ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN
RESEARCH REPORT

Discovering my teaching features and their relation with my students' learning: An autoethnography

Descubriendo mi manera de enseñar y su relación con el aprendizaje de mis estudiantes: Una autoetnografía

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los resultados de una investigación que exploró las características de mi manera de enseñar y cómo estas parecen influir en el aprendizaje del idioma de mis estudiantes. Participaron nueve estudiantes de una universidad pública: cinco hombres y cuatro mujeres de un Nivel 2-Principiante y yo como profesora investigadora en este estudio auto etnográfico. Se hizo observación de clases durante cuatro semanas en seis sesiones, se realizó una entrevista de grupo con los estudiantes y se recogieron los diarios de los estudiantes y de la profesora. Los datos se grabaron en video y se transcribieron; estos se codificaron y analizaron utilizando métodos cualitativos. Los resultados mostraron modelos emergentes relacionados a mi manera de enseñar como mi lado proactivo, mi informalidad y el afecto; hubo elementos que indicaron que mis estudiantes aprenden de la instrucción, aprenden de la co-construcción y para ellos el aprender tiene que ver con desempeño. Los resultados, adicionalmente, indicaron que entre mi manera de enseñar y la manera de aprender de mis estudiantes hay una relación en términos de mi actitud, la manera de presentar las actividades y el ambiente del aula.

Palabras clave: manera de enseñar, manera de aprender, relación, actitud, actividades, y ambiente del aula.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present the results of a research which explored the features of my teaching and the influence it had on my students´ language learning. Nine students: five males and four females from an English Beginners Level 2 course in a public university and me as a teacher researcher participated in this autoethnographic case study. Observation was conducted during four weeks in six class sessions, a focus group interview with the students was applied and journals from both the students and the teacher were collected. Data sources were videotaped, recorded and transcribed; they were coded and analyzed using qualitative methods. Results showed emergent patterns related to my teaching features such as my proactive side, my informality and affection; in regards to my students´ signs of learning there were elements such as learning from instruction, learning from co-construction and learning and performance. Findings indicated that between my teaching features and my students´ learning there was a relation in terms of my attitude, the way activities were presented and the classroom environment.

Keywords: teaching features, students´ language learning, relation, attitude, activities, and classroom environment.

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the past and observing the present can be indicative of how and why we do the things we do in class. This refection can help define a future teaching path. As stated by Schön (2000) "when a practitioner reflects in and on his practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of knowing-in-practice which he brings to them" (The reflective practioner part one section, para. 17). For the purpose of exploration I decided to observe my teaching, interpret the classroom events, evaluate outcomes and make adjustments in an attempt to influence my students' language learning.

There is a need to analyze the elements that make up the language-teaching thus language-learning scenario and teachers should be aware of the signals. Kumaravadivelu (2003) expresses "that professional theory belongs to the domain of the theorist and personal theory belongs to the domain of the teacher. This approach does not place theory and practice in positions of antithetical polarity, it perpetuates the artificial division between theory and practice" (p. 19). By assuming this position I came into terms with the phenomenon, and my students would recursively help me to redefine my purpose, my goals, and my professional objectives and make me consider a method or an approach that is inclusive.

Many things have been said and done around the topic of teaching and learning and specifically in the realm of ELT internationally (Krashen, 1981; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Oxford, 2003). In Colombia, Orrego and Díaz (2010) wanted to identify the conceptions about learning held by students and teachers. The study showed that teachers' conceptions can be classified under four theories of learning: behaviorist, psycholinguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural. Meanwhile the chosen learning strategies were cognitive, social, and those of compensation. Regarding the learner´s affective factors Fandiño (2010) highlighted the importance of students´ paying attention to their feelings as part of their learning process. On the subject of teacher´s beliefs Mc Nulty (2010) examined methodological strategies and explored roles assumed by pre-service teachers and advisors. On the topic of communication skills in an EFL class Herazo, Jerez and Lorduy (2009) assume a position where they defend the idea that communication might happen not only when learners have learned but also when learners are learning. There is additional research carried out by Clavijo, Guerrero, Torres, Ramírez and Torres (2004) that resulted in teachers planning and carrying out curricular innovations thinking critically about students' needs and interests.

According to the literature on the subject there is a need in the field of education and particularly in language teaching to permanently study how teaching is done and how teaching practice is therefore related to learning. To support this statement there is a study by Garcia and Figueroa (2007) that investigated the learning styles of students and teachers and whether the teacher's teaching style matches with the students´ learning styles to determine if learning and motivation are present when there is a crossroad between learning and teaching styles. And to conclude with what has been done in Colombia regarding ELT and language learning there is research done by Rosado (2012) in the city of Barranquilla, in the Caribbean Coast of Colombia. Her research was meant to contribute to the understanding of learning as a complex system and allowed a reflection on how students' and teachers' learning systems are connected in the classrooms.

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This research was meant to be another way of looking at this reality and explain how it has been and what it means to be a language teacher in city in the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

MAIN CONCEPTS

Proactive teaching

In my style I model behaviors and complement lessons with things that interest my students. In that complex and intricate context I look at their age, likes, dislikes, socio economic background, family structure and future plans. Knowing about them gives me the opportunity to look for ways of presenting what is going to be taught in class. It is because of this that I thought it would be interesting to include some notions of what it means to be an effective classroom manager. Tate (2007) includes the following proactive characteristics described by Tileston:

> They lead the class by modeling the expected behaviors, such as how to control impulsivity and how to use positive self-talk. They build resiliency in students by gathering and interpreting student data, developing a positive relationship with each student, providing feedback to each student, understanding students' unique differences, and understanding that content should be taught from a variety of linguistic and nonlinguistic organizers. They take care of behavior problems quietly and quickly. They move from low-profile interventions to more elevated measures while remaining calm. They realize that student behavior can be affected by a positive physical and emotional environment. They provide routines that are followed consistently daily. They assist students in perceiving the value or importance of the task. They directly teach students how to reach personal goals and provide feedback on their progress toward those goals. They reduce stress by making sure that students know what to do and how to do it (p. 2).

Affection

There are theories that explore the correlation between emotion, language and education. For example Maturana (2008) explains that "emotion or emotioning is a kind of behavior and a manner of relating; whenever our emotion changes the domain of relating changes. We are always in emotion - it is present in us always" (para. 22). In relation to what was mentioned above and to complement the notion on affection, teaching and learning the term Affective Filter included in Krashen´s (1981) Monitor Model was also incorporated. The three affective variables he mentions Anxiety, Self-Esteem and Motivation made me realize that every learning path starts there. It is all about affection. I realized there were two possible scenarios. One scenario involves a language learner with high or low affective filter per se as a personal choice for assuming learning. This denotes that the Affective Filter is already high or low within that person. Another scenario includes the teacher with his or her attitude and where he or she has the possibility to either raise it or lower it.

Consequently, we come to understand and perceive that emotion is there in each of us, it is there every day and in every class we share. There are ways to trigger the positive side of emotions. I consider that in a positive state of mind learning can occur more effectively. It is all about being aware of the other and recognizing each other in a specific environment.

Classroom Ecology

In being aware of the many situations that go on in a language teaching classroom and working with the elements I found another interesting concept by Morin (1994) that revolves around the initiative of the context or what he so calls

"ecology". He supports the idea that an organism builds itself up out of an existing environment into the existing ecology. The thought of self-eco organization is very useful if we think about it in terms of how our teaching is organized. It is impossible not to consider the class conditions and how we are also influenced by our students´ learning processes. We are part of the context and in response to that we adopt a certain shape. We have our own and particular teaching identity and thus our teaching features acquire their own contour.

I started understanding the complexity of this teaching-learning process and so decided that to find answers I had to take a look at myself. The purpose of this research was to characterize my emergent teaching features and how they seem to influence my students´ language learning. Specific objectives were:

1. Identify the features of my teaching in general.
2. Identify signs of my student`s learning features.
3. Relate what teaching features seem to influence my students` language learning.

METHODOLOGY

When researching about teaching and learning in L2 we must be sensitive to the contexts because we are dealing with human beings; in addition, those human beings are also in the process of formation and learning. We need to capture the essence of the teacher and the essence of the student, to be sensitive towards the participant's perceptions, to how the situations unfolds and immerse ourselves at the time of interpreting what is going on. Following Denzin and Lincoln (2000) qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. A qualitative framework helped me to make sense of my classroom setting, my students' decisions, actions and reactions, my choices and my delivery.

When analyzing the question and the objectives it is clear that I have a fundamental role in the study. It is about how and why I do the things I do in class. Besides, I need to analyze how and why my students respond the way they do in terms of learning. This led me to include the notion of autoethnography and the notion of case study in my methodology.

For Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) autoethnographic research is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (para. 1). It is following this definition that as an educator autoethnography becomes useful because of my need to analyze my personal experience in a specific cultural setting. This offers the possibility to tell my story, my past experiences and through the understanding of my actions and decisions I can then understand my students´ context in the present. I could therefore transform the old into something new and build my practice through discovering the relationships we establish in our classroom. It also allows me to write in a personally engaging manner that will appeal to many kinds of readers and not only conventional academic writers.

I chose to do a case study to focus on a group of students from a public university that are in a level 2 English course that have certain characteristics that can be observed, described and analyzed in order to gain and in-depth look at their language learning process as a phenomenon and relate it to the teaching phenomenon.

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Following Hamilton, Corbett-Whittier and Fowler (2012) "this approach builds up a rich picture of an entity, using different kinds of data collection and gathering the views, perceptions, experiences and/or ideas of diverse individuals relating to the case" (p. 1). As a set of individuals my students can bring richness to the whole class component and each member's perception can be taken into account to complement the group´s lived experiences in class.

Participants

The case study had 10 participants. There were 9 students from the Level 2 Group 1 English course at a public university in Sincelejo on the Colombian Caribbean and the tenth participant was me as the teacher researcher. The students were chosen based on their L2 language ability. There were three of them with a high competence in English, three of them with a fair competence and the other three with a low competence within their current Level (Beginners). Their ability was measured according to class participation, homework assignments, quiz and oral presentation grades. Within the 9 participants, five were male and four were female. The age range was from 18 up to 28. The males who studied Electronics were in 4th semester and the rest of them were in Civil Engineering on their 3rd semester. The females who studied Biology, AgroIndustrial Engineering and Business Administration were all in 4th semester.

I have an undergraduate degree in Communications from Universidad Externado in Bogotá, a Human Resources degree from Universidad Tecnológica de Bolivar in Cartagena and an English Teaching degree from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Monteria. During the research I was studying to gain a master´s degree in English Teaching from Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla. I moved to Sincelejo eight years ago. From then on, I started teaching English to elementary and high-school students at a private school until 2011 and in 2012 changed jobs and taught for one year in a small private University in Sincelejo. I was teaching at the public university at the time of the project. I worked for a total of 16 teaching hours per week.

Data Collection and analysis

The data was collected during four weeks in two stages. The first stage included classroom observation during 2 pilot sessions and my own journal writing. The second stage included ongoing classroom observation for 4 sessions, student journal writing, my own journal writing and a focus group interview. I used a variety of instruments with the idea of producing sufficient data for the process to be reliable and valid.

Classroom observation

I recorded 2 pilot sessions on April 29th and May 6th / 2013. I told my 25 students about my research project and they all agreed on being recorded. For the purpose of the study and to limit my sample I chose 9 students as my research participants.

After video recording the two first sessions, I thought it was important to include another camera that could record from back to front in an attempt to have a broader perspective of what could be observed from different angles. I used a Samsung S4 Cell phone to record and collect data non-stop from May 20th until May 29th for a total of 4 more class sessions. This meant I had 6 class sessions of one and a half hours each on average.

The first thing I decided to do with the video recordings of the class sessions was to watch them carefully and take notes. I made a chart where I put on one column the actual data from observation and on the second column the interpretation of that observation. I paid attention to the following things: what was said, how it was said, what effect it had and on the other hand, I looked at non-verbal language: body expression and facial expressions because I believed this would add a layer and could be meaningful for the analysis.

The second step was to transcribe the video recordings. After reading the transcripts for each session over and over many times I selected certain parts of the classroom discourse in the form of quotes and assigned names. These names had to do with what I thought was going on during the interaction. The ideas for the names came from theory and notions I had heard during my ELT studies. There were names like: Eliciting, Feedback, Giving instructions, Joking, Modeling Activity, Classroom Awareness, Positive Reinforcement and Teacher Code Switching to mention a few that related to the teacher per se; I also gave names to elements that derived from the students like: Student´s Affirmative Response, Student Using L1, Student´s Correct Response, Student´s Oral Activity or Student´s Intervention.

These names therefore became my codes. I finally came up with a list of 49 codes. In general terms, these codes helped me find my way through a significant amount of information in each of the class sessions. They became interaction organizers. They were showing me what was recurrent and somehow what was missing during my class sessions. They were presenting me certain patterns that became indicative of my teaching features and my students´ learning.

Journals

There were two types of journals: My own personal journal and my students´ journals. I kept my own journal from the day I started recording Session No. 1 on April 29th. My personal journal had reflections on 3 basic issues for 6 class sessions: how I felt at the beginning of each session, what I did in class and why, and what I thought my students learned. I summarized the entries and complemented my description including thoughts that were part of the journal. My journal allowed me to interpret my emerging teaching features mainly in relation to affection, error correction, and how activities were presented.

I also asked my 9 student participants to keep a journal for the last 4 class sessions from May 20th to May 29th. The journal had a set of questions that had to be answered in each of the sessions. These were the questions: How do I feel at the beginning of the class? How do I feel at the end? Which activities did I enjoy? Which activities didn´t I like? Did I learn anything? What was it? How do I know? What things did I like from my teacher´s teaching? Which ones didn´t I like?

It is significant to say that I analyzed the data from the students' journals in terms of feelings and affection, activities developed in class and definitions about learning from students. These areas naturally derived from the types of questions given as a guide.

Interview

The interview was used to obtain information from the different participants to get to know and understand individual points of view.

On May 20th and at the end of the class session I did the focus group interview with the 9

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student participants selected for the study. I told them to gather on one side of the room and get closer to one another so I could later observe how they responded to each question. Based on what I saw at first hand, they were all willing to participate but did not want to take long. They looked tired and expressed they were hungry. I told them there were 6 basic questions and that they should respond to them as naturally and spontaneously as they could.

Because of the students' beginner's English level I decided to do the interview in Spanish so they could respond in an honest and natural way. I decided to also record the interview to see how they behaved towards each one of the questions and amongst each other. I then transcribed it for further analysis.

For the analysis, I did a description of what went on in class and how they got prepared to answer the questions. Because their answers were in general short, one word responses I was as descriptive as I could when writing about their ideas. I bundled up similar responses and included differences in opinion so I could compare and contrast points of view and perceptions.

RESULTS

I will present now results obtained from the different instruments used.

Classroom Observation

It is important to say that from a total of 49 codes that emerged out of the classroom interaction for six sessions, 30 codes referred to the teacher and 19 to the students. 1648 quotes or extracts were associated to these 49 codes.

The codes were directly related to the quotes generated either by the students or me as the teacher and my analysis was based on what codes where more common and which ones appeared less as well as what it was said.

From this data I could recognize the type of questions I did in class and why, a feature which in my findings is explained as the "eliciting" factor; why and how I praised students a feature that is built on the idea of affection; why I am keen of giving my students constant reaffirmation an element that pertains to a feature that is called: positive reinforcement and in what way I gave instructions a notion that has a relation with my learning style and that is a strong trait in my practice. On the other hand and with less intensity the data derived from observation gave me some insights on how students responded to the questions being asked, how they participated in class and what type of things they said while speaking or when producing the language orally.

Students´ Journals

Students' journals allowed me to discover at firsthand how emotion and learning are connected; how my attitude is connected to their engagement and how they perceive the idea of learning from a very personal point of view. With this I started to describe some parts of my teaching features but most of all I could emphasize on my students´ signs of learning and how these two things were connected.

My personal journal

From this instrument I could identify emergent categories from my teaching perspective because it all came directly from my thoughts. On one hand I understood how important teaching and affection are to me; I also interpreted what type of

dimension my informality brings to the classroom and how certain components defined me as having a pro-active side. The data gathered from the journal entries allowed me to understand how my teaching is related to my students´ learning. One significant trend dealt with my attitude which was also mentioned in my students´ journals and how it influenced their own mood.

Focus group interview

I analyzed the data from the interview based on 3 elements: concepts about English, concepts about learning and concepts about the teacher´s teaching derived from the students´ point of view. These ideas naturally derived from the types of questions asked.

Below are questions 1 to 6, with the participants´ responses.

Question No. 1. Do you like English?- A total of 5 students out of the 9 responded to this question. One of the males said that it is the universal language. The second male that responded said it was very important and that he really liked it and wanted to learn more. The third male that answered explained that even though it was not easy for him it could help him with his career. The two females that participated answering this question had different points of view. One said that for her Biology career it was really important and the last female expressed that she had this notion of English as being something hard to learn and complicated.

Question No. 2. Have you learned anything in class?- There were a total of 5 students who responded this question. Four were females. One of them expressed that she learned what was on the book; specifically she mentioned the past and the present tenses. Another one said that when she tried to translate she knew more words, adding that she had more vocabulary now. The third female told a story of how in Biology class and after reading an article in English she was asked to translate it for other classmates and she felt comfortable and did it without hesitating. The last female who responded the question said that it was easier to connect ideas to understand sentences. The only male who spoke expressed that he learned while being in class but soon after he forgot what he learned.

Question No. 3. Describe your teacher in five words.- To this request that was inserted as part of the focus group interview 5 out of the 9 students mentioned an adjective. There were 3 females and 2 males who responded. One male and two females described me as being "crazy", one of the females added that I was "intelligent", "creative" and "loud", the other female who spoke before added I was "down to earth". The third female participant expressed I was "original" and the last male to say something used the term "hyperactive".

Question No. 4. Do you consider that there is something in particular that makes this class different from others?- To this question 5 students expressed their ideas. Four of them were males. The first one said that my "energy" added that special extra thing to my classes. The second male expressed that my "craziness" and "personality" made the difference when comparing me to other teachers in a positive way. One of the males who never spoke before during the interview expressed that my classes were different because I gave them the chance to express themselves just the way they were. The fourth male who spoke had something in common with opinion number 1 and it was related to the "energy" mentioned before because he said it was all about my "dynamism". The only female that

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intervened expressed that my "creativity" was the something that was different from other classes.

Question No. 5. What things does the teacher do in class that you think allow you to learn?- This question was answered by 4 of the 9 participants. Three were females. One of them said that the questions, oral presentations and games helped her learn. Another female expressed that the projects and games were things that I used in class that made it easier for her. The third female participant said that she really enjoyed and learned a lot from the Tongue Twisters. She liked the pronunciation practice and the new vocabulary derived from the words in them. The only male that spoke expressed that two key elements were participation in class and group work.

Question No. 6. What else should the teacher do to make the class experience better?- In this last question 7 out of the 9 students responded. There were 4 females and 3 males. The first one to participate was a male and he said that it would be better for him if I showed the grammar step by step, modeling the structures more carefully. And from there, do other activities. The first female expressed that she liked the classes just the way they were and another female added that if I became like the description given above she would run out of the classroom and never return. She continued expressing that there are a lot of students like her that feel apathy towards English and having a more relaxed, flexible teacher is better. One of the males added to this intervention that there are a lot of language learners that feel scared and that having a good relationship with students based on respect and where confidence is built up like I do gives them this sense of wanting to be in class and learn. A female added to this idea that in my classes there was a comfortable teacher-student relationship and that she did not feel afraid. One of the males expressed that a lot of teachers are boring. And one of the females expressed that I should be more flexible when grading dictations, because I did not allow a mistake on just one letter. To this the last female participant added that I should keep my "toughness" during the dictations and be demanding.

The interview allowed me to capture my students' frame of mind towards my teaching style and I was given insights of what was being done "right" or "wrong" in terms of my delivery and how this related to their learning. Regarding their learning they also expressed what they learned and how they did it. With these elements I could identify trends on what I described as the features of my teaching in relation to my attitude and instruction. To them instruction was of vital importance and was directly related to learning. In the findings section I gathered all these salient issues and did an interpretation in terms of my teaching features, my students´ signs of learning and related those features to their learning.

DISCUSSION

This section explains the data gathered from the instruments and the subsequent trends that emerged from its analysis. I interpreted specific patterns that emerged through the analysis and triangulation of the instruments.

The results are presented in relation to the objectives of this research. I specifically discussed my teaching, my students' signs of learning and the relationship my features have with their learning.

My Teaching Features

In regards to my teaching features I identified 3 main issues. I have a proactive side. I am very aware of my students' context, surrounding,

interests, and lives in general because I know their physical and emotional environment is going to affect either positively or negatively their willingness to learn and even more so a foreign language that is just a "partial fulfillment" for graduation. It was my intention to have them in a good mood so their behavior could allow them to be open to all that they were experiencing and in doing so, they could approach activities with interest. This is related to what Tate (2007) expressed concerning proactive teachers: "they realize that student behavior can be affected by a positive physical and emotional environment" (p. 2).

I also consider affection as the start of the learning path. All language learners have emotional aspects that raise their affective filters and in some way impede the learning process of the language. It is necessary to understand that the "barrier" can exist in one, ten or thirty of our students and if the affective filter goes up language acquisition is hindered. It is important to identify how they come to our classes and with what type of level. It is our duty to do things in class that can help our students to lower it. Because we are in constant "emotioning" as expressed earlier on in this paper a concept by Maturana (2008) it is necessary to build on a methodology that will allow the filter to go down. So the things we do in class and how we do them have an impact on our students' affective filters. In the same way other researchers likn Robertson (2008) expressed that:

> Krashen (1985) claims that affective factors such as motivation, attitude, self-confidence and anxiety will affect not only the amount of comprehensible input that learners seek, but will also determine the strength of the filter, thus determining the amount of 'comprehensible input' reaching the Language Acquisition Device. Weakening of the affective filter (e.g. by strengthening self-belief, or decreasing anxiety) is therefore vital for SLA. (The Affective Filter Hypothesis section, para. 1)

The third issue regarding my teaching has to do with my lack of a background on "educational theory" or "pedagogy" allowing my informality in teaching to have some dialogical components. It is like a compensation strategy. I have great gaps on pedagogical issues and also on ELT theories and methodologies. I sense the need to fulfill those gaps because I know there are other ways to teach. There are other ways to reach my students.

Theory on dialogic teaching has to do with a multiplicity of issues. In the 6 class sessions observed for this study I could identify more than with the techniques that deal by means of giving students a certain stimulus with 2 of its components: the classroom relationships and the balance of power between teacher and taught as conceived by Robin Alexander (2008). As to the classroom relationships that were also mentioned above in the proactive characteristics I can add from one of my entries how much I consider them and how important it is for me to have a respectful but close connection with my students. In terms of the balance of power it is important for me to give them spaces where they can try out things and explore. I like being open minded toward what they can produce. We both stand at the same level. It is just a manner of knowing how to say things. I am a guide, a support, a helping hand.

Students' Learning

In relation to my students' signs of learning there were 3 other issues they mentioned that were relevant to them. They expressed they learned from teacher instruction, they like clear instructions and they need structure and logical progression in what they learn. There are also examples

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of concrete learners. Julie Tice (1997) explains that they like to be entertained and physically involved. So I need to keep on taking into account that there are different types of learners with different needs, motivations and interests. That with my instruction I have to cater for different kinds of learning styles and preferences.

They also commented that co-construction allowed them to learn. I decided because they were Beginner level students to apply pair and group work so they could participate more, ask questions amongst each other, help each other, have extra time to practice and assume different roles within the group. It was with the intent of ensuring that every student however weak or strong got involved and felt responsible for their learning. This has to do with the ideas expressed by Pineau (2000) who was inspired by Morin and thought how learning has to do with the interaction between one-self, with the other and with the environment. In that interaction there is a space for students to come into terms with their past knowledge structures and allow for new connections to build up.

After reviewing and analyzing the students´ journals and focus group interview I came to the conclusion that for the majority of the participants learning is related to performance. The know-how element is a salient issue in their definition of how they know they learned. I suppose they emphasize on the know-how because the language needs to be produced either orally or in a written manner in order to realize if you have learned it. There was one student that caught my attention because he said that what he learned were words and knowing how to pronounce them correctly. This was his main interest and final goal.

Relation between my teaching features and my students´ signs of learning

The relation my features seem to have with their learning had to do with 3 basic components. One of them was teacher´s attitude. I can say from my class experience as an English teacher that my attitude makes a great difference when being in contact with language learners. I feel a need to know my students at first hand and for them to know me. I also have a need to hear them out, let them express their feelings so the ice can be broken and they can come to class relaxed and ready to have a positive learning experience.

Hallam`s (2009) study rescues what the National Network for the Study of Educator Dispositions (NNSED) considered are four domains for teacher dispositions:

> The most effective teachers perceive themselves as effective. "These teachers are self-confident and optimistic," says Wasicsko. "They can identify with a broad and diverse range of people." They believe that all students can learn. They have a broad frame of reference and see a larger purpose for what they do. "Yes, their job is to teach a foreign language, or whatever subject they teach," says Wasicsko. "But it is also to teach a disposition for learning." They look at the people element. "We are all emotional learners," says Wasicsko. "What really good teachers know is that it is all about people. You can get magnificent learning to happen when you know that". p. 27).

I actually think that you can connect when you know that you are as vulnerable as any of your students and that they have the right to know you at many other levels. If you allow them to explore your human/emotional side they feel they have arrived at a good place. In exploring their same side they start considering and respecting the other.

The other component was the presentation of activities. I must say that after reading the class transcriptions, the students´ journals and interview I think that the way or the how you present any given activity influences your students' mood greatly. And I also believe that there is a direct relationship with your attitude and identity as a teacher and how you approach these activities. It has to do with maintaining students engaged and how not to fall into boredom. I think it is very useful to have a positive outlook towards every class session. Even students can perceive your mood and in doing so this influences their own frame of mind.

The two components mentioned above: teachers attitude and how activities are presented are part of a greater one that I noticed while doing observation that has a direct connection with my teaching style and my students´ *signs of learning. It is about* fostering a positive classroom environment. Besides having a positive attitude and presenting activities dynamically results showed that my informal structure basically has to do with giving most of all oral instructions, having whole class explanations and making sure students got the basic notion of the tasks they had to do and their participation was key at the moment of doing the activity or giving answers. I also chose to introduce content both in a traditional grammar based format and with non-traditional "ice-breakers". I also believe that my way of treating errors builds up on a balanced classroom atmosphere. During most of the sessions I did not correct students immediately; I allowed them to finish their ideas and then came close and explained how a specific activity, sentence, or conversation could be better elaborated. I tried to avoid having the negative side-effect of making permanent oral corrections thus creating a classroom climate where students are reluctant to share ideas and answers out of a fear of being wrong. I go back once again to the magnitude of considering affective factors when teaching and knowing that emotions play a central role in language learning. De Andres (2002), quoting Brown (1994, p.1) mentioned that:

> Becoming bilingual is a way of life. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language (epigraph

This is who I am as a teacher or at least is part of my identity when teaching. My features are here to stay until they work and will be transformed or changed into something else when needed. They are what they are because I found they are connected with my students´ emotions, affection, and mood and directly influence their performance and of course their performance directly influences my way of teaching.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms the notion that it is very healthy to do exploration through a process of reflection and then act on the knowledge gained from that reflection. It is of vital importance for teachers to accept that they need to look at themselves first to be able to look at others. It is not about labeling one another; it is about taking the time to develop, always question your practice and have a permanent stimulus for ideas.

It also showed that learning a foreign language is a complex, intricate but most of all an emotional process and in being so there is a need to give time to explore this facet within ourselves and with our students. It is a good starting point to

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just accept that emotions undoubtedly affect the way our students learn and it is more important that as teachers we understand how difficult and complex it is to be in our language learners' position. In this sense I found that my features are connected with my students´ emotions, affection, and mood and directly influence their performance and thus their performance directly influences my way of teaching.

I found that the most notable aspects of the data analysis emphasized on the following: I had 3 salient features in regards to my teaching: I have a proactive side, I consider affective factors when teaching and that I am informal and somewhat dialogical. In terms of my students´ signs of learning there were 3 other notable elements: They learned from the teacher´s instruction, co-construction allowed them to learn, and learning had to do with performance. And as for the connection there is between my teaching and their learning there were 3 additional aspects: teacher´s attitude, presentation of activities and classroom environment.

The results show that my practice directly addresses the establishment of a relaxing learning environment that starts with my attitude, based on characteristics that have an impression on my students and can be a key influence for them to either like or dislike the subject matter. Secondly, I treat the human element as my key philosophical factor. It is from there that I believe that many other things can be accomplished by my students. Everything that I do in class has a connection with my attitude or my teaching-learning outlook. I assume that with a positive approach my students will feel comfortable. In assuming this position there can be an increase in learning opportunities.

It is also apparent from analyzing the data that I create a valuable connection with my students. But, on the other hand, I also need to make changes. I must enrich my pedagogical and theoretical background regarding TEFL so I can enhance my teaching in an attempt to promote learning. I have to learn more about testing, evaluation and assessment so I can be fair to students' accomplishments. I have to be more organized in relation to lesson planning and be able to look at the whole context while designing a course.

We have to become advocates of observing, analyzing and reflecting upon our teaching identity and what is going on in class. It is necessary to comprehend that as teachers our individuality, the context, the methodology, the ecology of the classroom, and the type of students we have are elements that need to be taken into account and as our environment changes from class to class, we as teachers should be in constant change for our professional development. Self-discovery and evolution intrinsically make part of our profession.

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