

Developing values, strategies and skills in future teachers

Cristina Frodden, Edgar Picón & Jaime Usma

Universidad de Antioquia

1. Introduction

According to Colombian law, teachers should have an integral formation; that is to say, trainee teachers should develop values, skills and strategies which could help them become not only integral persons but also real educators, so that they become role models for their pupils, and can effect changes inside their social context. We are aware that students have problems not just in their academic life but in their wider personal life; therefore, we think it is important to review traditional education in order to develop more fully as human beings. We think that responsibility, commitment and interest in research are values that need to be enhanced in future teachers, as well as strategies and skills such as autonomous learning and the ability to solve problems through dialogue and to reach consensus. This implies promoting activities inside the classroom leading to such a purpose along with the specific goals of the subject to be taught.

This presentation has two main purposes; first, to share the experience in an Advanced English Composition course where we had the opportunity to develop a so-called parallel curriculum. Values, strategies and skills were developed through activities such as role-plays, self- and peer-assessment, student involvement in decision making and reflection on the purpose of such activities. The second purpose was to engage in collaborative dialogue with participants in order to study the possibility of their doing a similar

project in their courses.

In spite of the feelings of impotence and apathy that may originate from the social and political situation we are living, we believe that teachers should keep their spirits high and take actions in order to contribute to the promotion of proactive human beings. We think that we should plant seeds of reflection, critical thinking and participation in our students. We reject the easy position of standing back and just looking at our youth's lack of responsibility and superficiality because otherwise we would implicitly accept the increasing number of professionals who do not take a stand to change and build a better world. If we join efforts to change our small world of the classroom we will some day effect qualitative change in our educational system which will contribute to a better world.

In the following section we will present a sample of actions taken in this course. Then we will discuss the students' reception to the parallel curriculum, and finally we will reflect on the whole experience.

2. Actions

Actions taken were tightly connected with the academic objectives of the course and ranged from classroom dynamics to lengthy discussions where the course was evaluated. For example, we used an activity from Woodward (1992) in order for students to know each other's strengths

and weaknesses, and to choose (an) appropriate partner(s) for their writing project so that students could learn to manage time, commit themselves to the group work, and be punctual handing in their assignments, they developed a time table with four columns: activity, time, place and person(s) responsible for the activity. To give the reader a clearer idea of what we did, we present three samples.

Role-plays

Role-play is a technique used in language classrooms with the aim to develop fluency, promote interaction in the classroom and increase motivation (Ladousse 1987, p. 7). In a role-play, shy students feel more confident to participate because when they assume a role, they are provided with a mask that makes them feel that their personality is not being involved. The role-play we used in this course was adapted from Hadfield's "Middlemen" (1992, p. 140) in which she places students in a situation where they have to come to a satisfactory agreement for all parties. In this case the negotiation and decisions referred to the course (Appendix 1). The teacher's intention with the role-play was to raise awareness about the importance of understanding different points of view and trying to find consensus instead of confrontation; to put students in the teacher's shoes and give them the opportunity to see things from the teacher's point of view, and to learn how to reach agreements and solve problems through dialogue.

The Rules of the Game

Prompted by Littlewood's (1998) "Ethics of the Classroom" (Appendix 2), students wrote a composition entitled "Students and teachers' rights and duties". Throughout the process, students had the opportunity

to reflect on their own behavior and realize what they value. A feeling of fairness as well as empathy with their teacher can be developed in students through this activity. Students can express their position and feelings towards the rules and decisions that affect them. Being taken into account in setting up "the rules of the game" makes students commit themselves to fulfill the decisions made and become aware of the fact that the classroom is a community. The expected result is more critical thinking, participation and commitment, in general, a better environment for successful learning and teaching.

A sequel to this activity would have been to systematize the information and deliver it to the group in order to discuss and build the "Code of Ethics" of the classroom community. Due to the teacher's lack of time and her perception that many students had lost interest in the parallel curriculum, this activity was not completed.

Self- and Peer-assessment

Based on the principle that reflecting on our own behavior is a way to understand it and change it for the better, self- and peer-assessment were proposed and carried out in our course. Through self-assessment the teacher intended to promote students' participation in class and enhance the quality of students' interactions. Peer-assessment allowed the teacher to have insight into the process students were following in writing their papers, especially if group work was effective and each member was contributing to the task.

Acknowledging students' right to know the criteria with which they will be assessed, students brainstormed ideas on what they felt was important in class participation. In another session, the teacher asked students to write an essay on their class participation

based on those ideas or to use a format she had developed with other students' ideas, and which matched most of theirs. Participation was characterized not only as speaking in whole group activities but also as being well prepared for each session, asking for clarification, helping to focus the discussions, making others reflect on what was said, and speaking English correctly (Appendix 3). Students were asked to support their statements as a way to ensure the students' reflection and to avoid students' underestimating or overestimating their performance. The teacher read the formats, took notes on them and gave them back to the students with comments.

Students worked on their final papers in small groups of two or three students. Here they had the opportunity to peer-assess their group work based on criteria discussed in class prompted by suggestions provided by Christison (1999) (Appendix 4) realizing their weaknesses and strengths. Each student wrote his/her assessment of the other member(s) of the group taking into account factors such as punctuality, commitment and contributions. These notes were read by the teacher and given back to students with her comments.

3. Students' Reception

This section of the paper is based on the minutes taken in class discussions, evaluations handed in by students, interviews we carried out with students of the course (Appendix 5), and our own reflection. With the purpose of ensuring anonymity, we have used pseudonyms for all students except the authors.

Students' reception of the parallel curriculum was of two types. There was a group of students who supported the parallel curriculum; however, some of them

did not agree with the way it was carried out by the teacher. The other group of students understood the teacher's intention with the parallel curriculum but did not go along with it. Some of them were discouraged by some activities or by the teacher's personality; others considered the academic part of the course more important and did not want to spend class time on the parallel curriculum.

The group of students who supported the parallel curriculum was the most numerous – ten students. It included the more mature students, and perhaps for that reason they already had the attitudes and skills we were trying to promote. For example, they were responsible, knew how to manage time and were punctual. They seemed to have clear goals regarding their future as teachers; some of them were already teaching. Therefore, they saw the relevance of the parallel curriculum in their work as educators. For example, some who were teaching realized the value of taking their students into account when making decisions that affected them, and set out to consult their opinions and interests in their own courses. They also saw the value of reflecting on their own behavior in order to develop self-discipline.

Crea la disciplina de estarse autoevaluando no sólo en comportamiento sino en todos los aspectos, de aprender a ser honesto, son formas sutiles de llamarle la atención a uno. Aunque no escriba lo que es, se da cuenta de que está haciendo bien o mal. (Edgar)

Yo hice el ejercicio de self-assessment con los muchachos una vez que se estaban portando muy mal. (Jaime)

I like very much the way in which

we worked during the all semester. I feel that I learned a lot of. I am happy because I know that is better to work hard and to learn that to work easy and to be a regular student. (Lilian)

I like the course because I got my objective. Learned something useful for my future. Moreover, I'm sure that I improve my writing and my personality. (Marisol)

These students' level of proficiency in the language was appropriate for the academic requirements of the course. They were the ones who interacted the most in classes with the teacher and with other students and worked harmoniously in their groups. Since they had no major difficulties with the demanding academic requirements of the course, they did not mind spending time on the activities of the parallel curriculum; in fact, they participated actively in them.

Within this group, however, there were some students who did not agree with some teacher's attitudes, such as confronting students openly in class about their responsibility and punctuality, calling on them to participate more actively, or prodding them with ironic comments. They thought that it was discouraging for the students to be confronted in front of their classmates, and in a way, they were empathetic towards those students of the other group who did not speak up. One of them also thought that insisting on developing values such as punctuality was appropriate in primary school but not at the university level, and that the teacher's negative feedback on their work was stressful.

Lo que se oye en cafeterías es por los

comentarios irónicos de Cristina hacia las fallas o falta de participación de los estudiantes. (Edgar)

Deberíamos haber tocado el tema de la puntualidad sólo con los que llegaban tarde pues se perdió mucho tiempo hablando de lo mismo. Estudiantes de la universidad deberían saber que deben llegar puntual a una clase. Eso se queda para el bachillerato o la primaria. Además, los que llegábamos temprano no teníamos por qué pagar por los que llegaban tarde. (Omaira)

The second group was composed of six students whose English proficiency was somewhat below the course requirements. Therefore, they felt that class time should be spent on the course program, doing practical exercises dealing with writing and composition skills they needed to develop. Some of them did not prepare well for the class and felt stressed when asked to report on what they had done.

Habían actividades, cuando se presentaban discusiones, cuando ella quería hablar de otros temas, no recuerdo qué temas, que redundaban en discusiones o diálogos o en opiniones, yo a eso como que no le veía ... mucho sentido dentro de los objetivos del curso. El objetivo del curso era componer, era escribir. (...) Yo me sentí muy inseguro. De pronto no soy muy bueno para hablar en inglés. (Gabriel)

They felt some of the activities of the parallel curriculum were threatening; for example, the self-assessment of class participation or the presentation of their

essay topics to the class in order to receive comments from their peers. It seems that they had not reflected on their performance before, and this was the first time they were faced with their weaknesses.

There were three females in this group who were particularly shy, and thus felt annoyed when they were asked to share their opinions with their classmates. The teacher's directness may also have impacted them.

Pienso que la personalidad de la profesora era también bastante fuerte y eso llevaba muchas veces a encontronos con los estudiantes. (Gabriel)

Como dura... como difícil de penetrar esa barrera... tuve temor pues de hacer preguntas. (Eliana)

One male student in this group was quite irresponsible, did not attend the meetings set by his group or arrived late and had not done the assigned task. His work in the group was very poor and seriously affected the academic performance of his peers. However, he felt that the teacher's comments on his lack of commitment had made him realize how uncommitted he had been and had become more responsible.

4. Reflection

In this section we will discuss the main issues that emerged from the analysis of students' opinions related to the course and our own views on the experience.

Transferring Control

The teacher being not the only person to assess and give feedback on students' work helps students become aware that they and the teacher have shared objectives. It is no longer the powerless students against the

powerful teacher. Students learn they can learn from each other, not just the teacher, and they can also learn the roles they will assume once they become teachers. This makes them more aware of the fact that they are not just studying languages but also learning how to become teachers.

Cuando a uno lo evalúa un compañero, eso lo toca a uno. (Jaime)

The students never knew what the consequences of their self- and peer-assessment were. If peer- and self-assessment had been assigned a grade, it would have correlated with students' academic achievement. That is to say, those students who did not work effectively in the group wrote poor papers, whereas those who worked harmoniously wrote excellent papers. Similarly, students who shared their ideas in class and supported their points of view wrote better papers than those who chose not to participate in class.

Peer-assessment did not have the expected impact on some students. For example, there was a group of students in which one student did most of the work, another came late for the meetings and did not bring the information he had promised, and the other did not contribute very much with ideas. The latter two handed in their peer-assessment, but the one who had done most of the work did not, maybe because he did not want the responsibility for assessing his peers in an unfavorable way and felt uncomfortable with his classmates. It seems that solidarity is poorly understood. Students tended to be supportive of each other when they had to hide their weaknesses from the teacher, e.g. they did not mind that all the members of the group received the same good grade even when one student did most of the

work.

The purpose of having students write a composition on “Students and Teachers’ Rights and Duties” was clear only to a few students because after the teacher returned the compositions with comments on their content and form, she never finished writing up the “Rules of the Game”. Therefore, they were not shared openly with the students so she was the only one who knew what they were. Only two rules were discussed; one of them was the controversial statement made by some students that they had the right not to be forced to speak.

Students’ Exposure

Some students’ fear of ridicule when speaking English may be due not so much to their poor level of English but to the fact that there are some classmates who speak better, and they are afraid they may make fun of them. If students who do not speak very well do not speak in class, where will they? There are not many opportunities for practice in our environment.

Students felt afraid of presenting their ideas to the class and resented the comments their classmates made. It seems that they had been used to students accepting anything they say without asking questions or making comments. In this course students gave feedback on students’ research topics and asked them questions in order for them to clarify ideas and focus the topic. Those who could not support their ideas misinterpreted these comments, which aimed at providing constructive criticism.

La actividad se prestó para que mucha gente se resintiera en su trabajo, se sintiera frustrada, se empezó a sentir mal. (Gabriel)

Teacher’s Personality

The teacher’s personality played a central role in how students received the parallel curriculum. Students did not feel at ease with the teacher because she is a person who is demanding and sets high expectations for students (“muy rígida”). They could not follow her intention beyond the academic requirements because they were too stressed with the course demands to be able to see the parallel curriculum, even when she made it explicit. She is also very critical and assertive and would like her students to be like that. Her gestures and tone of voice, which she attributes to the passion she feels about what she says and does, is usually interpreted as anger and consequently frightens students, particularly those shy or insecure. Another aspect that causes ill feelings among students is her use of irony. Because of all this, she has a reputation that is questioned particularly by poor students. That is probably why students were tense in her classes, but once the class moved to more individualized instruction and they had individual tutoring sessions, they got to know her better and realized that she is quite open-minded and kind, and the image they had of her tended to change.

A pesar de que... tuviera su temperamento fuerte ella fue capaz de como de... de aceptar las cosas que le decían y cambiarlas. (Eliana)

Students’ previous experience

Students tend to confuse the teacher’s personality with her style of teaching. Even if she did not have the negative personality characteristics mentioned above, we think that those students in the second group would have felt uneasy with the parallel curriculum, perhaps because they had not set themselves clear learning goals and objectives, but had been aiming just at passing the courses. They did just the minimum that teachers required of them.

Los profesores anteriores han sido muy blandengues. (Lilian)

El curso como tal es demandante... se dijo que se iba a hacer un proyecto de investigación... y sobre todo que si uno no trae una formación en los cursos anteriores. (Gabriel)

Nos faltaron pasos a seguir en nuestra formación y nos encontramos dando un salto del primero al tercer piso. (Omaira)

Students had not been asked to analyze the procedures they used to develop a task. That is to say, teachers usually pay attention to the product but not to the process. In this course, the process was as important; that is why discussions were held on how to choose a partner to work with, how to prepare for a meeting with them, and how to devise a time table to be able to distribute time efficiently. Once students are confronted with the fact that they have not learned what they should have at a university level, they become angry with themselves, but take a defensive attitude and blame the teacher.

Going Back to Primary (*Escuelera*)

Some students felt that the parallel curriculum was appropriate for primary schools but not for tertiary level, where students are supposed to be mature and to have already acquired values, such as responsibility and punctuality. Suggesting strategies such as taking notes and presenting papers in a neat fashion were also considered patronizing (*escuelero*).

Cuando yo llegaba y veía a todo el mundo hablando de tal problema o hablando del otro, yo ahí mismito llegaba y ¡ah! Me empezaba como esa bobadita. ¡Ah! ¡Otra vez el mismo cuento! (Gabriel)

Educating implies change, and change implies destabilization. Some students hold the view that learning should be enjoyable, but when they are destabilized, when they do not have immediate right answers and when reaching an appropriate solution to a problem takes a lot of thinking and time, they feel they are not having fun and reject learning. Others have a different point of view.

La personalidad es importante cuando se pretende lograr cambios en el estudiante. Porque si el profesor no es fuerte los alumnos tal vez no se sientan tocados. No hay esa parte del dolor que lo hace a uno reaccionar y tomar acciones al respecto. No estoy cumpliendo con esto y mire que me están exigiendo. No es que si quiero o si no quiero; en la vida es así. Uno en la vida tiene que compartir con gente que no es como uno y uno tiene que aprender a convivir con eso. (Edgar)

El que más lo quiere a uno es el que más le exige a uno. (Jaime)

Later on, however, when all the difficult moments were in the past, they recognized the goodness of the experience.

Todo me ayudó mucho. Lo de la parte académica y aún la posición del profesor. (Elizabeth)

What seems to be clear is that in order to reach the desired results, the parallel curriculum should be part of every teacher's daily practice. Otherwise, students realize inconsistencies in program policies and take advantage of them.

Uno entra a comparar y ve que en este curso, a pesar de las dificultades, uno hace un balance general y me parece que allí se manejó un aprendizaje muy importante para

nosotros como futuros maestros o para los que ya tenemos la oportunidad, con respecto a la responsabilidad. Al semestre siguiente uno llega a otros cursos y hay un relajo total, estudiantes y profesores que no exigen ni lo mínimo como profesores. Debe haber un equilibrio entre el profesor tan madre y el tan tirano. Debe haber un equilibrio. Hay profesores que aportan muy poco a nosotros como futuros profesores porque son muy permisivos y alimentadores de nuestros vicios: posponer trabajos, la irresponsabilidad, estudiantes que entren a un curso a la hora que les da la gana y se salen a la hora que les da la gana. Dique es porque es una universidad. Pero eso no debe ser así. Son profesores que ayudan muy poco en ese sentido. Y nosotros vamos a tener problemas al momento de enfrentarnos al trabajo porque tenemos que ser modelos para nuestros estudiantes. (Gabriel)

Conclusion

Effecting change is a slow process. Students are not used to taking control when they are given it, and get disconcerted. Students and teachers in universities tend to think that at this level we should aim at academic goals, and do not realize that integrating social and affective objectives into the course will not only enhance academic achievement, but will prepare students for their role in society. We feel that students have been accustomed to passing courses without giving their best. Is this a result of their previous high school education where there has been a shift from authoritarian to permissive teachers, and from quantitative to qualitative assessment? Or should we attribute students' "easy way out" attitude (*facilismo*) to the lack of standards in our program?

We have just started exploring the problem of developing values, strategies and skills. We still need to find ways of overcoming the difficulties encountered in this endeavor and try out similar experiences in other courses and levels of education with a holistic view but focusing on particular issues. Through self-assessment Edgar is transferring some power to students in order to develop their commitment to the course. Through role-plays Jaime is trying to make students in secondary schools aware of the importance of valuing the teacher's work, and through contracts students should learn to take responsibility for their learning. We hope that the readers will have found the ideas presented here encouraging and will also be willing to develop their own parallel curriculum.

References

- Christison, M.A. (1999). *Cooperating and Collaborating in the EFL Classroom*. Presentation at the School of Languages, Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín, August 19, 1999.
- Hadfield, J. (1992). *Classroom Dynamics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ladousse, G. P. (1987) *Role Play*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Littlewood, A. (1998). Presentation at the ASOCOPI Congress, Bogotá, October 1998.
- Woodward, T. (1992). *Ways of Training*. Essex: Longman.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Role-plays
Appendix 2: Ethics of the Classroom
Appendix 3: Questionnaire to Self-assess Class Participation
Appendix 4: Suggestions for Effective Behavior in Groups
Appendix 5: Schedule for Interview.

Appendix 1

Role-plays

In these role-plays adapted from Hadfield's (1992, p.140) "Middlemen" the teacher is asked to proceed as follows:

1. Divide the class into groups of three as far as possible.
2. Arrange the desks and chairs in two rows down opposite sides of the room.
3. Give each student a number: one, two, or three. Ask all the 1s to sit down the left-hand side of the room and all the twos to sit down the right-hand side opposite their partner. The threes can hover in the middle.
4. Explain that they are going to role play three situations, each involving an argument between two people, one and two. One and two will not speak to each other directly, but should make their views known to three who will help them to try and find a compromise.
5. Give out the cards for the first situation and ask the threes to go and listen to the ones.
6. When they have heard the ones' side of things, they should go and explain it to the twos, listen to their reply, and report back to the 1s, trying all the time to help the ones and twos to reach a compromise to settle their differences. This mediation should go on until both sides reach a satisfactory agreement.
7. Then get ones and threes to change places and continue with role play two.
8. Get the twos and threes to change places for role play three.

Role-play 1

Student

Your teacher is very demanding. She requires you to do a lot of work outside class. You wished you had all the time to do all the tasks she asks you to do, but you have to work to support yourself.

Teacher

You are having trouble with a student who is not handing in his/her homework on time. How will he/she learn if she doesn't practice what we are presenting in class? There is no point in doing the task a week or two weeks later; he/she will not be able to keep up with the course objectives.

Role-play 2

Mate 1

Your mate is always busy. Every time you want to agree on a time to work together on your research paper he/she says he/she has to work. The only time he/she is free is on Sunday afternoon and that's when you go out with your boy/girlfriend.

Mate 2

Your mate is very lazy. The only thing he/she does is attend classes and hang out in the cafeteria. However, when you propose to work together on Sundays he/she says he/she can't.

Role-play 3

Mate 1

You are in mid semester and up to now you have written most of your research paper alone. Your mate suggested the topic and provided some ideas for the paper, but never showed up for the meetings you had arranged. Now he/she wants you to give him/her credit as an author too.

Mate 2

Your mate is very inconsiderate. He/she asked you to work on the research paper with him/her because you are very imaginative and he/she likes your ideas. Now he/she is saying he/she won't give you credit for the paper because you missed some meetings.

Appendix 2

Ethics of the classroom

Andrew Littlewood

What are the rights of students?

1. A right to gain benefit from the time spent in the classroom
2. A right to share decisions that affect them
3. A right to be respected
4. A right to use their mother tongue
5. A right to participate actively
6. A right to have full account of the basis on which they are judged

What are the rights of teachers?

1. A right to be respected
2. A right to learn, to experiment, to develop
3. A right to make professional decisions
4. A right to be who they are
5. A right to expect cooperation

Appendix 3

Questionnaire to self-assess class participation

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

In order to assess your class participation, please answer the following questions as sincerely as possible by circling the appropriate alternative. Support your answer writing an example.

On the reverse side of this page write examples that support your answers, and add any comments on your participation that were not included in this questionnaire.

Did I prepare well for the seminar?	no	fairly well	very well
Did I participate in the process of determining the agenda (topics, activities and order) for the class?	no	sometimes	often
Did I ask for clarification?	no	sometimes	often
Did I explain a topic or an issue?	no	sometimes	often
Did I help focus the discussion?	no	sometimes	often
Did I say things that are related to the point under discussion?	no	sometimes	often
Did my interventions promote discussion?	no	sometimes	often
Did I ask questions that lead to further discussion?	no	sometimes	often
Did I express myself clearly in English so that my classmates could understand?	no	sometimes	often
Did I speak English correctly?	no	Sometimes	often
Did I reflect on what the others had to say?	no	Sometimes	often

Appendix 4

Suggestions for effective behavior in groups

1. Be on time.
2. Prepare. Go over the agenda, complete assignments and tasks, and make certain you understand those issues that are to be discussed.
3. Make certain that you can attend the meeting.
4. Contribute information to the meeting, be precise and to the point.
5. Ask for clarification on points that are unclear or ambiguous.
6. Be a good listener.
7. Make your disagreements principle based.
8. Leave your personal agenda at the door.
9. Involve others.
10. Work for the goals of the group.
11. Be committed.

Appendix 5

Schedule for interview

- Cuénteme de su experiencia en el curso de Composición con Cristina.
- ¿Recuerda alguna actividad del curso?
- ¿Cuál cree usted que era la intención de Cristina en el curso?
- ¿Cómo se sentía en el curso?
- ¿Qué actitud asumió usted frente a lo que no le gustaba del curso?
- ¿Es la naturaleza del curso la que indica que el curso sea así, o qué?
- ¿Qué cosas cambiaría si fuera la profesora del curso? ¿Haría lo mismo? ¿Qué haría distinto?
- ¿En qué medida lo que aprendió en el curso le ha servido para su vida como estudiante, como profesor, o en general, como ser humano?