



The English Lesson as a Site for the Development of Critical Thinking

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Abstract

This article discusses an investigation carried out with a group of young learners of English in a Brazilian language school aiming at these individuals' development of critical thinking and their involvement in a de-naturalization process of gender dualism. The study, which took place in an educational context witnessing important changes at both macro and micro levels, has its theoretical foundation in multicultural and identity studies as well as in Goffman's (1974, 1981) notions of footing and participant status and in Wood, Bruner, and Ross's (1976) concept of scaffolding. By re-defining the EFL classroom as a multicultural site in which essentialist and stereotypical social identities are constantly challenged, participants in this three-semester long research project engaged in pedagogical practices moving away from a teacher-student pattern towards a pattern in which participants, reconfiguring relations of power in the classroom, could take on different alignments while engaging in the development of critical thinking concerning gender issues. These debates, together with this dynamic participation structure, enabled students to revisit some taken-for-granted assumptions concerning gender. They also stimulated changes in the roles traditionally played by the teacher and by students: the former performed varied footings other than those of controller, transmitter, or facilitator, and provided scaffolding characterized by both support and challenge; the latter

could perform the role of the more knowledgeable participant.

Introduction

There has never been so much discussion about education and the many challenges it faces in the fast-changing contemporary scenario. Because of the increasing salience of diversity throughout the world, many scholars attest to an urge to prepare students to deal with the possible shock of "otherness" (Hyde, 1998). In the educational realm some scholars (e.g., Banks, 1999; McLaren, 1995) call for the implementation of a multicultural perspective in classrooms worldwide that would challenge monocultural assumptions which tend to orient schools' curricula and pedagogic work, and frequently involve essentialist views of social identities. By "essentialist" we mean "presuming that there is a universal essence, homogeneity and unity" (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004); as to "social identities," we mean social identification categories, including notions of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

In this paper we argue that multicultural and non-essentialist procedures can be successfully implemented in the TEFL context, leading students, as they engage in critical thinking, to collectively analyze and problematize naturalized discursive practices about hegemonic social identities, more specifically gender differences. In order to support this claim, we start by outlining current paradigms orienting research into gender and sexuality and relating them to the role of English in the growing multicultural panorama. We then show how current language educational policies in Brazil respond to these new configurations by placing the concern with students' organization towards difference and alterities as a major demand. In subscribing to this requirement, we argue for the need to redefine parameters at play in what we term traditionally conceived pedagogies. We then describe an investigation carried out with a group of young learners of English in a Brazilian language school, focusing on the institution's new curricular guidelines and its aim to develop citizens capable of critical thought. We proceed by reflecting upon our data and analyzing the possibility of engaging students in questioning hegemonic gender identities. We conclude by indicating the study's contributions, implications and gains.

Literature Review

From the end of the last century until recently, a prolific literature problematizing essentialist perceptions of gendered identities has been calling into question well-established definitions of manhood and womanhood (Connel, 2000; Davies, 1989; Hall, 1990; Moita Lopes, 2006; Osterman, 2003; Stoke, 1998; Woodward, 1997; also see Cameron, 2005 for a review). Besides providing criticism of the binary "women's style" and men's style," this research paradigm on gender and sexuality has also

suggested that intragender differences and diversity are normal rather than deviant, and that identities are dynamic and provisional. This literature has also suggested that the notion of a unitary individual person who is centered in a particular identity, is likely fractured by the idea that the "self" is a social process, formed in relationships with others. If we postulate that school settings (with their curricula, rules, norms, pedagogical procedures, language practices, interactional routines, theories, and evaluation rituals) are a loci of gender difference construction, one question is raised: How does the perspective delineated above affect the educational arena in general and the TEFL scenario in particular?

Although "identity" as defined above is seen as temporary, uncertain, and multiple (Sarbin & Kituse, 1994; Sarup, 1996; Shotter, 1989), it has not yet affected, in consistent ways, the panoptic heritage underlying school work change, which we think makes teachers resort to the "solid ground" of well-established canons, safe references, and explicit directions. Terming this a "disciplinary regime" Foucault (1977) approached the panopticon--a circular architectural structure created in the 18th century--as a space characterized by repression and confinement, providing total surveillance and enabling the control of people's behaviour. As a circular architectural structure, it provided total surveillance, enabling the control of someone's behaviour. This walled enclosure--and its underlying idea of precise and efficient action upon other people's actions--has influenced the physical shape of many institutional buildings, including convents, prisons and schools. In schools, we believe a myriad of practices still pay tribute to panoptism, including classroom arrangement and occupation, classroom management and control, and classroom interaction, time, and activities.

As perturbing as the ideas of instability and transience may be, many authors (e.g., Castells, 1997; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Hall, 1990) argue that rapid changes which we have been daily and concretely exposed to force us to experience unpredictable and unprecedented situations, whether we like or not. Therefore, traditional pedagogies are being increasingly confronted with the need to equip pupils to cope, in ethical and responsible ways, with the many transformations they face.

Changes in Brazilian Education

In the Brazilian context, the educational field has been responding to these demands by showing an increasing concern with the inappropriateness of monocultural curricula and by investing in the development of multicultural principles that can inform pedagogic work. Drawing on the works by Banks (1999), Freire (1970, 1973), and McLaren (1995, 1997), scholars call for an empowering education that can encourage students to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and consequently contribute to

societal reform as far as reduction of prejudice, discrimination, and social imbalance is concerned. In the realm of foreign language education, this trend has resulted in the publication of the National Curricular Parameters issued by the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture in 1998 (Secretaria de Educação Fundamental, 1998). This document replaced previous educational guidelines that emphasized skills development and focused on standardized content. The current policies comprise an interventionist agenda, and propose the development of critical thinking through a curriculum that:

- Helps students understand that knowledge is socially constructed, reflecting knowledge makers' experiences, beliefs and values;
- Shows how assumptions about hegemonic identities are the effect of situated practices, varying according to socio-cultural specifics of diverse historical contexts;
- Questions stereotyping that construct dichotomous views of identities; and,
- Highlights the diversity and plurality of life that constitutes social experience.

The Brazilian Curricular Parameters suggest that the learning of foreign languages should provide students with opportunities for acting in the world through discourses besides the ones offered by their mother tongue. From this perspective, TEFL should approach the way people act in society through language, constructing the social world, themselves, and others around them. The quote below summarizes the document's approach to language in society:

Language use (both verbal and visual) is essentially determined by its sociointeractional nature because whoever uses language considers either an audience or an addressee. This approach implies that meaning is dialogic, i.e. it is constructed by all participants in discourse. Besides that, interactional encounters do not occur in a social vacuum. They involve institutional, cultural and historical contexts. (Secretaria de Educação Fundamental, 1998, p. 27, our translation)

According to this view texts are purposefully constructed by identifiable participants (e.g., author and audience) in response to exigencies of time, place, and subject matter. Therefore, in the foreign language classroom, students should be encouraged to recognize and reconstruct these contexts which influence the way texts are organized as well as the lexical-grammatical components they contain--procedures involved in the notion of critical thinking. This is to be underpinned by the discussion of socially relevant topics, such as gender-related issues, cultural pluralism, ethics, and citizenship. The idea is that students can compare how these topics are constructed in their mother tongue and in the foreign language. The proposal is audacious. Teachers everywhere (and we argue, in Brazil) have been influenced by mechanisms of control, and they deal with categories, theories, materials, and assessment procedures (termed

power techniques by Foucault, 1977) . These seem to include some people and exclude others using categories such as intelligent/stupid, successfu/unsuccessful, competent/incompetent, literate/illiterate, rich/poor, black/white, homosexual/heterosexual, male/female (among others). As these dimensions are present in many areas of school and social life, it makes the task of challenging these binarisms a gigantic one. One needs to be alert concerning our understandings of familiar topics as we scrutinize them.

We think a "critique of essentialism" enterprise is daring in the TEFL environment which we believe is dominated by a traditional focus on lexical-grammatical elements and language functions, and by textbooks and materials that present pasteurized realities devoid of social tensions and cultural diversity (Gray, 2002; Santos, 2002). Important research on the enhancement of critical thinking in the EFL classroom (e.g. Luke, 2004; Wallace, 1992) does not seem to have reached the status of mainstream practice in TEFL. Moreover, given the tension of current times (Edge, 2006), more needs to be done to encourage widespread development of pedagogical practices aiming at reflecting on and challenging cemented social stereotypes.

We join this debate by arguing that the development of critical thinking presupposes an ongoing questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions and "an analytic move to self-position oneself as Other" (Luke, 2004, p. 26). These processes in turn make the notions of interaction and joint construction of knowledge suitable theoretical constructs to assist teacher-researchers in the implementation of dynamic meaning-making processes in the classroom and also in the analysis of educational scenarios aiming at the development of critical thinking. Developments from interactional sociolinguistics and sociocultural theory provide the theoretical support we need to develop our argument and we will comment on relevant concepts coming from these traditions in turn.

An Application of Interactional Sociolinguistics and Sociocultural Theory

In his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Goffman (1983) pointed out that, due to their socially situated nature, interactions should be investigated by means of micro-analysis using "interactional order" as a unit of analysis. In order to answer the question "what's going on here?" it is argued that people "frame" events in particular ways. They "ordinarily do not create this definition [but rather] assess correctly what the situation ought to be for them and then act accordingly" (Goffman, 1974, pp. 2-3). Key to this discussion is that frames involve the "principles of organization which govern events--at least social ones--and our subjective involvement in them" (pp. 10-11). Hence this concept addresses the interplay between social conventions and individual agency. In other words, it is a

concept which allows for, and gives theoretical support to, variation in interpretations and possibility of change.

Parallel to the concept of frame is the notion of *footing*, how framing is accomplished in interactions. According to Goffman (1981), a footing involves a three-legged stance speakers and hearers take toward themselves, toward interlocutors, and toward the content of their talk. The framing process, then, is mutually constructed through interactants' projecting, recognizing and ratifying, or challenging, one another's footings. Footing shifts permeate talk from moment to moment, and participants end up by embedding one footing within another--an interactional experience alluded to by Goffman (1974) as "lamination." As he explains, "in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on one foot, we jump up and down on another" (Goffman, 1981, p. 155). In so doing, interlocutors negotiate interactional relations not captured by the conceptualisation of "speakers" and "hearers" as monolithic categories. As an alternative, Goffman (1981) proposes the notion of participation statuses (defined as the positions interactants hold in relation to the utterance), namely "animators" (the one who articulates the utterance), "authors" (the position associated with the formulation of the utterance), and "principals" (the position ascribed to "someone who is committed to what the words say")(Goffman, 1981, p. 144).

These concepts provide us with a conceptualisation of language and semiosis which has the potential of allowing us to re-define the classroom as an interactional site which is open to an exchange of multiple perspectives, and likely suitable to support educationalists in the development of students' critical thinking. What we need in addition to this conceptualisation of language is an approach to teaching which offers the same potential, and we argue that the notion of "scaffolding" encompasses this possibility for change.

Scaffolding

Originally, the term scaffolding was used to discuss ways through which a "more-knowledgeable peer" (in Vygotskian terms) assisted "somebody who is less adult or less expert" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 89). These ways differ in their degrees of directness, from the explicit presentation of a solution to a problem; moving on to a verbal error prompt in which the tutor draws attention to the problem but does not necessarily point a solution to it; to a more indirect "verbal attempt" (p. 93) to elicit a particular behaviour with no mention of the problem. In Wood (1976) the researchers examined the extent to which children could carry out a task using wood blocks without help and, at a more fundamental level, in understanding the practical consequences of the different types of assistance described above. In our case, we are dealing with naturalisation of practices in a particular social group and the "problem" embedded in

taken-for-granted social identities. We are interested in exploring whether a group of teachers and young learners can challenge certain assumptions in interaction and jointly construct novel meanings.

Central to exploration of scaffolding is an approach to the recognized I-R-E pattern not as a fixed framework in which the teacher tends to occupy the I (initiation) and E (evaluation) slots, and students the R (response) slot (for a review see Hall & Walsh, 2002). Also, this approach rejects taken-for-granted descriptions of the I-R-E pattern as necessarily harmful to students' learning experiences. Instead, we argue that it is not the pattern per se which is problematic, but rather *how* it is implemented.

In summary, the notions of frame, footing, participant status, and scaffolding are the central analytical tools in this study (see the Analysis section below).

Context of the Investigation and Research Questions

Our study took place in a Brazilian language school in a large city. At the time we generated our data the institution had been implementing an innovative programme for three years. The project sprang from teachers' discontent and disappointment with the communicative methodology orienting their practice, which produced, they thought, disengaged and non-fluent students. The innovation proposed pedagogic innovation at important levels, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1

The School Before and After the Innovation Programme

	Before the innovation programme	After the innovation programme
The Teacher-Student relationship	Strong asymmetrical relationship, in which (1) the teachers make most decisions regarding what is done, when, and how. (2) the teachers define the goals of learning. (3) the teacher is described as facilitator	A less asymmetrical relationship, in which (1) the teacher avoids making excessive control of the turn-taking system; (2) the teacher makes her objectives clear at all times, and listens to her students' views in this respect; (3) the teacher is described as a provider of scaffolding
The classroom	Fixed furniture arrangement, generally following a horseshoe pattern, with the teacher occupying a central position in the open side of the horseshoe.	Dynamic arrangement, varying according to the purposes of the activity being developed; More often than not students work in a circle, without the direct presence of the teacher, who tends to be out the circle observing the interaction and taking notes
The lesson	Emphasis on pair work and roleplays;	Emphasis on group discussions; Audio- and/or video-recordings of the lesson are usually done to be a source of reflection and/or discussion (on grammar, vocabulary and interaction)
The syllabus	Pre-defined before the course begins	Partially pre-defined, partially to be negotiated with the students
The school and the outside world	Few, if any, connections are established	Connections between the school and the outside world are one important priority

One of us was directly responsible for the elaboration and implementation of the programme on its early days (as reported in Fabrício, 1996) and during data gathering

had the responsibility of designing new syllabi for different levels. The other one stood as Academic Director for the school and also had teaching and syllabus designing responsibilities. The roles we played in the school therefore contributed to the design of our research in terms of data selection and gathering. Furthermore, our roles in the school also guided the questions we wanted to pursue in this investigation.

Specifically, what motivated us to carry out this investigation was to assess the feasibility of the broader goals outlined in the National Curricular Parameters and in the more local objectives of the school (see Table 1 above) with a group of young learners. In particular, this study set out to explore the following questions:

1. To what extent is it possible to frame EFL lessons for young learners as a site of reflection and critical thinking?
2. What role does the process of scaffolding play in promoting the performance of reflective and critical footings?
3. What pedagogical procedures can encourage young learners to question the naturalization of the 'male/female' dichotomy'?
4. To what extent are the broader educational goals feasible in the context of young learners of English who have only elementary proficiency in the target language?

Method

In order to address these questions, we collaborated on the re-design of a syllabus for young TEFL learners who were beginners or false-beginners. The previous syllabus was primarily functional, following what Cook (2003, p. 31) described as "a constraining and conformist model of language use" we associate with the communicative approach. According to the previous syllabus, students were encouraged to participate in activities that were not necessarily relevant to them (e.g. engage in pair work to describe famous people; carry out roleplays and taking on roles they were unlikely to play in their social worlds). The linguistic core of the new syllabus was organized around the content of published materials (Littlejohn & Hicks, 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1996d) but we made additions to it, which we will outline below.

Participants

Six students (five girls and one boy) participated in this research, and their ages ranged from 10 to 11. They had had little exposure to formal instruction of English: Five of them had English lessons in their regular schools, but these lessons did not have a significant workload; also, given the large number of students in these classrooms, they had little opportunity to use English for communication.

In terms of the researchers, one of us taught the student participants for three semesters

in a row (with total contact time of 112 hours distributed in these eighteen months) and the other one was present in most classes in order to either videotape or take field notes.

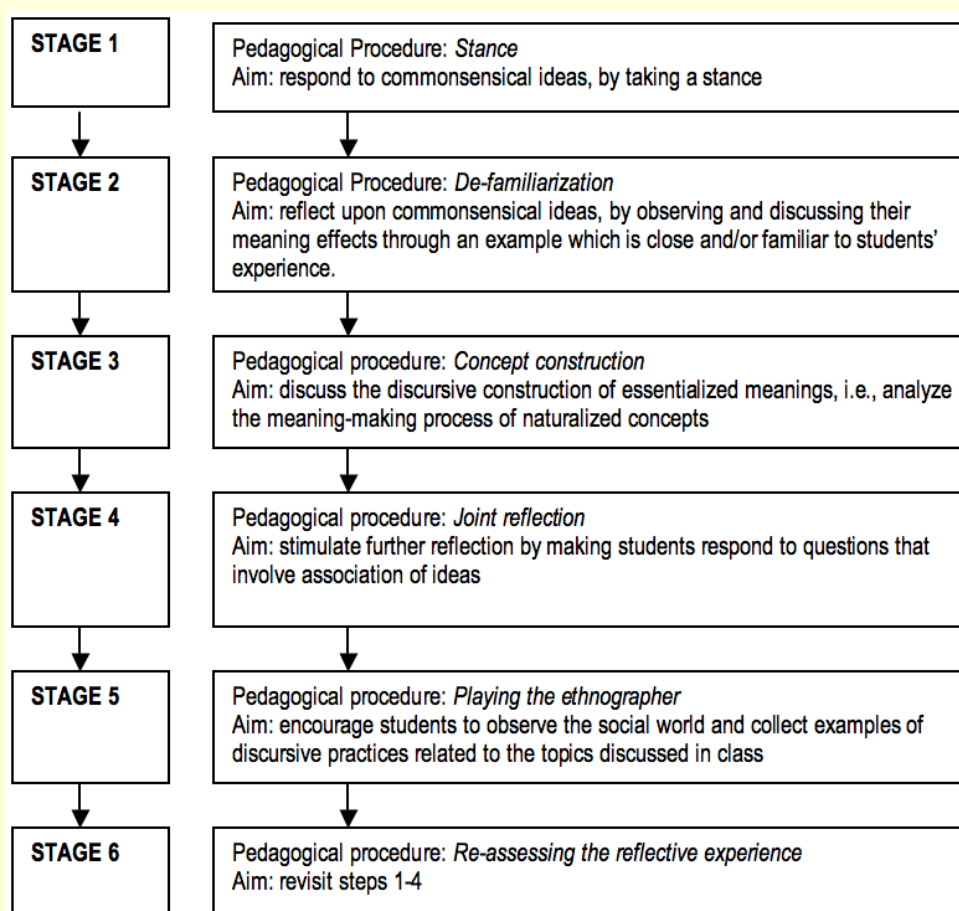
The Lesson Framework

These topics included not only socio-political issues attached to English in the Brazilian context but also personal responsibility in social matters such as environmental issues, conceptions of "the other," cultural stereotypes, and prejudice. These topics were brought into the lessons in order to foster students' critical thinking and to question taken-for-granted assumptions around key issues in their social worlds.

Specifically, the sessions focusing on the development of critical thinking were based on materials promoting reflective activities about the production of naturalized meanings. These materials typically took the form of discussion sheets that we developed and were constructed around the principles outlined in Figure 1:

Figure 1

A Framework for Developing Young Learners' Critical Thinking



An example of a discussion sheet whose design was oriented by the principles above

can be found in Appendix A. The Results section below will focus on the interaction developed around this particular discussion sheet. Further details of how these lessons were organized will be given next.

Materials

The activity reproduced in Appendix A focuses on stereotypical perceptions of gender, an issue raised in a story read by the group in which one of the characters said, "Women are vain everywhere." This activity represents other lessons revolving around critical thinking in two ways: First, it deals with with stereotypical meanings and the perception that people (men and women in this case) are expected to behave in particular, pre-defined ways; and second, it follows the framework shown in Figure 1, as specified in Table 2:

Table 2

Stages for Developing Critical Thinking in Relation to Gendered Dualisms

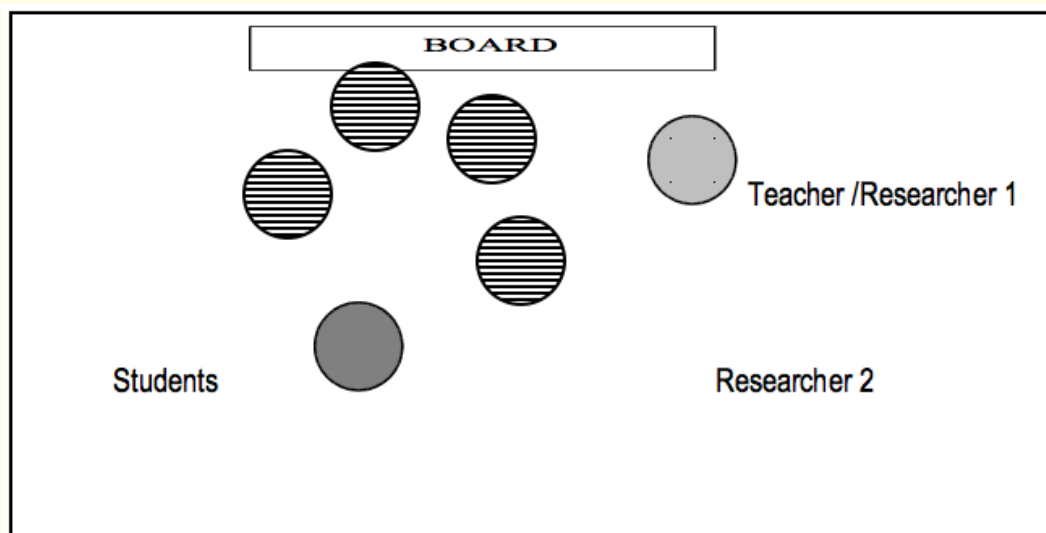
STAGE	EXERCISE	PEDAGOGICAL PROCEDURE	WHAT STUDENTS ARE ASKED TO DO
1	1 and 2	Stance	Take a stance concerning dichotomic essentialized constructions of <i>boys and girls</i>
2	3	De-familiarization	De-familiarize a commonsensical generalization concerning teenagers
3	4	Concept construction	Reflect upon the construction process of generalizations and stereotypes based on a classroom example
4	5	Group discussion	Associate ideas and broaden the reflection initiated in stage 3, by analyzing, at a more macro level, the social construction of rules for men and women
5	Homework	Playing the ethnographer	Observe gender construction in the social world
6		Re-assessing the reflective experience	Systematize the knowledge collectively constructed

Note that these discussion sessions did not follow the conventional T-S-T-S format, with the teacher posing the questions for students to respond to. Instead, the teacher made room for students' contributions and students learned how to do the same for their peers. This novel interactional pattern, challenging more narrow interpretations of the archetypal I-R-E sequence generated some initial reaction but students soon learned how to manage the turn-taking system and to involve others.

A key issue enabling this participation framework is the spatial arrangement used for the discussion sessions. Figure 2 below shows how the teacher, the second researcher, and the participant students were arranged in the classroom. This configuration favoured the maintenance of eye-contact among interlocutors. The teacher, standing away from the circle, observed students' interactional work, occasionally chiming in comments to trigger reflective thinking:

Figure 2

Typical Spatial Configuration During the Study



Analyses

Recordings of the lessons described above were transcribed and analyzed. Firstly, transcripts were divided into sections matching the Pedagogical Procedures outlined in Figure 1 above and these sections were subsequently coded in relation to the frames evoked by participants for each of these procedures. By doing this we were able to identify what were the typical frames evoked by the teacher and the students during different stages and also to associate particular frames with particular pedagogical procedures. Another round of analysis was then carried out looking at the participant statuses co-constructed by interactants on these occasions. Again, we were particularly interested in observing connections between certain frames and the footings taken up by individuals during their reflecting on stereotypical conceptualizations of men and women in society.

Next, we coded the data with a focus on the type of scaffolding provided by the teacher or by the learners during these reflection processes. We coded these instances in relation to the degree of the directness in support (following Wood et al, 1976). Finally, we looked at the transcripts with a focus on the quantity and the quality of learners' utterances in the target language. Although no comparisons can be made with other settings where young learners at a beginner level interact using English as a foreign language, this analysis can give us important insights into the potential implications of the interplay between certain frames, participant status, pedagogical procedures and types of scaffolding onto the language used by young learners in their early stages of learning English.

Results

Data analysis demonstrated that the 6-Stage model (Figure 1 above) we developed for critical thinking promoted the development of a set of framings and alignments that, in turn, were co-constructed by participants as the result of particular types of scaffolding. In Stage 1 (Stance), as the teacher negotiates a "problem posing" frame with students, she provides indirect scaffolding, aiming simply at encouraging participation and stance-taking. In this stage, students tended to respond to the teacher's footing of "problem poser" by aligning themselves merely as "answer providers." Afterwards, as participants went through the more demanding activities of Stages 2-6, they progressively rearticulated the original configuration by enacting different kinds of scaffolding and performing laminated alignments of animator, author, and principal. As scaffolding was provided more directly by either the teacher, the discussion sheet, or the students, room was made for the joint construction of new alignments: While the teacher played the role of the devil's advocate, encouraging reflective alignments, students negotiated "questioning footings."

We will illustrate the above claims by unpacking a discussion generated by the Activity Sheet in Appendix A. We will focus on the initial (Stance) and final stages of reflection (Playing the ethnographer / Re-assessing the reflective experience) in order to show how these young learners managed to jointly re-assess commonsensical cultural expectations around men and women during the critical thinking process. Students' names have been changed to preserve anonymity and transcription conventions are found in Appendix B.

The conversation below (see Table 3) took place immediately after students had gone through exercises one and two, i.e., the Stance Stage.

Table 3

Discussion Excerpt 1

1	Teacher	so what's the conclusion you come up with after / all this discussion?
2	Ana	/ all the
3	Paula	/ all
4	Ana	all these sentences ((pointing to the board)) are...
5		(.)
6	Teacher	are what?
7	Moema	/ incorrect
8	Ana	/ are bad
9	Teacher	why are they bad?
10	Ana	because they are not true
11	Teacher	are they totally bad or 100%...100% false?
12	Moema	((laughs)) no
13	Paula	no, no, ninety-nine
14	Moema	yes, they're one hundred per cent... because a boy can be sensitive (.)
15		a girl can be sensitive (.) depends on the / kind of person
16	Ana	/ depends on the kind
17	Teacher	so what's the problem with all the sentences? what are they doing
18		that they shouldn't do?
19	Ana	/ they are ((hesitating in L1)) éééé
20	Moema	/ they're
21	Roberto	((looking at Ana)) what?
22	Teacher	is it a difficult question?
23	Moema	they are making a difference between a girl and a boy (.) no difference (.)
24		like boys can't cry (.) they try not to cry (.) some boys, but (?)
25	Teacher	so you keep repeating that (.) some do, some don't (.) some are, some
26		aren't. so what's the problem with these sentences (.) when they say 'boys
27		don't cry'?
28	Ana	because they are (.) they are (.) they are / all the boys (.) some
29	Roberto	/ it's one direction
30	Ana	yeah, they are, not boys and girls. Boys. No, but it's not, because boys (.)
31		some boys are very sensitive, but some girls too
32	Teacher	so the problem with the (.) these sentences (.) see if you agree with me (.)
33		it's that they are making generalizations?
34	Students	Yeah
35	Teacher	they are generalizing? do you understand that? what's generalizing?

In line 1 the teacher proposes a problem for students to consider at the end of the Stance Stage but this problem it is not articulated as such. Instead, the teacher proposes a reflection in the form of a "conclusion" to be achieved. Both Ana and Paula (the latter implicitly, the former explicitly) frame the topic for discussion as external to them, and they do not take on responsibility for their claims. In other words, from the beginning of the discussion the students do not align themselves as principals for these claims, and neither do they immediately establish links between these claims and their own conceptualizations of boys and girls.

Instead, students' immediate response takes on an authorial footing describing the claims through judgmental comments (lines 7 and 8) which leads to the teacher's encouragement for students to justify these negative judgments (line 9) and to reflect on the interplay between individual behavior and group behavior (line 11). Moema accepts the challenge and takes a stand aligning herself against the generalizations being discussed by framing them in terms of individual differences (lines 14-15), a perspective which seems to be echoed by Ana (line 16) but not by the teacher, who then frames the sentences as a problem in explicit terms (line 17) while acknowledging that this should be a "difficult question" (line 22) for students to ponder upon. In lines 19-21 three students jointly articulate an answer to the question (note the

encouragement given by Roberto in line 21 to Ana who is trying to propose a response to the problem) but it is unclear whether students are struggling with the language or with the very meanings they are constructing (or both) at this point.

A turning point in the process wrapping up the Stance Stage occurs in lines 23-24 when Moema re-frames the problem in focus not as an individual issue (as she had previously done in lines 14-15) but as a gender issue. The teacher paraphrases this utterance in lines 25-27 (by doing what Mercer, 2001, describes as a reformulation and Cazden, 1988, as a reconceptualization) and other students join in. Ana still seems to find it difficult to produce a coherent argument but she constructs a reflective and critical alignment clearly challenging the dichotomous view of boys as opposed to girls (lines 28 and 30-31). Roberto frames the problem in terms of unidirectionality, de-familiarizing, in his own terms, allegedly fixed attributes of gender identities. Following this initial collective thinking, the teacher assumes a more overt participation in the discussion and introduces the terms generalizations and generalizing (lines 33 and 35).

The role of the teacher in the process of engaging students in critical thinking cannot be underestimated. In this excerpt (and, we feel, consistently during the research project) the teacher alternated different types of scaffolding, starting from indirect invitations to elicit particular types of responses (as seen above, line 1), moving on to direct instances in which she highlighted the problem but did not offer a solution to it (lines 9, 11, 17-18, 25-27). We think the effects of this scaffolding can be seen clearly in the next excerpt (see Table 4 below) when students were involved with the activities suggested in Stages 5 and 6 (Playing the ethnographer and re-assessing the reflective experience). The discussion in Table 4 took place in a class following the one reported above (Table 3). When students came to class where the discussion in Table 4 took place, they had done the homework seen in Appendix A. Students talked about the magazine images depicting women they had brought in--mainly dressed-up women, sexily posing for photos, wearing make-up and/or cosmetics.

Table 4

Discussion Excerpt 2

1	Teacher	so let's take a look at the pictures you've brought. what ideas of women
2		do these pictures represent? ideas that women have to behave or
3		/ be in a certain way?
4	Roberto	/ they have to
5	Lucia	this (.) she have (.) she has to be (.) beautiful (.) to make their face better
6	Teacher	have you ever seen a picture of a man like this?
7	Students	no!
8	Teacher	imagine the situation: you get a magazine and / you see a photo of a man
9		like this
10	Moema	/ it's funny
11	Teacher	how would you react?
12	Students	((laugh))
13	Teacher	why would you laugh?
14	Moema	I don't know
15	Students	((incomprehensible, simultaneous talk))
16	Teacher	let's think about this first
17	Roberto	it's not common
18	Teacher	do you think that only (.) do you think that only the women have to take
19		care of their skin? =
20	Paula	= no =
21	Moema	= only if they want to =
22	Lucia	= it's strange
23	Teacher	but why is it strange?
24	Moema	men don't do this
25	Roberto	you think: all the men don't do this, but this is a generalization

Unlike the discussion illustrated in Excerpt 1 (Table 3), this stage of development of students' critical thinking started with an explicit orientation of the discussion in gender terms (lines 1-3). It was the teacher who suggested this framing, but she soon (line 6) proposed an alignment which forced students to move away from a more distant perception of women as "they" (articulated by Roberto in line 4) or "she" (said by Lucia in line 5) towards a more personal orientation in relation to the topic (note the "you" in lines 6 and 8). This pronoun shift achieved more than a simple change in textual construction: We believe it leads students to re-align themselves as principals and to alter their social roles from being mere observers of an external reality to becoming an active participant in the construction of that reality.

Students' initial reactions to this new role was characterized by a collective denial (line 7) and a seeming feeling of humour when faced with the hypothetical event of coming across men performing roles often attributed to females (lines 10-13). As Bredel (2003, p. 155) points out, laughter is often related to opposition. Specifically, "it concerns an opposition between imagination (or probability) and reality" and in this sense these students' reactions at this point signal their discomfort in relation to the de-construction of established social expectations. But the teacher, sticking to a questioning alignment, pointed out students' laughter in lines 13 and 16. This process does not develop easily (see line 14) but we think it triggered students' interest given their active involvement in the debate (line 15). In lines 18-19 the teacher reframed the "problem" by making the familiar unfamiliar while still forcing students to express their commitment to their words.

Participants' joint construction of novel meanings in the final six lines of the excerpt still required one intervention from the teacher (line 23) to ensure "direction maintenance" and to mark "critical features" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 98) in relation to the task. These lines offer insight on how a group of young learners can collaborate in meaning-making. The thinking process culminated when Roberto (the only male in the group), in his own terms, mentioned the inappropriateness of a dominant perception of masculinity. Specifically, he "appropriated" (Leont'ev, 1981, as cited by Newman, Cole, & Griffin, 1989) the concept of "generalization" in the construction of new meanings. Moreover, as he seemed to align himself as a tutor, he drew his classmates' attention to a problem, in effect acting as the more-knowledgeable participant in the class. We believe this point in the discussion reconfigures, at least for a brief moment, the classical power relations of panoptic educational settings, in which the teacher is expected to maintain strong asymmetrical relationships. We also believe this re-configuration challenges a mainstream conceptualization of the teacher as facilitator, an image which implies that teachers just make certain processes easier and that these processes are defined *a priori*. Instead, what we think our data indicate is that by taking on a more active positioning in the class, students themselves become agents in their learning processes not only in ways previously defined by the teacher but also in the ways they construct and achieve unexpected outcomes in collaboration with others.

Discussion

In answering our research questions, our study has shown that the challenge present in our Research Question 1 is feasible. There is a concrete possibility of framing EFL lessons for young learners as a site of reflection and critical thinking and, by doing so, transforming EFL classes into multicultural environments. Firstly, our analysis suggests that it is possible to engage learners in a de-familiarization of naturalized views of social identities, and it also indicates it is through language that de-construction can be accomplished. By leading students to (1) perceive the inconsistencies present in generalizations concerning gender identities and (2) realize the social mechanisms producing stereotypes, they may become aware of multiple traps in their own talk. We have also come to the conclusion that data presented in this report give visibility to on-going processes concerning classroom interaction and student identity: the above described collective actions reconfigured relations of power in the classroom redefining a panopticon-type of control present in teacher-centered classes.

In responding to Research Question 2, the analysis illuminates the ways scaffolding work can support teachers and students in their joint construction of critical thinking. It has shown that scaffolding can be provided by pedagogy (the discussion sheet and the various stages for reflection it proposes). The teacher, who forces pupils to think about

their contributions and elaborate their ideas by expanding, clarifying, or justifying them, can also provide scaffolding by performing the footing of *thought-unsettling agent*. Moreover, students themselves can provide scaffolding. Operating on a reflective frame, they can trigger mutual re-alignments as well as the co-construction of reflective and critical footings. From this perspective, the process of scaffolding gains a special tone, other than its ordinary understanding: it is challenging, thought-provoking and supportive at the same time.

Third, our study indicates that the 6-Stage model we propose (Figure 1 above) offers a potentially effective way in assisting young learners to engage in critical thinking. As shown, by thematizing, questioning, and re-thinking cultural dichotomies, these learners were able to problematize the established gender dualism--something related to the challenge invoked in Research Question 3. It is important to note that our findings suggest that it is not the sequence of stages per se which is likely to trigger critical thinking. Rather, it is the implementation of these procedures, combined with the configuration of particular frames and the construction of particular types of scaffolding, which enable these interactional achievements. Specifically, our data suggest that the following pedagogical procedures can encourage young learners to question accepted male/female dichotomies: discussions of the topic at hand and the critical way it is dealt with; the room made for participants' contributions and the responsible interactional relations they jointly construct; the reflective alignments interactants negotiate; and the multivoiced context they create.

Finally, in relation to our fourth Research Question, it is important to highlight that these discussions described in Tables 3 and 4 were carried out in English after these students had been learning the language for only one year. In this sense, the road travelled by the students, in English, without recourse to their native tongue, showed two concomitant processes in progress: the development of learners' oral skills in the foreign language, and the analysis of cultural meanings and of the social practices in which they are produced.

It is our belief that it is this net of empowering practices that can shake, at least locally, schools' monoculturalism. As local as these changes may be, they suggest the possibility of redescribing the TEFL environment in terms of a context for debate, for questioning social life, for the development of students' autonomy and reflexive thinking, and for the formation of active critical citizens.

Conclusion

Our study was oriented by the idea that social identities and social meanings are not fixed, being therefore subject to change. In tune with this idea, it has shown that engagement in new educational practices can help students form new identities.

The in-class discussions we described reframe the EFL classroom causing a relocation from a landscape of knowledge transmission to a social creative "scape" of complex, dynamic, cooperative, and cognitive relations. It is in this kind of scape--where students can exercise "dialogue across difference" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999), rubbing alterities against mainstream identities--that new stories about the social world and social actors can be created.

In Fabrício and Santos (2006) we argue that any new space comes into being as the outcome of dynamic activities. Therefore, change in school scenarios are inaugurated through collective procedures. That said, one implication of our work is the necessity of investment in teacher development so that they can be, together with their students, agents of change. We see this local experience in a Brazilian TEFL classroom as related to the construction of citizenship in global multicultural societies. Stereotypes of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity produce widespread stigmatization, inequality, and prejudice in social life. If we educate students to question naturalized meanings about the social order and about social identities, we believe we can contribute to the formation of future citizens who do not merely fit into society, but creatively contemplate possibilities of change together with the implications that may come along with them.

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Appendix A

SOCIAL STEREOTYPES

1. Working in a group of four students, think about the following statements:

- *Girls are more sensitive than boys.*
- *Girls are more organized than boys.*
- *Boys don't cry.*
- *Boys are aggressive.*
- *Boys are more intelligent than girls.*
- *Men like football; women don't.*
- *Men don't know how to cook.*

Do you agree with these statements?

2. In the book you have read, Louis (one of the characters) said: *Women are vain everywhere!* Do you agree with the boy's opinion on women? Are all the women in the world alike?

3. You must have already heard the following statement: *When they are 11- 13 years of age they're quite boring.* Do you agree with this statement? Are all pre-adolescents alike? Do you think that this kind of statement takes into account individual differences?

4. Read about a classroom situation:

Paulo, one of the students in 603, started to blow paper pellets out of his pen at his classmates. Antônio, the first one to be hit said :What's your problem, man? Paulo laughs and chooses another target, João. João shouts: Hey, give me a break, will you! The third and last victim is Maria. The girl starts crying when she feels the paper pellet hit her cheek. The noise calls the teacher's attention who tells Paulo to leave the classroom. Paulo's comment on the situation is: Girls always overreact!

Observe what Paulo did: 1) he underwent a personal experience in his classroom, with his friend Maria; 2) By making a comment (*Girls always overreact!*), he expanded his opinion upon a specific event, not only to all the girls in his classroom, but also to all the girls in school, in town, in his country, in the world.; 3) This generalization creates a social stereotype: the idea that all the girls/women in the world are fragile.

What do Paulo's and Louis's comments have in common?

5. Carry out a class discussion: *A family scene: The mother is in charge of cooking with the help of her daughters, whereas her husband and sons wait for their meal while they*

TESL-EJL, vol. 26, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-12. This situation is not unusual in our society regarding women's and men's behavior. Are there rigid rules to be followed by men and women in our society? Are women and men expected to play different roles? As a result, do you think people are born behaving like men or like women? Or rather, do they learn through socialization

social stereotype: the idea that all the girls/women in the world are fragile.

What do Paulo's and Louis's comments have in common?

5. Carry out a class discussion: *A family scene: The mother is in charge of cooking with the help of her daughters, whereas her husband and sons wait for their meal while they watch TV*. This situation is not uncommon in our society regarding women's and men's behavior. Are there rigid rules to be followed by men and women in our society? Are women and men expected to play different roles? As a result, do you think people are born behaving like men or like women? Or rather, do they learn through socialization how to become "men" or "women"? How are the rules for social behavior created?

Homework

- Think about current stereotypes/generalizations in our society regarding:
GIRLS BOYS WOMEN MEN
- Look for any kind of information / illustrations in magazines, newspapers, comic strips or on the Internet that either reproduce or challenges the gender stereotypes discussed above. Bring the material in next class. It will help you prepare a poster entitled *The changing roles of men and women*.

Appendix B

/	onset of overlap
(.)	short pause
(())	non-linguistic behavior and/or clarification
Bold indicates relevant parts in the example	
<i>Italics</i> indicates utterance in L1 (Portuguese)	

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