Materials Assessment: A Shared Responsibility among Teachers and Students

Evaluación de materiales: Una responsabilidad compartida entre profesores y estudiantes

Claudia Yolanda Becerra*

claudiayolandab@yahoo.com
Institución Educativa Distrital IED Naciones Unidas II, Colombia

This article focuses on the development of a small-scale research project implemented in a public school in Bogotá, Colombia with a group of fourth graders who study English as a foreign language. The main goal of this research is to determine the criteria my fourth graders use when assessing the worksheets I provided them with in the English class. The data collection techniques that support the proposal are questionnaires, semi-open interviews, and the teacher's journal. This study prompted a more collaborative environment among teacher and students regarding a basic activity of the curriculum as the materials used in class. Finally, this paper emphasizes the importance of creating classrooms that are more democratic to enrich the educational process.

Key words: Materials assessment, evaluation, assessment, democratic classrooms, English innovation, foreign language innovation, curriculum

Este artículo se centra en el desarrollo de un proyecto de investigación a pequeña escala implementado en un colegio público en Bogotá, Colombia con un grupo de cuarto de primaria que estudia inglés como lengua extranjera. El principal fin de esta investigación es determinar el criterio usado por mis estudiantes de cuarto de primaria cuando evalúan los talleres que yo diseño para la clase de inglés. Las técnicas de recolección de datos que soportan esta propuesta son cuestionarios, entrevistas semiabiertas, y el diario del profesor como fuente secundaria. Este estudio promovió un ambiente de mayor diálogo entre profesor y estudiantes, teniendo en cuenta una actividad básica del currículo como son los materiales usados en clase. Finalmente, este trabajo enfatiza en la importancia de crear salones más democráticos para enriquecer el proceso educativo.

Palabras claves: Evaluación de materiales, evaluación, seguimiento, salones democráticos, innovación-inglés, innovación-lengua extranjera, currículo

---

*__Claudia Yolanda Becerra__ holds a B.A. in Modern Languages from Universidad Distrital and she is a candidate for the Masters in Applied Linguistics. She has been working at Institución Educativa Distrital IED Naciones Unidas II, Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia, and as a tutor of the PROFILE teacher development programme.

INTRODUCTION

During the six years I have been working in my current institution, I have seldom used textbooks because of the following two reasons: First, textbooks cannot be required by teachers since it is a public institution and the population we work with cannot afford them; and second, the series we have at the school library is out of date and there are not enough volumes for the number of pupils we teach (about forty children per classroom). Having in mind these factors, I have designed my own worksheets and activities. However, I have never formally evaluated them. Actually, I do not know yet if they are appropriate or not and why. Regarding this reflection and considering the fact that for the second semester of 2005 I had to design and pilot a printed curricular unit, I believe that it is the best opportunity to assess the printed materials I provide my children with.

That is why the two main purposes of this research study are to gather information about my students' perceptions of the printed materials I am using in class, and to reflect upon the appropriateness of these printed materials in light of my students' needs. On the one hand, I think that giving my pupils the chance of stating the criteria to assess the printed materials I present them increases our communication (the dialogue among us) and contributes to the building of more democratic classrooms as opposed to authoritarian ones, in which students only obey and follow commands.

On the other hand, this type of project fosters the reflective process I have to conduct in terms of the printed materials I implement in my classroom settings because it gives me the opportunity to become more sensitive and aware of my students' needs, and as it is one important component of curriculum planning, it will steer my teaching-learning process toward a more accurate and informed one.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of the theoretical platform, I decided to include three main constructs. Firstly, I will introduce the concept of evaluation from a humanistic perspective. Secondly, I will discuss the concept of assessment. And finally, I will present some key aspects of materials assessment.

Evaluation

To begin with, I will refer to one interesting component of what evaluation entails. For Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992) and Quintero (2003), evaluation is part of our daily lives and involves making decisions. In other words, we make decisions about a lot of aspects such as what to watch on TV, what kind of music to listen to, and, in the case of this article, what to include in the theoretical framework. Then, in words of Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992, p.3): "Evaluation is not restricted to the context of education; it is part of our everyday lives".

However, evaluation in education could not be based only on our intuition or our common sense. Conversely, Quintero (2003) states that evaluation, as a curricular activity, "needs to be less casual and more systematic, less trivial and more critical, less technical and more human and emerges as a way to generate informed decisions" (p. 124). That is to say that we, as teachers, need to move from thinking of evaluation as grading and testing students to consider this curriculum activity hand-in-hand with an ongoing process. In the same train of thought, Rea-Dickins et al. (1992) claims that evaluation in education "should be systematic and undertaken according to certain guiding principles using carefully defined criteria" (p. 5).

Besides, evaluation is also seen as "an activity of gathering information to be used in making educational decisions" (Genesee & Upshur, 1999, p. 140). Nevertheless, those decisions in light of a humanistic approach to evaluation go beyond deciding if a student passes of fails. Those decisions relate to instructional practices as well, and take into consideration a lot of information about the students' context, background, personality, etc. That is why evaluation is considered to be an informed practice, too.

To conclude, and after presenting some definitions of evaluation, I would like to introduce my own understanding about it. I consider evaluation to be a curricular activity that helps us to make decisions about the rest of curriculum activities, decisions like learning needs, objectives, testing, materials, and teaching (Brown, 1995, p. 20). These decisions are based upon several sources of information such as students' journals, portfolios, teacher's journal, interviews, etc, which provide us with the perspective of others rather than only the teachers' and who are as important as we are in the educational process.

The interpretation of this information gears us toward confirming that our educational practices are well-oriented or that we should innovate them (Rea-Dickins et al., 1992, p. 10). Finally and foremost, evaluation is an ongoing process that demands from teachers a careful and systematic planning that reflects this fact.

Assessment

In general terms, assessment is part of the evaluation process. It attempts to collect relevant information about the decisions you want to make as a result of evaluation (Genesee et al., 1999, p. 36). For instance, my students and I plan to make decisions about the printed materials I provided them with, based on their opinions and criteria. Then, having in mind this purpose, I have to collect information that enlightens this process. The latter step is what assessment is.

Moreover, it is worth stating that assessment is not only related to achievement. Assessment includes also "processes and factors that affect students' achievement" (Genesee & Hamayan, 1994, p. 216). As a result, I consider that one factor that can affect students' achievement is the types of materials we are introducing in our classroom settings. Nonetheless, sometimes we are not aware of this fact and we try to find out the causes of our students' weaknesses. That is why I think it is valuable to assess classroom materials as well.

Furthermore, Genesee et al. (1994) enumerate three components of classroom-based assessment, which I find closely-related to the evaluation process. They are first, the collection of information, bearing in mind factors such as students' background, learning processes, and instructional factors. The second component is the interpretation of the information "comparing it with some desired state of affairs, goals, or other information that you have that is relevant to your decisions" (Genesee et al., 1999, p. 36). And the third one is the decision-making process about instruction, students, or both of them. That is why, after identifying the need of assessing the printed materials I use with my students, I began following the stages I mentioned previously, namely: First, the collection of information by means of some alternative assessment instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, and teacher's journal. Second, I interpreted the information collected in light of my query and finally, I plan to make decisions about the instructional materials I use hand in hand with my students' opinions and perceptions.

Finally, I want to highlight that assessment is quite important in the evaluation process under a humanistic approach because otherwise we, as educators, will move from collecting information to make decisions. And this type of process is more related to evaluation seen from a technical perspective.

Materials Assessment

So far, I have defined two main constructs: evaluation and assessment. They have been presented from a humanistic approach, stating basically that evaluation is a curriculum activity which must be informed to make sound decisions, and that the gathering of information of this process is called assessment. Thus, these two terms are interwoven. Now, as the main purpose of this article is to shed light on the printed materials assessment from the learners' perspective, I will introduce some relevant aspects of materials assessment.

To begin with, it is important to note that materials, as evaluation, are a curriculum activity. Then, being part of curriculum, materials might be assessed as well. Also, as materials are a component of instruction, we, as teachers, are invited to make decisions about them. However, and as I illustrated at the beginning, it is not only our responsibility: it is the students' responsibility, too.

Regarding the materials assessment, Santos Guerra (1996) states some key concepts. Although he basically discusses the assessment of textbooks, there are certain insights which I find relevant to my attempt. First, the author finds some materials assessment formats dangerous and prejudicial because they do not account for their real contribution to the students' learning process. Those formats concentrate the attention on secondary aspects such as topics, cost, durability, layout, etc. When assessing materials, Santos Guerra claims that one should reflect upon their explicit and implicit purposes, the theoretical foundations on which they were designed, and especially the contexts and the population they intend to address. That is why he considers that we, as users, should assess the materials having in mind our specific needs and contexts.

Second, in terms of who assess the materials, Santos Guerra (1996) mentions two possibilities we should keep in mind. They are first, external evaluators understood to be people who are not part of the teaching-learning process and who can give us other perspectives. And second, the students, as the ones who use and work with the materials we implement. This fact, for him, leads to more democratic processes and demands from teachers an open-minded attitude in order to change current practices, if necessary.

Third, the author asserts the importance of designing our own classroom materials rather than following the materials that the publishing houses offer. He criticizes the way in which sometimes the textbooks provide everything for teachers and students as if telling the academic community that we, as teachers, are unable to do anything without

guidance. Conversely, he affirms that by creating and designing our own materials, we are making a systematic reflection, we are enriching our own processes. In his own words:

"[En ese sentido] los materiales producidos tienen unas características inversas a las de los materiales impuestos. Su misma elaboración requiere un esfuerzo de reflexión sistemática, su discusión compartida, un enriquecimiento para los mismos profesores que los elaboran" (Santos Guerra, 1996, p. 242).

"[In that sense] the produced materials have opposed characteristics to the imposed ones. The elaboration of them by itself requires an effort of systematic reflection, its shared discussion, an enrichment for the teachers who make them."

Finally, I would like to highlight that in our daily practices we do not usually recognize the importance classroom materials have. That is one of the reasons for addressing this topic. I consider that by giving the chance to my students to assess the materials I use in class, I have the possibility of enriching my practice and, at the same time, help my students to understand that they are important and that their opinions certainly count. Moreover, by means of these types of activities, students can develop a critical stance towards their learning process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Setting
IED Naciones Unidas II is a public school located in the Ciudad Bolívar zone, one of the highest, farthest and poorest of Bogotá. In the morning shift, there are twenty-one primary groups. Also, there are eighteen secondary groups, two pre-school and one first grade in the afternoon shift. Most of the students come from neighborhoods near the school. Some of these are Naciones Unidas, La Estrella, El Tesoro, La Cumbre, Villa Flor, Vista Hermosa, Lucero Alto, among others. These children and teenagers suffer

from a wide variety of socio-economic problems such as dysfunctional families, violence, forced displacement, hunger, poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, maltreatment and lack of love, to mention some of them. However, these students do have a high capacity for resiliency since they are respectful, kind, friendly, funny, and warm-hearted with others.

Participants

I selected six primary students out of the group of 44 by sampling. I considered two aspects when making the selection: Their teams should have answered the first questionnaire completely and they should belong to different teams. As a result, the first condition was fulfilled by six teams. Then, I selected one student per team, according to the list they made at the beginning of the first questionnaire. In other words, from the first team, I selected the first child who appeared in the list. In the second list, I selected the second student, and so on until I had the six participants. Before implementing the data collection techniques, I asked their parents for their written permission.

Dayana is an eleven-years-old girl. She has a sister who is in the same course. She is very intelligent and she usually fulfils all the tasks assigned. Besides, she is monitor of the course. However, at times, she seems bored in class.

Daniela is eleven years old, too. As the previous participant, she has a brother in the same course. Even though she seems interested in class, she sometimes does not understand clearly the instructions for carrying out the class exercises. She is shy and respectful.

Felipe is a nine-years-old boy. He works very well on teams. He understands really fast and encourages his team to complete and finish the activities. He likes to participate and contribute to the class.

Kathy is ten years old. She is one of the best students in the course. She is in a group which is really good: they understand easily and complete the tasks really fast. She has excellent pronunciation, but she is shy at times.

Yenny is ten years old. She works only with another girl on her team. She does not participate too much in class, but whenever she does not understand something, she asks the teacher. She is very kind and sweet.

Nelson is ten years old. He is very serious and is the one who organizes his team. Last year he had some problems in the English class because he was frequently distracted. Nowadays, his attitude is changing. For instance, he is working on teams right now while last year he preferred to work alone.

Instruments to Collect Data

I decided to work with the following three data collection instruments: questionnaires, interviews, and teachers' journal. The first two were my primary sources, and the final one was a secondary source.

Questionnaires

First of all, in the field of research, questionnaires and interviews are seen as similar procedures to collect data. In broad terms, questionnaires "are *printed* forms for data collection, which include questions or statements to which the subject is expected to respond, often anonymously" (Seliger, & Shohamy, 1989, p. 172). In my particular case, I used open-ended questions, and I asked my participants to write down their names (See Appendix 1).

I decided to implement questionnaires because I needed to elicit information about the way my students assess the printed materials I provided them with. I needed to know their feelings, thoughts, and impressions. In the words of Seliger et al. (1989, p. 172), "questionnaires are used mostly to collect data on phenomena which are not easily observed, such as attitudes, motivation, and self- concepts".

That is why I implemented this technique. However, as it is advisable to have another data instrument to validate the data analysis, I used interviews as well. Then, after analysing the answers provided by my six participants in the

questionnaires, I prepared some questions to expand more on the data provided by the three questionnaires I applied.

Interviews

As I have already pointed out, I decided to implement interviews, more specifically, semi-open interviews because I wanted to account for my participants' impressions and further comments about what they wrote down in the questionnaires. As a result, I planned some questions regarding the answers provided in the questionnaires in order to have a deeper understanding of their criteria when assessing materials (See Appendix 2).

As Genesee et al. (1999) assert, interviews can be applied for gathering information about instruction, and, of course, materials are an essential component of instruction (p. 129). Besides, as I wanted my students to expand on their criteria, this instrument was quite useful. Another important element of this technique is that interviews "permit the interviewer to probe the respondents for additional information in response to interesting or important answers that arise unexpectedly from the planned questions" (Genesee et al., 1999, p. 133). This characteristic was helpful to me because I could ask questions that were not in the questionnaire but which were important in eliciting the information I needed from my students.

Teacher's Journal

As stated at the beginning, I decided to keep my journal as a secondary source because, as has been highlighted along the discussion, my main interest is to gain understanding about the criteria my pupils use for assessing printed materials. However, I wanted also to collect data about the way my fourth graders develop their tasks with the printed material I prepared for them. In short, my main interest when jotting down my impressions and feelings at the end of the classes was to reflect upon the manner in which my students responded to the instructional materials I prepared for them.

Teacher's journals are "used to record hunches, feelings, assumptions about people or processes and the like as part of the reflective and verification process" (Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M., 2004, p. 36-37). The collection of feelings, impressions, and further thoughts is one feature of teachers' journals. They can be used in the evaluation process too.

In the same train of thought, Genesee et al. (1999) consider it important to keep a teacher's journal according to what you are evaluating. For instance, you should keep one for "recording insights and feedback pertinent to instruction that arises from portfolios and conferences in a separate notebook" (p. 114). In addition, they mention the usefulness of a teacher's journal for keeping notes on instructional issues like materials and students' feelings about them, activities, and so on.

In sum, using a teacher's journal can provide elements to assess the impressions teachers can perceive from their students in terms of instructional materials as well.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

As I mentioned at the beginning, I am used to preparing my own classroom materials. They have evolved during my teaching practice. I have realized that they may respond to my students' needs and to the context in which I teach. Due to the fact that my institution is a public school, sometimes there are not enough resources I can use. However, I have tried to focus my attention on the development of the four language skills, taking advantage of the overhead projector, the audiotapes, the photocopy machine, and my creativity, since my students cannot afford textbooks and the school library lacks enough printed materials like short stories in English, informational texts in the foreign language and so on.

I designed and implemented part of a curricular unit about the family, based on a needs analysis I carried out at the beginning of the term, which indicated that my pupils were interested in this topic. The material was based on tasks and the

special cycle you should follow when you teach real beginners, as I do. I designed fourteen lessons (See Appendix 3). So, the printed materials they assessed were three tasks related to the pre-task cycle, in which they were introduced to the topic, and the vocabulary they needed in order to carry out the task cycle in the second session (See Appendixes 4 & 5). So, the idea was that my students helped me to assess the printed materials I provided them with for the development of the three tasks. In short, I want to reflect constantly about the appropriateness of those materials in light of their needs, preferences, understanding, and knowledge.

FINDINGS

After analysing the answers provided by my six participants and their teams in the three questionnaires, I discovered certain criteria they include when assessing printed material. The names of the controversial issues were taken from my students' words. That is to say, it is a grounded type of analysis. In general terms, I found out about three main issues for the assessment my students completed over of the printed materials I provided them with. They are, namely: nice, enjoyable, the printed materials have lots of questions and they do not have drawings for us to guide, and very difficult vs. easier.

Nice and Enjoyable

First, they assess the instructional materials in terms of how they feel when developing them. In other words, if they are enjoyable or not. For example, when asking them about their feelings in terms of a puzzle they developed and why, four of them answered that it was enjoyable or nice. Nevertheless, these answers did not allow me to know more about the actual meaning of nice or enjoyable. That is why I asked them directly about what was enjoyable and nice when developing the activities proposed in the printed materials we worked on. The interview was valuable for this purpose.

They provided different ideas of something nice. For instance, for Felipe nice means *that I like to do it. That is very funny. That I get lots of fun* (Interview, May 25th, 2005). Furthermore, for Kathy the guides about the family we worked on were nice *because I can know the names from, from my classmates' fathers, from their mothers, their siblings too* (Interview, May 25th, 2005). Similarly, Felipe expanded on his classmate idea and asserted: *For example, as you are doing here, one can know for instance Karol's name, her father's name, her family [sic] when one meets Karol and greets her [sic]* (Interview, May 25th, 2005). This final statement reinforces what he answered in the third questionnaire, when he was asked about the chart they had to fill in with their classmates' information.

There are two more interpretations of nice. For example, when Yenny was asked about something nice, she mentioned that everything is nice because she knows something in English and she can learn something, as well: *Everything is nice to me because, for instance, I know something of English and I learn something of English* (Interview, May 25th, 2005). Finally, Dayana and Yenny found the English guides nice because of the puzzles and the drawings. In addition, Kathy mentioned an important element that makes the English printed material nice: its length, *and because the guides are short, and the others are three, four pages long* (Interview, May 25th, 2005).

Now, in terms of how they define enjoyable, they mentioned different aspects. Some of them considered nice and enjoyable as something similar, as the example provided by Felipe when he was defining nice. For him, they seem to be the same. Nonetheless, Daniela and Felipe answered in the third questionnaire that they found the puzzle an enjoyable activity because they had to look for the words in English. Meanwhile, Yenny considered this activity enjoyable because they coloured.

Moreover, when they were asked about how they had felt when developing the activities we had carried out, Dayana considered them enjoyable

because *one can learn English* (Interview, May 25th, 2005). In the same train of thought, Felipe stated that for him they were enjoyable because *one can learn to look for English words in letter soups. And one can recognize family, lots of things* (Interview, May 5th, 2005). Finally, Kathy thinks they were enjoyable because *one knows how to spell father in English, mother, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents* (Interview, May 25th, 2005).

In synthesis, my participants found that a task which is *chévere* and *divertida* possess certain features, namely: It is enjoyable to develop, it helps to learn more vocabulary, it provides possibilities of knowing more about their classmates' lives, it is not so long, and it helps to learn English.

The Printed Materials Have lots of Questions and They Do Not Have Drawings for us to Guide

Second, they assess the printed material in terms of what they like and dislike to do, bearing in mind the format and the content of it. For instance, when asking them about the written guides that they dislike the most, most of them said that they do not like the guides in which they have to write a lot. These opinions also arose in the interview. I wanted to expand on this finding and when we talked about the other subjects, and the opinions they had in terms of the guides they developed, some of them mentioned the fact that they are plenty of questions, that they are long:

"T: OK, when I talk about those guides, you tell me there is too much text, how are they? How can you describe them? What are they?
Kathy: Questions and questions.
T: Are they sheets of paper with questions, or are they in the notebooks?
Kathy: One sheet of paper like this, and on the other side, has more questions.
T: A lot of questions.
Dayana: And one little picture by chance.
T: Yes. And what do you think of those guides?
Kathy: Horrible.

Dayana: The English guides are funnier.
T: And why do you consider that those written guides are horrible?
Kathy: Because I do not like writing too much. I prefer to colour."
Interview, May 25th, 2005.

Conversely and hand in hand with the previous analysis, they like to solve puzzles, to colour, and to answer questions. Moreover, when they were asked about what they should include in an English guide about the family, they mentioned drawings to colour, puzzles, games, questions, and photos. Likewise, in the interview, they mentioned that they liked to colour, and especially to draw:

"T: What is your opinion about the written guides in the other subjects? Which ones catch your attention? How do you feel about them?
Yenny: The art class guides.
T: How are they? I haven't seen them.
Yenny: You have to do lines.
Kathy: Lines, shapes without lines and colours.
Felipe: Teacher! I like the computer science subject too, because you have to draw.
Group of students: Ah, yes...
Yenny: And you learn to work better on the computer."
Interview, May 25th, 2005.

Very Difficult vs. Easier

Third, when students assess printed material, they include the clarity in the instructions of it. In the final questionnaire, I asked them about how they had felt when carrying out the exercises proposed. Most of them felt pleased and happy because they had understood what they had to do and as a consequence they solved it successfully. This level of difficulty is also related to the knowledge they have of the topic. For example, when implementing the interview, I noticed that they considered the first matching task quite difficult because they did not know the vocabulary related to that topic. In words of my students:

"T: For instance, in Deisy's team, how did you do the first one? The first one about the guide, do you remember? It was a guide and then you had to match the photo, that first one, how did you do it? How did you feel when doing it?

Dayana: It was very difficult.

T: Yes? Why was it difficult for you?

Dayana: Because we were very confused.

T: Uhm!

Nelson: Teacher, and no one had studied the names.

T: Ahh!

Dayana: If you do not know them, then you will get confused.

(…)

Nelson: We got confused because we did not know the names."

Interview, May 25th, 2005.

On the contrary, they found the second matching task (which was the same one, but it was carried out individually) easier because they already knew the words and had had certain training in the vocabulary they needed to solve:

"T: And in the second one, you did it individually.

Group of students: Yes…

Dayana: It was easier.

Kathy: Though the first one was easy to me too.

T: Yes, why was it easy for you?

Kathy: Because we began by matching the brother and sister with the photo. Then there were two missing and so these were the grandmother… and, then we had a better guide for the word mother.

T: Yes.

Kathy: Then we thought that it was granny.

(…)

T: The second one, you told me that it was not so difficult like the first one, right?

Felipe: It was easy; it also helped us to answer the other question.

Kathy: Because we already knew.

Yenny: We already knew that we had done another task so we can develop another one that is similar."

Interview, May 25th, 2005.

In the previous extract, one can also see how one team on the first try did it well because they used their previous knowledge and took the risk of inferring things and putting these hypotheses in the task. It was something really worthy for me because it has to do with the learning strategies they implement when solving problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Bearing in mind that materials are a curriculum activity, they should be assessed and evaluated as well. However, sometimes teachers implement them without considering students' needs, preferences, and learning styles. It may occur because we are not used to assessing them. Even more, we hardly consider the possibility of giving our students the voice to assess them. That was perhaps the most important purpose of this research process: to open spaces in order to build more democratic classrooms in which everyone has the right to be heard. Thus, based on the findings presented previously, I can conclude the following:

Firstly, my participants found certain printed materials nice and enjoyable because they were enjoyable to develop, they helped them to learn more vocabulary, they provided possibilities to know more about their classmates' lives, they were not so long, and they helped them to learn English. In summary, they liked to develop them and they were learning at the same time. So, for them, having a good time does not mean not learning. It means learning in a way that I consider everyone loves: having joy.

Secondly, the six fourth graders who were my main participants stated that certain printed materials were not so appealing for them because they had to write a lot, because they had lots of questions, and due to the fact that they did not have pictures, or

things to colour, and so on. That is why I took one of my participants' words to label this second criterion: "the printed materials have lots of questions and they do not drawings for us to guide".

Finally, my fourth graders considered that some criteria to assess the printed materials they use daily had to do with their level of difficulty. That is why they asserted that there was some instructional material which was really difficult because they did not understand what to do, or because they did not know vocabulary (in the English subject particularly). In other words, some kinds of instructional materials were more difficult because they did not have the previous knowledge to develop the tasks effectively. Conversely, they found that there were easier instructional materials because they had the tools to develop the activities proposed successfully, or because there were certain hints that helped them to solve the tasks easily.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

I consider this research project to have enlightened my professional development and my daily practice in different aspects. Moreover, I think that this project can enrich other teachers' understanding. I will illustrate the most relevant aspects that giving students the possibility of assessing printed materials may provide our practices.

First, letting your students speak about something that may affect in a positive or negative way their learning, like the materials you provide them with, may help you to rethink them. At times you forget the population you teach to. You just adapt or design a guide thinking about what you consider they should learn. But, what about the children or adolescents you have in your class? They have the right to give their opinions and to be considered when a curricular decision is being made, such as the materials to be used.

By the same token, when you research the criteria students use when assessing materials, you might get closer to them. You learn about their

preferences, their styles, the activities they enjoy, among other issues. Besides, as happened in this project, when you implement activities in which you get closer to their lives, they find their learning to be more meaningful. This is even more the case when they are learning a foreign language such as English. They find these types of activities valuable and nice.

In addition, this type of projects aims at the development of learning skills that Nunan (1988) discusses. For instance, teachers may help students identify their learning preferences, in this case, in terms of materials. Also, English teachers can "develop skills needed to negotiate the curriculum" (Nunan, 1988, p. 3). All these considerations go hand in hand with a learner-centred curriculum, since it implies including students in the curricular decisions that may affect their learning process. In the words of Nunan (1988, p. 2): "The key difference between learner-centred and traditional curriculum development is that, in the former, the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught".

Finally, when you teach children (and I would say, when you teach anyone), you are invited to make learning a fun experience. Learning must not be seen as a burden. Going to school may be a synonym of going to a party, or going to a place in which you will learn from and with others in an enjoyable way. In synthesis, as teachers, we may consider it of utmost significance the fact that we are educating people to be happy. In our particular case, happy Colombian citizens; something that our country is claiming and requiring.

REFERENCES

Brown, D. J. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Genesee, F., & Hamayan, E. (1994). *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Genesee, F., & Upshur, J. A. (1999). *Classroom-based evaluation in second language education.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2004). *A handbook for teacher research: From design to implementation.* New York: Open University Press.

Nunan, D. (1988). *The learner-centred curriculum.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quintero, A. (2003). Teachers' informed decision-making in evaluation: Corollary of ELT curriculum as a human lived experience. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, 5,* 122-137.

Rea-Dickins, P., & Germaine, K. (1992). *Evaluation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Santos, M. (1996). *Evaluación educativa 2. Un enfoque práctico de la evaluación de alumnos, profesores, centros educativos y materiales didácticos* (2nd ed.). Buenos Aires: Magisterio del Río de la Plata.

Seliger, H., & Shohamy, E. (1989). *Second language research methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRES

First Questionnaire. April 18th 2005

This first questionnaire was answered per teams because my students voted and they decided to do so. The questionnaire was applied from 11:35 to 11:55 in the morning, last class hour. As one can guess, they were eager to go home. The questions were:

1. ¿Entendimos el trabajo que había que hacer en la copia?
2. ¿Cómo me pareció el material que recibimos? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Qué tipo de material me gustaría recibir la próxima clase?
4. ¿Qué le faltó al trabajo de hoy para que lo hubiéramos podido desarrollar todo?

Second Questionnaire. April 25th 2005

After checking the data gathered in the first questionnaire, I realized that it was not a good idea to apply it by teams because the data was not as fruitful as I had expected. Besides, I found that the questions were not appropriate for my purpose. That is why I made two decisions: On the one hand, I decided to apply the questionnaire at the beginning of the class, and individually. And on the other hand, I changed my questions completely, looking for more general information. So the new questions were:

1. ¿Qué tipo de cosas te llaman más la atención cuando recibes una guía para trabajar en clase?
2. ¿Cuál es la actividad que más te gusta desarrollar cuando trabajas en una guía?
3. ¿Qué tipo de guías son las que menos me gustan?
4. ¿Qué debería tener una guía para que fuera agradable y divertida de hacer?
5. ¿De las guías que te entregan, ¿cuáles son las que más te gustan?
6. ¿Cómo harías guías con el tema de la familia para la clase de inglés?

Third Questionnaire. May 16th 2005

After discussing the questions of the two previous questionnaires with Professor Quintero, I asked my students more general and open questions on an individual basis at the end of the class. The questions were:

1. ¿Cómo les pareció la actividad de la sopa de letras? ¿Por qué?
2. ¿Cómo se sintieron? ¿Por qué?
3. ¿Cómo les pareció la actividad del cuadro y la foto?
4. ¿Cómo solucionaron la sopa de letras?

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS FOR THE SEMI-OPEN INTERVIEW
May 25th, 2005

1. ¿Cómo te has sentido en este tiempo, digamos en estos últimos meses desde que empezamos con el trabajo de la familia, cómo te has sentido en la clase de inglés?

2. ¿Qué significa, qué quieres decir cuando dices chévere? ¿Qué es chévere para ti? Dame ejemplos.

3. ¿Cómo te has sentido desarrollando las guías? ¿Cómo te has sentido haciéndolas? ¿Cómo las has visto?

4. ¿Por qué te pareció fácil? ¿Por qué te pareció difícil?

5. ¿Qué significa divertidas para ti?

6. Cuando yo digo *una guía*, ¿qué entiendes por *una guía*?, ¿qué te imaginas?, ¿cómo las describes?

7. ¿Cómo te parecen las guías de otras materias? ¿Cuáles te llaman la atención? ¿Cómo te parecen?

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE OF A LESSON PLAN
PRE-TASK CYCLE - SECOND SESSION

Students' role: Partners
Teacher's role: Guide
TASK 2: ORDERING

This task works as the second introductory task and as the way to collect data related to students' prior knowledge about family members' vocabulary. This task will be developed by cooperative teams, using a cooperative learning activity called Roundtable.

This cooperative learning activity can be described as follows: Each team receives only one photocopy and one marker. The objective is that each team member matches a photo with the corresponding sentence and then he/she passes the copy and the marker to the team member who is at his/her left. The next member repeats the process until the team matches all the photos with the balloons.
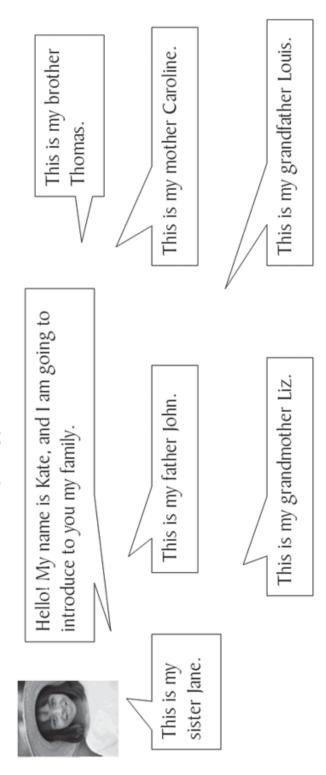
ASSESSMENT:
After all the teams have finished, the teacher will show a transparency with the information the photocopy contains, and he/she will ask volunteer students to match the photos and the balloons. This is a way of correcting the task and, at the same time, it is an opportunity to assess students' understanding and knowledge. Finally, students will complete the self-assessment format.

HOMEWORK:
Students will have to look up the following adjectives in their dictionaries: tall, short, beautiful, pretty, handsome, heavy, slim, intelligent, tender, responsible, shy, talkative, funny, and serious.

APPENDIX 4: MATCHING TASK

☺ Match with a line the balloon with the corresponding photo.

This is my brother Thomas.

This is my mother Caroline.

This is my grandfather Louis.

Hello! My name is Kate, and I am going to introduce to you my family.

This is my father John.

This is my grandmother Liz.

This is my sister Jane.

APPENDIX 5: PROBLEM-SOLVING TASK

IED NACIONES UNIDAS II. ENGLISH GUIDE

NAME_____ COURSE_____

 LOOK FOR THE FAMILY MEMBERS IN THE PUZZLE.

_____ _____ _____ _____

R	A	H	L	F	A	M	I	L	Y	W
E	B	I	M	P	U	A	F	M	Q	X
H	C	J	N	Q	M	O	T	H	E	R
T	D	R	Ñ	R	V	B	G	N	R	Y
O	E	E	O	S	W	C	H	Ñ	D	Z
M	F	H	C	T	X	D	I	O	S	V
D	G	T	R	E	H	T	O	R	B	S
N	A	A	S	T	Y	E	J	P	T	Y
A	B	F	W	U	Z	D	K	E	U	F
R	C	K	S	I	S	T	E	R	V	P
G	R	A	N	D	F	A	T	H	E	R

_____ _____ _____

 CIRCLE AND COLOR THE **FAMILY EXPRESSIONS** WITH DIFFERENT COLORS.

THISISMYFATHERTHISISMYSISTERTHISISMYFAMILYTHISISMYBROTHER

THISISMYGRANDMOTHERTHISISMYGRANDFATHERTHISISMYMOTHER