

Learning English as a second language by means of the discussion of social issues: traveling far beyond traditional techniques

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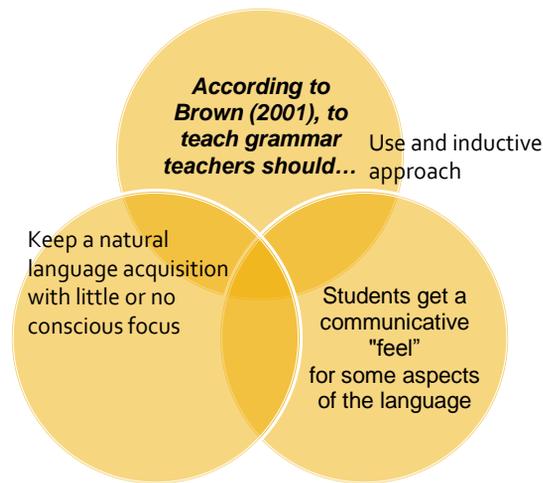
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Purpose of this presentation

- This presentation describes not only important thoughts and theories on the use of social issues in the L2 classroom , but also the transformative learning experiences of a group of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers who attended a professional development conference (Outreach at UPR Bayamón) aimed at fostering classroom discussions in the context of social issues.

Difficult times need challenging techniques

- According to Brown(2001, p.363), “appropriate grammar focusing techniques...
- are embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts...
- [and they] are as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible”.



Inductive Reasoning and English as a Second Language

- “Inductive reasoning moves from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories.” (Burney, 2008)
- Starting with simple things students know, we can make our students understand and acquire the language. One of the things they know is the terrible social situations we are living lately around the world, but specially in our country.

Narration: One of the oldest and more common and interesting ways of communicating



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The Bull

- With a just-awakened look of expectation and mischievous planning, the girl opened slowly the creaking door that led to the street in order not to awaken her family. At that early time in the morning they all slept unconcerned, embraced by the arms of that lazy and warm Saturday. Just in front of her house, the house of the Encarnación family seemed to have people who were already awakened. Olga could smell from afar, the coffee that most surely, her godmother, Elisa, was making. She could also hear Delia's husky voice while talking to her sister Elisa.

How does society issues discussions transform the ESL classroom?

- "Holding discussions of what is actually happening in society means transforming teaching practices and increasing an understanding of pedagogical practices and the complex world of L2 teaching and learning" (Sostre, Rosario and Pizarro, 2008).

One activity could be an event of national interest



ESL teachers can make good use of many situations that arouse opinion

- Inter American University at Barranquitas
 - Department of Education, Social Sciences and Humanistic Studies
 - English Program
 - GEEN 1103
- Introduction to Writing Process
- I-Brainstorming
- Think about the twins that disappear from their house. Identify three (3) different topics that you could use to write about this event:
- A-Possible Topics. Example: Crime in Puerto Rico; danger in the roads of Puerto Rico, relation between adopted children and their adopted parents etc. etc.
 - 1-
 - 2-
 - 3-
 -

How can these topics help our students not only to speak or read, but also to write in English?

- To put it in the words of those teachers who attended the Bayamón workshop , they said:
- *These discussions are the "right moment" to start the writing process because students reflect, organize thoughts, and practice English orally; discussing issues before putting those ideas in writing makes students think, and develop a better understanding of everyday problems.*

Why social issues?

- Due to the way our times have changed and evolved, it is important to integrate troubling social issues together with the study of language and literature and to make it the subject of discussion as well as other language activities. Creating a learned individual requires , according to Ortega y Gasset, a person who "...has acquired some idea about the world and his/her surroundings" (Ortiz, p. 79; translated by the presenter)

Why social issues?

- According to Dr. María Ortiz "...the primordial [mission]of superior education is to ...promote the knowledge of truth, to unveil, to dismithfy ...to offer alternatives, to teach students to be critics, to face the world, to solve problems..." According to Ortiz, Ortega y Gasset called these last thoughts, "virtues".

Why social issues?

- That's why, in addition to the increasing standardization and accountability, teachers must also take moments to include as part of their teaching practices, classroom discussions about social issues.

Discussion of controversial public issues and values

- “The essence of a healthy democracy is open dialogue about issues of public concern. An integral part of the training of young citizens, therefore, includes the discussion of controversial social, political, and economic policies.” (Hardwood, A. & Hann, C. , 1990)

Discussion of controversial public issues and values

Dark Scene

- Negligence or conspiracy to hide a murder? After the beating the young Vivian Rivera began a journey to certain death, because at no time came under the medical assistance needed. After 3 days she was taken to hospital and died some hours later. Even the death of this young man is a mystery because:
 - 1-Contradictions in the medical records.
 - 2-The beating was not recorded in the book of innovations from jail.
 - 3-Prison guards apparently did not hear or observe the events.
 - 4-Apparently there is information that remains hidden.
 -
 - These events are not completely clear. Causing distress in the relatives of Vivian and people ask: What happens Puerto Rico? I hope that this case is one that makes us consider the option reflect and overcome the pain through peace. In conclusion, we look to heaven and walk together to the collective good.
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Development of values by means of the discussion of social issues



Development of values by means of the discussion of social issues

■ Abuelita

- The woman **woke up** very early in the morning. She **got conscious** of life. Last night's dream had disappeared like ether and she sat in **amazement** on the bed; **sweating and trembling**. There she was, back to her reality; **sad and lonely** again; depressed. Slowly, she got out of her bed and walked out of the room **towards** the bathroom **down the hall**. A new day was about to start. What for? Many years ago the woman's husband **had died** and her children **had married**. She **had taken care** of some of her grandchildren for many years, but now, even they **were growing up** and they did not need an *abuelita* that **would take care** of their little things. Their parents **had been growing tired** of taking care of an old woman.

- Lately she **was becoming** even older and her way of being was **still rougher** than before. Yes, she had always been a very rough woman, who had suffered her family's **mock and mistreatment** and that had converted her into a very sarcastic and sometimes **mean** person, but... one thing was true; she had been a very dedicated mother and wife. Even as a mother and as a wife she had committed errors but...who wouldn't? Real life, different from a soap opera, was made out of many **mishaps**. As her **daughter used to say**: "Life was life" Yes, life was life...**hard** and cold, difficult and tricky.

The teachers themselves suggested how these themes might broaden students' perspectives

- *Form small groups and guide them to discuss how they feel and how these issues have affected them. Help them become aware of the conflicting life threatening realities that many students go through; have them create mind maps with the feelings and experiences discussed. Then, have them report back to the rest of the class.*

In the midst of these interesting and familiar issues, language might be used to discuss them by means of the usage of transitional phrases...

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| ■ For example | *Possibly |
| ■ Similarly | *Probably |
| ■ Naturally | *Especially |
| ■ Obviously | *Frequently |
| ■ As a consequence | *Occasionally |
| ■ As a result | *In other words |
| ■ For this reason | * Finally |
| ■ On the contrary | * To conclude |

In the midst of these interesting and familiar issues, language might be used to discuss them by means of the usage of vocabulary ...

■ **WHILE READING / LISTENING**

■ **GAP FILL:** Put the words into the gaps in the text.

■ The founder of the file-(1) _____ website megaupload.com has plead not guilty to (2) _____ of Internet piracy and money laundering. Kim Dotcom, aka Kim Schmitz, told a New Zealand court that authorities were doing their best to (3) _____ him as a dangerous criminal. His lawyer Paul Davison said: "Mr Dotcom emphatically (4) _____ any criminal misconduct or wrongdoing." Authorities in the USA want to (5) _____ Dotcom on charges of (6) _____ intellectual copyright by allowing millions of his site's users to (7) _____ download movies and songs. They say he made \$175 million by distributing copyrighted content. Megaupload's lawyer said his client simply offered an online (8) _____ service.

- *portray*
- *illegally*
- *extradite*
- *sharing*
- *storage*
- *charges*
- *denies*
- *abusing*

Combining the natural order of sentences in English, used in a natural way helps students to discuss issues ...

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Transitional + Nouns or subjects</i> ■ During the confusion, the count ■ As a consequence, the noisy carnival ■ At night, the horrible prison ■ The very interesting catacombs ■ Revenge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Verbs or actions+ objects</i> ■ escaped ■ was finished ■ stinks open its gates to bandits ■ destroys a person in a minute |
|---|--|

The qualitative study performed to PR teachers in the Bayamón area

- The participants were eight ESL teachers who attended an Outreach professional development conference at UPRB. During this one-day conference, participants engaged in multifaceted workshops concerning recent and effective teaching techniques used to foster discussions in the context of social issues.

The qualitative study performed to PR teachers in the Bayamón area

- "A qualitative analysis of the reflections suggests that ESL teachers experienced transformative learning, such as deepened perspectives, developed awareness, acquired a new understanding, and broadened perspectives for integrating classroom talk on social issues. The culture of the professional development conference transformed previous knowledge with the one acquired and the participants became aware that classroom discussions of social issues are a way to guide students to participate in a democracy." Sostre, Rosario & Pizarro

Some of the comments of the Bayamón workshop's participants

- *"...this workshop helped me for helping my students; discussions of social issues means more than talking."*
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Some of the comments of the Bayamón workshop 's participants

- *"Talking about social issues in their ESL classrooms will make their students become better human beings; discussing social issues is more than talking about top-story news, we can do something different and then use it in our classrooms".*

Techniques for presenting social issues in the ESI classroom

- The participants recalled that
- *The students bring up the latest news after the class has already started; the teacher introduces the topic before getting into the agenda for the day. When the topic is really important, they [students] do a class project. The projects consist of presentations telling the story of the headline news. These projects show that students did research, so they get points for presenting and creativity.*

Social issues can help students to start researching

- According to the teachers who attended the workshop: *Before students start mentioning topics, create the right moment through whole-group discussions; Use top-story news and guide students to reflect on what is actually happening in their communities. The topics can be found in the local newspapers, radio stations, television, on the internet, and perhaps students' experiences.*

Developed Awareness

- The teachers also discussed ways for learners to *become aware of issues; learn about the consequences; engage in becoming part of the solution.*

Development of new ideas

- As the teachers said, *Ok, I get it. It's more than just talking about the news; it means to know what students know, their opinions, and what they have to say about social issues; to learn about real-life problems that students might go through, [that] could affect them directly, and learn about something that is bothering them; to discover how they feel about these issues, especially their fears. Let's put together all ideas; do something different for our students.*

Acquire new understanding

- As the participants reflected on their classroom context, they understand that
- *talking about social issues does not mean to have a conversation about ethical understandings; Instead of talking about headline news, news around the world, the "right topics" are those happening in the classroom; obesity, unemployment, teenage parents, racism, discrimination, child abuse, teenage suicide, divorce, domestic violence, teen street gangs, and unethical use of technology.*

THE ESL classroom and international issues



THE ESL classroom and international issues

- Who are the Libyan rebels? U.S. tries to figure out
 - By [Laura Rozen](#)
- When a U.S. Air Force pilot ejected from his crashing F-15 Eagle fighter jet and landed in rebel-held eastern Libya overnight Tuesday, he soon found that he was in friendly hands.
- "He was a very nice guy," Libyan businessman Ibrahim Ismail [told Newsweek of the initially quite anxious American pilot](#). "He came to free the Libyan people." Rebel officials dispatched a doctor to attend to the pilot and presented him with a bouquet of flowers, according to Newsweek.
- But the U.S. government, now engaged in a fourth day of air strikes against Libyan regime military targets, does not know very much about the rebels who now see it as a friendly ally in their fight to overthrow Muammar Gadhafi.

Going beyond the mere discussion: creating future leaders, people who think

- Another step in the procedure, according to the teachers who participated in the workshop is:
- is to:
- *Guide students to analyze the consequences of issues; Some students can draw what they think can happen; Assign to each group a different means to learn about the consequences of issues, for example, a movie, a picture, and a youtube video- all based on true stories. Then, invite someone outside the school to talk to students about the consequences of the issues.*

Conclusion

- The transformative learning experiences moved participants a step further and generated a lesson plan grounded on transformative pedagogy where the goal is to practice speaking skills. The teaching technique includes addressing issues that students inside their classrooms might be experiencing, and then using these discussions as a prewriting phase. The approach suggested is to emotionally involve students to express their feelings about the issues, guide them to see the consequences, and critically think about a possible contribution to help solve the issue.

Conclusion

- As a conclusion, we dare to ask questions we , the authors of the article, would like to research about:
- What is the significance of implementing transformative pedagogy? Will ESL teachers be able to integrate the unit of study on social issues and students' democratic participation in their course curriculum?
- We expect there will be a transforming education in these years to come...we need to assess our students learning with a still fresher look and a fresher pedagogy that might help save our future generations..this might be one of these keys...

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