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Children as subjects with rights in EFL textbooks

Los niños como sujetos con derechos en textos para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera

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Abstract

This paper illustrates how a Colombian EFL textbooks' series deals with the educational discourse of children as subjects with rights and the new conception of childhood from a Rights Perspective, taking into account UNICEF's conclusions on the current situation of children's rights in Colombia where children are being silenced, discriminated against, and exploited by social practices as such. Using Critical Discourse Analysis tools this paper identifies different discourse strategies related to an educational discourse of children as rights-bearing subjects. The results show three main discourse strategies that reveal the way EFL textbooks tend to portray children as members of society: gender and racial visibility, human being's passivity, and value- system inclusion. Although the EFL textbooks address some of the principles that support the educational discourse of children as subjects with rights, they still have the tendency to represent children as passive subjects and non-right holders.

Keywords: EFL textbooks, critical discourse analysis, children's rights, children as subjects with rights, children's agency

Resumen

Este artículo muestra cómo una serie de libros de texto de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) producida en Colombia da respuesta al discurso educativo de los niños como sujetos de derecho y la nueva concepción que se tiene de la niñez desde una perspectiva de derechos, teniendo en cuenta las conclusiones presentadas por la UNICEF frente a la situación actual de los derechos de la niñez en Colombia donde los niños y niñas están siendo silenciados, discriminados y explotados por miembros de la sociedad y sus prácticas. A través del uso de mecanismos propuestos por el análisis crítico del discurso, este artículo identifica diferentes estrategias discursivas que los libros de texto de ILE presentan en relación con el discurso educativo de los niños y niñas como sujetos de derecho. Los resultados muestran tres estrategias discursivas principales que revelan la forma en que los textos de ILE tienden a entender y representar los niños y niñas como miembros de una sociedad: visibilidad racial y de género, pasividad del ser humano y la inclusión de un sistema de valores. Aunque los libros de texto de ILE toman en cuenta algunos de los principios que soportan el discurso educativo de los niños y niñas como sujetos de derecho, aún tienden a representarlos como sujetos pasivos y sin titularidad de sus derechos.

Palabras clave: libros de texto para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, análisis crítico del discurso, derechos de los niños, niños y niñas como sujetos de derechos, agencia de la niñez.



Introduction

According to research carried out in the last decades, there is strong evidence that the most important stage in a human being's life is childhood, since their development guarantees supporting practices for their socialization and immersion processes in society (Vila, 1999). As a result, the actions that adults and in general the educational environment take are the main engine to assure successful social and political practices that carry into adulthood. Thus, the discursive practices that are operating in different contexts such as the educational have a strong impact on the way childhood is understood and addressed by society and its actors.

Since the approval of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, hereafter) the concept of the child and its role in society have changed dramatically, in the sense that childhood is now seen as another stage in human development that requires participation and inclusion processes. Some decades ago, children were understood and validated by policies as objects that needed protection and knowledge from adults without the chance to have a voice. This paradigm change became the motivation to carry this project out in order to analyze how, discursively speaking, that evolution is being implemented in the actual educational practices, specifically EFL textbooks.

In the field of education one of the most important sources of information is teaching materials, especially textbooks (Tomlinson, 2003). In that sense textbooks become potential discourse (re)producers that, according to van Dijk (1993), reveal a constant reproduction of dominant ideologies that demands careful study of how they work.

Taking into account that education is one of the foundations for social transformation and that the access to knowledge empowers people

in all domains, one of the main concerns of the United Nations Human Rights declaration (article 26) and the UNCRC has been precisely the right to education. However, the educational field is constantly permeated by different social, cultural and political discourses that have an effect on social practices and representations. These effects are the mechanisms responsible for conceptualizing and stereotyping specific social groups and their roles, in this case children.

The new discourse on children as rights-bearing subjects is supported by three main characteristics proposed by the UNCRC. Firstly, this discourse is integrally protecting every child on planet Earth, assuring that all receive attention from the State and society. Secondly, the protectionist or assisted perspective is replaced by the rights-based one, which understands children through their capacities. Thirdly, children need to be treated as autonomous human beings in order to guarantee their participation status in social practices; of course, this is a progressive autonomy in agreement with children's cognitive and psychological development (Cillero, 1999; Galvis, 2007). Likewise, there are some principles for the application of the Convention that continue to sculpt the new concept of childhood, and they are: The best interest of the child, the equality and non-discrimination principle (Save the Children, 2003), participation and citizenship (Sauri & Marquez, 2005; Bojorquez, 2005; Secretaria Distrital, 2009; Roche, 1999; Landsdown, 2005; Bula & Camacho, 2006), and autonomy (Cillero, 1999).

The critical discourse analysis carried out in this project took those characteristics and principles as guides in order to analyze the relationship between the discourse strategies portrayed in the EFL textbooks and the discourse of children as subjects with rights.



Theoretical Considerations

Children as subjects with rights: a long quest

According to Woodhead and Montgomery (2003), the concept of being a child is socially situated and constructed. As a result, we cannot give an exclusive answer without taking into account that human beings are constantly positioning themselves and being positioned by others depending on the social reality that surrounds them (Baxter, 2003). For this reason, childhood is heterogeneous and we can even talk about different kinds of childhood mediated by gender, culture, social status, and geographical position that are constantly shaping this concept (Gimeno, 2003). Bearing this in mind, being a child could be defined as another stage in life, where children should be understood as subjects with rights and duties who are immersed in social and political structures of society.

However, children in our country, as in many places around the world have been conceived differently, mainly as objects needing protection that have to be guided and molded by adults (Pineda et al, 2009).

During the XVIII and XIX centuries, policies that guided children's role were totally divorced from practice. These conditions generated a lot of controversy and at the beginning of the XX century intellectuals from all over the world started claiming children's rights in order to guarantee better conditions for them and through their efforts, the process of change began. In one hand, a discourse based on a protectionist vision ended up supporting an irregular situation doctrine that presented children as objects of protection controlled by parents and State. On the other hand, a discourse based on a participatory or rights perspective appeared that aimed at presenting children as rights holders and emphasized their importance as members of the society (Galvis, 2007). Consequently, in

November 20, 1989 the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the Convention on the Rights of the Child that understands children as rights-holders and citizens who are not property of parents or State but individual persons who have fundamental rights (Howe & Covell, 2010).

Although at this point policies in Europe tried to portray children differently, in 1989 Colombia's government approved a policy that barely involved the integral character that children have: the Children's Code (Código del Menor). This new Code pretended to assure children's rights, but was more a kind of penal device for minors that conceived them from a protectionist perspective, becoming an exclusive social mechanism. In 1991 the National Constitution in Colombia was approved and some of the UNCRC principles were recognized. Consequently, academics, non-governmental organizations, and UNICEF mainly, started holding periodical debates that focused on the necessity of improving existing policies on childhood and the realization of the UNCRC discourse in order to implement the understanding of children from a rights-based perspective. Therefore, in 2006 the Infancy and Adolescence Policy -Código de la Infancia y la Adolescencia- was published, where the State and society became right's guarantors and the protectionist perspective was definitively defeated, at least on paper.

As is evident, the emergence of the UNCRC allowed society in general to view children and their actions from a different angle, conferring on them the position they deserve as human beings. Certainly the policies need to have a real impact on the social processes, even more when these policies are a paradigm change for a marginalized group as children, the actions are the most important part of these documents. Hence, it becomes crucial to study how the actions and dispositions mentioned by the policies about children as right holders are actually being



developed and are impacting real life in order to have a panorama on who and through what tools that discourse is being put into practice. Thus, this research project has one more reason to validate its importance in the educational field; taking into account that education is a right for every child, it plays an important role in the diffusion of these concepts, not only through its actors, but through educational materials as well. Consequently, I will briefly explain what the role of textbooks in EFL education is and what research has been done with them.

EFL textbooks

In ELT, textbooks represent one of the most common ways to approach language and reach the target culture when learning English as a Second or Foreign language. In fact, their production and merchandising has increased in the last decades in order to fulfill ELT's needs according to the new trends of a globalized world. For this reason, publishing houses are required to think about the textbook production from a standardized point of view in order to fulfill every market need. As a consequence, textbooks always present discourses full of cultural, political, and social content that may affect the learners' discourses and representations as well. In fact, van Dijk (1993) states that there is a constant reproduction of dominant ideologies in textbooks, so it is mandatory to figure out how it works. In this specific case, my research idea is associated with the concept of children as passive objects and the reproduction in children's minds of the scheme that they are empty containers to be filled with information in a passive way (see 'banking education' concept; Freire, 2007). Having that in mind, revising some research carried out in the field of ELT materials enlightens substantially my understanding of how discourses different from children as subjects with rights are being portrayed in textbooks.

Most of the studies focused on textbooks have analyzed representations of racism, sexism, and dominant ideologies in subjects different from English as a Foreign Language. Thus, they have tried to give account of the ideologies and hidden agendas that the content of the textbooks have been spreading in the environment of education.

In one hand, Rifkin (1998), Thomson & Otsuji (2003), and Temple (2005) describe and analyze issues of gender in textbooks in terms of equal representation of both male and female genders. These studies conclude that textbooks do not portray inclusion at all since there are a lot of instances where gender inequalities are depicted without reflecting the social reality that learners will face.

On the other hand, there are studies that aimed at dismantling dominant ideologies through analyzing textbooks in a critical way. Xiaoye (2005), Soler (2006), Basabe (2006), and Cortez (2008), explored the way in which powerful discourses included in textbooks construct and (re)produce dominant political and cultural formations. The authors concluded that textbooks contain dominant ideologies that privilege specific social groups such as the white, western, male, middle class through some discursive strategies such as invisibilization or homogenization. All these ideologies are influenced by the vision of the ones who produce the textbooks and the country in which they are being produced (e.g. England, The United States).

Finally, Firer (1998) explores 44 history textbooks in Israel to see how the discourse of Human Rights is being developed inside the textbooks. The author found that there is always a negative representation of Jews, and peace processes are barely mentioned. As a result, she concluded that those textbooks reproduce inequality by means of omission of discourses, trying to be neutral and not claiming human



rights and peace in a hostile context such as the Middle East.

Critical discourse analysis as an epistemological standpoint

CDA understands language not only in linguistic terms, but also in a social, political, and cultural context that accounts for the prevailing discourses embedded in these contexts' association. Thus, CDA intends to answer questions that emerge from the relationship between language and society (Rogers et. al, 2005). As a result of this connection, powerful and dominant discourses arise that (re)produce without any doubt discourses of inequality, injustice and power abuse.

In this study I decided to use some components of Van Dijk's cognitive perspective. It draws on a theoretical framework condensed in three different routes that play a role when building and (re)producing the structures of dominant discourses: power and dominance, access to information, and the cognition way which involves mind management.

In fact, the knowledge we have about the world is acquired through a set of shared attitudes and models that are socially constructed in our specific social context. These social representations are particularized in the mental models that powerful groups use to control discourse content through media and textbooks (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). For this reason, van Dijk states that it is important to understand how specific discourse structures (re) produce unequal discourses.

Methodology

The semantic analysis proposed by van Dijk (1993) in CDA was applied in order to characterize the way the textbooks' content is actually addressing children in terms of rights.

For this analysis I focused on global (*topics* or macrostructures) and local meanings (lexical forms of the discourse that have a direct influence on the mental models of the recipients). Thus, this semantic analysis became the route to unveil the discourse strategies used by different social artifacts that not only exercise power but also build the mental models desired by the elites in order to influence attitudes and behavior on people's minds (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Discourse strategies are understood here as a set of mechanisms used to build or interpret objects and subjects inside discourse itself. As a result, strategies explain what language users do in specific discursive situations. According to Jäger (2001), the procedures used by discourse strategies have two specific purposes: 1) to widen the spectrum of what is being said, and 2) to restrict or hide the given information.

Data sources

The corpus selected for this study is made by an EFL textbooks' series commercialized by Norma publishing house in Colombia. Right now, Norma is one of the biggest textbook distributors in countries such as Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, and others. The series is called '*Clapping time*' and it was chosen taking into account its high sales rates and the fact that it was published after 2006, the year when the Infancy and Adolescence Policy was promulgated in Colombia. *Clapping time*, a primary school series has been produced by Greenwich ELT, a Norma's subsidiary company. It is a Latin American publishing house specializing in ELT materials production that has been in the market for over ten years. Specifically, in Colombia this series is widely used by both public and private schools.

Keeping in mind that my analysis is focused on the textbook's content, I followed some steps



to approach the data. Firstly, I made a content selection process geared towards identifying the specific components I analyzed inside the textbook. I found that at the end of each unit there was a cross-curricular project (math, geography, arts, social studies, and American culture). Here the idea of a cross curricular project caught my attention in the sense that other topics different from the language per se were being incorporated and I wanted to see how the textbooks conceived them and used them. As a result, I decided to choose as units of analysis the units included in the Social Studies cross curricular projects which, for the role this area of knowledge has on education, is supposed to have a link with the Children's Rights topic.

Then, I continued the process, as Van Dijk (1993) proposes by identifying in each of the selected units the global meanings or macrostructures and the local meanings built by the lexical and semiotic choices the textbooks made in order to find the way *Clapping time* portrays children in terms of rights. Finally, those lexical and semiotic selections allowed me to unveil the discourse strategies related to children as subjects with rights that will be discussed in the next section.

Findings

It is important to clarify before going in depth into the analysis that the *Clapping time* series was not written based on a children's rights perspective. Consequently I am not going to assess the non-inclusion of this vision in the textbook's contents. On the contrary, my objective is to describe and disclose the discourse they portray about children and the strategies that from a traditional educational view may be supporting or not the discourse of children as subjects with rights. As a result, I am going to support the analysis and exemplify it using some

concrete instances from the data that explain my discussion and conclusions better.

After a detailed examination of the Colombian series intended for primary school grades, I found children are essentially being portrayed as subjects with some values and duties who live in a mono-cultural and homogenized society where they do not have the status of participants or citizens. It is evident for example in the cross curricular projects, previously mentioned, because they were conceived within a structural and cognitive perspective exclusively and there was no intention of promoting values, cultural understandings, or even social skills.

Having in mind that the textbooks are based on the State Competence Standards (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006) for foreign language teaching, I contrasted them with the vision presented in the book by the authors. I found they propose an individualized and passive student figure who matches the egocentric cognitive perspective that the textbook appears to show in its contents. This implies that the institutional and specific discourses (the Standards and the textbook) understand and validate learning as an individual practice and not as something socially constructed. As a consequence, it seems that the book (re)produces the traditional image of children as empty containers that need to be filled with information (Freire, 2007) without any sense of community, who will then be ready to be immersed in society.

This finding led me towards unveiling the discourse strategies that are being used by the text to represent children in such a way. As a result, in the *Clapping time* series, three discourse strategies that are related to the discourse of children as rights-bearing subjects were revealed.

Gender and racial visibilization

This category deals with gender and racial issues because one important component



that characterizes the discourse of children as subjects with rights is precisely equality and non-discrimination. Here diversity and inclusion implies giving every child the same opportunity to be a right holder without taking into account sex, race, religion, or any particular social identity or practice. For this reason, every child should be represented in the discourse(s) displayed in educational materials such as textbooks, and that is precisely what I am going to discuss in this discursive strategy that emerged from the data.

Throughout the textbooks this visibilization is evident by means of linguistic and semiotic features that support an inclusion and exclusion atmosphere as well. In terms of gender, the inclusion processes made by the textbooks are manifested through the use of specific grammatical forms. The Spanish grammar differentiates female from male with the use of the definite articles 'la(s)', 'el', and 'los' before a noun. In the teacher's guide instructions, the textbooks always highlight the existence of both boys and girls because every time the book addresses children it says "los y las estudiantes". Thus, the textbook's instructions are discursively making boys and girls visible through the use of the articles, and emphasizing the existence of a diverse society from a gender perspective, yet this is hetero-normative. Although it is a simple way to support inclusiveness, it may also have a tremendous impact on the teacher's actual discourse since through the reading of these instructions, any possible (re)production of sexist discourse may decrease.

In addition to that linguistic strategy, gender visibility is also supported by most of the images presented in the textbook since they address boys and girls in a balanced amount, quantitatively speaking. Several images represent boys and girls, as well as grown up women and men in the same amount, even the latter playing roles that historically have been associated with

women only. This balanced representation shows children that they have to recognize and treat human beings in the same way no matter their gender characteristics or social role. One could probably assume the EFL textbook draws on a gender equity discourse as it has also been found in teaching practices in EFL classrooms (Castañeda-Peña, 2009). Hence, the non-discrimination principle stated by the UNCRC, and part of the discourse of children as rights-bearing subjects, is being strengthened in the teacher's instructions as well as in the student's content.

However, there are some other elements included in this strategy of gender visibilization that disseminate an inequitable panorama in terms of diversity. Here, the concept of gender inclusion that the textbooks manage deals exclusively with the heterosexual pattern, excluding the possibility of the homosexual one. It implies that the gender visibilization is partially achieved and biased towards the heterosexual discourse that might be even reproduced from the general education policies, which would be worth analyzing in depth. This phenomenon is not new. For example in a previous study carried out in Canada, Temple (2005) found that local high school textbooks deal exclusively with the heterosexual discourse supported by a process of institutionalized heterosexism and homophobia. Consequently, inclusion means for the textbook's discourse the dichotomy: man vs. woman.

In the same way, I found a reading where women are stereotyped as housewives and an image where male and female occupations are conventionalized as well. In the latter a figure portrays six different jobs: a male chef, a male firefighter, a male astronaut, a male lifeguard, a female doctor, and a female scientist. Firstly, from a quantitative viewpoint the male representation is higher. Secondly, in chauvinistic discourses firefighters, lifeguards, and astronauts have always been associated with masculinity perhaps



for its relation with physical and mental resistance, and chefs are the ones who cook professionally, not as a home duty. As a result, women are being labeled and excluded from social roles as Ghorbani's study stated in 2009. He argues that EFL/ESL textbooks still contain a high percentage of masculine and feminine stereotypes where women are mainly displayed in domestic and low profile social roles.

On the other hand, Colombian society has always been characterized by the existence of racial diversity that demands citizens to be critically inclusive and tolerant towards inclusion. Thus, it is important that educational materials represent racial diversity in an even way in order to make children aware of the existence of races different from the western, white, middle class that has predominated in the elite discourse (Guerrero, in press). Besides, racial diversity is included into the non-discrimination principle stated by the discourse of children as subjects with rights. Taking this into account, I found that although previous research studies have indicated a reproduction of racist discourse in textbooks, *Clapping Time* is still discriminating afro and indigenous communities in its content. Here I want to clarify that the textbook series includes some images displaying afro people, however most of them favor the western, white, middle class stereotype, while downplaying the afro one.

In fact, the kind of people portrayed in most of the images are white, middle class with well-paid and interesting jobs that do not cover the local social representations in terms of race, social, and economical status because predominant Colombian jobs, people, and practices are distant from those. Apart from the use of strategies such as invisibilization to exclude people different from the white, middle class, some images marginalize afro communities' actions (Soler, 2006). It is evident in one activity in which the textbook is

using adjectives to evaluate the kind of weekend children had. Here, the majority of images are representing white children; however there is one that shows an afro boy. Yet, the only child who had an 'awful' weekend was the one portrayed by the afro boy. This depiction is only reinforcing to children the discourse of white=success and happiness.

To sum up, this visibilization strategy is showing children a homogenized and biased vision of the world that favors a male, western, white stereotype. Hence, educational actors as teachers and students might continue perpetuating a racially prejudiced environment where not all children have the same rights and duties due to their social conditions. Additionally, the textbook's discourse assigns children roles in terms of social actors that will be described in the next category.

Passive human beings

In the micro level of analysis CDA recognizes 'passivization' as a way to address actions, and understands it as the presence of passive sentences in which the agent disappears to highlight the object and hide the agents of the actions. In this study the passivization strategy is oriented towards the passive or active role that the textbook's content assigns to children, in other words the way the discourse addresses the subjects. For the discourse of children as right-bearing subjects an active role of children means they can participate as citizens, be heard, and have autonomy and voice in their decision making process. Accordingly, the passivization strategy is present in the *Clapping Time* series through the use of receptive skills, passive verbs, individualization processes and community exclusion.

According to Nunan (2004) foreign language acquisition deals with two groups of skills that need to work together in order to guarantee



learning processes: receptive and productive skills. As I see it, the productive skills are the ones oriented towards understanding and placing children as active human beings while receptive, as the definition itself mentions, are the passive ones.

Keeping that in mind, *Clapping Time* textbooks display mainly receptive skills throughout their units. The most common instructions are *read and circle*, *listen and repeat*, *look and number*, *listen and read*, etc, even in the practice and production stages of the lessons. This finding has tremendous implications on the way the textbooks are addressing children. According to Cillero (1999), one of the three characteristics that the UNCRC proposes to change the children's paradigm as objects is the transition from needs to rights. It directs us to stop understanding children as objects that need to be protected by the government and the society. On the contrary, children need to be acknowledged as right holders and human beings who need to be understood through their capacities and not their necessities.

Despite that, most of the activities proposed by the textbooks are oriented towards a needs perspective since they appear to be conceiving children as defenseless human beings that only need to be instructed with some behavioral standards in order to become active members of a specific social group. In fact, this situation is reinforced with the lexical choices made on the teacher's instructions and the learning outcomes (*desempeños* and *estándares*) proposed in each unit and lesson.

Thus, the instructions use verbs like 'let them', 'ask them', and 'guide them' (*permítales*, *pídales*, *guíelos*) presenting children as passive human beings who are not able to produce anything if an adult does not allow them to do it. Indeed, the activities and instructions proposed by

the textbooks still recognize children as passive objects because their nature does not open the possibility for something different. What is more, the analysis of the activities shows that most of them have a linguistic emphasis that is achieved through a repetition strategy, even the activities where the student is asked to talk about his/her context.

In the same way, when analyzing the lexical choices made in the learning outcomes proposed in each unit and lesson, I noticed that all the skills aim at developing a cognitive-linguistic perspective in which the use of some verbs imply active or passive roles for students. The use of verbs such as 'follows' (*sigue*), 'uses adequately' (*usa adecuadamente*), 'recites' (*recita*), 'verifies' (*verifica*) entail the passive role that the standard presents of the subject, a complete subordination of student's actions. While verbs such as 'participates' (*participa*) and 'has a conversation' (*mantiene una conversación*) present children as active human beings. Even though children's actions are being displayed as both active and passive, only two out of seventeen standards deal with individual's agency. Consequently, the idea of representing children as subjects with rights becomes more difficult.

Here it is important to mention that those learning outcomes are taken from the Standards for foreign languages proposed by the Ministry of Education, and as I mentioned above this document was analyzed as well. I concluded that most of the standards presented in the document validate and support a linguistic emphasis, repetition, and a passive role in students. Thus, if policies are looking for passive children, then what can we expect from educational materials if they are just following rules? As stated by Pineda et. al (2009), in order for a discourse on children as rights-bearing subjects to permeate education practices, there must be strong changes from the roots of how education is conceived by



teachers, family, stake holders, and society in general. Otherwise, a discourse permeated by passivization will remain in every educational context.

In addition it is important to highlight here that human beings are integrated by nature, consequently they need to develop their capacities in an integrated educational, social, familiar, and cultural context. As a result, educational aims should not be limited to a cognitive perspective, but also integrate social, emotional, interpersonal, and cultural angles, understanding children once again through their strengths and abilities. Therefore, socialization processes at this stage are essential because they imply participation and agency in students.

Children have a relationship with the world in a progressive way (rights and duties): first, me and myself, then me and the family, after me and the school, then me and the neighborhood, and so on. I understand that socialization processes are actively progressive as well. For this reason, educational materials developed for primary school should be referring to the children's world as a social one where they can interact, participate and make decisions all the time.

Unfortunately, in terms of presence and involvement in the learning process I have to say that family as well as community is being overlooked by the textbook's content. According to a children's rights perspective, education should include family and community as part of the children's context. In other words, there must be inclusion. As a result of having the misconception of children as small people who need to be educated, instructed and prepared for future life, the common belief is that at school they only need the teacher to do that job, so family and community seems to be disregarded. In fact, during the moments in which the family is mentioned in the textbooks, the purpose is to show that they usually join together at dinner

or breakfast, or in the cross curricular project, when the students have the final product they can show to their family. Consistent with Pineda et. al (2009) educational aims have to be framed from a diversity perspective where culture is respected and families and communities get involved in the process as well.

Here I conclude that there is still a strong tendency to present learning as an individual and passive action where children need to be constantly assisted by adults. This passivization is represented by the use of actions and instructions that imply inactive outcomes and the exclusion of family and community as a vital part of a child's developmental process toward becoming a citizen and rights holder. Even though the two previous strategies have shown passivization and invisibilization processes, the next strategy is an attempt to include not only children's rights and duties but also values that help for children to understand their active role as citizens.

Values system inclusion

Besides the principles of non-discrimination, participation, autonomy, and the best interest of the child that integrate the discourse of children as subjects with rights, it is important to acknowledge that not only adults, State, and society have to give children the status of active subjects, but also children have to be aware of their rights and feel like active subjects as well. Thus, educational materials should help children to be aware of their rights, values, and chances to be socially, and politically active.

As a result, this third category addresses a specific part of the units analyzed where a potential way to support the discourse of children as right-bearers was identified. This finding was recurrent in every unit analyzed because it is part of the textbook's content.

Each unit supports reading processes with a short story included in the section 'Mini-



Book'. This story is mentioned on the student's pages, but it is fully developed in the teacher's instructions. According to the *Clapping Time's* introduction, each short story highlights an important value for the children's co-existence in society. In order to have good social relations, it is necessary to have values and to know your rights as well as your duties as a citizen. The values the textbook presents include helping others, punctuality, accepting people's differences, and respect for children's rights. In the following I am going to focus on the latter.

In this case, there is a straight reference to children's rights which in fact is the only one throughout the units I analyzed. This activity invites children to read and listen to a short story called 'strange jobs'. To this end, in the extra material section of the textbook, there are some flashcards that ask some questions accompanied by a few pictures. This story presents different professions emphasizing their functions and roles in society. However, the textbook's activity is just addressing one of the rights present in the United Nations convention as well as in the Infancy and Adolescence Policy: child labor. The children's right not to work is connected to the general topic of the unit on professions. Here a child's right to education is taken as a job, and the image displayed in the extra material section is emphatic when mentioning that the only occupation for a child can be schoolwork. As a result, the inclusion of this reflexive content might create an atmosphere of interest for teachers and students to consider human and children's rights where they have the chance to learn and discuss.

In the modern educational setting, value systems and ethics programs have been included as part of the school's curriculum in order to teach students to become citizens who can constructively build a more democratic society. As a result, educational policies have been proposed to create and evaluate citizenship

competencies in students. According to Dacal (as cited in Alonso, 2004) 'education is the means through which societies keep, diffuse, develop and increase the values system that a social group has, in other words, education is the capable instrument to transmit values to every person and society' (p. 3). For this reason, it is essential to highlight the use of these tools in textbooks such as *Clapping Time* which represent a guideline to include topics related to children's rights and duties as citizens.

Conclusions

Since the introduction of the United Nations convention on children's rights in 1989, the figure of children in society has experienced a transformation, because with that new perspective children are addressed as active subjects holding an opinion and a specific role in society and not as mere objects that need to be protected. However, although some of the elements discussed previously support the discourse of children as subjects with rights, they still have a strong tendency to depict children as subjects with some values, rights, and duties, but who live in a mono-cultural and homogenized society. Hence, the conclusions that can be drawn about how racial visibilization, passivization, and value systems inclusion strategies relate to the discourse of children as subjects with rights are as follows:

Firstly, as stated by the convention on children's rights in its article number two, there must not be discrimination of any kind when guaranteeing rights to children. The category of racial and gender visibilization shows that some images displayed in the textbooks actually represent equity and diversity from a gender and race perspective. Although *Clapping Time* textbooks try hard to be inclusive there is still a strong tendency to portray mainly white, middle-class people in the images.



Here it is important to clarify that one of the aims of the non-discrimination principle is to assure inclusion of not only children from all races and gender identities, but also children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, indigenous children, and even children who are pregnant or who are young parents (UNESCO, 2007). Within this frame, although race and gender equality are being portrayed, the representations throughout the textbook have to include discourses that represent a more diverse school, where children recognize diversity as part of the world's dynamics and most importantly, they can be aware of difference and avoid perpetuating the dominant discourse of 'homogenization' (Soler, 2006).

Likewise, one of the children's rights perspective foundations is the inclusion of family and community as vital part of a child's status as an active member of society. In spite of this, the EFL textbooks disregard these two central components in their content. Although family and community as part of the educational context of children strengthen their affective foundations and allow them to have a better picture of what being a member of a social group is, the textbook's series barely includes them. As a result, children's relationship with the world would be characterized by uncertainty and distrust. (Pineda et al, 2009).

Additionally, the exclusion of the learner's context might be having an impact on their idea and understanding of social duties and responsibilities. As a consequence, the EFL textbooks for children analyzed in this research study portray duties at the level of the child and its own and immediate world this means that the textbooks address the self. According to the local news source *El Tiempo*, Colombia has one of the highest rates in Latin-America for infringement upon children's rights (Colombia agridulce, 2004). This raises the question of how we can nurture children to become active subjects as right holders and to be aware of their

social responsibility if educational materials, such as textbooks, only show them responsibilities to themselves. Consequently, this study suggests that EFL teachers include in the language curriculum the social, cultural and even political events that currently affect and shape children's environment.

All these types of representations can be potentially subverted within revisited instructional designs in the EFL classroom. This means that it is not bad at all for textbooks to portray a minimally diverse world. Rather, what seems to be interesting is to know what EFL teachers do regarding this; which becomes a relevant and important element for future research on teachers' practices or discourses toward a children's right perspective.

Secondly, According to Pineda et al (2009) to understand that children are progressively autonomous is to look at them as active agents in their development process. In other words, it becomes imperative to allow children to express their ideas, opinions, and beliefs about who they are in order for them to be participants in the EFL learning process and to empower them as members of a social group. In this sense, some of the activities proposed by the textbooks give students the chance to express their opinion about their own experiences. However, I want to argue that such opportunities are limited because classroom participation as guided by the textbook appears to be scripted, and most of the time students interact just by exchanging information.

From a language learning perspective, this type of scripted interaction views the learning process exclusively from an input (Loschky, 1994) and output (Swain, 2000) perspective, which fails to benefit from the potential a children's rights perspective might have. In that sense this research study proposes that EFL teachers be aware of the type of interaction suggested



by textbooks and to introduce innovations in classroom interaction patterns. This is to say that language learners need to be provided with meaning-negotiation-interactional patterns where their role as learners becomes more demanding and active. Activities implying collaborative dialogue (Swain, 2000) could probably fill in this type of interactional need/potential felt from a children's rights educational perspective in the ELT field.

As a result of the passive role the activities assign to children, the participation environment children should have is not being supported. As indicated by Roche (1999), participation implies membership and human rights understanding, for this author "participation and the language of children's rights presuppose and encourage their agency, the expression of their self-defined needs and interests. The idea of rights presupposes a more active role for the young person." (p. 484). In other words, when textbooks understand and address children as passive objects, they are just perpetuating the discriminatory discourse of children as unable to exercise their citizenship status as members of a social group.

In addition, most of the activities proposed by the textbooks are oriented towards a needs' perspective that does not approach children's learning processes through their capacities. On the contrary, the lessons are planned from a traditionalist perspective of language learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) that understands learners as passive subjects or empty containers that need to be filled with experiences and knowledge adults offer them. This also implies that educational materials such as textbooks have not recognized from a methodological perspective that children's development has to be approached from an integral perspective.

Although these textbooks were not produced with a children's rights perspective in mind, it is

important to highlight the use of value systems as recurrent elements throughout the units. In fact, foreign language education is a potential contributor to human rights and citizenship education since it offers the chance to reflect upon the ways knowledge and culture are constructed in different contexts from the local (Osler, 2000). Consequently, principles such as non-discrimination, participation and citizenship can be potentially developed.

From a general educational perspective, it is important to mention here the role that a children's rights education might play as a foundation in the construction of citizens in the classroom and curriculum. Education in children's rights pretends to teach about rights in an inclusive and tolerant environment where children have a real citizen's status with the right to be heard (Reynaert et. al, 2010). The implementations of the children's rights perspectives that have been done were very successful (Covell et. al, 2010), which leads to the conclusion concluding that treating children as rights-bearing subjects is the best option to guarantee a democratic society.

Finally, as stated by the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights and the Infancy and Adolescence Policy, the right to education has to be directed towards the best interest of the children, so that they have a voice to build democracy, equality, and citizenship.

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