
Increasing critical thinking awareness through the use of task based learning approach *

*Gladis Leonor Arias Rodríguez***

*Eliana Edith Roberto Flórez****

*Adriana Maritza Rivera Barreto*****

ABSTRACT

Received: April 15, 2013

Evaluated: September 6, 2013

Accepted: September 26, 2013

This document contains the required theoretical support to develop a project whose objective is to know the effects of applying task based learning (TBL) workshops to scaffold critical thinking in IV levels of English at Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja. Critical thinking is a concept that has been developed through several years and which entails important skills to be developed. It is associated with reasoning, interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating information or situations to give true or possible assertions regarding a specific topic. Hence, this construct is proposed in order to develop critical thinking under the parameters of the TBL approach as a way to motivate collaborative and independent work in students.

Keywords: critical thinking, task based learning, collaborative work.

* El presente artículo expone una revisión crítica de la literatura sobre diversos temas, tales como task based learning, critical thinking and collaborative work.

** Magíster en Docencia de Idiomas por la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Candidata a Magister en Pedagogía por la Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja. Correo electrónico: garias@ustatunja.edu.co

*** Magíster en Docencia de Idiomas por la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Correo electrónico: eroberto@ustatunja.edu.co

**** Magíster en Didáctica del Inglés con énfasis en Ambientes de Aprendizaje Autónomo por la Universidad de La Sabana. Correo electrónico: arivera@ustatunja.edu.co

Incremento del pensamiento crítico a través del enfoque de aprendizaje basado en tareas

RESUMEN

Este documento contiene los soportes teóricos necesarios del desarrollo de un proyecto cuyo objetivo fue conocer los efectos de la aplicación de talleres enfocados en el aprendizaje basado en tareas, a fin de promover el pensamiento crítico en estudiantes de cuarto nivel de inglés, en la Universidad Santo Tomás, Tunja. El pensamiento crítico es un concepto que ha sido trabajado por varios años e implica el desarrollo de importantes habilidades. Está asociado con el razonamiento, la interpretación, el análisis y la evaluación de información o situaciones, para dar verdaderas o posibles afirmaciones en lo concerniente a un tema específico. Por tanto, este concepto se propone con el fin de promover el pensamiento crítico a partir de parámetros relacionados con el enfoque de aprendizaje basado en tareas, que se constituye en una manera de motivar el trabajo colaborativo e independiente en los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: pensamiento crítico, aprendizaje basado en tareas, trabajo colaborativo.

Recibido: 15 de abril de 2013

Evaluated: 6 de septiembre de 2013

Aceptado: 26 de septiembre de 2013

Incremento do pensamento crítico através da abordagem de aprendizagem baseada em tarefas

Recebido: 15 de abril de 2013
Avaliado: 06 de setembro de 2013
Aceito: 26 setembro 2013

RESUMO

Este documento contém os suportes teóricos necessários ao desenvolvimento de um projeto cujo objetivo foi determinar os efeitos da implementação de palestras voltadas para a aprendizagem baseada em tarefas, com o fim de promover o pensamento crítico nos alunos do quarto nível de Inglês, na Universidade de Santo Tomás, Tunja. O pensamento crítico é um conceito que tem sido trabalhado há vários anos e envolve o desenvolvimento de habilidades importantes. El está associado com o raciocínio, a interpretação, a análise e a avaliação de informações ou situações, para dar verdadeiras ou possíveis declarações ao respeito de um tema específico. Portanto, propõe-se este conceito a fim de promover o pensamento crítico com base em parâmetros relacionados com o foco da aprendizagem baseada em tarefas, que se constitui numa forma de incentivar o trabalho colaborativo e independente nos estudantes.

Palavras-chave: pensamento crítico, aprendizagem baseada em tarefas, o trabalho colaborativo.

RATIONAL

Currently, the education in Colombia has faced different changes, and one of the last transformations has been in the university contexts; likewise, Santo Tomás University has been the search of academic quality and excellence. Based on that, teachers need to design, implement and evaluate the curriculum with innovations that produce new expectations regarding pedagogical practices. This is why this project is going to be carried out by a group of English teachers, trying to implement the development of several workshops centered on the application of critical thinking activities and through TBL approach, in order to get outcomes about their incidences in the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Additionally, the researchers aim at sharing insights that may serve to guide educators in this university towards the construction of improved learning environments.

The researchers have also had the opportunity to identify the tendency to focus the teaching of English just as a mechanization of linguistic structures, and for that reason, this project attempts to show another perspective because the role of language should not include just language features but also, encourages learners to reflect on current concerns and engage them in mental representations of the world.

Considering the need to make meaningful changes in the teaching process of English, some researchers at Santo Tomás University, Tunja, decided to present a new proposal that aims at knowing the effects of applying TBL workshops to scaffold critical thinking in English classes. As a results, not only

students can get benefits from the process, but also teachers and the university, because it might help the “tomasina” community to improve their knowledge in terms of language and engage them in higher critical thinking activities.

Consequently, we stated the main question: What might be the effects of applying TBL workshops to scaffold critical thinking in an English course? Besides, we take into account the following constructs to support the project: task based learning, critical thinking, critical thinking skills, and collaborative work.

Task based learning (TBL)

The Language Department at Santo Tomás University aims at bringing students the chance to learn English with a communicative approach. Thus, TBL is one of the approaches that deals with the different tasks students perform as protagonists of their own learning process in order to share their thoughts critically and freely. Hence, the learning process is seen as set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to the English program; about it, Nunan (1991, p. 279) proposes five characteristics which are meaningful for the development of this project:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts (teaching materials) into the learning situation.

3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Having in mind that our goal is to know the effects of applying TBL workshops to scaffold critical thinking, thus, it makes us think in the work of real situation through communicative activities that make students improve their English use; about it, Willis & Willis (2007) remark that the main advantages of TBL are that language is used for a genuine purpose meaning that real communication should take place, and that at the stage where the learners are preparing their report for the whole class, they are forced to consider language form in general rather than concentrating on a single form. Besides, TBL helps students face situations where they have to use the language as a tool to develop specific tasks. Thus, students have the advantage to practice their language skills according to their current level, and at the same time they improve their language through its use or as a necessity.

At the same time, Willis (1996) asserts that task based approach involves meaningful activities with a specific target. She also argues that task development needs to be focused on giving instructions in order to provide students opportunities to express their opinions in a free way. Furthermore, TBL

provides students personal experiences with the foreign language where the teachers also play an important role, because they have the responsibility to motivate and check the experimenting task activities which is very crucial for the success of TBL. Therefore, the teacher must help students solve questions about language use.

Based on Willis (1996), TBL focuses on three stages. The first one is the *pre-task* where the teacher assigns a topic or an activity in order to be developed, and both, students and teachers choose among a group of options how to work on the given assignment. The second stage is named *task cycles* which includes three sub stages: *task, planning and report*; these mechanisms are the basis of a lesson in order to promote in students inquires to think about and, this way to explore and share their own world's thoughts and perspectives, bearing in mind that their life experiences are different. Then, when students carry out the assigned task, they prepare a written or oral report which is called by Willis (1996) "the natural conclusion of the task cycle", which shows the process students followed and what they achieved throughout the task. Finally, the third is *language focus*, which is composed of analysis and practice. Analysis, in the sense of giving students spaces to think about the introduced language pattern, to be used during the time devoted for the lesson; and practice, taken as a fact of language use repetition emerged through the development of the lesson.

Another important thing at the end of the different stages is evaluation, because it is assumed that after the cycle is finished, the students must be conscious about their own

learning process. However, there are two parts who are involved in the TBL: the first part is the students who carry out the different activities, and on the other hand, the teachers who make students think in which just happened. Hence, if the teacher does not permit students analyze the result of the activities, the work is not useful.

Additionally, based on the stages proposed by Willis et al. (1996) above, TBL approach can be understood as a structured methodology in which students are able to learn successfully when teachers give them the chance to mix academic activities with their real life duties. Besides, learners can find and select their best learning styles, because TBL always provides a variety of dynamic activities. Moreover, when English teachers take advantages of TBL approach through the development of several tasks within the classroom and learners use these tasks in a foreign language, students' motivation increase and the final outcomes are positive.

Further, Willis et al. (1996) frames, learners require different interaction features that let them focus their attention on themselves and on the topics to be worked than on the professor. It means that TBL approach is able to satisfy different students' needs and help them to become active participants in each developed task. Besides, TBL allows student to achieve their academic goals and notice how they can develop tasks with language with meaningful purposes, because the students become the center of the class, they feel free to use grammar topics and vocabulary they need or they want after the teacher presents grammar in the pre-task section.

Teachers usually do different activities to improve grammar, because this is the way to improve English language use. Hence, TBL activities also help to implement strategies that motivate students improve it, as it is concluded in Esfandiari's research say:

Therefore, they have improved their knowledge of grammar to a larger extent than the experimental group, and as a result of that, they have done slightly better in this part because there was a deeper focus on grammar in their sessions. (2012, p. 49)

Finally, as it states above, TBL gives enough tools to develop critical thinking in a coherent and useful form; thus, students are going to work with activities that motivate their own leaning in the use of English and solve problems of daily life. Teachers and researchers can become critical thinkers through TBL approach on their classroom behavior, methodologies, materials, activities, and they can also improve their weaknesses and increase their strengths on their professional practices.

CRITICAL THINKING

Human beings are capable of interpreting certain issues in many different ways what might depend on the background they have about a specific topic; some analyze facts or situation with a deep understanding of the theme, while many others give a single and similar interpretation of an issue without making an effort of evaluating the own ideas. To validate the previous point, Dewey (1909), cited by Fisher (2001), perceived critical thinking as an active process,

stating that one thinks ideas through oneself, raise questions oneself, find relevant information oneself, among others; while in an passive process non-critical thinkers take a simplistic view of the world. Based on this claim, in the field of education most of the teachers strive hard to lead learners towards a high thinking process, where they can be able to consider several variables to draw high quality ideas and in that way, prepare them for their future given that they will have to face many circumstances which crucial decisions will have to be made.

Based on Paul & Elder (2006), our thinking is biased and distorted; for that reason, to cultivate critical thinking it is necessary to raise and formulate clearly and specifically questions and problems, gain relevant information to grasp main ideas in order to interpret them effectively to obtain well reasoned conclusions and finally to communicate information effectively. Bearing in mind the above assertion, teachers need to provide a context, data and many updated sources which contribute to the student's learning process to have them understand different opinions, analyze view points to get as an outcome a positive discernment of a given topic which can be evidenced through his/her performance; then, our duty as educators is to keep promoting critical thinking among students, by providing opportunities and learning environments to make students ask, analyze, interpret and evaluate any kind of information into and outside the classroom to share new ideas and perspectives as stated by Kurland (2000). Definitely, students' background knowledge plays an elemental role to scaffold their learning what helps to enable critical thinking within many fields, though; after posing some inquires

a restating of ideas it is necessary to shape knowledge to provide logical arguments.

Nowadays, much of the thinking done in education concentrates on teaching students to analyze and therefore, understand assertions to build a reasonable argument or figure out answers, as mentioned previously. However, Harris (2012 stresses that there is another kind of thinking which focuses on inquiring new ideas, creating possibilities and exploring many right choices instead of one, what makes the process of thinking an active activity with a bunch of possibilities to involve students in classroom projects what may become in a reason to research, considering the schemes that can be created as a result of sharing multiple topics. For this reason, TBL approach can be considered a justification to promote critical thinking what involves a process of rethinking, rejecting old view points and considering new ones, and thus, start working with the adopted framework which allows a continuous process where both researchers and students follow each step to know how the process is running and what outcomes can be unveiled. Today, educators talk about using knowledge in authentic contexts what demand to set open-ended tasks, and thus the researchers of this proposal believe that under the umbrella of TBL and the communicative approach much work can be done, students can restate their thoughts after considering some comments or feedback that might take them to think critically to face real world situations.

Likewise, in words of Ennis (2004), "critical thinking means making reasoned judgments" what might be interpreted as having criterion and reckoning to judge the

quality of a given situation and bearing in mind it is not an easy task, educators need to be trained and prepared for supporting the own opinions and lead properly the thinking process to achieve the unique goal that is to make learners' arguments valid, relevant and logic. Accordingly, teachers as promoters of learning need to consider that critical thinking is a reflective process focused on finding multiple arguments; hence, the goal of incorporating critical thinking into the TBL approach is to grow individuals who worth knowledge, learning and creative process through the different cycles this offers, making the tasks significant to their lives. This way, individuals might start thinking by themselves recognizing the limits of their own reflections and the need to contribute a mutual understanding of social situations which are given under the parameters of the communicative approach too.

As well, to mingle critical thinking theory and the task based approach may bring meaningful contribution into the teaching practice given that working in cycles may expand ideas to strength a given work and it also gives the chance to reinforce and scaffold critical thinking skills. For instance, Willis (2006) mastered that task based approach is a purpose of familiarizing meaningful activities with a specific target, and at the same time she states that through the cycle of stages it is necessary to offer a proper guidance to facilitate likelihood in students' work with the aim of promoting learning spaces which provide limitless expression of ideas, what critical thinking pretends to foster. As a result, these two constructs can become an accurate balance for helping learners to work collaboratively where new ideas can be uttered and shared.

In conclusion, critical thinking cannot be consider just a process of ideas or knowledge, but also an ability to imagine or create something new, and an attitude to accept changes and make improvements, because as stated by Fisher (2002), cited by Harris (2012), every problem that has been solved can be solved again in a better way what might denote that depends on the deepness in which a view point is considered. As a final point, to work critical thinking in the classroom can bring many successful experiences, since finding multiple solutions that include interpreting and applying multiple criteria and developing self- regulation of the own thinking, offer personal growth and help learners to picture points from a wide range of perspectives and all of this can be developed with an appropriate planning of activities.

CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Currently, if educators start to inquire into learners' mind they might find a label that says tell me what you want me to know or may be an insatiable curiosity to absorb everything she/he hear or read. In view of that, education asks for a transformation in order to become the classroom an environment where learning is an exchange of knowledge and opinions are equally valid, given that learning occurs through practice or experience. Smith (2003) considers learning as a product where educators can expect an outcome and as a process of learning-consciously to see what happens when learning takes place. Therefore, due to the importance of promoting a meaningful learning and make a change in our students to tackle critical thinking skills turns out to be essential.

Based on Hughes & Lavery (2004), language is an important aspect to become critical thinkers, because thoughts are expressed by using language. With words, human beings express ideas, feelings, and emotions; hence, based on our thoughts, we create our own reality or copy other's ideas. Although, the objective is not to become cheaters but inventors of new knowledge, thus, teachers need to work hard to shape critical thinkers. Taking into account the previous claim, knowing how to use language in a given context is of high importance because through this, people can communicate any kind of message which can be delivered effectively or misunderstood; for that reason, people need to have clear the information to be delivered and select the proper words to avoid any kind of drawbacks. Hence, it is considered that for scaffolding critical thinking, it might be crucial initially to know what using language constitutes, what is relevant to the learner and design teaching based on questioning, problem solving, thinking and lastly, to develop content and build and enhance critical thinking skills.

Hughes, Lavery et al. (2004) mentioned three skills which are usually referred to critical thinking. Firstly, *interpretative skills* help to precise meaning and to learn how to interpret statements to make meaning clearer, what can be reinforced through class work activities and by using different material to blend them. Based on Hughes, Lavery et al. (2004), arguments might be confused in some situations because the meaning cannot be conveyed clearly, and then at this point is where thinking skills take place along with the interpretative skills which help to understand better a position; for that

reason researching and digging concepts or arguments is important for the learning process. When the message is expressed comprehensible and demonstrates the mastering of a given topic it is possible to identify the analysis the speaker does. Secondly, *verification skills* focused on determining the truth of a statement; then, to develop these skills it is essential the listener or receiver is informed about arguments that fail to meet the appropriate logical criteria. It is also important the listener or reader identify the credibility and accuracy of a statement; that is why teachers need to provide a wide range of reliable data about a theme to have students grasp knowledge and train learners to recognize valid and logic propositions. Thirdly, *reasoning skills* concentrate on decision-making process and refer to specific cognitive abilities as stated by Brockman & Russell (2009), what entails the need to become familiar with the different types of assessment by empowering the ability to infer a conclusion from one or multiple premises. Hence, people need to foster the capacity to learn good arguments from bad ones and know what to believe; in consequence, many work needs to be done regarding this point, because most of the times people's thinking process is biased what makes arguments weak.

On the other hand, Kharbach (2012) emphasizes that critical thinking skills are what teachers expect learners develop and when these skills are not grown, outstanding performance in their jobs cannot be identified; for that reason, an outstanding achievement cannot be expected if a proper input is not introduced and that is why, the adoption of the communicative approach grants learners' personal growth, because it asks

people to act and use language in real life situations. In consequence, Pithers & Soden (2000) also agree that the challenge educators face is preparing learners to their future and then these authors provide some ideas about how to embed six elements of critical appraisal in a unit.

To start, they advise to *clarify the goal of the thinking* what requires to analyze the problem to avoid students struggle to determine what they are asked to do; then, *grant available information* what seeks to ensure the use of a wide variety of sources of information to support an idea; next, *determining the validity of that information* what suggest to confirm that the sources provide a status; consequently, *formulating inferences from the information* to make sure students understand what the consult with a purpose in mind; subsequently, *determining the applicability of the information* to manage strategies which can help students know whether information is relevant; and lastly, *decision making in relation to the goal* to convey in a same purpose and make appropriate choices. Given the above skills, it is evident there is much work to do and rather than filling learners with knowledge that may not be pertinent now or in the future, educators need to be trained to provide them the skills to be flexible, to judge, manipulate and critique the knowledge they possess as Pithers & Soden, (2000) affirm.

To end with, according to Rusbult (2008) critical thinking involves identifying, evaluating, and constructing arguments what might not be an easy task but a need to train competent students. Therefore, the researchers are looking forward to helping students become competitive and critical thinkers in

order to share ideas and take into account an integral education based on knowledge and values and to provide learners with skills they might need to perform a specific task in the future as professional.

In conclusion, Scriven & Paul (2003) consider that there is always an opportunity to enhance our skills and abilities, and for that reason it is considered that through collaborative work and the task based approach students can scaffold critical thinking skills deciding what the most important in a course is, despite having in mind critical thinking activities will take more time to prepare. Thus, it is an arduous labor where teachers need to picture themselves as innovators in the class and have students think “out of a box” and put into practice the pedagogy and didactic necessary to the fulfillment of an assignment.

COLLABORATIVE WORK

This construct presents representative researches and teachers’ concepts about the implication to develop collaborative work in TBL, considering that it is one of the bases of this approach. Considering the state of the art related to collaborative work issue, it was found one study named “Collaborative project work to enhance critical thinking and academic writing in EFL wettings at Distrital University”, by Robayo (2008). The objective of this proposal was to identify the changes in students’ formal aspects of language when they develop critical thinking and academic writing through collaborative project work. Two main categories and five subcategories emerged from this proposal. The first main category, named

collaboration features, has two subcategories: *agree and disagree* and *external aid*; and the second main category, *understanding how to write*, has three subcategories: *move to completion*, *critical thinking trigger* and *mechanics*.

The *collaborative features* category helped to establish the relationships that arose between students while they were working together. The subcategories *agree and disagree* and *external aid* deal with the collaboration performed in class. The researcher observed how students enjoyed working collaboratively, even if some of them struggled to reach agreement on some aspects, such as vocabulary. For that reason, the subcategories *agree and disagree* emerged. The *external aid* subcategory describes the different resources the participants used in order to complete their writing tasks. Students had the chance to resolve their doubts and to answer their own questions. The second category, *understanding how to write*, describes the different features of how students communicated their opinions through language use, per se, and how they achieved great improvement in form and function in their written compositions. The subcategory *move to completion* was named because most students wrote essays in paragraphs and gave the main ideas and the supporting ideas, as well as their personal opinion about the selected topic. *Critical thinking trigger* explains how students respectfully expressed their feelings and insights, and how the writing process let them have a voice through written form. The final subcategory, *mechanics*, allowed the participants to improve greatly in punctuation and capitalization, and they also wrote more

complex sentences, using vocabulary and connectors to share their ideas.

This research is related to the current study to be developed in certain aspects; for instance, both projects are based on collaborative work and critical thinking. The participants in both projects are undergraduate students from private universities. The studies are different in the following aspects. First, the researchers in the study mentioned above enhanced critical thinking through collaborative project work. The participants are able to state their opinions in essays about the positive or negative aspects they might find on each topic.

On the other hand, TBL involves collaborative work as part of its process. This is a way to share knowledge and enrich the academic processes. Thus, teachers and students have the possibility to grow from their own perspectives, and experiences. For instance, when English teachers are working with students from different careers such as law, engineering, architecture, economic sciences, among others, it can be perceived easily the reciprocity between teachers and students in terms of learning.

Likewise, one of the most important contributions of collaborative work in education is the possibility to work in teams in order to solve problems. McGrath (2003) makes interesting contributions about it when stating that working in groups engage students to solve challenging problems which are authentic and can be immerse in the curriculum-based, moreover it contributes to develop interdisciplinary projects. Consequently, Beckman (1990) thinks that according to his own experience in teaching, students

who work in collaborative groups are more satisfied with their classes, because they have the possibility to point out their ideas and also to answer their own doubts.

Johnson, Johnson & Smith (1991) propose three general types of group work where collaborative work is presented: informal learning groups, formal learning groups, and study teams. *Informal learning groups* can be composed by two or three students, in any time of the class or for the homework, with the purpose to discuss a question, solve a problem or propose a question. *Formal learning groups* are created with specific tasks for example develop a project, prepare a paper or essay, write a report, do an experiment, etc. Students are concentrated to carry out the project until the end, and there are grades for these tasks. *Study teams* are long-term groups; they can expend one semester or years developing specific tasks or projects. This work has long processes and it is usually part of classes or subjects, and the members have to present periodic reports.

Collaborative work is not always easy to achieve, because many students do not have the habit to work in groups and they prefer to work individually. Fiechtner & Davis (1992) say about group work:

Many students have never worked in collaborative learning groups and may need practice in such skills as active and tolerant listening, helping one another in mastering content, giving and receiving constructive criticism, and managing disagreements. (p. 17)

Thus, if teachers guide students in this kind of work, there might be a lot of benefits they

can gain, but also, it is necessary to point out that individual work is another style of work, and it has its own strengths as concentration in specific tasks, there are not distractions, the person makes disposition of his/her time. However, individual workers can share their work with more people in order to receive feedback or criticism which is going to be useful to improve their work; at the same time, they can contribute to other people with their knowledge and work.

It is possible to have problems or discussions in group work, but teachers can assume the role of guiding the process and encourage students to participate in discussions actively, respecting the personal opinions. Cooper et al. (1990) state: "Research shows that students who work in groups develop an increase ability to solve problems and evidence greater understanding of the material". Therefore, the advantages of developing group work are evidenced in students who are able to investigate, participate, argument and in general develop their critical thinking in daily activities.

At the same time, collaborative work enhances students' competition, which is useful in terms or learning, because they are not only anxious to be better than their own partners, but also overcome themselves. Thus, the task base learning and critical thinking develops collaborative work in order to maximize learning, the activities are created to motivate students' group work, where they can support each other from their personal capacities.

When students work in a collaborative way, they can find common feelings, interests, and also differences, which facilitates them

to perform a higher intellectual level; however, they can question themselves in order to clarify their doubts. About it, Bruner (1985) agrees that cooperative learning methods improve problem-solving strategies because the students are confronted with different interpretations of the given situation. Hence, these processes aid students to internalize knowledge and also develop their capacity for solving problems.

Many studies related to collaborative work have shown its relevance and importance in education, which shows as the importance to include this type of activities in daily activities. Thus, Gokhale (1995) concludes in one of her studies: "The students had to go beyond mere statements of opinion by giving reasons for their judgments and reflecting upon the criteria employed in making these judgments" (p. 28). Hence, students develop the capacity to discuss with arguments, an important ability students need to perform in order to get criteria and leadership, characteristics needed to face these days.

Another aspect that Gokhale (1995) mentions in her investigation is the comfort students presented to reach material, because they helped each other and also the comprehension was better. Additionally, they felt relaxation in the moment to develop the different tasks and it was easier to carry out the solving-problem activities; moreover, an interesting aspect was the humor and reduction of stress in the group. It makes us think in all the advantages to include collaborative work in class work.

At the same time, collaborative work implies teachers with the aim to be motivators

of students' learning process, stimulating their thinking through real world problems; teachers do not transmit learning, they are facilitators and open mind to break paradigms of learning, where students are able to inquire for their own, in order to look for solutions or explanations according to their own interests and rhythm of work.

Based on our own experiences as language teachers, we can state that collaborative work allows to identify how the different group-work activities which are developed in academic context, help students to achieve specific work roles. We have observed that most students show a positive attitude during the development of several workshops and enjoy working in groups, because they can help each other and they have the chance to take positions on specific roles and conduct significant negotiation.

Besides, we can affirm that collaborative work allow students to exchange ideas among them spontaneously even if some of them participate more than others; in this case, each group of students from different academic programs are defined by specific characteristics according to their performance. For instance, all of the groups are interested in the academic activities with a positive attitude; some of them are more enthusiastic, others are relaxed, some groups enjoy working in group, but they are a little bit shy, because they consider that their level of English is not good enough.

Moreover, we have concluded the same opinions about the variability among the groups because all of them are heterogeneous. Most of the members attend to the different sessions to be developed and delivered tasks

timely. Some students achieve their activities, but they enjoy working in group a lot when they share jokes and some students are less sociable than others.

Further, we identify that all the groups from the different faculties assume several roles such as: leader, harmonizer, listener, among others. When people work together, they have to recognize the several group roles (Montecino & Williams, 2000). Each one of these roles emerged from the dynamic of the groups along the workshops propose by the teacher-researcher.

Leader is one of the first roll that is identified in all the groups. Montecino & Williams (2000) define this role as a person who is comfortable with assuming responsibility. These students (leaders) have initiative to develop the different activities suggest along the academic activities, tend to organize their classmates; they are responsible to submit the activities on time and help their partners to achieve the goals. For instance, when the learners are organized into groups, there is always a leader in the group who is in charge of generating ideas and performing as suggestive person. The leader is characterized as being skillful and possessing knowledge of the language.

Another role identify in the members of the groups is harmonizer which is defined as a person who tried to keep conflicts in check and focused on the task at hand. Moves conflict away from the personality perspective and towards the objectives (Montecino & Williams, 2000). This role emerges in the development of all the academic activities it is evidenced when students develop different activities such as the organization of

the information, when the participants do not know how to use the correct vocabulary and so on.

Another role that is identified is the listener. According to Montecino & Williams (2000), a listener person is someone who listens carefully each member's opinions and values his/her opinions. It is evidenced in students from several faculties, besides, they listen to their classmates all the time and they value their students' opinions during their academic process.

In conclusion, the roles that every one of the students assume are significant, because teachers guide learners in their academic process and the students become engaged and try to do their best even if they present weaknesses when they are learning English. Each one of the participants contributes meaningful ideas and information. Among the different academic activities linked with collaborative work emerge different kinds of roles from informal and spontaneous conversations, and these roles allow characterizing each participant and each team-work with specific features.

Finally, teachers who employ cooperative learning methods promote learning because students are trained in processing information about specific subjects, and at the same time, it is promoted learning and students relationships. Hence, it is important to identify the teachers' role in collaborative work. Roger et al. (1994) think about it: "The teacher acts as a facilitator/coach moving from group to group to monitor the learning process. The teacher also provides students with on-going feedback and assessment of the group's progress" (p. 51). It makes us value

the teachers' role in front of students as innovator of the educative process, looking for a new and interesting way to teach.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis and implementation of TBL in teaching English is a window to new prospects of education, especially for new generations, because it focuses students to develop their thinking and intelligence in daily situations; it also motivates team work as a way to solve problems.

TBL approach in English classes allows students to enhance them in the learning process and also improve their language performance. For instance, involving real life activities make language significant and students might learn a foreign language more spontaneously. The implementation of task based approach is an innovative framework that is going to help a group of students to perform a given task, which is going to become effectively in the development of their critical thinking and also language use.

To implement critical thinking theory inside the classroom brings positive outcomes given that it demands teachers to research different types of activities and review large scales of literature to raise competent learners with the purpose of helping them to give strong arguments and find a solution to a problem.

In the different fields of teaching, sometimes the concept of critical thinking might be misunderstood and therefore it is thought that to pose a simple question and carry out an activity. For that reason, it is of high

importance teachers train themselves and do research about the topic given that the activities planned, focused on critical thinking, present certain complexity in their development which become in a high impact in learners what helps to start promoting those skills that presently students need to possess with the purpose of execute a different task

Critical thinking development offers great classroom experiences not only for students but also for researchers, because they gain knowledge from each other and start building a personal view of the world with the help of a collaborative work and proper guidance.

In conclusion, when students are able to think in a critical way after implementing a series of workshops, they have the facility to gather knowledge, analyze it and generate new information what can be evidenced in an oral or written performance. Besides, they have the chance to think with open mind in the learning environments the teacher provides and share their thoughts successfully with others.

Collaborative work is a meaningful strategy in language teaching because when students work together, they help each other. Besides, participants feel supported by their partners and teachers when they make mistakes and recognize how important is to value every attempt students make when expressing their own ideas.

When students work in group, they have the opportunity to learn, to improve and to practice English through the development of the four communicative skills and increase

the interaction among participants. Additionally, this paper shows the compatibility between critical thinking and collaborative work where students can practice group discussions; hence, they learn how to respect their partners' thinking and as a way to grow up in a learning community. Collaborative work can be taken as a classroom technique which helps teachers and students to share ideas by generating a space for discussion.

References

- Beckman, M. (1990). Collaborative learning: preparation for the workplace and democracy. *College Teaching*, 38(4), 128-133.
- Bloomington, IN: National Writing across the Curriculum Conference
- Brockman, M. & Russell, S. (2009). Decision-making/reasoning skills. Retrieved from http://calscf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/content.cfm?content=decision_making
- Bruner, J. (1985). Vygotsky: An historical and conceptual perspective. *Culture, communication, and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*, 21-34. London: Cambridge University Press
- Cooper, J. et al. (1990). *Cooperative learning and college instruction*. Long Beach: Institute for Teaching and Learning, California State University.
- Ennis, R. (2004). A super-streamlined conception of critical thinking. Retrieved from <http://www.criticalthinking.net/SSConcCTApr3>
- Esfandiari, M. (2012). *Task Based Learning Applied*. University of United Kingdom, United kingdom: Jubilee Press Occasional Press. Retrieved from www.nottingham.ac.uk/education
- Fiechtner, S. B. & Davis, E. A. (1992). Why some groups fail: a survey of students' experiences with learning groups. University Park: National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Pennsylvania State University.
- sher, A. (2001). Critical thinking, an introduction. Retrieved from http://www.criticalreading.com/critical_thinking.htm
- Gokhale, A. (1995). Collaborative Learning enhances Critical thinking. *Journal of Technology education*. Vo 7, No 1. Retrieved from <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v7n1/gokhale.jte-v7n1.html>
- Fisher, A. (2001). Critical thinking an introduction. Retrieved on January, 2011 from http://www.criticalreading.com/critical_thinking.htm.
- Harris, R. (2012). Introduction to creative thinking. Retrieved from <http://www.virtualsalt.com/crebook1.htm>
- Hughes, W. & Lavery, J. (2004). *An introduction to the basic skills* (4th ed.). Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books?id=rot3obo0iroc&printsec=frontcover&dq=critical+thinking+skills&hl=es&ei=fz2ttev5httogafxzjuz&sa=x&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0ccwq6aewaqa#v=onepage&q&f
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T. & Smith, K. A. (1991). *Cooperative learning: increasing college faculty instructional productivity* (ASHE-FRIC\Higher Education, Report 4). Washington, D.C.: School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University.
- Johnson, R. T., Johnson, D. W. & Holubec, H. (1994). *Cooperative learning in the classroom*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Kharbach, M. (2012). Educational technology and mobile learning. Retrieved from <http://www.educatorstechnology.com/2012/07/a-quick-guide-to-21st-century-critical.html>
- Kurland, D. (2000). What is critical thinking? Retrieved on January 21st, 2010 from

- http://www.criticalreading.com/critical_thinking.htm.
- McGrath, D. (2003). Artifacts and understanding. *Learning & Leading with Technology*, 30(5), 22-27.
- Montecino, V. & Williams, A. (2000). Writing in and across new contexts.
- Nunan, D. (1991). Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(2), 279-295.
- Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2002). *Critical thinking. Tools for taking charge of your professional life*. Pearson Education Prentice hall.
- Pithers, R. T. & Soden, R. (2000). Critical thinking in education: A review. Retrieved from <http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/learning/for-academic-staff/curriculum-2012-resources/critical-thinking-skills>
- Robayo, A. (2008). Collaborative project work to enhance academic writing in EFL setting at Distrital University. Bogotá: Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas.
- Roger, T. (1994) *Cooperative Learning in the Classroom*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Rusbult, C. (2008). Critical thinking skills in education and life. Retrieved from <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/think/critical.htm#critical-thinkers>
- Scriven, M. & Richard, P. (2003). Working definition of critical thinking. Retrieved from: www.lonestar.texas.net/mseifert/crit2.html
- Smith, M. K. (2003). Learning theory: the encyclopedia of informal education. Retrieved from www.infed.org/biblio/b-learn.htm
- Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Malaysia: Longman.
- Willis, D. & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford University Press.