

# The Role that Socioaffective Practices Play in Third Graders' Autonomous Learning

El papel de las prácticas socioafectivas en el aprendizaje autónomo de estudiantes de tercer grado

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In this article we describe and analyze how autonomous learning emerges in third graders' socioaffective practices as reconstructed in written narratives. Results were obtained by analyzing and reflecting on classroom observation, interviews and written narratives done by the students which let us appreciate different behaviors and reactions the students usually went through. This study shows that children are able to recognize and reflect on the causes and consequences of situations thanks to the use of different socialization forms implemented by their parents; those forms help them become aware of their duties and homework. It also makes evident that social interaction, with family as the main contributors, plays an important role in children's development of autonomy.

*Key words:* Autonomy, socioaffective practices.

En este artículo describimos y analizamos cómo surge el aprendizaje autónomo en las prácticas socioafectivas de los estudiantes a través del uso de narrativas escritas. Los resultados se obtuvieron a través del análisis y la reflexión de observación de clases, entrevistas y narrativas escritas por los estudiantes, que permitieron apreciar los diferentes comportamientos y reacciones que los estudiantes vivían. Este estudio muestra que los niños son capaces de reconocer y reflexionar sobre las causas y las consecuencias de situaciones gracias al uso de diferentes formas de socialización implementadas por los padres. Estas socializaciones les ayudan a ser conscientes de sus deberes y tareas. El estudio también evidencia que la interacción social con la familia, como principal contribuyente, desempeña un papel importante en el desarrollo de la autonomía de los niños.

*Palabras clave:* autonomía, prácticas socioafectivas.

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## Introduction

This is a report on how autonomy is revealed through third graders' socioaffective practices. It is based on our experience as novice researcher teachers in the English classroom, and our interests in order to inquire into learning autonomy when students share experiences, exchange ideas or help each other. The theory that illuminated our project has to do mainly with autonomous learning (Holec, 1981; Benson, 2001, and Lamb & Reinders, 2008), and socioaffective practices (Piaget & Heller, 1968; Marc & Picard, 1992 and De Andres, 2002).

This study was important for us as teachers because we had the opportunity to understand students' socioaffective practices through written narratives as well as to realize how students' interactions with their parents or classmates contributed to them to make use of their autonomy. We believe the Colombian academic community needs to remember that the school should be a place to give students a holistic education that goes beyond academic aspects.

This paper starts by presenting the problem, then the theoretical framework describing our main constructs which are autonomy and socioaffective practices; after that, we present the instructional design that let us carry out our research. Next, we mention the study itself that includes context and participants, type of research, and data collection procedures. Then we present the findings and finally, we gather the conclusions of the study.

## The Problem

Throughout our experience of about ten months as pre-service teachers in an English classroom of third graders, we noticed that they had an inner motivation to learn because they asked the teacher questions when they did not understand instructions, they asked each other for help and brought extra materials to the class to understand the

topic. On the other hand, they showed dependence on the teacher when making simple decisions such as asking what pencil to use when writing a title, or when waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do. These aspects drew our attention to the way we as researchers understand their socioaffective practices in their autonomous learning.

In the same vein, the materials, activities, and tasks carried out in the classroom by the teachers did not allow students be autonomous. Teachers perceived their role as having general control over their students; "however, the learning process can only happen if learners are willing to contribute" (Scharle & Szabó, 2000, p. 4). The success in the learning process depends on both the learner and the teacher. Based on this problem, our research question was: How does autonomous learning emerge in third graders' socioaffective practices as reconstructed in written narratives?

## Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the role that socioaffective practices have on third graders' autonomous learning, we focused on two theoretical constructs: socioaffective practices and autonomy.

### Socioaffective Practices

In the education process the cognitive domain has been overemphasized (Goleman, 1995, as cited in De Andres, 2002) and research has shown that this practice is not the only way to conduct a learning process. Both the affective side and the cognitive side are linked and with such combination learners are able to learn and recall better (Brown, 1994 as cited in De Andres, 2002). Affective variables such as self-esteem, inhibition, motivation and anxiety cannot be ignored in the learning process as they have an important influence on students' perceptions and attitudes towards English classes. Children's affective domain also occurs at home as

their parents or relatives are the principal source of affection for them and when students lack affection, serious consequences such as aggressiveness and academic problems may occur (Dewey, 1964). Taking Dewey's ideas into consideration, children need their parents to satisfy their affective domain in order to grow up healthily in this unpredictable world and for them to do well at school. Both family and school play an important role in children's psychological development and autonomous learning due to the interaction that takes place among them.

According to Marc and Picard (1992), developing one's abilities and potential requires getting in touch with peers in family and school which are defined as social institutions based on cultural meanings and values that shape individuals' personalities. Both family and school are the principal social institutions where individuals start constructing their identities as members of a community, and they comprise the most important places where autonomous learning and social responsibility are fostered (Piaget & Heller, 1968). In our study we decided to focus on the role that family has on children's autonomous learning development and how this role is evidenced through their socioaffective practices.

As for the family being one of the most important social institutions, Hargreaves (1986) says that parents transmit the culture they are surrounded by into their children initially because they filter their culture when interacting with them. Relatives play a great influence on children's personalities as they are the models to follow and imitate or as Kuhn in Hargreaves (1986) would say: relatives are the significant others; that is to say, the others the individual feels the most committed to both emotionally and psychologically; the others, who have given them their general vocabulary, including the most basic and crucial concepts and

categories; the others who have provided them and keep on providing them with the categories of the self and of the other and the meaningful roles those assignments refer to; the others in whose communication the self-concept of the individual is either supported or changed fundamentally.

We have mentioned how relatives interact with children, but we have to recognize that interaction at school is as important as interaction at home. According to Medina (1989), interaction in the classroom is characterized by the relational effort in diverse situations. Because of the new characters in their lives and the school as the new social institution they participate in, students face new situations that demand the acquisition of new roles framed by their classmates' attitudes. Medina also states that interaction in the classroom is a socio-emotional and cognitive reality complex and deeply influenced by the physical environment.

Then, relatives are not the only ones children interact with when constructing their personalities. Both their classmates and teachers also have a remarkable influence on them. According to Vygotsky (as cited in Lee & Jacobs, 2001), individual mental functions have their origins in social interaction, meaning their personalities, behaviors, attitudes and perceptions. As Hargreaves (1986) says, the individual emerges from the interaction that he or she has with others, and in this way family puts children through a process of socialization through which children learn their role in society.

Focusing this line of thought on the Colombian context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, Ávila and Garavito (2009) state that both parents and school are equally important in children's teaching and learning processes because they are the principal actors in the acquisition of their education; however, according to the authors, we as English teachers sometimes underestimate the interest of parents in participating in children's

academic processes and also the inner motivation that children have in completing school activities successfully with their parents. For that reason, teachers play critical roles in getting parents involved in their children's academic life and in order to accomplish that, teachers should create different spaces where both children and parents interact with each other so that they can learn together.

To conclude, we see that affection and social interaction have to do with children's autonomous learning and responsibility as they are the necessary elements for both children and parents to make autonomous learning emerge in their socioaffective practices which means that autonomy itself has to be promoted from childhood to succeed in making people autonomous learners.

### Autonomy

Autonomy has been researched mainly in an adults' context rather than in a children's context as we could see during the time we looked for theory to support our study; however, to some extent this theory showed us that children were also able to be autonomous individuals and that we teachers underestimate their capacity to become autonomous learners. These theories also let us identify the importance that students' socioaffective practices had in the development of their autonomous learning.

The reader may wonder what autonomous learning has to do with social interaction, and the answer is given by Piaget and Heller (1968). They understand autonomy as an educative process that teaches people to stop being egocentric in order to collaborate among themselves while at the same time submitting to common rules as individuals of the societies they live in. For individuals' practices to be fruitful they have to be in touch with the whole community.

According to the same authors, school is a sample society where autonomy can be put into practice because it teaches students to respect the law that was already created. As a matter of fact, autonomy helps them become aware of their duties, gives them a sense of responsibility and possession of oneself.

On the other hand, Benson (2001) states three claims that show the way he understands autonomy based on his own research. The first one is connected to taking control over our learning process. Autonomy is a natural predisposition, available to all even though it shows up in different ways and degrees according to the contexts. The second has to do with learners' lack of autonomy in the English classroom where, the author states, it is possible to work out this situation by giving students the opportunity to take control of their own learning process through teachers' lessons. Teachers can create the appropriate atmosphere for their students to exert their autonomy. The last claim says that when autonomous learning is fostered in the classroom, students learn the target language better.

Holec (1981) states that autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning, "not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). This definition can be related to social interaction by taking into consideration that children need their relatives, peers and teachers to build their personalities, a consideration which leads us to conclude that autonomous learning needs the participation of others in order to be acquired and developed.

In relation to Holec's understanding of autonomous learning, Ariza (2008) sees this concept as an opportunity for learners to make very personal decisions regarding their learning process based on their motivation and needs, so both students and teachers will have to assume new roles; the

former as active participants and the latter as facilitators. Despite recognizing the importance of doing things by oneself, teachers will have to encourage their pupils to set their own learning objectives and also to reflect on their performance in order for them to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. According to the author, this process is pretty emotional but necessary for both teachers and students to express all the feelings they go through when facing different learning dynamics.

On the other hand, Little (2000) characterizes autonomy through three main pedagogical principles: learner empowerment, reflectivity and appropriate target language use. Learner empowerment means that students have to accept responsibility for their own learning process; reflectivity has to do with encouraging students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning process, and appropriate target language use is the promotion of English when expressing oneself.

However, the learner's autonomy process does not imply that teachers become redundant (Fandiño, 2009). Instead, the teacher should assume new attitudes such as sharing relevant information with the student which is a way to show respect and willingness to the learner and help achieve the same goals as partners. Another attitude is consistent control which lets the learner know what she/he should or should not do, but not exceeding the establishment of rules that may stifle learners' initiatives.

Finally teachers must delegate tasks and decisions. That is to say, students need to have more influence on the learning process if they are going to take more responsibility; therefore, teachers can support students but not rescue them if they are making mistakes, as this is a natural process that helps students become aware of consequences. Among the definitions about autonomy, we have opted for the one provided by Holec (1981), which

leads us to conclude that children need their relatives, peers, and teachers to build their personalities and ways to approach learning situations.

### **Instructional Design**

Implementing tasks was an opportunity for the teacher to have the learners practice their socioaffective learning strategies, as the main objective was to have students practice rather than teach them implicitly. Task-based learning is rooted in the notion of a structural, functional, and interactional view of language. However, taking into account our intervention, the interactional view fulfills our requirements because it states that language is "a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transitions between individuals. Language is seen as a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations" (Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 21).

Our English class was organized into two stages. The first is pre-task, in which teachers introduced the topic by using questions in both English and Spanish. In this way, teachers allowed students to participate. Teachers highlighted useful words or phrases in English. The second one was the task cycle, which was composed of planning, reporting, analysis and practice steps, which meant students did a specific task; for example, they wrote about their own daily routine either in pairs or in small groups, and teachers monitored from a distance.

In the planning stage students thought about how they could perform what they had to do; in the reported stage students presented what they understood by participating in competences like matching activities, *tic tac toe*, etc. In the analysis stage students examined and discussed specific features about the presented topic, and in the practice stage teachers presented a new activity where students could reinforce their new knowledge. The tasks were organized as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Task Cycle

<b>My daily routine</b>	
Type of task	Description
Pre-task	What do you do every day? Do you have a specific routine?
Task cycle	<p><i>Planning</i> The students ask the teacher questions in order to understand what they have to do.</p> <p><i>Reporting</i> The students match the picture with the correct routine.</p> <p><i>Analysis</i> The students look at some pictures about routines which are in disorder, then they discuss the correct order according to their own routines.</p> <p><i>Practice</i> The teachers present a worksheet which helps students reinforce their knowledge.</p>

Thanks to this instructional design, we as teachers could interact with students and observe how they used their socioaffective learning strategies in class and practiced the language in a communicative way. At the same time we as teachers knew aspects about their family such as the place they lived, the specific family members, their occupations, economical status, but above all their emotional links and how they contributed to shaping the children's personalities. Thanks to those strategies and aspects, we were able to identify the different socioaffective practices that lead children to autonomous learning.

## The Study

### Context and Participants

The project was carried out at Heladia Mejia School, which is a public school located in Barrios Unidos locality in Bogotá, Colombia. The social conditions this institution was immersed in were characterized by people who belong to the low-middle class. The students we worked with were third graders between nine and ten years old organized into two groups, one with thirty-three students and the other with thirty-four students.

We applied those narratives to all of the students and during the process of data management ten students were chosen for our case study. They are recognized in this study as student A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and J to guarantee anonymity despite the fact that the participants' parents allowed us to use their names. The criteria we used to select our population were to have written all of the ten narratives with good handwriting that let us understand the text, and that those stories are based on real experiences and not on their imagination.

### Research Methodology

This is a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive case study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The data collection instruments we used were written narratives and interviews. According to Fitzgerald (as cited in Muth, 1991, p. 27), narrative is a discourse that aims to include linguistically a set of facts that took place in a particular period of time and which has a thematic coherence. In our study these narratives had two functions: a pedagogical one and an investigative one. Through them students had the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences because, according to Onbelet (2010), narratives give a space for reflection to allow

thinking to take place in different ways. They also reach our imagination and let us see each other's faces to stop being biased. We could collect data from the narratives to interpret and understand students' socioaffective practices in relation to their autonomous learning.

In our study we used a narrative form for the students to write about ten topics that had to do with their life experiences (see Appendix). All of the students were encouraged to participate; however, we selected the ones who wrote all of the narratives. These were twenty-one out of a total of sixty-seven participants, and in order to go deeper into our understanding of students' insights, we designed an interview.

According to Freeman (1998, p. 216), an interview "is a structured oral (or possibly written) exchange with someone. It aims to gather information" so our purpose was to expand the information gathered in the narratives. Patton stated "the purpose of interviewing, then is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1990, p. 92, as cited in Merriam, 1998).

### Data Analysis

The data analysis was divided into three stages: organization, reduction and categorization. In the first stage we organized a chart divided into sections. One section contained our participants' names; another, the topics that emerged taking into account our research question; the third one, the theory that supported the topics, and the last section included the number of the narrative. As soon as we finished this chart we started the second stage, reduction, by codifying the topics that emerged in each narrative and keeping in mind their likenesses by using different colors. We then colored each narrative done by the students to identify patterns: family relationships were blue, feelings were purple, responsibility was green and learning was yellow.

Based on these patterns we designed an open-ended interview that helped us expand the information to learn students' perceptions about different topics written but not explained in the narratives. We transcribed them and designed a chart similar to the narratives chart. We color coded the transcriptions based on the previous reduced topics to identify patterns again –family relationship in blue, learning in yellow and responsibility in green–, so we could join the narratives with the interviews in order to define our categories, this being the third stage.

### Findings

Keeping in mind our research question, our data analysis was focused on the socioaffective practices that students established with their families and how they showed their autonomous learning. In Table 2 the categories that emerged from our data analysis are presented with the corresponding subcategories. The data was collected in L1 and translated into L2 for the purpose of this publication.

**Table 2.** Categories and Subcategories

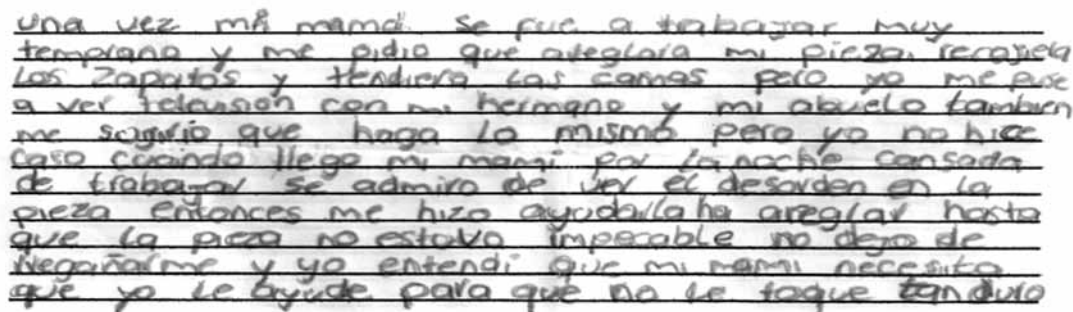
Category 1 Family as a shelter	Category 2 Learning from experiences helps oneself become responsible	Category 3 Expressing feelings inside family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's roles</li> <li>• Parents' roles</li> <li>• Mother's role</li> <li>• Family member as a model for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's capacity to reflect and evaluate</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Socialization forms</li> <li>• Students' lack of will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed emotions</li> <li>• Social pressure</li> <li>• Stimuli</li> </ul>

### Family as shelter

Many ways students showed us how they conceived their family and one of those ways had to do with family as a shelter. We decided to name the category this way because we realized that relatives of our participants are quite important to them as they mean protection and support, and revealed that too many of the students home stands for security. We are going to examine different aspects children referred to about their families; those are: the different roles that children assume when interacting with relatives and how those help them make up part of family; parents' roles; mother's role and the last aspect is family member as a model for children.

The first aspect deals with the different roles that children play when interacting with relatives and how those help them make up part of their families. Children have specific roles inside their families that help them become aware of their duties, and bearing in mind our participants' psychological stage, children require specific instructions in order to develop their duties.

In the next excerpts we could identify the first aspect:



una vez mi mamá se fue a trabajar muy temprana y me pidió que arreglara mi pieza, limpiar los zapatos y limpiar las camas pero yo me fue a ver televisión con mi hermano y mi abuelo también me sugirió que haga lo mismo pero yo no hice caso cuando llegó mi mamá por la noche cansada de trabajar se admiró de ver el desorden en la pieza entonces me hizo ayudarla a arreglar hasta que la pieza no estaba impecable no dejó de regañarme y ya entendí que mi mamá necesitaba que yo le ayude para que no le toque tanto

#### English equivalent

Once my mother got to work very early and told me to clean my bedroom, to pick up my shoes and make the other's bed but I just watched T.V. with my brother and my grandfather suggested I should do the same but I did not mind. When my mother arrived home at night, being tired of working, she was shocked by my bedroom mess, so she made me help her organize it until it was impeccable; she didn't stop scolding me and I understood that my mom needed me to help her so that it wouldn't be this hard for her. (Narrative 4, Student A)



66 Student A: That person explains me, helps me to strive for more, so that I can become very intelligent and so that.

67 Student A: I can do things by myself when being an adult.

68 Researcher: What good things have you learned inside your family?

69 Student A: To be respectful, tidy, sociable, and intelligent, ummmm a good neighbor eeee

70 Researcher: What do you mean by saying that?

71 Student A: It's to try to help neighbors, in case they have some difficulty or problem or help them to what? Ah...

72 Student A: Things, problems they have.

(Interview, Student A, 66-72, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

The following excerpt of students' narratives deals with family as my shelter especially with how they see their mother's role, which is the third aspect.

230 Researcher: What does your mother stand for to you?

231 Student E: Love because she has never left me alone, she loves me and she has never hit me.

(Interview, Student E, 230-231 October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Student E has shown an affective dependence for her mother as the person who helps her, who protects and loves her, and so, similar to the other participants, she considers her mother as the one who makes her feel secure and safe. For that reason we wanted to highlight the role that mother has in the family, because the mother is the first person children have contact with and this allows a clear feeling of love and safety for them. However, every member of the family has an important influence on socioaffective practices development.

As for the fourth aspect, which has to do with relationships with family members, they are seen as a model for children. The family is an institution where children can interact, create, and socialize their personality, behaviors, and attitudes. As Hargreaves (1986) states, the self emerges from social experience when the child interacts with others and in some

narratives, specific children's behaviors were evident when they interacted with their relatives including brothers, sisters, cousins, etc.

To conclude, it is demonstrated that family is a shelter because through the roles family give them, children know how to behave in society. Through the guidance parents give to their children, they feel safe and confident when making decisions. Children feel the mother is the safest connection; however, interaction with relatives is also important as it lets children learn how to behave. In tune with what Hargreaves (1986) states, relatives are the significant others the individual feels the most committed to, both emotionally and psychologically; relatives provide children with the categories of the self and of the other. That is why the self-concept of the individual is either supported or changed fundamentally, thanks to them.

#### **Learning from experiences helps oneself become responsible**

Thanks to the experiences that children have with their families, they learn how important being responsible is. These learning experiences improve through interaction and socialization that end up reinforcing children's will. In this category four aspects will be analyzed: children becoming autonomous by reflecting and evaluating on their actions; responsibility; the use of different socialization forms like punishment to learn, and students' lack of will as one of the reasons for children not to do their duties.

The first aspect that we analyzed has to do with the capacity that children have to reflect and evaluate their actions in order to be autonomous. In the concrete operative stage children have the capacity to evaluate their actions and at the same time the ability to reflect on their behaviors. However, both processes, evaluating and reflecting, occur thanks

to interaction. As the child perceives family actions, he or she is able to share with others and think not just about themselves, but also about others.

Certainly, Student c thought about his mother's reaction when he did not do his duties. This action shows that he was concerned about others' feelings and reactions and at the same time he reflected on his actions. Wadsworth (1995) states that it is typical of children who are starting to acquire the capacity to evaluate events from others' points of view to have a reduction in egocentric thoughts.

In this socioaffective practice it is evident that a degree of self management was used by Student c, who had the capacity to control the situation. In this case, he was able to assume the punishment and learn from that negative experience. According to Wenden (1987), self management and cognition are two classes of learning strategies which are necessary to use for achieving autonomy.

The second aspect has to do with responsibility, which is understood as being in charge of something with the capacity to assume the consequences. According to Scharle and Szabó (2000), the use of attitudes or skills like motivation and self confidence are necessary to develop not only

children's responsibility but their autonomy at the same time.

Inside the family every member must carry out different tasks; for instance, Student c knows the task or duties that he must do especially when his family is not in the house; this duties assignation helps children develop their autonomy. Morrissey and Brown (2009) explain it by using the term scaffolding, whose purpose is the ultimate transfer of responsibility for the task to the child as adult support decreases and child capability increases, and in this sense it is necessary that the adults and parents guide the child in development of autonomy and responsibility.

However, children require the use of different socialization forms like punishment to learn. Punishment is seen as one way to correct children's bad behavior because as evidenced in student c, the child needed punishment to realize his mistake but at the same time children learn from both their negative and positive experiences. According to Paez (1984), there are different techniques or forms to socialize children. The ones in which parents congratulate children when they do their duties are stimuli and recompenses and the others

mi mamá nos había dejado a mi  
hermana y a mí nos habían dicho tener  
las camas y lavar la ropa y a  
mi hermana le dicen lavar  
la ropa y colgarla pero no la pasamos  
jugando en el computador mucho  
mucho tiempo y mi mamá usó  
y se enojó mucho mucho mucho  
que nos castigó por un mes sin  
computador pero mucho mucho  
tiempo que ya nos habían dejado  
jugar computador y mi hermana  
y yo habíamos aprendido la  
lección y así fue el fin.

English equivalent

My mother had left us both my sister and me, and I was told to make the beds and do the dishes and my sister was told to wash clothes and hang them up but we played all day on the computer, when my mother arrived she got angry and punished us for one month without the computer, the time passed and we had learnt the lesson. (Narrative 4, Student c)

that let parents correct their children when they do something wrong are punishment, repression, threatening, and warnings; however, children showed that punishment led them to be more responsible and aware of their duties. The following excerpts of students' interviews show that.

288 Researcher: Do you consider that when you receive punishment you do your duties better?

289 Student G: as a child I do, even though I do not have to wait for the punishment to do them.

290 Researcher: Why?

291 Student G: because I have to, otherwise I will not be allowed to do the things I like

Punishments were not physical. As Students C and G mentioned, parents use the things children like to do in order to encourage them to obey, and punishments such as not letting them go out and play with their friends, or play on their computers.

(Interview, Student G, 288-291, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Based on Papalia & Wendkos (1995), parents try to shape children's character in order to make them competent people in a society. Parents use either punishment or reward to influence their children's personalities in order to make them a part of the society they have to interact with, so that they can develop their social skills and individual capacities.

The fourth aspect has to do with students' lack of will, which is one of the reasons for children not doing their duties. Children know they have to do something for their parents at home –in this case housework– but they do not do it because they are not really motivated to mind their parents.

According to Wadsworth (1995), will is defined as the capacity that an individual has to stick to his or her own values based on the experiences that person has been going through and in order to make both simple and important decisions. It means that through the experiences we go through and the previous values we are taught, we strengthen our will. As we could see in Student C,

this participant shows a lack of will when knowing he has to do things at home. He is able to learn from his mistakes when being punished because of his attitude. In this case, the child is able to reinforce the values that he was previously given because of the experience he lived.

Children can learn from negative and positive experiences. According to Paez (1984), the family establishes an educational, double relationship with children: the ones who learn (children) and the ones who teach (parents). By establishing duties, punishments, and roles, parents teach children to be responsible.

In the narratives and interviews, students expressed what they could learn from their stories or experiences and most of the time these reflections were based on parents' advice, so the zone of proximal development (ZPD) intervenes because the student is solving problems with the guidance of other people: "learners can move into their next level with their peers' or teachers' assistance" (Mantero & Iway, 2005, Zone of Proximal Development section, para. 1).

The data suggest that there is meaningful learning thanks to reflection that leads children to become responsible. Likewise, children need socialization forms like duties assignment, punishment, and reward given by their parents that let them become responsible and therefore autonomous. Taking Dewey's (1964) ideas into consideration, children need their parents to grow up healthily in this unpredictable world and for them to do well at school due to the interaction that takes place among them.

### Expressing feelings inside family

We decided to title the category this way because family is the first social institution where children start to express themselves. Children feel vulnerable when being scolded by someone who

is supposed to be their model to imitate; that is to say, the authority. On the other hand, they feel quite happy when sharing moments with their families and so it seems that relatives represent an enjoyable and safe place. This category dealt with three aspects found in our data collection process: mixed emotions, social pressure, and stimulus.

Feeling mixed emotions about family's social pressure, which is the second aspect this category deals with, has an important role in how people feel because human beings are sociable and need others to express themselves. Student D has mixed feelings about her family as its members may make her feel good or bad; however, what she feels for them remains positive despite her father's bad temperament. In Student D's excerpts we can also see that others' opinions influence the way she feels. For instance, when she was late to an event, she felt embarrassed because of being the last one to receive pie at the party:

434 Researcher: What sentiments do the people around you inspire?

435 Student D: My family

436 Researcher: What about bad feelings?

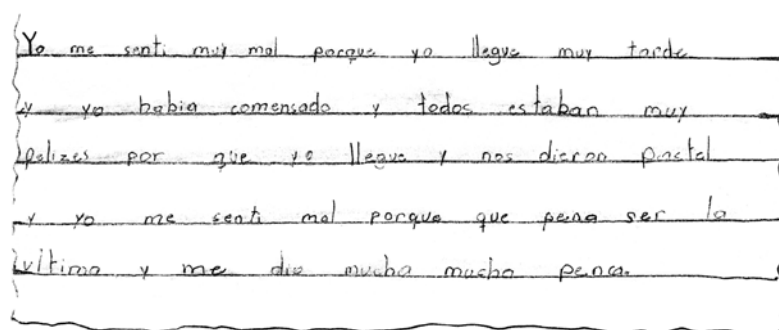
437 Student D: My dad as he sometimes gets angry and when they scold me.

(Interview, Student D, 404-407, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Student D tells us that emotions are related to interaction and social rules, especially in reference to what others think of us, which is why she feels embarrassed not following the social rules at a specific event. This fact is explained based on Marc and Picard (1992) when they state that children are not really able to avoid social influence on them as they are still constructing their personalities. Children are vulnerable to peer pressure to accommodate themselves to accepting general values; however, this fact is not necessarily negative because children become more independent from their parents due to the interaction they have with their peers.

According to Neddermeyer (2010), children are taught to please others throughout their lives and even told that if they worry about others their lives will be fulfilled. For that reason, Student D feels bad about the situation because she needs others' approval to feel she belongs to a community. The sense of embarrassment she goes through at the event is a learned behavior that is neither good nor bad, as it is based on the rules and values that the community she lives in has created, but the feeling itself can be transformed over time as the person becomes aware of this fact.

Families in general strive to give their children a good education which implies teaching them what is right or wrong. This interaction may



Yo me senti muy mal porque yo llegue muy tarde  
y yo habia comensado y todos estaban muy  
felices por que yo llegue y nos dieron pastel  
y yo me senti mal porque que pena ser la  
ultima y me dio mucha mucha pena.

English equivalent

I felt too bad because I arrived late and they had started and everyone was happy because I arrived and they gave us some pie and I felt bad because it was embarrassing to be the last one, I mean, it was too embarrassing. (Narrative 7, Student D)

cause lots of stress but children have the capacity to cope with it, becoming more adept at handling situations that produce negative feelings. However, that capacity needs to be developed in children by parents. According to Santrock (2007), "Parents can help children learn to regulate their emotion through emotion-coaching" (2007, p. 393), meaning that parents –by accompanying their children at the right moment in which they have to control their emotions– can help them become more independent when facing other situations they go through without their parents.

As for the third aspect, which is stimulus, it has to do with responding to the different stimuli in the children's environment. In Student D's case, those stimuli are her parent's scolding and rewards, and social pressure. Student D responds to the stimulus a person gives her, in this case, when she is given some pie sharing that moment with special people; she really appreciates it and it makes her feel happy. On the other hand, she feels bad when not getting her dad's approval but just scolding and also her feeling of embarrassment at the event because she feels she was not able to follow social rules and, as a consequence, thinks she is not part of that community. Those facts can be explained based on Santrock (2007) when he says that children in late childhood are able to understand complex emotions like shame and pride and also are aware of the fact that many sentiments can be expressed in a particular situation.

### **Conclusions**

Children become autonomous thanks to their capacity to reflect on their actions. However, they need their families to help them. For that reason, family as a social institution is the first place children learn how to express themselves and its members as the guides make them social beings through the interaction they have with them e.g. by assigning

duties, giving either rewards or punishment depending on the situation, all of which contribute to helping children become autonomous learners.

Family is a shelter because by giving children tasks they learn their role in specific situations; therefore, they are able to survive in the environment they are immersed in, while at the same time their parents' role as guides contributes to making children aware of their duties. The role that mothers play is very important in this process as they start the first socialization process with their children. Mothers have a big influence on their children's socioaffective practices.

In relation to the rest of the family, they help children build their personalities as they are the significant others who have personal contact with them, a contact which shapes children's behaviors and values. Taking into consideration all of the aspects mentioned above, family contributes to developing in children autonomous learning; that is to say, interaction with families is the way children can become autonomous and social beings.

According to the psychological stage these children are in, they have the capacity to reflect and assess their acts, which makes them more responsible and their learning process more meaningful. However, their responsibility was evidenced when parents assigned them duties and activities, meaning good choices were necessary for children to exert their responsibility. Punishment as a form of socialization is used by parents when their children do not carry out the tasks they are given. It is quite important in the construction of responsibility and a key element for their learning process.

Children express themselves inside their families as they are emotional beings who receive stimulus and social pressure from parents and relatives that make them feel good or bad depending on the situation. The different experiences children live give them the chance to redirect and shape

their feelings to control themselves emotionally and therefore have the capacity to be in charge of their learning process in an autonomous way.

We have to say that the research itself had an important impact on the students themselves as it was an opportunity for them to express their life stories and experiences transforming the English classroom into a place where both English and Spanish could be put into practice through normal English lesson plans and narratives to tell personal experiences. As was evident in the written narratives, family represents the first space for children to develop their socioaffective practices and the development of autonomous learning, which leads children to experience meaningful learning and become more responsible.

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### Appendix: Narrative Form As Used in Spanish (the Students' Mother Tongue)

INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA DISTRITAL HELADIA MEJIA

My family

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: 301

Escribe una historia en donde narres algún evento importante con tu familia

Un día yo fui con Mi mamá y con Mi papá y Mi hermanita fui a celebrar con Mi familia haci fue lo que me paso pero no paso todo porque hicieron a sorprender a Mi mamá con una fiesta de cumpleaños y la invitamos a la fiesta y tambien invitamos a los vecinos haci fue como su sueño mi historico pero comimos pastel y tambien comimos comida y la comida estuvo rica pasamos la noche en Parranda El fin

Dibuja el evento



¿Cómo te imaginas un día sin tu familia? ¿Qué harías y que no harías?

No iría a veras y jugaría computador  
jugaría con mis amigos



## Translation of the Narrative Form

Heladia Mejia District School

My family

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: 301

Write down a story where you tell an important family event.

I once went out with my mom, my dad and my little sister, I had lunch with my family, it happened like this, but everything didn't happen because they were going to surprise my mother with a birthday party and we invited her to the party and we also invited our neighbors and my story happened like this but we ate some dessert as well as normal food and the food was delicious; we enjoyed ourselves so much the whole night. The End.



Draw the event.

How do you imagine a day without your family? What would you do and what would you not do?

I wouldn't make any pranks and I would play on the computer.