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A proposal for teaching with authentic texts in order to develop social awareness in a language subject in tertiary education

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Abstract

The University of the 21st century has to establish links with society and prepare students for the demands of the working world. Therefore, this article is a contribution to the integral preparation of university students by proposing the use of authentic texts with social content in English lessons so that students acquire emotional and social competencies while still learning content. This article will explain how the choice of texts on global issues such as racism and gender helps students to develop skills such as social awareness and critical thinking to deepen their understanding of discrimination, injustice or gender differences in both oral and written activities. A proposal will be presented which involves using the inauguration speech from Mandela's presidency and texts with photographs of women so that students analyse them whilst utilising linguistic tools that allow them to explore a text's social dimension.

Keywords: social and emotional competencies; social awareness; global issues; texts; English Studies.

Resumen

La Universidad del siglo XXI tiene que establecer vínculos con la sociedad y preparar al alumnado para las demandas del mercado laboral. Por esta razón, este artículo pretende ser una contribución a la formación integral del alumnado universitario al proponer el empleo de textos reales con contenido social en una clase de lengua inglesa con el fin de que el alumnado adquiera competencias emocionales y sociales a la vez que aprende contenidos. El artículo explicará cómo la selección textos sobre temas globales como el racismo y el género contribuyen a que el alumnado desarrolle competencias como la conciencia social y la capacidad crítica al profundizar en la comprensión de la discriminación, la injusticia o las diferencias de género tanto en las actividades orales como en las escritas. Se presentará una propuesta para utilizar el discurso de inauguración de Mandela como presidente y textos con fotografías de mujeres con el fin de que el alumnado los analice teniendo en cuenta herramientas lingüísticas que les permitan explorar la dimensión social de los textos.

Palabras clave: competencias sociales y emocionales; conciencia social; temas globales; textos; estudios ingleses.

THE UNIVERSITY HAS experienced profound changes and transformations in recent decades in order to fulfil the demands of the twenty-first century. It has changed from being a *teaching university* to a *learning university*, where the priority is not so much the acquisition of knowledge but the development of competencies that students can use in the workplace, i.e., what is emphasised is that students are able to do things with what they learn. This necessitates the use of active methodologies that promote interaction in the classroom so that students can "learn by doing" and are active protagonists in the learning process (Ghaith, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Slavin, 1989).

A skills-based curriculum can integrate both theory and practice, relating the activities carried out in the teaching-learning process with evaluation, as well as uniting the content that students should learn with the different capabilities that must be developed in order to apply their knowledge to real situations. In other words, the successful acquisition of such competencies enables students to carry out professional activities effectively, since teaching approaches based on skills allow for the development of the ability to perform tasks correctly. The acquisition of these competencies contributes to the sharing of ideas and feelings, developing critical thinking, and promoting interaction (Tsay & Brady, 2010; Wang, 2009).

Emotional and social competencies are important due to the relationship they have with real life situations (e.g. conflict resolution, decision making, allocation of tasks) but they are not the ones that are paid special attention at university, although curricula are now often skills-based. This article pays attention to said competencies because of our interest in observing the analysis students do of authentic texts with social content.

The classroom is a social setting where human beings communicate, cooperate, and share experiences, feelings and time, among other things. Therefore, it is crucial that the time spent in the classroom is not only devoted to teaching content but also to helping students develop aspects of their emotional intelligence. Such features will be useful not only during their time in the classroom but also for their future in the labour market and in all aspects of their personal lives (Sheehan et al., 2009; Stubbs & Wolff 2008). This involves considering the role of classroom in terms of ethics (Dickson et al., 2001; Kingston, 2008), and choosing texts on global issues with social content is a good way to do so.

We chose two global issues: race and gender. These topics allow for the improvement of students' understanding of discrimination, injustice and differences between men and women in different parts of the world. In order to facilitate this, Mandela's presidential inauguration speech and some texts on women were chosen to bring culture and global issues into the classroom and to work on skills such as social awareness, which involves empathy and solidarity.

Every text has a function in society, and using texts on social topics in a language subject is appropriate in order to understand the way in which the linguistic and visual components communicate in a predetermined context to accomplish a communicative end: to persuade, to complain, to inform, to give an order, among other functions.

When teachers use texts with social content in the teaching-learning process they have the opportunity to highlight the relationships between text and society and between society and texts; consequently, bringing these texts into the classroom allow for the analysis of a social reality, as Fernández Martínez states (2011, ix): "The classroom offers tangible ways of interpreting contemporary culture; it is an excellent forum for teaching discourse analysis and for making students aware that there is a complex world there to be analysed".

Therefore, this article aims to bring in to the language classroom social topics and inequality in different parts of the world so that students develop their critical thinking and acquire social skills. To this end a cosmopolitan curriculum and an integral model of education are promoted (Boni & Walker, 2013; Ortega et al., 2013). Teaching skills as well as content shows that the University is committed to educating professionals who are competent and committed, thus contributing to the development of global citizens.

This article is organised into various sections: after this introduction, the theoretical framework concentrates on emotional skills; section 3 contextualises the study by presenting the objectives, setting, participants and methodology. Following this, some practical activities are described due to their contribution to the acquisition of social awareness. Finally, the article finishes with a discussion and some conclusions.

Theoretical Framework: Approaching Emotional and Social Skills

A university should be a place where students acquire new knowledge and grow as human beings. In this sense, education at tertiary level cannot only concentrate on the acquisition of knowledge; it must also consider the development and acquisition of useful life skills. This type of education considers the acquisition of academic skills important, but emotional and social competencies are also essential due to their role in the integral development of human beings, as MacCann et al. (2012, p. 315) state:

> Emotions and emotion-related skills are important in education for two reasons: (a) as facilitators of traditionally valued outcomes such as academic skills, higher test scores, and better grades; and (b) as a valued outcome in and of themselves. While academic skills are certainly important, it is a worthy goal to have happy students with strong emotional skills, and who are resilient to negative emotions, irrespective of their grades.

As regards a definition of social and emotional competence, we use the broadly accepted definition developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2008), which takes into consideration five major emotional, cognitive, and behavioural competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management (Zins et al., 2004). Similarly, Boyatzis et al. (2000, p. 3) defined emotional intelligence as "observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation". Furthermore, Nelis et al. (2011, p. 354) notes that: "The term *emotional competence* (EC), also labelled *emotional intelligence* (EI) or *emotional skills*, aims to provide a scientific framework for that idea. More specifically, EC refers to individual differences in identifying, expressing, understanding, regulating, and using emotions".

Goleman (1995, 1998, 2001, 2006) is one of the authors who has worked extensively on emotional intelligence. This type of intelligence is important at all levels of life but it is a crucial aspect to be taken into consideration when teaching is based on cooperative learning, and when the acquisition of emotional competencies is given as much importance as the acquisition of content (Bernand, 2006; Troth et al., 2012). This requests the revision of the teachers' social and emotional skills in order to guide students in the profound process of acquiring them (Jennings & Greenberg 2009; Jussim & Harber, 2005).

Armstong (2006) distinguishes between personal and social competencies. The author states that the main personal skills are self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation and the main social skills are: social awareness and social skills. For this research we will focus primarily on social competencies. Following Armstrong (2006, pp. 4-5), social awareness includes the following competencies:

1. Empathy: Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns.
2. Service orientation: Anticipating, recognising, and meeting customers' needs.
3. Developing others: Sensing what others need in order to develop, and bolstering their abilities.
4. Leveraging diversity: Cultivating opportunities through diverse people.
5. Political awareness: Reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships.

Tallón and Sikora (2011, pp. 40-41) also categorise emotional competencies as personal and social. Self-knowledge, security, self-control, adaptability, sincerity, optimism,

initiative, motivation to achieve a goal and resistance are the main personal skills that the author mentions. In addition, the main social skills the authors refer to are the following: understanding others, political consciousness (which alludes to who has the power in a group), communication, cooperation, leadership, influence and conflict resolution.

Research has proved that being emotionally intelligent and being able to recognise emotions and control them avoids depression and anxiety, and therefore human beings feel better in themselves and in their surroundings (Cherniss et al., 2006; Ciarrochi et al., 2003, 2006; Cicchetti et al., 2000; Elias et al., 1991; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). In this sense, emotional education needs to be understood as a continuous process that highlights emotional competencies as an essential element of human development (Bisquerra Alzina, 2010, pp. 11-12).

However, in general, emotional and social competencies are not paid special attention in tertiary education (Tsay & Brady, 2010; Wang, 2009). For this reason, this article will focus specifically on the acquisition of emotional competencies such as the development of social awareness and critical thinking since we are interested in observing the feelings and opinions students have when they analyse authentic texts on race and gender. By authentic texts we mean those that are used in real-life situations with a determined communicative purpose.

The main abilities that the term emotional competencies highlights are the following: being aware of one's emotions, having the capacity to observe and understand others' emotions, using vocabulary related to emotions, being able to be emphatic, distinguishing the subjective emotional experience from the external expression of emotions, having the capacity to negotiate negative emotions, giving importance to emotional communication, and being efficient in the control and expression of emotions (Barblett & Maloney, 2010).

Of the different emotional competencies and social competencies in particular, we are especially interested in the development of social awareness (Armstrong, 2006), i.e. sensing empathy and understanding what others are feeling. The development of this social skill implies that students need to contrast the social situation presented in these texts with their own and develop attitudes of solidarity; our interest in this area is motivated by two main factors:

Firstly, this competence is useful for making students aware of the social situations portrayed in the texts used in the classroom. In this sense, race and gender are introduced into the language classroom due to the characteristics of the texts selected for the analysis and consequently, two global and social issues are used as an excuse to learn vocabulary, check reading comprehension, put visual grammar into practice, write essays, etc. These activities concentrate primarily on two skills: reading and writing. Choosing texts on specific global issues is very useful for students to learn new vocabulary related to the

semantic fields of the texts under analysis. Moreover, the fact that they have to analyse and be critical with the texts chosen means that they have to use advanced grammatical structures in order to refer to the text in oral and written activities.

Secondly, we are interested in social awareness because the texts proposed allow us to highlight students' awareness of the opinions and feelings of their classmates. The fact that students are asked to work in groups to do the textual analysis means that they can discuss the content of the texts and can compare their different opinions on the analysis and interpretation.

Working on the acquisition of emotional and social competencies at university level implies the use of active pedagogies so that students can be active individuals throughout the whole teaching-learning process and feel free to communicate their ideas and feelings in the classroom. In this sense, active methodologies highlight interactions between students and between the teacher and students. Furthermore, students learn through the social contexts in which the different activities are developed and where the communicative exchanges take place (Adams & Hamm, 1994). Consequently, active methodologies benefit both teachers and students since both share the role of protagonist in the teaching-learning process and learning takes place by doing (Johnson et al., 2007; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). In addition, learning is effective because it is not only content that students learn but also skills that they can use in the workplace and in their personal lives.

Contextualising the Study

The main objectives of this research are the following: (1) to use texts with social content in order to work primarily on the acquisition of social awareness and critical thinking inside a cooperative methodology, and (2) to highlight the importance of basing university education on emotional competencies, particularly social ones, and to observe if they change the relationships of power in the classroom.

Context

The activities presented in the following section were put into practice in the core subject English Language V in the degree in English Studies (*Grado en Estudios Ingleses*) at the University of Alicante. The end of this subject is that students acquire an advanced level of English (level C1, CEFR) by developing the different skills. The subject is taught four hours a week and each hour is devoted to work with different skills: academic writing (the main cohesive devices and the main formal and functional aspects of the primary text types are explored); revision of the main grammatical aspects that C1 level implicates (e.g. passive voice, reported speech, inversion). Oral skills are also paid special attention and one hour is used every week for students to do a collaborative oral

presentation, and another hour is used for participation in a debate on the topic that the oral presentation considers so that students can develop their critical thinking and talk about global issues.

Participants

During the 2014-15 academic year, there were 125 students registered for this subject. The majority were women (85%), and 15% were men. Most of the students are 21 years old and have studied English as a compulsory subject in the first and second years of the degree, which means that they reach level B1 (CEFR) in the first year and level B2 in the second year. The majority of the students want to work as primary or secondary school English teachers, but there are also students who want to work as translators or interpreters in Spain or abroad.

Methodology

Due to the high number of students registered in the subject, the teacher, who is also the practitioner of this research, decided to use a cooperative methodology so that she could be in contact with the group coordinators in order to better supervise the students' learning process. Students were asked at the beginning of the academic year to organise themselves into groups of five so that they could work together on the following activities during the semester: the preparation of and participation in an oral presentation and debate on a social topic, participation in two group tutorials, a group analysis of the main cohesive devices found in Mandela's *Discourse of Inauguration as President*, the linguistic and visual analysis of a text on women and the writing of an essay on a text on gender of their own choice.

   Due to the limitations of length, in this paper we are just going to offer a detailed description of two of the activities the students had to do during the semester (see sections below). They have been chosen for their appropriateness to develop emotional and social competencies, particularly social awareness. Our proposal is related to what Martin (2004) calls *positive discourse analysis* because we intend to use texts that contribute to bringing social issues into the classroom so that students develop their critical skills and expand their knowledge about race, gender, justice, etc. In addition, interaction in the small groups and in the classroom was always promoted with the aforementioned activities.

Developing Social Consciousness and Emotional Competencies in a Language Classroom: Practical Activities

Teaching should be connected with society so that students can see a clear relationship between what they learn in the classroom and real life (Martínez Lirola, 2014). In this

sense, choosing authentic texts on global issues offers the possibility to think about different social issues such as racism and gender inequality aside from just learning vocabulary about these topics, or using grammar in order to write and to speak about them, etc. In fact, our teaching proposal in based on texts in order to present the relevant information and to introduce the context in which these texts are produced and consumed (de Sylva Joyce & Feez, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2012).

We consider that working with texts on social content in a language subject can contribute to the development of different types of skills, including the social ones. Moreover, these texts are appropriate for group work and motivate students to interact in the classroom, which is essential for an active pedagogy. The following section explains the way in which the teacher (who is also a researcher in this study) and the students worked on racism and gender in a language subject at tertiary level.

The teacher decided to select two important global issues: racism, and the representation of women in texts with visuals used by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and advertisers. Authentic texts were chosen so that students could analyse the main cohesive devices in English (see section below) and the main aspects of the model of visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) (see section below).

Introducing Race as a Social Topic in a Language Classroom

One of the main aspects of the subject English Language V is the development of writing skills. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher explained the main cohesive devices in English (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion) and their use was illustrated with examples from authentic texts. After that, students were asked to read texts with social content on topics such as ecology, racism, fair trade, and human rights, among others. In this way, students would develop critical thinking and social awareness, which are essential skills for navigating the labour market.

The teacher was especially interested in deepening their understanding of racism and of the representation of women in the media. An important activity for being critical of racism consisted of analysing one of the best known speeches given by the South African president Nelson Mandela, namely the one he gave in Pretoria on 10 May 1994 when he was inaugurated as president.

The classroom was divided into groups of five students, and each group was given several paragraphs of similar length so that they could analyse the main cohesive devices and rhetorical structures used by Mandela to express meaning and add vivacity and emotion to the speech. The analysis of this text made students think about the divisions between black and white people in South Africa during the apartheid period, and the unfair behaviour that is involved in a racist ideology. There is no doubt that the topic of this speech contributes to the development of critical thinking and social awareness

because students have to analyse and discuss a text about a social reality that is quite different from their own. In essence, they are invited to analyse a social context marked by racism, exclusion and injustice through textual analysis.

Moreover, this activity highlights cooperation in a language subject because the fact that each group was only given some of the paragraphs for the analysis meant that they needed information from the other groups in order to understand the complete discourse. In this way the final result of the activity depends on the work done by every group. Hence cooperation is promoted in the classroom instead of competition.

When every group had completed the analysis of the speech, the teacher organised a debate so that all the students could participate and express their opinions about the existence or absence of leaders such as Mandela nowadays. Prior to the start of the debate, each group discussed examples of racism that can still be observed in the twenty-first century and possible ways to overcome them, and then shared their ideas with the class.

At the end of the debate, the teacher emphasized that the *Discourse of Inauguration as President by Nelson Mandela* (Asmal et al., 2004) is a clear example of a social text that contributes to the development of a pacifist ideology. It was also pointed out that Mandela is one of the most important leaders of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries because although he was in prison for many years, his ideology was pacifist and always in favour of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Introducing Gender to a Language Classroom

Twenty-first Universities should aim to incorporate the use of multimodal texts into their teaching practices (those that use more than one mode of communication in order to convey meaning, for example, written text and visual aids). The photographs used in these texts allow students to think about global issues so that they can be critical of certain topics and develop emotional competencies such as social awareness (Martínez Lirola, 2013).

Working with multimodal texts requests that students be able to read visuals and observe how the visual elements of each text combine with the written language. The model proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) was chosen and at the beginning of the semester, the teacher explained the basic principles of visual grammar following said model (information value, salience and framing). Consequently, students could read the both the visual and the written texts and observe that the different linguistic and visual choices are not made at random, but to achieve a predetermined communicative end. Next, the teacher presented an outline with the main linguistic and structural characteristics of the different text types, and their social purposes.

In order to practise with the theoretical principles already mentioned, students were

asked divide into groups of five people, and were given a text on gender from the media to analyse. The texts on gender issues covered topics such as the inequality women may face in different parts of the world solely due to their gender, gender violence, and the importance of women's physical appearance in advertisements. Students had to analyse both the importance of the cohesive devices used to express meaning in the written language and the images of the women. Afterwards, students were asked to discuss their opinions about the social reality presented in the text they were given and to write a paragraph summarising the group's opinion.

On the one hand, the groups that analysed texts from NGOs concluded that the general tendency is to represent women as victimised and passive, in need of help from countries in the West. On the other hand, the groups that analysed text from advertisements observed that generally women are represented as objects of desire in order to promote a product.

At the end of the semester, students were asked to select a text on gender which had visual content. Then the students were asked to write an essay based on the text they had selected. This meant that students had to put into practice what they had learnt during the semester, i.e., to analyse the main cohesive and visual devices in a text concerning a social issue. The choice was theirs so that they could put the skills of decision making and being leaders in their learning process into practice. They had to use the different cohesive devices in their essay to ensure that the text was clear and fluent. Moreover, they had to express their opinion and analyse their chosen text in order to work on critical thinking and establish relationships between the different aspects of gender discussed in the classroom.

Discussion

The kind of activities presented in this article are used in a language subject based on the teaching of authentic texts to highlight the importance of including global issues such as race and gender in the curriculum. Choosing authentic monomodal and multimodal texts contributes to bringing social topics into the classroom as a way of establishing a clear connection between what happens in the classroom and real life. In this sense, the University of the twenty-first century aims not only to teach content but also skills such as social awareness, respecting diversity, conflict resolution and leadership.

Teaching a language course to students who are advanced learners offers the possibility of choosing various global topics in order to work on semantic fields, grammatical constructions and discussion topics. When teachers choose texts on social content such as poverty, war, globalisation, gender inequalities, racism, human rights, etc. they intend to highlight students' critical thinking because the analysis of the texts selected makes students reflect on the possible facts that are behind these texts, such as

economic interest, power, discrimination, or injustice (Martínez Lirola, 2013).

Moreover, social awareness is promoted as an important social skill because the different activities proposed make students aware of social situations that are different from their own. They allow them to approach and understand others who are different from themselves and feel that they are active citizens in a global society where individual and cultural differences have to be taken into consideration. In this way, the activities proposed contribute to the acquisition of emotional competencies by developing social awareness, empathy, respect for diversity, and active listening.

The combination of global issues and a competence based teaching proposal such as the one presented in this paper offers the chance to promote diversity and to present many perspectives in the language classroom (Bajaj, 2008). The positive effects that the introduction of global issues has had in the classroom are far ranging. Students participate more, attendance is better and they have higher levels of motivation.

Introducing the analysis of texts concerning social issues in the classroom makes students aware of the need for social transformations in the world and encourages them to assume an active and critical role as citizens of the twenty-first century (Barahona et al., 2013). Choosing texts on racism and gender representation are also useful for working with students on the prejudices some people have against people from other races, on gender discrimination and to discuss the benefits of cultural diversity.

The different activities presented above intend to help students think about different ways of discriminating against human beings (through race and gender). Further to this, the importance of stopping discrimination in all forms and of treating human beings equally no matter what their race, sex or social class is emphasised.

Organising English Language V to improve the students' understanding of social issues such as racism and gender also allows for the introduction of topics related to human rights and justice in a language subject. In this way, the curriculum makes the importance of global issues and their relationship with values and social competencies explicit. In fact, teaching content involves teaching skills and developing the social nature of education. To this end, students were invited to observe their feelings when analysing texts on racism and gender so that attention was paid not only to the linguistic and visual content of the texts but also to the emotional potential they possess to have an effect on students as active analysts.

In addition, choosing current social issues and designing activities that combine the development of oral and written skills gives students the opportunity to participate actively during the teaching-learning process at the same time that they develop their awareness of the need to be active citizens of the twenty-first century. The fact that students have to discuss topics with their classmates and express their opinions about the different realities that the different texts portray forces them to put into practice

being respectful regarding the different opinions that their classmates might have.

Conclusions

The teaching proposal presented in this article highlights the importance of teaching using texts concerning social issues so that emotional and social competencies are promoted in the teaching-learning process. Materials and curriculum topics for class discussions were chosen while considering social topics and the way in which social awareness could be taught to students. Therefore, using texts with social content contributes to the acquisition of emotional competencies, particularly social skills. This paper has concentrated on the importance of generating social awareness through the use of texts with social content so that students can be critical and committed citizens of the twenty-first century.

Highlighting a methodology and a teaching proposal based on the acquisition of skills as well as content highlights that what is taught and learnt in University classrooms should have a direct relationship with the demands of modern society, and specifically with demands of the workplace. Moreover, the activities and the methodology proposed show that the subject is student-centred rather than teacher-centred, i.e., students are the protagonists in the teaching-learning process.

Basing the subject on social content facilitates the development of students' social awareness and responsibility because they are aware of different social realities and even observe examples of social inequality and injustice in some cases. Consequently, they advance in the process of being a global citizen by opening their minds to social realities that are different from their own.

This article is a proposal for the design of activities in a language classroom based not only on the acquisition of knowledge but also on the acquisition of skills such as empathy, critical thinking, social awareness and respect for diversity. Choosing texts on social issues facilitates the acquisition of said competencies. Furthermore, these teaching practices emphasise the democratic principles related to equality, social justice and awareness, and solidarity, among others. By teaching in this way, society and the collective consciousness of twenty-first century citizens will be improved.

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