THE MIRROR CLASS AS A MULTI-CAMPUS TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The policies of the Ministry of National Education (MEN) regarding the teaching of a foreign language, currently require students to have the opportunity to use the language taught as a means of communication and learning. Consequently, they must acquire linguistic knowledge through pedagogical experiences that foster collaborative and participatory work and that allow them to acquire and strengthen certain digital skills. One of the main goals of teaching a second language is to ensure that students have a more critical, flexible, metalinguistic and interactive vision through various sociolinguistic and intercultural competencies that allow them to effectively communicate in different environments and circumstances (Trujillo, 2001). All this requires the planning of activities and projects that involve integrative strategies, effective use of ICTs and adequate means of evaluation in order to facilitate effective and creative communication in the foreign language (MEN, 2006). The mirror class, designed and implemented by two Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia (UCC) campuses, sought to address the issue of achieving social, linguistic and digital skills through a meaningful learning experience that involved task-based, blended learning and active learning principles.

Congruent with Brown's postulates (1995, cited in MEN, 2006), the mirror class, called Mirrors and Minds sought to recognize and take advantage of the students' motivation by giving them opportunities to practice using English, both orally and in writing and encourage their self-confidence through an active, interactive and playful project that allowed them to learn by doing through activities that promoted socialization, content creation and the generation of connections with other students.

WHAT WAS MIRRORS AND MINDS ABOUT?

"Mirrors and Minds" was a multi-campus teaching initiative that led to the planning and implementation of a mirror class between two of the 18 UCC campuses in the country. According to ITM (2018), " a mirror class is an academic resource that uses a digital platform shared between professors and students from two or more universities, to participate in the synchronous and asynchronous development of a complete course or a session of a course". This teaching and learning experience was envisioned as an activity to be divided into two different sessions. This activity had to reflect the main characteristics of a blended learning model that combines virtual and face-to-face instruction and that, as Bartolome (2004) explains, helps students develop skills such as finding relevant information online, developing assessment criteria to curate content, using information to create new content and apply it in real situations, as well as in making individual and group decisions. Besides that, the lesson plan had to ensure that students would have an active role during the whole mirror class. In other words, the teachers would not use technology to just transfer knowledge to their students as done in more traditional teaching approaches. Since both campuses have American teaching assistants, it was decided that they would also participate in the activities planned by the teachers. Additionally, students would carry out and present, simultaneously, a collaborative teamwork project with their peers from the other campus. In order to ensure the acquisition and application of digital skills, the students had to use an online tool they had never used before in order to make and present their final project.

With that in mind, Mirrors and Minds began with the meetings between the coordinators of the Open Lingua TEFL program of the university and teachers from both the Cali and Ibagué campuses in order to determine the feasibility of the proposal. Once an agreement was reached, the lesson and logistics planning started.

HOW MIRRORS AND MINDS WAS CARRIED OUT

After contacting each other, the teachers from the two campuses established that the mirror class would be divided into two sessions to be held one week apart from each other. Thanks to the joint efforts by the technology departments of the two campuses, both sessions were broadcast via Zoom, an ICT that provides remote conferencing services using cloud computing.

The lesson plan was divided into a four-section that involved both teachers and teaching assistants. Each one of them was assigned specific activities to be developed jointly with the students of the two campus.

The students who participated in this experience, were level 2 students of the Open Lingua program of Universidad Cooperativa. Most of them were law students in their teens. The theme around which all the activities

revolved was vacation plans. As a final project, mixed teams of students from both campuses had to create a multimedia mind map that would include tourist attractions, typical meals and activities in a specific country.

Each team could choose the country of their choice, after consulting between the students of the two campus since the idea was that the final product would be the result of a purely collaborative and ICT-based activity mediated in a synchronous and asynchronous way
In addition to the technologies used to make the class broadcasting possible, students were introduced to a digital tool they had not heard about before.

Mindomo, a technology tool that facilitates designing dynamic mind maps, was the ICT chosen for the students to make their final product and also to communicate with their peers from the other campus. In this way, students could not only acquire the linguistic contents stipulated in the program, but also develop digital skills through the use of an ICT they were unfamiliar with. Mindomo is an ICT that allows you to make multimedia concept maps in a collaborative way and that had already been used in the realization of some academic projects. An important component of this teaching and learning experience was that students from the Cali campus were trained on the possible uses of Mindomo to carry out the project that they had to present. To achieve that, they received training from their teacher and watched some video tutorials. A mock mind map was created in class so that they could get their feet wet right away since they had an important mission to accomplish: they had to mentor their Ibagué peers on the use of Mindomo so that everybody would be able to contribute to the creation and presentation of a multimedia mind map. In other words, those students were not only trained but also empowered to help others develop some specific digital skills related to communication, collaboration and content creation and dissemination (Altablero, 2005).

The teaching of the classes was bidirectional since the teachers and teacher assistants provided simultaneous, face to face and online instruction to the students from both campuses. A significant element of this pedagogical experience, and one that makes it stand out, was the assignment of collaborative work that each team should also present collaboratively through the Zoom platform. It was in this activity that students creatively used the contents studied in class and the Mindomo tool.

All this allowed the design and implementation of a highly effective, meaningful, collaborative and creative didactic strategy in which the appropriate use of ICTs played a leading role. One of the added values of this activity was the link created between teachers and students who agreed on their willingness to work collaboratively and to communicate through the effective use of the aforementioned digital tools.

The pedagogical strategy of the mirror class provided both teachers and students of the Cali and Ibagué campuses a very enriching opportunity for interaction and collaboration. To this end, different types of synchronous and asynchronous technological tools, such as WhatsApp, Outlook and Zoom were used, not to mention the central role that Mindomo had for the development of the final product that each team should present. This type of activity is part of the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia's national Rizoma project, which aims to foster and spread innovative ways of teaching and learning through the use of ICT in educational settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This meaningful experience tried to focus on students, their interests and needs with a flexible and innovative methodology that involved a variety of activities, resources and actors, also allowing the Cali headquarters to be close to the Ibagué headquarters. It was shown here that the proper use of Web 2.0 allows UCC students to acquire, transform and disseminate knowledge in a meaningful, interactive and collaborative way. This, in the short and long term, could have a very positive impact on the teaching and learning processes of English proposed by the UCC. Educational and technological trends intimately linked to the principles of constructivism and connectivism were involved, creating innovative and effective learning environments. Teachers from both campuses had the opportunity to work collaboratively while their students were trained and empowered to mentor and work collaboratively with students from that city. The interactions of both teachers and students occurred synchronously and asynchronously.

The following aspects made Mirrors and Minds an innovative activity with respect to other mirror classes in which, sometimes, a traditional, teacher-centered class is taught through a remote transmission involving technology:
 1.-The students were active agents during all the stages of the class.
2.-It was the first mirror class conducted by Open Lingua teachers as a multi-campus experience
3.-There was an effective curriculum integration of ICTs in the teaching-learning process.
4.-Constructivist and connectivist activities that strengthened different kinds of social, academic and communicative skills, were planned and implemented.
5.-This was a totally bi-directional mirror class that involved real time interactions among the 4 teachers and the students of the 2 campuses.

This activity requires macro-planning, by stages, and micro-planning, by activities, which allows it to be fully replicated or implemented with relevant modifications according to the grammatical, lexical, sociolinguistic and pragmatic contents to be addressed.

In conclusion, Mirrors and Minds helped to create a greater awareness of the existence and usefulness of a diversity of free use digital resources that can greatly enrich the didactic activities planned thus creating more dynamic and productive learning environments without

generating excessive expenses neither for students nor for
the institution.

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