

Fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence Through Reading Authentic Literary Texts in an Advanced Colombian EFL Classroom: A Constructivist Perspective

Desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural mediante la lectura de textos literarios auténticos: una perspectiva constructivista

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This article describes an action research experience carried out in an advanced English as a foreign language classroom of the language program at a university in Bogotá, Colombia, in 2010. The study proposes the inclusion of authentic literary texts in the English as a foreign language classroom through the implementation of four constructivist approaches as a means to develop intercultural communicative competence. Data were collected to show how those approaches engaged learners to read authentic literary short stories, to negotiate meaning, and to develop intercultural competence. It demonstrates that integrating language and literature in English as a foreign language not only constitutes a communicative reading practice, but the opportunity to construct cultural knowledge through social interaction.

Key words: Authentic literary texts, constructivist model, dialogical approach, inquiry-based approach, intercultural communicative competence.

Este artículo describe una experiencia de investigación acción llevada a cabo en una clase de inglés avanzado del programa de lenguas de una universidad colombiana en Bogotá, en el año 2010. El estudio propone la inclusión de textos literarios auténticos en el contexto de inglés como lengua extranjera mediante la implementación de cuatro enfoques constructivistas como recurso para desarrollar la competencia comunicativa intercultural. Los datos recolectados demuestran cómo tales enfoques contribuyeron a que los estudiantes leyeran cuentos literarios auténticos, negociaran significado y desarrollaran su competencia intercultural. La integración del lenguaje y la literatura no solamente constituye una práctica de lectura comunicativa, sino la oportunidad de construir conocimiento cultural a través de la interacción social.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa intercultural, enfoque basado en preguntas, enfoque dialógico, modelo constructivista, textos literarios auténticos.

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Introduction

The development of intercultural communicative competence has become a central issue in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) over the last two decades. Teachers are becoming aware that one of the main goals of language teaching is to enable learners to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, several authors such as Lázár (2003) point out that despite the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference to Languages (CEF), the focus of language learning is still the study of grammatical and lexical competence. Byram (1997) and Haneda (2007) also explain that cultural competence has often been ignored in EFL because language teaching has been influenced by the study of grammatical forms.

Certainly, acquisition of grammar rules and language fluency is not enough to establish meaning negotiation and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, as indicated by Kramsch (2001), the main goal of second language learning should not only be effective communication, but the search for the understanding of cultural boundaries and the attempt to come to terms with those boundaries. Lázár (2003) claims intercultural communicative competence can actually be enhanced in EFL through different means such as speaking with members of a particular cultural background and using textbooks, media, documentaries, and movies. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in the EFL context learners have limited opportunities to speak with native English speakers. Hence, in many cases teachers can only use instructional materials such as songs, videos, movies and, very often, communicative textbooks in their classes.

Brown (2009) observes that, although communicative textbooks provide a wide range of readings with different topics, the variety of material is scarce because most textbooks mainly feature

magazine-style reading passages, missing out other types of genres such as poetry and short stories. In addition, there are still EFL textbooks lacking authentic language and containing a limited array of cultural information. Berardo (2006) states that the language in non-authentic texts often tends to be “artificial” and “unvaried” because many textbooks concentrate on forms that have to be taught, often containing a series of “false text indicators” and including perfectly formed sentences that very often do not read well. Likewise, Stryker and Leaver (1997) affirm that graded language textbooks often contain “artificial language” which does not provide students with models of how people really communicate in the foreign language. Such language lacks natural redundancy and multiple contextual cues for comprehension, and differs from the actual material EFL learners may encounter in real life.

It is also fair to recognize that textbooks include meaningful language activities suitable for their expected audiences and promote the development of the four language skills through communicative functions. What is important to clarify is that EFL learners should not entirely acquire language through textbooks, but also through the use of authentic texts. The implementation of authentic materials in the EFL classroom becomes, as Kramsch (2001) notes, a priority in order to enhance learners’ intercultural communicative competence. Teachers might reflect that, instead of giving importance to the learning of grammar rules through the use of non-authentic language, learners need to develop language knowledge and cultural awareness through more authentic materials. For this reason, the main goal of this research was to include authentic literary short stories in a class of *advanced English* based on the notion that literary texts provide the ideal means to help EFL learners develop *intercultural communicative competence*. In this sense, the following two questions guided this study:

- How do EFL learners develop intercultural communicative competence through the study of literary selections?
- Which teaching approaches might be useful to help EFL learners develop intercultural communicative competence through the study of literary selections?

Accordingly, four teaching approaches from the constructivist model, Inquiry-based approach, Dialogical approach, Transactional approach, and Content-based learning, were implemented for the study of literary texts in the EFL classroom. Clear descriptions of their implementation will be supported by a teaching intervention carried out in an EFL classroom at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN), Colombia, first term, 2010. These constructivist approaches will be addressed later in the article.

Theoretical Framework

This study is supported by three theoretical considerations which are explained as follows:

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Lázár (2003) defines intercultural communicative competence as an extension of communicative competence. While communicative competence refers to the speaker's ability to interpret messages and to negotiate meaning with other speakers within a particular speech community (Bachman, 1990; Savignon, 2001), intercultural communicative competence is conceived as the speaker's ability to interact effectively with people from other cultures that he/she recognizes as being different from his/ her own. It is understood as the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others.

As Byram (1997) observes that EFL instruction has given special importance to the study of

the linguistic and the discourse competences, he intends to recognize the cultural dimension that language naturally conveys. Byram (1997) explains that Hymes, the initiator of the notion of communicative competence, established the relationship between linguistic and socio-cultural competences as he conceived language as another form of tacit cultural knowledge through which speakers interpret social life. By citing Hymes, Byram's main goal is to restate the notion of communicative competence in EFL as intercultural communicative competence by pointing out that language teaching should guide learners to develop the ability to deal with their own cultural meanings as well as those from other cultural settings.

The notion of intercultural communicative competence necessarily involves the acquisition of both language competence and cultural competence. In this respect, Sihui (1996) affirms that language is an inseparable part of culture because the beliefs, ideas, and identities of a group of people are constructed and communicated through the use of language. That is why intercultural communicative competence should be understood as the ability to identify cultural issues that are necessarily expressed through real language in use. In this sense, Byram (1997) believes that authentic literary texts, which are essentially loaded with real language, offer EFL learners the opportunity to develop intercultural communicative competence, since not only people, but "documents" and "cultural products" created by a distinctive society help learners to know about and appreciate events, thoughts, and national memories of a culture.

Literary Texts as a Means to Develop Intercultural Communicative Competence

In general, all kinds of reading materials such as newspapers, magazines, and books are implicitly

loaded with diverse levels of cultural expression because, over all, they are the product of a particular community essentially depicting cultural content. Yet, it is important to point out that literary texts are considered difficult material to be assimilated and understood by EFL learners. Kramersch (2001) notes that teachers are hesitant to use literary texts in the language classroom because they are told they are only competent to teach conventional texts for their general interest and for their information value. However, it is vital to reconsider that literary texts in EFL are ideal materials to promote meaning negotiation and the access to cultural knowledge, as textbooks and other factual readings do. Kramersch (2001) suggests that EFL learners have to be exposed to different types of reading material, from conventional texts (textbooks, newspapers, and magazines), to literary texts because they offer learners the opportunity for the negotiation of meaning and the encounter with cultural representations.

Authors such as Carter (1996), McKay (2001), Amer (2003), and Savviduo (2004) have also stated that EFL learners have the opportunity to open their minds to cross-cultural experiences and to enhance their language learning process when they negotiate meaning during their interactions with authentic literary texts. Amer (2003) affirms that literature acts as a powerful agent to develop students' intercultural awareness while nurturing empathy and tolerance for diversity. The Common European Framework of References to Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) also points out the role played by literature in EFL as a potential means to develop language and interculturality: Imaginative and artistic uses of language are important both educationally and in their own right. Aesthetic activities of language may be productive, receptive, interactive or mediative. They include the production, reception, and the performance of

literary texts e.g. reading and writing texts (poetry, novel, short story, etc.) (p. 56).

If real intercultural communicative competence is the main goal to be achieved in second language learning, it is essential to consider the inclusion of well-selected literary texts, if possible, at all levels of instruction. After all, from a very early age in our own language, we are exposed to read or listen to different literary pieces such as folk tales, fairy tales, legends, fables, and other selections from children's literature, reflecting the important heritage of our own culture. Similarly, by selecting appropriate literary pieces, we might help EFL learners to become aware of diverse cultural expressions.

Criteria for the Selection of Literary Texts in EFL

Five American short stories were selected in order to help learners develop intercultural communicative competence during the pedagogical experience at UPN. Short stories are easy to read with EFL learners because they are usually brief compositions, mostly dealing with one single plot. Learners can read them in a short period of time and become motivated to hold class discussions. Also, short stories can prevent negative feelings of frustration and tiredness, as would happen if learners were required to read long novels.

The selections were characterized by being multicultural literary pieces rather than canonical works. This is because American literature today is crossing borders beyond the exclusively Anglo-American canon. Since the U.S. is gradually accepting that it is composed of the amalgamation of diverse cultural groups, its literature is becoming more inclusive and multicultural (Lauter, 2010). Almerico and Silverman (2008) define multicultural literature as the aesthetic expression of those groups that were outside the socio-political mainstream of the United States. As a result, the

term refers to African-American, Asian-American, Native-American, and Latino/a writers that have been accepted as members of the current pluralistic society of the U.S., and recognized as the new voices of the American literary heritage. For that matter, the five selections were “A Worn Path” written by Southern writer Eudora Welty, “Everyday Use,” written by African-American author Alice Walker, Jewish-American author Bernard Malamud’s “The First Seven Years,” and Latino writer Sandra Cisneros’s “Eleven”. Only one story from a canonical author was chosen, John Steinbeck’s “The Chrysanthemums,” since it deals with topics of discrimination, exclusion, and social injustice.

From the pedagogical point of view, multicultural literature aims at accomplishing several goals. First, it tries to expand students’ knowledge of the world. Second, it helps learners to understand and communicate cross-culturally with other communities. Third, it reduces the proliferation of prejudices, stereotypes, and racist attitudes, and fourth, it helps students appreciate aesthetic manifestations produced by authors from different cultural backgrounds. As can be seen, multicultural literature promotes the same goals of intercultural communicative competence.

The Socio-constructivist Pedagogical Model for the Teaching of Literature in EFL

The teaching of literature in the EFL classroom should not be understood as merely teaching the literary texts themselves. Literary texts should be studied through appropriate teaching approaches that might promote meaning negotiation and knowledge construction. The socio-constructivist approach to learning seems to be a salient model to encourage learners to read and discuss authentic literary texts. Socio-constructivism, proposed by Vygotsky (1978, p. 88), advocates knowledge as

being socially constructed, rather than received because “human nature presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.” Students construct knowledge in the socio-cultural environment in which they live and interact as they become the center of the learning process. Hence, learners are no longer conceived as passive receivers waiting for the teacher to “fill” their minds with information. On the contrary, learners are engaged in experiencing the world so that they construct their own knowledge within meaningful contexts, sometimes through trial and error, because making mistakes is a normal part of the learning process.

Scholnik and Kol (2006) explain that social constructivist approaches are becoming important in EFL because learners learn better when they discover and construct knowledge through a social process of communication with classmates, teachers, and other individuals of their cultural background. From this view, the socio-cultural theory becomes an excellent foundation for the teaching of multicultural literature in EFL because it facilitates discussions as learners acquire cultural knowledge, appreciate and understand literature while, at the same time, improve their language competence.

As a pedagogical model, constructivism proposes several teaching approaches which seem to meet the goal of teaching literature in EFL. The reason for using several approaches in the language classroom is, according to Schowalter (2003), because teachers need to be pragmatic and eclectic, using a variety of teaching strategies that might work in their daily teaching. Today, EFL teachers must take advantage of the diverse pedagogical theories available in order to meet the needs of different types of learners who often possess varied learning styles and learning paces. Hence, the following four teaching approaches belong to the

constructivist theory and share and meet similar pedagogical concerns:

Inquiry-based Approach

This approach values students' opinions in the classroom. Learners are engaged in a process of asking and answering questions to discuss ideas and share personal views based on the reading of literary texts or other materials. Gellis (2002) asserts that inquiry-based learning facilitates active learning, moving away from an approach built around lectures given by the instructor. It involves learners in critical exploration and in the construction of knowledge by a process of meaning negotiation. Inquiry-based learning is an important procedure that can be implemented in EFL when dealing with literary selections, since Gellis points out that it has been designed for students with limited expertise in literary criticism. It focuses on asking questions, allowing students to explore personal reactions and to address a more objective analysis of the texts being studied. This important characteristic matches the pedagogical necessities in EFL since learners, who do not have too much experience in literary analysis, can be motivated to express their opinions through guided questions.

Essentially, the inquiry-based approach has been used in U.S. classrooms while rarely used in EFL classrooms. It is because EFL has placed emphasis on the acquisition of grammatical competence and survival language. Then, it must be pointed out that by encouraging EFL learners to read and discuss literary texts through questions, different personal reflections on the stories read can be achieved. As Holden (2002) suggests, teachers should provide students with the means to reflect on and respond to questions. This approach can change a class from that of a teacher-centered lecture into one of a student-centered discussion.

Dialogic Approach

The dialogic approach to literature, proposed by Bakhtin (1984), is another constructivist pedagogical procedure that works when literature is studied in the language classroom. Kramersch (2001) proposes the application of the dialogical approach in EFL as an appropriate pedagogical procedure to promote the negotiation of meaning when learners are exposed to literary discourse. As Bakhtin (1984) states that literature should be appreciated through dialogue among the author, the literary work, and the readers, Kramersch (2001, p. 27) sees that "it is through dialogue with others, native and non-native speakers, that learners discover which ways of talking and thinking they share with others and which are unique to them". This approach is equally supported by other scholars interested in EFL literature (Amer, 2003; Maley, 2001; McKay, 2001, and McRae, 1996) in that they say that by interfacing language and literature, EFL learners are encouraged to negotiate meaning communicatively.

Transactional Approach

The transactional approach is proposed by Rosenblatt (1995) whose influence continues being adopted by many English teachers around the world. Amer (2003) explains that the transactional approach should be applied in the EFL setting because it conceives the reading process as a communicative interaction between the reader and the text. The reader relates his/her past experiences, previous knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions to the perspectives in the text, and constructs meaning, resulting in this transaction. Thus, meaning is not ready-made and predetermined. On the contrary, meaning is shaped by persons in dialogue with one another. Amer (2003, p. 68) cites Rosenblatt to argue that transactional processes should be the basis in language teaching today because the

teacher should accept “multiple interpretations” of a text rather than one “correct interpretation”.

One of the important contributions that Rosenblatt provides for the teaching of literature and that deserves attention in EFL is the humanistic approach to literature. Rosenblatt (1995) argues that literature deals with human life and reveals real human experience. The reader usually seeks knowledge of the world and craves for understanding the human condition in order to make his/her own life more comprehensible. In light of this assertion, one of the main concerns of English teachers should be the study of literature as a means of contributing to the humanization of individuals and to answering questions concerning human behavior and human circumstances. We cannot deny the fact that literature helps us to construct our understanding of reality and to perceive the world around us. This conception becomes a real need in the EFL context as learners are studying a foreign language not just for the sake of learning a language, but for understanding the world around them with a firm intercultural attitude. Literature can help them to become more culturally tolerant, respectful, and open-minded to diverse human expressions and cross-cultural experiences.

Content-based Approach

The last constructivist perspective in the teaching of literature in EFL is the content-based approach. Scholnik and Kol (2006) indicate that in the language classroom, content-based instruction helps students construct two kinds of knowledge simultaneously: content knowledge and knowledge of language, because materials are organized by contents which challenge learners to conscious reflection on the language. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that people learn a foreign language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information

and content rather than as an end in itself. In consequence, literature as content implies a process through which EFL learners acquire knowledge and information of the world in a meaningful and contextualized way. As stated by Stryker and Leaver (1997), the content-based model is becoming increasingly common in EFL because foreign languages are currently conceived as the medium through which subject matter is taught. It is intended to change the systematic study of grammar into a study of different topics and subjects such as science, math, culture, technology, arts, and literature. This approach represents a significant departure from the traditional grammar-oriented focus to the study of subject matter, since talking about topics and the realities of the world is more meaningful than just learning grammar rules.

Content-based instruction is also characterized by the use of authentic language and texts with no exception. Stryker and Leaver (1997) state that teachers should use well-selected authentic materials taken directly from the culture being studied, and make the texts accessible to the students at their level of proficiency.

As can be seen, the four approaches described above intend to be ideal support to incorporate literature into the EFL class because they share similar procedures and goals and are part of the constructivist theory which advocates a meaningful learning construction of knowledge through social interaction and mutual communication.

Context for the Research Study

This study was carried out in one advanced English class of the Modern Language Program at UPN in 2010. The program aims at preparing EFL learners who will eventually work as qualified English teachers in public and private schools in Colombia. The academic strengths and the pedagogical backgrounds to do such a job are highly

dependent upon the quality of preparation learners receive. For that reason, learners' focus of study is the language in all its varied manifestations, including the native language, foreign languages, literature, and those other systems used for the sake of communication and cognitive construction. This focus implies that learners have to be trained not only to learn English as a foreign language, but to be provided with the pedagogical tools to teach it. Consequently, during this action research, learners were expected to become aware of the teaching approaches used for the reading of literary texts, so that they might use them in their future teaching careers.

Participants

The participants involved in this study comprised a group of 23 *advanced* EFL learners, ages 18 to 22. In the previous English courses they had worked with the communicative English textbook *Top Notch* (Saslow & Ascher, 2005), which is a six-level course for international communication. Additionally, they had worked on class projects to study cultural content of the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. The contents they studied consisted of factual information including celebrations, food, tourist places, geography, and historical events. Participants had an appropriate language level, although they had several problems with grammar, pronunciation, and spelling due to the fact that they were still going through a learning process.

Pedagogical Procedure

As already stated, for the purpose of this research project, five multicultural literary pieces were included in an advanced English course as a means to help learners develop intercultural communicative competence. Each story was read and discussed in a period of one week, although some of them took two weeks.

Inquiry-based learning was used when learners read Steinbeck's short story "The Chrysanthemums". By following the principles of this approach, learners were given a study guide containing key questions to direct their reading process. Initially, they read the story at home by answering the questions individually during the reading process. After that, they came to class to speak about and compare their personal responses with their partners' responses (see questions sample, Appendix A).

The *dialogical approach* was applied when participants read the African-American short story "Everyday Use". Questions were not given in this case, as participants engaged in dialogue to express their responses to this literary piece. In doing so, they used language to interact with others, to express personal meanings, and to communicate relevant information orally with respect to the story. Learners were encouraged to work in groups and in whole class discussions to establish a dialogic conversation. The findings with respect to the development of intercultural communicative competence when reading this story will be discussed later.

The *transactional approach* was carried out during the reading of "Eleven," written by the Mexican-American writer, Sandra Cisneros. During this opportunity, learners related their personal experiences to the experience of the main character in the story. Learners not only identified with the character, but expressed their opinions about the education system, talked about their own experiences, and referred to harsh human incidents, an issue that will be discussed in the findings of this study.

The *content-based approach* took place when learners read the Jewish-American story, "The First Seven Years" and the African-American story "A Worn Path". This approach involved learners in the study and discussion of literary topics such as characters, conflicts, ideas, symbols, points of view,

and themes. Moreover, students were able to speak about history, geography, and culture, aspects which will be analyzed later in the findings as they relate to intercultural communicative competence development.

Research Method

Diagnosis

At the beginning of the project, a diagnosis phase took place. Learners were asked three main questions: 1. What do you know about intercultural communicative competence? 2. Have you ever read authentic literary texts in English in previous courses? 3. Are you familiar with the term American multicultural literature? For question one, learners affirmed they were not familiar with the term. For question two, learners answered they had never read authentic literary texts before. For question three, they said they were not familiar with that kind of literature.

As their answers were negative, learners were given a presentation to clarify these constructs, since one of the main goals of this experience was to help students become aware of the issues related to this study so that they could reflect critically on the application of those constructs in the course. Learners found these issues relevant for their learning process and for their future teaching profession. They mainly valued the notion of intercultural communicative competence as an interesting topic and as a factor they still needed to improve upon.

Data Collection Instruments

The data collected to answer the two posted questions guiding this study were gathered during class sessions and right after students had read and discussed each literary piece. Essentially, there were three data collection instruments.

Direct observations: Students were observed during the development of the pedagogical intervention to determine how they interacted with the constructivist approaches to the study of literary texts. Field notes were taken to obtain descriptive accounts of the different situations that happened in class (see Appendix B). Participants were aware of the notes taken.

In-depth interviewing: With their previous consent, students were interviewed and recorded individually on one occasion in order to collect data from their critical responses about the readings and the methodological procedures proposed. Each interview lasted five to eight minutes and students were assigned a fictitious name to protect their identity. This was a structured interview which consisted of asking learners three main questions: 1. What cultural knowledge have you acquired through the reading of authentic literary texts? 2. What was your experience of reading multicultural literary texts in this course? 3. Do you have something to criticize or point out about the methodological procedures used in this course? The recordings were transcribed directly into a computer file.

Journals: This kind of source allowed participants to produce reflective opinions related to the experience. Learners were required to write three journal entries during the pedagogical intervention, all of them anonymous entries.

Through a process of triangulation, data were compared and analyzed from the three data collection instruments in order to identify significant opinions, attitudes, and comments about the literary texts and the approaches applied. That is, participants' frequent opinions, actions, and procedures that were often present in the different data collection instruments in regard to the way they acquired intercultural knowledge and the teaching approaches they used were taken as salient data

to justify the inclusion of multicultural literature in EFL. For example, participants' comments about the inquiry-based approach were grouped as presented in Appendix C, which shows all the participants significantly favored questions to help them reflect and explore literary content.

Findings

This section presents the outcome resulting from the examination of the data collected, which essentially constitutes a qualitative analysis.

With respect to Inquiry-based Instruction

Asking EFL learners questions in advance before reading "The Chrysanthemums" was a useful teaching strategy as the questions led them to construct critical analysis. Field notes show that the questions enabled learners to engage in discussion-based classes in which almost all students contributed significantly to the negotiation of meaning when giving their interpretations of the story. Once students had individually answered the questions provided in the study guides, they participated in class because they had had time to think about and to explore the literary pieces more carefully and to be more prepared to speak in class.

Also, students' comments on their journals and interviews highly favored the inquiry-based process for the construction of knowledge. Some samples of learners' remarks in regard to the usefulness of the study guides are listed in Appendix C. From their comments, we can observe that they became aware of being able to focus their attention on the reading of the multicultural pieces in an easier and more directed way, were more conscientious to explore the short stories, and were more confident to participate in class discussion.

The inquiry-based approach provided reflective reading with which EFL learners were engaged

to answer questions in order to encourage interrogation of texts and to promote critical thinking. For example, the field notes show that in order to answer question number three on the study guide (see Appendix A), some learners concluded that Elisa and Henry were not a happy couple because Elisa was always enclosed in her garden planting chrysanthemums as a result of her husband's carelessness. For other students, the flowers she planted projected her necessity to be loved and valued. Others argued that the flowers represented her fragile and lonely life while other learners explained that the chrysanthemums represented a child she would like to have in order to stop feeling lonely.

Interestingly, through the application of the inquiry-based approach learners did not only enhance communicative competence, but simultaneously acquired intercultural knowledge. Based on the field notes, when reading Steinbeck's short story in particular, learners acquired geographical information such as the location of Salinas Valley, the place where the story takes place, historical references in regard to the causes and consequences of the American economic depression in the 1930s, and the author's biography. Additionally, learners were able to analyze gender issues such as women's submission to their husbands' chauvinistic attitudes, and to compare problems between American and Colombian marriages. In fact, from their journal entries, learners reflected and commented the following:

I found "The Chrysanthemums" a very interesting story because we spoke about the causes and consequences of the Great Depression in the United States. The story also made me understand Elisa's situation as a woman who lived at the time of the Great Depression. (Sandra)

I learned that the role of women in America in the past was similar to their role in the rest of the world. (Pablo)

These comments indicate that learners compared the submissive situation of women in the

U.S. with the situation of women in Colombia in the last century. With this in mind, learners developed intercultural communicative competence as they constructed knowledge of language in context and acquired significant intercultural information.

With Respect to the Dialogical Approach

From the field notes it was concluded that learners discussed in small groups and later as a whole class the cultural meaning of the story "Everyday Use". Specifically, learners interpreted the meaning of the quilts which, for them, represented African-American heritage. For instance, some learners discussed that one of the characters in the story, Dee, wanted to have the quilts hung on the wall because her conception of culture was based on the preservation of ancient objects deserving to be kept as decorative souvenirs or fashionable antiques, while for Dee's mother, the quilts represented the family traditions and should be used as everyday objects for Dee's sister Maggie's upcoming marriage.

During the discussion of the meaning of the quilts, other related issues also arose as learners started to argue who really deserved the quilts: whether Dee, the well-educated, independent, and pretty daughter who had left home for a long time and had denied her past; or Maggie, the shy, not good-looking, and helpful daughter who had stayed with her mama and had embraced her African-American traditions. Learners expressed their opinions and after discussion was held, they concluded that Maggie deserved the quilts once they had compared their views and learned from one another. Dialogic approach became an ideal means for communicative interaction and the construction of meaning during the reading process. Two students' remarks are the following:

I like this class very much because one is able to build knowledge with others. One is open to listen and to establish a negotiation of

ideas. For example, I can share what I think with what the others think, I can complement ideas, and I can extend my personal perspective about a topic. The class has a safe environment in relation to the fact that I can express my ideas and I am not going to be judged for that. (Sonia, from interview, May 12, 2011)

We try to express our own ideas. I mean, [we do not only] read the short stories based on theories, but we thought and tried to state and develop our own ideas, to defend what we think, and to show what we understand about the short stories. (Daniel, from interview, May 19, 2010)

In these remarks, Sonia and Daniel value the process of meaning negotiation with their classmates because this dialogic experience allowed them to complement and enrich their personal views as they compared their ideas about the literary texts with others' ideas. They also expressed that the class offered them a safe atmosphere of respect and acceptance in which they spoke freely and revealed their perceptions and literary reflections without feeling scared of making mistakes. Therefore, as what happened with inquiry-based learning, the use of the dialogic approach to literature not only promoted negotiation of meaning, but the understanding and construction of intercultural competence. Learners mainly discussed the cultural significance of the quilts and were able to identify and understand cultural traditions and beliefs presented in the story. They had the opportunity to develop intercultural communicative competence by means of a constructivist approach as they explored and reflected on the events of the story through dialogic interaction.

With Respect to the Transactional Approach

It was observed that EFL learners related the short story "Eleven" to their own personal experiences. The story is about a Mexican-American girl who is scolded on her eleventh birthday by her

American teacher because she does not want to wear a sweater the teacher thinks belongs to the girl. Thus, two students who were leading the discussion invited their classmates to remember an incident at school when they had an unjust experience with a teacher. Surprisingly, most learners had had a bad experience with a repressive teacher so they started to relate their personal incidents to the one in the story. This first response was the activation to talk about issues on repression at school, humiliating attitudes, a sense of inferiority and of identity, important topics treated in the story. This activity also led to a discussion of issues related to respectful relationships among teachers and students. Implicitly, learners also reflected in their journals on intercultural attitudes, including the ability to respect others, the importance of being tolerant, and the need to become open-minded to other views and beliefs:

We were allowed to find and express our own interpretations, we connected personally to the text, and we were free to manipulate the text as we liked it. The teacher didn't impose what we had to do, he rather facilitated with the means to construct our learning. (Ana, from journals)

I've learned about Chicano literature when reading "Eleven." I've also learned about Chicanos' economic situation in the U.S. and their problems of discrimination and immigration. (Santiago, from interview, May 19, 2010)

With Respect to Content-based Instruction

This approach also became the means to develop intercultural communicative competence as EFL learners identified important information about beliefs, traditions, and values reflected in the story "The First Seven Years". A clear example identified in the field notes was when learners were able to talk about topics such as the conflict between materialistic and humanistic attitudes to life reflected in the characters' actions and

thoughts, about the difficult problems immigrants go through when they migrate to the USA, the ideals of the American dream, and the different cultural traditions toward marriage between individuals of Jewish and American cultures when they interact together in the U.S. These findings support Stryker and Leaver's view that content-based instruction aims at preparing EFL learners to understand and live in a new culture.

Learners also proposed their own topics for class discussion when they read the African-American short story, "A Worn Path". For instance, field notes reveal that one learner discussed the idea that Phoenix, the main character of the story, probably suffered from senile dementia. She defined senile dementia, explained its characteristics, and applied them to the character in Welty's short story. This topic allowed other learners to express their own opinions by giving evidence from the story. Some agreed with the idea and others disagreed, and after listening to different viewpoints they made their own conclusions. In other occasions learners proposed the topics they thought were relevant to discuss in class by having done some autonomous research and having come to tutoring sessions. These sessions were led by an instructor. For instance, as noted in the field notes, one learner addressed a discussion on racism reflected in the story and did some research about the establishment of slavery in the southern part of the U.S. The significant outcome is that learners constructed meaningful knowledge by speaking in English about content. A few remarkable comments taken from interviews are these:

We talked about the problem of racism in the U.S., and we learned to avoid having racist attitudes. (Sandra, from interview, May 12, 2010)

I have learned about the conditions of African-Americans after the Civil War. They continued being oppressed and slaved. (Sebastian, from interview, May 12, 2010)

These comments reflect that learners were not only able to talk about content related to the situation of African-Americans in the U.S., but to reflect on the negative effects of discrimination and exclusion. In this sense, they developed intercultural empathy toward the harsh situation of other cultural groups.

With these findings in mind, the two questions guiding this study were answered. Including literature in the EFL classroom is an ideal means to enhance intercultural communicative competence, an important fact that many English teachers still need to consider. Literature as content area enables students to work on problem-solving tasks in order to comprehend important issues. Learners can manipulate information, express personal ideas, compare and contrast information, find and investigate historical events and literary topics, defend a point of view, and address conclusions from the literary works they read. In short, with the use of appropriate constructivist approaches, EFL learners can potentially build both language and cultural knowledge through a process of meaning negotiation by working out the meaning of real language in context.

Some Negative Data from the Experience

In general terms, learners did not express any negative attitude toward the reading of the texts. However, they admitted that the first readings had been difficult because they contained unfamiliar vocabulary. Learners also manifested that the later readings had been easier to read because they were already familiar with literary language. Others admitted that they had taken more time to read the stories than with other kinds of materials. Although learners thought the selections were difficult, they implemented reading comprehension strategies. For example, some learners reported that they

had used the dictionary as a main tool during the reading process, a practice they had not seriously engaged in with other types of readings. Some learners affirmed that when they did not know the meaning of a word, they tried to understand it from context. Although the stories were somewhat challenging to read, students reported that they had enjoyed them due to the complementary material and the pedagogical support provided.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This article has developed two important issues. First, it has described two major problems that still exist in EFL teaching. One problem is that the teaching of English primarily focuses on mastering the linguistic system despite the teaching methods available to teach English communicatively. The other problem deals with the need to implement more authentic material in EFL in order to complement the pedagogical goals of communicative textbooks. Secondly, this article has presented four suitable constructivist approaches to incorporate authentic literary texts with EFL in view of fostering learners' intercultural communicative competence. One of the most remarkable findings is that those approaches constitute the basis to improve the teaching practices in EFL through a process of meaning negotiation and the possibility to construct knowledge in a more personal, memorable, and meaningful way. Another conclusion is that providing learners with appropriate approaches accompanied with guidelines and tasks can help learners to explore and understand authentic texts in a more accessible way. Therefore, the teaching of literature in EFL should be a more constant practice in advanced levels, adopting eclectic and consistent pedagogical approaches such as those offered by the socio-constructivist theory rather than attempting to

study those literary texts in isolation without taking into account solid pedagogical perspectives.

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Appendix A: Study Guide with Posted Questions to Apply the Inquiry-Based Approach

John Steinbeck Study guide on “The Chrysanthemums”

The story shows a very simple daily routine of a normal day on a farm. However, it contains a deeper literary significance. Explore the story and answer the following questions. Find key words, examples, actions, or events in the story to support your answer.

1. In the description of the setting, Steinbeck remarks that the fog “sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot.” Moreover, it is December with “pale cold sunshine.” Later, he describes Elisa enclosed in her garden working eagerly, and the garden is surrounded by a “wire fence.” How does the setting affect Elisa’s life? What is the meaning of the environment in relation to Elisa’ daily life?
2. Compare Elisa’s activities on the farm to those of her husband’s. What can you say about the issue of gender? Do they do the same activities and do they have the same opportunities?
3. Based on your reading, are Elisa and Henry a happily married couple? Support your answer.
4. Study the conversation between Elisa and the tinker. What is his real intention when he comes to Elisa’s farm? What kind of a man is he? Does he want to establish a friendly relationship with Elisa?
5. What are the similarities and differences between Elisa’s husband and the tinker? How do they affect or favor Elisa?
6. Is Elisa sympathetic or unsympathetic to the tinker? Why does she please the tinker with everything he asks for (the chrysanthemum sprouts, the flower pot, and the saucepans to be repaired)?
7. Does Elisa change physically and emotionally throughout the whole story? If so, how and why does she change? What theme or idea do you think Steinbeck intends to show through her change?

Appendix B: Sample of Observations (Field Notes)

Fourth formal observation

Site: UPN, room 319 Date: April 28, 2010

Literary work read: "The First Seven Years" Author: Bernard Malamud

Field notes	Comments
<p>Three presenters were in charge of leading the discussion on Bernard Malamud's story "The First Seven Years." They presented Malamud's biography and the Jewish-American literature movement. They also spoke about the Holocaust and the Second World War. Additionally, students discussed the immigration of people to the USA and what immigrants had to suffer in a land that was completely new for them. They commented that immigrants suffered from discrimination, poverty, and social injustice. They related the situation of Feld, one of the characters, to the present situation of immigrants in the USA, and the recent law that considers immigrants as criminals.</p>	<p>Students were able to speak in English about serious social issues such as immigration, a problem that still prevails in the USA. Students related the events of the story to the recent Immigration Reform under Obama's administration.</p>
<p>Several students spoke about Jewish cultural elements presented in the story. For instance, they said that one important Jewish tradition in the past was that parents always expected to have a male baby as their first son instead of having a girl because having a male was a God's blessing. Another Jewish, cultural tradition they identified from the story was that children were very respectful and obedient with their parents, and were expected to do what their parents said. Also, they said that parents used to make decisions for their children as happened with Feld, one character in the story, who wanted his daughter Miriam to marry a boy he had chosen for her. Some other students expressed the opinion that Miriam, Feld's daughter, was breaking the strict rules of Jewish family traditions because she wanted to do what she thought was better for her than just obeying her father's orders.</p>	<p>This discussion was very meaningful because students were very analytical in terms of identifying important cultural values in cultural backgrounds different from their own. In this way, the cultural issues discussed showed that students were interculturally aware (socio-cultural sense) of certain cultural aspects that the story provided.</p>
<p>One student point it out that Sobel suffered from exclusion just because he was poor and Jewish. However, something that shocked this student was that Sobel was excluded by Feld, who was also Jewish. In that sense, people discriminate and exclude people from their own cultural background. Feld abhors Sobel because he is poor, ugly, bold, and uneducated. Thus, Sobel is a character who has been excluded by Germans and by Americans because he is an immigrant, and now by Feld who is his compatriot.</p>	<p>Students were able to talk about issues related to exclusion and discrimination.</p>

Appendix C: Sample of Students' Opinions about the Inquiry-Based Approach

S2: "I think that literature is a very difficult area to study, but when a teaching strategy is used as the study guides, the class work is easier because you have a concrete guide that helps you to consider ideas about the author, themes, the plot, etc." (Journal 2)

S7: "I think that the study guides were a very appropriate tool to do the readings because the questions focused our attention on the main themes of each story and allowed us to have a first approach to the readings before class discussions. The study guides made us read the story between the lines." (Journal 2)

S12: "The questions that the teacher asked us to answer [in the study guides] were very important because we can find another way to explore the short stories. It is not just to [tell students] to read, but to give them some guidelines. I liked this method and this way of teaching." (Interview, May 12th, 2010)

S16: "The study guides were very useful because we had our first contact with the text. They were very useful, and I think all my partners were very happy with them because reading those texts without a study guide would have been too difficult. With this method, all of us tried to speak; we weren't scare of being wrong or right. All of us tried to say our ideas. In my case, I am very shy, but with the methodology, I tried to participate a lot because I felt confident with the information I had. So, I think that method is very good. I don't have anything to criticize about it." (Interview, May 19th, 2010)
