# "I am doing better and better": From Critical Pedagogy to Action Research

by

Yolanda Padilla Lebrón

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
ENGLISH EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO
MAYAGÜEZ CAMPUS
2011

Approved by:

_____                _____
Ellen Pratt, Ph.D.                                                    Date
President, Graduate Committee


_____                _____
Rima Brusi, Ph.D.                                                    Date
Member, Graduate Committee


_____                _____
Nancy V. Vicente, Ph.D.                                          Date
Member, Graduate Committee


_____                _____
Lic. Elvia Camayd Esq, LL. M                                  Date
Graduate School Representative


_____                _____
Kevin Caroll, PhD                                                   Date
Interim Director, Department of English

# Abstract

The main goal of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study is to empower students to become aware of, and address issues of inequality and social injustices through literacy practices such as reading and writing instructed by the paradigm "Critical Pedagogy". This study was implemented in the context of a collaboration between the students of a public school and the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez (UPRM). The participants are students from the program "Centro Universitario para el Acceso" (CUA) from the UPRM and they are middle school students who live in public housing who for years, have been marginalized. The participants analyzed, reflected and wrote about social issues in order to later, create an activity where they let their voices be heard through a booklet. While the students were reading and writing about social justice, they became more interested in learning English and in doing activities which foster community service. Consequently they also created their own action research project where they identified a social problem in their community and tried to solve it. The outcome of the project shows how the paradigms "Action Research" and "Critical Pedagogy" work best when they are implemented together, in a project that should be a collaborative effort between the stakeholders (in this case the students) and the researchers (teacher).

# Resumen

El objetivo de este proyecto de Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) es ayudar a los estudiantes a tomar conciencia y acción en cuanto a injusticias sociales en su comunidad a través de actividades instruídas por el paradigma de la Pedagogía Crítica. Los participantes son estudiantes del programa "Centro Universitario para el Acceso" (CUA) de el Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez de la Universidad de Puerto Rico (RUM). Estos estudiantes de escuela secundaria, viven en residenciales públicos, comunidades que han sido marginadas por años. Como parte de esta IAP, los estudiantes analizaron, reflexionaron y escribieron acerca de conflictos sociales en un pequeño libro que sirve como un registro de voz e ideas. Los estudiantes desarrollaron más interés por aprender inglés según se involucraron en las actividades de escritura y lectura que también promovieron el deseo de llevar a cabo ayuda comunitaria. Por consiguiente los estudiantes crearon su propio proyecto de IAP con el propósito de resolver un problema de inundación en su comunidad. Por último, los resultados reflejan que los paradigmas de IAP y la "Pedagogía Crítica" funcionan mejor cuando son implementados a la vez, en un proyecto que debe ser un esfuerzo colaborativo entre los "stakeholders" (en este caso, los estudiantes) y los investigadores (los maestros/facilitadores).

# Agradecimientos

Realizar este proyecto no hubiese sido posible sin la ayuda de muchas personas que han sido una luz en mi camino. A mi familia, gracias por sus consejos y ejemplo, porque desde siempre, me han enseñado a valorar la vida y lo más importante, a la gente. Mami, Papi, Papo, Catin, Ita y Papa, todos maestros por excelencia, mis ganas de enseñar con el corazón, servir, facilitar y ayudar se las debo a ustedes. A mi novio, demás familiares y amigos, gracias por su apoyo y motivación en los momentos que hacía falta "despejar la mente". Mi amiga Francheska, gracias por tantas experiencias, gracias por ser mi mejor equipo, que bien trabajamos, y que bien la pasamos! Profesora Brusi, Sharon y compañeros del CUA, gracias por hacerme parte de su equipo y permitirme tener el honor de trabajar con ustedes mano a mano con los estudiantes, los chicos a los que le he tomado un cariño inmenso. Nan Van Vicente, gracias por contagiarme con tu energía y buena vibra, gracias por ser fuente de inspiración. Finalmente, estaré eternamente agradecida de mi profesora y mentora Ellen Pratt. Gracias por nuestras reuniones semanales por todo un año. Gracias por todo su empeño y dedicación, gracias a usted he aprendido tanto! Gracias al Departamento de Inglés del RUM, porque durante casi ocho años a enriquecido mi vida con experiencias académicas que me han formado como profesional comprometida con la sociedad, la educación y mis estudiantes.

Gracias, todos y todas están en mi corazón.

# Dedicatoria

Esta tesis se la dedico a mi familia, especialmente a mis padres y abuelos. Porque ser maestro corre por mis venas…

También se la dedico a mi mentora Ellen Pratt.

Este logro es nuestro!

**List of Figures**

**List of Tables**

# Table of Contents

**Chapter 1**

## Introduction

"I am not a social scientist interested in more participatory research, but an educator and activist

exploring alternative paradigm research as a tool in the multifaceted struggles for a more just,

loving world"

(Pat Maguire, as cited by Reason & Bradbury, 2001. P. 1)

  I believe that educators should teach from their heart. Their main goal should be to

become facilitators striving to help their students and their communities' progress. In fact, this

commitment should emerge from an idea that education can promote student transformation and

consequently, social change. This change does not refer to any superficial change; rather, the

students should be encouraged to think critically, to question their environment and their context

in order to construct their own life perspectives and ideologies. Ultimately we can hope that the

awakening will evoke reforms and movements that deal with issues of inequality and social

injustices.

  Even though I am an educator, not a social scientist, I consider myself an activist. I

became aware of this when I was an undergraduate student working on a "real world"

community project called "Proyecto para las Comunidades Especiales" where I worked as a tutor

for students from the disadvantaged community "El Retiro" in San Germán, Puerto Rico. Thanks

to this experience, I met Wario[1], a second grade student who in honor to his name, a warrior,

taught me the most valuable lesson that I have ever learned. He always walked alone to the site

where I tutored the students in the community "El Retiro", and he was eager to learn even though

---

[1] All the names of the participants are pseudonyms

1

he had many obstacles and limitations that were blurring his path to the tutoring site. Still, he came every day, and I was the only connection that he had to academia, to the university and to all the resources that an institution like the UPRM can offer.

From this experience, I understood the importance and the necessity of developing action research projects that will improve education and transform our students and their communities. Greenwood and Levin (1998) define the concept of Action Research (AR) as social research carried out by both, the researcher and the stakeholders. The stakeholders refer to the members of a community such as an organization or a neighborhood. According to Greenwood and Levin (1998) "AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation for the stakeholders" (p. 3). Greenwood and Levin (1998) use the term "stakeholders" to refer to the people who can affect or can be affected by the process of AR. Therefore, AR can be defined as a paradigm that generates knowledge with the intention of materializing that knowledge. This abstract knowledge becomes concretized when the stakeholders become participants, incited to act and to endorse social change.

As a teacher striving for "a more just, loving world", (Pat Maguire, as cited by Reason & Bradbury, 2001), AR to be an essential tool for improving education. This paradigm is composed of three main elements: "action, research and participation" (Greenwood and Levin 1998, p. 5). The first element is action, because AR aims to reform the reality of a group of people in an organization or community. The second element is research because AR has the power of generating new ideas, data and knowledge. The final element is participation because both, the researcher and "stakeholders" or participants are responsible for carrying out the project. The contributions that the stakeholders offer to the research are indispensable and valuable because the stakeholders are the ones who have more knowledge of the needs of their communities. In

light of what has been discussed, AR is a paradigm that can serve as a tool to promote social change, reform and equity in an educational context.

Although AR has been used primarily for research in social sciences, it has now become a tool for educational research. According to my experience as a tutor from the "Centro Universitario Para el Acceso" (CUA) and a teacher, AR is a tool that can help students to reflect about their circumstances, but also it empowers them to act upon the issues which might limit them. AR then, is a paradigm that could work hand on hand with the theoretical framework, Critical Pedagogy. Paulo Freire (1970) affirms that through "Critical Pedagogy" students understand that their reality is not something fixed, but something they can transform. Literacy plays an important role in this process of transformation, because it is through literacy, that these students become active learners questioning positions of power and social constructs in the struggle for "reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.11).

**Justification of this study**

For this AR project I decided to analyze the connection between school teaching with access to higher education. The main idea of this AR project is to motivate students from the CUA to come closer to academic contexts such as the UPRM through activities instructed by "Critical Pedagogy". It is important to motivate these students and to provide them with the necessary resources and tools to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, the social structures of the students might limit their possibilities to enter College. Haycock (2006) explains that Higher Education is no longer promoting social mobility, but it reinforces social class. Brusi, Dika & González (2008) explain access issues in Puerto Rico.

Brusi (2008) explains further this statement by providing statistics that clearly demonstrate the relationship between Higher Education and social class in Puerto Rico. They explained that 80% of the 45,000 students admitted to 12th grade in Puerto Rico study in public schools, while only 20% of Puerto Rico's seniors study in private schools. However, only a 5.4% of the 185 public high schools placed more than 60% of the students at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), while 48.2% of the 220 private schools placed the same 60%. What this means is that most of the students who request admission, and are admitted to the UPR belong to private schools. Their research revealed that 1 of 3 students from the public system request admission to the UPR while 3 of four students from the private system do the same. In light of this data, we can interpret that students from the private system are probably more motivated to enter the university because they actually have more access to it. Brusi further explain that if there were no educational disparities in the system, the students from the private system who enter the UPR would be the expected 20 % rather than the actual 40%.

Another relevant statistic that Brusi (2008) provided is that only 106 students living in public housing projects have been admitted in the UPRM in the last 17 years. For that reason, they concluded that there is educational inequality which represents social inequality, and that the school and the university need to reflect and act upon this social issue. As a result, in the UPRM, a group of committed professors and students developed the program (CUA), to generate more research and construct practical facilities for this social imparity. Their goals are to carry out research and outreach activities to address the connection between poverty and education. According to the objectives stipulated in its blog, the CUA aims to help students from public housing to come to the UPRM and successfully finish their degree. This project intends to motivate school students to come to the university while polishing their "university skills".

4

Language is an issue that is also related to social class. Whipp (1979) explained that there are some language policies that aim to "kill" language variation. She provides the example of a situation that occurred in a Mid Western University where professors said that the students were "deficient in the basics". Therefore, the institution offered a course titled "Business English" where students learned that there are three kinds of language: formal, casual and illiterate". The latter one being more related to the way African Americans spoke. Since students would classify this language, according to the way it was taught in this course as illiterate, they would not use it in order to be successful throughout their academic career.

In Puerto Rico where two languages, Spanish and English, are used, those who are more literate in English usually have either lived in the United States or come from a higher socio-economic background, which allows them more access to the English language through travel and the media. Even Pousada (2007) commented that "English has become the international *lingua franca* of the information age and its promoted globally as the language of science, technology, business and diplomacy". English is important to success in college because most textbooks and wide variety of media used for education are in English. As a graduate student in the Department of English, and as a graduate Teacher Assistant, I see that often students come to the university underprepared in English. According to the results of the "Pruebas Puertorriqueñas" from the Department of Education, out of 500,157 students, only 34% are proficient in English. English is the lowest percent, in contrast to Spanish and Mathematics 66.35% and 69.35% respectively showing proficiency. For this reason this project was taken into effect with low- income students who live in public residential housing. The idea is to expose these students to English while they are also provided with a safe environment at the university.

These students are granted access to the resources of the university in order to hopefully, motivate them to pursue higher education.

**The Purpose of this Study**

This study aimed to develop a PAR project to promote social change. For my research, the students in the after school program CUA held at the UPRM became researchers of their own communities, identified a social problem and developed strategies to address the problem. Before the students got to work "hands on" with their own projects, they studied issues of inequality, social injustice and social constructs through specific literacy practices that I developed in English.

This AR project provided literacy activities in English that promoted social change and at the same time helped college students, like myself, to have a "real world" experience with a "real" community where we can put our study of theory into practice. This commitment to "the real world" is a space that social institutions like universities, should always fulfill. Scholars like Brulin (2000) argue that universities should have a third task besides just educating and doing research. According to Brulin (2000), universities should serve their communities and he provides the alternative of action research to accomplish this third objective. In my case, the students from the CUA are L2 learners that could have issues of identity, fed by inequality, societal power relations and language resistance. The burden of all this unfairness can be addressed with community action research projects like writing after school programs where students can give voice to their stories and experiences.

As I have discussed above, AR can bring together theory and practice, it is a paradigm that fosters praxis and the valuable democratic participation of the stakeholders. Universities should

6

be the institutions involved in AR. Greenwood and Levin (1998) commented that universities need to reconstruct their relationships with the stakeholders in society. They explained that AR is a collaboration among the government and other service agencies and big or small organizations and communities. These stakeholders have the undeniable, genuine task of identifying the problems on their communities and being part of the research process which according to Greenwood and Levin integrates teaching/ learning with the non-university partners mentioned above.

AR promotes the development of a collaborative effort between stakeholders and universities. This collaboration is helpful for the stakeholders because they can actively participate in the development of the project. However, it is also beneficial for the university since professors, students and researchers can practice their theories in a real scenario with real life situations. Cammarotta and Fine (2008) state that researchers involved in "Youth Participatory Action Research" (YPAR) pretend to transform "systems and institutions to produce greater justice" (p. 4). This greater justice, like Cammarotta and Fine explained is plausible when students like Neo in the movie "The Matrix" choose the red pill that leads them to reality, instead of the blue pill which leads them to oblivion and ignorance.

Like the authors cited above, I reaffirm that universities as social institutions should engage with its surrounding communities to develop a strong tradition of community service. Professors, college students and administrators from the UPRM, need to develop more projects where community members can participate in order to help not only their community, but the entire island become "transformed" through social awareness and action research.

**Research Questions**

     According to the description of AR provided by Greenwood and Levin (1998) I explored the extent to which AR could serve as a tool for promoting PAR but also, social change and reformation through literacy practices such as reading and writing in a university setting. I used qualitative methods in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How can language arts activities in English be used to help students examine social issues in their communities?

2. How can the discussion and analysis of social issues help students to improve their English language skills?

3. As facilitators, teachers, and researchers, how are university student- tutors like me changed by this experience?

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### Social Educational Constructs and Critical Thinking

We understand and make meaning of the world negotiating new ideas with the ones that we already have. As teachers, we should encourage our students to think critically and to be aware that they can question social structures, especially those who limit them and foster inequality, poverty, social class divisions, and gender roles. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section considers how AR can promote critical thinking and social change, the second section provides an overview of several studies that use AR, the third section analyzes how teachers can empower social change through literacy, the fourth section discusses the historical background of English in Puerto Rico and the fifth and last section of the literature review provides the historical background of public housing in Puerto Rico and their implications on segregation and marginalization.

The work of Paulo Freire is central to AR as a pedagogical tool and as a political project. Freire (1970) provides a description of problem posing education, a pedagogy that intends to humanize students, a pedagogy of hope and reformation through praxis (critical thinking and action). This "praxis" refers to the idea that "reflection-true reflection-leads to action" (Freire, 1970, p. 66). In other words, "problem posing" education promotes critical thinking and thus, questioning our context in order to provoke change, action. That is, teachers are facilitators who foster what Freire (1970) calls "authentic thinking" (p. 77), and shall never impose ideologies or thoughts on their students. They have the power of engaging students on a praxis of transformation and social change where the students are full participants: "The teacher cannot

think for her (or his) students, nor can she (or he) impose her thoughts on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place on ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (Freire, 1970, p. 77). As a graduate student I have been exposed to these Freirian theories. However, I explored how teachers can make these ideas operational and useful for the benefit of their students and their communities. My premise and point of departure is that the gap between educational theory and actual practice can be alleviated through AR.

**AR as a tool for promoting social change.**

> "Action Research can help us build a better, freer, fairer society through collaborative problem analysis and problem solving context" (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p. 3).

AR is related to the Freirian idea of "praxis", or reflection and action. Freire (1970) explains that praxis is "the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is the source of knowledge and creation" (p. 100). So transformation is a process that starts in the mind, with an idea empowered by critical thinking which ultimately becomes materialized and practiced.

Freire (1970) elucidates his idea that people have the power of interpreting the world through critical eyes but that they can also transform their reality thanks to "problem-posing education" (p. 83). According to Freire (1970) "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83). In other words, through education, students can become aware of their own identities and the relation of their "self" with their context. So teachers can use action research methodologies to promote this "critical awareness" of self and context among their students with the objective of fostering social change and progress.

10

AR does not refer to a facile methodology for promoting a superficial change, but to a process of deep transformation and reformation. Greenwood and Levin (2006) justified the importance of AR as something that does not promote "just any kind of change" (p.5). AR in contrast, aims to help the stakeholders to develop a comfortable and just environment where they can manipulate their own destinies playing an important role on the process of transformation.

As I explained in the introduction, the researcher is a facilitator and the stakeholders play an active role on the development of the investigation, therefore they are also known as "co-researchers" (p. 3). This "democratization" (Greenwood and Levin 2006, p. 4) of power between the researcher and the stakeholders might arouse accusations of unreliability and lack of credibility. However, given the fact that AR has such a deep impact on the lives of the stakeholders, it is important to develop AR projects taking into consideration all the possible preventive measures to avoid oppressing the participants.

AR is naturally and inevitably a participatory paradigm. Since AR aims to reform the lives of the stakeholders, their contributions are invaluable for the project. Therefore, their histories should not be catalogued as mere "storytelling". In fact, Greenwood and Levin (2006) state, that AR is not accepted by conventional social scientists who label AR as: "unsystematic, atheoretical, storytelling" (p. 62). I believe that no one knows best what the needs of the stakeholders are, than the stakeholders themselves. They are the ones who have to endure difficult situations and desperately need to change their reality. Besides, Greenwood and Levin (2006) contrasts conventional research versus AR being the main difference that the former builds credibility through hypothetical generalizations made by the sole competent community of professionals (researchers) while the latter researchers believe that credibility emerges from

knowledge in practice, placing emphasis in the stake-holders who play an important role in the process.

AR unlike "conventional research," has the ability to narrow and contextualize research practices for the benefit of the stakeholders. In fact, the stakeholders' well being is what matters the most, therefore, if they agree on participating actively in the process, they are not obliged to do anything that they believe is not beneficial for their communities.

Teachers need to try to tie theory and practice. We need to encourage our students to think critically, but also to act upon the situations which oppress them. According to Castelloe, Watson & White (2002), "Participatory Change" is an integrated approach that attempts to obliterate the gap between theory and practice. "Participatory Change" is a melting pot where three practice approaches; community organizing, popular education and participatory development work together. The concept "community organizing" refers to bringing citizens together for accomplishing a task. (Castelloe *et. al* 2002). This approach is very important because the assembled groups can develop other grass-roots movements. The participants of these groups can work together if they belong to a specific geographical community, or if they share ideals, like for example, gay and lesbian communities.

Another relevant concept for developing a PAR project is "Participatory Education". This component of "Participatory Change" is related to the work of Paulo Freire's (1970) libertarian education where students learn from their own experiences and through teacher-student dialogue.

According to Castelloe *et. al* (2002), students learn from their background knowledge and the experiences that they have. They try to relate their identity, their beliefs, their ideas, to the new constructs and concepts. However, through filtering these new ideas and trying to

understand how their own personal ideologies match with what is already "established", the students can learn not only about themselves, but they can have a clear broad perspective of their surroundings. If the students have a clash of ideas when they realize that their ideologies are not necessarily favored by society, teachers can encourage students to reflect and even act upon the situations through dialogue. Castelloe *et. al* (2002) explained that: "dialogic education" refers to the interaction between students and teachers in a way, where students are not mere recipients of knowledge. In contrast to this traditional method, in "dialogic education" the students are listeners and speakers at the same time, constructing their own knowledge, instead of passively digesting the knowledge provided by their teachers. These results in what Castelloe *et al*. (2002) denominate: "critical consciousness (i.e., a more critical understanding of the broader social, cultural, political and economic context in which one lives), group confidence and self-action" (p. 9)

Self reflection and then action, should be our ultimate goal as committed teachers. We need to be facilitators providing students with the tools they need to become agents of change. However, in order to accomplish that, we need to develop an environment of trustworthiness in our classrooms where students can feel free to share their ideas and expose their concerns through dialogue. In other words, Participatory Education is Education through Action- the people's experiential wisdom and background knowledge can help as the "foundation for creating significant community change". (Castelloe, *et al*. 2002, p. 15) However, participatory education alone is not enough. For that reason, it is important to consider both, Community Organizing and Participatory Education but also Participatory Development, or the idea that the stakeholders are not mere participants of the research, but they rather take an active stance on the process.

Freire (1970) also agrees with this idea, and he said that many political and educational plans have failed because they were more driven towards the interests of their authors rather than towards what Freire calls "*the men- in- a- situation",* or the people for which the plan should have being directed on the first place. Freire better explains this argument when he wrote that "For the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other people- not other men and women themselves" (p. 94).

Therefore, the participants and the oppressed should rise and develop their plan to solve their problem. Researchers, teachers and other scholars, can work as facilitators providing guidance, but not total control of the process. These activists can encourage the participants to accomplish their tasks and consequently, help the oppressed to change their reality. Castelloe (2002) argued that the role of the participatory change practitioner is to work together with the stakeholders as a facilitator of the process. The practitioner should be informed by the people's ideas and skills to then help these stakeholders to envision concrete plans, and then implement them for the stakeholder's communities to be transformed.

The stakeholders first need to envision a more optimistic reality, and then they try to work forward to it. The best way to improve education, and to help our communities through action research projects is to give our participants the liberty to become activists, social agents and  researchers of their own reality in order to act upon it on a practical way.

**Studies that Use Action Research and Educational Research**

The work done by Percy-Smith (2006) is an example of how students can become social activists and agents of community change. Percy- Smith (2006) explained that in order to

promote effective participation in an AR project, the participants need to be empowered and their voices need to be taken into account during the process of making decisions. His project serves as a "dialogical social learning model of participation" using an example from the UK. Percy-Smith (2006) explains that there is a miss- match between what adults and young people think is more suitable for their communities regarding neighborhood development and policies. Percy-Smith (2006) discusses "the value of creating spaces for dialogue, interaction and learning between groups as part of the participatory process to help mediate such conflicts and differences (p. 155)." To be sure, when young people are limited to consultation, participation is ineffective. However, Percy- Smith (2006) explained that this issue could be addressed through the creation of what Kemmis (2001) calls a "communicative action space" (as cited by Percy- Smith 2006, p. 168). Smith argues that young people should have equal participation in the development of community projects with adults. Smith explains that in order to make this possible, a "safe space" that promotes dialogue between young people and adults is crucial. What Smith suggests is a social learning approach, a collaboration between the younger ones with the adults in a place where they can share their cultures and values.

According to Wildermeersch *et al*. (1998), "communicative action spaces" are characterized by "flexibility, mutual respect and reciprocity in relationships between young people and adults (p. 168)." The main goal is to equalize power relationships between young people and professionals. Percy-Smith (2006) wrote that participation should not be prescribed by adult professionals. In order to promote participation, there should be dialogue and communication, a democratic attitude, a cooperative- social learning approach. Percy- Smith (2006) concluded that the relationship between professionals and young people need to be reciprocal and reflexive in order to understand the process of social learning. Finally, it is

15

important to mention that one of the techniques that Percy- Smith (2006) encouraged young people to create was posters and visual materials with the intention of portraying the way they felt regarding their power relationships with adults. The posters also helped these young participants to give ideas to solve the issues and concerns that were affecting them.

Cammarota (2007) like Percy Smith (2006), also provides an example of how students can become social activists, engaging on a praxis that promotes individual and collective reformation. Cammarota (2007) provided an example of an AR project where praxis and ethnography were mutually intelligible. He explained how the high school program "Social Justice Education Project" (SJEP) aimed to give Latino students living at Tucson, Arizona the tools that they need to identify oppression. Students perform participatory AR projects with the aim of investigating how these students have experienced inequalities and social injustices on their schools or on their communities. Cammarota (2007) taught the students ethnographic research methods like for example, participant observation, interviews, videography, etc. (p. 342). His main goal was to help students become active research participants with the right tools to develop their own social justice projects.

Consequently, students were encouraged to change their reality acting upon those injustices throughout the development of social action projects. Interestingly, the students were able to identify many flaws within their communities so they met with administrators and policy makers, etc. in order to not only let their voices be heard, but also transform their social reality. But, how can teachers engage students in a praxis that will help them become social agents of change? Cammarota (2007) and other researchers like Singer (2006) successfully accomplished that task through the power of literacy.

**Empowering Social Change Through Literacy**

I believe that schools should provide students with the opportunity to have powerful literacy experiences where the students engage in social relations to develop ties with other people and society. Freire and Macedo (1987) among other scholars share this idea.

Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote that literacy is not as simple as words and mechanics. They comment that literacy also refers to the relationship between "the word and the world." Reading is not just decoding text from paper. Reading is actually analyzing and interpreting the text in a meaningful way. Reading is being able to understand content and context of those "words in the world". However, reading to promote critical thinking and transformation is not enough to evoke a positive revolutionary action and change.

Freire and Macedo (1987) remarked that: "reading always involves critical perception, interpretation, and *rewriting* of what is said". (p. 36) When we write, we re- think and we organize our ideas. When we write responses to the readings that we do, we reconstruct the ideas of the author and we connect them to our experiences and our real world. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that we don't necessarily have to agree with the ideas of the author. In fact, Macedo asked Freire if "is it possible to avoid the permanent shock that exists between individual consciousness and collective consciousness?" (p. 48). Freire's (1987) response was that when an educator challenges a student through critical pedagogy, the student better understands that their real freedom starts when they are able to recognize that there are constraints that could be overcome. Then they understand that they are not the makers of their circumstances, but like Freire told to Macedo "they transcend the constituting reality and question it" (p. 48).

17

Being literate is not a synonym for being free. However, literacy promotes the "recognition" of social constructs and injustices that can be constraining our lives. Therefore, as teachers we need to challenge our students to become critical thinkers, able to question their world. Hopefully, this abstract practice will lead them to a concrete action. Giroux (1987) better explained this when he argued that literacy is a powerful foundation for cultural action and freedom. He cites Freire's idea that literacy is not just a technical skill, but a project in which men and women read to transform their personal experiences to later on "reconstitute their relationship with the wider society"(as cited by Freire & Macedo 1987, p.7). Literacy can promote individual transformation, but the communities of those individuals can also be reformed. Through literacy, not only can individuals get to know themselves, but they can tie (or untie) their identities with the context in which they live.

Jessica Singer (2006) provides a framework to empower students to develop projects where they work towards social change through literacy. Singer's project consisted of mixing Cleveland's High School "honor" and "regular" groups, in order to "stir up justice". She became interested in social justice after teaching in high school in Portland, Oregon. Singer (2006) developed a curriculum on social change with the objective of promoting critical awareness and a sense of social justice among her students. Singer provided a list of activities and ideas that teachers can implement in their classrooms with the idea of "awakening" students' awareness of social problems and how those problems affect them. Incidentally, according to Espada (2000) "Any progressive social change must be imagined first, and that vision must find its most eloquent possible expression to move from vision to reality. Any oppressive social condition, before it can be changed, must be named and condemned in words that persuade by stirring the emotions, awakening the senses" (as cited by Singer 2006, p. 1). Certainly, reading and writing

18

about social change can help students to reflect upon their own social reality, but also to envision possible solutions to their problems. To be sure, critical thinking, reading and writing should be the first steps to social action and change in our classrooms.

Singer (2006) wrote that her book does not pretend to perpetuate wrongdoing and suffering. In contrast, the focus of the curriculum of her book is on how high school students can learn about social change through reading and writing activities which can help students become "social activists" (p. 2). In other words, Singer took an approach to teach social change that focuses on hope and faith on progress, rather than simply identifying social issues and inequality. That is, students not only identify social problems, but they also try to provide suggestions to solve them. For example, at the end of the semester, Singer's (2006) students presented their projects. Singer (2006) explained that the last day of class, her classroom turns into an art gallery. All her students bring their activism projects to expose them. The classroom is filled with posters, political cartoons, slide, photographs and collages among many other projects.

This activity gave students the opportunity to share their work and feel good about all the work they did during the semester. This is very important because it fosters motivation among the students but it also promotes social change among other school members that visit the "gallery". Moreover, the students develop a sense of belonging and they can feel embraced by the school, a community that needs them.

Finally, this inspiring approach was very successful because Singer (2006) seemed to adopt Freire's (1970) idea that, "The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (p. 95). Singer's students had the freedom to choose and develop their project contents according to their needs and concerns. The students also self evaluated their

19

practice as activists at the end of the semester. The students wrote revelatory statements; Jenna for instance commented that:

> After reading about this wonderful person (Holocaust rescuer Irene Opdyke) it really makes me see the world differently. It makes me think of what I want to do that will work to influence positive social change in the world. Irene taught me that you really don't have to listen and follow the rules all the time. She taught me that you have to follow your heart and let it take you to that special place of being a social activist (p. 141).

Jennas' reflection illustrates the importance of facilitating class readings and relevant material for the students' context. Jennas' comment is an example of how students can identify with what they read and how a social "awakening" can be fostered through literacy. Jenna was inspired by the social activist she read about, and she felt committed to become a social activist herself. Singer was successful in empowering students to reflect upon oppressing issues but also to act upon them not only in their classrooms, but also in the "real world". These lessons of hope, justice and equity can definitely transcend the walls of a classroom and make the world a better place.

**The Historical Background of the teaching of English in Puerto Rico**

> Nicknamed 'El Difícil'(the difficult one), a symbol of Americanization, a necessity on the road to a better job-the multi-faceted, complex beliefs about English in Puerto Rico seem contradictory at times (Mazak 2008, p. 2).

Since the United States took over our island in 1898, there has been a debate of what should be the primary language used in public instruction: Spanish or English. The language of the US colonizers was known as "el difícil" because Puerto Ricans had to cope with it and with the political agenda that English endorsed. Obviously, as Algren de Gutiérrez (1987) points out,

Puerto Rican language teaching ideas are closely related to the political status of the island. In Puerto Rico people often tend to view language as a symbol of national identity. For that reason the implementation of English into the Public Instruction was perceived as a threat to our culture and traditions. Therefore some students consider the learning of English a meaningless activity. Some students do not feel a necessity to learn English because they do not use it on a daily basis.

My experience as an English Second Language (ESL) teacher has taught me that the students have the feeling that English is a language that according to some people "can" replace Spanish. For that reason, it is important to consider that Puerto Rican students can potentially have negative feelings towards learning English. Consequently, their motivation in the classroom may be affected. As teachers, we need to be aware of this. We should educate our students and let them know what the benefits of learning English are. We should help our students understand that learning English, like learning any other language does not have to change the way we feel towards our own native language and culture. Mildred Santiago (1999) wrote that as an English teacher she aims to "respect the heritage language" of her students, so that they don't feel that one language will super impose the other.

In light of Santiago's (1999) ideals, we should encourage students to learn English obviously not at the cost of losing Spanish. What Santiago (1999) promotes is the notion that teachers should consider all the historical, political, and cultural issues of the students. In addition teachers can ask the students what is their motivation to learn English and in what ways do they think that English will benefit them. Hopefully, if the students find that the learning of English is a meaningful, pertinent act, they could be more motivated.

Puerto Rican students of ESL can be encouraged to learn if we as teachers help them understand that learning English will not decide the political status of the island. Therefore, it is an option to foster second language learning through teaching history. However, according to Bill Bigelow (2008), historical accounts are inevitably biased. For that reason Bigelow (2008) cites the work done by a historian and activist, Howard Zinn. Bigelow (2008) analyzed the work done by Zinn and he wrote that our society is shaped by the actions of its people, so the lives of ordinary people matter. Zinn wrote that "it's people's history in that it's a perspective on the past that is usable today, that can instruct and inspire and caution as we try to make the world a better place (p. 1).

Through history and helping students to realize that history is "his story" (a subjective account of someone's description of life events) we can motivate students to take a stand and try to develop their own ideas. This process promotes critical thinking but it can also motivate students to act. Bigelow (2008) also points out that "What we think and how we act can make the world a better place. For teachers, our challenge is how to bring this insight alive in our classrooms-not just *telling* students this, but *showing* them" (p. 3). Our goal as teachers should be not to mere fill up an empty vase (Freire, 1970), but rather to facilitate our student's learning making their education relevant, and this is possible if we give our students the opportunity of participating actively in their learning process.

Another way of encouraging Puerto Rican students to learn ESL is perhaps, through PAR paradigms. Ariizumi (2006) did a case study where his student "Mike", who was a second language learner of Japanese, engaged in a project where he became a researcher of his own learning process. Mike had to do reflections that helped him become aware of what was a limitation or an improvement on his learning process (Ariizumi, 2006). According to the

comments that the student wrote on his writing log, Ariizumi (2006) was able to conclude that one of the most powerful characteristics of PAR is the opportunity students have to evaluate their own learning in a comfortable way, where they can make adjustments to the learning process to improve their results. PAR can actually help students to learn a second language. This is so due to the fact that students engage in a metacognitive process, which fosters reflection upon strategies and processes, and thus, "authentic" learning occurs.

Teachers of English have both, linguistic and cultural barriers to try to overcome when teaching English. Therefore, teachers should try to motivate the students to learn a second language and think critically at the same time encouraging students to become active participants of their own learning process. Teachers can accomplish that difficult but not impossible task getting to know their students in order to develop relevant, authentic materials for them taking into consideration the student's historical and cultural backgrounds. Authors who have done projects related to ESL and social action such as Cammarotta, Fine, Singer and Arizumi all agree that the students must be the center, the students should construct their own learning. However these scholars also have in common that they developed project where they helped students become aware of their reality making connections with what is personal, and then with a broader perspective, or community learning. In order to implement my own project and encourage my ESL students to learn, I adopted that same process approach. At the beginning, when we were writing personal narratives, the students felt free, they took that opportunity to vent, our study sessions became a manifesto, an exorcism for the students.

**Historical Background of Public Housing in Puerto Rico and their implications on segregation and marginalization**

This section provides an overview of the historical background of public housing projects because the participants of this project live in public residential housing. The work that I carried out has to do with the stigmas that these students and their communities have to overcome and how their social background influences their learning of English.

According to Alameda & Rivera (2005) after the great American depression of 1930, the Puerto Rican Government began a process of industrialization with the intention of diminishing housing problems. Among these problems were unsanitary conditions and lack of security in marginalized areas where most of the population lived. Alameda & Rivera (2005) affirm that these measures were not enough to make justice to underprivileged families. These public housing programs were implemented after "The United States Housing Act of 1937" was adopted. The main goal was to provide economic assistance in order to help families to finance a house while fighting unemployment.

Alameda states that this system of "early urban irruption" fostered poverty, and maladjustments in the communities that were constructed by the Government. Some of these "arrabales" (slums) as Alameda calls them were "El Fanguito" and "Sal si Puedes" among others. Alameda (2005) explained that people living in "arrabales" had to endure diseases caused by mosquitoes, polluted water and trash. In addition, the number of citizens living in "arrabales" was on the rise, in fact, Picó (1975) wrote that more than 36,000 families were living in "arrabales" in the 1950's (as cited by Alameda 2005, p. 16).

These marginalized communities are still affected nowadays by issues of poverty and inequality, but also by negative stereotypes. Dinzey (2005) declares that communities like public housing are labeled as troublesome communities, generators of crime. Dinzey (2005) argues that the policy "mano dura contra el crimen" (hard hand against crime), is an example of how public housing projects are segregated because during the time the policy was imposed, these communities were surrounded by the police in full force. Dinzey (2005) commented that "the built environment became a tool which communities employed and activated to solidify class, racial and social identities and to feed perceptions and stigma of community distinctions. Through a complex process of stigmatization of communities and the stigmatization of elements of physical design of the neighborhoods, the built environment served to increase segregation among communities that are typically spatially adjacent". In other words, the infrastructure of public housing projects along with the policy "mano dura contra el crimen" reinforced the already existing environment of marginalization, discrimination and isolation that these communities have been subjected to.

In light of the history of communities such as public housing projects and "arrabales" in Puerto Rico, it is obvious that they are communities that have been marginalized since they were constructed. Therefore, given the fact that  there is a connection among poverty, social class and access to education, it is necessary to investigate how institutions like the UPRM can reach marginalized communities like public residential housing. The main objective of universities should be to accomplish the third task of social institutions which according to Brulin, Reason & Bradbury (1997) is to do community service. For that reason, my research is a project of hope, a project that aims to foster student's awareness and motivation to address the major social issues that oppress them.

## Methodology

In the following section, I provide the context of my AR study in Puerto Rico and the methodology that I will use to carry out my project. The main goal is to better understand the extent to which it is possible to foster social change through literacy practices in English. I will use the qualitative methods of ethnography and auto ethnography in order to answer the three research questions:

1. How can language arts activities in English be used to help students examine social issues in their communities?

2. How can the discussion and analysis of social issues help students to improve their English language skills?

3. As facilitators, teachers, and researchers, how are university student- tutors like me, changed by this experience?

### Qualitative Methods

Through the practice of qualitative methods such as ethnography and auto ethnography, I tried to understand how reading and writing about social change can empower students to act upon the circumstances that oppress them. Furthermore, I interrogated how my own practices as a teacher and a persona are influenced by this project.

### Justification for Ethnography

Similarly to the study done by Cammarota (2007), my project also used an ethnographic approach to collect data. Ethnography is the most practical method to carry out this project because researchers can observe and interpret how events and processes unfold and how the

members of communities make sense of their social world. This praxis promotes social change, reformation, individual and collective transformation. Ethnography also helped me to analyze the data from a holistic point of view, taking into consideration different perspectives. Giroux's (1992) "critical ethnography" better describes the method that guided this project. According to Giroux, critical ethnographers not only interpret historical, social and economical situations, but they become "blue collar cultural workers" aiming to weaken oppression.

**Justification for Auto- ethnography**

This research method allows the researcher (me) to become part of the study. In other words, the researcher/ facilitator can analyze the participants, but he can also do self- reflection and introspection. According to Butler- Kisber (2000) "self-study" is becoming very popular for reflecting about educational practices. (p. 104). As stated in the previous chapter, the paradigms which inform this project are AR and Critical Pedagogy. These paradigms endorse the idea that the stakeholders, or the students should be the focus, and/ the researchers or teachers, should become students of their own students. In order to do this, I decided to write an auto-ethnography where I reflect upon my practices and interaction with my students/stakeholders. Besides, the "Latina Feminist Group" (2001) explained that by sharing "testimonios" (testimonies) through autobiographical narratives, people can start a process of empowerment. The Latina Feminist Group acknowledged that "We all professed in the classroom about the connection between life experience and new knowledge construction, but we had never made our own life trajectories a source of inquiry". These words justify the need for self- study. As a teacher committed with education, I intend to theorize and share my experience as a teacher/facilitator/nurturer through a "testimonio" so that other teachers can eventually be empowered to write their own story.

**Pilot Study**

In order to discuss social issues that affect them, students need to feel comfortable with the researcher. Therefore, the fact that I positioned myself in the project helped as a tool to break barriers that can limit the students to share personal experiences, ideas or feelings. For that reason, I decided to do a pilot study before working with the participants. I volunteered to become the participants' tutor a semester before I carry out this project. The main idea was to start to get to know the students while we developed a sense of trust while simultaneously creating a comfortable environment appropriate for sharing personal experiences. This pilot study had an important role in the process of designing this project. In addition to the fact that the students were more comfortable with me when we began to work together, this pilot study helped me choose readings and prepare activities that were in tune with the academic preferences of the students. I also had the opportunity to prepare relevant lesson plans more driven towards the needs of the students even before we started to meet "officially". When we began our study sessions the second semester, the students already had clear expectations of what they wanted to learn and how our study sessions could meet those expectations.

**Setting and Context**

This project was an after school tutoring program where the six participants met at the facilities of the "CUA". We met in a classroom where we had access to school materials and technological devices such as laptops, a printer and internet. As stated in the introduction, this program aimed to motivate students to come closer to academic contexts like the UPRM. The university is a social institution with the task of developing professional human beings

committed with their communities. This institution has many projects that work directly with different communities. The project CUA is certainly a powerful strategy that can not only motivate students to finish studying their high school, but also to aspire for more, to pursue a higher education.

**Role of the researcher and participants**

**Researcher and facilitator.**

My role in this project was that of a facilitator providing my students with the tools they need to become researchers of their own community. Since the paradigm that I used is PAR, the stakeholders, as defined in chapter 1, played an active role in the development of the research. Freirian approaches to teaching also guide this study. Since this approach is not a traditional teaching methodology and one that has been criticized, I used auto ethnography to consider my own change, as a teacher and researcher using this paradigm. In other words, I became a participant of this project. Even though  I was a facilitator and a participant at the same time, some days I played the role of a teacher with the task of instructing students on how to use research methods for their own projects. This means that my role in this project was three-fold and it may vary according to each activity.

**Participants (Stakeholders).**

The participants of this study were high school students who belong to a project coordinated by Dr. Rima Brusi called "Centro Universitario para el Acceso" (CUA) from the UPRM. These students live in public residential housing communities in Western Puerto Rico. Initially, there were 7 students participating, but this number changed throughout the semester.

Most of the time 3 males and 3 females came to our study sessions and their ages range from 14 to 15. These students have always lived in Puerto Rico and are learning ESL. In order to participate, the students signed an assent form (appendix B) and the parents a consent form (appendix A).

**Profile of the Students.**

The students who participated in this project were adolescents of which 9 were in tenth grade and one of them was in eleventh grade. For most of them this was their first semester in high school, therefore they were still getting used to the style of new teachers and teaching methods. For these students it was a sacrifice to come to the study sessions, because they had to choose from going to basketball practices, dance classes or even other study sessions from private companies who offer students computers for assisting regularly. The performance of these students in this project was not only affected by the "regular" circumstances that adolescents have.. In addition to circumstances such as playing sports or spending time with friends , they also had to deal with the violence they are subjected to in their neighborhoods.

It is important to clarify that the students who participated in this project come from very low socio-economic backgrounds. These social contexts and background have an influence in their performance of the study sessions. As we will see in the data analysis, students like Marie even had to stop coming to the study sessions. Marie's mother prohibited her to come because the bus that would take her back home from the CUA would come too late, and the neighborhood where Marie lives, according to her mother, "gets too dangerous at night". For the most part, these students do not live in "traditional" homes or neighborhoods. According to the anecdotes they shared throughout the semester, most of them have been witnesses of domestic

violence, use of drugs, and children abandonment, consequently resulting in some of them living

in foster homes.

# Chapter 4

## Data Collection

In this chapter I discuss the ethnographic and auto- ethnographic methods used to collect my data and the pilot study I did. This pilot study was the first step to get to know my students before doing the actual project.

## Pilot Study

The first stage of data collection for this study began in the previous semester, Spring 2010 with a pilot study. Since the nature of this project requires students to reflect upon social issues related to themselves and their communities, it is important that they feel comfortable with me. The purpose of doing the pilot study was to get to know the students and that they get to know me. We also did several activities very similar to the ones I planned for the Fall semester 2010. I received positive feedback, the students liked the activities and they decided to participate on the project. After I did the pilot study, the students were receptive to me and throughout their written pieces they provided insight on who they are, and where they come from.

## Ethnography

After I did the pilot study, when the fall semester 2010 started, I began to meet with the students and I did observations and kept my ideas in the form of field notes that I wrote on a personal journal. I had meetings with the students twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays, and each time, we did different creative writing activities that also provided insight about the participants. These activities were divided in stages: The first month, September 2010 was

devoted to "Getting to know Ourselves", October and November 2010 activities were focused on

"Reading and Writing about Literature related to social issues" and in December 2010, the

students began to develop their own community research project. (Please see appendix D).

The following diagram better illustrates the process that I took into effect to be able to

encourage my students to discuss and analyze issues related to identity and social justice, to later

on turn that knowledge into a community project. This diagram was inspired by Cammarota

(2007) who had a similar approach to carry out his community project. Figure 1:
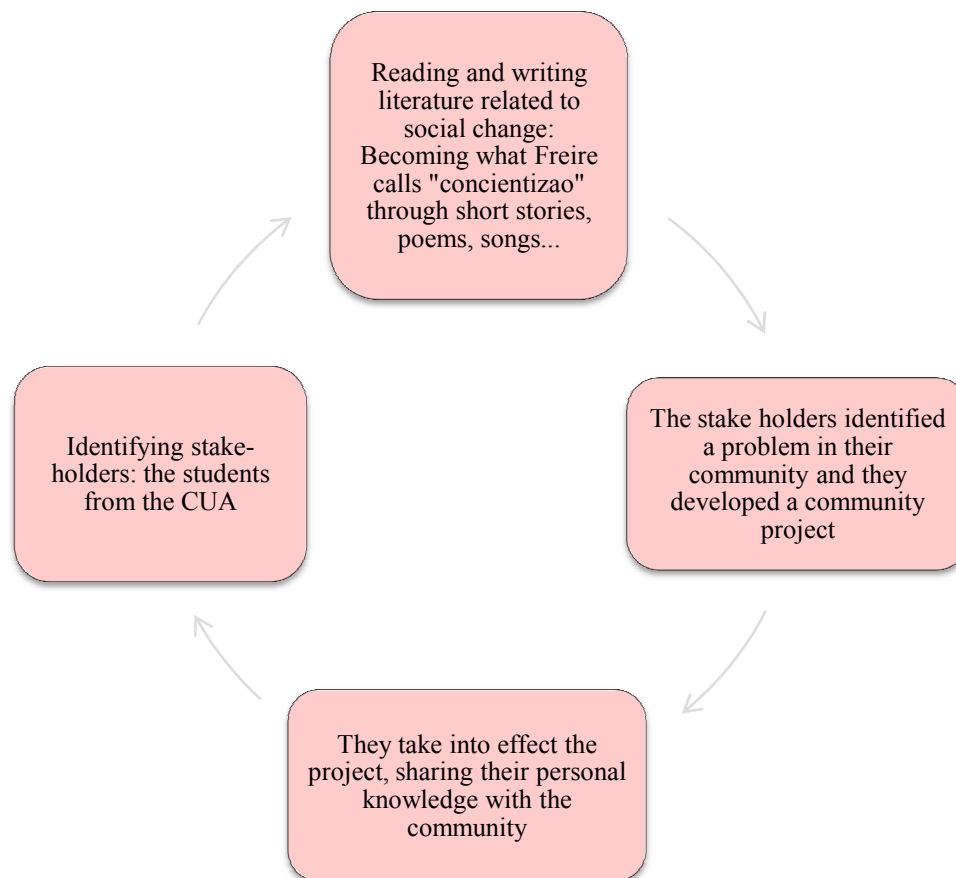


Very similar to Cammarotta, I did an ethnography of my students doing their own action

research projects. After reading and writing literature related to social change, gender,

discrimination and oppression,  the students became researchers of their own lives and their

projects consisted of: 1) identifying a social issue that they were experiencing at their community 2) taking pictures reflecting the issue and developing a community project to provide possible solutions to that problem and sharing their project with their community. (Appendix D)

*To answer research question 1 and 2*, I created a unit on social change. In this unit the students analyzed culturally relevant literature related to social issues. The unit consisted of a series of writing workshops that dealt with students' cultural identities. Even though I designed this unit, the students played an important role in the process. I decided to complement my lessons using music, pictures, videos etc. because the students had previously commented that they liked these type of activities. In this stage of the process the students were still working hand on hand with me. Their final written pieces were analyzed for social awareness and language use. These written pieces, poems, monologues and short stories were tools that provided valuable information and insight to the students' perceptions upon social change and reformation. I kept field notes and reflective journals of my observations. The work done by the students was compiled in a booklet where I kept record of the written pieces done by the students. The purpose of creating this booklet was also to reward the students for all their work and motivate them to share their findings.

To gather data *for research question number 3*, I kept a personal diary of my thoughts and ideas regarding the activities and experiences that occurred and my reflections on them. The main goal was to study how this project changed my perception of doing research and being an educator. As I began meeting with the participants of the AR project during the fall semester of 2010, I started writing journals with the purpose of analyzing the data that I was gathering from the student written samples and discussions. The journals that I wrote helped me analyze every student reaction gathered from these activities in a deeper level. I explored possible thoughts and

ideas that could be further developed. For example, some of my considerations were: what is the role of the teacher according to the students, can the AR paradigm provide an appropriate platform for teachers to establish cheerful, enjoyable and at the same time professional relationships with the students, can the activities promote awareness and consequently social change among the students, and how can I deal with my role as their teacher/researcher/facilitator? The objective of these journals was simply to help me organize my ideas and move towards the pedagogical implications that I want to share with the readers of this investigation.

## List of activities carried out during the semester

The following chart lists the activities we did for each stage of the research process along with the number of students who participated at each activity. Table 1:

| Stage One: "Getting to know ourselves | Description of Activity | Date | Participants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data Collection #1 | A written and performed monologue to express attitudes towards English | September 20, 2010 | Luna, Tito, Jenny, Franco, Kathy, José, Marie |
| Data Collection #2 | "Who am I Poem" | September 27, 2010 | Luna, Tito, Jenny, Kathy, José, Marcos |
| Stage 2- "Reading and Writing about Literature" | | | |
| Data Collection #3 | Reaction to the song "I Love the way you Lie" | October 4, 2010 | Luna and Tito, |
| Cont. | The same activity with the students that | October 6, 2010 | Jenny, José and Marco (he was a student that |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | were absent the previous day. | | was with us just for the day, but then he wanted to continue participating in our meetings) |
| *Data Collection #4* | Comic Strip using the handout "A Case of Discrimination" | October 13, 2010 | Tito, José, Luna, Marcos, Jenny and Franco |
| *Data Collection #5* | Illustrated Short Story | October 18, 2010 | Tito, José, Marie, Franco, Marcos, Wally, Jenny |
| *Data Collection #6* | Reaction to the song "Get Up Stand Up Brainstorming ideas for Social Justice projects | October 20, 2010 | José, Marcos, Franco, Jenny |
| *Data Collection #7* | Turning Pain into Power: Writing a letter poem | October 25, 2010 | Pepe and José |
| Data Collection #8 | Questionnaire Role of the Teacher to see if their answers match with the previous written pieces | | |
| ***Stage 3- "Developing their own community project"*** | | | |
| *Data Collection #9*<br><br>Ongoing activities such as Writing letters, articles, doing interviews etc. from the last week of November to the present | The students identified a social issue in their community and they took pictures to document the problem. | The students wrote a letter to the Municipality of Mayagüez to explain that a street in their community was getting flooded every time it | The students invited Dr. Francisco Maldonado, a civil engineer to visit their community and offer solutions to this problem |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | rains. |
| *Data Collection #10* | Assessment questionnaires | December 8, 2010 | Franco, Jenny, Tito, Marcos and Luna |

## Detailed Description for Each Activity

Data Collection #1- A written and performed monologue about the attitudes of the students towards English

The purpose of this activity was to listen to the student's perception of English to have an idea of what were their expectations and needs were in order to try to address them. I decided to do it in a monologue because they could be honest and vent all their feelings through the voice of a character without the feeling of being judge. I also gave the students hats, wigs, glasses and masks to create their characters so they felt we were not looking at them, but we were looking at the character. During the activity the students practiced their written skills, they expressed their feelings in a performance that was like an "exorcism" to liberate frustrations while the students practiced their oral skills.

Data Collection #2- "Who I am Poem"

In order to carry out this activity, I looked up the definition of the name of every student on the internet. When I went to the classroom, I told them what their name means and I asked them to tell me if they think that their personality is actually related to the meaning of their name. Then we saw a video which is a dramatization of Sandra Cisnero's "My Name" from "The House on Mango Street". We discussed the feelings of Esperanza regarding her name.

Then, I explained what word pictures are, and some elements of poetry such as similes and metaphors. Finally I encouraged the students to write a "Who am I poem" where they would describe their personality and how the definition of their names give them a hint of who they are as individuals. They had to write the poem using similes, metaphors and word pictures.

Data Collection #3- Reaction to the song "I love the way you lie" by Eminem and Rihanna

`The purpose of doing this activity was to initiate student conversations regarding domestic violence and arousing their awareness of this issue. Violence is also a form of oppression and sometimes we promote violence even unconsciously through music, tv shows and the media in general. For that reason I chose the song "I Love the Way You Lie", it is very famous, everyone sings it, and many people post it on their Facebook walls. I also wanted to know the student's perception of the song. In order to carry out the activity, I showed to the

students the video of the song available on www.youtube.com. Then we discussed the song, how it portrays violence as something "sexy", the image of women vs. men, the use of alcohol and chauvinism. After our discussion, the students watched another video, "Chicago's" scene "Cell Block Tango" where women explain why they killed their husbands. The purpose of showing them this video was to show them things from a different perspective and to "catch" the beat of that song in order for students to do a written activity inspired by the rhythm of "Cell Block Tango". In their own songs, the students had to write a reaction to domestic violence in general, or a reaction to Eminem and Rihanna's song. I wrote my own song to provide students a concrete example of what I was asking them to do:

What I would like to tell Eminem or his producer:

He had it coming

He had it coming,

He only had himself to blame,

He was disrespectful, so freaking insane

He had it coming

He should be locked up in jail.

He is an abuser, a total loser,

This man is an EPIC FAIL

His daughter suffers,

She had to whiteness her parents mess

Hope she forgets this someday

I wish her the best

Data Collection #4- Memoir or Comic Strip using the handout "A Case of Discrimination"

The main idea of doing this activity was to discuss with students issues of discrimination. After reading Esmeralda Santiago's memoir "But they're Still Illegitimate", the students discussed the text and how the narrator and her mother were being discriminated. I gave students a handout with three comic strips from Schniedewind and Davidson's book "Open Minds to Equality". The comic strips portrayed different situations where discrimination was present. After we discussed the comic strips, the students provided their own definition of discrimination and they narrated through a comic strip an experience they had where they felt discriminated, or they gave a general example of discrimination.
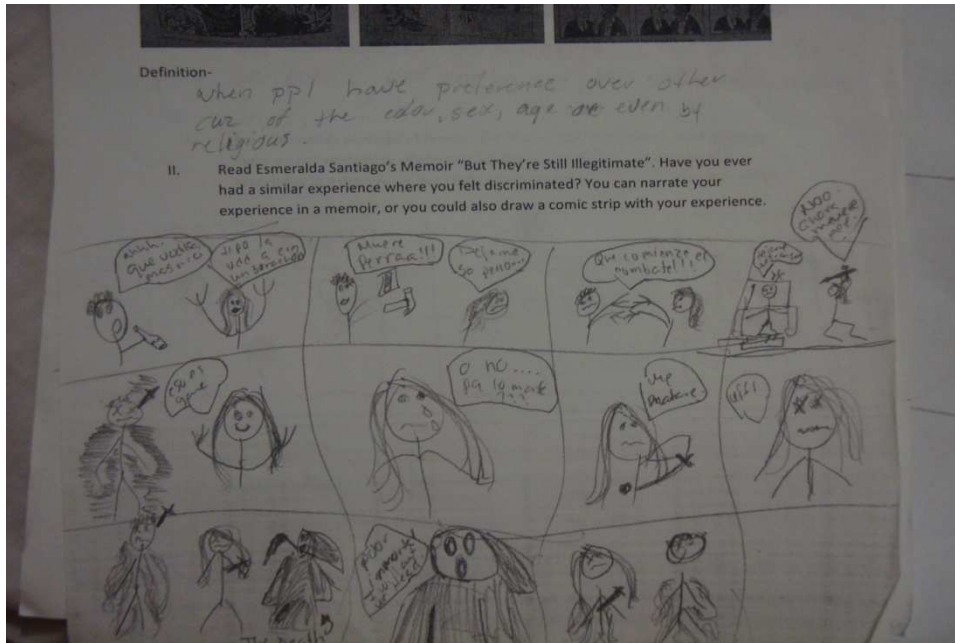
Data Collection #5- Illustrated Short Story

The purpose of this activity was to help students write an illustrated short story related to one issue of discrimination. To carry out this activity I discussed with students the elements of a short story, and then we talked about drawing images that could represent events from the story. The images had to be related with the setting of the story, and the description of the characters. As an example, we read excerpts from the illustrated novel Diary of a Wimpy Kid" by Jeff Kinny. After the students read these excerpts, they had an idea of how to write their short story using illustrations. I asked students to create a "group story" and they all narrated events were they were discriminated. They decided to write a story about Jenny's experience when she went to a new school. Her classmates didn't accept her because she lived in "el caserío" and a girl even invited her to fight. For the story, the students decided to create a male character.

Data Collection #6- Reaction to the song "Get Up Stand Up"- Call for Action (Brainstorming ideas for Social Justice projects)

The students were given the handout "Social Action". In this handout they have the lyrics of the song "Get Up, Stand Up" by Bob Marley. After watching and listening to the lyrics of the song from a You-Tube video, the students discussed the song. They answered questions such as: "What is the purpose of Bob Marley's song?" "Why do you think he sings this song, besides entertaining people"? Then after students answer and discussed these questions, they analyzed pictures related to social action with the aim of providing a definition of what is social action, and what are some examples. Finally the students had to write a paragraph where they explain how they can "Get up, stand up for their rights" and how they think they can promote social action. The last question was: "what activities or things could you do to help people or improve something in your community?" The objective of this question is to help students to develop plausible ideas that could become their AR projects.

Data Collection #7- Turning Pain into Power: Writing a letter poem

After the students listened to Daniel Beaty's poem "Knock Knock" from a video, they also read his poem from a handout. Then they discussed the poem. They answered questions such as: What is the author's purpose in writing this poem? What is the structure of the poem? Why is the author writing a letter as if he was his father? Then I asked student to write their own letter poem, where they "father", or "mother" themselves, in other words, a letter where they give themselves the advice they need to hear regarding certain issue. The idea of the activity was to help students to consider writing as a tool that can empower them and even heal their soul. The students who participated wanted to write their poems in English to practice their language skills.

After the students wrote their poems, we had a discussion about what they wrote, and then I provided them feedback related to grammar. For example I explained that in Spanish we use the verb "tengo" (have) to say our age, but in English we use the verb "be".

Data Collection #8: Project developed by the students

Given the fact that this was an AR project, the students/participants had to become involved with the project on a deeper level. For example, after we discussed literature and wrote songs related to discrimination and social change, the students had to develop a project where they take a stand and do an activity in their community. In this stage of the process the students were expected to be able to work independently. During our previous unit, the students discussed ideas to solve social problems, and they analyzed how other people and writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Maya Angelou and Mariposa encourage readers to think for themselves and strike oppressive structures. To engage students with this project, I started one of our study sessions with a riddle. In order to solve the riddle the students had to "think outside the box", a box which is imaginary, created by ourselves. Then I asked students to think about things that happen in real life and how we create these "Imaginary boxes" which limit us. This was a helpful transition to define praxis. I explained that we not only should "think outside the box", but also use those ideas to act. I asked students if there were any problems in their communities where they could do something to help solve them. Immediately Tito said: "*Si. La charca casi lago que se forma en la carretera cada vez que llueve*". So I asked students why this is a problem and they said that it is a place where mosquitoes are growing, affecting the residents and even exposing them to dengue. The students felt the need to solve the problem, so they started brainstorming ideas to make a plan of action. To help students brainstorm ideas and get organized, I asked them to imagine they were writing an article for the newspaper where they had to explain the problem. I

43

gave students a handout with the structure of a newspaper article and they wrote their own article using that structure. This activity was very practical because it not only helped me to discuss the structure and purpose of a news article, but the students answered the questions who, what, when, where, why and how in an organized way. They also had a product from which they felt proud.

After doing the activities, I had to analyze all the data I gathered. Since we did many activities and I was able to gather a lot of data, I identified recurrent themes to later, organize those themes into categories and sub categories thanks to the Constant Comparative Method. The next chapter provides more information on this matter.

# Chapter 5

## *Data Analysis*

In this chapter I provide an in depth analysis and interpretation of the data that I collected from the written pieces of the students, and from the reflective journals I wrote in order to analyze my performance as the researcher/facilitator of this project.

While I analyzed the reflective journals and identified specific topics for further discussions from the activities and my field notes, I decided to organize the data into categories. This is the technique that Epstein (2007) used to organize her own thesis (p. 113). Bogdan and Knopp (1982) called this method "The Constant Comparative Method". According to Bogdan and Knopp (1982) "the constant comparative method is a research design for multi-data sources which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of the data collection." In other words, the process of interpreting and analyzing the data occurs simultaneously while the data is being gathered. This method was practical and effective for even recalling the smallest detail from each meeting. In order to be able to analyze all the data, I had to code it.  I used a system of colors and categories such as "The role of the teacher", "Students' perceptions of English", "and Students' perceptions of their English class", among other categories.

The data is triangulated, which refers to the use of two or more sources of data collection in a study (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 141). For example, my focus was always the students, but I had a journal were I wrote all my observations and I analyzed the written pieces of the students. The data was also analyzed in context, and compared and contrasted to the data generated by similar projects done by other scholars in different backgrounds. This technique helped me to

avoid validity and reliability issues. As Campbell and Fiske said, "triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research" (as cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 141). For that reason, I decided to use more than one research source to gather information for this project. In this case, as stated before, students' writing pieces, journals, my reflective logs, and observation protocols were taken into consideration.

## Interpretation of the Data

In this section I analyzed how the social context of the participants had an influence in their performance during the semester. I also discussed the different categories the data reveled such as: the role of the teacher, the perception of the students towards English and their English class among other categories.

It is important to have in mind that the participants of this project had to deal with many factors which affected their performance. Even though there were 7 participants, not all of them participated in the same activities. Some of them were absent to the study sessions for many circumstances, and others would come, but maybe they were not in the mood to write. Marie's case provides an idea of how the student's performance was affected by the circumstances they have to struggle with in their homes. I went to the school to talk to Marie, and when I asked her why she was not coming to the study sessions she responded:

*Marie***:** "Its just because the bus is picking us late, and my mom does not want me to be late at home, because things are not good at the neighborhood, it is too dangerous".

This environment does not provide a safe, comfortable setting for students to feel free in their own homes. For this reason, it is very difficult to assess the student's performance in such a hostile environment where their personal lives, their relationship with their family members and

46

the reality they live day by day are inextricable components of who they are as students. Therefore it is of outmost importance to praise any effort these students made to simply come to the study sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays. That shows their willingness and motivation to learn.

Given the fact that these students have gone through many difficult experiences that influence their performance in this project, the role of the teacher and her relationship with these students is crucial. In order to start working with the students I had to negotiate my position with them as their teacher, facilitator/ nurturer doing activities where they could bring their personalities and background into the classroom. After they felt comfortable sharing their personal written pieces with me, we started to discuss and analyze literacy. The readings we did roused discussions about gender roles, discrimination, racism, and language. The students identified with the readings, and these were mind unshackling. After doing a reflection where we analyzed the song "I love the way you lie", *Tito* commented that he doesn't want to be like his step father. Interestingly, an engineering professor from the UPRM went to one of our meetings, and after he saw Tito's performance within our group, and how he acted like a true leader, the professor invited Tito to be part of an electrical engineering project from the university. So this type of project can give students the opportunity to learn English and to discover who they are and where they want to go. Tito doesn't want to be like his step father, but here at the university he has the opportunity of meeting professionals such as Dr. Marcel Castro, a professor that can become Titos' inspiration by modeling alternative forms of masculinity.

Negotiating my place among the students and providing them with relevant literacy motivated them not only to become aware of their reality and their circumstances, but also to empower them to do something to change those circumstances. This helped us to begin working

47

with our own research project in the community "El Carmen". Things started flowing. The wheels were turning slowly, but, surely. I just gave a hint, a motivation to bring about change and the students did their best to develop their social action project.

"Turning the wheels" was a process, that took time and effort, but it would have been impossible to even start the engine without taking students through the following stages:

1- Getting to know ourselves- a stage to complain and vent our feelings towards English, school, our teachers and the things we do not like about our communities.

2- Reading and writing about literature related to our main concerns- In this stage I aimed to push students forward to develop consciousness regarding social issues

3- Developing their own research project- A stage where the wheels are supposed to be turning. The students should take flight and create a project by themselves. This is the time to turn theory into practice, thoughts, complaints and ideas into action.

The journey throughout the previous stages aimed to help students move from what is "personal" reflection to community learning. This process resulted on a series of reflections and data very relevant for teachers. These students provided insight and valuable information related to the role of a teacher, and learning a second language. The following section provides an analysis of this type of data taken from my reflective journals and field notes. The following figure better outlines the process. Figure II:

| Personal | •Getting to know ourselves<br>•Sharing experiences through poetry, and other written pieces |
|---|---|
| Literacy, awareness | •Reading and writing literature related to social issues to promote awareness of discrimination, racism, gender and class issues<br>•Reflecting about how powerful we can be, and how we can change power relations and oppresive structures |
| Community Learning | •Identifying a social issue in our community<br>•How can we connect with other people, and work together to solve the problem |

## Data Gathered from the reflective journals

The following table better illustrates the categories and sub- categories in which the data

was organized after been analyzed. Table 2:

| |
|---|
| *Category 1 .Role of the teacher* |
| *Sub categories:* |
| a.Do not embarrass students |
| b.Provide them with enough time to work and do their assignments |
| c.Be committed with the students |
| d.Develop a warm and comfortable environment for the students |
| e.Become part of the students social contexts |
| f.Complement lessons with visuals, written samples and art |
| g.Praise student's work and asking them to share written pieces |
| h.Teach grammar explicitly |
| i.Teach grammar alongside writing activities |
| *Category 2. Raising student's awareness of social action through music and literature* |
| *Sub categories:* |
| a.Open up and turning pain into power |
| b.Acknowledge students' mother tongue Spanish |
| *Category 3. Attitudes of the students towards English* |
| *Category 4. Attitudes of the students related to social change and developing their own Action Research project* |

| |
|---|
| *Category5. Emerging questions* |
| *Subcategories* |
| Did students experience a change in attitude, improvement of English language and leadership skills in their communities thanks to this project? |
| What are the aspirations of the students and what are their plans after graduating from high school? |
| *Category 6. Action Research: a learning experience for the facilitator/teacher/researcher* |

**Categories and sub categories with the Interpretation of the data:**

## 1. Role of the Teacher

The first category provides information on what should be the role of the teacher according to the students. This category had to be my priority because every time the students had a chance to speak about their experiences with English, they would automatically talk about their previous teachers and how most of them did not address their educational and affective needs. Obviously, I used their feedback to prepare my lessons. I gathered information for this category throughout the student's monologues and performances where they described their perception of English, a small questionnaire and the relevant dialogue that was initiated and inspired by the written pieces the students shared. I developed the following categories based on the comments done by the students during the research period.

### a. Do not embarrass them.

Do not embarrass students saying out loud their grades like José wrote in his monologue where he described his perception of his English teacher: José**:** *"Me gusta la clase de Inglés pero la maestra no me cae muy bien. Dice las puntuaciones al frente de la clase y eso no me agrada mucho".*

Immediately after José read his monologue, Jenny felt identified with him and she also made a comment about her teacher. She felt the teacher made fun of her when she made a mistake: *Jenny***:** " *quién te dijo a ti que el pasado de end era finish?.*

This event might have not only embarrassed the student but probably inhibited her from participating in class. Jenny also expressed this feeling in her monologue about her perception of English and her teacher:

> *Jenny:* Mija en la escuela desde 7mo hasta 9no grado yo no supe mucho que era el
> ingles. Imaginate en 7mo estuve todo el año haciendo una friquin carpeta sobre mi
> y pintando dibujitos de 8vo a 9no con palabras de vocabulario y lectura y ahora en
> 10mo imaginate la maestra esta que se cree la mas que sabe y uno no le puede
> preguntar algo que rápido te critica.

Again, the role of the teacher plays an important part in the student's attitude towards English. In addition, the students are discouraged if they feel the activities they do are not challenging and useful for them. Jenny provides an important piece of information: she had not been challenged educationally before. Now she needs to adjust to a difficult class to which she does not feel she has a solid foundation to work with. This lack of rigor is a situation that mostly affects low- income students who do not have to much access to English, technology and other media that promotes learning a second language.

**b. Provide students with enough time to work and do their assignments.**

According to what José, Jenny and the rest of the students expressed in the monologues about their perception of English, I also know that they do not like their English class because they feel their teacher does not provide them with enough time to work with the material. In other words, teachers should let the students take their time to process the information even if they do not

cover all what was planned even though students still need to be academically challenged. This is an issue that teachers often ask themselves how to address: If they should cover what is stipulated in their syllabus, lesson plans and curriculum or if they should adjust to the student's pace. If we asked a student like José what he would prefer his teacher to do in this case, he would definitely ask for more time to understand the material:

> *José***:** La clase de inglés no me gusta porque la maestra es muy estricta. La rason por la maestra muy estricta pq no te da chance en los trabajos. Me gustaría que la clase de ingles fuera más divertida q. practicaramos el habla más y q. nos diera más tiempo para entender el material.

After I read this from Jose's monologue, the next day I did not start a new activity because some of the students were working on the previous one. Those who were finished helped their peers. Teachers can also use revising and editing techniques to show students that writing is a process that takes time and effort. In a crowded classroom with students with multiple intelligences and diverse educational and emotional needs, it is difficult to make sure that all the students are running in the same track and keeping up with school work. However, after school programs like this one provide teachers with the opportunity to prepare lessons that are more individualized and focused on each student's needs in order to provide them with the appropriate resources and enough time to understand the classroom material. Since AR is implemented in real time and it is applied to the situation at hand, it provides teacher/students like myself with useful, practical knowledge about educational practices.

### c. Being committed to the students.

Even though the commitment a teacher has to the students does not guarantee that students will also feel committed, some students appreciate and value the efforts of their teachers. Kathy for example asked me *Kathy***:** "Maestra pero por qué siempre viene, y hasta nos trae estas cositas?!" (Referring to the snacks and classroom materials)

The students got excited every time they saw me carrying crackers, juice, magic markers and card boards among other materials. I think this made them feel important, that I cared for them, and that I was prepared and organized. The fact that Kathy was asking herself why I was "caring" so much for them made me think that she is probably not used to teachers acting that way. But I can teach her with my example that any profession should be done with love, responsibility and commitment. Kathy also commented on her monologue that the best teacher of English she ever had, was a caring teacher with whom she could talk to when no- one else could understand her:

> *Kathy***:** Cuando llegue a Florida me senti very happy but very nervous. Despues al pasar el tiempo me acostumbre y fui la primera, the first person of my family que aprendi English. Gracias a unos children's del classroom pq me desesperaba al ver q. no los entendía y no podía expresar nada con ellos. Solamente podía hablar con la maestra. That teacher I love it, era the best teacher in the world…

When Kathy was little she had the chance to practice English because she was immersed in the language. It must have been very hard for her because like she said, no one in her family knew English, so they could not help her. The same thing happens with students in our classroom. Sometimes no one they know, besides their teacher can help them with English, or even any other problem these students might be experiencing. Therefore it is of outmost importance that we are there for them, we support them and we care for them.

### d. Developing a warm, safe and comfortable environment where students can feel free to be themselves.

The role of the teacher should also be to develop a warm, safe and comfortable environment where students feel free to be themselves. I think that the pilot study that I did before I met with these students helped me to gain their trust because they already knew me or at least they had seen me at the CUA. I was not a stranger in their lives so they felt comfortable sharing their experiences and written pieces. If they see the teacher as the ultimate authority, they might not want to participate in class discussions and they might not feel free to clarifying doubts. Thanks to the comfortable environment we had in our meetings, Jenny shared her life story and she described some terrifying memories she have from her childhood when she no longer lived with her mother and father because Social Services separated her from them.

### e. Becoming part of the students social contexts.

The role of the teacher should not be limited to teaching in the classroom, but they should also become part of the social contexts of the students. Since the students felt comfortable with me in the classroom, they often times invited me to activities they were part of, outside the school. In other words, these students introduced me to other social contexts they belong to. Tito for example was going to do a performance at church, so he told me it was very important for him that I could go. I went to his performance and I realized how important it really was for him that I was there because that day, people had to bring a guest, and Tito was very proud to say he had two guests; his English teacher, and his mother. He was anxiously waiting for his mother, which was going to be the first time she would go with him. She came in late, and sat at the back of the room. Tito was looking around trying to find her. When he realized she was there because she went to the front to say how proud she was of him, they hugged and cried together. I felt

happy to be there, congratulating Tito and his mother for this beautiful and enlightening moment. I do not even want to imagine how Tito might have felt if neither of us, had gone that day.

### f. Complementing lessons with visuals, written samples and art!!!

Every time I wanted to ask students to write something, I would have to ask them to draw their idea first. I also had to demonstrate them a written sample as guide to do their own piece. I have to admit that I was feeling a little discouraged when I began to do the activities with my students because nothing was coming out the way I had planned. For example, when I asked them to write a song reacting to Eminem and Rihana's "I love the way you lie", I only received a written piece from Jenny, and it was a free- written paragraph:

> *Jenny:* Que ella (referring to Rhianna) antes de vivir con un hombre debe conocerlo y que si ella vivio esto no deberia estar cantando esa cancion no debe estar diciendo que le gusta la forma en la que el le miente. Si tiene un hombre el cual la maltrata no debe estar con el pq un hombre maltratante la puede hasta matar. Hoy en dia se viven muchas experiencias con los hombres maltratantes en las cuales las mujeres terminan muertas. Que no sea masoquista.

This reminds me of what students argued in the first activity we did which was a written and performed monologue: Students need time to write! I was asking them to write a song, but they needed to brainstorm ideas first in order to be able to write the song. In other words, it is important to take students step by step through the writing process and the written product will not necessarily be the one we expected. In this case, Jenny didn't provide an analysis of the song "I love the way you Lie" through the genre I specified, but at least she wrote a paragraph which could be a standing point for the song or any other written piece. Certainly she had many ideas,

she is aware of the mortal consequences domestic violence can provoke and she even related the issue of the song with real life situations, she just needed time to organize all these ideas before writing her song.

José and Marcos preferred to draw their feelings towards the song and I could not convince them to write something. At that moment I understood that as an instructor I am aware of the importance of teaching students to write step by step, following the writing process. However, I was pushing them towards a product that they were probably not ready to write at that moment. I think that even though most of the time the students don't want to write, this projects' accomplishment has been to at least, have them write or draw something even if it is not the genre required in the instructions. Still, their drawings where they reacted to the song "I love the way you lie", actually portrayed their opinions regarding the topic:

Picture A:                                    Picture B.
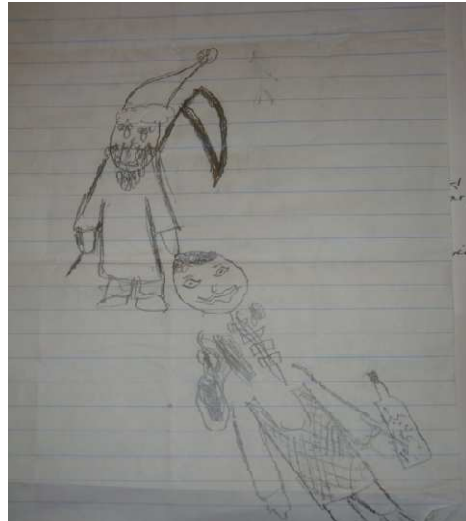


Jose drew Picture A. He explained that the picture represents both, Eminem and Rihana's heart and souls. As we can see in the picture, he portrayed Eminem's heart and soul broken with wings that had to be repaired. The heart also has horns, symbolic of his cruelty, and abusive

behavior. Rihana's heart in contrast, has a halo symbolizing purity. In other words, Jose's interpretation of the song reflects his idea that Eminem was a corrupted soul versus Rihanna, a victim that doesn't seem to be aware of all the cruelty she is subjected to.

Marcos presents another side of the coin in picture B. He drew a man being carried away by alcohol. Marcos made a connection between alcohol and domestic violence, where apparently one leads to the other and self destruction then, is inevitable. This means that the student is aware that domestic violence can affect both, the victim but also the abuser.

The fact that students prefer to express their ideas drawing pictures instead of writing demonstrates that they have ideas and thoughts to share, but they do not know how to do it through writing. One reason why the students probably spend so much time on a blank page, not knowing what to write, or they just prefer not to write anything at all, might be that they were not used to writing in English or in Spanish. Jenny provides insight on this matter: Jenny- *"Misi es que yo sé lo que quiero decir, pero no se escribirlo, y cuando veo el papel se me olvida"*.

For these students it seems to be very easy to speak their ideas in Spanish, putting them in paper seems to be a much harder task. Eventually they get blocked and they just don't want to write.

The students also had to draw something that represented their personality to be able to write their "Who I am poems". After they started drawing, they unconsciously started to write descriptions of their drawings. Some sample poems that the students wrote even include figurative language and the elements of poetry that we had discussed. *Jenny* wrote:

I am as explosive as a volcano erupting
I am like a bottle of champagne,

When people agitates me "el colcho sale con fuerza!"

But I am sweet like strawberries and chocolate

I am a box of surprises,

The more you get to know me,

The more treasures you will discover of me.

I come from "Mayaguez, Ciudad de las Aguas Puras"

And I come from the dance floor

Where I move like a "trompo"

**g. Praising student's work and asking them to share their written pieces.**

Since I had two of my students participating in the pilot study, for the first poem activity the written samples I used were the poems Tito and Luna had written the previous semester. They wanted to read them to their peers and after they did so, they felt proud of themselves. Their peers were also empowered to do the poem because they thought that if Tito and Luna could do it, they could do the same thing.

Sharing the poems was a powerful experience because as I explained earlier, since the authors were Tito and Luna, the rest of the students identified with those poems. Writing and sharing this "Where I'm from Poems" became a powerful and pertinent tool where the students described negative aspects of their neighborhood, but they enhanced the positive aspects of it and how proud they are of "where they come from".  Praising the work done by the students and sharing their written pieces is definitely very important. In this case, Tito and Luna felt happy and proud with their poems so they wrote them on card boards and posted them at the wall in the CUA for everyone to see them:
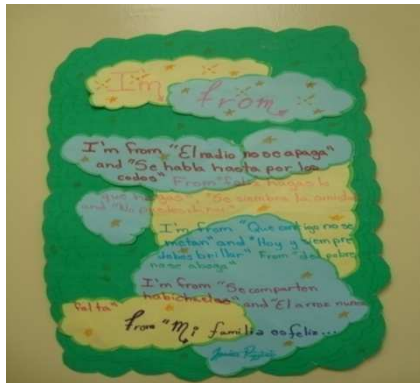
Tito's Poem                                          Luna's Poem
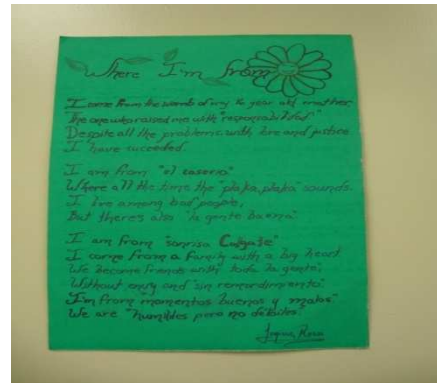


#### h. Teaching grammar explicitly.

According to my experience with this writing after school program, teachers should use both, top down and bottom up approaches to teach language. On September 29, I started the session with a grammar note about subject, object and possessive pronouns. I heard the comment "Aprendí algo nuevo hoy". I felt that they thought that studying grammar in an explicit way was actually learning "something new". I think that students like to measure their knowledge so it is a good idea to keep on starting the session with these grammar notes. Besides, this is an approach that can help me reinforce students' writing skills in general while they feel they are learning (x amount of things). Smith and Wilhem (2006) elaborated a discussion related to grammar where they favor the idea of grammar as something that needs to be taught in context. They express that teaching formal grammar (identifying parts of speech, labeling, etc.) is "senseless" because "Kids don't learn this kind of grammar, because there is no practical context for using this kind of knowledge" (p. 40). The main idea is that teachers should not approach grammar as if it was a set of rules that students need to digest, but a knowledge of linguistic structures used for purposes such as reading and writing.

59

### i. Teaching grammar alongside writing activities.

Grammar however, is taught at its best alongside writing activities. After the students wrote their pieces they usually asked me to revise them, especially in terms of grammar. For example, when Angel finished writing his letter poem, he asked me to correct it, and I had the opportunity to explain to him that when we say our age in English, we use the verb "be", not have.  This reminded me of the importance of integrating reading and writing to our classes, even if they are basic courses which focus on grammar. Reading and writing help us teach grammar in context and it gives students the opportunity to go back to what they wrote, and restructure it. Benjamin & Oliva (2007) explained that due to the numerous studies scholars have done regarding the teaching of grammar, there is no need to continue justifying it, but rather there is a need for developing new ways to teach grammar. Oliva mentioned that learning grammar makes us think and anything that make us think is worth it because we become smarter. In their book, they provide "hands on" approaches and lessons that aim to let the students know that they are already grammatically competent, the students are the ones who construct grammar rules according to what they read from texts. For example, Oliva's students analyzed the use of appositives for sentence variety, so Oliva provides examples from the text the students have to read which was "The Scarlett Letter".

## *2.* Raising student's awareness of social action through music and literature.

The second category is related to the use of music and literature with the purpose of raising student's consciousness regarding issues related to social class, gender, age, domestic violence, and discrimination. This is what Paulo Freire calls "conscientização" when he commented that "The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by

the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientização". This is a process that should come from within the students to eventually and hopefully, become exteriorized through action. After analyzing and discussing the song "I love the way you lie", the students shared their thoughts about domestic violence and relationships. The purpose of this activity was to make students aware of different forms of oppression and how the media and even some of their "favorite" artists promote them. The activity not only helped students to "open- up" their eyes but also their hearts, and it helped them become aware of the importance of learning English.

### a. Opening up and turning pain into power.

Tito for instance, opened up and talked about an experience he had with his step father when he was little. He felt confident to narrate how he called his stepfather "pato" because he saw on a TV show that men who hit women are not men. So he deduced that his stepfather was not a man, but a "pato", a derogatory term to refer to a man who is homosexual. However, it was not painful for him to remember this childhood memory, it was rather a powerful experience which made him think that:

> *Tito*- Tal vez Dios me puso esa experiencia cuando pequeño para que me diera cuenta de que cuando sea grande yo quiero ser todo lo contrario a mi padrastro, yo quiero ser un hombre caballeroso y respetuoso.

Tito also expressed that after analyzing the song and transcribing its meaning to Spanish, his perception of the song changed. This is another way of motivating students to learn English, sometimes they don't understand a song and they promote it without even knowing that its lyrics go totally against their values and believes.

*Pepe* also shared a powerful experience through a letter poem inspired by Daniel Beaty's "Knock Knock". In the poem, Pepe not only narrated a difficult situation he is having because his mother is in jail, but he wrote a letter with the words of comfort that he would like to hear from his mother:

<u>My Mother</u>

When I have 7 years old

My mom felt in prison

I passed to the hands of my grandmother and grandfather

For 8 years.

Dear <u>son,</u>

<u>I write this letter to asking how are you</u>

<u>And to say I am fine</u>

<u>I love you my son and you now</u>

<u>All you need I can give to you.</u>

**b. Acknowledging students' mother tongue Spanish.**

The Literature, songs and writing workshops were provided in English, however I acknowledged the students mother tongue- Spanish. Most of the time, the students preferred to write in Spanish because they said it was better for them to organize their ideas. But even in Spanish it was difficult for them to write something. Therefore I did not punish students for writing in Spanish. Writing and speaking in Spanish was not prohibited; on the contrary, it helped as a standing point for English.

Teaching relevant literature- Cherry-Paul (2010) explained in a workshop she gave at the UPRM that "Vernacular traditions are the source of great literature. We can create classroom environments in which students' voices are validated by teaching literature rich vernacular traditions". This means that if the students can see themselves in the readings, and if their first language is acknowledge, they can be more motivated to write and learn a second language. So for example, the students can write in English, but they can code switch to Spanish. The combination of relevant literature and using code switching seems to be crucial determiners student motivation and participation. For example, after reading Sandra Cisnero's monologue "My Name", the students noticed how Esperanza's great grandfather had been chauvinistic and a dominant man. Kathy for example reacted to the monologue saying that she "would never want to be in a relationship with someone like that because a relationship is based on two people who have to feel free but respect each other". Certainly, "Esperanza's" monologue ("My Name") turned out to be totally relevant and interesting for the students, who immediately reacted to this monologue.

## 3. Attitudes of the students towards English

The third category portrayed the attitudes of the participants towards English. The main idea was to examine any positive or negative changes of attitude across time. The first activity the students did was a written and performed monologue where most of them, wrote about their feelings towards English. *Marie* for example commented that:

> "A mi el English me encanta. Soy de esas personas a las que les cuesta mucho hablarlo por vergüenza. Yo pienso que el "English" es un idioma muy importante para la sociedad.… Me gustaría perder el miedo a hablarlo pq. así desarrollaría y aplicaría en muchas otras destrezas como leyendo y hablando mejor."

In other words, Marie is aware of the importance of English for Instrumental purposes, but she admits that it is difficult for her to speak because she gets ashamed, however, she would like to lose fear. This is a positive note for me as a teacher because this lets me know that I need to help her to lose that fear. Another student who has a similar perception of English is *Kathy*:

> I like English but, don't want to talk English. Me da verguenza de q. piensen a no saves hablar pero no tanto asi porque no me importa tanto de lo q. opinan de mi. Cuando llegue a Florida me sentí very happy but very nervous. Despues al pasar el tiempo me acostumbre y fui la primera the first person of my family que aprendi English.  Gracias a unos childrens del classroom pq. Me desesperaba al ver q. no los entendía y no podía expresar nada con ellos solamente podía hablar con la maestra. That teacher I love it era the best teacher in the world.Me encanta el ingles y me gustaria aprender mas idiomas no solamente el ingles sino muchos otros."

When Kathy was little, she learned English because she had to, she felt the necessity of communicating with other students. This means that probably, if students feel a necessity to learn the language, they are more motivated, even though if they are ashamed to speak. By the way, Kathy is eager to learn not only English, but any other language as well.

*Marcos*, also explained that even though sometimes he has fear to speak, he likes the language. He also added to the discussion that there are times when he wants to express something in English, but he can't, or vice versa. Therefore he said:

> me gusta mucho hablar los dos idiomas a la misma vez ya que uno no encuentra las palabras adecuadas o habeces es al revés cuando uno habla español hay algunas veces que te sientes mas comodo hablando inglés

"Finding the right words" when used to watching television in English, listening to Lady Gaga and the Jonas Brothers music while talking in Spanish can be difficult. For that reason, as I explained before, I gave credit to the use of Spanish and even "Spanglish".

Jenny was the only student who had a negative attitude towards English that seemed irredeemable. In her monologue, *Jenny* wrote a dialogue between "Jenny" and "Misma" (herself):

*Jenny*-  Misma, a ti te gusta el ingles?

*Misma*- mija, Ingles, a mi, estarás tu loca?

*Jenny*- Y p.q. no te gusta?

*Misma*- Hay es que mija, toda mi familia habla nada mas español y pues no lo practico mucho.

*Jenny*- Misma mija y p. q. rayos te da miedo hablar y practicar el ingles a lante de otros.?

*Misma*- Hay es que me da miedo que los demás me critiquen y deberas que eso me molesta.

Jenny didn't even want to hear the word "English" at the beginning of the study sessions. However, in our last meeting, when I gave the students a sample of the booklet I was preparing with all the written pieces they had created, Jenny was the first one who volunteered to read. She was excited about the booklet and having her written pieces published in it. It was obvious that her attitude changed, she felt more confident with her English language skills.

Luna and Tito also decided to do a monologue. During their performance they became a hair stylist (Tito), and his client (Luna). Luna and Tito, like the rest of the students made reference to their feelings of shame and fear towards English. However, they added to the list

another important remark: not knowing English makes them feel horrible and with a low self esteem.

*Tito*- Luna, do you like English?

*Luna*- Ingles? Bueno…. me gusta. Pero a veces siento como que no voy a poder aprender a hablarlo. Lo escucho y lo entiendo, lo poco que se, pero hablarlo!!!! Carajo se me hace difícil. Y a ti, Se te hace difícil?

*Tito*- Yes is difficult to me, bot I like it. The problem is talk it. I understand if you talk to me and if I read it. Cuando te hacen una pregunta en ingles, te sientes inferior al no poder contestarle?

*Luna*- Me hace sentir pésima, me gustaría ser la mejor de las mejores sin creerme el mejor. Osea, quiero saber comunicarme. Saber hablar el ingles. Me siento super inferior a esos que hablan perfectamente el ingles. Y tu, como te sientes?

*Tito*- Nade bien, porque?

*Luna*- Por que?

*Tito*- Siento que no me lo han ensenado bien.

*Luna*- Mira, si no entiendes el idiomita ese, mijo lo que tienes es ponerle la mano en la cara al que te esta hablando y decirle "Talk to my hand".

These students might have experienced negative situations with English. Their attitude of "putting the hand on the face to whom is talking English and telling him or her "talk to the hand', reflects how not knowing English, or feeling inferior to people who know English can lower their self esteem. However, with the American expression of "talking to the hand" the

students are creating a barrier that probably does not want to block the language, but the negative feelings it might generate. Nonetheless, the students are adopting English slang to give voice to some kind of imaginary English speaker.

## 4.Attitudes of the students related to social change and developing their own action research project

After analyzing and reflecting about literature related to social issues such as discrimination and social class, the students were asked to move towards action. This category aimed to interpret not only if students were able to reflect upon issues related to social issues, but to document if students were able to develop and effectuate a plan to solve these issues. I divided the students into three groups and I gave them a camera. They had to take picture of problems they identified in their neighborhoods and school to create a community project to solve that problem.

I only received two cameras back. The students had identified two problems: At the library of their school, the books were tied with a rope to one another and the students could not use them. The pictures from the other camera were from a massive flood at the main street of the student's neighborhood "Residencial El Carmen". These pictures were impressive. The street was pathless and the water covered the entrance of one of the "favorite spots" of the students in their neighborhood: the electronic library. So I told the students that if they worked together, they could try to solve this problem. At this point of this action research project, everything made sense to the students. They were able to see what they were reading and listening from music live in their own community. The students decided they were going to develop a project to address the problem of the street that gets flooded because it was more dangerous. The students seemed to be bothered by the situation, and they explained that "la charca" or the pond as they called it,

was stinky, nasty and it made their way home uncomfortable. The water accumulated on this street is the cause for mortal diseases such as dengue, and the students were also aware of that.

In order to solve the problem, the students decided to write a letter to the municipality of Mayaguez and to a Professor from the department of civil engineering Francisco Maldonado. The idea was given by Dr. Marcel Castro, a professor from electrical engineering that is also a tutor at the CUA. When the time came to write the letter, even though the students were motivated with the project, Tito was the one who wrote most of the letter. He wrote it in Spanish, but it was very formal and neat. Professor Maldonado responded to their letter and he made an appointment with the students to visit their neighborhood with the purpose of identifying the cause of the flood. Again, all the students were motivated with the visit of this professional to their community. However, when the moment of truth came, only Tito was the one who paid attention to all the suggestions the Professor was giving them. The students seemed to be more interested in what was happening around their neighborhood, than in what the professor was explaining. They did not want to walk around the community because according to them it was hot and they were tired. Luna for instance would have rather preferred to stay playing a computer game at the Electronic Library of the community, she just walked around with us because Professor Maldonado tried to convince her, and I think she felt obliged to do it.

This situation made me think that even though the students know the importance of their project, they do not seem to feel committed to it. But my question is, why? When trying to find an answer to this query, I stumbled against another issue affecting students' performance: age. It could simply be that fifteen year old students have other priorities, and these types of projects are time consuming. Besides, we started the project towards the end of the semester, where the students are already tired and looking forward to their Christmas vacations.

## 5.Emerging questions

**Did students experience a change in attitude, improvement of English language and leadership skills in their communities thanks to this project?**

The following section intends to answer the questions: Did students experience a change in attitude, improvement of English language skills and leadership skills in their communities and schools thanks to this project? What are the aspirations of the students and what are their plans after graduating from high school? The main idea is to see if the students were somehow empowered to learn English, become involved in community projects and even to come to study at the university thanks to the readings, and activities they did as part of this AR project.

### Learning English, Reinforcing Spanish

One of the main objectives of this project was to help students understand that their stories and voices are powerful and significant. (Cherry- Paul, presentation, February 2010). Even though most of the time the students preferred to write their stories in Spanish, I think that consciously or unconsciously, their attitude towards English has changed, thus, their performance as well.

Even though I cannot measure in a concrete way if the students improved their language skills, there are instances that let me know that this project had a positive impact on them. The other day, Tito was participating in a challenge called "Operación éxito', where students around the island take virtual tests and if they pass, they compete with other students. Tito was taking the math test, and he was frustrated, so he changed to sciences and he was frustrated again, so he switched to English. This time, he felt good, he knew most of the questions because we had discussed them in our study sessions, and even though he was not conscious about the

relationship between our study sessions and his performance on that test, I knew the correlation was evident.

In an attempt to better understand how much they had learned from the tutoring experience, at the end of the semester I gave students a questionnaire and I asked them if they thought the activities had helped them with their English language skills. *Franco* said "me ayudaron a entender cosas que no entendía y me gusta hablar english pq me habrerian muchas puertas como en el trabajo etc. *Tito* also said: "Si, porque me hace feliz. No quisiera usar el español siempre, yo siempre ando buscando cosas que aprender."

Tito's case not only helped me understand that he had been positively affected by this project in terms of language, but he was also empowered to do community work. Tito seemed to be the most mature student of the group. Therefore he was able to be more committed with the project. In a questionnaire I asked students what they thought about developing their own social project and only Tito and Nicole answered that question. For example, Tito wrote: *Tito*- "Fue maravilloso, me siento grande". This could be interpreted in both ways, he actually became more mature, or he also feels big and powerful after doing the project.

*Jenny* also commented- "me a gustado cada paso q hemos llevado a cabo y me interesa q se nos aga realidad". Jenny understands this is a process that takes time and effort, but she is hopeful and optimistic.

**What are the aspirations of the students and what are their plans after graduating from high school?**

In a questionnaire I asked students to write about their plans for when they graduate from high school. The idea was to see if they all have aspirations and a clear idea of what they

would like to do. All of the students answered that they want to pursue higher education. Only Jenny wrote what she wants to study with conviction:

*Jenny*: "Leyes, esc. De leyes".

Tito, Luna, Marcos, and Franco know they want to study something and some of them have an idea of what they would like to study. However, they do not seem to know where or what they should do to have the profession they like.

*Tito*- "Me gustaria estudiar algo relacionado con ciencias y matematicas'

*Franco*- "Si pienso seguir estudiando y quiero estudiar psicología forense, pero no se donde estudiar"

*Marcos*- "Me gustaría estudiar ingeniería mecánica en una universidad en Brasil cuya materia primaria es la ingeniería"

*Luna*- "Me gustaría continuar estudios. Todavia no se que me gustaría estudiar, no he pensado en eso".

As part of my role as their teacher/ facilitator, I could give them a workshop related to learning more information about this programs of study and where they could study.

## 6. Action Research: A learning experience for the facilitator/teacher/researcher

The objective of this category was to provide an analysis of how Action Research has a dual purpose: influencing the lives of the stakeholders and researchers/ facilitators at the same time.

This semester I started working with the students at their school because the facilities of the CUA were not operating until September. I decided that it would be a good idea to start ahead of time and go to the school to have more time to work with the students, but also to let them know

that I was willing to do whatever I could to reach them. Going to their school and being part of their environment was a learning experience for me. I was fortunate because I had the opportunity to do my student teaching at a high school before doing this project. However, I have always had the feeling that my teacher practice was not enough. In order to be able to visit the school, I had to go through the process of writing a letter signed by Dr. Rima Brusi, the director of CUA  talk to the director of the school, and make contact with a teacher who could lent me her classroom. This process was a glimpse to how the Public School System works.

When classes started at the University and I was able to meet with my students at the facilities of the CUA, a new tutor was assigned to our group. When I talked to her about the special activities that we were doing, she immediately became motivated with the project and she asked me if she could be in charge of bringing an activity to do with the students. Adelys asked me what the requirements were for her to do her teacher's certification in History because she is considering the idea of becoming a teacher. This means that this type of action research project can motivate college students to become future teachers with a solid background on lesson development and effective classroom techniques.  Towards the end of the semester, Adelys shared with us a memoir titled "Paper Boats" where the author narrated a remembered event from childhood. After the students read and analyzed the memoir, they did their own written piece. Tito for instance wrote an inspiring memoir that reminds teachers like Adelys and me of the importance of not losing our faith in our students, they have not lost their faith in theirselves and they are doing their best to "do better and better" as *Tito* wrote:

<center>Legos</center>

When I was a child I had a box of legos. Some were big, some were small and others were not too big, not too small. There were red blocks, green blocks… All the colors! With these blocks I began to construct a fort and soldiers, but I knew it would be beautiful and stronger. Years have gone by and I still have not finish and I am doing better and better…

Tito wrote this memoir towards the end of the semester, and this written piece reflects how he has evolved as a writer. He was able to not only narrate a remembered event, but he constructed a metaphor to better describe how he is constructing his future with a solid base and he also used the technique of leaving an open ending to memoir to give the impression that it does not end there. He will continue becoming "better and better".

In addition to analyzing my journals and the written pieces of the students, I decided to write an auto- ethnography with the aim of self reflecting upon my practice as the students' teacher/facilitator/ nurturer. The following section provides my thoughts, questions, concerns and self reflection. As I explained in chapter 3, The Latina Feminist Group (2001) justifies autobiographical narratives and "testimonios" because they help us "translate ourselves for each other" (p. 11).

**'Writing Social Change is not that Easy!': An Auto- Ethnographic Account of a teacher's Experiences implementing a writing after school program inspired by Freire's "Critical Pedagogy"**

As a teacher inspired by Freire's Critical Pedagogy, for me it is fundamental to self-assess and reflect upon my performance as a teacher/facilitator/researcher working in an after school program. Specially because these students have manifested a deep discontent with their previous English teachers and the way they have been taught the language. First of all I have to confess that it is very difficult for me to become a researcher of myself, a researcher of my practice and experiences as a teacher. I think that it is naturally difficult for me to evaluate my own practice as a teacher/facilitator/researcher because I am a product of a system that fosters banking education. I am the outcome of a culture that promoted memorization, repetition and acceptance of authority as the ultimate truth. Therefore, when I look back in time, I can say I had many teachers that were truly an inspiration, and now that I became a teacher, I have good role models to follow. However I also remember that every day the bell rang for my fourth grade math class, I would start to sweat, tremble and slip down my desk a little bit as if that could made me invisible.

I have never been good at math, and my teacher apparently knew it. She would call my name every time and I had to go to the board every day. Learning division in fourth grade was a scary monster, it was like stumbling against the same rock over and over again and there I was, with a piece of chalk in my hand, everything else was green and I wanted to cry. Meanwhile Mrs. Lugos' authoritative voice hold tears back: "Qué pasa?" "Nunca vas a salir del boquete". Years went by and I was frighten, buried, I just hated math.

As a student I had experiences that shaped who I am as a teacher. I try to avoid becoming the teacher I am sure I don't want to be. But, who am I as a teacher? Have my students ever felt the same way I felt when I was in fourth grade? Am I more like Mrs. Montalvo, my favorite elementary English teacher, Mrs. Castillo, Mrs. De Leon? Or perhaps, am I a combination of the best things these teachers taught me? All I know is that I don't want to follow Mrs. Lugo's example!

In my intent to discover and assess my performance as a teacher, I need to look first at who I am/ was as a student. This is not only because somehow my teaching style could have been influenced by my own teachers, but also because as I said, I am still and will always be a student. I can recall many memories where I used to summarize ideas from a text, but little instances where I actually had the chance to reflect upon a text and make my own inferences about the topic. Freire for example, promotes a critical pedagogy which is an alternative to this type of banking education. Freire (1987) explains that literacy is a tool with a double purpose. Teachers can use literacy as a liberating source, but literacy could also help teachers to perpetuate ignorance. Giroux outlined this idea in his introduction for Freire's (1987) "Reading the Word and the World":

"Central to Freire's approach to literacy is a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency on the other. Within this perspective, literacy is not approached as merely a technical skill to be acquired, but as a necessary foundation for cultural action and freedom, a central; aspect of what it means to be a self and socially constituted agent. Most importantly, literacy for Freire is inherently a political project in which men and women assert their right and

responsibility not only to read, understand, and transform their own experiences, but also to reconstitute their relationship with the wider society". (p.7)

After reading about Freire's critical pedagogy, I was motivated. I wanted to change the world. I felt transformed. I took in my own hands not only the responsibility of trying to look for the truth by myself, but I wanted to "reconstitute my relation with the wider society" (Giroux, 1987). I was ready to implement this theory in my classroom and this theory would guide my thesis project so that I could give out something to society in return. But it was not until I started working at the after school program Centro Universitario para el Acceso (CUA), that I understood the truth about Freire's critical pedagogy. And what is the truth? The truth is that reconstituting our relationship with the wider society through social work, and education (teaching the word and the world through writing) like Freire (1987) suggests, is not an easy task. It is rather a painful journey through a dusty, labyrinthine long road that could lead you to "Narnia". It seems like the only way someone could drive through that dusty road that leads to Narnia, is with his or her eyes closed, guided by faith and hope that the destiny would be reached sometime.

After reading about critical pedagogy, and theories that are an alternative to banking education, drivers could be smitten by the idea that in real life, getting to their destiny through an arduous path could be easy if they use a map or even better, a GPS. When I started working with the students of the CUA, I thought that if I let them know how motivated I was in going there and having our study sessions in a comfortable learning/ nurturing environment, they would feel committed with the project.

At the beginning, almost all the students were coming to the meetings and they would participate. We had a classroom for our own, and we would meet at their school. I went to their school several times before the facilities of the CUA were available. The students and I shared many "bonding" experiences where they told me powerful stories of their lives. For example, Kathy narrated an experience where she had a fight with another girl at school. She explained that she was even sent to the psychologist, who asked her to write on a daily basis her feelings in order to canalize them. Jenny also shared a personal experience when she said that she lives with her aunt because social services removed her and her sisters from their parents when she was little. All these accounts demonstrate that there was a trustworthy environment among the students and me. However, developing a comfortable environment in our classroom was not enough to keep all the students coming to the study sessions.

Some days Kathy for example could not work with us because her preference was no longer English and writing. She felt the need of using the study sessions to work on her math class. In fact, sometimes most of the students would have other assignments they needed to take care off, so we had to focus on other subjects. I started to feel that the study sessions that we were doing were not quite practical for the students because they might not be addressing their educational needs. But then I started thinking, how can I address all their educational needs when these students have so many? I started to realize that it is not me. I am not the responsible for all that. I can try to do my best and help my students. But I cannot do it alone. Teachers cannot change the world by themselves. Teachers need support. Teachers need other teachers. Teachers need to ideally work with one student at a time. But, is that a plausible idea?

"Misi, I finished", "Misi no quiero escribir", "Misi pero por qué tiene que ser en inglés?" (Misi, why does it have to be in english), "Misi, I don't know what to write", "Misi, I know what

I want to say, I just don't know how to"… All these phrases were always embedded in our conversations and in our intents to do our activities. How can a teacher deal with all these "Misi, please, help me!"? This is what they really want to say: "I need help, we are many students here, but please pay attention to me, I need your help". The question remains, am I truly helping these kids one way or another? As a teacher who is committed to creating a "more just loving world" (Pat Maguire, as cited by Reason & Bradbury, 2001) this simple question can take control of my mind, heart and soul. Then, these students and their needs become part of me. I understood that I am not a Mrs. Lugo type of teacher, I am more like a chameleon, or an eclectic. I have my own teaching style, molded by my students and their needs. But being a committed teacher can be draining. My students shape who I am, they guide my life and they take over my thoughts. So, I ask myself, am I capable of addressing all these "Misi please…" am I doing something wrong as their teacher? Why is it that some of them are not even coming to the study sessions anymore?

I was told that they were not coming because at school there were private tutor companies offering the kids lap tops, and I pods just for going to their study sessions. The students would confess that they were no longer coming to our study sessions at the CUA because they were really interested in those lap tops and I pods. Once again, my mind plays tricks on me and makes me ask myself, what am I doing wrong? This is when I also ask myself if it is worth to spend all my energies and afternoons volunteering at the CUA, if the kids are not committed to come. This is a very delicate topic and I have mixed feelings about it. I think it is very ironic that I was offered a job that would pay me a lot of money with the same companies that are now taking away the students with them. I rejected the job opportunity because I knew I wanted to do my thesis with these kids. I wanted to do a project as a volunteer at the CUA. But, is it really worth it?

Yes!! Despite all the hard work and complications, I think it is worth it to do action research projects and to promote social change through writing. In my frustration, I did not understand that I was trying to negotiate my role as the teacher/facilitator/researcher and my students' trust in a place that was too harsh for us because it was limiting our performance all the time. For some days, there was no power at the facilities of the CUA, other days, the air conditioner didn't work, and other days it was for us impossible to have our usual study sessions because like I explained before, private tutoring companies were taking over the schools, and hence, the students participating at the CUA. I had to face it, my students were also experiencing the same frustrations I had. I started to accept the fact that there are many outside factors that are contingent to making a successful tutoring program, the responsibility does not fall entirely on the teacher and student's shoulders. Teachers and students cannot change the world alone, however, we could start by working with what we have. Ayers (2001) also compares the ideal classroom with a beautiful place, I would say something like "Narnia", and he also encourages teachers to gain strength and unite with other teachers, students and parents in order to create some sort of grassroots journey towards what he called not Narnia, but "Emeral Cities"(Ayers, 2001, p. 135). Ayers better illustrates this idea when he wrote:

> Recognizing that the people with the problems are also the people with the solutions, and that waiting for the law- makers, the system, or the union to "get it right" before we get it right is to wait a lifetime. We can look inside ourselves, then, summon strengths we never knew we had, connect up with other seekers- teachers and parents and kids- to create the schools and classrooms we deserve- thoughtful places of decency, sites of peace and freedom and justice. We are on the way, then, to our own real Emerald Cities. (p. 135)

I think the essence of the paradigm Action Research and Freires' Critical Pedagogy are related to Ayer's (2001) idea that "the people with the problems are also the people with the solutions". Action Research for instance emerges from the needs of the participants, and the participants themselves are the ones who come up with ideas to improve their circumstances. Freire's critical Pedagogy aims to empower students to think for themselves and to help students to perceive their reality as something that can be changed. I think this Action research project, instructed by Freire's critical pedagogy is an example of how this approach can be effective, even if it only transforms one student out of ten participants. In my case, even though some students left the project to take other study sessions or for other reasons, there seems to be a small group of students who are committed and motivated with the project. Tito, Jenny, Luna and Marcos for instance, developed a project with the aim of solving a problem in their community. One of the streets of the "Residencial Candelaria" gets flooded, and the water level does not lower for at least three days every time there is a heavy rain, creating mosquitoes and other diseases. So the students are trying to solve this issue writing letters to the municipality, interviewing residents, collecting signatures and educating the residents regarding this issue. I think this group of students is now more committed to our meetings because now they understand how powerful they are, and how they can actually change their circumstances.

I am hoping that these students at some point can engage their other peers into the project, but also maybe residents of their community who are also being affected. Perhaps, motivation is like see weeds. Maybe these students who became empowered and their mind unshackled can spread the seed afterwards through many other places. I know they can promote change. That change however doesn't necessarily have to be concrete, something tangible like fixing a structural problem of a community. Jose for instance is a student who has projected a

change from the beginning of the study sessions up to the present. At the beginning he was shy and didn't even want to speak. Now, after we read Daniel Beaty's poem "Knock Knock", Jose commented that the author's purpose is to make people see that he (Beaty) could succeed in life by himself: "q la gente viera que él hechó pa' lante solo,… solo". Jose was the same student who also said that Bob Marley's song "Get Up, Stand Up" wants to let us know that we should not believe all what other people say, we should think for ourselves and we should act when we think there is an injustice. Thanks to instances like this one, teachers like me have moments of bliss, moments that remind us: "Don't stop spreading the seed, even if it is one individual at the time". Ayers (2001) said that "learning requires action, choice, and asset from the student. But teaching is always undertaken without guarantees. Teaching is an act of faith" (p. 137). Thus, we should not lose our hope, our students can be empowered through writing, their minds can become unshackled through literacy because like Christensen (2000) suggests: "reading and writing are emancipatory acts" (p. VII). As teachers we should use literacy as a tool to promote critical thinking and reflection, rather than just memorization, summarizing and the skills that banking education promote. We have the power of starting a revolution of thought, ideas, and even social change on a big scale. This revolution of thoughts and ideas has a double purpose: it will influence the lives of the students/stakeholders, but the teachers/ researchers are also positively influenced. My students and I went through the process so Tito can say "I am doing better and better" and as his teacher I can say that "I have faith".

# Chapter 6

## *Conclusions*

In this chapter I summarize the major findings of the project according to the stakeholders' performance and my own practice as their teacher. I also explain why there is a powerful relationship between Critical Pedagogy and Action Research, the paradigms that guided this project. In addition I provide a comparison of my findings with the results of other researchers that have done similar projects in different contexts. Finally, I also present recommendations and pedagogical implications.
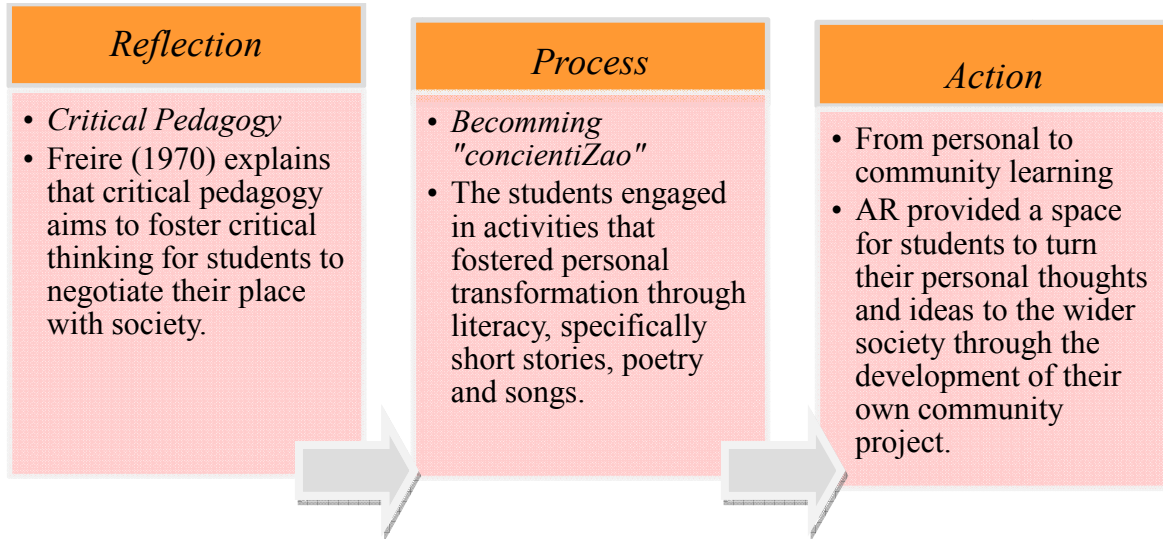
## Critical Pedagogy and Action Research Complement Each Other

According to the literature review discussed in chapter II, the basis of critical pedagogy and action research is to focus the attention either on the students (Critical Pedagogy), or the stakeholders (Action Research). The former paradigm favors the idea that teachers should not promote banking education, but rather they should encourage critical thinking. Freire and Macedo (1987) for instance also explain that teachers should revolutionize education by teaching the "word and the world" while they become students of their own students. This means that the role of the teacher is to help students to make connections between themselves and the wider society. The role of the teacher is also to know their students' interests to develop relevant lessons that address their educational and emotional needs. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that this project is guided by Critical Pedagogy but also by Action Research. Action Research became the vehicle I used to help students take their personal knowledge to their communities. The students, or in this case, stakeholders, were able to develop a community research project where their knowledge was no longer personal. AR helped us turn theory into practice. It helped
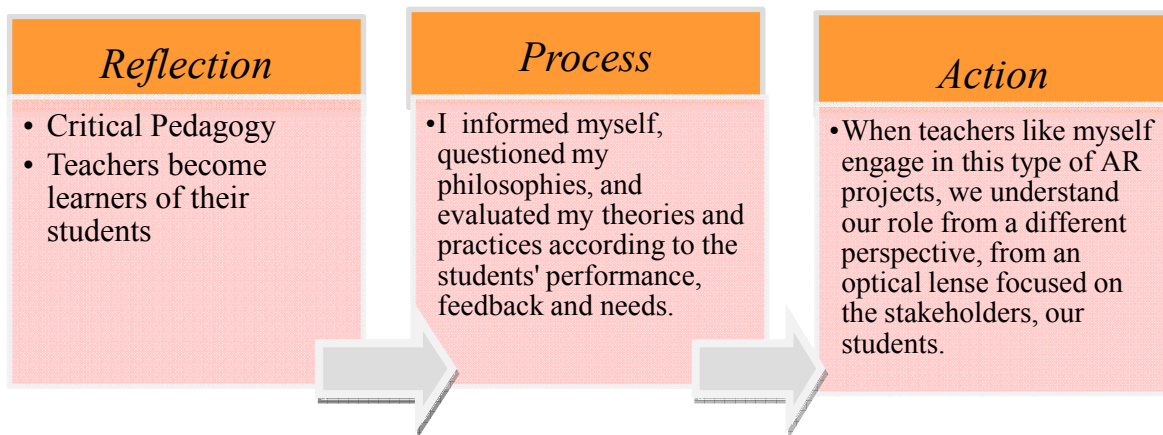
me as a teacher and my students to take into effect praxis, reflection and action at the same time in order for students to make a connection with society.

The following diagram better illustrates the relationship between Critical Pedagogy and Action Research and how these two paradigms worked together with the purpose of creating a praxis of transformation for the students or (stakeholders, my students) and their communities, but also for the teachers/researchers/facilitators such as myself. Figure (III)

*Students, or stakeholders and their communities:*

| Reflection | Process | Action |
|---|---|---|
| • *Critical Pedagogy*<br>• Freire (1970) explains that critical pedagogy aims to foster critical thinking for students to negotiate their place with society. | • *Becomming "concientiZao"*<br>• The students engaged in activities that fostered personal transformation through literacy, specifically short stories, poetry and songs. | • From personal to community learning<br>• AR provided a space for students to turn their personal thoughts and ideas to the wider society through the development of their own community project. |

*Teachers,Researchers/Facilitators:*

| Reflection | Process | Action |
|---|---|---|
| • Critical Pedagogy<br>• Teachers become learners of their students | •I informed myself, questioned my philosophies, and evaluated my theories and practices according to the students' performance, feedback and needs. | •When teachers like myself engage in this type of AR projects, we understand our role from a different perspective, from an optical lense focused on the stakeholders, our students. |

**Other researcher's findings versus my findings: analyzing results according to context**

Teachers like me can be interested in the results, but also in the processes that were taken into effect during this project. This project was guided and informed by Cammarottas's program called "Social Justice Education Project" (SJEP). My students like Cammatota's, were able to develop their own project. These projects had similar processes but different outcomes. Cammarotas' students seemed to take the lead in developing their own project with maturity and responsibility. However their context was different to the context where my students and I were working. In this case, my students were not receiving remunerations, like grades or bonus points for a class. This might have had an influence in their performance. Besides, age is probably another important factor to consider. The participants in my study were10th grade high school students, becoming accustomed to their new school and new teachers.

These students did not seem to fully develop leadership skills in order to take the initiative to take into effect their own community project as it was planned. My students were involved with the project, but they could have adopted an active stand more driven towards creating activities by themselves to take the lead at their communities. Nevertheless, almost all the students seem to have a positive attitude towards English, and an open mind, more mature and receptive to social action and change. Tito for instance commented in the questionnaire that he felt more mature after doing this project when he wrote "I liked the project, it makes me feel big". According to the students' responses in the questionnaire (please see appendix C), probably this process of taking personal research to the community can accelerate the student's process of becoming empowered, mature adults.

Very similar to what Cammarota's students did, my students also documented through pictures (Please see appendix D) a community problem they identified and with my help, they developed a plan of action. They wrote a letter to the municipal government (Please see appendix E) and they contacted a civil engineer for suggestions on how to solve the problem. At the end of the semester, when the students had the chance to work with the action research project, all what they had learned about social action made sense. Each student became aware of the power of social action. They have not implemented the part of their project where they are supposed to take their knowledge back to their fellow students and community members. In spite of that, as their teacher I have hope that this will happen one day.

## Pedagogical Implications

### Pedagogical Implications for ESL Teachers.

The pedagogical implications in this section are specifically geared to ESL teachers. These implications are divided into two sections: social implications and didactic implications.

### Social Implications.

Teachers definitely need to reconsider our social/ emotional relationship with our students. Ayers (2001) also believe that students need to be academically challenged, but also nurtured. He explains that human development is complex, and "cognition is entwined with affect." So we have to approach teaching from a holistic perspective having in mind that our students are complex human beings with multiple facets that are intertwined. According to the results of the questionnaire about "the role of the teacher" (Please See appendix C) Most students feel the role of the teacher is three- fold. In fact, if I had not negotiated my place within the students as their teacher/ facilitator /nurturer, probably the students would not have open up their hearts to me,

and the window to their life stories would have remain closed.  Christensen (2000) is a teacher that like me, is influenced by Freire's philosophy of education. Christensen is also aware of the importance of making relevant lesson plans for our students needs . This teacher successfully structured a curriculum that appeals to the student's affective needs. She explains that her lessons try to help students bring to their classroom their lives and stories in order for her to "locate the right book, the right poem that turns pain into power" (p. 33) while she also teaches literacy skills. As I mentioned before, the role of the teacher needs to go beyond instruction. Teachers need to nurture their student's affective needs while they also instruct context based lessons.

It is apparent that the role of the teacher does not merely finish at three o clock when the school bell rings. Teachers should become involved with the community of the students, and know their parents. When I went to see Tito's performance as a mime at church I remembered that the students have many talents that are not acknowledged in the classroom, and these "outside" experiences provide room for that. Besides, this type of experiences can contribute to the environment of the classroom with a more humane, realistic feeling that breaks the wall between the school and the community. Moore (2003) remarked that educators play an important role in communities because they can create partnerships that provide great resources and ideas to education. Moore also explained that teachers can volunteer to work with these communities. The outcome might be projects like this one, where both, my students and I had learning experiences. All in all, the teacher, like the students, needs to be committed with the process, enjoy it and also learn from it to be able to constantly design and re-design lessons and activities related to the students' likes, and necessities.

**Didactical Implications**

It is important to acknowledge student's mother tongue when teaching ESL. The students felt more comfortable writing and speaking in Spanish, therefore I did not impose English on them. However, with practice, towards the end of the semester the students felt more comfortable with English, and every time I asked for a volunteer to read a passage in English for example, Tito and Jenny had to take turns. As I stated in chapter two, since English in Puerto Rico was an imposition, the students might have negative feelings towards the language. Santiago (1999) explains that the students should not feel that English will "super- impose" Spanish. She suggests that teachers should include the cultural background of the students and history lessons related to their context so they feel their roots, identity and mother tongue are been valued.

As stated in chapter 5, according to Smith and Wilhem (2006), Grammar should be taught in context, but not in a way where students feel overwhelmed with this learning process. The students need to understand the rules and then be able to apply them into their writing. Their written pieces are very valuable because they provide insight on the student's feelings and ideas, but also their knowledge and English competence. Smith and Wilhem (2006) express that teaching formal grammar is "senseless" because it is not practical. As I mentioned in chapter 5, teaching grammar is not as simple as teaching linguistic rules and correctness, but what students need is knowledge of linguistic structures they can use for purposes such as reading and writing.

The activities and lesson plans teachers develop should include visuals, music, and art in order to motivate students to learn English while appealing to their senses and multiple intelligences. Throughout the semester the students did several written pieces, but in order to write, they had to go through the writing process, being the "pre- writing" stage of outmost

importance. I had to do different kinds of activities where I included art, visuals and music to help students become inspired to write. Ayers (2001) states that it is important to create learning environments for each student to feel free to construct knowledge and interact with each other. He says that it is the task of the teacher to invite students to learn, and I say that one way of "inviting students to learn" is of course, taking into consideration our students' talents and abilities (singing, writing, drawing) when we construct teaching lessons.

**Pedagogical Implications and Action Research**

**The following implications are related to Action Research and Education**

Action research is a tool that can provide College level students like myself with enriching experiences in communities and schools before we graduate. According to Greenwood and Levin (2006) we are more than researchers; we become part of the stakeholders. Eventually, Action Research fosters the development of a community of learners sharing experiences and learning from each other's different experiences and points of view.

Action research then, has a dual purpose; the researchers are influenced by this process along the stakeholders. The process is the most important part of the research. It is more important than the product, because it is the process, which determines the effectiveness of the project. Even though many external factors can limit the participants and researcher, if the outcome is not the one they expected, they still have the enriching experiences learned throughout the journey. Ferrance (2000) said that the results can be seen "first- hand", but the mindsets of the participants will be influenced no matter what the outcomes are due to all the time and effort this type of projects require. In my case, most of the stakeholders did not participate in the project

until the end, but most of the students had the chance to share different perspectives towards language, identity, social change and community work.

## Limitations

There were some internal and external limitations which affected the performance of both the students and myself throughout the project. With internal limitations I refer to limitations that were a result of our decisions and student preferences, while external limitations refer to the limitations we could not control.

## Internal limitations

All the internal limitations we had could be attributed to the age of the students. These students, like any other group of high school students, enjoy playing sports and doing other extracurricular activities. For these students, playing basketball for instance, is more attractive than the idea of staying at school for an after school program. We tried our best to schedule our meeting when everyone could, but some days Kathy had basketball classes and others she had boxing classes. Jose was also practicing martial arts some days of the week.

The nature of this project requires that students take an active stance in their education and use their leadership skills to develop their own project. The reading and writing activities that we did with the purpose of empowering students to act and develop their community project did not seem to be enough to motivate students to take the lead in the development of their own projects. When the time came for students to work on their own, develop ideas and implement them, I had to be there, pushing them towards our main goal. After I talked to the students and read their questionnaires, I understood that they know the importance of the project, it's just that

they are young and they have many other things they also want to do. Besides, developing this project was not obligatory and the students did not receive a grade for doing it. Then this question remains: how can teachers help 15 year old students to adopt social action and community projects as one of their priorities in an after school program where they will not receive a grade for doing so?

**External limitations**

First of all, the CUA has a comfortable classroom, equipped with computers and other resources that the students need. However, on many occasions we could not access our classroom due to the fact that the university was going through hard times, and a student strike which lasted for many months, prohibited our entrance to the university. A student fee of eight hundred dollars was imposed on the students; therefore they felt the need to strike. Even though it seems ironic that at the time the strike affected our project, the strike was actually defending the right of the students to have access to the university, a topic which is the core of the CUA. We started to meet at the school where the students attended, but they didn't have transportation so they had to walk to their homes. When the strike was over and we returned from the CUA, there was no electricity at the building where our classroom is located, so we had to wait another week to have our study sessions.

Another limitation to the study was that private tutor companies were offering students lap top computers, mp3's and I pads among other electronic devices for attending their study sessions. Obviously this is a tempting offer for some of the students, who decided to go to those study sessions instead of coming to the CUA.

## Directions for Future Research

Action Research is very similar to writing: a process. As an English teacher, I helped my students to go step by step throughout the process, hoping that they would enjoy it, and continue to write and participate in community service even after the class was finished. In Action Research, like in writing, the outcome of a project is never fixed. These projects can be revised, and edited. Action Research like writing should be continued, it should never stop, it needs to be re- invented and adjusted to different contexts. This is a task that teachers, along school administrators and stakeholders need to accomplish to better facilitate a "real" learning experience for this revolutionary community in process, a community in metamorphosis. The students who participated in this project will continue to be part of the CUA and it would be a good idea to continue with this project, hoping that these students, like marvelous caterpillars continue to expand their horizons as full fledged butterflies with access to venture through the gardens of higher education. The teacher/facilitator/researcher who decides to break the walls of her/his classroom to work with these students, will also "do better and better" as Tito wrote in his personal narrative "Legos".

**Appendix A**

*Informed Consent*

Departamento de Inglés                    Universidad de Puerto Rico- Mayagüez

**Título de la investigación-** Writing Change: Action Research to Promote Social Reformation

Mi nombre es Yolanda Padilla, y soy una estudiante graduada de la Universidad de Puerto Rico de Mayagüez. Recientemente estoy trabajando en un proyecto diseñado con el propósito de examinar cómo actividades de lectura y escritura en inglés, pueden promover cambio social y ayudar a los estudiantes a mejorar sus destrezas de escritura en inglés.

Los estudiantes que decidan participar de este proyecto, tendrán múltiples beneficios. Por ejemplo, tendrán la oportunidad de convertirse en investigadores de su comunidad con el propósito de desarrollar estrategias para resolver problemas sociales. Además, los talleres que se les ofrecerá, pueden ayudar a los estudiantes a mejorar sus destrezas de escritura en inglés. Los estudiantes también tendrán acceso a computadoras, internet, la biblioteca y otros recursos de la universidad.

Es importante clarificar que los estudiantes nunca van a estar expuestos a ningún tipo de riesgo o peligro físico. Pero si deciden no participar, no estarán obligados a hacer lo contrario.

Los escritos que los estudiantes produzcan pueden ser publicados en un blog y en un libro. Los estudiantes podrían ser identificados en fotos, que si usted no autoriza, van a ser destruidas. De todos modos, la identidad de los estudiantes nunca va a ser revelada. Los estudiantes van a practicar el uso del idioma ingles a través de discusiones orales que pueden ser grabadas pero no serán publicadas. Si desea permitir que su hijo (a) participe de este proyecto, favor firmar esta hoja. Gracias por su cooperación.

Atentamente,

_____

Yolanda Padilla Lebrón

Por favor, escoja sólo una alterntiva:

_____ Estoy de acuerdo con que mi hijo (a) participe en dicho proyecto ____ No estoy de acuerdo

_____                              _____

Firma de padres o encargados                                        Fecha

# Appendix B

*Informed Asent*


Departamento de Inglés                    Universidad de Puerto Rico- Mayagüez

Título de la investigación: Writing Change: Action Research to Promote Social Reformation

Mi nombre es Yolanda Padilla, y soy una estudiante graduada de la Universidad de Puerto Rico de Mayagüez. Recientemente estoy trabajando en un proyecto diseñado con el propósito de examinar cómo actividades de lectura y escritura en inglés, pueden promover cambio social.

Como parte de este proyecto, los estudiantes que participen van a reforzar sus destrezas de escritura en ingles mientras discutimos issues sociales. Los participantes también van a desarrollar sus destrezas de investigación y van a crear su propio proyecto.

Si decides participar de este proyecto, los escritos que desarrolles podrían ser publicados en un blog, y las conversaciones analizando issues sociales podrían ser grabadas.

Por favor firma esta hoja si deseas participar en este proyecto que se llevara a cabo durante el semestre escolar de agosto a diciembre del 2010.

Atentamente,

_____

Yolanda Padilla Lebrón


_____          _____

Firma del estudiante- participante                              Fecha

**Appendix C**

*Questionnaire*

Universidad de Puerto Rico, Mayagüez

Centro Universitario Para El Acceso

Cuestionario

- Crees que las actividades en inglés y de escritura que hemos hecho en el CUA durante este semestre son motivadoras? Cómo? O prefieres siempre usar el español? Por qué?

- Te gustaría continuar estudios cuando termines la escuela superior, o prefieres entrar de lleno al mundo laboral? Qué te gustaría estudiar, o donde te gustaría trabajar?

- Que te pareció desarrollar y llevar a cabo tu propio proyecto de acción social?

- Crees que lo aprendido a través de este proceso te será útil en otras etapas de tu vida? De qué forma?

# Appendix D

*Student's Action Research Project*

The students first identified a problem in their community and they were asked to take pictures of the problem with a camera I provided them. The following pictures were taken by the students with the purpose of evidencing the problem.
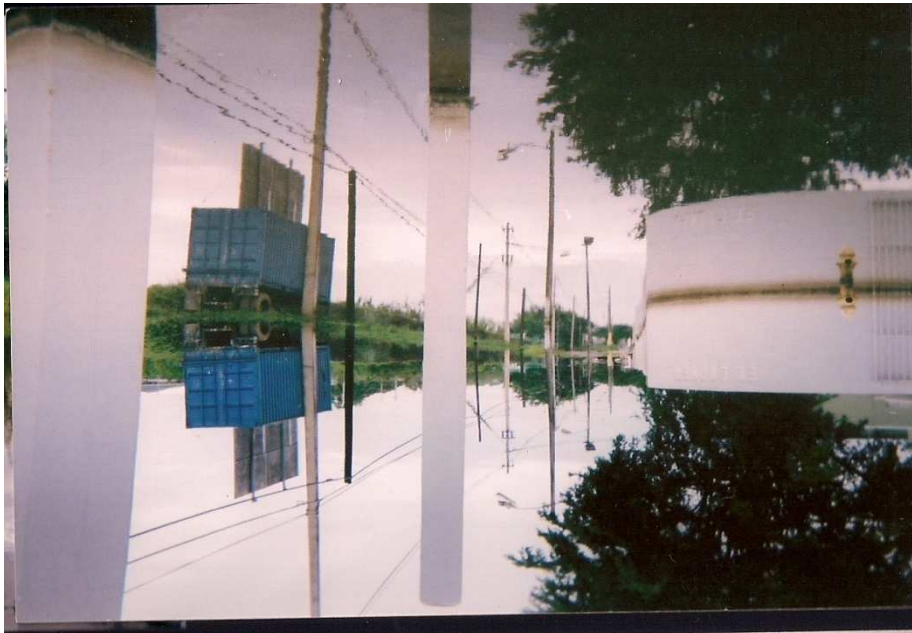
After the students identified the problem, they decided to contact a professor of civil engineering from the UPRM. They invited the Professor to their community and they walked around the community, showing the problem to the professor. The Professor gave the students many ideas and possible solutions to the problem. The following picture was taken the day the professor visited the student's community:
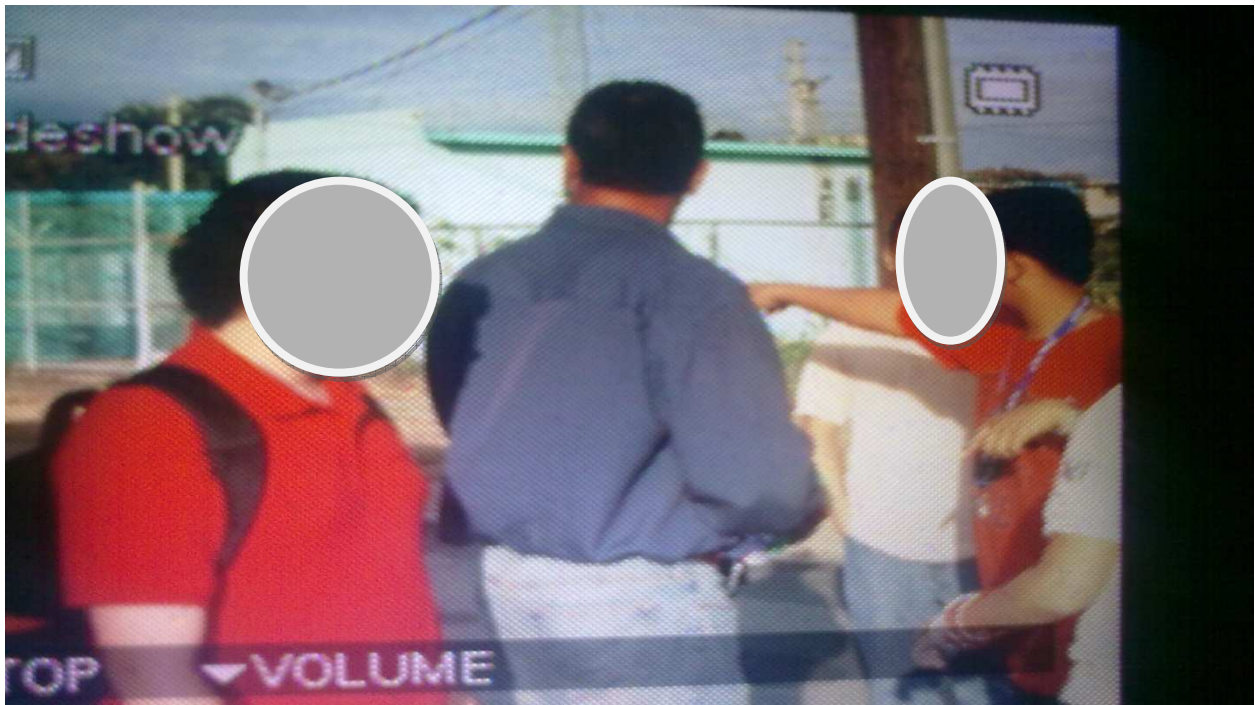


After the Professor visited the community, the students decided to write a letter to the municipality of Mayaguez to ask them if they could drain the sewers which were causing the problem and help the community. The letter reads as follows:

22 de noviembre de 2010

A quien pueda interesar:

Reciba un cálido saludo de parte de los residentes de los residenciales Carmen, Candelaria y Kennedy y de los estudiantes del "Centro Universitario para el Acceso" (CUA). El CUA es un proyecto de la UPRM para los estudiantes que viven en residenciales públicos de Mayagüez. Este proyecto fomenta el desarrollo de destrezas académicas y a su vez motiva a los estudiantes a seguir con sus estudios.

Como parte de nuestras tareas, estamos realizando un proyecto de ayuda comunitaria. Elegimos uno de los mayores problemas en la comunidad e investigamos para saber cómo lo podemos resolver. La carretera que conecta los residenciales Candelaria, Carmen y Kennedy está en pésimas condiciones. En esta carretera hay agua estancada que puede causar daños en la salud de los residentes. Cada vez que hay lluvias fuertes, el agua se acumula hasta por varios días, si es que no continúa lloviendo. Las alcantarillas están en malas condiciones y no se drena el agua. Este problema está afectando a los residentes desde principios de agosto cuando comenzó la temporada de lluvia y huracanes. El agua causa mal olor, plagas de sapos y mosquitos del dengue.

Es por esta razón que solicitamos su ayuda. El Dr. Francisco Maldonado, ingeniero civil, inspeccionó el área y nos informó que uno de los causantes del problema, es que el sistema de alcantarillado está tapado. Nos gustaría saber si es posible que el Municipio de Mayagüez nos brinde ayuda para solucionar este problema. Adjuntamos a esta carta algunas fotos de la inundación con el propósito de evidenciar el problema.

Muchísimas gracias por su atención.

Atentamente,

References

Alameda, J. I., & Rivera, C. A. (2005). La Vivienda de Interés Social en Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico; PR: Advanced Graphic Printing

Algren, E. (1987). *The movement against teaching English in schools of Puerto Rico*. Boston, MD: University Press of America Inc.

Anderson, G. L., Herr, K., & Nihlen, A. S. (1994). *Studying your own school*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Ariizumi, Y. (1998*). Five Ways of Knowing Action Research*. Unpublished dissertation. Brigham Young University.

Ayers, W. (2001). *To Teach the Journey of a Teacher.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Benjamin , A . , & , Oliva , T. (2007). *Engaging Grammar: Practical Advice for real Classrooms*. IL : NCTE

Bigelow, B. (2008). *A People's History for the Classroom*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Butler- Kisber, L. (2005). Inquiry through poetry: The Genesis of Self Study In Mitchell, C., Weber, S., O' Reilly- Scanlon, K. (Eds.) *Just Who Do We Think We Are? Methodologies For auto- biography and self- study in teaching.* (pp. 95- 109). London: Routledge Falmer.

Brulin, G., Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2000). *The Third Task of Universities or How to Get U Universities to Serve their Communities!* Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice. London: Sage   Publications.

Brusi, R. (2008) *Si te Dejas Llevar…Universidad, Geografía y Desigualdad.* Cuaderno de Trabajo Proyecto Carvajal para la Democratización del Conocimiento Núm. 1

Cammarota, J. (2007). A map for social change: Latino students engage a praxis of ethnography. *Children, Youth and Environments 17* (2), 342- 353.

Cammarota, J.  Fine, M. (2008) Revolutionaizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion. New York: Routledge, 256 pp.,

Castelloe, P. T., Watson, C., White (2002) . Participatory change: An integrative approach to community practice. *Journal of Community Practice, 10* (4), 7- 31.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007).  *Research Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Christensen, L. (2009). *Teaching for Joy and Justice*. Wisconsin: Rethinking Schools.

Dinzey, Z. Z. (2005) . Fighting Crime, Constructing Segregation: crime, housing policy, and the social brands of Puerto Rican neighborhoods. Retrieved March 1, 2010, from Pro Quest Information and Learning Company Full Text database.

Ferrance, E. ( 2000). *Action Research*. Themes in Education . The educational Alliance: Brown University.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.; New York & London.

Freire, P. Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World.* New York, NY: Bergin & Garvey

Greenwood, D. Levin, M. (1998). *Introduction to Action Research 2nd ed: Social Research for Social Change.* Thousand Oak, CA: Sage

LeCompte, M.D., and Schensul, J.J. (1999). *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*, Lanham MD: AltaMira Press, 220 pages.

Mazak, K. (2008). Negotiating el Difícil: Uses of English text on a rural Puerto Rican community. *CENTRO Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies.* XX (2), Spring 2008.

Moore, K. (2003). Reaching Out to the Community. *Scholastic Early Childhood Today,* 12- 14

Percy-Smith, B. (2006) From consultation to social learning in community participation with young people 'Creating 'spaces' for young people's participation in neighborhood development using dialogue and social learning', *Children Youth and Environments*, 16 (2), 153-179

Pousada, A. The Sociolinguistic Implications of Teaching English in Puerto Rico. Retrived from:http://home.earthlink.net/~apousada/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/sociolinguisti cimplications.pdf

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of Action Research*. London & Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Santiago, M. (1999). *Language, Culture and the English Teacher. Retrieved November 21, 2009, from http://www.uprb.edu/milenio/Milenio1999/15Santiago99.*

Singer, J. (2006) . Stirring Up Justice: Writing and Reading to Change the World. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Smith, M. Wilhelm, J.  (2006) What Research Tells Us About Teaching Grammar. *Voices From the Middle,* retrieved from Pro Quest Educational Journals p. 40

The Latina Feminist Group. (2001). Telling to Live Latina Feminist Testimonios. Duke University Press

Whipp, L. (1979). Teaching English and Social Class Relationships. *College Composition and Communication. Vol. 30, No. 2*

Wildeermersch, D, Theo J,  Vandenabeele, J. and Jans, M. (1998). "Social Learning: A  New Perspective on Learning Participatory Systems. *Studies in Continuing Education* 20(2): 251- 265.