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Why do my students believe they cannot learn English at school? – Exploratory Practice promoting understanding in the classroom.

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Nothing in life is to be feared,

it is only to be understood

Now is the time to understand more,

so that we may fear less.

Marie Curie (Chiu, Gilmer, Traegust. 2011, p.9)

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Leoni, Ana Claudia dos Santos; Cunha, Maria Isabel A. (Advisor). **Why do my students believe they cannot learn English at school? – Exploratory Practice promoting understanding in the classroom.** Rio de Janeiro, 2016, p.81. Monograph – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

ESL teaching is a broad topic for discussion. Therefore, there are always plenty of aspects waiting to be investigated. One of these aspects is teaching English to minority Brazilian students. Through the usage of Exploratory Practice (EP) and strategies applied to some Critical Pedagogy concepts, this study reveals some social and psychological conditions which may influence these youths' academic life. Observing these students' routine and analyzing some of their poster productions, one may realize how issues such as life history, identity, violence and self esteem may be crucial for their development at school. These findings may suggest EP and affect as good options to promote understanding and dialog between teachers of English and socio-economically deprived students.

Key words: Critical Pedagogy; ESL teaching; Exploratory Practice; Minority groups; Affect.

Resumo

Leoni, Ana Claudia dos Santos; Cunha, Maria Isabel A. (Orientadora). **Por que meus alunos acreditam que eles não são capazes de aprender inglês na escola? – a Prática Exploratória promovendo entendimento na sala de aula.** Rio de Janeiro, 2016, p.81. Monografia – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

O ensino de Inglês como segunda língua é um assunto amplo e por isso, há sempre vários aspectos a serem investigados como, por exemplo, o ensino de língua inglesa para alunos brasileiros oriundos das classes minoritárias. Através do uso da Prática Exploratória (PE) e estratégias aplicadas a alguns conceitos da Pedagogia Crítica, esse estudo revela algumas condições sociais e psicológicas que podem influenciar a vida acadêmica de jovens carentes. Observando a rotina e analisando alguns pôsteres produzidos por alguns desses adolescentes, pode ser possível notar como questões relacionadas à história de vida, identidade, violência e autoestima podem ser cruciais para o aproveitamento escolar de tais indivíduos. Diante de algumas observações resultantes da análise dos dados colhidos para o presente estudo, a Prática Exploratória e afeto parecem ser boas opções para promover entendimento e diálogo entre professores de Inglês e alunos socioeconomicamente desfavorecidos.

Palavras-chave: Pedagogia Crítica; Ensino de inglês como segunda língua; Prática Exploratória; Grupos minoritários; Afeto.

Contents

1 – INTRODUCTION

"Educate the children and it won't be necessary to punish men". This quote attributed to the respected Greek philosopher Pythagoras is quite useful to prove that there has always been a concern of education importance not only for human beings' development, but also for the construction of less violent societies. Some modern scholars, complementing Pythagoras' thoughts, affirm that "knowledge is power". Michel Foucault (1980, p.52), for instance, wisely states that there is integration between "knowledge and power" and it is a utopia to imagine a time when power will not be based on academic formal knowledge. Foucault (1980, p.52) states that "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power."

Reflecting upon this intrinsic relation among education, knowledge and power, some questions come up to committed educators' minds: Is academic knowledge available for everybody? What can be said about the education of people who belong to social minorities? Scholars, namely, Giroux, McLaren and the Brazilian Freire defend Critical Pedagogy as a solution for working with socially excluded individuals. Giroux (1988, p.165) highlights that this kind of pedagogy values students' experience as its fundamental concern. Learners' problems and necessities are the starting point for critical educators because this educational initiative suggests the confirmation and legitimation of students' knowledge and experiences which make their lives meaningful.

Having their studies focused on social empowerment of minorities, these theorists have struggled to promote some special teaching for those who are socially marginalized trying to develop their critical thinking about the political, historical and economic reality which surrounds them. Nevertheless, social environments are diverse, and I wonder what it would be like to apply some of these critical pedagogy concepts to my EFL teaching context – young students, most of them in social risk, from an NGO school situated in Cantagalo/Pavão-Pavãozinho, a poor community in Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

This paper aims at trying to understand a little about these youngsters' realities in order to propose alternative activities aimed at attending to some of their needs. To do so, there is the attempt to matching Critical Pedagogy beliefs

to some central ideas emanating from Exploratory Practice – an approach to teaching developed by Dick Allwright. His main idea is to make use of pedagogical activities to reach understanding about ordinary issues which are part of classroom routine. Allwright (2014, p.9) briefly defines Exploratory Practice as "an indefinitely sustainable way for classroom language teachers and learners, while getting on with their learning and teaching, to develop their own understandings of life in the language classroom."

Agreeing with Allwright when he highlights the relevance of pursuing understanding to guarantee the sustainability of my English classes, one main question endeavored to be answered in this research is – "Why do some of my students say they cannot learn English at school?" Counting on my pupils' collaboration, I will try to answer this question analyzing some data collected through activities designed according to the Exploratory Practice rationale. Another point of this study is to report some interesting classroom experiences lived within this context from March to December in the year of 2015. It is possible to anticipate that violence, self esteem and identity issues will be discussed in this paper since they can be taken into consideration as crucial aspects which may have huge influence on these youths' academic success.

I hope - with the reflections suggested by this initial study - to help other teachers and educators immersed in similar teaching contexts to understand a little about the educational environment they take part in. Reading this paper may sound as an invitation for those who believe in education as the key element for a more harmonious society with less inequality and unfairness. For those who accept the - maybe emotionally painful - challenge to engage in this reading, it is organized in the following way: after this introduction, there is the research literature review. In sequence, the research methodology is explained leading to the following sections in which the reader may have access to the data analysis, discussions of results and final considerations.

2– LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims at presenting some theoretical background which serves as solid bases for understanding the issues proposed for investigation in this present study.

2.1 – What is Critical Pedagogy? Does it apply to the EFL classroom?

Critical Pedagogy aims at helping students to become aware of the place they fit in society. It acts in favor of giving voice to minority groups which have been formed through history and have been kept in silence due to, especially, economic and political interests. Critical Pedagogy theory, according to McLaren (1997, p.13), fights against social inequality and unfairness, trying to empower marginalized groups, not rarely formed by black people, heir of regrettable facts, such as slavering, provoked by humanness along our history. This critical education view wants to lead minorities to value their culture and develop identities which have been destroyed by the dominant group, commonly pictured as the wealthy white man.

Critical educators need to research the context in which their pupils are immersed. According to Henry Giroux (1988, p.146), schools must propose pedagogical practices engaged in views and problematic situations which really concern learners in their daily lives. For Giroux, it is also paramount for schools to keep the necessity of cultivating an analytical spirit, besides the respect for human beings' dignity, with the objective of connecting individual and social aspects around pedagogic projects. By doing so, students may become more critical and active citizens.

According to Giroux, schools should prepare individuals to be activists in a real democratic society. Differently from the traditional schools "from the past" which were idealized to model the students according to established, adamant, and sometimes even segregating rules, post modern educational institutions should be designed to take students' needs into consideration. Schools should help minority students know their roots leading them to understand who they are. By doing so, these students may become proud of their origins, instead of denying them. They may also be able to combat aspects which do not please

them in the context they live in. It means to see the educational space as a multicultural area, in which a lot of voices are looking forward to being heard. McLaren (1997, p.229), zealous defender of Critical Pedagogy, defines "critical multiculturalism" as a "polyvocal and insurgent" multicultural movement which challenges not only suffocated and assimilative discourse, but also social practices to go against "social standardization" resulting of hegemony characterized by cultural conservativism. It is multiculturalism struggling against cultural hegemony, monoculturalism and capitalist exploitation.

By reflecting upon this view, it is possible to understand why there are sometimes acts of rebellion and violence inside, mainly, public schools or other institutions which home historically oppressed individuals. Whenever a school system believes there is homogeneity in the classroom, some culture and views, especially the dominants' one, will be favored and those who come from the minority will keep on being ignored. There is a moment when dissatisfaction explodes and excluded groups go against all the rules imposed by any kind of oppressing practice. In fact, traditional schools may often be hated by a lot of people, independently of their social class, because there is neither space for questioning, nor opening for new possibilities of understanding human beings' issues. When the main concern is "content transmission", the humanitarian aspect of education may be, unfortunately, set aside. Sometimes, even open-minded teachers have difficulties coping with this kind of school philosophy which does not respect individualism. Once there is neither dialogue, nor positive classroom environment, the learning process may be completely impaired and the subject being taught does not matter.

This condition relates especially to the teaching of English as a foreign language in a very delicate way because, first of all, English cannot be seen as a better language in comparison to the students' mother tongue. Benites (2012, p.75) affirms that "teaching strategies should be adapted to maintain a student's cultural identity as well as foster resistance to oppressive policies, dictated within English language curricula." Consequently, learners' identity and culture must be respected if one believes, as it is common sense, that having communicative competence means empowerment.

If having good linguistic skills makes a lot of difference concerning one's mother tongue, knowing a second one, especially English, nowadays seen as "lingua franca", can offer much more autonomy to individuals. Besides, by being in touch with another language, or better saying another culture, students may relate their own reality to a foreign one establishing differences and similarities. Knowing English has been essential lately because of globalization. Even very needy students from poor communities may get interested in international events because they get acquainted with them through the media. Furthermore, it is known, as already mentioned, that having information and knowledge means being powerful, therefore being able to understand either written or oral texts in English is a way of presenting individuals with new possibilities of reading the world around them.

Critical literacy should be stimulated not only in the students' first language, but also in English. Giroux argues that

> […] critical literacy can provide the theoretical basis for presenting students with knowledge and skills necessary for them to understand and to analyze their own historically constructed voices and experiences as part of a project of self and social empowerment. (GIROUX, 1988, p.34)

As, most of the time, the subjects discussed in English classes are miscellaneous, critical teachers should provide students with texts bringing themes about relevant aspects related to their communities.

Since English is spoken in different countries, language teachers can, for instance, engage students in activities in which they would be invited to analyze texts (written or oral) exposing women's conditions around the world and debate about the reasons or solutions for the aspects presented in the classroom, always relating the topics studied to their similar realities. Delicate themes such as race, genre and sexuality should not be set aside in class. English lessons can be an open door to expose students, sometimes used to a limited view, to a more holistic one. By discussing these controversial themes, students may become aware of the existence of inequalities around the whole world and not only in their country or community. Benites (2012, p.77) is in favor of this idea when she alleges that Critical Pedagogy allows for a language to be viewed as social practice constructing ways for students to better understand themselves

in the process of English acquisition. For this reason, she believes that learners get awareness not only about aspects surrounding them, but also about their collaboration in society. There are benefits because besides comprehending the new culture representation, learners can also speak, read or simply understand English.

Although Benites points out the importance of English acquisition to lead students to a better comprehension of the facts around them, she also makes it clear that respecting the local culture is essential. By paraphrasing Peterson & Coltrane and Thu, Benites affirms that

> [...] language and cultural considerations should be provided in a non biased manner that does not place judgment on the distinction between students' culture and the dominant one being taught. In like manner, it is utmost importance to not only learn facts about a new language, but also values and behaviors that support the language in order to bridge cultural misunderstandings. (BENITES, 2012, p. 80-81)

To sum up, the teaching of English may be a tool for empowerment within Critical Pedagogy, for this reason it may be interesting to invest on studies concerning the most efficient ways to engage students, especially those from less fortunate social classes, into the EFL classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers must watch out for the danger of presenting the foreign culture in an oppressive way, reinforcing the idea, sometimes supported by the media, that especially Americans are better than other peoples. Once the recommendations presented here are followed, teachers of English can change their regular classrooms into stages for debates where paramount issues should be discussed in order to help students to have both an overview and understanding about their position not only in their own culture but also in relation to those spread around the world. Or, at least, less ambitiously, students should be stimulated to see and understand themselves immersed into this micro multicultural space which is called - the classroom. However, how can this proposal come true? Maybe, educators should count on Exploratory Practice (EP) (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009) an approach to teaching and learning English, a contribution to method.

2.2 – What is Exploratory Practice? How does it align itself with Critical Pedagogy concepts?

Exploratory Practice has been seen as an alternative language teaching approach characterized by the pursuit of understanding. According to its mentor, Dick Allwright, it consists of simple activities which may be carried out not only in language classes, but also in other contexts in order to promote some moments of reflection, discussion and research. Exploratory Practice aims at getting some understanding about any situation which seems to influence the good quality of life desired in different human being's environments. Narrowing down, the context taken into consideration here is the school, especially the English classes. Allwright makes his own evaluation of this alternative for language teaching affirming that

> "Exploratory Practice" has been devised over the last decade or so to make possible the full integration of research perspective into language teaching and learning, so that course time can be usefully spent, without prejudice to the teaching and learning themselves, on developing local understanding that will feed back into immediate course decision-making and also contribute in the long run to enhancing the long-term development of both teachers and learners. (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p.6)

As one may feel, there should be some further comprehension about Allwright's thoughts. To begin with, it is crucial to point out that the concepts involved in Exploratory Practice are relatively new in the EFL field and therefore, it is necessary to invest on these alternative ideas once the educator believes in his/her social role, as conceived in the revolutionary Critical Pedagogy. If one wants to form critical thinkers, first of all, it is paramount to give our learners the chance to participate in their educational process. As it may be felt when analyzing Allwright's quote, research is another essential notion within Exploratory Practice. The suggested idea is to investigate dilemmas, taboos or ordinary questionings which everyday life in the classroom brings about. However, addressing such puzzles does not depend only on the teacher. Exploratory Practice attempts at creating a sense of collegiality because the ways to investigate the questions proposed by the classroom community are unlimited and carried out by all the participants involved in it.

One may wrongly think that there is no planning or pedagogical activities preparation when an educator decides to adopt some of Exploratory Practice suggestions. What is suggested by EP practitioners – keeping in mind that in this context students are as important as teachers - is that by having some pedagogical activity as a starting point, it is possible to address some of the practitioners' questions. Teachers should propose activities to help all practitioners reflect on their puzzles. What Exploratory Practitioners desire is to open some space for discussion and investigation of issues which have been lying silently inside classrooms for years and years without being questioned. It breaks the idea of automation in the classroom since it basically tries to deal with some "why-questions" about school routine.

By doing so, both teacher and students start realizing what is going on in the classroom. When knowing their group's needs, interests, likes and dislikes, the teacher may find some ways to improve the quality of life in the classroom and everybody has the chance to be a researcher because the teacher investigates his/her group and the learners keep an active performance into this understanding activity. Allwright and Hanks (2001) highlight some good reasons for teachers to invest some time in looking for understanding. Among them, there are the benefits for the educators themselves who can become "more confident" about their pedagogical practice even decreasing the risk of "burnout" (ALLWRIGHT; MILLER, 2012). For learners, understanding themselves within the educational environment may help them to "resist drop-out temptations" because they develop more awareness of their condition in relation to the learning space. Moreover, most of the time when trying to understand a situation which may be puzzling the group, it may be a sign that something is "not going well" and should be investigated in order to be offered, at least, an attempt to change or understand a fact better. Teachers and students may look for improvement to certain conditions in the classroom only when they realize that some aspects should be talked over.

Giving students space to discuss upon their classroom life is meaningful and rewarding because they can act more autonomously and participate in the decisions taken inside their educational institution. In the long run, learners used to Exploratory Practice meetings may become more critical citizens

because they start to be stimulated to think about the reasons for certain conditions which surround them not only in the classroom, but also in any social group they may be part of. Exploratory Practice can be seen as a way to lead individuals to reflect upon their lives in different contexts throughout the simple exercise of thinking about and trying to answer "why-questions".

There are two acronyms which are quite common among Exploratory Practitioners, they are: PEPA, which stands for Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity and PERA – Potential Exploitable Reflexive Activity. Basically, they are pedagogical activities designed by the teacher, counting on the students' collaboration aiming at connecting the language topic being introduced in class to the EP practitioners' lived experiences in the classroom. A teacher may, for instance, use his/her imagination to link the ideas presented within a text about the importance of practicing sports to the reason why students have Physical Education (P.E.) classes, why classes are obligatory or why boys usually like P.E. more than girls. The possibilities for questioning are illimited. What is interesting is that the vocabulary or grammar structure presented in texts or by the teacher before this moment of question raising may work as a support for the learners to formulate their questions. While they are focused on preparing the questions which puzzle them, they may use English structures and clusters of this language spontaneously and with a real purpose. Most of the times, students get quite motivated while getting together to think about their lives in the classroom, they start bombarding the teacher with questions about English vocabulary and its grammar structures.

It is important to remember that using English to formulate the questions and answering them may not be an obligation. Sometimes, depending on the proficiency level or difficulties, students may use their mother language to formulate and answer the questions. What is crucial is to open some space for reflection leading to understanding some aspects of classroom routines or even some facts about life outside the educational institution. One of the possible procedures proposed by Exploratory Practice teachers is, starting from some pedagogical activity, to ask students to brainstorm some questions related to their classroom routine. For instance, any texts such as lyrics or a simple cartoon may be an inspiration for a variety of "why-questions" about facts

occurring in the classroom. Any pedagogical task may be a key for opening an uncountable number of questions which may be bothering or interesting students' and teachers' minds. The questions may be written on pieces of paper and displayed on the board or organized on a cardboard. Then, with the puzzles in their hands, students may choose what questions they think are worth to investigate.

Different possibilities of looking for answers or further reflections are considered. Students may look for information on the internet or books, newspapers and magazines. They may also organize pools or record classes to get more information. The methodology for puzzle investigation and the data presentation may be defined by the learners, who can certainly count on the teacher's help when necessary. When there is some understanding about the aspects investigated, students share their findings with the other peer practitioners, and the way the results are presented is also determined by the learners. As the methodology to answer these questions is free, learners deal with a lot of autonomy and responsibility because they decide on the tools they may use to investigate the issues. This practice may even lead passive students to become active and critical researchers. Once the data is collected, learners can be again organized preferably in groups and they are given some time to arrange their findings – usually on posters but also in any other creative way. The small groups' material is shared with the whole class and everybody has the chance to listen to different views about the puzzle or "why-question" focused on.

Within the beliefs defended by both Critical Pedagogy and Exploratory Practice followers, the teacher is much more than a mere "language instructor". He/she assumes the role of an eternal researcher who participates as a mediator to facilitate students' development as collaborators to their own learning. Allwright wisely points out the benefits enjoyed by educators when adapting an exploratory posture:

> Here it will have to suffice to draw attention to one of the chief distinguishing features of Exploratory Practice, the deliberate exploitation of standard classroom language learning and teaching activities as the means for collecting data on what happens in the classroom, preferably making at the same time a direct contribution to

the learning, and certainly without lessening in any way the value of lessons as language learning lessons. (ALLWRIGHT, 1999, p.4)

By accepting "Exploratory Practice" and its concepts, such as observing some phenomena which happen in the classroom by data collection, analyses and action for change ("when it is required"), one may conclude that this practice is really consistent with Critical Pedagogy concepts, or better saying, Exploratory Practice is essential if one wants to engage in a more critical language teaching practice. On the one hand, students have autonomy to choose their own source of research. They can also have freedom to make use of aspects of the second language and culture learned which most interest them in order to express their ideas and even relieve the stress sometimes involved in learning. On the other hand, by getting used to Exploratory Practice, a teacher educator may be able to understand the context in which he/she is immersed. By observing and listening to his/her students, a language educator will be able to know their students' wants, needs, wishes, interests, difficulties etc. Therefore, he/she will be able to choose the best approaches to satisfy his/her groups' needs, in a way, "personalizing his/her teaching", an idea that has been gaining more prominence in the post-method era (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2003) a moment in which human beings should be seen every day as individuals with their single voices. Each one with his/her own weaknesses and strengths, their own different learning styles and their peculiar identities, which may be in crises due to social pressures and prejudices.

2.3 – Who are you? How important is identity when the issue is learning a second language?

There have been plenty of studies about the importance of identity for the development of human beings. Taking into consideration that individuals spend five or more hours of their days inside a classroom throughout their childhood and adolescence, it is worth to reflect upon some conceptions of identity and how this issue should be treated inside educational spaces. First of all, it is relevant to observe that

Identity is what is naturally given and is therefore considered a possession, yet it is also that which possesses the individual. If, on the one hand, identity is constituted by a personal experience and an individual history, it is also inevitably a product of the otherness of

cultural, social, and linguistic determinants. (RACEVSKIS, 1988, p. *21, apud* McLAREN, 1997, p.24*)*

Racevskis's definition of identity relates to an essentialist view. Studies such as those supported by Hall (2015, p.9) revel that, in the post-modern era, identities have been "decentralized" or "fragmented", resulting in individuals with a mix of identities, specially due to globalization and the cultural contacts that it implies. Certainly, this social movement tends to reflect inside the classroom. Once teachers really want to make the difference in their students' learning, or even deeper in their lives, it is crucial to respect this diversity of identities inhabiting the classroom which may be seen as a "melting pot". Once again Exploratory Practice conceptions are applicable to this context because by reflecting on "why-questions" about students' behavior, likes, dislikes etc, a teacher-researcher may understand that his/her classroom reality is the way it is because of the co-existence of different identities found within the group.

Racevskis mentions that "cultural, social and linguistic determinants" may influence the individual's formation of identity. One might wisely imagine how hard it may be for a teacher who does not understand certain determinants to cope with youths coming from poor areas in which individuals learn how to take care of themselves since an early age. It is normal to listen to educators complaining about their "students' lack of upbringing". However, as Racevskis points out, maybe it is about time one started considering diversity inside the classroom. If students speak loudly, if they have difficulties listening and respecting rules, maybe it is a reflection of the social group in which they have been living since they were born. Understanding this diversity of identities and finding explanations for certain behaviors inside the classroom may promote the contact with what Exploratory Practice followers name - "students' idiosyncrasy", leading to understanding the classroom "quality of life", not as something better in relation to other contexts, but the understanding of the conditions in which the participants of a certain group live.

At this moment, the endless questioning and investigation proposed by exploratory practitioners is essential to guarantee a more harmonious environment inside the classroom, respecting heterogeneity and avoiding exclusion. Especially, if one considers Silva's reflections (2000, p.82) when he

highlights the danger of excluding individuals due to identity diversities because once one assumes a certain behavior as standard, one may be automatically excluding certain differences. The greatest challenge is trying to accommodate all these identities with their special features in a way that a class may really be seen as a democratic space. A place where both teacher and students are respected, and consequently, learning takes place more easily without the risk of practicing prejudice or not reflecting upon certain issues which sometimes may even result in embarrassing situations such as bullying. Therefore, it is through this eternal attempt of coping with the others that both teachers and learners keep on building their education as citizens.

With the space opened through the dialog proposed by Exploratory Practice investigations, identities may be redefined, behaviors may be reinterpreted, rules may be renegotiated and all the practitioners involved in this process may have a sense of belonging to a group engaged in meaningful pedagogical purposes. For a teacher, it might be a relief to understand, for instance, that his/her students speak too loud not because they want to, on purpose or to annoy everyone. But, due to the way people speak at home or in the community certain students belong to. Understanding it can make life in the classroom less tense and more pleasant.

Once all this understanding about the existence of singular identities and the need for respecting or negotiating about this diversity is reached, there should be some concern about what is proposed by Critical Pedagogy followers who believe education is a tool for transforming some reality or, better saying, a tool for empowerment. Trindade (2002, p. 263) reminds us that individuals are able to be aware of their realities "via thinking and action". It happens according to some conditions namely, biological, cognitive, social and cultural. However, it is necessary to be attentive to the way teachers "observe, act and communicate", being attentive to what is said in order to   respect the different identities and cultures that live inside classrooms. If one of the aims of education is developing awareness, as preached by Critical Pedagogy (McLAREN, 1994), the classroom should be a space for this required observation and dialog, from where new learning opportunities may arise.

By reflecting upon their identities, behaviors and so on, youths may bring to the surface good reasons for changing (or not). What is important is this connection between the classroom and discussions of issues related to students' daily lives. It is relevant for critical citizens' education, keeping in mind that one of the first steps to be critical is thinking. If the proposal of Exploratory Practice does not intend to teach people how to think, at least, it provokes and stimulates them to do so. Maybe, these moments of reflections pursuing understanding can lead to an important aspect pointed by the famous psychologist Jung who, according to Saiani (1999, p.19), believes that one of the roles of schools is to free the kids from their families, in a way, making them develop their own identity and personality.

For those kids coming from families whose expectations about academic success is low, this disconnection proposed by Jung may be crucial for the writing of a different story from that of these youths' ancestors who often had to quit studying for diverse reasons. The classroom should be a space where the kids belonging to these families may, little by little, rethink their potentialities and find the conditions to become much more self-confident. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, some socio-economic disadvantaged people have difficulties joining academic life and, unconsciously (or not), they pass on this stigma to their kids. When the subject is a second language as English, for instance, the situation gets even harder because a lot of aspects and taboos are involved. Some people may believe English is learned only at courses, and that it is necessary to have money to pay for studying it. Others may think that when learning English, one is dealing with different practices, belonging to dominant countries, especially the USA, therefore, if this new language and culture are so distant from learners' reality why would students be interested in learning it?

Another aspect to be considered as an impediment for young students to learn a second language may be close-minded parents' fear of not understanding what their children will be saying if they are able to use another linguistic code to communicate. Language may be considered one of the strongest cultural bonds binding an individual to a community (EDWARDS, 2009). Moreover, parents may be afraid of raising a child with another kind of formal education from the cultural group the family belongs to. Once one starts

getting in touch with another culture and habits, he/she may enlarge horizons towards political, economical and educational views over life. Therefore, one may begin having difficulties dealing with some of his/her own culture which he/she may wish it would be different. Teachers of English should be aware of all these issues surrounding their learners, especially those from minority groups which, most of the time, are socially excluded without receiving any kind of incentive from the governments in order to deeply invest in their real roots and needs.

The secret is, through the understanding of identities, realities, needs, puzzles, dislikes etc, to build a bridge between the students' universes to that presented in English classes. By doing so, learners may become interested and understand that there is a diversity of identities and cultures around the world with their differences and similarities. They may understand their own position in relation to that of the foreign culture being introduced. Is there any doubt about the fact that the American Civil Rights may have influenced other minorities' movements around the world? This is a relevant issue to be discussed with minority students from different countries. What should definitely be abolished is "selling" the foreign country culture as a better one in comparison to the students'. In this case, the traditional or uncritical English class could be seen as a weapon hurting the students' identities and affecting negatively their self-esteem which is quite often already low due to all the hard social conditions surrounding youths belonging to poorer families.

2.4 – How can self-esteem influence one's learning process?

Lack of affection, family conflicts, social exclusion and emotional disorders may directly influence one's self-concept, more commonly referred to as self-esteem, which may be understood as the image or self evaluation that each human being has about himself / herself. This self-concept formation, as is observed by Barros (2002, p.165), is developed little by little, according to the experiences lived by the child and the others' reactions towards the child's behavior. As a result, infants whose actions are approved, praised and stimulated tend to develop a good self-esteem. On the other hand, those children who are oppressed, rejected or even ignored by their families and

society may have a defective self-concept. Barros (2002, p.165) highlights the importance of adults' actions, among them parents' and teachers', in relation to children, as substantial for the development of the youth's self-image. If a child is often reprimanded by a teacher because of "her/his lack of intelligence", she/he may start "feeling unable to learn, even when he/she is trying to".

In fact, before labeling a kid for her "lack of intelligence", educators should investigate the illimited reasons for learning not to take place. Maybe, the child has not got enough maturity to understand certain contents, or he/she might bring doubts about previous subjects. Besides, he/she may have different kinds of physical disorders affecting her intellectual development or, as it has been investigated here, he/she may be under identity or social pressures which may impair his/her good condition for learning. What is amazing is that due to Exploratory Practice constant questioning, a teacher may discover some of the reasons for a child's, or a group of children's, academic failure or success.

Exploratory Practice and its possibilities of investigation and understanding about a lot of conflicts hidden in the classroom may lead educators to think about the importance of their role as agents for the formation of more active and critical citizens. Conscious teachers should go against crystallized concepts which still haunt a lot of traditional educational institutions around the world and opt for making a difference in their students' lives.

Sometimes students' abilities may not be linguistic, once the point here is English teaching. Nevertheless, one may not forget that, when there is creativity, language classes may be moments in which students acquire a second language by dealing with music, drawing, acting out, producing handicraft and using knowledge from different areas such as History, Geography, Mathematics etc. Counting on such diversity, at some moment, even those students whose self esteem is really low may identify with one of the activities proposed and engage in one of them, opening some windows for learning a second language and improving his/her self esteem.

What is essential for educators to keep in mind is that students coming from minority groups may have difficulties learning, especially a second language such as English, due to the discourse they may be used to listening

since their early childhood – "you do not speak your own language, how will you learn a second one?"; "you are not intelligent enough to learn a second language." or "In order to learn English, people must pay a course or travel abroad." People who are assertive about such statements forget that with the advent of globalization English can be learned through games, songs and on the internet all the time. Unfortunately, that is the ordinary discourse of those who do not believe in the learning potential of those special kids who belong to poorer social classes. Trindade (2000, p.12) warns everyone who is involved with education about the power of schools to reinforce a lot of minority students' low self-esteem. The author believes that whenever one considers a learner as unable or inferior, his/her action in relation to the student may underestimate him/her and it may result in lack of investment in this learner' multiple possibilities. This kind of teachers' view added to some other aspects may lead to the individual's seeing himself as incompetent.

According to all this theory (TRINDADE, 2000), more than ever, one may accept the classroom as the place where tasks should happen in order to help all individuals feel useful and able to produce something. Still nowadays it is hard to see teachers negotiating with students what is going to take place in class. What is the problem if the students decide, for instance, the way they are going to be evaluated? The more freedom they have to decide, the more they are assuming the responsibility for their results and the more the teacher lets his/her groups to have autonomy over their learning. Certainly, the teacher may keep on being one of the responsible people for stimulating and giving suggestions and instructions in order to lead their students to success. However, letting the learners to be on the spot makes them feel important and increases their self-esteem. When they see their research results, discoveries and productions in a different language or about a different culture, they may feel that they are capable of learning. It is necessary to discuss the possibilities and always envision an opportunity for dialog defended in this simple monograph, based on the principles and beliefs that characterize both Critical Pedagogy and Exploratory Practice followers.

To wrap up this issue about self-esteem, it is relevant to consider Barros' perception (2002, p.166) when she reminds educators that most human beings

have the tendency to keep their self-conception and they resist changing it. For this reason, the so called "teacher's challenge" becomes really demanding when the aim is to make kids from the minority classes believe in themselves and prove that despite their social realities, they may overcome the historical and economical chains which are believed to tie these people to misery. Nevertheless, the challenge for the teachers of English is bigger once his/her role is to lessen the distance between his/her pupils' culture and the one being introduced in the classroom. Exploratory Practice may help at this point because with the students' intense participation, not only crucial aspects about the classroom well being may be investigated, but also research about cultural differences and similarities may be carried out by enriching students' view about the world they live in.

Exploratory Practice opens a window for dialog, something still scarce inside a lot of classrooms. Moreover, it creates opportunities for teachers to learn a little more about their students' worries, desires, beliefs and thoughts. By engaging in the attempt of answering "why-questions" (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.175-176) such as "Why homework?"; "Why tests?"; "Why do you believe you cannot learn English?"; "Why do I sleep in class?"; "Why do teachers scream up?"; "Why? Why? Why?"… Teachers and learners may start getting closer to understanding and reflecting upon the classroom routine and, as a result, without huge expectations or previous planning, there may be a moment when everybody (or almost everybody) in the classroom will have established bonds of affect, something fundamental for teaching and learning to take place.

2.5 – Is affect really important in the classroom?

It is difficult to deny the importance of affect when the issue is interaction. Anyone can compare their emotional reaction, for instance, to a "good morning!" followed by a spontaneous sweet smile or an obligatory rude greeting given at an information booth. Human beings need acceptance and signs of affect ease interactions in different contexts, especially in the classroom where children and teenagers usually meet mandatorily every day. Affect, as Kuschnir (2003, p.51) observes, is socially constructed. It is constantly present and in interaction with

social cognitive structures in the school context. This scholar advises educators to face the challenge of favoring students' positive affect and replacing the negative one in order to lead a learner to recognize himself/herself and the others in the environment in which he/she is a participant.

This challenge is extreme when dealing with needy youths. Sasha, McLaren's (1994, p.149) poor student in Canada, made the following comment about her rebel classmates when having an informal conversation with her teacher: "how you expect them to get along with other folks, when they don't even like the person that they are?". There are some interesting points about this young Canadian student's statement. First of all, in comparison to Brazil, Canada is a much richer country, but even there, students from less fortunate social classes suffer with identity and low self esteem problems. Moreover, an attentive teacher may realize how much students (and teachers themselves) may open their world views in simple conversations as that one which took place while some students were helping McLaren to clean his cupboard. Finally, once more, it is crucial to consider dialog as the tool which may help students discuss their beliefs and puzzles, besides leading teachers to have access to what students think deep inside their minds.

For this reason, Exploratory Practice with its endless questioning about what is going on inside the classroom may be considered a good way to promote open discussions about these topics, which are part of the hidden curriculum. Issues that sometimes may be disguised inside the classroom without being questioned, but silently result in troubles such as bullying and indiscipline. Exploratory Practice is a way of starting by questioning, researching for understandings and maybe solutions for changes, when they are really wanted or possible. What may be impossible to ignore is that Exploratory Practice promotes higher student talking time and teacher listening time, and this is a kind of affect already since a lot of learners do not have voice in the communities where they live and as it is commonly said: "listening is an act of love".

By seeing the classroom as a participatory space where dialog is promoted and understandings of classroom life are encouraged, learners may

start to feel more comfortable inside the educational institutions. Schools are sometimes seen by some students as prisons when rules and obligations are established without any attempt of negotiation. It reminds us of Freire's (2000, *Apud* CITOLIN, 2001) utopia which consists of developing "a school where people think, act, create, speak, love, guess, a school which says *yes* to life". As one may realize, Freire's idea is in harmony with the Exploratory Practice followers' ambition (ALLWRIGHT, 1989, 1996) which is to promote classroom positive well being through the pursuing of understanding. Both philosophies are permeated by affect since they want to turn the educational institutions into more democratic spaces where people may have voice and may be stimulated to discover their potentialities. Maybe, by having possibilities to reflect upon their own lives, students might understand their realities and recognize that they, in fact, can become examples of overcoming.

Once more, to change the classroom into this transforming space (FREIRE, 1996), plenty of affect needs to be involved. The relation between teacher and students should be established on the basis of trust, patience and respect. When thinking about second language teaching, Kuschnir (2003, p. 50) points out that "while teachers teach a language, they equally educate students to live more satisfying lives and to be responsible members in society". For students with low self-esteem, developing tasks as singing the chorus of a song or understanding a text in another language may be very rewarding because they might realize that they are able to produce, even if it is a simple activity, in a second language. Sometimes, learners are demotivated by relatives who may see the possibility of learning a second language too far from their reality. As a consequence, second language teachers may face the challenge of erasing this stigma stimulating learners to believe in themselves. In doing so, besides investing in teaching strategies, considering the development of affect in the classroom is essential.

Besides the opportunities of opening space for dialog and understanding as it is sustained by Exploratory Practice followers suggest, Marques (2003, p. 110) recommends very plain attitudes which may bring the students closer to educators in order to establish bonds of affect and also improve learners' self-esteem. This scholar explained that she used an abandoned mural to display

her students' academic production and listened to some "how beautiful" comments among the learners who showed enthusiasm when looking at their papers in exposition. Marques (2003, p.111) also invests in giving some chocolate to the students not only for their participation but also as a sign of affect. Very probably some educators may disagree with this practice for particular reasons, but when questioned by the teacher about the reason why she was pleasing them with candies, some of the pupils could define her action as a "demonstration of affect". It makes a lot of sense since giving chocolate is a way to show the students that the teacher thinks about them even when she is not at school. Little actions such as these may really lead students to think about the teachers' feelings with this kind of practices towards them. For teachers, reflecting about their pedagogical choices and looking for strategies, such as the ones chosen by Marques, as strategies to cultivate affect, are paramount attitudes to help students to engage in the English tasks and may improve their self-esteem and results.

Educators could listen to Jung (1981, p.60, *apud* SAIANI, 2000, p.25-26) when he defends the idea that the method is not very important, even if it is not according to the modern procedures. For Jung, teaching success does not depend on the method, but on the ability of school to free youths to be citizens with their own identities, aware of themselves. Without this self-awareness, individuals may always depend on their families or they may tend to imitate others, maybe experiencing the feeling of being oppressed or unknown, in the case of needy children, repeating the determinist destiny already followed by their ancestors. When dealing with youths used to coping with abandonment and violence, Jung's view should really be respected because the school ought to really be the place where new possibilities should be considered. Educational institutions should stimulate students to rethink identities, self-esteem, personalities among other issues. In order to do so, a lot of affect may be required to guarantee the good quality of the interpersonal relationship among all the participants immersed in schools. As an attempt to convince readers about the efficiency of all the theory presented on this Literature Review, an educational experience based on the main conceptions related to the issues

exposed here will be explained, starting with the methodology and followed by the research description.

3 – METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims at reporting and describing some of the methodological procedures which have been applied in this study. Firstly, some description about the research paradigm and the kind of research will be given. Then, a detailed description of the setting, the participants and the data collection will be reported. After that, there will be the explanation about how the data has been treated for analyses and finally, I will expose some caveats about the method.

3.1 – Research Paradigm

As this research is based to a certain extention on the concepts of Critical Pedagogy, it would be expected to be in harmony with the Critical Paradigm of Research, which as stated by Lincoln and Guba (2010, p.168) should respect a "historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values crystallized over time" in order to start understanding some situations of inequality existing in current societies. The drawback about the Critical Paradigm of Research and Critical Pedagogy is that both propose social changes. And being realistic about the precarious conditions of some countries educational system, including Brazil, it is not unusual for one to get frustrated when he/she realizes that huge or magic social transformations seem to be a utopia. One can easily realize after reading the news about the Brazilian educational system, or even listening to some public school teachers' conversation that empowering minorities is a great challenge and it does not depend only on the educator.

I believe that educators can make a difference in people's lives. However, if someone wants to propose changes in education, it is important to know the context of the participants involved in that specific environment. One should admit that any group of human beings have their own power, therefore it is crucial to define what kind of change or empowerment may be considered to a certain group. We should not forget some regrettable historical facts in which explorers such as the Portuguese in Brazil around the 1500's decided to "teach" their language, religion and other cultural aspects to the local people. For this reason, the concepts sustained by the Constructivist Paradigm sound

much more sensible for the development of research in which the object of study is minority students who live under obscure conditions for a lot of teachers/educators. Van Lier (2003, p.246) is quite sensitive when he affirms that "an ecological approach asserts that the perceptual and social activity of the learner, and particularly the verbal and nonverbal interaction in which the learner engages, are central to an understanding of learning."

Van Lier's thoughts match very well with the reality in which this study has taken place. It may sound dramatic, but since I wanted to have some quality of life inside my classroom, and even to keep physically and psychologically healthy, I needed to look for some strategies to understand that new educational challenge which would demand understanding about the "new culture" I was getting in touch with.

In fact, as needy children are nearly always used to oppressive environments at home and in society, the first step for anyone who wishes to develop any educational project with them is to respect and accept their culture. For this reason, the concepts of the Constructivist paradigm gave me some certain relief about the urgency of changes, sometimes preached by the Critical Paradigm. Respecting all this theory, my plan was to observe the environment to understand the context and the role of each participant in it. By proposing reflexive activities, some of them associated to the historical aspects seen as paramount by Critical Pedagogy experts, students started being provoked to participate more actively. Then, this planned research moved a little towards the Participatory Paradigm, which according to Lincoln and Guba (2010, p.170) has in its quality criteria the "congruence of experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowing leading to action to transform the world in the service of human flourishing". I agree with these scholars due to the progressive involvement my students and I started having to the proposed activities. The more they started to show autonomy by bringing their suggestions and questions to our meetings and becoming more active towards their pursuit for understanding , the less I felt as the traditional teacher who offers students ready activities to be carried out in a passive way.

Within this Participatory Research Paradigm, I felt acting not only as a teacher, but especially as a learner because I had the opportunity of getting acquainted with some of the students' narratives about characteristic aspects, and even lexical/linguistic features of their community. It was also worth to break the distance between teacher and learners due to our interaction, mainly through informal dialogues when we were all engaged in the tasks developed in our meetings out of regular school hours.

To sum up, I may admit that this study has been permeated by a little of these three research paradigms: the constructivist one, in the very beginning when I offered pedagogical tasks but the students were quite resistant or passive to the activities and reflections proposed; the participatory paradigm when the learners started showing more autonomy and engagement in the tasks developed in our meetings. Certainly, the objectives of the Critical Paradigm were desirable in the background. But they may only be observed in the future by other studies able to investigate how some of these youths participating in this study will be acting in society. Last but not least, it is relevant to highlight that this research consists basically of a case study developed in the setting being described as follows.

3.2 – Research Setting

This research describes a project developed at a philanthropic institution situated on a street which gives access to Pavão-Pavãozinho and Cantagalo - two poor communities in Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The main assistance offered to the community by this non-governmental organization (NGO) is education. It has homed kids, most of them from the local area, from nursery levels until Junior High School since 1991. In fact, in previous years, the institution also had High School levels, but, due to economic difficulties, it was necessary to discontinue these groups. There was a promise of restarting the first grade of High School in 2016.

This school has a spiritualistic basis and the kids are offered a lot of extracurricular activities, from evangelization to physical activities such as basketball, capoeira, hip hop, yoga, cooking and theater lessons, among some others. This NGO's managers believe that having these needy kids and

youths busy at school for the most part of the day may keep them far from the violence which, not rarely, threatens them not only in the community, but also at home.

I can better describe the routine of the Junior High School groups because I taught youths from 6th to 9th grade. As far as I know, the school planned these student activities as follows: regular classes with the obligatory subjects imposed by the curriculum in the morning and, in the afternoon, study time. After that, the students took part in extracurricular activities, while some of them also had psychological assistance.

Classes in the morning started at 7:30 and finished at 1:00 pm. There was a one-hour break for lunch. The afternoon activities happened from 2:00 to 5:30/6:00 pm. The school offered three different meals: a morning snack at around 10:00 am, lunch at 1:00 pm and an afternoon snack at 3:00 pm. In order to keep all this structure, the school had some partnerships, received donations and also counted on some symbolic payment from the students' families.

The school dealt with financial difficulties, but teachers received their salaries on the established day and according to a legal scale. We could count on some facilities such as a laptop which used to be connected to a television when there was any video or students' presentation planned. There was a good library, a multimedia center with some computers for classes and some free time for research. Each segment, from that of very young kids' to Junior High School, worked in a different space. There were five main houses, besides the outdoor areas such as the two gymnasiums. In the house where I worked, there were four classrooms which were not very comfortable, but good enough for class condition. There were fans in all of them and only one of them still had a chalk board for whole-class explanations while there were white boards in each one of the other three classrooms. . There were also lockers for the students, but they did not like them because they were old and covered with graffiti done by the learners themselves. With this picture of the school in mind, the main research participants will be described.

3.3 – Main Research Participants

There are three basic groups of participants within this study: my Junior High School students from the 6th to the 9th grade; the students from the 8th grade, as my main focus of observation and I myself, who had to split into teacher, researcher and participant.

To begin with, it is essential to highlight that most of the students I dealt with at this NGO were kids in social risk. This means that most of their families were dismantled mainly due to violence. Some of their parents and other relatives were in jail or involved in crimes, especially drug dealing. There were also kids whose parents had already died or had walked out on them. Being sensitive about this hard condition faced by these students and respecting the laws which protect kids and teenagers in Brazil, all the youths have their names substituted for pseudonyms in this study in order to have their identities preserved.

As observation was taken into consideration, I took notes of the most relevant facts to answer the research question proposed here: "why do some of my students say they are not able to learn English?" I could not set aside some very important notes taken at different kinds of interaction with all my Junior High School students from the 6th to the 9th grade. These interactions occurred in our regular classes, in extra meetings we had every Tuesday afternoon after class, during the breaks or even on special events we had at school along 2015.

I considered the 8th grade students my main research participants. As a person who likes challenges, I elected this group because they used to be known for having the worst grades and behavior compared to the other Junior High School groups. Indiscipline, lack of interest, disrespect, low self-esteem, parallel talking and other negative features used to be the tags teachers shared to describe the 8th grade students. In my first month at the school, these students and I had some conversations about the differences between their group and the 9th grade, which was considered the best class at school, and the 8th grade students argued that they did not have "opportunities" because all of them were given to the 9th grade students. As I had always had

a very good relationship with these students, I decided to promote some meetings with them outside school hours, every Tuesday afternoon, in order to try to understand them better.

The 8th grade students were, in average, between 14 and 16 years old. There were 14 boys in March, but around June one of them left the group because his father used to move from places to places due to his involvement with crimes. Anyway, there were still 13 boys, the majority of the class, compared to only 6 girls, taking into consideration that, despite being good tempered, one of them insisted on sleeping during most of the class time when she did not miss them. One paramount piece of information about these students is that 90% of the group seemed to be afro descendents, the importance of this fact will be understood along this research. Before that, it is still necessary to observe the kinds of instruments used here for investigation.

3.4 – Research Instruments

To approach the research question proposed by this study, two main instruments were used for my investigation – observation and posters produced as the result of some PEPAS (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities).

The first instrument was constant observation. I kept a research diary in which I took notes of students' statements or behavior which called my attention during classroom interaction or any other moment in which we were together. This procedure was followed for all the groups. However, I tried to pay more attention to events taking place while I was in contact with the 8th grade students. I had a notebook, my research diary, dedicated especially to the pedagogical tasks and development of the activities carried out with this group of students in our meetings in the afternoon because I volunteered to "teach" them English as an extra-class activity in order to try to do Exploratory Practice with them. Some of the relevant pieces of information and statements collected through these notes will be later presented in another section of this monograph, especially designed for this purpose.

Furthermore, in order to have more concrete data for analyses about the issues being investigated here, there were the proposals of some PEPAS which resulted in the preparation of posters illustrating students' views and reflections about the topics brought into discussion. The way this data material was elaborated will be more deeply explained in the next item devoted to data collection.

3.5 – Data collection

The data collection for this study happened from the third week of March to the third week of December in 2015. As it has already been said, the observation took place as follows: in all the groups and even at moments outside the classroom because I took notes of relevant facts related to my research question about these students' academic production. Even though, the main participants were my 8th grade students, some behaviors and statements made by students from different grades were quite meaningful and applicable to other learners' reality inside the broader context described here.

The posters resulting from PEPAS were produced by the 8th grade students in the second semester of 2015. It may be important to report that when the Exploratory Practice sessions were proposed as a kind of extracurricular activity to the school, the school managers decided that the meetings should be offered to the whole group from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm. Although I preferred to work only with students who wanted to take part in the meetings or with a small group of learners, I did not have enough space to negotiate the school managers' decision and I ended up accepting to work with the whole group. In spite of having the help of two foreign graduating students who worked as volunteers at educational programs supported by PUC-Rio, the results of the seven first meetings occurring in the first semester of 2015 were frustrating. The students' indiscipline was out of control since they knew I would not punish them. The space in which we worked, a sort of studio designed for dancing classes, was too big for the group and once the students, around 18 per class, entered the room they would start running, singing, dancing, fighting or doing anything but engaging in the activities which were being proposed.

Without telling anything to the school principals about the students' indiscipline, we kept the meetings without one of the volunteers, who seemed to be tired of the students' behavior and lack of respect. This volunteer was a young Portuguese woman who left our project claiming that she had been robbed around the school neighborhood, in fact it was far from the institution, but because of that she was afraid of getting close to that place once she was told the thieves could live in that community. Anyway, with or without this young woman, only three or four students really showed some interest in the English activities taking place in those afternoons. As they did not get engaged, there were few productions which were not taken into consideration for this study.

The Exploratory Practice meetings in the first semester did not have a happy ending. On one of the last days of our afternoon classes before vacations, one of the inspectors passed by the studio to check the students' behavior. On this especial day, they were completely out of control. Most of them had already left the classroom without asking for permission to tease students who were having another activity at the school gymnasium. Therefore, the inspector did his job: he got in touch with the principal, reported the students' lack of respect during our meeting and as punishment all of the 8th grade learners who were out of the room - about 90% of the group - received a note reporting the happenings to their parents who were supposed to sign it. Moreover, they had to prepare an English exercise to hand in to the principal who assigned the task believing that it could show them how much a teacher has to work to plan a class and prepare pedagogical activities.

This event was a bit embarrassing for me because I also needed to give some explanations to the principal. When they felt they would be punished, my students said they did not have anything to do in the Exploratory Practice meetings, the activities were pointless and because of that, they started to mess around. Fortunately, I had all my lesson plans to show the principal. With all these happenings, I almost quit the Exploratory Practice Project, but, luckily, in the second semester the whole situation changed a lot. Most of the boys from the 8th grade started to have some percussion instrument classes and only 10 students stayed without an activity on Tuesday afternoons.

Knowing about that, I talked to the school coordinator again, but this time I set some conditions for the students' participation. The coordinator wanted all the 10 students participating in the EP meetings, but now she accepted my arguments in favor of giving a more individualized attention to these needy youths. After negotiating the possibilities, we decided to have 2 different groups with 5 students each. Most of the boys would participate in the meetings from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm because some of them had psychological treatment later, and the girls' group would have the activities from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm. So, with the help of two "new" volunteers, we wrote a different story for our Exploratory Practice meetings.

The first classes were aimed at using students' previous knowledge of English. After that, there were some activities with the objective of helping them with the contents studied in the regular classes. All of these meetings were much lighter and pleasant than the ones that had occurred in the first semester. Nevertheless, a pedagogical activity proposed for one of our meetings was the starting point of the posters produced as data for this study.

The pedagogical activity proposed was an exercise of intertextuality analyzing two texts of different genres about women's condition in society. The first text was the song "Superwomen" by Alicia Keys, because the girls pointed out this artist as one of their favorite singers in one of our previous meeting. The students were supposed to read the lyrics and to underline cognates and words they knew in English in order to give an oral summary of the song message. After that, they watched the video of the song and talked about the image of women presented in that text. The video shows women struggling to support their families, some of them even carrying water probably somewhere in Africa. The second text, a cartoon about the "Simpsons Family", was presented. In the cartoon, the mother, Marge, was busy doing various household chores at the same time, while the father, Hommer, was unable to find his underwear which, in fact, he had already put on. In the cartoon, he was asking his overloaded wife where his underwear was. Again, the students were stimulated to say what they could understand about the cartoon and decide whether they could relate the two texts and why. At this moment, the concept of intertextuality was introduced and there was some discussion about

the situations illustrated in the two texts and the students' lives. This activity was proposed because I usually challenged them with critical reading of cartoons in their tests. Moreover, it was an opportunity for them to express themselves about the theme, by making connections with their lives.

In the following meeting, we started reflecting upon the "Super Heroes" in real life. Once again, I wanted to provoke students' reflection about people who they admired and why, so they were given a piece of colored paper in which they were supposed to choose at least two of the following sentences to complete: "_____" is a Super Man because_____"; "_____" is a Super Woman because _____" and " I am a Super _____ because _____". The students wrote their ideas down on pieces of paper using the dictionary and the volunteers' help. Finally, they glued the pieces of paper on a piece of brown paper producing the first poster (Poster 1) which was set aside for about two meetings.

After these two weeks, we revisited the poster about their heroes and I suggested giving it a title and immersing in it. I asked the students to observe the pieces of information displayed on their poster in order to try to formulate some "why-questions" about what they were being exposed to. On that day, I talked to the students about the possibility of taking part in the 16th Annual Exploratory Practice Event which would happen at PUC-Rio in December. I told them that they had been invited to go, but we needed to improve our production. Everybody, even those who did not look very enthusiastic about the event, produced well on that day. I gave them another piece of brown paper in which they would write the questions that they could formulate (Poster 2). One of the boys started drawing a Super Man on the brown paper. He kept on saying that his father was a Super Man because he was a fighter, besides being a strong black man. Suddenly, one question came up: "Why do black students suffer bullying?". Right after that, another boy asked for some help to make up the question "Why do rich and white people are racist?" and as a chain of thoughts, a boy who wrote on his paper for the first poster that he was a Super Fat, made up the question "Why do fat students suffer bullying?" There were some more questions such as "Why did we produce this poster?"

and "Why are mothers Super Women?". However, after that meeting, I left the school feeling the necessity of negotiating with the students the possibility of researching a little about the questions related to bullying, especially those kinds pointed by the students in their questions.

Life at school is hectic especially by the end of the year, but there is always an opportunity to do something different. As most of the 8th grade students had already reached 24 points, the minimum score to succeed, they neither studied for the 4th bimester English test, nor did the simple compositions suggested as part of their evaluation. Consequently, the whole group's final mark, with one exception, was very low. When the school coordinator saw their results while I was organizing their grades, she told me that everybody who had succeeded but neither wrote the essays nor reached 6,0 – the minimum required grade for each bimester – would need to have a final paper being either a test or some research. It was the gap I was waiting for to propose the research about bullying. The students had the option of having the traditional review class followed by a final test or the research about bullying. The group decided to study about bullying, racism and obesity to prepare posters (Posters 3, 4, 5, 6) about their findings and impressions in class.

The analyses of some of this material added to the notes taken from the observations would already be enough for answering my research questions about the students' lack of belief in their ability to learn English. However, to be straight to the point, I still had some Exploratory Practice meetings in the afternoon to investigate my question, so I decided to provoke the students' reflections again saying that more than once, I had already listened to some of them saying strange things such as "I am black, I am poor, I cannot learn English". I kept on saying that I would like to know their opinion about the reasons why some of them used to say that it was not possible to learn English at school. Once again, paper for poster production was distributed and the students organized some of their ideas about the topic having really nice and surprising discussions about it (Posters 7, 8, 9).

This is basically the way my data was collected. In the following section, I will state the way this data was treated in order to answer the research questions about my pupils' pessimism about their ability to learn English at that school.

3.6 – Data treatment

As it was already mentioned, the data collected for analysis in this study consisted of the notes taken in my research diary during those almost nine months working at this specialized school for kids and youths in social risk. Moreover, some of the posters produced by my 8th grade students both in the morning regular classes and in the afternoon meetings were observed in order to illustrate some of the aspects claimed by both Critical Pedagogy and Exploratory Practice. Besides, relevant issues about Identity, Self-Esteem and Affect, discussed in the Literature Review section of this study, were also highlighted by examples taken from the data collected.

After spotting some paramount items defended by this study in the Literature Review section, some fundamentals of the theory used were organized in order to be supported by some of the evidences which seemed to be represented by facts standing out through my careful observation of the data collected. The most relevant for the present analysis are described in this research as follows. Some of them are defended by more than one aspects discussed in this study "Literature Review" and are listed below:

1) Relevant aspects for Critical Pedagogy defenders and Exploratory Practice followers:

* Dialog involving all participants in the classroom routine

* Critical Thinking development

* Development of students' autonomy about their research and learning

2) Relevant aspects for Critical Pedagogy defenders:

* Discussion of historical and social issues in order to understand minority formation.

* Multicultural respect in the classroom.

3) Relevant aspects for Exploratory Practice followers:

 * Understanding of classroom routine.

* Understanding of students' idiosyncrasies.

* Promotion of classroom well being.

4) Relevant aspects involving "Identity" for Exploratory Practice followers:

* Students' identities leading to understanding some of their idiosyncrasies which is one of the fundamental notions of Exploratory Practice.

5) Relevant aspects linking "Identity" and "Self Esteem":

* Students' pride, or at least awareness, of their identities, may enhance their self-esteem and make them feel more confident to learn a foreign language.

6) Relevant aspects linking "Self Esteem", "Affect" and "Exploratory Practice".

* Affect and motivation as tools helping human beings to keep a positive self-esteem. Exploratory Practice promoting a kind of community sense gathering people, stimulating dialog and creating affect bonds.

Although all these aspects taken from my readings about the theories introduced in the Literature Review could be pointed out in harmony along the happenings, evidences and interpretations resulting from the data analyzed, there were some other facts which might have been seen as some impediment for the carrying out of this actual research. A few contrarieties faced are about to be described in this study in its following section, named - method caveats.

3.7– Method caveats

As characteristic of this research field, it is important to consider the situatedness of the specific context researched in this study. There may be very similar teaching conditions in other educational institutions that home kids in social risk. However, educators should be aware of the constant need to

consider particularities of each context which may influence the results of such experiences with other groups of students.

One of the difficulties faced for this research development, besides the lack of time which nearly always haunts human beings while they are engaged in academic productions, was the traditional unpredictability of school routine. Due to some events, such as cultural and science fairs, the students had no English classes, sometimes making me worry about the tasks that I had planned to carry out.

Another fact that seemed to make the development of this project hard was the personality of some very demanding students who really looked resistant to any kind of proximity, making it very often harsh to deal with. Nevertheless, even those resisting students had a very special participation in this study because they were the ones who really challenged me as an educational professional.

Institutional management, school organization and the diversity of traits considering the individuals that belong to a certain context are only some of the factors which may be relevant to describe the peculiarities of this research in a specific educational environment. Notwithstanding, adversities like those may not demotivate educators who want to investigate their classrooms in order to generate some comprehension about what happens with the individuals involved in this scenario. Certainly, the understanding, involvement and conclusions reached after all the dedication to the research is worthwhile, as it is about to be presented in the data analysis section of this study, in which theory and practice are placed side by side as an attempt to propose new strategies to create more positive quality of life in the (English) classroom.

4 – THEORY AND PRACTICE THROUGH DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents some of the interpretations reached by observing the data collected. There is an attempt to connect some theory selected for this study to some interesting facts presented by students in their poster productions or reported in the research diary when there was interaction or a relevant happening involving the 8th grade students and my research question. The fundamental notions are defined in sub sections being followed by illustrative facts taken either from the posters or from the research diary.

4.1 - Dialog involving all participants in the classroom routine

The poster produced by the students worked as a pedagogical tool to promote dialog between the learners and myself, as practitioners, to discuss problematic issues as it is suggested by Giroux (1988, p.146). While involved in the poster elaboration, students could discuss deep issues about their private lives such as the violence some of them suffer at home. Listening and participating in their conversation has led me to realize how hard it may be for students who cope with such hard realities to concentrate on studies inside the classroom. To illustrate the importance of this dialog for understanding, there are two passages observed in different moments: one of them, a narrative of interaction, during the poster production and the other recorded in the research diary.

Poster Production: While one of the students was concentrated on drawing "his father", according to him a "Superman" on the poster (Poster 2), he was interrupted by another student who questioned, in an informal way, the fact that a father who spanks his kid almost up to death could not be a "Superman". Despite the embarrassment of the situation, some reflections have emerged. Maybe, for the first time someone has been so straight forward about that student and his relation with his violent father. We cannot guarantee if he reconsidered his relationship, but it was certainly an open moment for reflection. Another interesting aspect of this situation was the fact that, even involved in the poster production, the boy seemed to be far from the activity daydreaming about his ideal father. Knowing that he had difficulties to concentrate during classes, even failing in a lot of subjects by the end of the year, I questioned

myself about what he could think about during classes. After this experience, whenever I felt this student was far from the events which were taking place in the classroom, I tried to motivate him to interact keeping in mind that he could not get concentrated during classes because, maybe, his mind was busy with such family matters.

Research Diary Entry: Once I entered the 8th grade classroom and Amanda, a 13 year-old girl, maybe one of the best ones in the group, was sleeping. I tried to wake her up but it was in vain. She kept on sleeping. Later, during the break, this student was quiet in the cafeteria and I got closer to her in order to ask what was going on with her, trying to understand the reason why she was sleeping during class. She answered that "some little things" had happened at her home during that night. I tried to play with her asking if "some little things" were good, such as a birthday party. She smiled and said that "some little things" in the community are never good. In fact, her parents had argued and she could not sleep during the night thinking about the family situation she would have to face. At that moment, I felt surprised but also relieved for having asked for opened up a dialog to understand the reasons which led that girl to sleep in class. Sometimes we, teachers, complain and overreact against this kind of behavior without investigating the roots for such attitudes. Feeling the uncomfortable situation was another opportunity to think about the difficulties some students, especially those from communities, had for keeping concentrated in school activities while facing too many troubles at home.

4.2 - Critical thinking development

Satisfying Giroux's (1988, p.146) pursuit for the development of students' critical spirits which could be seen as one of the ways to lead them to have more dignity in society, this Exploratory Practice experience has dealt with activities which stimulated critical thinking and discourse generation quite spontaneously not only while the students were engaged in the poster production, but also during our ordinary conversations either in our regular classes or in the volunteer meetings in the afternoon. Some samples of the students' criticism may be observed as follows:

Poster Production: when the poster (Poster 9) produced by Martha, who was around fifteen years old, about the reasons why some people say that English is not learned at school, the girl came up with a lot of self evaluation about the students' blame for their lack of success in learning English. The girl pointed at the mess and noise in the classroom, besides their classmates' indiscipline when "shouting, throwing paper balls, sleeping and talking", as some of the aspects for the students' difficulties when English was the subject in question. Martha was able to have a self-critique moment about her position as a student. This is a relevant fact to point out because most of the times students complain about the teachers saying sentences such as "I failed because of you". When being critical about the students' behavior, Martha seemed to have some awareness about the students' responsibility towards their learning. Noticing this student's self-criticism may sound as a relief to teachers since we sometimes take the blame for our pupils' lack of academic success. The girl's speech seems to express her understanding about the fact that students know that their behavior is crucial for the development of their academic life.

Research Diary Entry: one of the most outstanding occasions of critical thinking was when some of my eighth grade students researched about "Beauty Pattern". They were involved in a Cultural Fair in which the main theme was "Identity" and I was responsible for a group of five boys. Talking informally about what could be done for the event, I suggested interviewing their male and female classmates about their opposite sex physical preferences. The boys prepared a questionnaire, carried out the poll in their class and with some of the inspectors at school. When they came up with the result, both male and female beauty patterns had no relation to the physical features of those students' at school. I started provoking the students making funny comments such as "In this case, all of you here will be left on the shelf because no one fits these patterns". I kept my "involuntary" suggestions telling them to type "Beautiful People" on Google and look at the images that would appear. I also told them to look for black people as models in magazines. They got really puzzled and carried out the simple activities. On the day set for talking about their findings, the boys seemed to be very upset because they had realized that according to

the "Beauty Pattern", black people would have little chance in the media. Then, we had a very nice discussion about the reasons why there has been this exclusion and little by little the students started being conscious about the historical reasons which have led our society to this kind of silent segregation and creation of "beauty pattern". It was one of the most rewarding experiences with my eighth grade students. On the day of the Cultural Fair, their speech about "Identity" was very emotional and they reported their findings to the other students which also got puzzled by those reflections.

4.3 - Development of students' autonomy about their research and learning

One of the strong aspects within both Critical Pedagogy and Exploratory Practice is the students' learning autonomy. Allwright (1999, p.4) sees the classroom as a space for data collection resulting from pedagogical activities in order to understand dilemmas and puzzles which are part of the classroom routine. For our poster productions and research, students were free to look for different ways to illustrate their thoughts and to try to understand the questionings which were being proposed. Next, there will be some explanation about the steps followed until the students developed a deeper research about "Bullying".

Poster Production: after having a pedagogical activity with the song "Superwoman", by Alicia Keys, the students were invited to think about a person who they considered to be a "Superwoman" and a "Superman" and the reason for their thinking so. They were also supposed to think about themselves to discover what kind of "Super person" each one of them was. They filled in pieces of paper with the information required. In order to do so, they were stimulated to use their previous linguistic knowledge in English and they could also make use of dictionaries. The pieces of paper with their conclusions were displayed on a poster (Poster 1) which was some classes later revisited for analysis. During their second visit to the poster, students were supposed to pay careful attention to the differences and similarities observed on the pieces of paper to formulate some "Why-questions", which could be asked according to all the information they were dealing with. To my surprise, students came up with questions about "racism" and "bullying" (Poster 2). As "Bullying" is a theme

which really haunts schools in lots of parts of the world, the students were free to decide which aspect of bullying they would like to research (Posters 3, 4, 5, 6). I confess that I was afraid of their not carrying out the task and for this reason I gave them some links for research on the internet as a starting point. However, some of them stood out watching videos and movies about icons namely, Malcom X and Martin Luther King. All these steps may prove that from an activity in the English class, students were free to look for different ways to develop their research getting some autonomy about the way they would get information about issues which interested them.

Research Diary Entry: Revisiting my research diary for this analysis I realized that, although I agreed and understood the need of allowing the students to freely develop their research and consequently knowledge, I was afraid of this freedom. Sometimes, I feared that they would not carry out the task. However, unexpectedly, some of them were able to reach very good conclusions about the topics researched. Even those who produced some posters based on their own view of bullying, for having faced the problem during the childhood, were able to come up with relevant aspects for discussion. Maybe, all this involvement happened because "Racism" and "Bullying" were meaningful issues for this group. This is another point defended by Critical Pedagogy and Exploratory Practice – the activities carried out in the classroom should be related to student's interests and puzzlement. They could also be about "good things" that happen to them. While involved in poster production in the classroom, I was very glad to observe them looking up words in the dictionary and for their asking me how they could say some words or sentences in English. What or whether they learned with that experience, I may not say now. However, looking at their involvement with the English language and its cultural aspects was another positive consequence of dealing with Exploratory Practice.

4.4 – Discussion of historical and social issues in order to understand minority formation.

One of Giroux's (1988, p.34) concern is to open the classroom for students to reflect about their own historically constructed voices. Here are two

samples of how my pupils took the opportunity to discuss and to ponder their origins.

Research Diary Entry: the first drafts on my diary were exactly the ones which gave me the idea of investigating the puzzle "Why do my students believe they are not able to learn English at school?", I frequently came across comments such as "I cannot even speak my language, how can I learn English?'; "I am poor and black, English is not for me." These statements annoyed me a lot and, suggesting the poster productions opened some space for us to talk about my students' social reality. We talked about slavery and extermination of black people. As we talked, some students could even reach the conclusion that most Brazilian construction workers were black since they were the ones who were responsible for taking care of the plants, harvest, animals and all hard work in Brazil, as slaves under the dominant's pressure. Because of the English culture, we could debate issues about the American Civil Rights Movement and how it reflected on the black groups around the world. Most of the students from the eighth grade sympathized with these ideas because maybe 80 per cent of the group was formed by students whose family was black or at least 'multiracial', something very normal in a multicultural country such as Brazil.

Poster Production: the students expressed the idea of their not being able to learn English clearly on the posters (Posters 7, 9), when they stated ideas as the following ones: "People think white people can learn English."; "People think they learn English at courses." and "There is little time to learn and it is basic English. Courses teach everything.", therefore, it would be necessary to afford it. By crystallizing these thoughts, students coming from the minority groups may block themselves to learn this second language. While they produced the posters, we talked about South Africa, where English is spoken, and also about some of the black foreigners, English speakers, who visited their schools and were neither white nor rich. They had a black basketball teacher who travelled abroad and used English on his trip, it was a fact they did not know about and which came up to the classroom due to their poster production. We also talked about the fact that while people believe or are led to believe they are not able to do something, they will keep on being slaves

of some deterministic ideas which lie silently inside excluding societies. Little by little students were listening and discussing some ideas about minority formation. They got to know that some people close to them, such as the basketball teacher, were able to leave a community to practice sports abroad professionally, overcoming the limits sometimes imposed by poverty. The students may have considered the possibility of either accepting the inferior position the *status quo* sometimes seems to pressure on poorer people, or trying alternative options to look for ways of writing their future stories different from those predicted by society.

4.5 - Multicultural respect in the classroom.

McLaren (1997, p.229) views the classroom as a multicultural "polyvocal and insurgent" space in which learners should have a chance to go against "social standardization". Once a teacher/researcher dedicates some time to observe the movements in the classroom, he/she may come across some curious evidences which may confirm this "polyvocal and insurgent" multicultural movement inside schools. Here, there will be some aspects which may illustrate this "insurgent" manifestation in the classroom taken from the research diary and the posters produced.

Research Diary Entry: Students really seem to go against the traditional educational system when they rebel in the classroom. The sign of rebellion may be felt in learners' indiscipline when they insist on having attitudes such as speaking a lot and loudly during classes or sleeping in the classroom. In the beginning of my work with the eighth grade students, I had to face some rain of "paper balls", which was really annoying. However, even believing that indiscipline was one of the reasons for most of the students' weak results in the tests, instead of telling them to leave the classroom or punishing them, as it has been done by traditional institutions for years, I decided to try to understand the reasons for that behavior. After accepting the "paper ball shower" as part of my teaching context and insisting on an endless talking, I believe the students got tired of throwing the balls. Nevertheless, I was left with the strong impression that learners do have their own power since I left home with my lessons planned and I could not follow them due to the students' behavior. There was a

certain time I had to decide between keeping the traditional classroom "social standardization", punishing them and running the risk of opening a gap between them and me or trying something alternative such as opening some space to give them voice to justify that behavior. Working on the posters, besides the usual talking, was essential to give my learners some voice to express their own views about the difficulties they believed they had to face in order to learn a second language.

Poster Production: after creating some bonds with the students and asking them the straight question about the reasons for which they believed it was not possible to learn English at school, I got very surprised when I saw that some of them did not hesitate to point at their own indiscipline as one of the reasons which impaired their learning. In the posters, they stated some curious ideas about their responsibility for their learning which relieved me for my feeling that I should be the one who ought to "control" them to pay attention to my classes. In three posters (Posters 7, 8, 9), students admitted the class was messy and noisy. They even used pronouns which may give the impression that they are taking the blame for their English learning. Jennifer, for instance, stated (Poster 7): "**I** like to talk about myself". Another boy mentioned (Poster 8): "**We** use cell phone and don't pay attention"; "**We** get tired and lazy". These poster productions were quite useful not only for students to voice their ideas about the question discussed, but also to lead them to reflect upon their involvement towards their academic progress. The most impressive aspect of the poster production is that, while these students were engaged in their task, they asked questions about the English structures, they got close to me in order to have some grammar explanation. They used the dictionary to look up for unknown words and they were able to remember some of the contents, such as "Reflexive Pronoun" which had been studied with their books during the regular classes in the morning. The poster production, besides being a tool to give students some voice about the "Learning of English at school", also motivated them to deal with that foreign language, which for some of them seemed to be so distant and difficult. Exploratory Practice strategies may decrease this distance, when students occasionally realize that some characteristic issues of their culture may also exist in foreign countries.

4.6 – Understanding of classroom routine

Allwright (2014, p.9) sees Exploratory Practice as a tool to promote understanding about language classroom life. In the beginning of this experience, it was not possible to predict how far this understanding could go. In fact, classrooms seem to be the proper space for puzzle production. Through some notes taken from the research diary and some aspects revealed during the poster production, we, practitioners, may have gotten to our own conclusions about the understanding of some ordinary facts which happened in our English classes at that school.

Research Diary Entry: there were about 25 students in the eighth grade class. As I have already mentioned in this paper, their indiscipline was pointed, even by themselves, as one of the impediments for their academic success concerning the English language. My first idea was having the Exploratory Practice meetings in the afternoon with a smaller group, if possible, with students who had some interest in taking the classes. Nevertheless, as there was a lack of available people to develop pedagogical activities with the students during the afternoon, the institution coordinator suggested having the meetings with the whole group. It was a big mistake because the indiscipline, which damaged our regular classes, followed us during our gatherings in the afternoon. I do believe that when dealing with apathetic students, some more personalized work should be developed. After some very stressful meetings, the students' indiscipline led them to the end of the Exploratory Practice meetings. As I was determined to continue my investigative work, I talked to the group about our failing and some of the students said they misbehaved on purpose just because their participation in the meetings was mandatory. I did not give up the idea of having my more individualized meetings and I decided to talk to the coordinator again to keep on with the meeting with smaller groups in the second semester. At that moment, part of the group would already be busy, once there was another volunteer project about music happening in the afternoon. Most of the least interested and "laziest" students would be without an occupation, so I decided to work with them. It was again mandatory by the institution, but now there was the chance of giving each one some special attention. To have real conditions to deal with the students' needs, we talked about the possibility of

working for one hour with two different groups. To my surprise, the students liked the idea and did not resist attending the Exploratory Practice meetings. After this reorganization, I could really understand that working more individually with those needing youths would be necessary if I wanted to have some positive quality of life during our meetings. Although, in the beginning some of them still seemed to resist because their participation was still mandatory, after some meetings they started getting spontaneously involved and did not hide themselves nor arrived late at the library for our classes.

Poster Production: observing some posters about the impossibility of learning English at school, one may get some understanding about students' thoughts which justify their difficulties. It is possible to realize that students may unconsciously be tied to some myths which might be generated by the stereotypes socially kept. Unfortunately, there were some statements such as "Some students think they cannot learn because they are black and poor" (Poster 7), it is hard to assess how much such thought may influence a learner's development, but it seems to be clear that this statement reveals some kind of inferiority feeling by which some individuals' production is underestimated. On the same poster, students mentioned that "Some people don't know *then* abilities." These contrasting ideas led me to understand that maybe those socially deprived students really faced the conflicts of seeing themselves as inferior compared to "rich white people". However, on the same poster there was a sign of hope. If the learner does not recognize his/her abilities, we - teachers - may be the ones who can help them uncover hidden talents, ideas and views, especially during English classes filled with discussions about relevant topics.

4.7 – Understanding of students' idiosyncrasies.

Allwright (2003, p.6) considers Exploratory Practice experiences as a way to enhance both teachers' and learners' development. In order to do it, it is essential to understand students' idiosyncrasy (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009) In fact, when trying to understand learners, teachers may get amazed for discovering, at times, personality defects or even cognitive limitations. On the other hand, talents and virtues may also be revealed as it may be illustrated in

notes from the research diary and in the poster production. Understanding either positive or negative aspects of students' idiosyncrasies is essential for us, teachers, to decide on which practices we may invest when dealing with learners individually or in groups.

Research Diary Entry: As my focus was the eighth grade students, I used to monitor everything which concerned that group. Certainly, there were moments when I faced acts of disrespect such as the day when some of the students threw a paper ball at me. However, nothing that happened with me was as serious as what they did with their History teacher. She was trying to show them some videos and, for knowing the resource limitations we faced at the institution, she decided to use her own internet connecting her cell phone to the laptop. Surprisingly, some or one of the students discovered her password or PIN (personal identification number) and a lot of them could get connected to her internet consuming all her credits at once. The situation was really embarrassing because I did not expect them to have such attitude. Nevertheless, the intelligence they had to carry out their plan was astonishing. The whole group was punished according to the institution rules, which most of the times consisted of not letting them participate in their favorite extra activities. Knowing that they were able to have attitudes like that led me to be more attentive when coping with them. If this fact meant dealing with some negative aspects about my students' characteristics, there were also the rewarding discoveries about their positive aspects or simply some findings about some of their individual personality traits, as it could be seen during the posters productions.

Poster Production: taking a fast look at my students' poster productions, it is possible to realize that although some of them seemed to have lack of interest for their academic lives, they had special talents namely, drawing (Posters 2, 7). Knowing about some of the boys' ability to draw, the other students spontaneously invited them to illustrate the posters. Observing this fact, I realized that even with the difficulties these students had to carry out the activities in English, they seemed to feel important because they knew they could contribute to the group. Exploratory Practice poster production seems to promote a kind of sense of community in which all the participants involved in

those singular moments in the classroom are responsible for giving some contribution. Sometimes it is possible to see students motivating or demanding their classmates to participate in the activities. Still about understanding students' idiosyncrasies, we had the opportunity to promote an activity in which, besides using the English language, students could reflect upon their own characteristics when they had to think about what kind of "Super" they thought they were and why (Poster 1). Some of them mentioned their positive aspects such as "I am a Super kid because I have ability to draw" or "I am Super kid because I surf". While they were revealing their abilities, I listened to them with enthusiasm trying to increase their pride for these abilities, therefore trying to get closer to them, showing I was interested in some extra academic aspects of their lives. This spontaneous and sincere interest might make all the difference as a stimulus for learners to talk about their worlds. A girl revealed some negative personality trait when saying: "I am a super boring because I beat everybody". I laughed and informally talked to her about it asking whether it was true and the reason why she used to beat up her classmates. One boy wrote "I am a Super Fat person because I am". I was intrigued because he was not fat anymore and I told him that. During our conversation, he explained that the students used to bully him a lot when he was a kid at elementary school because he was overweight. This meeting was one of the most rewarding ones because, from such a simple pedagogical activity, I could understand a little of my students' idiosyncrasies, but I could realize how paramount it is to offer tasks in which students may reflect upon themselves, understanding their values, criticizing their defects and relieving their sadness for some of the unfair treatment they may have received along their lives. It implies carrying out activities which are meaningful to them.

4.8 – Promotion of classroom well being

As Allwright and Hanks (2001) state, Exploratory Practice activities end up at reducing both teachers' and students' burn out due to their possibilities of opening space for dialog – essential to promote understanding among human beings. At first, students may resist to take part in the discussions proposed by Exploratory Practice mainly because, most of the times, learners do not have this habit of discussing classroom life openly with their teachers. Nevertheless,

when they realize that the questions brought for debate or investigation are really worth because they are part of their everyday life, most of the learners get engaged in the tasks and realize the importance of using the English language to send across their messages. The improvement in the quality of life inside my classroom will be exemplified now with some excerpts taken from the research diary, as well as from some students' posters.

Research Diary Entry: It is very interesting to reread the notes taken in order to describe our first Exploratory Practice Meetings. The students were too resistant to take part in the activities. They misbehaved, there was too much indiscipline resulting in a lot of stress for the volunteers involved in the project. As time passed by and as there was some determination and belief in the need for having an alternative kind of English teaching for those youths, instead of giving up the ideas and complaining against the learners' behavior, we decided to reorganize the meetings reducing the number of students in class and even giving them the opportunity for having a more intense participation during our time together. Once the organization of the meetings was adapted to this new and much more personalized format, there were better conditions for interaction between volunteers and learners, resulting in the creation of some bonds of more affect and respect. In the last meetings and poster productions, although some of the students were tired due to the final tests, they did not complain about our meetings. In fact, most of the students at the institution started to cause trouble to the professionals supposed to deal with them in different activities such as Yoga and Percussion Instrument classes. Most of the kids and youths wanted to go on vacations, but the institution insisted in keeping the extra activities in the afternoon to prevent them from staying on the streets without any adult supervision. Curiously, our Exploratory Practice meetings were the only ones in which students still participated with some enthusiasm and respect. Compared to those stressful classes from the beginning of the project, the last ones sounded as friendly meetings in which most of the students who took part could produce something in English despite their difficulties. Actually, one of the boys, Giovanni, could be outstanding keeping some natural conversation in the foreign language about surfing, his favorite activity, making use of some basic structure they had learned. This boy quit the

music classes to join us. Insisting on the meetings and believing in dialog could convince us - as educators – that the classroom atmosphere may get less tense and promote well being for all the participants in the group especially when some of the Critical Pedagogy and Exploratory Practice concepts are practiced.

Poster Production: while students were engaged in the poster production, it was possible to feel better quality of life in the classroom. Compared to the regular classes, characterized by traditional activities in which students did exercises to be corrected on the board sometimes in the middle of a lot of mess and noise, the classes when students were reflecting upon the questions proposed by our exploratory moments were much calmer. When students produced posters about their views over bullying, for instance, they were really concerned about the problem. One of the groups reflecting upon bullying against overweight people wrote the following message about excluded people (Poster 5): "He can be more friendly than your best friend. Don't judge people because of *then* appearance." Nobody can guarantee whether these youths would really follow their own advice. However, knowing that they were able to come up with such sensitive conclusions about some social problems faced at school was priceless. We, teachers, may not reach one hundred percent of our groups with these more peaceful and harmonic ideas, but opening space and leading students to think about the possibility of living in a more inclusive society ought to be one our tasks as educators, as opinion formers. Leading learners to express their own opinions about issues such as bullying might have made them discuss and understand a little about the reasons and the consequences of this practice which should be talked over and combated if we want to try promoting well being in the classroom and maybe in a future society.

4.9 – Students' identities leading to understanding some of their idiosyncrasies which is one of the fundamental notions of Exploratory Practice

As Racevskis (1988, p.21 *apud* McLaren; 1997, p.24) puts it, a person's identity is determined not only by his/her own personal experiences, but also by social and historical facts which have influenced that individual inside the community he/she belongs to. Certainly, each learner has his/her own individual characteristics. However, as I have already explained, most of my students

belonged to families which coped with violence and crimes and this could place those youths' lives in risk. Understanding that this living condition would affect those learners' view towards life, our Exploratory Meetings were useful to make us get acquainted with some of their views, even about the way certain kinds of crimes were viewed inside the community and how it reflected on those learners' behavior inside the classroom. Some of the possible observations were taken both from the research diary and from the poster production as it is described above.

Research Diary Entry: a curious fact about these students was the way they judged two attitudes which are considered crimes in our society. As most of them coped with drug dealing seeing this black market in function, or even living with people who were involved or consumed these illegal products, some of them considered drug dealing as a normal kind of business being different from robbery. There was a situation with one of our volunteers, a Portuguese student who helped us in the first Exploratory Meetings. She took part at about four meetings, but then she decided to quit because she was robbed around a very famous place in the south zone of Rio de Janeiro. The crime happened at a well known square usually visited by tourists near my students' neighborhood. When the students were told the reason why the girl had quit the meetings, the group got touched, and one of the students considered talking to some criminals, leaders in that community, to try to get the volunteer's stolen objects back. The students used some codes in their conversation that I could not make out. As I did not want them to get involved in dangerous situations, once again we started some conversation about what was going on. It was a great opportunity to understand the difficulties faced by some of these youths in the communities. I questioned them saying that there may be options not to get involved in drug dealing or other kinds of crimes. To my surprise, one of the girls said that usually there was no option because when living in the communities, sometimes people are forced to keep the drug dealers' stuff when they have to escape from the police. It was a really sad conversation, but at the same time, the whole group was motivated to participate and at that moment I was really a learner getting into a burst of consciousness about how hard those students' lives could be and what a teacher could do to, at least, try to light their

minds (to escape the determinism which frequently seems to haunt those people's destiny). I wondered how all these facts could affect their learning, how they could concentrate on their studies at school knowing that at any time a war could explode around the community, how school could try to change their minds about their "own truths" socially defined. Observing the whole group engagement in that conversation, I could understand a little about my students' lives and their hard reality. I could also reflect upon my teaching practice and the need of having some moment in our English classes to reflect upon some issues such as minority formation, social exclusion, women's condition in order to help them think about their own cultural constructed identities and the possibilities to change or, at least, understand their own idiosyncrasies.

Poster Production: as already mentioned, one of our poster productions proposal was about bullying and racism. A group of three boys, probably those who seemed to be the least interested ones in class, produced a poster (Poster 3) in which it was possible to see two scenes: in the first one a white guy with the Nazi swastika tattooed on his chest killed a black man saying "Die Negro, you dirty the world with your race." In the second scene, the same white man goes to prison, maybe as punishment for his crime, but there in jail, he is hung while a strong black man handing a sword repeats the same statement but now saying "Die White, you dirty the world with your race". I confess I was a little bit shocked at first, but then we talked a little about their production and the boys said that according to their views there was prejudice everywhere. What called my attention was the stereotype they revealed in their drawing: the white man was strong out of prison and the black person he killed was an ordinary one. In the second scene, the black man was much stronger. The boys highlighted the size of their black character's sexual organs in their drawing. When they talked about what they wanted to represent in that poster, they simply said that white people can give the orders in society, but in prison the black ones were powerful. Sometimes, it is very hard for us, teachers, to cope with these socially and historically constructed ideas, but denying their existence or not letting students reveal their views about these ideas is not going to open spaces for understanding some facts which unfortunately are part of our history.

4.10 – Students' pride, or at least awareness, of their identities may enhance their self-esteem and make them feel more confident to learn a foreign language

As pointed by Saiani (1999), one of the school's roles should be setting students free from the bonds they have with their own families to make them assume their own identities. It is undeniable that the educational institutions may be the space where human beings should really be stimulated to reflect upon who they may really be and how they may fit the social spaces where they belong to. The school may end up being the arena where social, historical and cultural paradigms can be critically rethought. There were some intriguing observations about the way my students saw themselves and their motivation to research about some black people who have made a difference in history. Again, I will report some relevant facts extracted from both the research diary and the poster production.

Research Diary Entry: in the beginning of my puzzlement about the comments I heard in the classroom, I took notes about some statements that I could listen to when I stepped into the eighth grade classroom. Students said sentences such as "I do not even speak my language, how will I speak English?" or "I am black and poor, I will never learn English." Once, in a very informal conversation I asked one of the boys: "If you do not speak Portuguese, what language are you speaking now?" then, he said that it was Portuguese, but that it was all wrong. On that day, we had some whole-group conversation about linguistic prejudice and how it could affect people's lives. Some of the youths said that older people at their homes were used to making the same kind of comments about their "disability" to manage their own language. I thought how it might be hard to grow up in an environment where kids have been discredited for their disabilities since an early age. Once again, it made me realize that educational institutions should fight against these myths and develop students' awareness about the beliefs which may only impair their academic development. When teaching English, the challenge of reducing the gap between the students' culture and the foreign one may be too demanding. The ideas for this study have come up from the initial discomfort generated by the students' statements. In order to increase my students' self-esteem I

suggested some activities aiming at investigating important black people in history. Some research was carried out leading students to notice that social unfairness has been part of different societies, but it did not mean that it must last forever, specially because there have been conscious people struggling against social exclusion. They could listen about the fact that they did speak Portuguese and that anyone could learn English. They were also told that not all English speakers were rich and white because it was spoken in multicultural countries such as South Africa. In one of our regular classes, I told the group a short story called "The Welcome Table", written by Alice Walker, an American black writer whose many literary productions have been about black people's condition. To my surprise, most of the students quietly paid attention. How or if such experience might have influenced their lives, nobody may know. However, they could get in touch with something about the history of black people. For students who were black, maybe they could feel proud of their origins, while those who were not, or who did not accept their 'multiracial' condition, it was an opportunity to reflect upon the need to respect people disregarding their religion, social class, skin color or any other physical aspect.

Poster Production: when we had the poster production about bullying and racism, we decided together which topics the students could illustrate or approach in their research. One of the topics suggested by the students was: famous black people who changed history. Students could bring information about black icons namely, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King (Posters 4, 6). One of the groups could orally explain the differences between Luther King's and Malcom X's ways of fighting for the Civil Rights. Another group addressed Barack Obama as a black politician who stood out as the first black American president. After all this discussion, some of the black students started "kidding" – or maybe they were serious - saying they were proud of being black. Some of them concluded that when a poor black person succeeds honestly in life, it may be seen as an incredible example of overcoming social barriers. Once more, my learners were led to understand that black people may sometimes be looked down in some societies, but they should keep on struggling to fight against any kind of prejudice. My intention when showing them the questions about racism in the USA and its influence for the recognition of black people's rights in

different parts of the world, including Brazil, was trying to convince them to see English not as a language which can be spoken only by rich and white people, as they believed. Knowing English would be important because, according to their own observations, "it was everywhere: in songs, internet, fast food vendors' stands etc". Finally, on another day, we thought about English words that we naturally use in Brazil without realizing that they are not part of our lexicon. The boys, in special, were able to come up with a lot of words learned when playing videogames resulting in the questions: are we able to learn a second language or not. How does this learning take place?

4.11 - Affect and motivation as tools helping human beings to keep a positive self-esteem. Exploratory Practice promoting a kind of community sense gathering people, stimulating dialog and creating affect bonds.

Kuschnir (2003) defends affect as being as important as the cognitive aspects when the subject is learning. Since affect is part of a social construct, creating a classroom environment in which it may collaborate to students' learning is one more challenge for teachers, specially, in our first contacts with pupils. Although, my eighth grade students were characterized by being demotivated and indisciplined, my option as an educator was to build this affective atmosphere supported by Kuschnir. Some passages extracted from the research diary, as well as, an aspect revealed by one student in one of the posters may reveal the existence of affect as a desirable factor for the successful interpersonal relation between teachers and learners. These observations will be reported as follows:

Research Diary Entry: although some educators are against praising students with surprises such as candies or simple school material, I believe this is a way to show students that they are part of a teacher's thoughts even when he/she is not in the classroom. This may be seen as a sign of affect, once it is not part of the teacher's obligation to gratify the students. Feeling their rebellious personality, the first time I invested in this kind of surprise was at Easter time. The eighth grade students were surprised by my attitude and some of them were even very sincere saying that they did not deserve to receive that small gift. Taking my Exploratory Practice attitude, I asked them why they

thought I should not give them that surprise and some learners mentioned they did not deserve the chocolate because they misbehaved. Then, I told them that the candy was not a kind of "payment" for a better behavior, but a way to share the Easter feeling with them. When class was over, some of the students got close to thank me. Their gratitude made me feel good. Another simple way to establish affective bonds with them was writing simple messages on their papers and tests, or even drawing smile or sad faces on their exercises or tests. Certainly, this was not the whole-class feedback, but it was interesting to see when some of the students answered back writing simple sentences in English such as "I love you, Teacher". It may sound as something silly, but these simple attitudes may be the ones which still make the relationship between teachers and students to be unpredictable. Once a teacher gets involved with a learner, it is impossible to define how much or how long one may influence, positively or negatively, on each other's life. As any other kind of interpersonal relationship, the affect bonds between teachers and learners should be raised. However, it is paramount for educators to accept that some students might have difficulties understanding demonstrations of positive affect. In this case, there is a need of understanding and respecting the learner's attitude, keeping in mind that probably, that unexpected rejection might not be personal. In the Easter experience, for instance, one of the girls did not accept the chocolate saying that maybe it was poisoned. I got a little sad, and the girl was criticized by most of her classmates. However, I told them to respect her. After some classes, she started offering me some help to complete the attendance list or to carry my folders. By the end of the Exploratory Meetings experience in the afternoon, she was the one who rarely missed classes and always carried out the activities in a good mood.

Poster Production: the demonstration of affect or at least a students' recognition about my dedication to them may be illustrated in one of the posters produced about their "Super People". Martha, again, a very shy girl who had lots of difficulties understanding what was being proposed, pointed at me as a Super Woman writing that "My teacher is a Super Woman because she is very patient with me" (Poster 1). I was really amazed and glad when I saw the girl's comment. Besides, once again, I was concerned about the importance of

keeping certain attitudes when you are in the position of an educator. Teachers may be models to some of their students, and for those kids living in a context featured by violence and intolerance, being in touch with calmer people might sound as having a shelter. There is a proverb which says something like this: "Once one is loved, he/she is indispensable." For youths, who sometimes do not have many demonstrations of affect at home, having moments of delightful interaction at school may be a motivation for them to believe they are important. It may increase their self-esteem due to the feeling of being accepted in a group. Demonstrations of affect promote wellbeing in the classroom and even when the usual conflicts arise, if there is affect, it is easier for the teacher to solve the problems using his/her authority conquered through dialog, instead of that traditional one characterized by authoritarianism based on fear and threats. During classroom conversations, while students were deciding on their methodologies to send across their messages through posters or any other way, it seemed that Exploratory Practice in itself was creating opportunities for affect exchange because listening to people is a sign of love, mainly nowadays when human beings seem to be so immersed in their own worlds. Exploratory activities open doors and windows for dialog, one of the most rational and peaceful ways to promote understanding among human beings. In fact, when dealing with Exploratory Practice, practitioners – both teacher and pupils – may learn how to listen, how to express their ideas and how to respect the others, essential abilities which might help individuals to look for more comprehension about the facts which surround them in their daily life.

5– DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reflecting upon all these observations reached by analyzing the data, it is possible to feel the need for sustaining investigations in the different contexts in which students, especially those belonging to the minority groups as the ones belonging to this study, are immersed. Certainly, the methodology followed for the development of this present study may not be applicable to other groups due to the diversity of variables characterizing each classroom. However, what teacher educators should keep in mind is that there is some urgency, as preached by McLaren (1997) and Giroux (1988), to understand life at schools, to respect multiculturalism and to transform the educational institutions into more democratic spaces where dialog takes place in order to guarantee good quality of life for all the individuals participating in collegiality. Keeping some harmony inside the pressure cooker which classrooms sometimes appear to be only brings benefits to all the participants involved in the process of "language education". Teachers', students', principals' and coordinators' stress and burnout may be avoided when the conflicts arising from the classroom may be discussed and solved democratically.

Teacher educators could start making use of the Exploratory Practice principles (ALLWRIGHT; HANKS, 2009, p.216-234) among them: prioritizing the quality of life through working for continuous understanding of daily events in the classroom keeping everybody's participation and development as something essential for individuals' interpersonal relationships. By doing so, one day the utopian school imagined by Freire (FREIRE, 2000, p.55 – 64 *apud* CITOLIN, 2001, p.15) may become true - "A school in which people think, act, create, speak, love, guess, a school which passionately says *yes* to life". There should also be the constant attempt to see the classroom as a "puzzle-making space", which reflects all the unbalanced moment lived by societies throughout this post-modern area, a time when there is a lot of technology and medias which, on one hand, make people virtually connected all the time, but, on the other, lead people to get distant from face-to-face talking and eye-to-eye interaction, so essential to human being development.

While coping to answer "why-questions" generated inside the classrooms, practitioners – both teachers and students – may be able to understand the reasons for their own existence at first in microcosms such as the classrooms and, maybe later, in their own lives. Looking for "puzzle" understandings, human beings may be stimulated to reach some sensibility to consider those philosophical questions which have been following human beings' existence for such a long time: "Who am I?"; "Where am I coming from?" and "Where am I going to?".   Having some answers for these questionings may lead people to a better life, once they might understand themselves and their position in different contexts instead of taking automated attitudes without any kind of reflection upon their actions.

Besides this attempt at making students develop some awareness of themselves, Exploratory Practice and its reflexive activities may present individuals with a sense of belonging and responsibility, as co-participants for the group's well-being. While trying to work with classroom puzzles, teachers and students engage in the task of being researchers. In this process of investigation, bonds of affect are created, talents are revealed, conclusions are reached, selves are known and everybody has the opportunity to conquer their own space inside the classroom. Along this interactive process, both educators and students are educated proving that learning is an eternal continuum which is life-long.

Looking back at all the theoretical material and data gathered for the development of this study, I may reach certain conclusions about my research questions: "Why do some of my students say they cannot learn English at school?" In fact, I was glad because I could come across some evidence showing that English learning, maybe, really took place during our meetings at that school. One day, an interesting and funny situation was reported by the math teacher in the teachers' room. She said that while she was having her class with the sixth grade students, she used a clock as concrete material for the students to observe it and reflect upon the different angles formed whenever she changed the time. She mentioned that it was very surprising to see most of the students screaming up to say the time in English every time she changed

the position of the clock. I remember her saying that the very young students "were so cute speaking English.".

Another rewarding experience about students' dedication towards this second language learning was finding some of their research drafts and notes in English. Some of them were long texts from the Internet with their notes and observations. Moreover, there were opportunities to see their interaction with foreigners, English speakers who visited the school, some of them aiming at working as volunteers. I remember that on one of my first days teaching at this institution, when I arrived for my class, a group of boys told me that there was an American in the classroom and that they were having a good time "making fun at the guy". On that day, we talked about different cultures, I went to the classroom and our class was basically about the opportunity we were having for being in touch with that American student who was in Brazil for an exchange program. I stimulated the students to ask questions to the American volunteer and the interaction took place. One of their curious questions was about when the American volunteer had learned the "Simple Present" tense in his childhood because it was the subject we had been talking about by that time. "Making fun" at the American, certainly an act of disrespect, changed into an invitation for playing soccer and a possibility to be in touch with another cultural learning. The students also seemed proud to teach the visitor something about the Brazilian culture and even the shiest ones listened to the "PortuguEnglish" conversation enthusiastically.

Some days later, we discussed the reasons for "making fun" at foreigners and they could not even explain the reasons why they used to ridicule the foreign people who had visited the institution before. Maybe, those youths had never been led to reflect about how enriching these kinds of meetings may be. Before our discussion, some of the girls did not consider the possibility of those foreigners understand some Portuguese and be very disappointed with their "rude jokes". Some of them seemed a little worried and embarrassed for having said silly things to the "gringos", as they used to refer to the foreigners. After that day, I started to observe their behavior whenever they could get in touch with the English speakers who visited the school and most of the students, instead of making fun, really tried to communicate. The girls remembered and

said that "maybe a foreigner can understand Portuguese". It made me very proud to observe their change in behavior when in contact with tourists, being much more respectful than what they used to be. In fact, the students themselves were amazed when they could ask questions such as: "What's your name?"; "How old are you?" and "Where are you from?" Once at the library, such conversation happened so naturally that the foreigner asked me whether my student could speak English, while the girl, quite surprised, questioned me about her ability to communicate: "Teacher, what is it?" and I amusedly answered: "You are speaking in English!"

All these reports, chosen among some others, suggest that maybe, despite the students' beliefs, English might be learned at school. It is possible to go further and admit that with the advent of globalization, English might be learned at various places and ways in Brazil: at snack bars, at shopping malls, through songs, international sport events and computer games. Studies such this one are only attempts to suggest that teacher or educators at schools should be facilitators of learning processes – a paramount role for teachers who want to purse constant understanding towards their students' idiosyncrasies. By being attentive to their needs and proposing activities which may be able to provoke a desirable critical posture, we may promote the formation of autonomous citizens and increase their self confidence towards second language learning. According to what has been observed in this study, issues such as identity, self esteem and affect should be essential for educators dealing with learners coming from socially deprived communities, especially with those students who have coped with social exclusion and intellectual discredit since their early age.

Independently from the difficulties that minority students may face to succeed in their academic life, and more specifically in this research about English learning at schools, what they need is basically the same respect students from any kind of context deserve. In order to know their groups, teachers should understand some of the puzzles which belong to their classroom lives. This is what Exploratory Practice is all about. In order to teach, anyone who assumes the role of an educator should be aware of Freire's (1996, p.22) wise observation, when he states that "teaching is not *transferring*

knowledge, but creating possibilities for its production or construction". By generating dialog in the classroom when involved in exploratory activities, understandings may be reached through learning opportunities. This is priceless because at these moments of teacher and students' interactions, educators realize that, again as Freire (1996, p.23) defends, "whoever teaches learns when teaching and whoever learns teaches when learning".

During one of the conversations with the students involved in my study, I asked them if they did not fear the violence they faced inside the community and a thirteen-year-old girl assertively answered: "We cannot fear. Fearing will not help us to survive." It was such a simple statement, but I have incorporated it in my life. Teachers may not fear. We should not fear trying new strategies and methodologies in order to improve our practice and help our students become more active, reflexive and critical citizens. Through this exercise of promoting learning opportunities and pursuing understandings, teachers and learners get to know more about each other. As it is commonly said by some anonymous philosophers, "we only love what we know". By knowing and understanding our students, we may love them even when there are some adversities. We may get a little bit involved with them, but without fear, because "fear will not help us to survive", mainly in this hard context named language education for minority students in Brazil.

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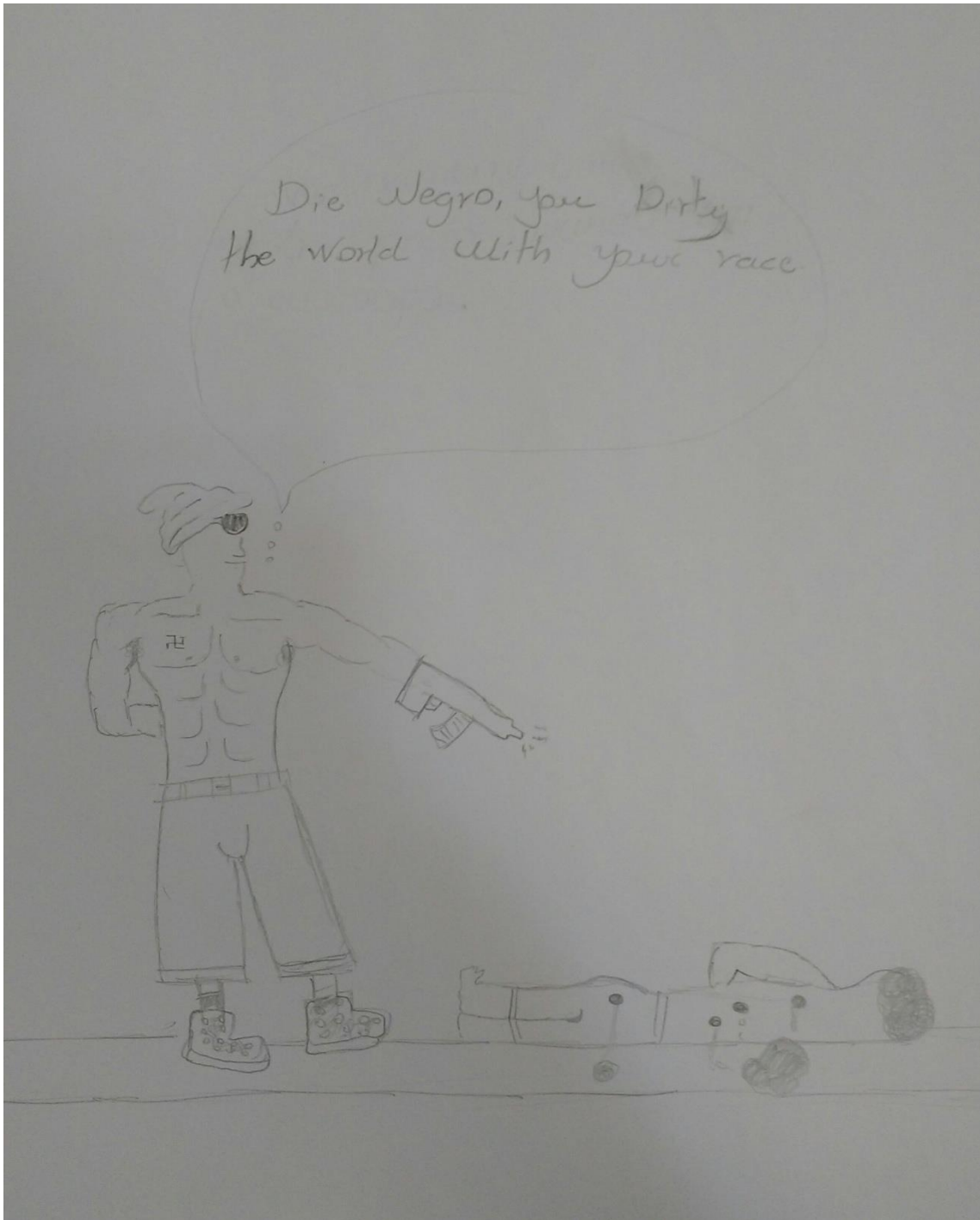LIER, L. From input to affordance: social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective. In: LANTOLF, J. P. (Ed.). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Available at: http://eslenglishclassroom.com/Art-03.pdf Accessed on April 19, 2015.

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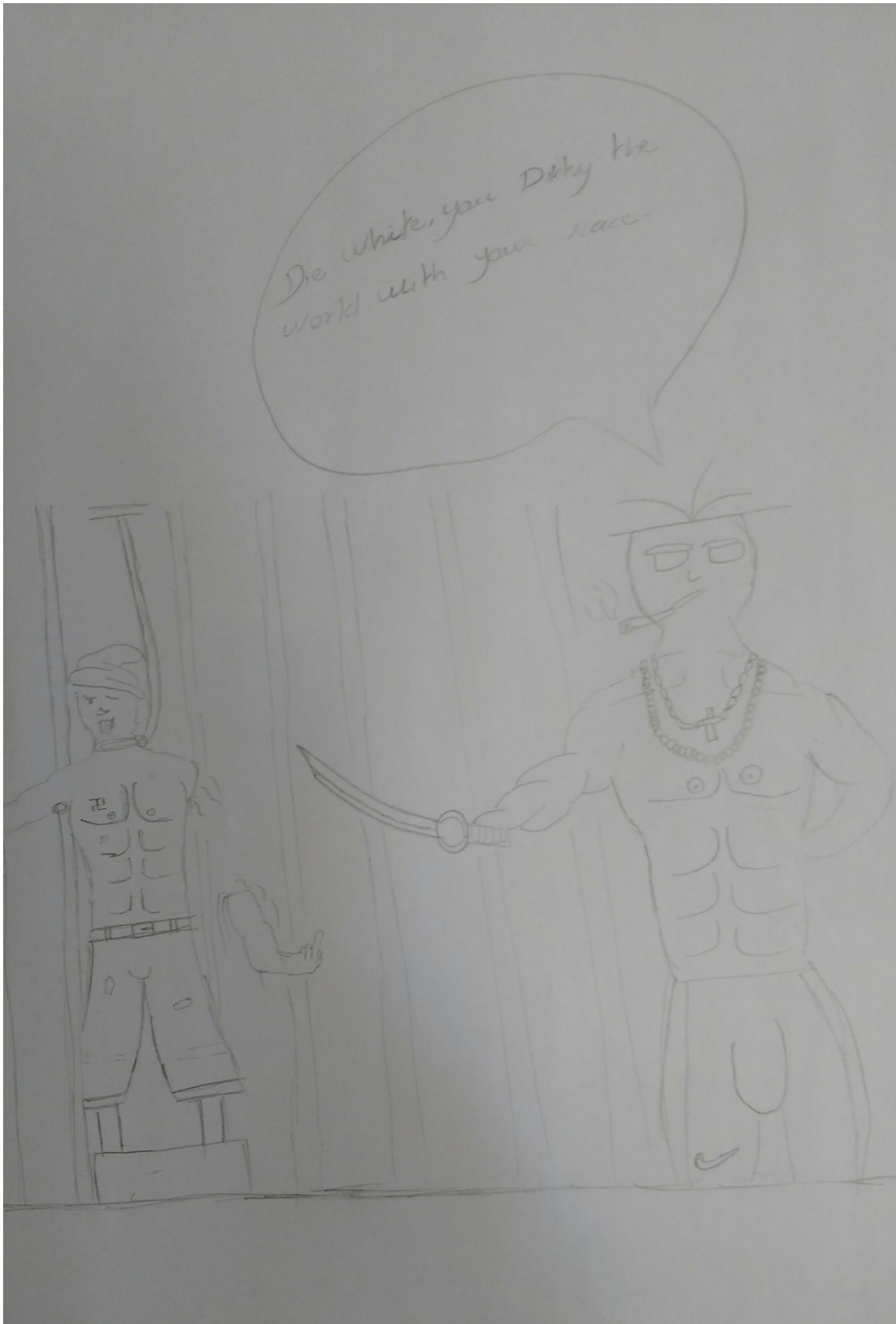
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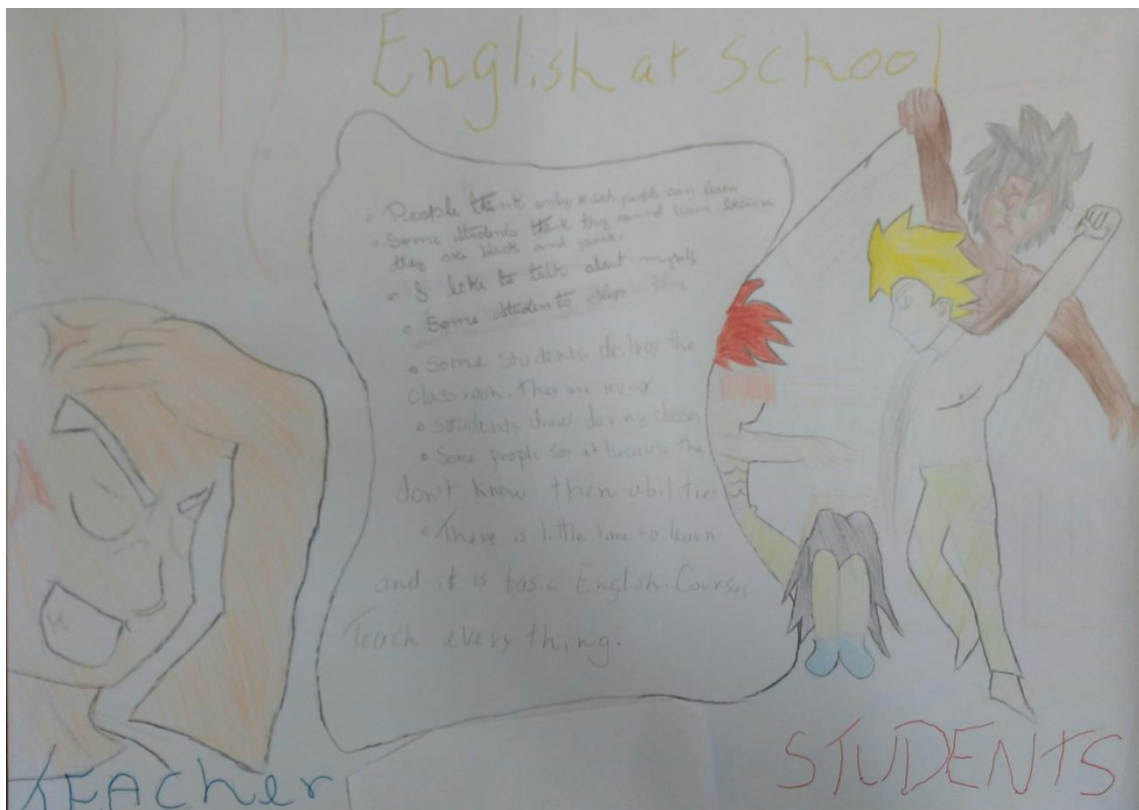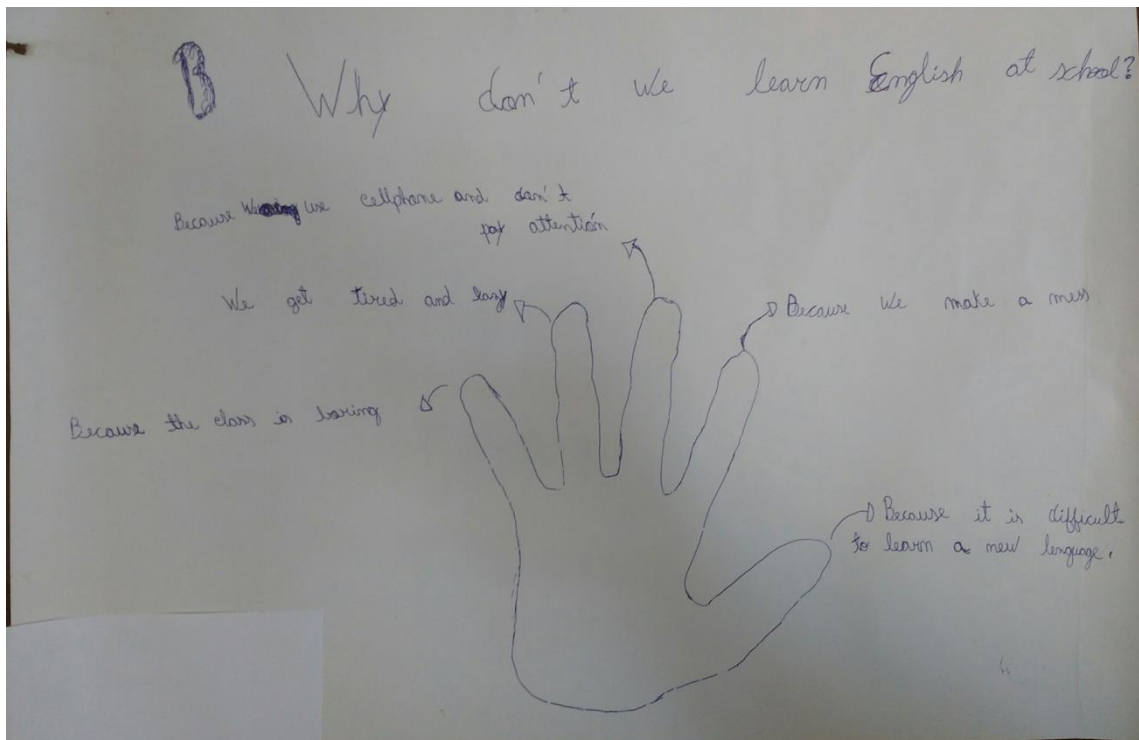

Poster 1

Poster 2

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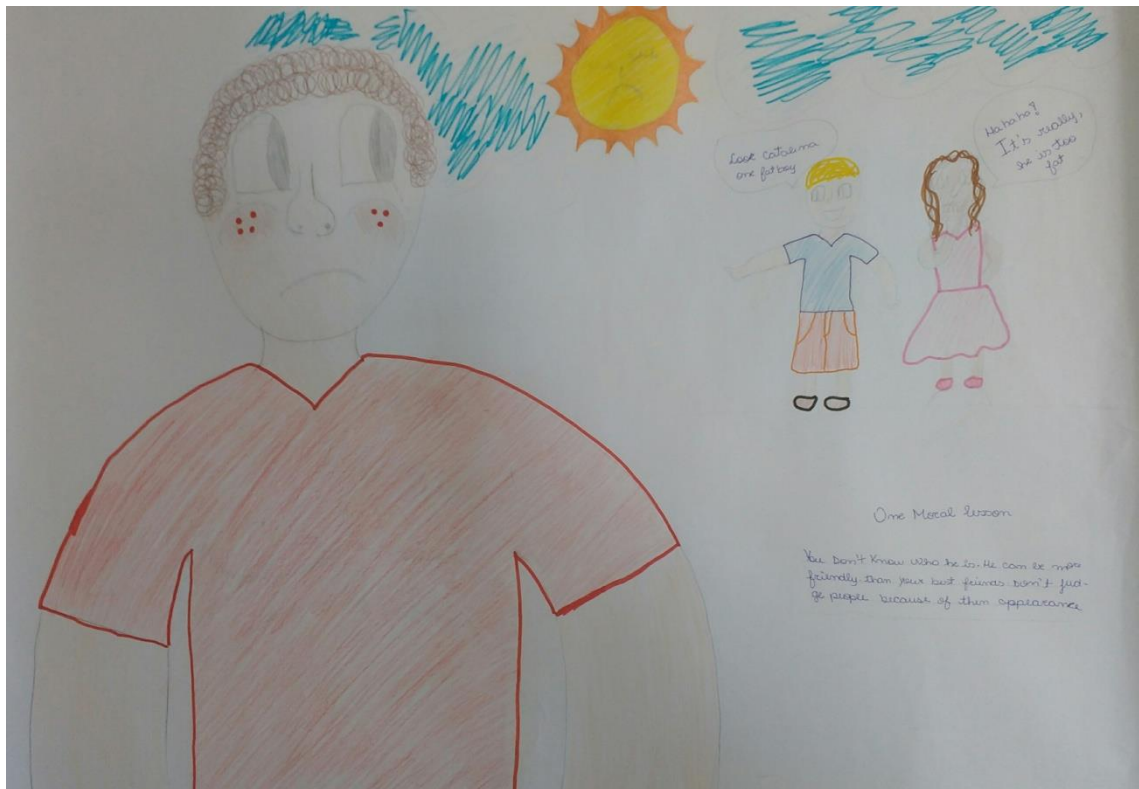
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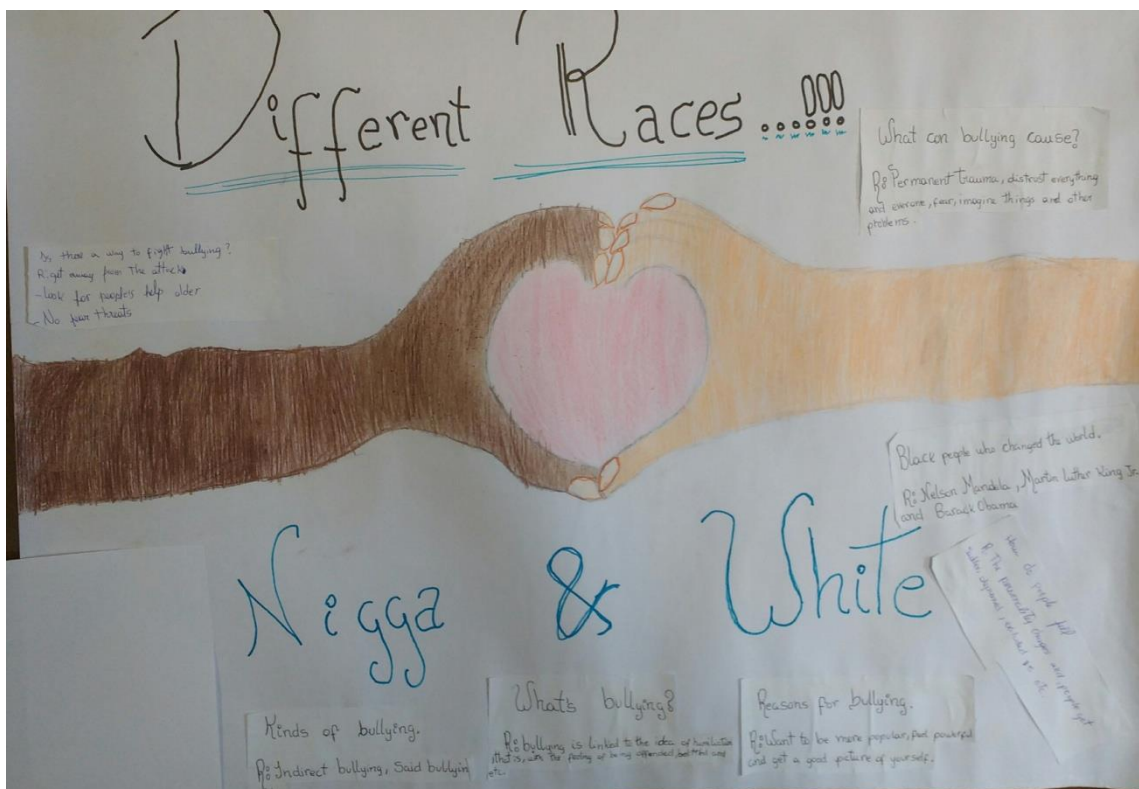
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