



FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN DE PALENCIA
UNIVERSIDAD DE VALLADOLID

SETTING PATTERNS TO ANALYZE A CLASSROOM CULTURE BASED ON CHILDREN'S THOUGHT

ESTABLECIMIENTO DE PATRONES PARA ANALIZAR UNA
CULTURA DE AULA BASADA EN EL PENSAMIENTO DE
INDIVIUAL DEL ALUMNADO

GRADO EN EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL

Mención en Lengua Extranjera: Inglés

TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

AUTOR/A: Marta Rodríguez Alcalde

TUTOR/A: M^a del Carmen Alario Trigueros

Palencia.

ABSTRACT: This study aims to define what the classroom culture is and what are the elements that constitute it, in order to categorize and organize them through the establishment of basic patterns. Additionally, it exposes different models of establishing a classroom culture based on thinking skills and emotions. Classroom culture is a key element found in every classroom, and it is established by the joint action of teachers and students. Through it, children settle the basis of their learning process at the same time they develop values, which are useful to them throughout their life. Within the classroom culture, patterns of classroom management are established, so it is what defines how to cope with each of the situations that take place within it, both favorable and less favorable, in which problem solving situations are carried out. Definitely, this study analyzes and sets the essential keys for the establishment of a classroom culture based on the development of multiple intelligences and the children's thought in class.

KEYWORDS: Classroom culture, Thinking Skills, Multiple Intelligences, Emotional Intelligence, Multiculturalism, Emotions, Problem Solving, Mediators, Values, Thought, Strategies, Patterns.

RESUMEN: Este trabajo pretende definir qué es la cultura de aula y cuáles son los elementos que la conforman, para después hacer una categorización de la misma a través del establecimiento de unos patrones determinados. Asimismo, expone diferentes modelos de establecer una cultura de aula basada en las habilidades de pensamiento y las emociones. La cultura de aula es un elemento clave que se encuentra en todas las aulas, y que se establece por la acción conjunta de los maestros y el alumnado. A través de ella, los niños asientan la base de su proceso de aprendizaje y desarrollan unos valores que les son muy útiles a lo largo de su vida. Dentro de la cultura de aula se establecen los patrones de gestión de la clase, por lo que es quién define cómo se desenvuelven cada una de las situaciones que tienen lugar dentro de ella, tanto las favorables, como las menos favorables en las que se ha de llevar a cabo la resolución de conflictos. En definitiva, este trabajo analiza y establece las claves necesarias para el asentamiento de una cultura de aula basada en el desarrollo de las inteligencias múltiples y el pensamiento de los niños dentro de la clase.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cultura de Aula, Habilidades de Pensamiento, Inteligencias Múltiples, Inteligencia Emocional, Multiculturalismo, Emociones, Resolución de Conflictos, Mediadores, Valores, **P**ensamiento, Estrategias, Patrones.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Infant Education stage is known for its globalizing character, which allows children to have a meaningful learning. Given that children do not perceive the world analytically, but on the contrary, it is perceived through their personal experience, therefore, it is important for teachers to consider this aspect and all the factors surrounding the children and their environment, to use suitable strategies and develop a proper learning process.

In fact, to achieve this kind of learning it is essential to know children's context: family situation, special needs of the children, among others; and understand that they are coming from a determined culture, with its corresponding fundamentals, rules and values. All of this change at the time of going to school, when the children become part of a new group different from their families, where there is a new authority figure and a new culture, which could be similar or quite different from their own culture.

All of this implies a great change in the dynamics of children, since now they have to adapt themselves to the new classroom culture, in which there are determined patterns to follow and where they have to learn how to coexist with others, at the same time they begin their learning process.

As an Infant Education teacher, one of the main goals that I must have is to know about the culture my students belong to and its features, in order to establish a classroom culture within, in a class based on individual autonomy, thinking and on the respect for all the cultures. In spite of being a difficult assignment to carry out, it is important for the teacher to know how to keep calm and be able to transmit their students the illusion that involves the learning experience. Thereby, children will feel motivated and will want to be part of the group, since they will develop a sense of community that provides them welfare and security within in the classroom.

Therefore, I need to analyze and apply the suitable patterns to establish this kind of culture, to be able to include it in the normal development of the classroom afterwards. In this way

children will feel they are part of this culture and develop a sense of community in which they feel comfortable, secure and loved.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to achieve the following goals:

- Categorize a classroom culture through the analysis of each of the elements that composes it.
- Set patterns to establish a classroom culture based on children's thought.
- Promote emotional intelligence and thinking skills in order to make the children develop and manage their emotions and also become good thinkers.
- Establish ways to allow children to be more autonomous while they train their thinking skills and multiple intelligences.
- Develop strategies to emphasize the use of dialogue as a tool to communicate and solve problems.
- Define a process to follow in order to solve problems based on thinking skills.
- Analyze the stance of the teacher as a mediator within the classroom.

3. JUSTIFICATION

Within the school and its sociocultural context, it is essential to consider how important is for the children to have a sense of belonging to a social group where they can develop their skills, both academically and socially.

Nowadays, it is possible to find schools in which is necessary to work keeping in mind multiculturalism, owing to the entire or most of its students come from other cultures. This is a change in the mindset of school, since it has to adapt to the characteristics of their children and thus, be able to develop a good environment.

While it seems a difficult task, this adaptation takes place in better conditions when thinking skills and emotions are worked within the classroom, since they are the basis in which any culture is established and thus, which the children must enhance and strengthen.

These skills are mainly worked during Primary Education, while in Infant Education the need to develop thinking become less visible, but by no means least important. Fortunately, there are schools with a culture based on thinking skills, which are considered to be coupled with emotions as the basis of any learning for all educational levels.

At Infant Education level it is especially important to define the identifying features of the classroom culture and ensure that it is based on respect. Belonging to a culture means being respectful of our own culture and that of others, so as teachers, we have the duty to promote these values of respect and tolerance in our students.

This study aims to analyze each of the cultural traits belonging to the classroom culture, mainly from the point of view of Infant Education and, more specifically, from the stance of a specialist of foreign languages teacher, who must act as a cultural ambassadress and work from multiculturalism.

4. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

4.1 HOWARD GARDNER: MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES.

The latest theories in psychology on Multiple Intelligences developed by Professor Gardner (1993) and his colleagues are evidenced at Project Zero at the School of Education at Harvard, leaving behind the almost unique conception of intelligence. Up to that moment rational intelligence was the unique measure: children were only evaluated and enhanced logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligence through tests similar to the one proposed by Binet.

In contrast to this view, cognitive competence is understood as a set of skills, talents and mental abilities by the theory of Multiple Intelligences. All people possess these skills, mental abilities and talents at different levels of development.

Intelligence is considered by Gardner as a combined potential that can develop and grow along the life of the individual. The author defines it as 'the ability to solve problems or make products that are valued in one or more cultures', and use terms such as 'ability' and 'aptitude', instead of using the word 'intelligence' as other people have traditionally used. Gardner adds that just as there are many types of problems to solve, there are also several types of intelligence. The psychologist and his team at Harvard University have identified eight different types:

- **Linguistic Intelligence:** Ability to understand and use the language itself. Writers, poets and good editors frequently use this Intelligence. It requires the activity of both hemispheres.

- **Spatial Intelligence:** Ability to perceive the placement of the objects in space and bearings. Our mind creates a mental model of the world in three dimensions. This intelligence belongs to sailors, engineers, surgeons, sculptors, architects and decorators.

- **Logical-Mathematical:** Ability to understand abstract concepts. It is used to solve problems of logic and mathematics. This kind of intelligence corresponds to the way of thinking of the logical hemisphere and what our culture has traditionally been considered the unique intelligence. Scientists or engineers are examples of people who use it.

- **Corporal-Kinesthetic:** Ability to perceive and reproduce movement, using the body in order to carry out activities or solve problems. It allows developing sports skills and dancing. It is the intelligence of athletes, craftspeople, surgeons and dancers.

- **Musical:** Ability to perceive, listen and reproduce music. It allows singers, composers, musicians, and dancers develop this kind of skills.

- **Intrapersonal:** Ability to understand and self-control oneself. It is based on self-esteem, self-confidence and emotional control. It is not associated with any specific activity, but it is often found in good salespeople, politicians, teachers or therapists.

- **Interpersonal:** Ability to put yourself in the place of others and learn to deal with social situations. It helps us to improve relations with others: social skills and empathy. It enables

us to understand others, and it is usually found in good salespeople, politicians, teachers or therapists. Intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence make up emotional intelligence together and determine our ability to conduct our own lives successfully.

- **Naturalist:** Ability to get on well with nature. It is used when the nature is being observed and studied with the purpose of knowing how to organize, classify and order it. This kind of intelligence belongs to biologists, naturalists and environmentalists.

4.2 DANIEL GOLEMAN: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

Connecting with the previous ideas about Multiple Intelligences, it is needed to make reference to the importance of a kind of intelligence, essential in children's personal and academic development: It is emotional intelligence. Gardner laid the foundation of this theory, which later was developed by Daniel Goleman.

Emotional intelligence has a background in the historical development of research on intelligence, from its origins in the early twentieth century to multiple intelligences eighty years later.

It is an important aspect of the psychology of emotions, considering that educational intervention is the basis of emotional competencies and is the main reference of emotional education. For Goleman (1995: 43-44) emotional intelligence consists of:

- Knowing one's emotions: It allows us to be aware of our own emotions, recognizing feelings in the moment it happens. An inability in this sense leaves us at the mercy of uncontrolled emotions.

- Managing Emotions: The ability to manage feelings to express themselves appropriately is based on awareness of the emotions themselves. Moderating expressions of anger, rage or irritability is vital in interpersonal relationships.

- Motivate yourself: An emotion tends to push towards action. That is why emotion and motivation are closely interrelated. Directing emotions and consequent motivation towards the achievement of goals is essential to pay attention, motivate yourself and develop creative activities. People who possess these skills tend to be more productive and effective in the activities they undertake.

- Recognize others' emotions: Empathy allows us to recognize others' emotions. It is fundamental because it is based on knowledge of one's emotions and the basis of altruism. Empathic people tune better with signals that indicate what others need or want.
- Establish relationships: The art of establishing good relationships with others is largely the ability to manage emotions of others. Social competence and skills involved are the foundation of leadership, interpersonal popularity and efficiency. People who master these skills are able to interact gently and effectively with others.

4.3 VYGOTSKY'S THEORY: LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT.

According to Vygotsky, the two primary means of learning occur through social interaction and language. Language greatly enhances humans' ability to engage in social interactions and share their experiences.

It is a function that is acquired through the link between the individual and his environment because biologically he possesses the tools to create signs of verbal communication structures.

In that sense, the evolutionary process takes humans to handle instruments or symbols as the language, to suit their environment. Therefore, human behavior is organized and controlled by both real intentions: of the individual himself; as intentions attributed by others: from interaction with others.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory establishes the basis of what it is known as a thinking ability, which enables us to have a thinking classroom at schools. This theory signals the following kind of languages:

- **Public Language**: Ability of the children to establish conversations and relationships with other students.
- **Social Language and Private Speech**: The transitional stage or intermediate plane of activity linking interpersonal speech to the development of inner speech which consists of talking aloud to oneself. It is not interpersonal and therefore almost incomprehensible to anyone but the child itself.

- **Inner language:** It provides an advisable explanation for the human development of psychological processes as listening, understanding, and conversational perspective-taking. Inner speech refers to think in pure meanings. It is a dynamic, an unstable thing that flutters between words and thought.

- **Verbal Thought:** It rises to the most abstract concepts and refers to thoughts focused on the words themselves. Verbal Thought is not merely the content of a word that changes, but the way in which reality is generalized and reflected in a word. It occurs when grammatical functions as well as word meanings develop as the child engages in interaction with more mature speakers about their shared situations.

Language has a role in children development, as well as in our decisions as an adult or as a teacher: the topic you speak about, the public language that you select; all that helps your children to go act in your individual student's as ZPD.

Therefore, it is interesting to stand out this concept belonging to Vygotsky's Theory: **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**, which is defined by the author as the distance in the real level of development determined by the ability to independently solve a problem and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable companion.

In other words, it is the space in which through interaction and support of others, a person can work and solve a problem or accomplish a task in a way and at a level that would not be able to have individually. In each student and for learning contents exists an area that is next to be developed and one that at the moment is out of reach.

The ZPD has two limits:

- The lower limit, which is the level of skill reached by the child working independently.
- The upper limit, which is the level of additional responsibility that the child can accept with help of an able person.

Vygotsky's theory about verbal thought and the ZPD offer us information about how could the level of our children be in order to develop a methodological approach and to set patterns of our classroom culture. Taking into account both theories, teachers are able to

categorize their students and give them the support needed in each case, making possible the establishment of a classroom culture based on coexistence and help.

4.4 JEROME BRUNER: SCAFFOLDING.

Making a connection with the previous Vygotsky's theories, it becomes necessary to make use of the term of scaffolding, which appears since teachers create learning situations that facilitate the internalization of contents to learn by taking into account the ZPD of the children.

Scaffolding theory was developed by Jerome Bruner and it states that in an interaction of teaching and learning, teacher action is inversely related to the level of skills of the student; that is, how much more difficult is present in the student, the teacher will need further action. Scaffolding presents a set of features:

- **Adaptable:** It must be adapted to the level of competence of less experienced subject and progress to occur.
- **Temporary:** It cannot turn into a routine because it would hamper the expected learner autonomy.
- The subject **must be aware** that it is helped in this way facilitate progress towards autonomy.

The purpose of this theory is to guide children through the learning process, lending them support until it becomes clear that the children have achieved independence in their tasks. Bruner believed, ultimately, that scaffolding could help children become self-regulated and independent students.

4.5 RON RITCHHART AND DAVID PERKINS: VISIBLE THINKING

Visible thinking intends to foster intellectual development and learning of the children in order to help them to build their own thoughts and understand the tasks' contents. This is

what Project Zero wants to achieve in many schools, whereas tries to get the following aims:

- To have a deeper understanding of content and a greater motivation for learning.
- To develop learners' thinking and learning abilities.
- To build up learners' attitudes toward thinking and learning and their alertness to opportunities for thinking and learning.
- To get a shift in classroom culture toward a community of enthusiastically engaged thinkers and learners.

Ron Ritchhart and David Perkins consider in *Teaching Students to Think Magazine* (February 2008) that there are 6 key principles which anchor Visible Thinking and characterize their approach in schools. These are the following ones:

- Learning is a consequence of a thinking process.
- Good thinking is not only a matter of skills, but also a matter of dispositions.
- The development of thinking is a social endeavor.
- Fostering thinking requires making thinking visible.
- Classroom culture sets the tone for learning and shapes what is learned.
- Schools must be cultures of thinking for teachers, professional learning communities in which rich discussions of teaching, learning, and thinking become a fundamental part of teachers' experiences.

4.6 WILLIAM PIERCE: METACOGNITION.

The concept of Metacognition refers to the idea of thinking about the thinking. It is what we already know, as well as the required skills and knowledge to understand, carry out and evaluate the tasks given and the situations presented in our life.

According to William Pierce in *Metacognition affects motivation because it affects attribution and self-efficacy* (2003), there are three different types of knowledge:

- **Declarative knowledge:** Is the information that students already know. It can be written or spoken. For example, this knowledge is used by the children at the time of doing a brainstorming in class.

- **Procedural Knowledge:** Joins the knowledge of how to develop a task and the fact of dividing it into steps in order to carry out the task. For instance, this knowledge is applied when the classroom routines are developed by the children.

- **Conditional knowledge:** Refers to the knowledge used when the children have to use a skill, procedure or strategy. An example of this knowledge is at the time of doing literacy exercises; children have to know what kind of strategy use in order to develop the activities: use a good handwriting, grab correctly the pencil in order to write well and so on.

Pierce stands out the importance of developing thinking skills to achieve thinking classrooms. Being part of a thinking classroom make the children be more motivated and improve their grades.

It is necessary from the part of the teachers improving metacognitive skills through self-assessing and self-questioning of the students. By this way, thinking skills will be developed in the classroom.

5. DESIGN

5.1 WHAT A CLASSROOM CULTURE IS?

When talking about the classroom culture, our first task would understand the concept of culture in itself. We are surrounded by many kinds of culture from all over the world and all of them include: the identification of the features that define specific styles of life.

The notion of culture makes reference to integrated patterns of thinking and behaviour that join the members of a group. It presents some characteristics that define the concept itself: Culture is learnt and shared. It is dynamic and looks for adaptability. Besides, it presents a common symbol code as an integrated system.

In addition to those aspects, it is essential to stand out the elements that make possible the existence of the culture:

- Values: Shared and abstract rules of what is right, desirable and worthy of respect. Values set the general tone for the cultural and social life.
- Social Rules, awards and punishments: This will involve what people have or don't have to do, to say or to think. They are rewarded or punished, imposed by the members that are part of the culture with which people are encouraged to become attached to the rules.
- Symbols: They express a meaning related with the culture. They can be any thing, regardless of its features but with a specific sense.
- Language: Known as 'culture store', it is the primary means to communicate, discuss, engage, exchange and transfer knowledge.

In the same way, and returning to the aforementioned, we can see how those aspects are present in the classroom culture in a very similar way. For instance, taking into account my second training period in an infant education classroom, I would show brief examples about how we can find these elements belonging to the culture:

- Values: Everybody is respectful within in the classroom, offers help to the classmates, and takes care of their own things, we've got companionship and friendship between us...
- Rules and punishments: Listen to the teacher and follow the routines, work in a quiet way, respect and take care of the classroom materials...
- Symbols: We've got a symbol that identifies us, for example a turtle. We are the turtles' classroom and that is our symbol.
- Language: The class owns a specific language and also has a culture of dialogue. They use dialogue as a tool of communication among them. Any kind of problem can be solved through a talk.

Schools are cultural scopes that introduce children to their biggest intellectual achievements, and also have a community sense, which can be perceived in the class. Each class has got a specific culture of teaching and learning. This becomes apparent in the form of interaction between teachers and students, in their mutual expectations, the language they have in common and in the sharing of ideas about what is acceptable, interesting and valuable.

Understandably, not all classes have the same cultural attitude: some are rigid and others are open; some value answers and others, questions. Every teacher has a slightly different interpretation of what classroom culture is, and it can be described in many ways: as an overall state of being in the classroom; as the attitude of students and teachers; as the cultural makeup of the class and how it is addressed with respect to equity in the classroom; among other definitions. However, all classrooms have a culture of some kind, and this cultural aspect of education is one of the things that make the experience of schooling much more than the sum of its parts.

Talking about the classroom culture is also referring to the classroom culture of thought. Here, exists a classroom scope where a lot of strengths: language, values, expectations and habits; work together to express and strengthen the culture. The integrated patterns of thinking and behaviour belonging to the classroom culture signalize the shared things by the members of the classroom.

In a classroom culture of thought the spirit of good thinking is everywhere. Thus, the feeling of *'Everybody is doing it'* exists. All people, students and even the teacher, are striving to be thoughtful and imaginative, which make these behaviours are reinforced from the scope of learning.

5.2 IDENTIFYING FEATURES FOR CLASSROOM CULTURE.

Classroom culture is made up of the combination of different aspects. Firstly, as Samuel R. Mathews said in *Teaching and Learning Strategies for the Thinking Classroom* (2003), it is needed a good classroom environment, which invites children to learn actively and think critically, thus enabling the following features to appear:

- Teachers and students share responsibility for the classroom environment. As a way to define a class culture, students may participate in developing the class rules, mainly the ones that will lead our behaviour. Teachers invite students to take initiative using cooperative learning strategies in which each student is assigned their own role to play in helping classmates learn. In infant education, the teacher negotiates the rules of the classroom with the children, offering them the possibility to choose the consequences of their acts. For instance, when a child is not doing a task, the teacher asks this child the

consequence: *Do you think you are doing the correct thing? How can we solve this situation? What is the consequence of not doing your task?* Once carried this out, if the situation does not change, the rules applied are which chose the child. That allows children to understand better the functioning of the classroom rules.

- Teachers model thinking for students and support them as they share their thinking strategies. Teachers demonstrate how a person thinks critically, not by propounding ideas as if everything that came out of their mouths was a certainty, but by approaching ideas tentatively, conditionally, and promoting respect for different points of view. Teachers and students have open discussions with each other, and learn not only each other's ideas, but each other's ways of thinking. Teachers may question their own, their students, and others' conclusions and knowledge, and encourage students to do likewise. Within the classroom a lot of situations could occur, and all of them pose situations in which decisions have to be taken. Thus, teacher can guide the children through questions or guidelines such as: *What happen if...? Oh, X had a good idea, what do you think? Let's listen to what Z has to tell us!*

What do you have to do? First observe, your hands are dirty. So, what do you have to do now? Anybody can help us, what can we do to solve this problem? Perhaps somebody knows what to do, let's see! Think the possible things you can do and finally carry it out.

- There is an atmosphere of inquiry and openness. The teacher and students use questions such as 'Why?', 'What if?' and 'Why not?', in order to analyze problems and make decisions. Students take certain roles in activities as they practice different kinds of thinking: they make predictions, gather information, organize the information, and question conclusions. Teachers show students ways to carry out tasks in the classroom, and they give students better advice than criticism and evaluation. In an infant education classroom is very important make children realize what the situation they have to deal with is. So, the questions that teacher has to use has to be closer than the previous ones: *what happen? Oh, there is a problem here; do we stop the class for a while? Ok, let's talk about the problem. What do you think the solution could be?*

Sometimes, teacher's intervention is not necessary because children support themselves at the time of making decision and solve problems. It is not strange to find situation in which children are having this kind of conversation: —*Oh, I have to do.... and I don't know how.* — —*Why don't you do this? — What if you do...?* In these cases, the teacher has to listen both

parts of the conversation and support the ideas of the children, letting children take their own decision and not imposing their ideas. By this way, teacher enables children to be autonomous.

- Students are given support, but just the right amount of it. Teachers pay close attention to what students are learning and how they are thinking, investigating and communicating as they go about learning. Students are taught to examine their own learning and to improve their own performance. Teachers vary the amount of guidance they give students, and offer them more independence as they show they are ready for it. There is an emotionally secure learning environment in which students feel free to try new tasks, and in which unsuccessful attempts may lead to eventual success.

The development of learning in Infant Education is a process followed by the teacher, who has to know how every child evolves, and also when it is required to guide. For instance, when a child is doing an activity, sometimes teachers intervene not leaving the children to be autonomous. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to know when our intervention is essential and when we can let the children develop an activity by themselves. It is important make children feel comfortable at the time of work and consider mistakes as something usual in learning, not as a bad thing which categorizes them as capable or incapable.

Continue with the previous advices about how to create a good environment within the classroom, it can be seen the importance of good strategies to build a classroom culture. It allows deeper student learning to evolve over time facilitated by a teacher who is skilled in the art of thinking within a carefully crafted environment. According to Elizabeth Garcia¹, it can occur in all classrooms, so that she proposes beginning with five cultural transitions:

- 1. Engage in inquiry-based professional development:** Achieve a deeper learning requires developing logical reasoning and formal thinking, so that teachers should prepare their students to build inquiry skills through strategies such as making them thinking aloud or making unlikely connections, thus children will be able to be skilled at inquiry-based discussions and get a deeper learning. At the time of transfer this connections from primary to Infant Education, it can be seen that

¹ Elizabeth Garcia: Founder and Head of the School Discovery Day Academy, America Achieves Fellow: Preparing a Classroom Culture for Deeper Learning. <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/preparing-classroom-culture-deeper-learning-elizabeth-garcia>

children are involved in this kind of strategies along the daily routines carried out during their school timetable. Every day, they have to inquiry and question about what they are working on, and continue discussing between them until they get a deep learning about the topic.

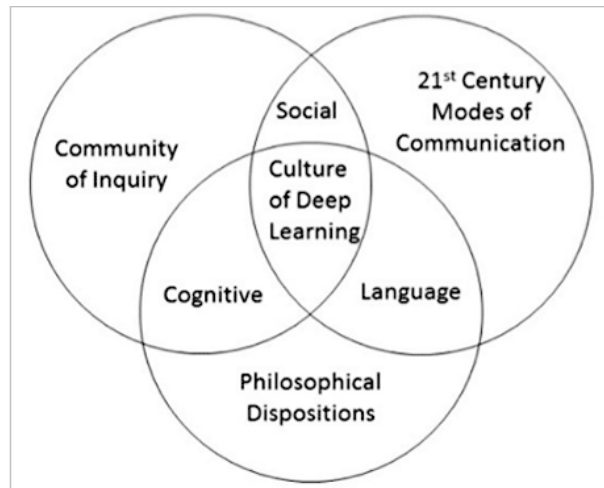


Figure 1: Elements belonging to the Culture of Deep Learning

2. **Formulate a classroom community of inquiry:** Establishing a community of inquiry in class involves students to respect the ideas of others and share their thoughts freely without being afraid of making mistakes. Teachers should use strategies and tools to facilitate respectful communicative situations. Those methods have to provide situations in which children have time to listen to the ideas of others , hear their thoughts and internalize the information, so that it could be possible the inquiry, reflection and respect for the children during classroom discussions. There are moments within the classroom routines into the infant education class where it is necessary to establish a dialogue between the children, about a situation that had happened in the class. In these cases, the teacher has to make children see the importance of respecting the other turns of speaking and the things the classmates are telling. Of course, children are able to express their ideas and externalize their thoughts, what makes easier the establishment of a classroom community of inquiry.
3. **Start simply and exercise the brain daily:** Process of learning to think implies time and an adequate practice of thinking and inquiring skills, so that the teachers cannot see deep learning as a special classroom activity, but rather as a set of

activities in which children's interpretations and stories of any kind of classroom material or situation allow for discussions that are focused on building thinking skills. Every day something happens around the children, and due to this fact, children are used to talk about the thing and question about it. It is important, especially in this early stage, allow children to investigate and exercise their brain in order to develop their thinking skills since they are children.

- 4. Make learning relevant:** At the time of providing learning contents is important to take into account the characteristics of the children in order to make learning relevant and meaningful. If teachers allow children to tell or imagine contents in their own way, it will develop creative ways of thinking about the information and a deeper understanding of it, what enable children to make connections between the contents.

If the classroom in which we are possess a classroom culture based on thought, it is common for children to externalize what they think while developing an activity. Many times, especially when they already move on in infant education courses, children become aware of the skills they are learning and relate them with others who had learned in other courses. It is interesting to see how, for example, a child realizes that flowers grow and it has to be water, because in a past situation had already learned that plants feed water.

- 5. Integrate technological resources:** Throughout the story, human beings have communicated through different kind of means such as the writing or symbols. Nowadays, technology allows us to communicate by any technological way, so the teachers can use them to provide a deeper learning to their students. Technological means are tools which provide an opportunity to extend thinking skills within a classroom. Technology is an important resource in infant education because is the anchor which allows teachers and children to investigate and develop different kind of activities adapted to new technologies. As an example of that, a classroom where is being carried out a project requires a computer and Internet connection, in order to look for information and activities about the topic of the project. Thus, if we have got these resources, the possibilities of learning are much higher than if not.

On the other hand, and making a relation with the aforementioned theories about classroom culture, belonging to Samuel R. Mathews and Elizabeth Garcia, it is interesting to stand out David Perkins view about the dimensions of the classroom culture (1997): He said that the purpose of teaching thinking within a classroom culture is to prepare students so that in the future, can effectively solve problems, make well-considered decisions and enjoy a lifetime of learning. Perkins distinguishes several dimensions for good thinking that we should take into account within the thinking classroom culture. These are the following ones:

- The expression language of thought is related to the terms and concepts used in the classroom referring to thought, and how this language, used by teachers and students, can serve to promote in the classroom a thought highest level.
- Thought predispositions are the attitudes, values and mental habits of pupils to thinking, and what you can do to encourage classroom productive patterns of intellectual behaviour.
- Mental monitoring (sometimes called 'Metacognition') refers to the reflection of the students about their own thought processes and how the culture of the classroom can stimulate students to take control of their thinking more creatively and efficient.
- The strategic spirit is a special kind of attitude (that a culture of thought to foster care), which encourages students to build and use thinking strategies in response to intellectual challenges and learning.
- The higher-order knowledge goes beyond the factual knowledge of a subject, and focuses on the knowledge and mastery of the ways to solve problems, using evidence and asking questions in a discipline.
- The transfer relates to the application of knowledge and strategies in another context and exploring the relationships between seemingly different areas and remote knowledge.

Considering these theories as a way to establish a classroom culture based on thought and the development of thinking skills, it is worthy to mention the importance of combining them in order to achieve our own classroom culture. As it is said before, each culture of the classroom is different, so if we want to establish patterns of culture to our students, we have to make a mixture of these ideas and, of course, give our classroom culture a personal

twist which signalizes our role as a teacher and our personality within in the classroom with the children.

5.3 LANGUAGE: A TOOL TO SET THINKING SKILLS.

As Tishman, Perkins and Jay said in their book ('Un aula para pensar', July 1997) the use of language of thought is made up of all words and ways of communication that possesses a natural language referring to the processes and products of thought.

School is a place where is expected to listen a lot of language of thought used as a tool of communication between students and teachers within the classrooms. There are groups who have a rich language that allows children to think better and develop their thinking skills, using terms such as reasons, conclusions, evidences and opinions. However, we can find other groups who do not have this capability and use another kind of simple and limited language.

As teachers, we should make ourselves this question if we want to achieve a thinking classroom culture based on children's thought: How does language help the children to think better?

Language helps children to organize and communicate their own thinking with greater precision and intelligence. Words are precise instruments that create categories, which can be applied not only to the obtained information, but also to the thought.

In addition, language also provides the grounds for communication and reinforces the rules of thought; so that words say what kinds of thought are right and when they are. The use of certain terms in the dialogue with children says the expectations of what we call 'level of discourse'. In order to language of thought becomes part of our classroom culture, teachers have to include four cultural forces in our class: modeling, explanation, interaction and feedback.

These are four powerful ways in which a culture sets standards for good thinking. They can be defined as:

- Modeling: Consists of examples and practical demonstrations of good thought. It means incorporating examples and demonstrations of words and concepts from language of thought in regular classroom activities.

- Explanation: Refers to the direct transmission of the relevant information for good thinking. Providing explanations of a language of thought means directly teach the meaning of terminology, along with the direct teaching of use.
- Interaction: Involves the active use of good practices of thought with other community members. Culture is an active and interactive phenomenon, so that the teaching of a language of thought involves providing many opportunities for students to use terms and concepts of it in their daily interactions in the classroom.
- Feedback: It is information provided by other community members, regarding the accuracy of thought and practices, and it occurs through the reformulation of inexperienced speech. Feedback consists of providing students with encouragement and informative guidance concerning their use of terms and concepts from a language of thought.

Furthermore, I would like to point out Herbert Puchta's² view in his book '*Developing Thinking skills in the Young learners' classroom*' (2012), where makes reference to a model belonging to Kieran Egan on the basis of Vygotsky's work.

This model stresses the core role that the child's language development plays in understanding the world through the use of language-based intellectual tools or capacities. Literacy can be taught more efficiently through our understanding of the concept of cognitive tools and through applying these insights to what we do in the classroom. It was designed for mother tongue literacy development, but it also has important relevance for the foreign language class as well.

5.4 THINKING CULTURE.

Within the context of classroom culture and everything that it involves, we have observed how a culture is built by the people who belong to the classroom context and the situations which happen while the course is moving on.

² Dr Herbert Puchta is a full time writer of course books and other ELT materials and a professional teacher trainer: <http://www.herbertpuchta.com/resources/>

Taking into account the aforementioned parts of this study, when a classroom culture is built from different cultural transitions and several aspects belonging to an active process of learning and thinking within a good classroom environment, it is important to say that we are also creating cultures of thinking.

Project Zero³ has got a project focused on thinking culture called *Cultures of Thinking (CoT)*. This project defines Cultures of Thinking as places where a group's collective as well as individual thinking is valued, visible and actively promoted as part of the regular, day-to-day experience of all group members.

Ron Ritchhart (2002) supports through his research the existence of eight cultural forces present in every school, classroom and group learning situations that act as a group's cultural dynamic. These forces are: language, time, environment, opportunities, routines, modeling, interactions and expectations. Teachers strive to create thinking cultures in their classroom through strategies, which provide children the necessary skills to become good thinkers.

Into the classrooms time for thinking should be dedicated to using thinking routines such as: supports and scaffolds, model and make their own thinking visible, interact with students, in a way that demonstrates an interest in respect for students' thinking, and send clear expectations about the importance and value of thinking in learning. However, having a culture of thinking is not as easy as it seems to be. Teachers need to implement not just a set of practices, but also they must have been supported by a rich professional culture.

Moreover, Project Zero has got a part of the previous research called *Visible Thinking*, which is dedicated to help students become into better thinkers and where they develop patterns of thinking in which their ability is combined with their inclination to think well and their awareness of thinking opportunities.

This project stands out that thinking development of the children occurs within a cultural context where:

³ Project Zero is an educational research group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education composed of multiple, independently-sponsored research projects. <http://www.pz.gse.harvard.edu/>

- Thinking is valued.
- There is time for thinking.
- Rich opportunities for thinking abound.
- Thinking is regularly modeled.
- The process as well as the products of thinking are present in the environment.

5.5 CATEGORIZING AN EXPERIENCE.

The main focus of this study is to analyze the classroom culture following an ethnographic approach. Therefore, in order to carry out this analysis it is necessary to propose an example of classroom culture, where all the theories exposed previously are represented. Taking into account my second Internship period in Infant Education, I would like to expose my classroom in rural school as an example of classroom culture. First of all, place ourselves into the village as well as the school context.

It is a village located in Palencia, 28 kilometers from the city center, belonging to the region of Castilla y León. It has got a population of 850 inhabitants, so it can be considered as a small place. Most of the population is engaged in the primary and tertiary sector, which can be seen reflected in families that are part of the school environment, given that are dedicated mostly to the hostelry industry.

5.5.1 School Context.

The School was founded in 1970 and is part of a rural context, which lives around tourism, given that the village is crossed by the “Camino de Santiago”. This allows us to see a large number of pilgrims and tourists daily carrying a part of the way. This fact makes the population to be respectful with other cultures, making possible the establishment of a culture based on respect and acceptance, with a community sense in which every person can collaborate to make better the life in the village.

Nowadays, to this school children from neighboring villages come, setting up a small educational community with a total of 57 students.

One of the main features of this school is that it is a place where the concept of multiculturalism is present in each of its corners, since a great part of their students belongs to different countries and cultures. It gives a high level of integration of foreign students, so that is a good opportunity for school and for students to share and learn about other cultures and values. This causes sometimes a high mobility of students, due to familiar and work circumstances: students arrive or leave the school at different moments of the year, without finishing the academic year completely.

In addition, the school has a Bilingual Project which has implemented the language section in English language along Primary Education. It means that it is an educational space in which the English culture is integrated. The school acts as a mediator between both cultures, which is visible from the first moment when contact with the school is taken: corridors, classrooms and the main areas of the center have signs, posters and English rules. However, bilingualism in Infant Education has a small presence, but allows students to have a first contact with the English- speaking culture, traditions and language.

These characteristics directly affect to the classroom context, thus students are influenced by this situation, which changes the classroom culture and make it work in a determined way.

5.5.2 Classroom Context.

Apart from the aforementioned, there is a smaller context within in the school where this study pretends to focus in: infant education classroom, more specifically 4 and 5 year-old class, where as I mentioned before, I developed my second training period.

‘The classroom of the turtles’ is the way in which this group is recognized by all their members and the rest of their mates in the School. They are 11 students, 6 girls and 5 boys, between 4 and 5 years olds. As a result of the little number of students, the school management decided to combine both levels in order to simplify the organization of the center.

As it has been said before, the village has a multicultural sense of community because of the great amount of cultures living together, and as it could not be any other way, all of that affects the whole classroom culture.

The group of the class is composed by many cultures, due to some of the students were born or their parents come from South America or children coming from Eastern Countries (Rumanian, Russian, Bulgarian, etc.) among others. Children native from the village live with others who came into the class, in some of the cases, without knowing anything about the culture, not even the language; as it was the case of one of the children.

This fact makes an attitude of empathy and support to develop; which must be proposed and strengthened by the teacher, in order to make children aware of the importance of inclusion and the feeling of belonging to a group, and also to make the person who comes new to the classroom feel safe and secure in their new context. Thus, soon will become part of the classroom culture and will unfold in a natural way in the classroom environment, living with their classmates and school life.

As it is described in the previous paragraph, this is how the classroom culture is built on the 4 and 5 year-old class. From the moment we entered the classroom, we can realize the culture that the teacher and students have been established: It is an open and accessible space for everybody, in which learning takes place in accordance with the materials available of the classroom and the experiences that happen during the day.

Another defined feature of this classroom culture is that behavior is based on dialogue and thought, but especially in the respect for others. Children are used to dialogue among them and with the teacher, whenever they have a problem or need something. The teacher always tries to provide communicative situations to her students, and if it is possible she usually proposes cognitive challenges, where children have to use their thinking skills and try to solve difficult situations. She likes to do it in order to train student's thought and help them to solve their own problems without relying on anyone.



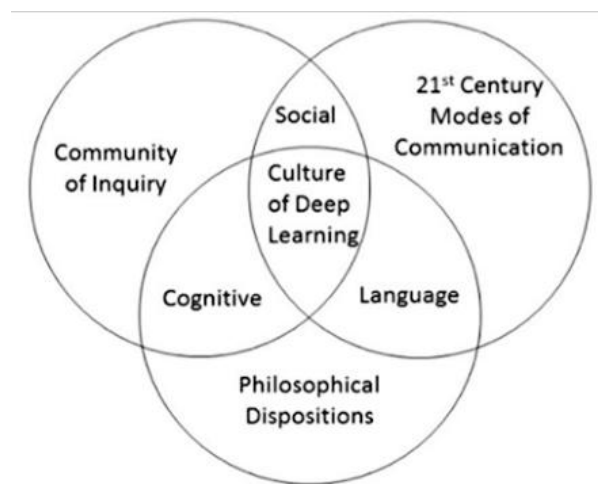
It is interesting to see how these children have internalized the feeling of being a community, within in the classroom as well as outside. Everybody offers help to their classmates and also to the teachers, no matter how costly it could be.

At the time of sharing, children have learned that they feel much better when they share their things and thoughts that when they don't. No matter how insignificant it may be, they are used to help and share everything they have with others.

All those features are possible thanks to the tutor's perception of learning, who has an active and cheerful spirit that influences the children. She knows very clear that classroom culture that there is established is the result of hard work and effort from the group, and that is achieved and maintained if everyone does their bit.

5.5.3 Classroom Management.

Infant Education is a very important educational stage, since during this period the children build the foundation for their development and their future. Within the classroom, as well as it has been previously analysed, there may be many learning situations, both academically and on a personal and emotional level, which are managed in a specific way. This way of managing is one of the aspects that lead to the formation of the classroom culture.



Therefore, there are different protocols to follow in each situation, all of them based on the principles belonging to the classroom culture. These principles are known by the children as a result of the continue action of the teacher at the time of teach them to solve problems. When a problem appears, these are the steps that the children have to follow:

1. Observe: There is a problematic situation. It could be between children, as well as between a child and the teacher, outside the classroom... whatever. The first thing the child has to do is to observe the context of the problem and realize the people or things involved.
2. Think: Once the child is aware of the problem, the next step is to think about what the solution could be. It is a very important moment because the child internalizes the situation and starts to use their thought, working with the problem solving strategies that the teacher has taught to them. Besides, it is a good moment where the child becomes aware of the level of autonomy acquired.
3. Do: The last step to follow is the action. Once the two previous steps have been done, the child knows the possibilities about how to solve the problem and tries to do it in the best possible way.



When a problematic situation appears into the classroom it is necessary to know how to include it within the development of the class. Turtles' classroom culture is mainly based on emotions and feelings so, in this case, the teacher includes these situations in a natural way where she makes clear that the really important things are the feelings of the people who are involved.

The common way to carry out this strategy is to follow the previous steps: observe the situation, think about the solutions and do the best thing to solve the problem. The teacher usually stops the activity which is being developed and asks the children: *What happen? Is necessary to stop the class and talk about the problem?* And then, here starts the process of mediation.

When this moment comes, the teacher acts as a mediator between the parts involved, or on the contrary, she sometimes leaves the children to solve the problem on their own when she can clearly see that children are quite capable to handle the situation. When the teacher acts as a mediator, she observes the process of mediation between the children and only if it is necessary, she proposes possible solutions: *to get this, we can do...*; *with the purpose of... we should carry out...* However, the solution always has to be what the children decide or agree, taking or not into account the advices of the teacher.



On the other hand, another feature of this classroom management is the intention of the teacher to make her children work in a cooperative way. The disposition of the classroom furniture makes easier this collaborative work given that children are seated close between them, what also allows the appearance of dialogue and the sharing of ideas. As a training teacher I could see how children learn much more when they work in this way, since they present their ideas about something and complement it with others' ideas. By this way, a deeper learning is developed and that helps to maintain the classroom culture based on values and thinking skills.

All these classroom management features allow us to see what the role of the teacher is at all times. Her role does not change, but is adapted to the needs presented by the group. This means that in spite of being the authority figure in the classroom, she also performs other functions such as accompany each child in their learning process, facilitate learning situations in which children can learn thanks of her and by themselves, provide them security and serenity, delegate their responsibility into the children through small tasks that

allow children to develop their autonomy... between other functions, besides those described above like being a mediator between children in order to solve problems.

6. CONCLUSION

As a result of this study it can be said that there are several patterns, which allow us to analyze classroom culture, especially the one based on thinking skills and children's thought.

Work on developing thinking skills takes place mainly in Primary Education owing to the children's need to think logically and reasonably, and also to develop strategies to cope with possible problems that arise along their academic background and life. On the contrary, in Infant Education thinking skills are not considered as important as they are, so that occasionally exists a little abandonment by teachers. Luckily, not all teachers give up this task and continue working harder in order to make their children autonomous people and good thinkers.

Thinking skills should be worked from the first years of schooling, as they are the bases of the educational and social development of the children. Teachers need to understand that it is not only possible to work with thinking skills, but also it is necessary. It can be worked through language, as it has been explained before, what will allow us to make our children develop and strengthen their multiple intelligences and capabilities. All of this makes possible the construction of the classroom culture within in the classroom, mainly based on children's thought.

This study has allowed me to categorize a thinking classroom culture. It has been useful to identify how I can build a culture through the inclusion of values and rules, as well as making the thought to act as an important mediator in the learning process.

As a future teacher of Infant Education, I would like to take into account this study in order to achieve a good environment and a good classroom culture within in my class. In my second training period I have learned useful strategies to get the children value the importance of language, thinking, dialogue and collaborative work, so it could be

interesting apply them and establish a thinking culture where the children feel comfortable and secure, and also in which emotions and feelings are considered as the base of the culture, built through and for the children.

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