

**Co-construction of Self and Peer Assessment in Class and on Online Learning  
Communities**

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2017**

**Co-construction of Self and Peer Assessment in Class and on Online Learning  
Communities**

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**Trabajo de grado para optar al título de Magister en Enseñanza de Lenguas  
Extranjeras**

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Bogotá  
2017**

**NOTE OF ACCEPTANCE**

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Acuerdo 031 del 04 de diciembre de 2007 del Consejo Superior de la  
Universidad Pedagógica Nacional

**Artículo 42, Parágrafo 2:**

« Para todos los efectos, declaro que el presente trabajo es original y de mi total autoría; en aquellos casos en los cuales he requerido del trabajo de otros autores o investigadores, he dado los respectivos créditos. »

### **Acknowledgements**

There are so many people who deserve credit on this paper. As a teacher-researcher I have stood on the shoulders of so many helpful and encouraging people. To begin with, I want to thank God for every single blessing poured in my life. Likewise, I want to thank my wife Laydy Bernal for her loving support and firm encouragement. To Nico and Salomón for being a constant inspiration and a reminder of God's blessings.

To Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and its Foreign Language faculty. Not only did I become a teacher here, but also a more down-to-earth person. From the foreign language faculty special regards to Ferney Cruz who showed in his classes the true calling of a teacher. To Professor Esperanza Vera who was a lighthouse for me during the entire process; thanks for being so professional, constant and kind.

Finally, I want to thank Olguita Mancipe for being so patient and for always greeting me with a smile and my classmates Marcela Vargas and Camila Carrillo for having been motivating and supportive.

### **Abstract**

This document presents the results of a qualitative study case research carried out with eleven high intermediate students from Centro Colombo Americano, a private language institute in Bogotá, Colombia. This study was born with the intention of hearing such high intermediate students' voices when they co-constructed the concepts of self and peer-assessment. Its results shed light on perceived characteristics and best practices students proposed to effectively carry out self and peer-assessment in an EFL context. The data were collected during six academic cycles, each cycle had nineteen two-hour sessions and the instruments that were used were voice notes, questionnaires and focus groups.

The findings showed that students can be honest, assertive, accurate and fully conscious when engaging in self and peer-assessment practices. It also offers a complete characterization constructed by students of peer and self-assessment is presented. Likewise, the research presents some guidelines that helped students be more effective and empowered when giving feedback to each other. The study also showed how critical it is students be given the chance of taking more responsibility, not only in their learning but in the assessment of their learning processes.


*Key words: Self-assessment, peer-assessment, feedback.*

### **Resumen**

Este documento presenta los resultados de un estudio de caso cualitativo desarrollado con once estudiantes de un nivel intermedio-alto (Challenge 1-3) del Centro Colombo Americano, Bogotá, Colombia. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo describir, analizar y documentar los conceptos de auto y co-evaluación construidos por los estudiantes mediante su participación en tareas de evaluación en clase y en una comunidad de aprendizaje virtual. Los datos se recogieron a lo largo de aproximadamente 57 sesiones de clases dadas en un espacio de tres meses, y los instrumentos que se emplearon cuestionarios, grabaciones de voz por parte de los estudiantes y grupos focales de discusión.

Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes son bastante conscientes y acertados a la hora de definir los conceptos de auto y coevaluación y de realizar tales procesos de forma acertada y clara. Igualmente, se presentan unos lineamientos creados por los estudiantes que les permitió llevar a cabo momentos de retroalimentación de manera clara, empoderada y responsable.

Palabras claves: autoevaluación, coevaluación y retroalimentación

 UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL <small>Escuela de Pedagogía</small>	<i>FORMATO</i>	
	<i>RESUMEN ANALÍTICO EN EDUCACIÓN - RAE</i>	
<b>Código: FOR020GIB</b>	<b>Versión: 01</b>	
<b>Fecha de Aprobación: 10-10-2012</b>	<b>Página 1 de 6</b>	

<b>1. Información General</b>	
<b>Tipo de documento</b>	Tesis de grado
<b>Acceso al documento</b>	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Biblioteca Central
<b>Título del documento</b>	Co-construction of Self and Peer Assessment in Class and on Online Learning Communities (Co-Construcción de Auto y Co-Evaluación en Clase y en Comunidades Virtuales)
<b>Autor(es)</b>	Cruz Suárez, Edgar Fabian.
<b>Director</b>	Vera Rodríguez, Esperanza.
<b>Publicación</b>	Bogotá. Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2017. 98 p.
<b>Unidad Patrocinante</b>	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
<b>Palabras Claves</b>	AUTO EVALUACIÓN, CO-EVALUACIÓN Y RETROALIMENTACIÓN

<b>2. Descripción</b>
<p>Tesis de grado de maestría en la que el autor presenta los resultados de un estudio de caso cualitativo desarrollado con once estudiantes de un nivel intermedio-alto (Challenge 1-3) del Centro Colombo Americano, Bogotá, Colombia. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo describir, analizar y documentar los conceptos de auto y co-evaluación construidos por los estudiantes mediante su participación en tareas de evaluación en clase y en una comunidad de aprendizaje virtual. Los datos se recogieron a lo largo de aproximadamente 57 sesiones de clases dadas en un espacio de tres meses, y los instrumentos que se emplearon cuestionarios, grabaciones de voz por parte de los estudiantes y grupos focales de discusión.</p>



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#### 4. Contenidos

El presente documento consta de introducción en la cual se incluye la descripción de la población, las preguntas y los objetivos de la investigación. El segundo capítulo ofrece al lector la referencia bibliográfica que comprende todo lo que tiene que ver con autoevaluación, coevaluación, ambientes de aprendizaje en línea. El tercer capítulo ofrece todo el diseño de la investigación, y la descripción de los elementos usados para la recolección de datos.

El cuarto capítulo muestra el análisis de los datos y los hallazgos de la investigación. Por último, el quinto capítulo muestra las conclusiones e implicaciones de la investigación

#### 5. Metodología

El documento presenta un estudio cualitativo. La modalidad es de estudio de caso. La información se recogió en el Centro Colombo Americano en una clase intermedia alta conocida como Challenge 1. Los estudiantes participantes fueron 11 y fueron escogidos por llevar más de 6 meses en la institución.

Los instrumentos de recolección de datos fueron Cuestionarios, notas de voz y grupos focales.

La información recogida fue analizada siguiendo el enfoque de teoría fundamentada en la que se encontraron relaciones y categorías en la información recopilada.

**6. Conclusiones**

Los resultados demostraron que los estudiantes son bastante conscientes y acertados a la hora de definir los conceptos de auto y coevaluación y de realizar tales procesos de forma acertada y clara. Igualmente, se presentan unos lineamientos creados por los estudiantes que les permitió llevar a cabo momentos de retroalimentación de manera clara, empoderada y responsable.

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<b>Revisado por:</b>	Esperanza Vera Rodríguez

<b>Fecha de elaboración del Resumen:</b>	15	02	2018
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This first chapter presents important elements of the research titled Co-Construction of peer and self-assessment in class and on an online learning community. It will cover the background and motivation of my research, its objectives and related questions as well as the rationale behind it.

#### **General background**

Learning a foreign language such as English in Colombia is a goal of many people who in most of the cases, after a long schooling process of at least 12 years still feel the need of learning English with accuracy and at a communicative level despite the fact of having studied it as a subject at school for at least 6 years. During that learning process, students got used to traditional ways of assessment and to the fact that it is, for the most part the teacher alone who has a say when determining how well a student does in any specific subject or area. This is especially common in the language classrooms where assessment is not a continuous process and tends to be understood as giving grades to students (López, 2009).

The Centro Colombo Americano, located in Bogotá, Colombia is one of the most popular language institutions where people enroll in order to pursue their goal of learning English as a foreign language. It is the only binational center in Colombia that is approved by the American Embassy and the only institution that offers intensive programs with 10 hours of class per week. The learning experience at Centro Colombo Americano proves successful for a high number of students who see progress in their foreign language learning. However, there is also a number of students who fail at learning English or developing proficiency measured by their own needs and

goals. Successful and less successful students alike have to deal, at the beginning of their learning process, with the evaluation system at the Centro Colombo Americano, from now on CCA. The CCA believes that quantitative formal exams do not accurately determine how well students are doing (Taylor, 2009). The lack of formal, quantitative testing then presents a big difficulty for students who are used to traditional assessment methods and struggle to see themselves and their own classmates as trustworthy sources of assessment information.

Likewise, when teacher assessment is analyzed, some students tend to think that teachers' feedback is a series of recommendations that have no effect on their performance or on the fact that they might pass or fail a course. This is evident when students fail a course and complain about not having been warned in advance about this fact, to which teachers respond reminding them about the assessment moments when students were informed about the weaknesses they had and how to overcome them. In recent years, the Colombo has managed to tackle this discomfort by working hard on TDTS (Teacher Development Training Sessions) aimed at creating a more strict and rigorous process with specific guidelines and rules of thumb that ensure that teachers across the program carry clear, punctual, valid and coherent assessment by using a plethora of elements such as rubrics, charts, tasks, checklists and so on.

On the other hand, at the CCA, self-assessment and peer-assessment are heavily promoted in the classroom, but also through online learning communities, especially in more advanced levels such as skills 4-6 and Challenge 1-3. Online learning communities are web spaces created by teachers for students to post their work and have access to links and information about the class. On such communities, students have the opportunity to interact in forums, post their written production and even video clips they create in order to a work on class

content in areas such as vocabulary, listening and writing (Pallof and Pratt, 2008). Online learning communities should provide a great chance to work on assessment, nevertheless, the assessment procedures used in this kind of communities show some of the deficiencies expressed above given the fact that students don't feel they are knowledgeable enough to assess their or their classmates' work.

### **Research problem**

Throughout the years the topic of assessment has been very controversial and troublesome in every field of our society, especially in the field of education. Such problem affects people in different proportions and the fact that self-assessment has been historically unbalanced and poor (Casanova, 2003) Casanova's ideas remain a truth in our day-to-day lives.

At Centro Colombo Americano Bogotá, the Adult English Program has worked hard on adopting a comprehensive assessment approach that is based on the principles of formative, qualitative and alternative assessment and has relied on it as the evaluation system to be used by every participant of the learning process. Academic coordinators, supervisors, teachers and students altogether have been trained in the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment practices. As part of that process, it has been agreed upon an instrument which is a mixture between rubrics and checklists as the major assessment tool to be used to report students' process and progress, this tool is called online checklists (Appendix 3) and you can see a sample of it in the appendices

With the online checklists set, and as part of class procedures, students get familiar with the five aspects they cover which are labelled as follows: task accomplishment, communication, learning, language, culture and attitude. However, the fact that students and teachers are familiar with the checklists, does not mean that they interpret them correctly when they use them to

assess their performance. In fact, the use of the rubrics sometimes varies even from teacher to teacher. A possible way to tackle this would be to integrate the assessment system and the use of an online learning community as it was done in a research study by Ibabe and Jauregizar (2010) at University of the Basque Country.

In that study, a positive relationship between frequency of self-assessment and academic performance was found. Also, students' self-assessment matched the evaluative concept given by teachers showing that assessment was better understood by all members of the class. Students' understanding of the concept of assessment is one of the evident consequences of this research since it is not happening accurately right now due to the poor understanding of some of the assessment tools used at the institution, namely rubrics and checklists.

In all fairness though, and as it is expressed by Marzano (2010) there is a phenomenon called the uncertainty of rubrics, which means that no matter how well-trained students and teachers are in the use of rubrics, there is always going to be some uncertainty on the accuracy with which rubrics describe someone's performance. This phenomenon is seen in the program when some students fall through the cracks and make it to high courses showing some deficiencies in the performance, although this is not frequent, it is necessary to say that it happens as it proves how necessary it is to strive for a full grasp on the concepts of self, peer, teacher assessment and how this would reduce uncertainty.

Regarding other adopted methods of assessment, it is necessary to say that students are shown the ropes of basic procedures to carry out self-assessment and peer-assessment properly. Recently the whole syllabus for basic courses has been modified so students who start in "Basic one" have a clear, step by step training on assessment. The first part of that training consists of

having a conversation with students in which they express their opinions and give account of previous experiences in this area. After that, the principles of assessment at the Colombo are explained and some hands-on activities take place, all this aiming at having students well prepared to face different assessment practices during their learning process at the Colombo.

The recent change in the syllabus described above, was implemented due to the fact that some students, even at advanced levels, who have been in the institution for more than one year, did not seem to have grasped those concepts completely. Thus, there is not a unified definition or application of assessment procedures in students which results in their complaining when they fail a course.

Likewise, and according to the results drawn from a preliminary survey (Annex 4) whose main objective was to see what students understand from the assessment method at the CCA, it was noted that most students, 9 out of 11, think they are always being evaluated by the teachers, whereas there was no consensus as to how often or effectively they carry out self and peer-assessment. Students seem to have different opinions regarding how the online learning community creates opportunities for assessment to take place as well.

Online learning communities, from now on OLC, are web based communities that share most of the characteristics of a real community, it means, they are spaces where people who have something in common meet generating virtual communication, social imagination, identity, and discussion around a topic or a physical community. (Renninger and Shumar. 2002) At the Colombo, the OLCs provide spaces for students to post their articles, opinions and assessment on their peers' and their own work since this is the project of the block for Challenge 1-3 students. Challenge 1-3 is the name the Colombo gives to the high intermediate English level class.

Regarding assessment on the OCL, criteria for teacher assessment, peer-assessment and self-assessment also seem to be blurry for students at CCA, given the fact that students mentioned different elements when asked about the aspects they took into account when carrying out self-assessment. Those elements vary, and go from fluency to grammar mentioning several different features such as vocabulary, grammar, use of expressions, writing and personal progress among others which means students don't really know what they should pay attention to when they engage in a task, so they resort to aspects regarding the English language as a code, but tend to dismiss one of the characteristics that a community has, which is freedom to express and construct your own voice and the ability to learn and grow as stated by Renninger and Shumar (2002).

Finally, it is necessary to say that when asked about the online learning community (OLC) major differences were found; for some students, the OLC was used daily to self-assess, other students said they never used the OCL for this purpose and other students said they used it only sometimes. Here, it is evident that the concepts of self and peer assessment need to be clear for students, so they really understand when they are assessing and have consensus on how often they do this, specially, because assessing is part of autonomous work and students are constantly encouraged to work autonomously and cooperatively to accomplish specific goals which gives way to the idea of co-constructing the concepts of self and peer-assessment.

Co-constructing all the concepts of assessment is an idea that finds support in the theories of Zone of Proximal Development explained by Vygotsky (1978) in which students benefit from working together in specific learning projects. Group work and collaborative learning are also principles taken into account when working on a learning community as expressed by Zea and

Atuesta (2007). They affirm that in a school based community a “culture of learning” is created and teachers and students work together in order to construct knowledge leaving behind traditional divisions in their roles and replacing them with collaborative work, shared leadership, participation and coordination.

### **Research Purpose**

This case study research was done to describe what students from a high intermediate level course, known as “Challenge 1-3” at Centro Colombo Americano (Bogotá) co-construct as the concepts of self and peer assessment through their participation in an online learning community. During this research, assessment was understood as a critical evaluation of students’ learning process, performance and production carried out by students themselves. That co-construction was documented as the answer for the research question below.

### **Research Question**

How do upper- intermediate students view the characteristics of peer and self-assessment processes when co-constructing them in their face to face classes and through an online learning community at a private language institute/ or at CCA?

About the research question, it is worth mentioning that the students co-constructed such concepts by viewing their own personas as agents in different assessment processes and moments and not merely observing the characteristics of assessment but rather creating or transforming them.



### Research objectives

Research objectives	Research Question
Describe and document what students co-construct as the characteristic of the concepts of peer assessment and self-assessment while assessing and reflecting through an online learning community and in class.	How do upper- intermediate students view the characteristics of peer and self-assessment processes when co-constructing them in class and through an online learning community at a private language institute/ or at CCA?

### Rationale

The concepts of assessment, peer-assessment and self-assessment have been understood differently by students at CCA, for this reason, it is imperative that all the members that belong to the teaching-learning community find a way to create clarity in such concepts. On the other hand, one of the most common tools used in education is technology, however clear guidelines and goals must be set to effectively insert technology in the learning process, especially when it comes to assessment.

An effective way to accomplish this would be through the introduction of prescriptive assessment moments which, according to Tisha Bender (2003), are needed to guide students to understand how assessment would be carried out even before the course begins. In her words, prescriptive assessment would:

- Provide “a clear and explicit statement of course goals, along with crisp, logical course structure that enables students to comprehend requirements of the course. This increases their chances for deep learning to occur, and the course goals to be achieved.

- Discussion questions and techniques that will elicit upper-level thinking and reflection.
- A clear reflection of these discussion questions in the grading and assessment.

Then, it is obvious that the process of reflection and discussion on assessment has to be done even before the content of the course starts to be developed so that students and teachers share the same idea as far as progress, weaknesses and strengths go. Nevertheless, as Marzano (2010) points out, there will always be some imprecision in assessment no matter what method is used or how much discussion there is around the topic. That is why, setting common and well understood guidelines for self and peer-assessment is a must because even if assessment is not completely precise, the more students and teachers reflect on it, the more effective and clear it is going to be, and that is the ultimate goal of this research since it intends to see how students co-construct the concepts of peer and self-assessment. Furthermore, another reason why this is essential is because most of the theory on this field is basically an adaptation from teacher assessment to self or peer-assessment but there are certain differences that have not been thoroughly addressed.

This study was born with the goal of giving power to students so they are able to make of learning a long-lasting project as they take learning and assessment out of the classroom by making informed and well supported decisions geared toward achieving their goals. At the institution where I work, teachers will have a better understanding on the way students view assessment, which in turn would shed light on their teaching practice. Likewise, teachers will be able to come up with new ways to conduct and promote assessment in their classes.

On a larger scale, and taking into account that learning has shifted from being a teacher centered process to a student centered one, this research paper precisely aimed at making of assessment a more student-centered activity bringing solid outcomes in any teaching-learning environment. According to Brown (2004), shifting assessment from teachers to students might be seen as politically incorrect according to traditional views of education but it is the student community who are more involved in their learning process, so the fact that they can also come up with insights that result in better assessment practices would change that traditional view of education and language learning.

This research will show, in chapter two, a literature review that includes important information regarding assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment and the use of technology in such process. It will later, in chapter three present the research design and the instructional design which will describe a unit and how assessment in class and through the online learning community will be carried out. In the data analysis section, important information that supports the nature of this research will be presented by drawing important conclusions. Finally, it will present limitations of the study and the pedagogical implications that it will entail.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature review**

This part of the study shows a definite stand point on the concepts of assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment, to do this I will refer to the ideas expressed by experts such as Douglas Brown, Robert Marzano, Lyle Bachman and Tim McNamara among other important authors. The reason why assessment is explained lies on the fact that peer and self-assessment actually spin off assessment and it is my opinion that in order for those to be effective, they definitely share certain characteristics.

Finally, in this chapter and to fully explain the idea of an online learning community I resorted to the work of Zea and Atuesta, Palloff and Bender.

### **Assessment**

Both assessment and the use of technology in education have been widely documented; however, when the relation between both topics has not been as widely documented. It is necessary then, to define assessment, describe the types of assessment that were used in this research and the way in which technologies supported this process.

To begin with, it is imperative to say that, as McNamara states (2006), assessment practices worldwide have become an instrument of power due to their connection with economy and politics. The connection between different realms of the society and education have impacted the latter and a tendency to answer to the needs of a globalized world have created some practices that have been applied in different contexts, regardless of cultural and idiosyncratic differences. In this regard, it is more and more usual to find that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been adopted by different nations, even if they

are not European or share borders with nations that speak other languages as is the case in Colombia.

The CEFR has some clear standards that are used to compare students against, and given the fact that in Colombia we are in a completely different context to the one that gave origin to it, it is necessary to set a clear position regarding the concepts and practices of assessment adopted at CCA.

Also, defining assessment is necessary because teachers and students should have clarity about what needs to be assessed and how assessment should be carried out. During the review of literature about topics such as testing, evaluating and assessing, it is common to notice that the theory that has been written on such topics places the teacher as the most important agent of this process and there is a tendency to assign a less active role to students. According to Stiggins and Chappuis (2011), assessment is “the process of gathering evidence of student learning to inform instructional decisions.” Although teachers are not mentioned in this definition, the fact that learning is defined as “student-learning” and not just as learning, indicates that assessment is something that only helps teachers make decisions about instruction and not students about their own learning. Furthermore, those instructional decisions are commonly made by teachers and institutions and seldom are they initiated by students.

In fact, later in their book, the aforementioned authors claim that assessment traditions revolve around the belief that assessment results inform the instructional decisions made by the adults who manage schools and classrooms (teachers, principals, curriculum directors, superintendents) leaving students out of the assessment process as active agents who can also make decisions based on the results of the assessment process in order to make modifications in

their study habits or just to see how close they are to accomplishing their goals. (Stiggins and Chappuis, 2011)

Stiggins and Chappuis' definition of assessment is complemented in their book by the description of two main goals of every assessment process. The second of those goals is a concept that was taken into account in the instructional design of this research to plan for and work on assessment activities. The authors state that assessment should benefit students by enhancing both their drive to learn and their achievement which is one of the expectations when bringing assessment closer to students.

Another example of how assessment is, most of the times, a process carried out by teachers is seen in Brown's affirmation that "whenever a student responds to a question, offers a comment, or tries out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously makes an assessment of the student's performance" (Brown, 2004). This definition summarizes the fact explained before and shows students as the passive individuals that are constantly assessed by more active and knowledgeable agents which in most of the cases are teachers, although in all fairness, Brown devotes the last chapters of his book *Language Assessment* to the concepts of peer and self-assessment.

Now, assessment, despite the definition presented above is a huge concept that needs to be explained in a more detailed way and one necessary task in trying to define it well is to shed light on the principles that orient language assessment in a classroom. According to Brown (2004) there are five key principles that must be taken into account to ensure that assessment is well conducted, such aspects are; practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity and washback.

Owing to the fact that this research is focused on peer and self-assessment, and sticking to the idea that these types of assessment should follow the principles of assessment, the definitions for each principle will be geared toward peer and self-assessment. Practicality refers to that trait in the peer or self-assessment activity that is done easily in terms of time, evaluation and instructions. It is already a challenge to request a student to evaluate his peers, so the assessment moments should be crystal clear and easy to conduct to get the most out of them.

A more complex trait is reliability. Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability that assessment activities show. For instance, if working on peer-assessment, would two students share the same opinion about a third mate's performance? Now, taking into account that there is a high degree of subjectivity in peer and self-assessment it was interesting to see how students tackled this challenge in their characterization of peer and self-assessment.

Validity, in terms of Brown (2004) is the most complex criterion in assessment. It refers to the relation of the assessment tool and the area that is actually being evaluated. According Harmer (2010) a valid assessment tool would yield a similar performance description to the one deriving from other tools; it is to say that if a rubric is used to evaluate students' understanding of a reading exercise, the rubric would, to a great extent, match the results of a comprehension test given about the same passage. In self and peer-assessment validity could be a challenge since an overall perception of students' own or their peers' performance could misguide them when assessing specific skills. To illustrate this point, imagine a student whose assessing mission is to check fluency but ends up checking pronunciation or conversation strategy use. It is the teacher's mission to ensure validity by previewing the assessment activity mechanics and goals with his or her students and setting clear criteria for them to effectively carry out either kind of assessment.

The next principle, authenticity, normally poses a problem in formal testing, but differently from the previous two, in peer and self-assessment this trait is easier to establish. Given the fact that authenticity refers to how contextualized and similar to real life a task is, an assessment moment during a conversation is more authentic than taking a vocabulary quiz on a formal exam given the interactive nature of the task and the necessary and corresponding bond between the learning context and task. If a teacher were to ask students to evaluate their partners in a task that has no connection to the ongoing class process, students themselves would likely express their nonconformity explicitly by talking to their teacher or subconsciously with their lack of understanding of their role in the assessment activity or their ineffectiveness following instructions.

The final principle is washback, this principle is part of the reason why this research was born. Washback refers to the effect of assessment in teaching and learning (Brown 2004). It is easy to identify washback as a problem given the fact that sometimes students dismiss their peers' observations and evaluations without considering that they could have a toll on their overall or summative assessment. From my experience, students tend to ignore their peers' comments and only regard their teacher's as cues to exert changes in their learning habits or general performance.

So far, we have seen the principles that should guide assessment, but it is still a wide concept to explain, and only after we have full clarity, teachers will be able to help their students assess in a more accurate way. Maria Casanova presents a categorization of assessment based on the work of Scriven (1991) that might help us get a richer grasp on the concept. According to her



classification, assessment could be grouped because of its functionality, norm types, timing and agents, this latter opens the door for peer and self-assessment.

- Regarding functionality, assessment could be summative or formative.
- Regarding norm types, assessment could be nomothetic or idiographic.
- Regarding timing it could be initial (prescriptive), ongoing, final.
- Regarding its agents, assessment could be divided in self-assessment, peer-assessment and hetero-assessment.

Summative assessment refers to the evaluation that takes place at the end of a cycle, or school year. Its main objective is to determine if students accomplished or not the objectives of the course or if, instead, they should take the course again. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is a constant recollection of data about the learning process that permits both, the teacher and the student make changes and adjustments to the process in order to overcome problems and strengthen possible weaknesses. Thus, for this research, assessment was seen as a formative process which is understood by Brown (2004) as the evaluation of “students in the process of forming their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process.” At the CCA, given the fact that no formal exams are given to students, it is necessary to develop serious and healthy assessment practices that support the student when growing as a user of the English Language.

Formative assessment is a great way to give students control over their own learning process, which is one of the three imperatives for the use of technology in the classroom as stated by Collins and Halverson (2009) According to these authors *customization, interaction* and

*learner control* are necessary to incorporate technology effectively in any education system.

Such authors also believe in the use of summative assessment through online exams as a way for students to measure their progress. They believe that “certifications” or exams taken by students according to their own needs and pacing can help students improve by making them fully aware of their weaknesses. Due to the principles of CCA I will not share this aspect in the research study since the CCA does not approve of summative assessment through tests, but through certain tasks and accomplishments such as platform work.

Assessment, according to norm types or the referents used to evaluate the subject or object, it could be internal or external. When the referent is external, the performance of the group sets the tone of the evaluation, so if the group does well, a student with an intermediate level of performance might not do well according to this kind of assessment. Idiographic assessment refers to what the student needs to learn and his/her achievements based on purely internal circumstances. This evaluation centers every single student in the process of assessment.

Regarding timing, assessment could happen at different stages of the learning process so it could, and should, take place before, during and after each academic cycle and learning process. The reason for this lies in the fact that planning for a course, teaching and assessing it are simultaneous processes that need to match so the student has a clear idea of why.

Finally, according to its agents, assessment could be carried out by the learner himself, among peers or by another person which in most of the cases is the teacher. When students assess their own work, it is labelled as self-assessment. When learners assess their classmates the process is called peer-assessment and when the teacher assesses students, which is the best

known kind of assessment there is in traditional education the process is called teacher assessment.

### **Self and peer-assessment**

Self-assessment is an autonomous practice that according to Brown (2004) is rooted in the learner's ability to establish his own learning goals and the follow up of those goals in a self-determined manner. Self-assessment is meant to bring benefits to students' intrinsic motivation by helping them take the necessary steps they need to excel when learning different subjects including a second language as is the case in this research. There are other benefits in self-assessment in the practicality are, for example, self-assessment is a great way of providing immediate feedback to the student since he can assess his performance during and immediately after he has worked on a task.

Casanova (1995) claims that self-assessment is something humans are used to doing as we constantly seek to appraise our actions. It could be troublesome to apply self-assessment without the proper training because factors such as personality and previous experiences could lead the student to overlook his mistakes or be too hard on himself. It is crucial teachers be thorough in explaining students how to self-assess in a fair, balanced and accurate way even if they know that this is an individual task and they will be the only beneficiaries or doing it well.

Peer assessment, on the other hand, appeals to the community of learners to care for each other in such a way that they can help other members of the learning community achieve their goals in a collaborative and cooperative way. Peer-assessment makes students feel they are leading their learning process. It was part of this research to see to what extent students could overcome or deal with the challenges peer assessment pose, namely subjectivity.

Brown (2004) describes subjectivity as one of the main issues to tackle when introducing self and peer-assessment to class since students could be too demanding or too lenient with themselves and their peers when evaluating certain task, a process or an overall result. However, it is necessary to let students explore the benefits and understand the guidelines and ultimate goals of self and peer assessment to make sure they work in our classes and why not, even out of class given that it is a teacher's mission to equip students with tools and processes to do well in and out of class, and self and peer assessment can go a long way in a society as the Colombian one in which we need to be more observant and committed with our surroundings and evaluations

Peer and self-assessment can bring great benefits to individuals and communities, therefore, in our classrooms we should be able to engage in such practices correctly and to know well how they work. According to Brown (2004), there are different types of self-assessment and it is important to understand these types of assessment so they can be fruitfully used in class settings. The first type of self-assessment is assessment of a specific performance. Students engage in this type of assessment when they have done an oral or written task and they could evaluate themselves during the task or right after they are through with it. The second type is overall assessment of general competence and this one does not limit to a task but to a series of them throughout a longer part of the learning process.

The first two types are focused on performance but the third one focuses on the metacognitive area. Metacognitive assessment focuses on the strategies that students employ to reach their learning goals, they are commonly applied through goal setting and self-monitoring and they change mainly those students' habits and strategies that help them learn something.

Socio-affective assessment, the fourth kind looks to help student build up from a psychological stand point. According to Brown (2004) this type of assessment leads students to lower their anxiety or simply find for alternatives to boost their motivation, in short this assessment is key to make sure students avoid those affective factors that might keep them from learning.

Finally, Brown (2004) refers to student generated tests as the final type of self and peer-assessment. This type of assessment is great at showing students how much they have learned by focusing on using their knowledge to assess their peers. This type of assessment would be more efficient at the moment of creating a washback effect on students. Below we will see how these types of assessment are present in online learning communities, even if, according to some authors the most common type of assessment used on online learning communities is performance based assessment, indeed Collins and Halverson (2004) also agree in regard to “performance-based assessment”. Both authors agree that this kind of assessment would help education build skill-based assessment systems that would benefit teachers and students despite being time consuming in their design. Collins and Brown claim that performance-based assessment goes beyond the traditional paper-and-pencil tests but it is Brown who goes beyond and postulates that with this method of assessment pupils are assessed as they perform real and simulated real-world tasks such as selling and buying objects or presenting information about their families which are some of the tasks students engage in at CCA classes and on the OLC

### **Assessment in online learning**

Let us remember in this regard that according to Collins and Halverson (2009), and as stated before, there are three conditions for the use of technology in class to be successful, which are

*customization, interaction and learner control.* These conditions are explained and expanded by Egbert and Hanson-Smith in the book “Call Environments” According to them there are 8 conditions for optimal language learning environments, they state that:

- Learners have opportunities to interact and negotiate meaning.
- Learners interact in the target language with an authentic audience.
- Learners are involved in authentic tasks.
- Learners are exposed to and encouraged to produce varied and creative language.
- Learners have enough time and feedback.
- Learners are guided to attend mindfully to the learning process.
- Learner autonomy is supported.
- Learners work in an atmosphere with an ideal stress/anxiety level

The conditions stated above are in alignment with the nature of this research and what the CCCA aims for when pursuing the inclusion of assessment in its curriculum. Now, regarding this research document, it is my belief that online learning communities are perfect environments to provide students with meaningful, authentic and varied learning moments and opportunities. Those moments and opportunities need to be evaluated by both, teachers and students through a coherent integration of class activities and assessment. According to Chao (2007) assessment must gather some important characteristics, such as being blended with class activities, focused on the learner as it leads him toward improvement of his process through reflecting and having awareness of his process.

Those conditions correlate to the conception of prescriptive assessment mentioned by Bender (2003). From the authors that work on the use of technology and assessment it is Chao (2007) who better documents the co-relation between the two of them. He gathers the ideas from the previous authors and sets the guidelines to effectively integrate technology and assessment. He

also mentions an important aspect that the previous authors did not explicitly mention which is critical thinking. For the nature of the tasks that we propose at the CCA, it is necessary for students to develop critical thinking skills. Also to the light of critical pedagogy students should be able to look critically at current problems of our society and propose solutions to them instead of developing “test wisdom” that only works to do well in old-fashioned classes but will not benefit their surroundings or their own lives.

In Colombia and abroad, some works have been done on this matter. To begin with, Ibabe and Jauregizar (2010), conducted a study that aimed at establishing the relationship between self-assessment and academic performance and they concluded that students’ performance improved when they engaged in self-assessment activities. This study was carried out at the University of Basque Country and it was implemented among students of first semester Psychology.

In the article, Turned Models of Peer Assessment in MOOCs (Massive Open Access Online courses) written by Piech and others (2013) The authors describe how accurate peer assessment is provided there are certain conditions such as a high number of graders, for example 5 graders per task. Likewise, there is a mention to a time sweet spot which describes how long a student should take when grading a peer’s task. Finally, the article offers insights on graders – gradees assorting based on how well people grade tasks. The article was written taking samples of more than 30.000 graded tasks in an attempt to create an algorithm that would improve peer grading after analyzing bias when grading a task. One of the most important conclusions is connected to how accurate peer assessment is, showing that if well done, this type of assessment can be trusted.

Two local studies were also carried out in Colombia, and they belonged to the field of language. In 2009, Medina, a university teacher at the Alex Program at Universidad Nacional, conducted a research study that sought to document and describe students' interaction in Online Tutoring Sessions. The whole process was mediated by self and peer assessment and the findings show that self-assessment and self-repairing were more common than peer-assessment and peer-correction. However, both types of assessment were evident and both had a positive impact in students' overall performance.

Also locally, a study was led by Laura Hurtado (2012) at Centro Colombo Americano, Bogotá, and it showed that students became more reflective and analytical when they assessed their own tasks and assignments as well as their classmates'. It is relevant to mention that the three studies referenced here, use online educational spaces to see students' implementation of self and peer- assessment techniques which is also the goal of this research study.

To sum up, assessment is a very vast concept and in order to understand it, several aspects should be considered such as its principles, timing and classification among others. When analyzing assessment through their agents I find that self and peer assessment are essential in order to give authority to students and help them take the reins of their learning process. The following chapter will present important information regarding the research design that was followed during this investigation.



### **Chapter 3**

#### **Research design**

This part of the study will cover important information regarding the research design, such information gathers a justification of the type of research adopted, a description of the setting in which the study will be carried out, the participants and the ways in which data were collected.

#### **Type of Research**

This research is qualitative in nature since according to Mills (2007) qualitative research uses description and narratives to comprehend a phenomenon through the view of the research participants, who, in this case are my students who allowed me to describe the process of co-construction of concepts and principles around self and peer-assessment. Likewise, according to Burns (2009), in qualitative researches the questions to be answered are what, why and how and as stated before this study aimed at describing how students construct the above-mentioned concepts of assessment.

Also, it is worth mentioning that the primary source of data, in this research, is the natural setting where the problem has been observed which is an important characteristic of qualitative research, as stated by Frankel (2006) In fact, according to Creswell (2005), in qualitative research the researcher relies mostly on the opinions and views provided by those who participate in the research process.

Another characteristic of this study that categorizes it as a qualitative research is the fact that as a teacher - researcher, I was concerned with the process as well as with the product (Fraenkel, 2006). The co-construction of important concepts such as self and peer-assessment is

a student-centered process that can lead to a product that might shed light on what students make out of self and peer-assessment and what practices they consider useful in their learning process.

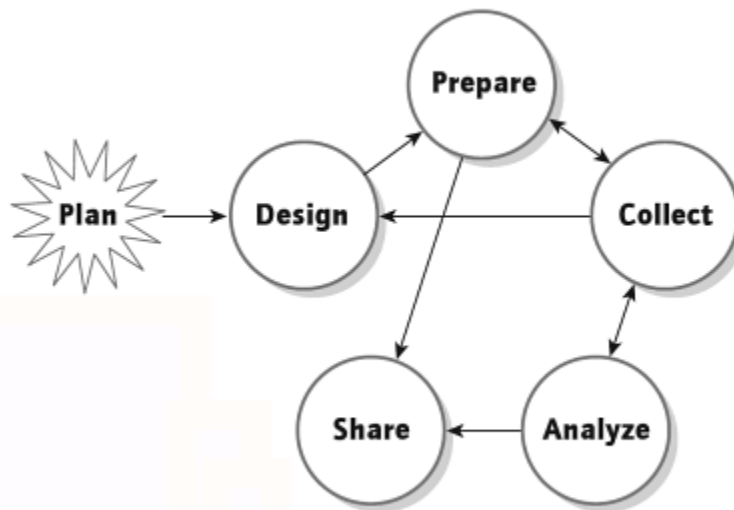
Finally, the steps of this investigation are those followed by qualitative researchers since there is initially a thorough identification of the phenomenon to be researched, and an identification of the participants of the study. Once those two steps are achieved there is a generation of hypotheses that leads to data collection and analysis that are necessary to make interpretations and draw conclusions (Fraenkel, 2006).

### **Research Method**

The selected research method for this study was case study given the fact that case study projects, as expressed by Yin (2008), are an inquiry aiming at describing deeply a current phenomenon within a real context. In this particular case, the phenomenon is the process of co-construction of the concepts of self and peer-assessment in the context of my own classroom, which will be further described in the setting.

Also, this study is a case study since as a researcher I intended to get a deeper understanding on how the phenomenon of co-construction occurs and to describe it so that other teachers can use it as a way to understand their students in their settings taking into account the differences and similarities between their and my own context. According to Merriam (2016), a case study can help readers expand their assimilation of a certain situation, which in this case is how students view self and peer assessment. Another key element in case study research is actually connected to the word “how”. According to Yin (2009) case study is one of the preferred methods when the question to be answered in the study is “how”, as it was the interest of this study and has been thoroughly expressed before.

In order to answer the question “How do upper- intermediate students view the characteristics of peer and self-assessment processes when co-constructing them in class and through an online learning community at a private language institute/ or at CCA?” A series of activities was planned, designed and prepared and after students worked on them data were collected and analyzed and later shared through this document. This linear approach belongs to the case study method as clearly expressed by Yin (2009) and depicted in the diagram below.



*Figure 1. Doing Case Study Research: A linear but iterative process. Yin, 2009.*

### **Descriptive case study**

Yin (2009) establishes three different categories for case studies. According to him a case study can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Each type has specific features, but it is the nature of this study what makes it a descriptive case study. This research was conceived in order to describe characteristics of self and peer-assessment understood as the natural phenomena that emerged among the data, namely the co-construction process.

Furthermore, descriptive case studies intend to document completely the phenomenon being researched, even if the data that emerge during the process have not been documented (Yazan 2015). Although there is vast theory regarding self and peer assessment as it was documented in the second chapter of this report, the population that participated in this research was not overly aware of such theory since it was their job to co-construct those concepts, processes and characteristics as an array of activities took place in the classroom and as they resorted to personal and previous experiences to help me, the researcher, describe how they viewed peer and self-assessment.

### **Setting**

This study was carried out at Centro Colombo Americano, Bogotá, which is a binational center whose main goal is to teach English as a foreign language. The institution has been in Colombia for more than 75 years and has important relationships with the Embassy of the USA. Due to that fact the institution is categorized as a binational center.

The Colombo institution offers classes to children and adults through three different programs: The KTP program that targets kids and teenagers, the university program that covers college students and the adult English program whose main target are people aged 17 and up who want to learn English.

The students selected for this research were in the Adult English program in the course Challenge. Such program is divided in 18 courses that go from beginner to high intermediate levels. Each level lasts one month which means that students attend to a total of 19 classes of 100 minutes in each course.

The profile of a student that takes the program and finishes is successfully states that a student challenge 6 should be able to:

- Express him/ herself easily.
- Read about specific topics.
- Write and defend essays.
- Be ready to enroll in advanced English courses.
- Study or work abroad.

In order to help students achieve the goals above, the Centro Colombo Americano and its teachers focus their instruction on three main principles which are: learning, language and communication. Regarding the first principle, learning, the institution trains students to develop serious study habits. This means that students are aware of the need of working out of class in order to hone their English skills. Students are supposed to do homework every day, plan their lessons by looking up words and IPA symbols for the lesson they will see the next day. In advanced levels students are to plan activities that help them learn new vocabulary and improve their writing skills.

Students also adopt learning strategies that will help them learn the foreign language. As part of language, students are trained to analyze language structures carefully and use them in meaningful contexts. Finally, regarding communication, students are supposed and encouraged to communicate only in English, even from the very basic levels, among themselves and with the teacher or any other speaker students might have contact with. (CCA 2009)

### **Participants**

The students selected for the research were in the challenge 1-3 block which means they have a high-intermediate level. As stated before they were from 17 to around 39 years old. Some of them will be new to the institution and the rest, most likely the majority, will be a product of

the program, meaning they have been studying at the Colombo for at least 6 months. Students were chosen because they had a high intermediate level of English and had been part of the assessment process at the CCA. Making this sampling a convenience sampling criterion. The population is typical in the sense that students will be usual high-intermediate learners of English who carry out assessment processes required by the institution and that face language learning Problems similar to any other high intermediate student might face.

### **Data collection instruments**

In order to collect trustworthy data during the implementation of this action research, three instruments will be used: a questionnaire, students' voice notes and a focus group. Such instruments are explained in detail below.

#### **Questionnaires**

The first instruments were a couple of questionnaire whose main purpose was to find out what students' perceptions about assessment in general, including self and peer assessment were. In those questionnaire students explained what they understand about the assessment practices carried out at the institution and in previous learning experiences and also their beliefs and opinions on how effective they considered self and peer assessment to be. These instruments were used only once because although at the beginning the idea was to have an entry and an exit questionnaire, the exit questionnaire was changed by a focus group interview.

Questionnaires according to Brown (2011) are a great tool to find out what the people involved think. They are an effective way to assess programs and curriculums. Given that students are the ones who are directly affected by the approach to evaluation proposed by the

institution, they are the most accurate source to inform the impact this has on their practice and on their students. Gilham (2000) reinforces this and adds that questionnaires are a way to have conversations with participants.

Dornyei (2003) states that questionnaires are a good instrument to gather information regarding participants' feelings and, given that my research questions is related to how students view the characteristics of self and peer assessment this proved a very suitable instrument to let me explore students' initial ideas without making them feel on the spot. In order to design my questionnaire, I took into account several authors like Foddy (1993) and Gillham (2000) and their recommendations regarding the length and the kind of questions in order to avoid bias. In the design of my questionnaires (Appendices 5 and 6 ) I tried to take into account the fact that I wanted to make it easy to fill out, and I wanted to make sure it did not take up too much of their class time and for that reason the questionnaire was divided into two sessions. One to talk about self-assessment and the second about peer-assessment. I needed questions that were easy to answer and to the point as it is suggested by Oppenheim (1992). The first questionnaire had seventeen questions and it helped me gain insight on my students' general background, age, socio-economical level but also on their beliefs and previous experiences with assessment. The second questionnaire had less questions since background information questions were not necessary anymore. Such questionnaire focused on students' experiences, perceptions and recommendations about peer-assessment. The questionnaires were given to students on two different dates to make sure students weren't overwhelmed by the amount of information; the first took place on May 22<sup>nd</sup> and the second one on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### **Voice notes**

Voice notes were used once a week, especially in moments in which students were carrying out self and peer-assessment activities. The idea of using them was to see if there was a match between what students made out of self and peer assessment to be in the questionnaire and when they were giving their opinions and when they actually got down to facing themselves or their partners through assessment.

There is some theory that labels the use of voice records as a key tool in qualitative research. For example, Rapley (2007) described the use of voice recordings as a very rich option and he went on to state that transcribing notes gives the researcher deeper understanding of subtle aspects in conversations sometimes the researcher misses during the actual interaction. In my case, transcribing the notes shed light on how students interpret peer and self-assessment.

Another advantage of voice recordings is that they allowed me to know students assessment process without making them uncomfortable. Often times, in class, when I walk on students who are engaged in peer assessment practices, they stop talking when I come near them and start looking for my approval when they make comments. Voice notes, as compared to my presence were a non-obtrusive tool that allowed me to review self and peer assessment in the making. According to Thomas et al (2007) the fact that voice records are not obtrusive is one of the main utilities that voice recording brought to the on-site researching scene.

On the other hand, in order to guarantee a thorough process with voice recordings, I transcribed them myself. Thomas et al (2007) express that when researchers themselves undertake the task of transcribing the notes, they improve the accuracy of the transcription and



eliminate gaps in the interpretation that outside transcribers could bring. A sample of voice notes transcription can be found in the annex session. (Annex E)

### **Focus group**

A focus group is a method for data collection widely used in qualitative research. It was used only once during this research and it proved a meaningful tool to let me, the researcher gain insight on my students' co-construction of assessment. This method was used only once during my research but it proved to be more meaningful than the exit questionnaire that was once thought up as a way to contrast students' initial and ultimate ideas on assessment due to the fact that it yielded a lot of information over a short period of time. According to Mack et al (2007) the fact that students can expand their answers when lead by the researcher is one of the main advantages of focus groups.

On the other hand, focus groups are a very inclusive tool since it does not aim at achieving consensus but rather for a plethora of opinions as it was the case of this research (Mack et al 2007). When conducting the focus group, my students could contradict, complement and collaborate with each other when coming up with the appropriate processes and characteristics of peer and self-assessment. That dynamic exchange of information is in the core of focus groups and the fact that students could hear their partners' opinions elicited some reactions from them that I could not have obtained through a questionnaire.

In order to guarantee validity as I used the focus group as a research tool, the focus group interview was taped and transcribed, but also some field notes were made during the actual session. This gave me the contextual information that I needed to interpret and describe

participants' comments and answers. Likewise, in order to ensure that the focus group was successful different guidelines were followed when creating the questions.

According to Elliot and associates (2007) questions should be concise and expressed clearly so they do not mislead the interviewees. In fact, questions should be unbiased but lead to rich discussion which is why yes/no questions were not included in the focus group (Annex F).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

This chapter presents the data analysis approach, the research perspective, the procedures followed in order to analyze the data. Later on, the categories and subcategories that emerged from the data analysis will be described and documented as well as the discussion of the findings.

#### **Data analysis approach**

In this research process the selected approach for data analysis was grounded theory. Grounded theory, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1999) is an approach that allows the researcher to analyze social phenomena, especially when they are given in specific contexts. According to Freeman (1998), when adopting grounded theory as the approach to analyze data, the researcher looks closely at the data that emerges without trying control it. The author refers to Van Lier's (1988) typology to illustrate how the researcher needs to have less intervention and re-structuring of the teaching context in order to obtain data directly from the participants.

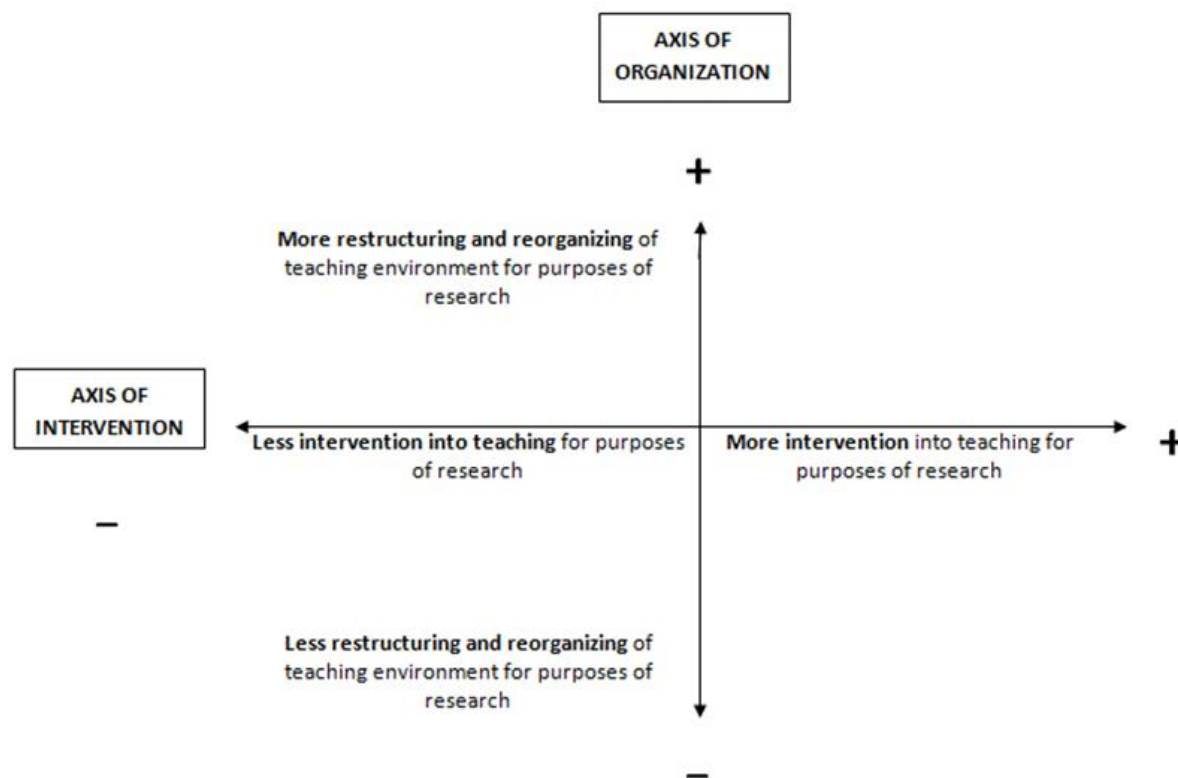


Figure 2: Axis of Organization. Van Lier's typology. Van Lier 1988

The context provided by The Centro Colombo Americano allowed me to analyze the co-construction of important concepts such as self and peer-assessment, as these processes are encouraged among students and required for teachers there. During this process, rich data were collected and later analyzed in order to find significance and through careful reading and reflection a connection between categories was found, just as suggested by Freeman (1998).

Having adopted grounded theory brought so many benefits to me as a researcher since it helped me contribute to theory as I aim at setting some foundations to understand students' views on self and peer-assessment. Doing this is the core purpose of grounded theory and it goes beyond putting a yardstick between theory and social phenomena. However, the fact that theory

is not tested doesn't mean that the findings don't fit closely the substantive area in which it will be used. (Glaser and Strauss, 1999, p 237)

### **Research Perspective**

Being the participants' English teacher made me not only an observer but somehow part of the group in which the data were collected. Thus, I was in some way an insider when it came to analyzing and understand the data, making the perspective of this research emic. Freeman (1998) explains the concept of emic perspective supported in the ideas of Kenneth Pike (1963) as the process in which insiders of a particular socio-cultural group, in this case my students, give meaning to a situation or phenomenon. In this particular case, my student are giving meaning to the processes of self and peer-assessment.

The emic perspective allowed me to log observations in a "rich qualitative form" (Morris 1999) that avoided the imposition of my ideas as researcher. In fact, most of subcategories were surprising for me at the beginning but I was able to identify them given the fact that I experienced meaningful situations as students were co-constructing the concepts of self and peer-assessment.

### **Data Analysis Procedure: Codification, Data Reduction and Validation**

Given the fact that this case study research depended entirely on students' views as they co-constructed the concepts of peer and self-assessment I had to step back and analyze what was happening in my classroom. Freeman (1998) suggests that this process of observing, making connections and develop interpretations will create "new perspectives on familiar things". It was exactly the case of this study, since at the beginning I thought I had some knowledge of what self

and peer-assessment meant for my students, but while taking a step back and listening to what they had to say many inquiries and then understandings cropped up and they bound me to be very observant and look for organized and planned ways of gathering data.

Freeman (1998) mentions that a researcher cannot be haphazard or fall short when collecting information because this might cause the research to be incomplete or even impossible to develop. Thus, it was crucial the data be collected, stored and organized correctly.

Once I had planned my data collection tools and strategies, I collected the first data by using a questionnaire. Such questionnaire which was done using google forms in order to have students' replies be automatically saved to avoid any information loss. Then, following Mack's recommendation (2005) copies were made and titled using my name, the date of data collection and the data collection method.

Likewise, I saved and stored the voice notes students' recorded as they engaged in self and peer assessment practices and the focus groups. Such voice notes and focus groups were fully transcribed and typed in order to ensure accuracy and in the long run validity of the data analysis. Those transcriptions also followed a rigorous process of archiving in order to avoid accumulating raw data. Each transcription was titled and saved in Google Drive and in two different hard disks.

Once the collection and storing process was complete and the data organized, I moved on to read several times the information and after careful reflection and when necessary correction or clarification of some of the information shared by students (incomplete ideas or misspelled words). Such correction took place by going back to students and asking them to expand on their opinions. After that, I started color coding the categories that emerged in the study. First self and

peer assessment were identified with different colors, yellow and green respectively. Outliers (Freeman, 1998) were also given a color and analyzed as they conveyed very important data to the investigation. Outliers were then highlighted in blue. Afterwards, I made a mind map (Appendix 7) to have the big picture on how students co-constructed their views of self and peer assessment as they engaged in such assessment practices. That map changed though, because as Freeman suggests, gathering and displaying data make it necessary to go back to it in order to shape the study findings.

Then, pre-categories were analyzed to find relationships, commonalities and differences among them, reducing the data and naming the new groups as categories that were labeled using either students' own words to name their visions on self and peer-assessment. Afterwards Categories were visually portrayed in order to follow Freeman's recommendations (1998) to ensure data grouping was correct and offered a solid foundation to categories and subcategories. Those categories were related to the views students constructed as they actively engaged in self and peer-assessment endeavors. After categories, and sub-categories were clearly defined, I kept on reflecting on revising the data and striving to make sure that those categories were evident in students' display of peer and self-assessment and through all the instruments.

The reflection process mentioned above led me to go back constantly to observe my context and the data which is one of the suggested methods by Guba (1981) to ensure validity of the data collection and analysis. In regard to validity, Guba also recommends practicing data triangulation. In the particularity of this study, voice notes, questionnaires and focus groups' data were contrasted and compared to make sure the findings were airtight. The nature of the study itself also activated what is labeled as interpretative validity in Maxwell's words (1992).

According to Maxwell, researchers need to thrive to favor the participants' perspective and rely heavily on students' words and concepts as it is the job of the researcher to ethically account for students' real voice.

### **Categories and subcategories**

As it has been mentioned before, the categories found during this research process are solely the product of collecting data as students self and peer-assessed and after they actively reflected on what these two concepts are and mean for them. The product below has been thoroughly documented and analyzed aiming at shedding some light on what students' constructed as self and peer assessment processes. Below you will find a figure that clearly expresses the relationship between categories and subcategories, and below that figure a concise explanation is offered of each category and subcategory.



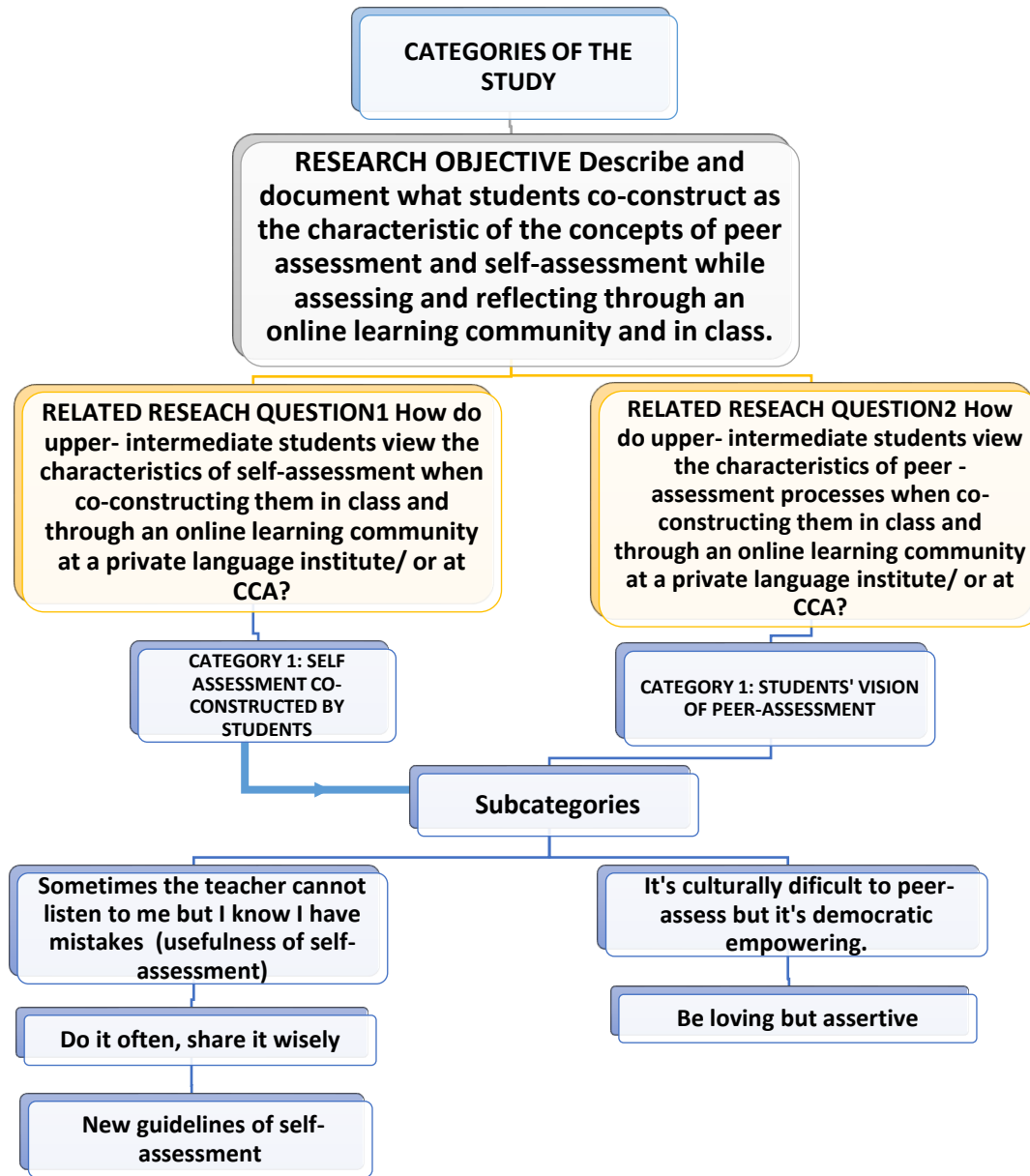


Figure 3: Categories of the study

**First category: self-assessment co-constructed by students**

Since the course starts at Centro Colombo Americano, teachers are instructed to foster self-assessment in class. However, the concept is not always clear for students. During this study, the goal was to observe, and document in a very detailed way what is it that students understand when they work on self and peer assessment. The first category focuses on the former.

This first category spins off the research question on how upper- intermediate students view the characteristics of self-assessment when co-constructing them in class and through an online learning community at the CCA, and it allowed me to understand how valuable it is to allot time for students and teachers to use something called prescriptive assessment moments. This was proposed by Tisha Bender (2003) and it is worth mentioning the sound of the word prescriptive might be misunderstood as something that is imposed or enforced on students but it must be seen as an initial discussion that must take place even before a course is started, especially if that course has some online components, in which students share their views on assessment and have crystal clarity on the evaluating procedures to be used. It is expected from students to be agents in this process because after all, giving the chance of assessing their own work increases the level of responsibility as it was documented by O'Malley and Valdez (1996)

This first category, then, assembles students' vision on self-assessment and it shows that despite lacking formation in the field of pedagogy, they have a crisp grasp of the fundamental nature of assessment. As a teacher-researcher I felt puzzled several times when students elaborated very conscious reflections about how poorly they had performed and then seemed surprised once they failed the course. Noticing that teachers' perception of students' self-

assessment not always matched, I allowed my students to explore and construct the concept on their own as a way of trying to understand the gap that was previously described.

After careful observation, I noticed students had a pretty good idea concerning self-assessment so by collecting the data I was able to match what happened in class (seen in my observation journals) with students explicit answers in the questionnaire and the focus group.

Right at the beginning, it became notorious that students envision self-assessment as an evaluation of their process. One of the students mentioned this; “I see self-assessment as a description and evaluation of my learning” St 11 Questionnaire 1, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. Although this definition might seem too simple, it encompasses two important aspects; first, it shows the formative nature of assessment in the way that it includes description and not only judgement as an important component of assessment. According to Brown (2004), assessment is an ongoing process that documents students’ production, but also gives them breathing room to make mistakes without making them feel judged. If this freedom were not given to students, they would not engage in trial and error endeavors due to the fear of judgement. The second part of the participant’ definition of self-assessment shows the most common face of assessment which is that of appraising one’s performance just as described by Casanova (1995)

Viewing self-assessment merely as description might bring negative consequences or even a mismatch between a teacher’s assessment and students’ self-assessment. This has been documented before by Blue (1988) after a research process on self-assessment in which his participants expressed difficulties at looking back at their own process intending to describe or evaluate it. However, even after having experienced such reluctance from students to undertake self-assessment, Blue urges self-assessment be more encouraged and welcome in second

language learning settings. Students' reluctance decreases as soon as they see self-assessment as more genuine process and not as a requirement to present to the teacher. During the current research, students managed to do so, thus, self-assessment was constructed in different ways and represented as the subcategories described below.

**Subcategory 1: "Sometimes the teacher cannot listen to me but I know I have mistakes"**

This subcategory refers to the fundamental usefulness of self-assessment and to the way students as they managed to break away from the conception of deeming self-assessment only as a teacher's requirement. This was enlightening because I realized that many times in previous courses students just wanted to give me an answer to satisfy an artificial need that I and maybe the program created. What I mean, is that in some cases self-assessment was seen as a fake action to report to the teacher whether or not they had done well in an activity.

During the co-construction of the process students' seemed to have noticed the importance of self-assessment and they started engaging in it, even when the teacher was not there to somehow approve or disapprove students' opinion of their own performance, as it is shown in the definition below

"It is a useful way to describe how do (sic) I do things in class, well or bad. Sometimes the teacher cannot listen to me but I know I have mistakes" St 8 Questionnaire 1, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

This view was shared by many of the participants as they saw a real need of being able to spot their own mistakes. When asked to expand on what they meant when they referred to mistakes, students estimated self-assessment as a useful way of spotting grammar, pronunciation

and vocabulary usage mistakes. Given the fact that students are constantly analyzing the language they use, they resort to checking, through self-assessment how accurate they are in terms of language use be it in specific exercises or in their classes in general. This is the first stage though, because when done with frequency, this habit pulls students to be more critical and consider a wider range of aspects when self-assessing.

Moreover, the data showed students perceive self-assessment as a tool to become self-critical. In fact, the data evidenced how students acknowledged being more honest and critical after engaging in self-assessment. Nonetheless, they also know there is an element of fear at being totally honest knowing that their own criticism might result in them having to repeat the course. However, in this regard, some students refer to a higher goal at the moment of learning a foreign language, and the realization or the clarity on this goal helps them be honest with themselves and the teacher even at the possibility of being held back. In fact, one of the main reasons why self-assessment is perceived as useful is the fact that the teacher cannot always assess each student during class.

For instance one of the students explained that: “It is necessary because I know if my mistakes are things I don't know or things I need to review.” St 6, Questionnaire 1, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016) Such statement clearly shows how some students don't only focus on their mistakes, but also on how those mistakes can reflect things they have failed to grasp or topics that have not being taught to them in the program.

Self-assessment, on the other hand, also proved effective at teaching students to categorize mistakes or find gaps in students' learning process. The socio-affective component of self-assessment (Brown 2004) often guides students to feel either motivated or demotivated when

analyzing their performance. Thus, students at the beginning gave very vague answers when told to share their assessment and focused mainly on their feeling. In one of my initial observations, a student reported to her two classmates how she had done in an oral presentation.

“I felt really bad, because my speaking wasn’t good in the presentation. I made basic mistakes, I was nervous I forgot my ideas. I know I need to improve my speaking (Journal, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

This was a common trend in the initial stages of the research, students tended to refer only to I felt good or bad and they mentioned very general aspects, most of the time mentioning just skills; listening, speaking and so on. When asked to expand on what they meant by that, some students started sharing more detailed descriptions of their weaknesses.

In the later stages, students were spot on what they had missed or done wrong, so it was common to hear them using meta-language when self-assessing. In one of the observations, I noticed conversations in which students referred to the lack of precision when using irregular verbs, or the lack of linking they had perceived in their recordings. One of the students reported this: “Actually today I felt well, I was in the mood for a fantastic conversation maybe because I didn’t have a lot of time for thinking about it. On the other hand my classmates looked very relaxed and that made the conversation easier. I still need to link the sounds, especially the initial "s". I also think that I could include more expressions rom lesson B” Voice Note June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Being more precise at assessing specifically the weaknesses students had noticed in their performance was a higher step in how they constructed assessment, but it was not certainly the last. After having noticed they were more precise when assessing, several discussions and activities went on and they helped express students how they realized other aspects were also

important and relevant, so, they started talking about action plans and changing objectives and goals as they were more analytical and comprehensive in the analysis of their overall learning process. One of the students expressed this in the questionnaire saying: “I take into account my mistakes and think of how to change them or new strategies that my partners tell me” St 9, Questionnaire 1, May 22<sup>nd, 2017</sup>) This finding matches what was mentioned by Hurtado (2012) as her study showed that students became more reflective and analytical when they assessed their own tasks and assignments.

Other students expressed that once they checked what they had learned, they felt the need of setting new learning objectives, and that even if their teacher didn't notice, and they could see those goal changes boost changes in their learning habits and exercises. “My (learning) objective changed from one skill to another. Initially I came to learn about writing and then I realized how important speaking is, so I focus on that now” St1 Focus group. August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017. What the student expressed here is closely connected to the self-involvement principles underlying self-assessment (Brown and Hudson. 1998) since this practice places students in the position of decision makers, instead of being passive individuals that expect to get constant directions from the teacher, even on the contents and topics to learn and skills to develop.

To sum up this subcategory it is safe to ascertain that the longer students are exposed to self-assessment, the more precise and accurate they become at spotting their mistakes and even finding ways of overcoming them. Those mistakes are not only limited to linguistic mistakes but they also cover attitude, behavioral and strategic aspects.

**Subcategory 2: “I have to know for sure that I learned and I am supposed learn something new every day”**

Engaging in self-assessment should be a frequent activity in our classes, and not a once-in-a-cycle kind of activity as it is traditionally done in our school system. In his research conducted in Southampton, one of Blue’s (1988) discoveries was students disagreement with the fact that self-assessment was carried out only once a year. The data showed a similar opinion given by my students. In fact, according answers given in the questionnaires and later confirmed through the focus groups, self-assessment should be constantly promoted in class and students should have at least one chance in each class to reflect, describe or evaluate their performance in activities. As one of the participants explained, learning happens every day in class and students need self-assessment to know for sure what they learned and how well they did.

Learning, as described by the students not only takes place in the classroom but also online, where students are confronted with the answers given automatically by the LMS; whenever they have a mistake, they tend to focus that self-assessment in terms on action plans to understand the source of the mistake.

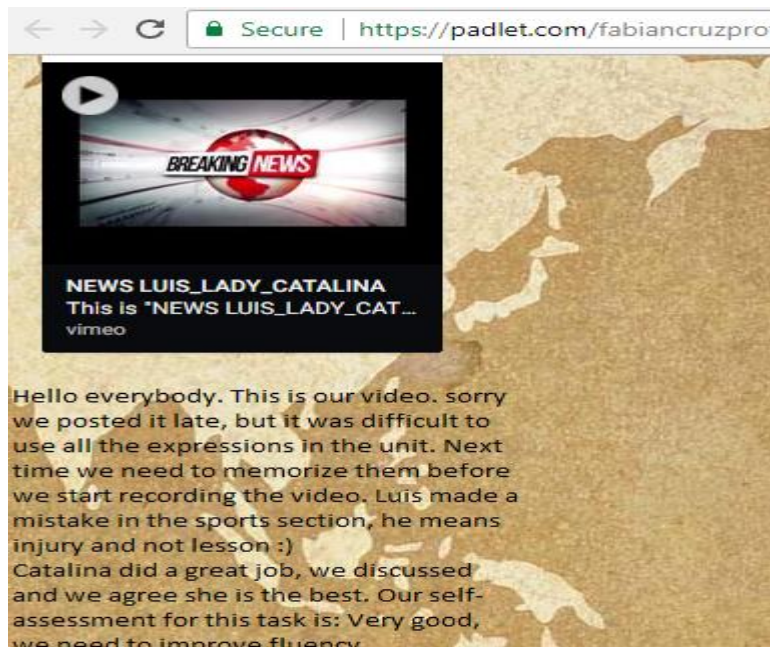
“Every time I have a mistake in the platform or in the learning community, I go back to the book or my notes and try to see why I make the mistakes” (St 8, Questionnaire 1, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017)

Taking into account that students’ online work is individual and most of the times done out of the institution, students have the time to reflect upon their mistakes, as it is shown in the student’s excerpt below; this leads students to seek for actions or create action plans to avoid those mistakes in the future.



“The platform tells you what’s wrong but I get angry when I make silly mistakes and I remember the links the teacher and other teachers gave me to practice” St 1 Focus group. August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

The fact that self-assessment happens in a more spontaneous way when students are working on their own, allows them to resort to their own activities and strategies in an attempt to overcome their difficulties or simply correct their mistakes. This was highly evident when observing students when they were sharing their self-assessment in certain tasks in the class or even on the posts they shared on the online learning community. The post below, shows students’ self-assessment after they posted a task on the online learning community.



*Figure 4:* Students’ self-assessment.

This is just one example of a common practice in the course. In fact, all the students acknowledged doing self-assessment reflection when working online, and expanded on a wide

range of strategies and activities they do or keep in mind when analyzing their performance or identifying mistakes in their production.

Such strategies are connected to using online dictionaries, reviewing the grammar booster section of the LMS, checking their class notes and resorting to external websites to clarify the topics.

Frequency in doing self-assessment could be seen as a problem for the teacher in terms of time, but, if done properly, it should be short and effective enough that students are able to self-assess at least once per class. Likewise, students who have been effectively trained can engage on self-assessment on their own when working at home or on their online community and LMS. About this specific aspect Collins and Halverson (2009), indicate that teaching and assessing are simultaneous processes and they need to be allotted sufficient time to obtain proper integration. Although the authors are speaking from the teacher's perspective, it would be safe to include learning as a third process so that students can be seen as agents in their own process, being thus capable of self-assessing as often as necessary to strive in accomplishing their goals

### **Subcategory 3: New guidelines for self-assessment**

Having collected information on self-assessment the data evidenced certain characteristics students perceived as pertaining to self-assessment processes that are not mentioned when most authors describe self-assessment. Some authors focus on the characteristics of self-assessment that would make it valid to be taken into account as part of general assessment. In other words, authors mostly try to document the validity of self-assessment and its correlation to teacher's assessment, in other words, if the self-assessment tool measures correctly students' performance (Harmer, 2010). However, students provided insightful

characteristics of self-assessment that are worth considering to ensure their voice is heard and probably replicated in other contexts. These characteristics are now discussed

*Private.* To begin with, students are inclined to define self-assessment as a private process. According to students' view, self-assessment conclusions should not always be shared with the class due to different reasons, and unlike the guidelines of the Colombo, should not be shared all the time, only when it is useful for finding new strategies and ways of having a better performance.

Consequently, students see that every time they have to share their thoughts about how they felt, it makes them feel like they are repeating themselves since mistakes are similar among them, but focusing on tips and pointers is a more beneficial activity.

“Sometimes, the teacher asks us how we feel in an activity, but that is very personal and it's better to focus on activities that are good to improve. Sometimes I feel ashamed of telling others how I felt in some activities, especially when I didn't prepare the class.

If we strictly stick to the linguistic implications of the prefix self, then it is easy to understand students' preference for privacy when it comes to self-assessment. On the other hand, sharing self-assessment conclusions or thoughts can intimidate some students at the fear of appearing egocentric in front of their classmates; one student expressed this view when he said that “... I don't think it's nice for my partners that I talk all the time about myself.” St 11, Focus group. Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Students in general are aware of the importance of self-assessing but they also deem the excessive sharing as an egocentric practice.

**Short.** Likewise, students determined that self-assessment activities should be short and concise because in this way they are more natural and effective. Data disclosed that they liked those self-assessment moments that were short, normally those that were guided with some sort of checklist that allowed them to see what they did and how well they did it, as it is observed in the followed excerpt. “When we use the formats the teacher brings, it’s nice because you know quickly what you need to do better” St 2, Focus group, Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

This student’s opinion was backed up by other students during the focus groups as they agreed upon the fact that such formats and the brevity of the reflection time was better than asking open questions because in some cases the opinions were different and self-assessment became boring.

**Transferable to other contexts:** After sharing their experiences with self-assessment during the classes, students determined that self-assessment is most effective when it has a connection to their learning or their performance out of class. When students reflect on the importance of being proficient speakers, not only in class but also out of it, they feel more energetic in their attempts to improve, as can be noticed in the quote below.

“I met some people in conferences and I remembered how I had to pronounce some words, I felt happy because I noticed that I was really improving and my practice and strategies to improve was (sic) not only for the class” St3, Focus group, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

**Observable through others’ performance:** This characteristic shows how students are always engaged in assessment. Brown (2004) said that teachers are always assessing and this

does not seem to be different in some students at some institutions such as the CCA. One of the participants mentioned this:

“One does self-assessment every day analyzing how well one does in comparison to others” St10. Focus Group. August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Added to the fact that students feel rubrics help them ascertain their progress, students shared the idea that analyzing others’ performance in class, was in itself a way of self-assessing since they could see how much they had learned compared to other people that had very similar learning conditions (class, teacher, amount of time spent in class, etc) This was a very interesting finding and showed me how listening to others does not always need to be a matter of peer-assessment but can also be a great opportunity for self-assessment. After all, the constant appraisal of actions that Casanova (1995) and Brown (2004) mention, don’t necessarily occur. This indicates that, self-assessment happens very often, even when students don’t share their thoughts, and even when they are not asked to do so in class.

Likewise, it shows that performance based self-assessment is tough and only through methodic training students manage to develop consistent and accurate practices. Nevertheless, educators must understand that a student’s self-assessment will vary according to the group he is in, and it is necessary to have a close look at level variations so students’ assessment is dependable.

***Thought provoking:*** One characteristic students mentioned often to construct the concept of self-assessment used by students was “thought provoking”; which was one of the expressions students learned in the course. When they were asked to expand their opinions, it became notorious that only checking whether they had included all the elements required in certain tasks

was not enough; self-assessment was more than that in the sense that it let them reflect upon other aspects such as how comfortable they would feel using the English in contexts that are different from the class.

“Before this course, I only did self-assessment saying yes or no about grammar exercises, but it’s nice to think about the strategies and the reasons why I make mistakes. Those strategies can help me when I speak English out of class” St 7 Focus Group. August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

What students referred to as though provoking has some relation to the concept of authenticity to how contextualized and similar to real life a task is. Brown (2004) mentions that in formal assessment the authenticity trait is difficult to achieve, but in the case of self-assessment it seems a lot easier, since students talk, when assessing on how some activities developed in class are common out of the classroom e.g, conversations, presentations etc. Similarly the assessment of those situations can be transferred to other contexts.

To sum up this final subcategory of self-assessment it is necessary to bring up the fact that students con-constructed a very detailed series of characteristics that self-assessment must possess. Being aware of this can make teachers’ job easier as it helps students be more critical, fair, specific and effective when engaging in self-assessment.

### **Category 2: Peer- assessment**

The second category of this research naturally covers peer-assessment. It was interesting to find out that despite the fact that self and peer-assessment share some core characteristic the findings that emerged after using voice notes, questionnaires, focus groups and actually doing

peer-assessment as part of the course showed different subcategories in the co-construction of peer-assessment, but right now I will just stick to the description of this category.

Peer assessment is deeply rooted in the nature of cooperative learning Brown (2004) and presents an important aspect of building knowledge together. As a matter of fact, according to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZDP) theory, learners can improve their skills with the assistance peer. Peer assessment is a process that shares certain characteristics with self-assessment. For example, when students shared their views on peer-assessment they included a series of somewhat common adjectives such as useful, necessary, honest and important. Nevertheless, other less common yet very interesting definitions emerged such as difficult, subjective, culturally interfered, democratic and empowering.

Brown (2004) expresses that peer-assessment might be seen as a reversal in politically correct hierarchies, since it strips the teacher of some power and gives it back to students, and that is exactly what this study wanted to document, since giving the power to students to co-construct peer-assessment resulted in great benefits for students, such as making them more goal oriented and fair.

Peer assessment was labeled as useful by ten out of the eleven participants in the research. Some of those views expressed that:

“It is so useful, overall about the best way to say a word or an idea about something our partner did right or wrong” St 1, Focus group Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

“It's very useful because we check the mistakes that others have and we can learn in base of that, we can work together to improve our level” St 6, focus Group Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

As it is evident in the comments above, students see the value of using peer-assessment when the teacher is not in the ability of checking every students' performance while they are doing a task. Moreover, they see the benefits of engaging in peer-assessment as it helps them learn and improve together. It is also worth noting that students are aware about the good and bad performances. According to my experience, normally people tend to associate peer-assessment with the discovery of only negative things. In fact, the fact that positive and negative aspects are accounted for through peer-assessment makes it honest.

"I think is very important, because the teacher doesn't have time to correct every detail of each student so in a way peer-assessment is honest, because it happens always we work in pairs". St 3. Focus group. Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

As the student noticed, the Colombo relies heavily on pair interaction, subsequently, students are told to offer recommendations or point out things to improve as often as possible. The fact that the teacher circulates around the classroom, missing sometimes parts of students' conversations would reduce the chances students have to receive thorough and honest assessment from the teacher, or at least it will not be done as often as it could happen provided students participate correctly in such practices.

On the other hand, students also characterized peer-assessment as difficult and they agreed that not everybody makes it easy to give feedback to. 5 of the participants mentioned that in the questionnaire and they expanded their observations through voice notes.

"It's a difficult situation because if my classmate misses a letter I have to take points off and then he can question me, hey, how come you didn't help me out?) St 5 Voice note June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017



” It’s very, very hard, sometimes I feel a lot of pressure, especially when my classmate has a lot of mistakes) St 4 Voice note June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Students agreed that working on peer-assessment brings some difficulties since students who receive feedback might feel that the best way of helping them is not to report all the mistakes they make during certain tasks, especially those tasks that are somehow collected and evaluated by the teacher as well, like unit reviews or quizzes. That misunderstanding on the concept of helping a partner when doing peer assessment in fact brings pressure to students as it was observed by the teacher-researcher when students had to say out loud the number of mistakes their partners had made in a task. Sometimes, the teacher elicited the number of correct answers and students who reported a low number of mistakes reported in a clear and loud voice as congratulating their partners, whereas those reporting a high number of mistakes tended to cough up the answer as if they were ashamed of putting their classmate on the spot.

Boud (1980) offers a great alternative to tackle the issue above when he states that Peer Assessment is where students use criteria and apply standards to appraise the production of their classmates. If students focus on the criteria, the feeling of “betraying” their peer disappears or at least it’s reduced. During my observations of students when doing peer assessment, it was evident that using clear criteria by means of rubrics or checklists made it easier for students to evaluate their peers work. Likewise, the student who is assessed comes to terms with his/her peer’s assessment more easily.

When done correctly, peer assessment can bring many benefits to students Zariski (1996), Race (1998) and others have documented that student get a feeling of ownership of the assessment process which improves motivation. Also, the fact of cooperating when self-assessing helps

students see mistakes as opportunities to grow rather than failures encouraging them to try harder next time they are challenged by a task.

Below, and in order to offer a complete view of peer-assessment as a co-constructed concept by the participants of this study, it's necessary to break down their ideas in subcategories.

**Subcategory 1: It's culturally difficult to peer-assess but it's democratic and empowering.**

The first subcategory was one of the toughest for students to express. The data collected through the different instruments showed that students are fully aware of the difficulty it entails to tell another person how they did in certain tasks and activities. The main difficulty lays on the fact that students did not feel, at the beginning the power or authority to assess or even correct a classmate. However, once they viewed peer assessment from the other end, placing themselves as the receivers of feedback from their peers, it was easier. Later they agreed that having to face a peer might cause some problems between them.

An explanation on this issue could be given through a characteristic that students openly defined: cultural interference. Students mentioned that peer-assessment had some interference, in their opinion, from our Latino culture. Conversely students tended to associate English speaking cultures as more blunt in peer-assessment practices

“It's hard and it's our context, isn't it? It's the culture of “hey, aren't we friends?” St 9 Focus Group, Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

“It's something that transcends and becomes cultural...Here in Colombia, people say: hey, why don't you let a little mistake go by? St 1 Focus Group, Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

“I think it’s cultural, we are too lenient, but this is the Centro Colombo Americano and in the American culture if something is wrong it’s wrong and they give each other frank feedback”

St 10 Focus Group, Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Students feel this way and appeal to prior experiences to justify their ideas. However, some teachers are reluctant to introduce peer-assessment not only due to the cultural component, but also due concerns about the validity and reliability of peer-assessments. Lack of validity and reliability will undoubtedly result in inaccurate assessments (Swanson et al. 1991).

Another characteristic of peer assessment that emerged through this case study research is “democratic”; students see the possibility of making decisions when participating in peer-assessment. Traditionally, assessment has been placed on the teacher’s corner but students have freedom to use peer-assessment when the teacher is “not near” St 11 Questionnaire 2, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Indeed, student’ decision making is deemed democratic as they get to determine what is well done and what is not. This rings true when the teacher doesn’t provide students with a rubric or a checklist.

“We can be better together, it’s kind of democratic, especially when we do it in groups because we make decisions (sic) about what things are good or wrong. St 9. Focus group. Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Finally, as a logical consequence, students related this democratic characteristic of peer-assessment and a couple of students went on saying that peer-assessment is empowering.

Interestingly, one of the students who mentioned this feature of peer-assessment does not agree

with using it in class, but still manages to see its empowering nature as it requires responsibility with themselves and with one another.

“I don’t think it is usefull (useful) at all, i prefer working with someone that knows how to speak English fluently and perfectly. But i admit it's empowering because it gives me responsibility in class with my classmates”. St 11. Questionnaire 2, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

“If one is not one hundred percent empowered peer-assessment won’t be effective” St 10. Focus group. Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Giving power to students to monitor each other progress, creates more self-oriented and determined learners, not only in the field of EFL but in other fields as well. Giving students the opportunity to assess each other can improve students' critical thinking skills and serve them to acquire a lifelong learning skill (Villamil et al., 1996)

That final comment shows an aspect of peer assessment that gives place to a whole new subcategory and it is feedback, the ultimate stage of peer-assessment.

### **Subcategory 2: Be loving but assertive**

Giving feedback brings an altogether different set of characteristics that students constructed during the learning process documented through this research. It became notorious that students’ assessment of their peers was very accurate in most the cases. During my observations I noticed that students were demanding as they included many details about their peers’ performance in their written, unnamed reports. Nevertheless, when students had to sit face to face they struggled to be upfront and one hundred percent honest with their peers.

In order to help students pave the way on how face to face feedback was to be given, students were asked to come up with a few guidelines to give feedback to the posts made on the online learning community. Students then came up with a slide that collected that first group of guidelines

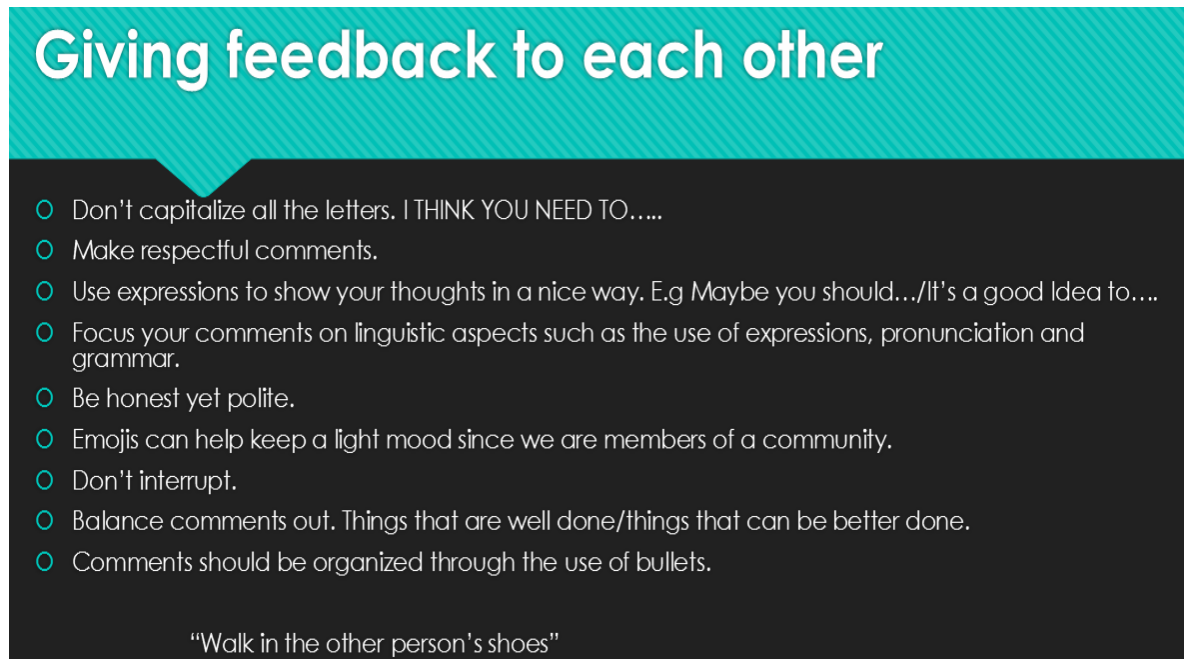


Figure 5: Guidelines to give feedback online

Students' collaborative effort resulted in very interesting data that can help teachers promote best practices when inviting students to assess their classmates. Students mentioned how important respect is. This refers not only to the message per se, but also to how the message is delivered. Interestingly, they recommend one be careful with the use of capital letters, as it might seem a bit harsh to receive feedback whose words are all capitalized.

These guidelines show something that was later seen in face to face peer-assessment. Taking into account students were mentioning the best procedures to assess peers on the online learning community, they showed a glimpse of the importance of body language.

However, since body language is not noticeable on an online learning community, students included the use of emojis as a way to help convey messages in a friendlier way.

Finally, a proverb was translated in order to show the socio-affective component of peer-assessment. Students agreed that a golden principle to give feedback is to “walk in the other person’s shoes” when asked to expand on this, students mentioned that feedback needs to be done with love; “the idea is to help your partner improve, not to destroy him or make him feel you are better than him” St 6 Voice note July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Another student even said, “para que el feedback funcione, éste tiene que ser de una manera decente y respetuosa, hay que hacerlo con cariño.” (For feedback to work, it has to be done in a decent and respectful way, it has to be done in a loving way” St 5 Focus Group, Aug 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Providing feedback in a loving way doesn’t mean that students must pass up mistakes their classmates make, but to show a polite attitude when giving feedback. In fact, it’s a great moment to remember that not only linguistic aspects are evaluated, and some of the more meaningful conversations regarding peer-assessment were geared toward improving confidence and motivation. Brown (2004) mentions that socio-affective peer assessment can help students identify mental or emotional impediments to be solved in order to improve learning.

Being polite when giving feedback also refers to how much time the person takes to explain his or her peers how they performed in a given class activity or online task. Rushing feedback or not giving the person enough time to process what has been said. In a study done about peer-assessment by Piech and others (2013) and interesting finding about time is

mentioned. The researchers found something called a “time sweet spot” which refers to the ideal time a person should take when assessing a peer’s work. They found out that 30 minutes, to assess a written text was ideal under some circumstances. Likewise, there must be a time sweet spot to give feedback, and although this must be much more difficult to measure given the circumstances of each task, it would be an interesting topic for further research.

The final component of this subcategory has to do with assertiveness. One of the reasons why some people reject the notion of peer-assessment has to do with the lack of authority or assertiveness some learners might display. No matter how much freedom is given to students regarding peer-assessment, it has been determined that, setting crystal-clear evaluation criteria for students can improve the reliability thus the assertiveness of peer feedback (Omelicheva et al, 2005)

It was evident, from the data collected that students prefer when their peers are clear and somehow firm when reporting assessment. One of the students mentioned that:

“feedback Works when it’s concrete and specific, when they tell you, you have to improve this or that) St1 Focus Group, Aug 25th, 2017.

According to Brown (2004), students need to be trained so they can show assertiveness when assessing each other. So, it is crucial students can keep a balance between assertiveness and being polite for peer assessment to work better and that entails bearing in mind our tone of voice, eye contact and gestures.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter presents the main conclusions of the research based on the findings; the implications of the study for students, EFL teachers, the institution where this research was developed, and the Colombian society. Also the limitations of the study; and finally some suggestions for further research are presented.

#### Conclusions

For starters, I would like to say that this research experience has led me to different conclusions. First, it offered me the chance of applying what I had learned in my master's program in regard to research. Also, it allowed me to go beyond my role as a teacher and somehow, relinquish my power as the person in charge of assessment in the classroom. In other words, my students were given the power to define the concepts of self and peer-assessment and their voices were compiled in this study.

The research objective of the study was document students' co-construction of self and peer-assessment as they engaged in such practices in class and while working on an online learning community that is used to complement the course project according to the syllabus at Centro Colombo Americano. Initially, the preliminary survey showed that students had clarity in the basic nature of peer and self-assessment but there were some gaps and misunderstandings as well. The data that emerged led me to find out two main categories (students' views self and peer-assessment) and five subcategories in total.

The subcategories of self-assessment offered a comprehensive view of aspects of self-assessment that are sometimes left out in the theoretical framework that encompasses this



practice. The first subcategory shows the usefulness of self-assessment, first due to the fact that students most of the times outnumber the teacher; in that sense, it's very fruitful for students to be able to assess their performance, ability and learning process in an accurate way.

The second subcategory documented in this research advocates for the constant application of self-assessment in our learning contexts. In the traditional schools, self-assessment happened once a cycle most of the times, but the participants of this research call for a more frequent inclusion of this practice in our classes.

The final subcategory, collects student-generated characteristics that can help learners obtain the best possible results when doing self-assessment. Students characterized ideal self-assessment as short, thought provoking, transferable to other contexts and measurable through peers' performance. It is really interesting to think about the chance of transferring healthy self – assessment practices to other fields, as a teacher and as a citizen of the world I am sure it would yield great benefits.

On the other hand, participants went on to define peer-assessment. They saw peer-assessment as a community practice in which values such as respect, honesty and assertiveness are crucial. From this category emerged to subcategories that somehow set the guidelines to empower students to give feedback to each other and invite classes to participate in what they define as the democratic activity of assessing their peers.

### **Implications**

The first set of implications of this study concerns the participants who worked so well and eagerly to express their voice in the co-construction of self and peer-assessment. Participants have understood that they can be active agents and assessing their own learning process. They

know they don't always need to be in the presence of a teacher to ascertain whether their performance is good or not because they can resort to their own assessment or even to that of their peers.

For EFL teachers this study can serve as an invitation to engage in serious, meaningful conversations with students to reach consensus on what self and peer-assessment really mean, and the unlimited benefits these assessment practices offer. Likewise, this study is an invitation to place the student in the center of the learning and assessing process, trusting that in time they will find the best way to create valid and reliable ways of assessing themselves and others. Finally, this is an invitation for teachers to relinquish the power that assessment gives them and opening up to what students want to learn and assess.

For Centro Colombo Americano this study can serve as a way of reassuring their call to give power to students to peer and self-assess, but it also raises a voice of warning about the dangers of assuming that everybody views these assessment practices as they do. This study also invites the CCA to include their students in conversations that are geared toward improving assessment practices and why not, parts the curriculum as well. Finally, for the CCA this could be an opportunity to see online learning communities as a very useful tool to help enhance how we communicate with our students today; it is not just about letting them know how well or poorly they performed but it's about developing a more meaningful relationship in which students can help each other and the institution improve.

Finally, this study can help a society that has depended on leaders in the education and social fields to tell them whether or not they are doing things well. We should self-assess our

performance as students, learners, citizens all the time so we can co-construct a more honest, assertive and in general a better society.

### **Limitations of the study**

The first limitation of the study was the fact that sometimes students missed class and that pushed back some of the data collection moments. At some points, I felt I had to devote long parts of the class to collect data correctly.

The second limitation has to do with the lack of a better sound recording device. Sometimes it was uncomfortable for students to have to get close to the recording device so their voices could be heard loud and clear.

The third limitation has to do with all the space voice notes take. A couple of times, it was hard for me to store all the notes in my hard disk, so I had to send them to my e-mail and then took a long time organizing and labeling them properly.

The final limitation has to do with the size of this research. What students co-constructed in class was so valuable that somehow I feel the online learning community could have been more carefully assessed and taken advantage of to gather more information.

### **Further research**

I propose more research be done in order to keep documenting students' co-construction of assessment. This study was done in a language institute with mostly adult learners. It would be interesting to see how younger populations take on the responsibility of assessing themselves and their peers.

Likewise, more assessment on online learning communities could yield interesting findings since nowadays most learning process are either technologically mediated or simply online based.

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## Appendix 1

Dear Students,

My name is Fabián Cruz and I am on my last semester of a Master's program on second language teaching. Through this consent form I want to let you know that you are cordially invited to be part of a research project that seeks to describe your opinions, attitudes and application of peer and self-assessment activities at Centro Colombo Americano (CCA). The main purpose of this study is to focus on assessment practices and reflect on them through an online learning community and in our face to face sessions.

In order to collect data for this study different methods and tools will be used. You will be asked to answer some questionnaires regarding your perceptions and opinions about assessment.

Similarly, some of our assessment moments in class will be recorded in order to see how assessment is carried out by you and your classmates. Finally, excerpts from your online posts will be part of this study as evidence of your co- construction of peer and self-assessment concepts.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you will be able to drop out of it at any point you decide. Also it is essential you know that your contribution to this project will not have an impact on your grade so I guarantee that your opinions will not affect your overall process. Also, you can rest assured on the fact that your personal information will not be disclosed at any time, but pseudonyms will be used when there is need to reference individual contributions to this research in the thesis, publications and events.

The development of this research will not entail any risks for you as a person or student but will bring about concrete benefits as your reflection on these assessment practices we hold at the CCA may help you strengthen your learning process.

If you agree to participate

in this project please sign below, and if you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me personally or by writing to my e-mail address: [fabiancruzprofesor@gmail.com](mailto:fabiancruzprofesor@gmail.com)

Fabián Cruz

Master's candidate at UPN

Senior teacher at Centro Colombo Americano

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the focus groups recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 2**

Bogotá, March 2016

Luz Libia Rey

Academic Coordinator

Centro Colombo Americano.

Dear Luz Libia, through this letter, I am requesting your permission to conduct a qualitative study case research project that aims at checking students' perceptions on self and peer-assessment. Such study will take place at the North Branch and the block in which it will be conducted will be the Challenge 1-3 Block.

You can rest assured that students will be given a consent form to check whether or not they want to participate in the project and all the findings and conclusions will be shared with the institution. This research project will be my Master's degree thesis as I am currently enrolled in a Master's program on second language teaching at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

Please if you have any questions don't hesitate to contact me at my phone (3125649942), my e-mail ([fabiancruzprofesor@gmail.com](mailto:fabiancruzprofesor@gmail.com)) or personally. If you allow me to conduct my research project please sign this consent form.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3

#### Adultos English Program

#### Challenge 5 - Final Evaluation

Student: Maria Jose Amaya Farfan

Teacher: Edgar Fabian Cruz Suarez

Course: CH5-8AM8AM-CN-OCT2017-01

Cycle: 2017-10-17

<b>Task Accomplishment</b>	<b>VERY GOOD</b>
<p>The student completed most of the tasks of the course. He or she was very committed to the completion of the course tasks suggested by the teacher as he or she handed in most of them on time and followed up on them by making corrections, adding new information and in general improving them. Student worked on and submitted most of the entries of the project of this course: a professional portfolio.</p>	
<b>Language</b>	<b>VERY GOOD</b>
<p>The student uses most of the grammar from the course correctly by producing complete statements, questions, and answers both orally and in written. The student makes a few mistakes and usually self-corrects them. The student incorporates the vocabulary from the course when he or she speaks and writes. He or she grasps information from different types of listening activities. He or she recycles structures and expressions learned in previous courses and incorporates the ones learned in this course. He or she also writes paragraphs making sure to organize and express ideas clearly.</p>	
<b>Communication</b>	<b>VERY GOOD</b>
<p>Most of the times, the student communicates and interacts with peers confidently using strategies (Really? I am like that myself, I am just the opposite, wouldn't it be nice if, It says here Why not? I wonder if you could be happy to, I guess that's true, If you ask me) conversation strategies appropriate for the level to ask a rhetorical question, to introduce a contrasting statement, to establish common ground, to propose a solution, to share information from an article, to defend a position, to ask for a favor, to express willingness to help, to validate an opposing opinion, to call attention to your own opinion in controlled and spontaneous interaction. He or she usually takes the risk to initiate and keep the conversation going and resorts to strategies to overcome lack of vocabulary. He or she usually expresses his/her point of view and supports it. He or she agrees and disagrees with peers in a polite way and always tries to negotiate with them. In general, the student has incorporated some new and advanced vocabulary and expressions from the level to his/her speaking.</p>	
<b>Learning</b>	<b>VERY GOOD</b>
<p>The student sometimes prepares and reviews his/her classes following his/her teachers suggestions. The student resorts to some technological tools to comply with the tasks of the course and sometimes reflects on his/her own weaknesses, strengths, personal goals, and future plans. The student follows and uses strategies to listen to their peers and draw conclusions together as a group, personalize grammar, evaluate arguments and theories, show understanding of a writers point of view and select information that is false, memorize chunks of language, and rehearse to prepare for a presentation.</p>	
<b>Attitude and classroom culture</b>	<b>VERY GOOD</b>
<p>The student is an effective team player as he or she cooperates and contributes to tasks that are assigned in couples or in groups. He or she usually has a positive attitude towards the activities proposed by the teacher and all in all is self-critical and reflective towards issues and topics that are important for his/her own growth as a professional and as a person.</p>	
<p>Comments: Maria José, you need to give yourself more credit for the things you do. Your speech was really well done and you managed to present it well despite your evident nervousness. You are a hardworking devoted student. Review reported speech to avoid making mistakes with this structure.</p>	

Absences	2



C – Every other class

F – Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**8. In your opinion, how effective is peer assessment? Why?**

A- Very effective

B – Somewhat effective

C - Ineffective

D- Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**9. Do you do peer assessment in class?**

A- Yes

B- No

**10. How often do you do peer assessment in class?**

A – After every activity

D – Once a week

B – Every class

E – Once a month

C – Every other class

F – Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Do you use the online community to self or peer assessment?**

A –No. Why?

B-Yes. How?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**12. If your answer to the previous questions is yes, what is your opinion on that experience?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**13. Do you have any suggestions about how to improve self-assessment and peer-assessment processes?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 5**  
**Questionnaire about self-assessment**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your education level?
3. What socio economical level (estrato) do you belong to?
4. How many courses have you taken at the CCA?
5. How do your teachers normally assess your performance?
6. In your opinion, how effective is that assessment technique?
7. Why do you think that?
8. How often have your teachers evaluated your performance?
9. Do you normally agree with your teacher's concept of your performance? Explain your answer
10. In your opinion, what is self-assessment?
11. Do you do self-assessment of your learning process? How?
12. What aspects do you take into account when you self-assess?
13. How often should you self-assess your learning process?
14. Is it necessary to see others' work before you evaluate yourself? Explain
15. Is it a good idea to share your self-assessment conclusions with others?
16. Write three adjectives to define self-assessment.
17. Do you have any suggestions about how to improve self-assessment processes?



**Appendix 6****Questionnaire about peer assessment**

1. In your opinion, what is peer assessment?
2. Have you done peer assessment in class?
3. How often do you do peer-assessment in class?
4. How often should you do peer-assessment in class?
5. In your opinion, how useful is peer-assessment?
6. Have you ever used an online community to do self or peer-assessment?
7. If your answer to the previous question is affirmative, what was your experience like?
8. Do you have any suggestions about how to improve peer-assessment processes?
9. Define peer-assessment in three words?
10. When should be peer-assessment be used? Be specific
11. How should a classmate give you feedback? Include ideas about body language, voice tone etc

Appendix 7

