

Exploring Stories and Discovering Values³

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Introduction

This paper reports on a qualitative case study carried out with twenty-six intermediate-level EFL learners at Comahue University and it discusses the implementation of a discovery approach to their value systems through the analysis of fictional and non-fictional works. The original idea was to introduce a combination of methods that would engage the learners and stimulate their involvement in the exploration of their value systems as an innovative alternative to the usually scant connection found between students' real needs and interests in the context of an English course at university level and the actual content of the course. In conventional models, it is common practice to use a core textbook with a compilation of additional texts for intensive and extensive oral and reading practice. Little or no attention is paid to the learners' preferences and needs as individuals, as the focus is on furnishing them with the perceived necessary linguistic tools to guarantee their successful professional practice once they have formally completed their skill-getting and skill-using training in English.

In an attempt to explore an alternative course of action, and in the belief that we are teaching more than just English to our students, a framework was proposed in order to introduce value-laden texts as initial input and to promote the development of values. The results of the project revealed an increase in students' self-awareness and appreciation of others, and the consideration of differences as positive. Additionally, the learners' oral and written production exhibited significant qualitative differences in the display of lexical options and grammar patterns, as well as in the generation of elaborated ideas and the ability to establish connections among them. Likewise, the results highlight the relevance of a constructivist approach that considers learning as an interpretive building process by active human beings interacting with the physical and social world.

Brief description of the educational context

At the Escuela Superior de Idiomas, Universidad Nacional del Comahue, Patagonia Argentina, English is taught as a foreign language to students who are planning to become either EFL teachers or translators. The basis of this study, the English II course taught in the second year, focuses on the development of both receptive and productive skills in an integrated way with the overall objective of providing a solid foundation in the linguistic skills the students will need in their

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academic and vocational endeavours. The multi-layered syllabus has a theme component, a macroconcept with sub-topics that serve as the backbone of the course and provide contextualisation and significance; a grammatical component in that the content material provides loop input for focus on form and language analysis; a lexical component which tackles vocabulary related to each of the themes; and a task component with open-ended activities which provide ample opportunities for the contribution of the students' own ideas and personal experiences. This alternation of content, grammar, lexis and tasks allows the systematic coverage of the most important situations or contexts in which the learners are likely to use the foreign language at an upper-intermediate level of proficiency, which is the expected standard to be achieved on completion of the course. The core textbook used is *Cutting Edge* (Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate levels), plus a set of complementary readings selected on the basis of the students' preferences and choices.

Values in English Language Teaching

Our present globalised world offers a bewildering array of possibilities and alternatives for interaction with heterogeneous groups of people. In this scenario, life continuously challenges us and confronts us with situations that call for careful thinking and constant decision-making. Everything we do or say is, consciously or unconsciously, based on our beliefs, attitudes and values. In this respect, some typical areas where human beings—and teenagers in particular—may experience confusion or conflict in values are friendship, work, love, family, looks, religion and politics, just to name a few. This confusion may, if not delved into and cleared up, eventually develop into prejudice. Confronted with this latent possibility, one of our tasks as university teachers is to help future professionals adopt a non-judgmental attitudinal change and develop strategies for overcoming resistance to diversity and promoting pluralism through classroom practice.

This topic has not been widely explored in the English language classroom, as attested to by the scarce literature concerning research on values. Johnston (2003) concentrates on this issue from the perspective of the teacher, who he defines as "a moral agent," and contends that "it is only by confronting the moral complexity and ambiguity of our teaching that we can hope to identify the good and right things to do in any given set of circumstances, that is, to know the right way to teach" (Johnston 2003:21). This paper reports on an attempt to delineate a course of action and to assess its outcome from the learners' perspective. The philosophical framework of our proposal is based on Paulo Freire's principle of transforming present structures to create an inclusive climate in the classroom with the ultimate objective of fostering understanding and appreciation of differences which will later transcend to the outside world.

Theoretical framework

The objective of this article is to share a set of strategies which were implemented to deal with values by using ethically-rich content for reflection and discussion. As all action is based on theory, a brief description of the underpinnings of the course we designed will provide the foundation for each of the activities and methodological decisions that have been adopted. Our framework draws on some premises and focal concepts provided by the different, yet highly-compatible pedagogical approaches outlined below.

1. Learner-Centred Teaching

One of the distinctive tenets of this perspective is that the curriculum is “a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, who are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught” (Nunan 1988:2). The focus of attention is on the learner, who participates actively in the construction of a negotiated curriculum model whose content should be flexible since it may need to be modified as the course progresses. Such adjustments will be motivated by the learners as they experience different kinds of activities and by teachers as they obtain more information about the students’ subjective needs and expectations (Nunan 1988). Self-evaluation by both teachers and learners is highly promoted.

2. Whole Language

This approach puts forward the idea that language should not be broken up into abstract bits and pieces. In order to facilitate learning, the language is to be kept whole and involve the learners in using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs. This top-down view of learning entails the psychological premise that individuals learn from the whole to parts. In this line of reasoning, the language becomes meaningful and easy to learn when it is relevant to the students, when they use it for their own purposes and when the focus is on the meaning being communicated. Even though this approach is an attempt to account for the cognitive development of literacy programs with school children (Goodman 1986), its philosophical base seems to hold true and can thus be extrapolated to our own teaching-learning context since our goal is to work with the foreign language to meet a functional need in our students. The target language thus becomes a means to an end, not an end in itself, as the focus is on the construction of effective meanings.

3. Content-Based Instruction

The rationale underlying content-based teaching is that a foreign language is learned most effectively when used as the medium to convey information of

interest and relevance to the learner. Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989:vii) define content-based instruction as “the integration of content learning with language teaching aims. More specifically, it refers to the concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the form and sequence of language presentation dictated by content material.” This approach aims to develop students’ academic language competencies, so it provides them with study skills and a familiarity with scholarly discourse which they can transfer to other academic tasks they encounter. The use of authentic texts which are relevant to the learners’ foreign language needs is emphasized, i.e. written or oral pieces which were not originally created for language teaching purposes, as they contextualise the lessons by providing the structures, functions and discourse features to be taught (Brinton, Snow and Wesche 1989, Snow and Brinton 1997). At Comahue University, we have implemented a theme-based language model, which lends itself particularly well to heterogenous groups of young adults who share common areas of interest. For example, a typical intermediate-to-upper-intermediate-level course would consist of three to four broad thematic units or ‘content modules’—e.g. sex roles, language learning, technology and media, environmental concerns—with sub-units on derived issues such as air pollution control, toxic waste disposal, land conservation, advertising and so on when dealing with the thematic unit “the environment.”²

4. Humanistic practices

Our views are closely related to humanistic theories which engage the whole person in the learning experience, including the emotions and feelings—the affective realm—as well as linguistic knowledge and behavioural skills. Moskowitz (1978:2) defines humanistic techniques as those that “blend what the students feel, think and know with what they are learning in the target language.” Her techniques pursue the development of self-actualization; that is, the acceptance of oneself and others, and self-esteem, concepts that were coined by Maslow, who is considered the father of humanistic psychology. In a similar vein, the Reflective Model (Richards and Lockhart 1996), though mainly focused on the teacher, is an inquiry-oriented constructivist approach in which the learners are given a significant role and are viewed as active creators of meanings. Cooperative learning and the exploration of both teachers’ and learners’ belief systems are also strongly encouraged. Likewise, Rinvoluceri is an experienced practitioner of the humanistic approach and his main concern is to consider students as individuals rather than as “the class,” recognizing their affective as well as their cognitive nature, thus educating the whole person. This concern is clearly

² Brinton and Master (1997) offer a collection of detailed in-class activities to accompany theme-based courses in which language and content are taught in tandem.

manifested in his collection of creative activities in the framework of the humanistic approach (Rinvoluceri 2002) ³

In keeping with this train of thought, the content of our English II course relates to the learners' experiences, memories, hopes, beliefs, values and needs, which are thus integrated into the curriculum. A base of humanistic principles is used for choosing materials, planning instruction, organising classroom discussions and evaluating student progress and the course itself. The ideal is to pursue growth in the target language in tandem with personal development integrating the intellectual and emotional dimensions. Likewise, we aim at creating learning environments that are caring and supportive, and which we hope will then be reproduced in the real world outside the classroom.

The stages of the study

From the outset, our intention was not to instil any particular set of shoulds and should nots but to foster a discovery approach to each student's value system through an analysis of fictional and non-fictional works. In other words, the overall objective of the project was twofold: on the one hand, to explore the possibility of developing values in our university lessons by leading students to examine their own systems of beliefs and assumptions, and to enable them to give shape to those that are still emerging; on the other hand, to put materials and tasks to the test in order to assess their potential to develop values, and to stimulate oral and written language development while promoting affective involvement and active participation in class.

The reading material was used as a tool for learning about conflicting situations—such as discrimination, lack of justice in society, obsessive love relationships—that would allow our students to apply a set of problem-solving strategies in order to understand and overcome these contemporary dilemmas. The ultimate aim was to foster the development of a sense of identity (Who am I?) and alterity (Who is the other?) by examining certain 'facts of life' as they unravelled in the lives of real and imaginary heroes and villains.

◆ Stage 1: Planning and organizing the project on values

³ The humanistic movement has several exponents nowadays, represented by their contributions to *Humanising Language Teaching*, an on-line magazine for teachers and teacher trainers which provides a wide variety of articles and resources to become familiar with this approach (Editor: Mario Rinvoluceri. The Pilgrims Group of Canterbury. University of Kent). Also, Curran's method, known as Community Language Learning, is considered an example of a humanistic approach within the language teaching tradition. In recent years and in a similar vein, *Global Education*, *Peace Education*, *Human Rights Education*, *Development Education* and *Environmental Education* have become frequently-used labels in the language teaching world.

The English II course lasts for a whole academic year (thirty weeks) with meetings of three hours on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. During the first lesson, the students (N=26) were asked to get into small groups, to brainstorm and to provide a list of six broad topics or themes they would like to tackle. As expected, each group produced their own list of topics.⁴ The teacher's task was to analyse the students' choices and select the most frequent ones, which were then discussed in class and agreed on collectively during the following meeting.⁵ These topics were organised into three thematic units, broadly termed 'discrimination,' 'love' and 'justice'. Since stories are an integral part of our EFL curriculum⁶ as they provide the springboard for the discussion of value-related issues, the material used was a selection of first-person narratives taken from the Chicken Soup Series, which was then complemented with a set of fictional short stories written by contemporary writers. The criterion for selection of the autobiographical accounts was that the texts were written by or addressed to teenagers; besides, they are informative and inspirational, relatively short and manageable for the students' level of proficiency. Learners of English in their second year at the university have not yet been confronted with many authentic texts⁷, thus this material seemed to be a good starting point for our purposes. As to the fictional stories, they were selected principally on the basis of their contents which offer interesting data of contextualised uses of language. Following Jane Austen, "fiction offers the most thorough knowledge of human nature [...] conveyed to the world in the best chosen language," thus it may contribute to the development of sensitivity and exploration of human qualities and relationships. The texts in our compilation dealt with controversial topics such as the resistance to differences, the non-acceptance of change and the intolerance of diversity, the lack of or the excess of love, and the questionable notion of justice as it is conceived by some human beings (See Appendix 1 for a brief summary of the

⁴ The activities in the organizational stage described above were not time-consuming and were easily accommodated among the usual tasks related to the other components of the course.

⁵ It is interesting to note some of the recurrent topics that emerged, which may be considered for future development depending, naturally, on the students' preferences. One area was related to 'teenage problems:' eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia), teenage pregnancy, stress, depression and phobias in teenagers, teenage suicide, addictions (smoking, alcohol, drugs), family relationships, appearances and looks. Another area dealt with broad topics that relate the individual to the society (s)he lives in, such as sex education, friendship, marriage, gay couples, gay parenting, organ donation, assisted death, abortion, the influence of TV on teenagers, role models, human rights, freedom of thought and expression in society, violence and sexual abuse.

⁶ Massi (1997) and Massi and Benvenuto (2001) discuss the relevance of using stories and fairy tales in the ELT classroom for text analysis and critical thinking. Massi and Scruggs (2000) present a rationale and a set of class activities for the exploitation of the potential of stories as retold in films.

⁷ Due to the heterogeneity of the students' linguistic competencies during the first year at university, the materials used are mainly a coursebook (e.g. *Cutting-Edge, Pre-Intermediate*. Pearson) and a list of simplified novels (*Penguin Readers*. Longman) to develop the habit of reading, to encourage vocabulary growth and to consolidate grammar patterns. Though highly suited to our needs, these texts are not considered 'authentic' as they have been abridged for language teaching purposes.

content of these texts). Although the selection of the stories for the project was organized by the teacher on the basis of the learners' preliminary choices, most of the decisions in the stages that follow were made by the students in an interactive and collaborative fashion.

◆ Stage 2: Analysing the texts

Approximately two weeks after the course started, the students were asked to obtain the reading material for the first thematic unit. The methodological approach consisted of assigning the first set of three stories⁸ for home-reading and organising in-class talking circles based on ideas derived from a pool of the students' exploratory work and initial conclusions. First, they organized themselves in trios and chose one story to read at home. Each of the different groups had to read the same story for the next meeting. Specific activities were assigned to get the students familiar with the content as well as with the vocabulary and language structures (Appendix 2 presents a scheme with guidelines). In the following session, they were re-grouped into different trios, that is, one student from each of the previous groups became part of a new one, so that each of them had a different story to present and share. They explained their story to the other members of the group and once they had presented their stories, they worked on the similarities and differences among them. Finally, they drew some general conclusions on the main issues at stake. These learner-centred group discussions helped them get to know each other a bit more, reach a consensus on the different topics and develop a collaborative team-building attitude.

The teacher kept a list of the groups and their stories, so that on subsequent sessions, new trios were formed and each student had a story to share with his/her new group. The purpose of organizing trios was to foster group interaction and to maximize student speaking time. The 'group swap' was meant to increase the students' level of interest in each other's story: each of them had something 'new' to present, and this encouraged them to establish points in common, differences and so on. Eventually, some of them got interested in their peers' stories and accessed them as they were bound together in a booklet for the students to copy.

After the preliminary analysis, all the students knew the contents of all the stories. Generally, during the following session, the learners got into different trios organized by the teacher. A handout with some basic leading questions was provided for developing strategies to carry out an in-depth interpretation of the characters' conflicts (See Appendix 3 for sample activities on one of the stories).

⁸ The discriminatory practices set was made up of the following stories: *Betty Ann* (Ina Hughs), *One Friday Morning* (Langston Hughes) and *All Summer in a Day* (Ray Bradbury). Appendix 1 offers a short list of alternative options.

After directing the students' attention to the descriptive level of analysis (Who are the characters involved in this story? Where does the action take place? What are the main events in the story?) Further questions were posed in order to focus on the events that generated the conflict and the feelings of the people involved: What event caused the conflict? Why did the main character feel different from the other people? How did the other people treat her/him? -- the explanatory level.

Gradually, the focus was shifted to issues addressed to the students themselves by means of a set of you-questions such as the following: How do you feel about the character? Have you ever felt like him/her? Have you ever had a similar experience? How did you feel? Did you manage to overcome the problem? By leaving aside the conflict of the main character(s) and gradually conducting a meaningful exploration of similar problems that had an impact on the learners' own lives, we passed on to the transition level, in which students verbalized their feelings about the issue. At this stage, they positioned themselves as the people portrayed in the stories and reflected on the conflict from their own perspectives to better assess the situation and the reasonableness of the characters' actions.

Then, with the help of why-questions like Why do you think that problems like this exist? Why do people discriminate against other people?, we moved to the exploration of the causes of the problem—the projection level—and to its generalisation to the social context. Why-questions are interesting for developing critical thinking skills since they allow the learners to move out of their personal experiences into a broader understanding of the issue and the consideration of similar and dissenting opinions. These projective questions can turn out to be too difficult for starting discussions in EFL classes, especially for students who are not used to freely expressing opinions or who are restricted by their language competence. Therefore, they should be posed after a good deal of debate over the topic has already taken place. Finally, after the evaluation of different situations, the emphasis was laid on generating possible solutions—the action level—by means of prompts that shifted from the oppositional you to the inclusive we, as in this sequence: What can you do to prevent people experiencing upsetting events? How can we reduce the effect of negative situations? This framework attempts to bring students to a closer understanding of the everyday problems of society and to assess how their beliefs and assumptions influence their own perceptions of reality. At the same time, it allows them to draw on their own experiences and points of view in order to address those problems.

The tasks outlined thus far were carried out in a relaxed atmosphere, in which students interacted with their peers freely and enthusiastically. While working on the transition-level questions, several learners provided very personal cathartic accounts of events which had been traumatic or significant in their lives and were emotionally supported by their group's members, who listened attentively and respectfully. During these sessions, the teacher's role was limited to providing emotional feedback on their accounts, asking and answering

questions, making comments, clarifying concepts and suggesting ways of expressing ideas. Likewise, specific lexical items were provided when the students asked for specific words or collocations, their production was monitored by signalling unclear ideas or inaccurate patterns, and they were urged to continue in the process of generating narrative and opinion discourse. The teacher's intervention and participation was active, though indirect, as the students were in control of the organization and expression of their ideas.

The cycle of discussion and analysis of the set of stories on discrimination took approximately a week (9 hours altogether) and was completed by the end of April. The procedure described above was repeated when dealing with the two remaining topics of the students' choice in June and September.

◆ Stage 3: Producing an original text

Towards the end of the project, the students were asked if they would like to produce an individual written autobiographical story in an attempt to capitalise on their high exposure to narrative texts and on their analyses and interpretation of different stories⁹. Although they had been previously asked to group meaning-related words in semantic fields, and to write notes and summaries after each reading and discussion session, writing an autobiographical piece on the basis of self-examination and reflection represented a significant challenge. The purpose of this activity was to develop an awareness of significant moments in the students' lives and to examine: 1) their own reactions to those experiences as well as 2) the influence of outside pressures. It was agreed that they would complete the task in two weeks, and that it would then be considered as a part of their course assessment. Once they completed their first draft, students gathered in small groups to share their preliminary pieces and to get feedback from their peers and their teacher before working on their final versions. The production of an autobiography entails considerable ego-involvement; therefore, the learners were free to take their own initiatives in matters related to their feelings and they alone decided how much or how little to open up and contribute of themselves. As English II is a year-long course, staff-student and student-student contact takes place frequently so there is plenty of time to build up a genuine relationship and develop a sense of community. Many interesting topics emerged out of these interactions, such as the resistance to changes, the difficulties of adapting to new models or patterns, the importance of freedom to make decisions, the role our values have when making choices, the risk of becoming less human each day by being indifferent to other people's material and emotional needs, the relevance of

⁹ The reader may wonder how voluntary this activity was, considering that it was the teacher's suggestion. In fact, the students not only agreed willingly and enthusiastically but also came up with interesting ideas that led to a modification of the original model: they suggested exchanging their own texts, compiling a booklet with their finished stories and running copies for everyone in the class, including the teacher. During breaks, it was gratifying and stimulating to see them eagerly reading each other's stories and exchanging views on them. After all, they were really curious to see what their classmates had written!

developing positive attitudes, and the enhancement of values related to the family, our friends, and people by and large. Finally, these 'pages' of their autobiographies were compiled in a booklet and then shared with the whole class (Some samples are provided in Appendix 4). This experiment was carried out in the belief that the students' experiences can affirm their cultural heritage; thus, they make a welcome addition to our daily EFL literacy practices as they contribute to personalising and transforming the curriculum in a meaningful way.

◆ Stage 4: Listening to the students' voices

After completing each of the thematic units, students were asked to record their thoughts and views on the different topics and activities via journal writing, as journals provide a non-threatening forum to express ideas and comments with a minimum of concern about form or structure¹⁰. The learners wrote on the following topics related to the project: What I learned this week, My favourite story so far, My opinion on the Chicken Soup stories, An identity crisis I have gone through, My opinion on the project on values. Because there had been considerable involvement in each of the stages, their writing was simple, yet clear and enjoyable. At this point, the focus of attention was on the flow of ideas rather than on the grammatical and discursive aspects. These learning journals were read by the teacher, who usually responded with encouraging remarks as to the content of the entry—as readers looking for meaning –, with comments to reinforce and sometimes dispute what the students had written, and with questions to elicit further information. The results of this case study indicate, as the students themselves explicitly stated in their journals, the development of their self-awareness and appreciation of differences. Likewise, they seem to highlight the relevance of content-based instruction with the ultimate objective of empowering university level learners and raising critical thinking skills through the use of value-laden texts as initial input. The following renderings, however brief, illustrate this point.

Journal writing – Entry 2 (What I have learnt this week)

This week I have realized how important it is to KNOW people. Yes, 'know' with capital letters, that is, not just know about superficial matters – things they like and dislike and so on – but about their past, their experiences, their dreams and hopes. [...] The more we know about each other, the more likely it is that we will communicate successfully and without conflicts. I have also learnt that sometimes ignorance of other people's specific feelings and ideas may lead us to have a negative impression of their abilities and this, in turn, may lead us to a social or cultural stereotype, and eventually

¹⁰ The *Learning Journal* is a constituent part of the course. As a home assignment, the students are asked to write an entry once a week on topics related to the course and their own learning process. They usually keep a record of their opinions and ideas and reflect on their own progress as learners of a foreign language. In connection with the values project, they were asked to write on five occasions: after dealing with the first thematic unit (entry 2), after completing the second unit (entries 3 and 5), after the third unit (entry 7) and on completion of the project (entry 10).

to discrimination. [...] The less we know about each other, the more likely we are to misunderstand each other on a linguistic or cultural level.

Journal writing – Entry 10 (My opinion on the project on values)

The topics were interesting and touching because they were connected to our feelings, our emotions and our personal experiences in life. [...] I think that each of us managed to find something interesting to share. There were very moving stories which caught the attention of the class and generated a wonderful atmosphere to open up and debate. [...] In conclusion, I think it was an interesting project that helped us become more self-confident, to talk about our feelings, problems and experiences. But the most important point was that it helped us to consolidate as a group because it allowed us to 'discover' one another and to get to know each other in a deep way.

Although there was a marked increase in the students' effort and participation, the most substantial development took place in the realm of attitude, position-taking and openness of perspectives. The educational experience is individual but it is highly influenced by the context in which it occurs. Taking into account the learners' individual and contextual evaluation, the results yield considerable attitudinal growth which is reflected in most of the learning journal entries (See further samples in Appendix 5).

Qualitative discussion of the results

Even though the original aim of the course design and organization was to achieve a maturational change and to enhance emotional development in our students, the goal of both teachers and students alike was also to develop more complex lines of reasoning while utilising precise lexical items and grammar patterns when referring to a particular event or idea. The students' systematic progress at morphological, syntactic and lexical levels was not subjected to rigorous quantification, but their 'autobiographies,' as well as their oral performance in class and the written performance during term-exams, revealed the use of a wider range of vocabulary and a more accurate use of collocations than their production at the beginning of the academic year. There was also evidence of a more confident use of complex structural patterns and a more careful selection of words. Our contention is that a values project like the one outlined can contribute to the improvement of the students' oral and written performance, providing integral practice in the receptive and productive macro-skills.

In their evaluation of the course, the students reported that one salient aspect of their personal growth was the development of awareness of the fact that sometimes "what you say is not as important as how you say it." Besides, they concluded that they managed to generate ideas triggered by the stories, the discussions and the analyses, which served as springboards for the development of viewpoints and perceptive comments about their own reality. Many learners provided feedback on how they perceived their own activities and interactions in

the group in such areas as contributing ideas, praising and helping others, and staying on task. They viewed their own interactions critically and managed to discuss their group dynamics openly among themselves. Likewise, they admitted having realized how differently people could perceive the same event, and openly expressed that they had become aware of their own prejudices.

One of the strengths of a framework like this is its flexibility, as it allows both teachers and students to “create” a content-syllabus with the specific learners’ needs and interests in mind; however, a caveat is that the syllabus will have to be adapted or adjusted every year, as a new group of students start the course. But this is also one of the interesting aspects of a teacher’s profession: students change, teachers change, and teachers change when meeting new students, so the materials should also change accordingly to adapt to the dynamic complexity of the classroom.

Conclusion

A course based on values like the one briefly presented can be a welcome addition to a traditional language course as a stage in the process of *empowerment* of university students. A traditional axiom states that “students should not go through the university, rather, the university should go through the student” – *el alumno no debe pasar por la universidad, la universidad debe pasar por el alumno*. This is a wise reflection, though it may cause some discussion and even controversy. Our role as university educators is to lead our students to become critical not just of the other, but also of themselves; to consider other people’s perspectives, to understand and appreciate differences, to defend one’s views with respect for the other but also accept heterogeneity and diversity, while fostering integration. All these *values* will give our students the power—in a good sense—to be responsible citizens in society. Above all, guiding them to achieve a sense of control and ownership of their identities, manifested via their ideas and moral standards, will allow them to make smarter choices when using both the foreign language and their L1. Viewed this way, the linguistic system can provide a real access to personally and socially useful knowledge through the development of ethics and moral principles.

This paper has attempted to outline the framework that supports our methods and to conduct an experiment using a blend of features drawn from different, yet highly compatible pedagogical models, namely learner-centered, content-based, whole language and humanistic principles. The tasks and method reported in this case study are by no means the only or the best approach towards fostering the development of values and critical awareness. Imaginative teachers and interested students will discover new ways to explore these and other materials in order to better meet the needs of individual learners and classes in other institutional settings. In this sense, the guidelines provided thus far are still provisional and should be subjected to a continuous process of

revision and evaluation. The whole experience has raised many questions to which we are still trying to find answers, but from the results obtained, we are positive this is a promising start and a fruitful path to follow.

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APPENDIX 1: Contents of suitable stories to discuss and develop values

1. Selection of autobiographical pieces from the *Chicken Soup Series*:

- *Betty Ann*, by Ina Hughs, retells the sad story of a brilliant girl who has been discriminated against by her classmates and now it is too late to undo the wrong.
- *Like People First*, by Kent Nerburn, helps us think about the importance of getting to know the people around us before making judgements.
- *In Losing the “Us”*, Lia Gay feels no longer whole after breaking up with her boyfriend until she discovers that loving oneself helps overcome difficult moments.
- *Tigress*, by Judith S. Johnessee, deals with an adolescent who has to face the death of his pet.
- *In My Most Embarrassing Moment*, by Rochelle M. Pennington, a model student gets into trouble by putting one of her teachers in an uncomfortable situation and eventually discovers the value of forgiveness.
- *In Adulthood*, Robert Fulghum reflects on his life as a teenager and draws the conclusion that ‘being an adult is dirty work, but someone has to do it’.

2.a. Fictional short stories dealing with discriminatory practices:

- *One Friday Morning*, by Langston Hughes
Nancy Lee, a black teenager, is told that she has won the art scholarship at an American school. Prize Day will be a grand occasion for her and she has even prepared her acceptance speech when she is told that the committee have decided not to give her the award because of her race and color.
- *All Summer in a Day*, by Ray Bradbury
On Venus there is a perpetual rain, a rain so heavy and steady that the inhabitants live underground. Yet once every seven years the sun shines for an hour, and that day will be something special for Margot, who is the only child in the group who has seen the sun before. A conflict arises and, in the end, Margot is locked in a closet and released when it starts raining again.
- *The Lottery*, by Shirley Jackson
The inhabitants of a rural village are ready to play the lottery, a community event that they traditionally hold every summer year after year. Bill Hutchinson draws the black spot for his family and his wife, Tessie, who arrives late saying that she has forgotten all about the lottery, yells out that it isn’t fair. Finally, she is stoned to death by the villagers.
- *Country Lovers*, by Nadime Gordimer

Somewhere in South Africa, Thebedi, a black teenager, and Paulus, the farmer's white son, feel a strong attraction towards each other, yet they recognise the need to hide their affection from other people. Later, Thebedi, who is to be married to Njabulo, realises that she is pregnant and that she must not let anybody know that the baby is Paulus's. The baby is poisoned by his own father and the case goes to court. In the end, Paulus is set free and Thebedi is accused of committing perjury.

2.b. Stories that approach values related to love:

- *The Colonel's Lady*, by W. Somerset Maugham
The Peregrines have had a conventional marriage for more than twenty years. While George, the Colonel, is a respectable and popular gentleman, Evie is a housewife who keeps a low profile. When he learns that Evie has written a book of poems, he reads them and realises that she had a secret love affair with a younger man who had a sudden death. Confronted with this shocking piece of news, he resorts to indifference and wonders what on earth that man saw in his wife.
- *Mrs. Bixby and the Colonel's Coat*, by Roald Dahl
Mrs. Bixby lives a double life. She is married to a dentist in New York, but has a rich lover in Baltimore. On one of her visits, he decides not to see her any longer and gives her an expensive mink coat, which is very difficult for her to explain away. She takes the coat to a pawn shop and invents a credible story for her husband. In the end, he turns the table on his wife and she discovers that he is having an affair with his secretary.
- *The Gift of the Magi*, by O. Henry
Della and Jim are a young couple who live humbly in a small flat. Their two 'possessions' are Jim's gold watch and Della's hair. It's Christmas time and she wants to buy a nice present for her husband. As she only has \$1.87, she decides to sell her hair in order to buy a platinum chain for Jim's watch. When they meet, Jim gives her a set of combs to wear in her beautiful vanished hair. He has sold his watch to get the money to buy her the combs. Even though they get useless gifts, they show their love for each other, which now becomes the greatest treasure of their home.

2.c. Stories related to justice:

- *Vendetta*, by Guy de Maupassant
Widow Saverini is an old woman who lives with her only son and their dog on a small Italian island. One evening, Antoine Saverini is treacherously killed during a quarrel. Having no male relatives to help her kill the murderer, the old woman prepares a plan to avenge her son's death with premeditated cunning. She trains her dog, Semillante, who then carries out the vendetta to perfection.
- *The Man with the Scar*, by W. Somerset Maugham

This is the story of a revolutionary general who fought in Nicaragua. One day, he is captured, tried by court-martial and sentenced to be shot at dawn. His last wish is to say goodbye to his wife. When he meets her, they kiss passionately and he stabs her in the neck. When he is asked why he has killed his wife, he answers that he did so because he loved her. The general who ordered the execution considers this a noble gesture and sets the man free.

- *The Mother*, by W. Somerset Maugham

La Cachirra has had a hard life and her objective is to protect her son, Currito, who she loves with tenderness and passion. Her extreme jealousy reveals her inability to share him with Rosalia, a young woman he has apparently fallen in love with. The all-consuming nature of La Cachirra's love leads her to kill her son's girlfriend in a violent and unexpected way.

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APPENDIX 2: Guidelines for the analysis of stories

1. FOCUS ON GENERAL ASPECTS

For a start, consider the following preliminary aspects:

TITLE: What is the title of the story?

AUTHOR: Who wrote it? When?
Where is he/she from? Is he/she a contemporary writer?
What else did he/she write?

TYPE: Is it an autobiographical story? Does it deal with horror, science fiction, mystery, contemporary and general-interest topics?

MAIN TOPIC: What is it about, *e.g.* family life, an unusual person, an adventure, etc.?

2. FOCUS ON THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE STORYLINE

The next step involves the reconstruction of the original text. Read the *strategies for summary writing* below and produce your own simplified version.

After reading the story, put the text down. First, make a mental picture of the main idea/s. Then, write it/them down *in your own words*.

1. Locate *important/relevant specific information* in connection with the main topic, following the order of the original text. Establish another main topic and proceed in a similar way. Choose the information that is related to and expands on the main idea.
2. Make sure you include information on the *setting and the main characters or people involved*.
3. After examining how the author organized the material, work out your *outline* and get ready to organize the information you have selected. Flesh out your text. Remember that you should present 'the big picture' so leave aside minor details and irrelevant information.
4. Do not write one sentence for every paragraph or section. Instead, combine ideas from the different paragraphs/sections of the text by providing suitable *connectors* to establish semantic relationships.
5. Go over your summary when you have finished it. Then, quickly read the story again to make the necessary adjustments and check that your summary is complete.
6. Polish your summary. Ask yourself the following questions: Is it easy to follow and understand? Have I used connecting words like *furthermore, in addition, however* and so on? Have I organised my text in a coherent way? Does my summary reflect the original work?
7. Remember that a summary is based on other people's material, so mention the author at some point—generally at the beginning of the new text. To avoid plagiarism, paraphrase *i.e. use your own words* as much as possible. If you prefer to use the author's words, indicate them by means of quotation marks.

3. FOCUS ON LANGUAGE USE: Grammar Patterns, Vocabulary and Idiomatic expressions

We now need to consider the language used *in context* as a strategy to learn new words or to consolidate familiar and unfamiliar structures. Are there any specific lexical items or chunks that are semantically connected in the text? Are there any *semantic fields* or *word domains* in the story? Your task is to group and classify those words and expressions that belong to the same or similar semantic field according to some pre-established criterion. For example, you can use grammatical labels such as *nouns*, *verbs* and *adjectives*; an alternative is to provide an 'umbrella term' that refers to a particular field, such as *ways of walking*, *laughing*, *speaking* and the like. Yet, another possibility is to group words and expressions according to broad categories, such as *education*, *friendship*, *social issues*, etc. Then, you can organise a conceptual map to display the words and collocations of your choice, plus some others taken from an English-English dictionary. Finally, it is advisable to produce a short paragraph to illustrate usage and collocation in context so as to facilitate retention and retrieval.

4. FOCUS ON THE EVALUATION OF THE STORY

This stage of the process requires you to be critical and to judge the original text. In order to do so, your task is to provide evaluative comments while giving reasons for every point you make. Take some time to think about the main themes and sub-themes dealt with in the story. Is the writer saying something important about people and society? Is there a 'message' or 'moral'? The following questions may help you generate your evaluation of the text. Remember to always support your opinion.

Was the text easy/difficult to read?
 Is the language up-dated or old-fashioned?
 Is the register neutral, colloquial or formal?
 How would you describe the contents? Realistic? Amusing? Thrilling?
 Fast-moving?
 Did you like the story? Justify your answer.
 What did you like especially about it?
 What will you remember the most about it?
 How does it relate to other texts on the same topic that you have read?
 How did you feel after reading it? Happy? Sad?
 Would you recommend it? If so, who to?
 Complete the following: To me, this story means...

5. FOCUS ON QUESTIONS TO GENERATE FURTHER OPINIONS

Every text has the potential to generate second thoughts and establish associations with other situations. At this point, your task is to jot down a set of thought-provoking questions that you have come up with while reading and analysing the story. They can be related to personal experiences or to imaginary circumstances. Examples: Which of the characters do you sympathise with? What piece of information in the story can justify his/her behaviour? How would you react in a similar situation? As you can see, you may not have the answers to those questions, so the objective is to pass them on to your group and the whole class in order to generate debate and, if possible, reach agreement.

6. FOCUS ON AN ACTIVITY DERIVED FROM THE ANALYSIS

This is your golden opportunity to play teacher for a while. Your task is to design a motivating hands-on consolidation exercise for your classmates. The only limitation here is your time! Feel free to create thinking activities that involve matching, filling in blanks, illustrating the meanings of some selected words, solving a problem, drawing, mime, providing an alternative ending, writing a letter, a short article, headlines, a song, a poem... The sky's the limit!

7. FURTHER READING RELATED TO THE MAIN ISSUES AT STAKE IN THE STORY

This is the last stage in the process! In order to establish a connection between the story we have analysed and the real world out there, you should look for texts (minimum: 3, maximum: 6) that are in some way related to the main issues illustrated in the story. With this material, we will organise a data bank to be used for the oral term-exam. Feel free to include short articles, news items or ads derived from any source (newspapers, magazines, fanzines, the Net, books and journals). As you look for the topic-related texts, make sure you read **ONLY** English.

APPENDIX 3: Sample activities for the interpretation of stories

ALL SUMMER IN A DAY (RAY BRADBURY)

Integrated language practice

- *Reading*: unsimplified material, extracting topics and writing summaries
- *Speaking - Listening*: discussion in talking circles (groups of three or four students)
- *Writing*: after intensive reading and analysis of the stories (recognition of organizational relationships, presentation of the information and the like), production of a similar text on their own with the use of skeletal notes or outlines

Pedagogical objectives

- To develop an intellectual and emotional understanding of the lives and motivations of 'others'
- To experience a conflictive event and develop the ability to see things from another person's point of view

Responding to the Story – Triggering Questions for Group Discussion

Step 1 - **Description level**: Establishing the setting and main events

- Who are the characters involved in this story?
- What is the setting (a school)?
- What is the larger setting (a city on Venus)? How would you like to live there?
- Why do you think the people in the story have moved to Venus?
- What happens in this story?
- Do you like the ending?

Step 2 – **Explanation level**: Defining the problem or the cause of the conflict

- What fact or event causes the conflict in the story?
- Why is Margot different from the other children on Venus?
- Why do they dislike her?
- How did Margot feel when she emerged from the closet?
- How did her classmates react towards her?

Step 3 – **Transition level**: From the story to the students' lives and their feelings about the issue

- What are your feelings about Margot?
- What are your feelings towards the children in the classroom and the oppressiveness of the rain outside?

- Have you ever heard of the same kind of treatment that Margot received happen in another setting, for instance, in your school or community?
- Have you ever had a similar experience? Have you ever felt different, as if you didn't fit into a particular situation?
- How did you feel about it?
- How did you behave? Did you try to overcome the feeling of embarrassment?
- What was it like to be considered 'different'?
- Did you receive support from anybody to lessen the effect of prejudice?
- Did you cope successfully with this issue?

Step 4 – Projection level: From the students' individual experiences to a larger social or cultural perspective

- Why do problems like this exist? Why are some people cruel and discriminatory towards other people?
- Why are there so many victims of racial prejudice, religious prejudice, social class prejudice or any other type of prejudice in our present-day society?

Step 5 – Action level: Discussing alternatives and solutions

- What can you do to eradicate this problem? What collective actions can we take?
- What new perspectives on the issue of discrimination can ameliorate it?
- How can we reduce or lessen the effect of prejudice in our society?
- What is Ray Bradbury telling us about prejudice? Is he saying it effectively?
- Is fiction a good way to make the kind of statements that he is making? Why?

APPENDIX 4: Sample excerpts from student autobiographical pieces 11*Drop the Checklist!*

When you are too picky to find a partner and look for a mate on the basis of a long checklist, you might end up with... just a checklist! This is exactly what happened to me about two years ago while I was enjoying my 'bachelor' life. At that time, I was coming out of a break-up from a long-lasting relationship with a very special girl whom I got to love quite deeply. She was special in many ways, she had an interesting strong personality and she had a rather 'messy' life as well. The problem was that not only had I idealised this girl but also my relationship with her, despite the fact that she made me suffer quite a bit.

Every weekend I met someone new either at school or when I went out with friends. One evening I got the chance to talk to this 'I'll-be-a-good-girlfriend' and eventually date her. I got to know about her likes and dislikes, her ideas, wishes, etc. In short, I got to know her better. But after a while, I lost my interest in this person. And then the whole sequence would repeat, over and over again...

It wasn't after quite a long time that I realized what I was unconsciously doing. My frame of mind at that time was expecting the same type of relation that I had had with my ex-girlfriend from every girl I spent some time with. I even expected the same likes and dislikes! I missed our jokes and our fooling around!

The time when I actually took the blindfold off my eyes came along when I met my present girlfriend. She is a sweet, loving, patient and beautiful person. She's really good-looking, but it is her inside that shines the most. The moment she burst into my life I realized that I had to drop my checklist, otherwise, I would lose her and, as a consequence, I would have missed one of the most wonderful experiences in my life so far. (Paulo)

The Intruder

When I was twelve, I arrived home from school at midday, as usual. After saying hello to my mother, she broke a piece of news that changed my life for ever. "You are going to have a sister or brother. I am pregnant", she said.

I remember that I stared at her in astonishment without being able to utter a single word. I could not believe my ears! I was a twelve-year-old girl and had spent my whole life as an only child enjoying the love of my parents and now, an intruder would appear to make my life miserable. I left the room crying and shouting, locked my room door and jumped on the bed punching the cushions on it.

¹¹ The students' lexical and conceptual choices have been kept to reproduce the authors' voices. Minimal editorial revision has been done in the area of collocation, verb form or verb tense. All student samples are used with permission.

After I had calmed down, I decided to do everything at reach to prevent the 'little thing' from modifying my perfect life. I would not let the baby take away all the things that were mine: my relatives' love, my place in our home, my cherished dolls and toys... I was determined to fight!

The first stage of my plan was to wait until the baby was born. In the meantime, I would behave extraordinarily well so as to make my parents love ME more. Once the baby was born, my revenge plan would really start. The second stage would be to make her/him feel as miserable as I had felt when I got the news and to make her/him wish not to have been born at all.

Nine months went by sooner than expected and one evening, I found myself at the waiting room of the hospital. My dear father was by my side. After waiting for four unbearable hours, my mother gave birth to the intruder. I could not help feeling jealous when my father hugged the little baby with the happiest expression I had ever seen on his face. I started to sob and then I burst into tears. At that moment, my father put the baby in my arms and told me that she was my little sister. He added that from then onwards I would have to take care of her as if she were a little treasure because she would probably take me as a role model. I had to do my best in order not to let her down!

I cannot explain the joy I felt the moment the little baby opened her eyes and made a gesture as if smiling at me. She was such a sweet little thing that I realized I could not hate her. I immediately understood that she would not take my parents' love from me; on the contrary, I realized that, from that moment onwards, I would have another person to love and to share my life with. (Soledad)

The Chance

When I got to know that the person I admired and loved the most was leaving us for good, I felt that the world was coming down to pieces. My father was the one who broke the news to me, just as I arrived home after a gym class about three years ago. When he told me that he had received a phone call from the hospital announcing that my grandmother was about to die, I panicked. Although she had been in hospital for nearly a month and her death was quite predictable, I still hoped she would recover. Confronted with this reality, the first thing I did was drive up to the clinic so as to have a chance to, at least, say goodbye.

When I went into the room, I had the feeling that she had been waiting for me. I took a deep breath and sat next to her bed. She seemed to be sleeping, with closed eyes and a sad expression on her face. I was holding one of her hands when a miraculous thing happened: she opened her big grey eyes and smiled. She kept on looking at me in silence and I felt an internal peace inside. We didn't say a thing, just looked at each other for a couple of minutes, and then she passed away.

I have the conviction that she is next to me every day and I am grateful to have had the chance to be with her for a little while before she departed. This was my first encounter with death and, in fact, it was not as traumatic as I had expected. I will always keep my granny's smile in my heart... (Nora)

A Hurricane of Pessimism

During the last three months, I have been thinking about my future as an English translator. Every time I try to get an image of myself working happily, everything turns black... I suspect that the crucial fact which has caused this negative impact on my train of thought has been the last meeting I had with my tutor.

From that day on, pessimism has invaded my mind with an immense power. For instance, I wonder how I will explore those literary texts in the target language if I cannot even cope with them in my mother tongue. Apart from this, as it was said that the Internet would be our closest ally, I will have to make a great effort and start surfing the net. I hate technology! From where I stand, it is rather tedious to spend hours glued to a computer looking for information. To make matters worse, it was also highlighted that translators' job opportunities are much fewer than teachers'. As a result, many of us – including myself??? – would have to face the challenge of “playing teachers”. The picture that immediately came to mind wasn't that gratifying, actually. If I had to establish eye contact with such a sea of faces while giving a lesson, I would probably faint!!!

I still remember the last phrase at the meeting due to the fact that it made me get on my nerves. “You can join the teachers' course of studies if you are not satisfied with the translation classes”, the tutor said. What a disappointing comment! If only I had had the courage to respond to her!

Needless to say, this is something temporary (I hope!). I am positive this hurricane of pessimism will disappear as soon as I get rid of all my exams... If it doesn't, there will be many more entries on this topic in my personal journal! (Angélica)

The Real Me

There was a period of time in my childhood when it was not easy for me to relate to people, especially children my own age. Approximately from age nine to thirteen I was quite plump and, as everybody knows, children are cruel towards those peers who are somewhat 'different' from the standard child. I remember myself as a funny girl, talkative, eager to have friends and be accepted by others, with lots of ideas to share and things to say. But because of my 'extra kilograms' I had to put up with all kind of unpleasant jokes. I liked to make friends with boys, but they called me names all the time. They said that I was 'their little fatty buddy', that I couldn't run as fast as they did, and they even told me hurtful things which I won't reproduce here. My relationship with girls was not much better. They used to compare

themselves all the time, talking about clothes and make-up that I didn't wear. They even exchanged sweaters and pants for parties, but I couldn't do so and all I could think of was that I was 'the ugly duckling', the piece that didn't fit the puzzle. Yes, I was different and I felt rejected because of that...

I now realize that, luckily, I had real friends – very few – who helped me to overcome my sad situation because they made me feel that they accepted me no matter my appearance and looks. Anyway, I gradually became a shy person and on many occasions I found myself hiding the 'real me' because I felt I wasn't loved by others. I thought that something was wrong with me and though I had a nice childhood, those are my worst memories.

With the passing of time things got better as I grew up. I lost weight and I realized that boys treated me with respect. Although I regained confidence, I have never shown myself again as openly as I used to when I was younger. I can only open up in a very comfortable environment when I am surrounded by people who love me and I love. Of course I understand that it is impossible to be loved by everybody, just as it is impossible to love all those people around us, but it has taken me quite a while to build up a strong spirit to fight for acceptance and always remember that there are people who will support you in spite of your 'outer' looks. If they love you, it is because they got to know your soul. And that is what matters the most...
(Ailín)

APPENDIX 5: Samples from Journal Entries written by the students¹⁴¹⁵

Journal Entry 3

My favourite story so far

[...] What impressed me the most about *Like People First* is its moral: 'Don't judge people if you don't know them.' I think this story deals with tolerance and that the person who learns to be open to differences will have more opportunities in life. I will re-read it every now and then because we run the risk of discriminating or being discriminated against every day in the real world. [...] Personally, I consider that behaving or looking differently is not a good reason to be looked down or set apart. Needless to say, human beings are the ones who can make discrimination disappear by accepting others. [...] Finally, I would like to point out that the author of this narrative began to see the world with different eyes when he started to listen to people. [...] We certainly have to accept others as they are and treat them the way we would like to be treated! (Sandra)

Journal Entry 5

What is your opinion on the Chicken Soup bunch of stories?

I enjoyed reading the first-person narratives from Chicken Soup. To be honest, the only plot I would describe as unbelievable is the one from *My Most Embarrassing Moment*, but I have to take into account that people who live in the USA have a different culture from ours. Obviously, each country has its own sets of beliefs! In addition, I know the unpleasant jokes those teenagers played on their teacher was an episode the author has chosen to show 'the power of forgiveness.' By the way, I adore the reflections that we generated after each reading and I find them very useful to enrich our knowledge as regards the vocabulary and the culture of people who live in another country. Most of the words and phrases are related to feelings which are not easy to express. The only problem is that their assimilation takes time, as a result, I haven't yet been able to incorporate all the new expressions into my oral and written production. As you can see, I am satisfied with these texts and I will be grateful to read many others. All in all, my objective is to learn the English language as thoroughly as possible, so any other coherent project like this will be welcomed! (Virginia)

Journal Entry 7

Have you ever gone through an identity crisis?

Lately I've realized I have a big problem, which is related to an abstract but very important aspect of life. The problem is that I don't know how to define my personality. In

¹² The samples reproduced here have minimal editorial revision in order to maintain the students' ideas and organizational design.

other words, I don't if I am a secure boy, a very shy one, a merciful one, a young man who is interested in nothing, a man with social commitments, an outstanding person...

Nowadays, it is very hard if you don't fit into the system, or if you don't fit with the 'regular' pattern, and this makes you feel a weird person because you 'feel' different. I think that a person cannot be classified or defined as X or Y, because the way in which we behave depends on the circumstances we live. We have to take into account that our lives depend on our personality and, why not, on our attitude when dealing with problems or unexpected situations. I think that our personality will open some doors and close some others, so to speak, and that is why I am worried. Would you say that we could refer to personality as a general framework, which adapts to different situations? If so, can we say that in life there are circumstances that call for perseverance and hard work, and others that call for honesty and sincerity, for example? This is a very thorny question to deal with, isn't it? (Javier)