroom where it is possible "in real time, in a real place with real people" to question ourselves in a responsible way about what we do. It is an opportunity to polish us as teachers and our work, too (1993, p.124).

The participants were forty-five 8th graders at CJE in Quito. They are around twelve- and thirteen-year-old students that attend fifty percent of their classes in English including Language Arts, Social Studies and Science. For this study, the changes and observations were only done in the subject of Language Arts.

I used a literary work, *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry as the axis in the class. I chose this literary text because it was in the curriculum. Additionally it has the following features listed in the literature review as characteristics to choose a literary text: it is age appropriate; it has vocabulary that can be defined through context; the length of the book was ideal to let them read a chapter in a session and continue with the activity; it contained new vocabulary and could be used to curriculum related content; the language structure was contained in the curriculum too and was familiar to the students; the vocabulary repetition was appropriate to get into students' lexicon; readers' background was appropriate to

understand the text; page layout, size of the letter, content on each page, and page format was appropriate for the audience (Fry, 2002, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). Students did not choose the book, but as Guthrie & and Davis say, motivation and engagement can also come with cognitive competence and social interaction, not just student choice (2003, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). Going further, Schussler says that students' engagement happens when in the classroom they develop an interest because they create a bond with the topic (2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). The interest development, and the cognitive competence was done through the activities where there was social interaction within the students, and with the interaction with the text.

For the purpose of this research, and to accomplish the learning objectives, I focused on the model of Comprehensive Approach for Foreign Language Literature Learning mentioned by Bloemert, Jansen & van de Grift (2016) in their research. I started with the Text Approach reviewing the genre of the book, the plot, setting, and characters. Through the context approach we reviewed the historical background of the book to ensure comprehension, that in this case was World War II. We reviewed the countries involved in it and what happened specifically in Denmark at the time. Through the Reader approach, I observed the literary experience of the students while they were reading. Finally, in the activities I used the Language Approach to introduce and review grammar, vocabulary, and language competences. This book replaced the English textbook, which had been used so far.

Within the Language Approach the activities linked the events with the story with vocabulary for example. In the curriculum content for the term we had to review negative prefixes and phrasal verbs. One of the activities to do this was to find some adjectives that had negative prefixes and match them with the possible definitions. According to this, they found some of the most important negative prefixes (un-ab-,in-,im-,...) Then by describing the

chapter that we read in that session, they found other adjectives and in pairs they had to find which negative prefix they would use in each case. After that, each pair wrote on the board and then we corrected them together. In the case of the phrasal verbs, they made a list of the ones found in the chapter they read that session and they wrote them in a paper hanging on the wall of the classroom. Each time they found one, they kept writing on the paper and we reviewed them at the beginning of the following sessions. In the case of grammar, we reviewed the future perfect for predictions. Each couple made predictions, for example: By the time the war ends, Kirstie will have ended primary school. They also wrote a letter as if they were one of the characters writing to another one. They used "I wish" and "if only" expressing regrets of things they would have done at times of war. Through this we reviewed the format of a letter too. The students read the letters to each other and talked about them.

During the three weeks of the study, I collected data by observing and recording in a personal diary with all the effects of the implementation of new methodology in students' behavior. My journaling technique deployed a double-entry notetaking methodology. Anne Berthoff calls this type of dairy a Dialectic Notebook. On the right side, all the observations were recorded in detail. On the left side all the questions, ideas, highlights of the observations were written. Berthoff describes it as a permanent possibility to rethink observations, to comment about comments and the exercise of "looking and looking again." (1984, p.20). I kept analyzing the observations of my students on a daily basis while literature was included in the class. I tried to find some patterns, some associations of the behaviors with the activities and analyzed what went on during the class. After jotting down and re-reading the information, I found patterns, coded the information and separated it between "engagement" and "disengagement" to focus on the activities that made students be interested or uninterested in English and the book. I saw engagement through interaction and separated it

into 3 categories: interaction with the teacher, interaction with the book or activities, and interaction with other classmates. I coded disengagement when there was a lack of interaction with the teacher, with the book or activities, and with classmates. After coding the information, there was also an exercise of association between each category. Then I found patterns within these and continued analyzing the data. Some questions that helped me analyze the data were: What was the relation between engagement with English and Literature and the observations made? Were there any changes? Which changes were positive for the purpose and which were not?

As qualitative research, the objective of this study is not to generalize the results but to analyze through the observations the effects of the changes made in the classroom. I could share the experience with other teachers to try and see if it is an effective change to improve students' interest in learning English.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing some of the data recorded in the journal, there are some important details that stand out by bringing literature to the class. The first and somewhat obvious observation is the increase in the **students' reading rate,** therefore their engagement with the literary text. Before, when the book was read at home, the reading rate was supposed to be demonstrated by reading controls. This was done through summaries, quizzes, reading responses, and oral comprehension questions. The effectiveness of this control was relative because children who did not read used different sources to learn the general idea of the reading. This is described by Gallagher as underteaching; just handing students a book and expecting them to read them on their own (2009, as cited as cited in Moley et.al., 2011).

By bringing reading of the literary text to the classroom, I could see that they were doing it. Reading was done consistently and regularly during the week. We used different ways to approach literature like silent reading. I observed behaviors like: moving lips while reading, turning pages, asking me or classmates questions about a certain word or idea on the page, sharing a prediction for the next chapter. For example, on one occasion two students, Camila and Sara (pseudonyms) came after class and asked if one of the characters was going to be captured. We also did guided reading where I could receive immediate response to the content. There were fifteen specific students that were always participating in these sessions by retelling the story, asking questions, and predicting. While doing out loud reading by turns in pairs, I could listen to them reading out loud while I walked around the class. After these sessions we built together a summary. As Allington mentions, rereading and discussing different points of view gives familiarity, and familiarity gives students a sense of comfort because their opinions are listened to and lets them get into a deeper level to think about the characters and events of the book. (2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). When listening to the

book, it was more difficult to prove they were attentively listening but I could see some of them turning the page at the appropriate moment. Most of the students took notes in their notebooks or on Post-its. There were four students, Lisa, Victoria, Juliana and Lorena (pseudonyms) in one of the groups that left a special section in their notebook to make their notes. There were three students that had pages in their portfolio that had notes on the chapters. There were two girls, Isabel and Camila (pseudonyms), that love Post-its, and had them with notes in the pages of the book.

Immediately afterwards, the activity required information from the reading to complete it. This familiarity brought by the rereading made them engage more with the book (Allington, 2006, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). When solving the activities, I could also see that students went back to their notes and/or to the book to find the pages that contained the answers. I recorded in my journal a case of two boys that struggled in English, Mateo and José (pseudonyms). I was observing them closely and three times in the first week of the research period, one of them showed me where he found the information in the book. He retold me what he thought it meant. He wanted to make sure if that was the correct answer to the exercise. Sumara et. al. observe, "Comments by the students reveal the formation of a kinship with the book," (1998, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011).

Another thing observed was that students were interested in the book, they were engaged with it. I think that a key part of it was the activation of background knowledge. Before we started reading the book they did a collection of data to locate the book in its setting. They learned about the time period the novel was set in, the broader and exact locations of the story, and historical events. Through this activity there were certain students that started adding some previous knowledge of the events and the other students asked them about what they knew, others just contributed with some details and a lot of new vocabulary

that was elicited. There was a specific student that made a presentation of World War II in the school where he came from. He started sharing information and the other students asked him questions. He answered the questions and there was interaction that lasted for around ten minutes. After this, interest was also observed during the reading of the book. Once they got the content information, they felt comfortable asking questions about details of war in the book. There was a student that when the German military force was mentioned, he said that they were under Hitler's orders. This opened up another discussion and was associated with the effects of the occupation of Germans in Denmark, the consequences of war and the fear that the characters felt because of these specific events. Sage mentions that literature is the way to make the students get closer to the culture in this case of the book they were reading (Sage, 1987, p.14). While summarizing the content of the chapters, several students participated spontaneously. Most of the students collaborated and inferred some explanations based on their thoughts and what they read. They made some predictions of the possible future events and discussed them too.

As we had the literary text as the main topic, students becamee familiar with the details and were interested in finding them because they wanted to know what was coming next. They were interested in finishing the activities to be able to read the next chapter. Something very explicit that happened and cannot be generalized for all the students, but that was new in the class, was the comment of three of my students, Mateo, Camila and Susana (pseudonyms) that this was the best book they had ever read and that I should look for more of the kind. The boy that struggles with English, Mateo, was one of them and came to me saying that this was the best book he has ever read. He said it was short and interesting. Obviously, the topic is very important but the length of the text makes it an approachable objective to be accomplished (Fry, 2002, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). A girl that is always

focused on doing other things, Susana, came to me during class and asked for permission to keep reading it after they finished the activity. In the end, she finished reading the book before everybody else, and once I had to tell her not to reveal the details of the next chapter in order to let the other students read the next chapters.

There were specifically five students who finished reading the book long before the rest of the class. Comparing the previous periods where classwork was done around the textbook, there was a clear change in students' interest, motivation, and work. Two very good students, Verónica and Isabella (pseudonyms) said that this was the best way to learn English and that we should find more similar books. As Paesani (2011, as cited in Viana and Zyngier, 2019) Literary Awareness (LitAw) helps students engage into the literary piece letting them explore language and literature. One student that doesn't like reading in English and Spanish told me that he was even starting to like reading. A group of seven girls asked me to always read in school and not at home. A real interaction with the text and within students was observed here too. Kelly Gallagher mentions the demotivation of students to read when they are left alone in the task and describes it as under teaching (2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). In this sense it was a good idea to read the book in the classroom and accompany the students through it.

Students also committed to start and finish the activities assigned on time and assuring a good quality delivery. They were engaged with the reading response activities of the literary text. As Moley et. al. says, if there is no individual interest, "effective instruction has the potential to be the catalyst of sparking situational interest." (2011, p.235). In my teaching practice, it was important to design the activities appropriately to provoke individual interest. The activities were designed around reading comprehension, for example. Students made sure

to find appropriate answers and were ready to explain their reasoning. There were also grammar deductive activities.

I think most of the content of the curriculum was developed through the topic of the book. The difference was that the purpose of the grammar was linked with the actual knowledge of the events in the book. They were not just "doing English " as Rosenblatt mentions, (1978, as cited in Moley et. al., 2011). They were not just making grammar or vocabulary exercises. They were being engaged with the activities through the events in the literary text. For example, they were able to write a letter pretending they were a character of the book and they wrote it to another character. The setting of the letter was 10 years after the war was over. They used "I wish" or "if only" to talk about regrets. For further exercises they knew the purpose of these phrases and the tense associated with them. The new knowledge was already linked to an experience in the book, and for them to remember how to use new concepts, they just associated them with what they did in the activity. These activities were designed with a certain purpose and after accomplishing them. They were able to see the reason behind a specific grammar form and went back to check if they did the activities correctly. While working on vocabulary, students went back to the book to make sure if they were using the words right. They interacted with their partner and encouraged themselves to finish. For Ghosn (2002) and Savvidou (2004) (as cited by Pardede, 2021) the use of literature in EFL classrooms develops communicative competence, increases cross cultural awareness, and principally makes learning interesting, enjoyable, and encouraging- the one thing teachers look for to motivate students.

I also designed some activities that were linked to each other as in a gymkhana. They had to finish the first one to be able to do the next one and they did not stop until they finished these sequential exercises. In this case there were two pairs of students in one of the groups

that had great results. On the first activity they had to make pictures of three of the characters based on the descriptions of the book. These girls made great pictures, colored them and wrote the characteristics. They finished this activity in fifteen minutes and then took the second worksheet that consisted of locating the setting of the story in a map. They used 15 more minutes to get the names, used perfect spelling and colored the map. They took the third worksheet and took 20 more minutes to finish a questionnaire about the two chapters. They used capital letters, correct spelling, complete sentences and then they finished looking for some words that used negative prefixes. The interesting thing was that as they finished first they set the work pace and their classmates followed them. It was not just a matter of accomplishing activities but of doing them correctly. The results of the activities once corrected were very good and there was a lack of unaccomplished work.

Something that was observed and was shown was how curiosity was aroused through the interaction with the book. Based on their comments, they started to make some connections with reality. A few of them knew about World War II and they gave their classmates some information. Some of them found relations with the countries involved because they know about those cultures or places. They made some connections with the characters based on their ages, behavior, or thoughts. They were curious about the reality back then, people's habits, their routines, and schools, the changes because of war and compared them with their actual realities. Students were also curious about the specific historical relation between the Nazis and the Jews. This was a topic of discussion, where opinions were catalyzed. They put themselves in the characters' shoes and tried to imagine their actions and reactions in certain circumstances and the probable consequences of those decisions. Certainly, this was a moment where I could see that the interest aroused. Sage defines literature as "human" because Literature reflects human concerns and needs and that

makes it universal. (1987, p.12) There was a student that asked what was the situation of Belgium at those times because he was claiming his Belgian citizenship. Another asked about the reasons for the lack of food and energy at times of war. One student asked why the Germans did not attack Denmark and Sweden. This was helpful for language production and there was a rich interaction between classmates.

The next thing I could observe was an increase in English language production through speaking, by interacting with their classmates. When there was something that was not very clear about the reading, students asked each other to verify if what they understood was correct. One day we were checking vocabulary and one of the students, Esteban, (pseudonym) found a sentence from the book where the word was used. He read it to his partner and both were discussing the possible meaning of it. As Rosenblatt says, it is not a matter of "doing English" but the opportunity to discuss, give opinions and listen to each other's thoughts (1978, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011). Once they came up with the idea, they asked another couple if this was correct. Once they knew they did well, they continued doing that with the other words. They negotiated meaning and clarified facts. Rabb Khan et al., in their article (2018) stress the importance of literature that helps students to communicate using lexical and syntactic items that they read in the book.

Students worked in pairs, and they collaborated and interacted with each other. In order to complete the activities each of the students looked for the necessary information and then they compared answers. If they were not sure of what to do or they disagreed in some aspect, they discussed it and then they got to a final decision. If they were still not sure about it, they came to me for clarification or to share the answers that they were not sure about. Then they went back and decided what to do. In all this process there was a lot of speaking involved. If the speaking was done in Spanish, they were reminded that we were in English

class and that the interactions had to be in English. As an example, when they were preparing the dramatization of one of the chapters, they decided who the leader of the group was going to be. Two of the group leaders spoke in English to their classmates and they started responding back in English too. They decided who was going to play each character, the dialogs and the sequence of them. They practiced and chose some phrasal verbs like "run into" or "look after" that were part of the vocabulary. When speaking to me, I never answered if they spoke in Spanish, so they immediately switched language to L2. Interaction between students was necessary to complete the activities which were designed around the book. While working in pairs, as they were discussing content both students knew about, interaction was possible and there was a two way communication. Moley et.al. highlights the importance of letting them debate, consider diverse viewpoints, role-play solutions, is a way of letting them engage with the literary text and promoting interest (2011, p.253).

The last thing that was observed was students' autonomy while reading and accomplishing tasks.The teachers' balance intervention is very important. It starts with the correct selection of the book and the way to motivate students to become engaged with it. Then, it comes to the appropriate scaffolding through instruction to give the students the sense of security to understand the topic. After that, teachers ought to give space for students to read and to activate knowledge, to motivate critical thinking and opportunities to use communicative competences. Nevertheless, students have the need to feel supported by the teacher. (Moley et. al. 2009) Before bringing literature into the classroom there were constant lecture sessions to introduce the curriculum content. The second part of the class consisted of a practice session and finally to wrap up there was some activity from the textbook from which I could assess the comprehension of the content. When literature was brought into the class, my role as a teacher changed. I went from a teacher lecturing, to a teacher monitoring,

guiding. There were a few times when I read the book to the students but mostly they did it independently or listened to some chapters from a recording. After that, the activity had very specific and clear instructions. The instructions were written on the board or on a worksheet or a digital document. Students read them and did the activities on their own. I monitored closely and some of them just wanted to know if they were doing the activities correctly. There were students who asked for clarification to assure positive results. Mainly I was there to conduct the wrap up of the class and to correct the activity as a group. The rest of my interventions were mostly to guide them and ask questions individually to elicit their answers. The students' interactions with the teacher were clearly reduced and this was a surprising fact that was observed throughout the research period. Students' autonomy is always positive in the class even though interaction with the teacher is always an enriching factor.

The next thing observed has to do with the disengaged students in reading and in doing the activities. The attitude of this type of student is normally repetitive in all the subjects. I observed things like: they did not take the book to school, they stayed with the book open on the same page all the session, they wanted to leave the class to do something else, they did not do the activities because they did not read, they did not participate in discussions. Specifically, there were four students of the forty-five that did this twice and 1 that was permanently trying to do something else. Nevertheless, there was a certain improvement of their results by bringing literature to the center of the class. These students delayed the start of the process of reading. Because of the late start, normally they also began the activities late. There was a specific session when two pairs of students did not start their activities on time. They finally turned in their activity incomplete at the end of the class. The following session they did not read and started looking for the answers in the chapter but it was really difficult for them to understand the pieces of information without the context.

Because of this the next sessions they started reading on time and once they did that, they got excited and got involved with the new class format. This students' excitement coincided with the role play activity. They participated in the preparation of it, they organized their dialogues and were able to say their lines on the day of the presentation. At the end, there was an improvement in their class participation and involvement in the class too. Schussler says that students' engagement happens when in the classroom they develop an interest because they create a bond with the topic (2009, as cited in Moley et.al., 2011).

In general, I could see a positive change by using literature in the center of the class. Still this might be because they were willing to make something different, the novelty effect. There are some variables that were in favor and a specific one was the quality and topic of the book. Much of the reaction and motivation has to do with whether the topic and the reading material is interesting and well written according to the age, student's interests, English level, quality of the book. I think that I still have to work on a variety of activities and sometimes it is really hard to convey the curriculum content with the book. It took creativity and time. This is really important in the end because I have to be careful not to fall again in mechanical exercises to just "do English" (Moley et. al., 2011) instead of taking advantage of the literary text. The activities had different reactions according to the profile of the student and their abilities. For example when there were creative activities the artistic ones did a great job but the ones that are not very creative did not spend much time on presentation and details. This happened for example when they had to redesign the cover page of the book for their portfolio. I asked one of the boys, Manuel, (pseudonym) that I knew he could do much better and he repeated it. There was also Esteban (pseudonym) that told me that he wanted to go back to the textbook because it was easier to finish the activities there and he wanted to practice for the test. He said he thought that maybe they were not practicing enough by having

the class like this. Something that really surprised me was the one comment of Mateo (pseudonym) that really struggles in English because his English level is different, he came from another school. He said he really started to like reading and that he would read everyday if the books were as good as this one. I think this was a good try, and of course there are so many things that can be improved, especially in the activity design.

CONCLUSIONS

As an Action Research project, the final purpose of this investigation was to find out the changes I should make in my teaching practice to motivate students to have the will to learn English. For this purpose, I decided to try what worked when I was a teacher in early years and put it in 8th grade: a literature text in the middle of the class to engage students to literature to be able to teach the curriculum contents through it. In the end, as the scholarship says, bringing literature into the class has positive outcomes, but its success or failure depends mostly on the teacher. Students might have been reacting positively because of the novelty of the new approach but the comments received and their behavior was proof that they felt more interested in their classes than before.

According to the literature review, I think that putting a literary text as an axis for content learning is always positive. What I experienced is that reading and writing skills can be developed. It is a great source to learn vocabulary because words are learned in context and they have the associating factor to understand the meaning. They know how to use it in sentences and to extend this learning to other words associated with the topic. Grammar can also be learned in context. Children also developed communicative competences through discussion. Additionally, this approach has given the students cross-cultural awareness.

What the scholarship also says, is that success or failure depends on the teacher. Here is where I can see the aspects where my practice can be improved. It starts when you look for the appropriate literary text for your students. The preparation ahead of the reading is really in the teacher's hands. An adequate background study needs to be done before the reading to ensure a better comprehension of the setting. The teacher has to give a space for discussion and debate to impulse familiarity with the text. This assures student interaction. The design of the activities has to be cautious with the aim of using the topic of the book as a

resource to learn vocabulary, grammar, language and communicative competences. This assures interaction with the text. For me, it was the most challenging part because not always the literary text has the material needed to present concepts. Not all the activities were as challenging or creative as the students would have liked. Some of the disadvantages found was that not all the books work for all the readers. Each student is different and to find a literary text for each student is not possible in reality. Still this can be taken as an opportunity. Moley says at the end of his research that "purposeful book selection and intentional instruction" (2011, p.253) help adolescent students confront the difficult and confusing issues they go through at that age. It is an opportunity, he says, to help them be aware of exploring these issues through other characters.

The students' perceptions of the benefits they had by using literature go around their interest in reading not on a 100% basis, but there were more students interested in literature than before. They were aware of the increase in their interaction with communicative competences when discussing the book, they felt comfortable doing it because all of them knew about the topic. In those cases, they were able to use new vocabulary and grammar presented. This happened especially when they did their role play. This also required creativity. They were aware that they got cultural knowledge of the setting of the book and they could take those discussions home too.

How has the perception of English and Literature changed by replacing the textbook as the center of the class with a Literary book? By taking the literature book into the class I ensured the reading of the book. An improvement of my teaching practice was made here at this point. Students were not left alone fending by themselves through this activity. I was there to guide them through reading.

Then, to what extent is taking literature into the classroom beneficial to improve English learning interest and reading literature interest in students? The positive outcomes were the students' interaction with the book through the reading and the activities arousing curiosity. There was an increased interaction within classmates experiencing communicative competences. There was a different interaction with the teacher. I was there to support and guide my students which developed autonomy.

Based on the results of this study there will always be challenges, but this could be a good start to keep making changes in my teaching practice. I have to find ideal books and this might change according to the groups' profile each year. The activities have to introduce curriculum content and skills and on top of all they have to be challenging and interesting for students. This requires deep preparation in literature teaching in EFL. (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014). The books have to be matched with the needs and interests of the students. The teacher has to be an expert in the book. The objectives of literature's role in class have to be very clear. This will help the teacher to choose the correct book focusing on the content, the level and even the length of the reading. The background knowledge of the books is necessary to make students connect with it from the beginning. This also requires an appropriate training of teachers in Literature. (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014). The design of the material is very important too because it has to link the curriculum content and the book. It has to be strategically and pedagogically designed. (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014).

My practice as a teacher has to continually evolve. Teaching is a dynamic process, so there is not a recipe that will work with every child or group. A permanent journal can be very useful and its analysis can be helpful to polish this strategy and material. Action research has the advantage that it is made out of cycles that can be permanently repeated and as the study continues, some changes can be made so as to experiment with new activities, approaches,

methodologies, materials. This can help us make some modifications according to the previous experience and keep observing and measuring what worked better. This study can contribute to future studies of this type and can be experimented with different materials to see the contrast. For me as the teacher conducting the study has been very useful and for sure the experience has brought to my attention that literature in the middle of the class can be a great approach for EFL.

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