

SCENERIES FOR DREAMING AND LIVING.  
AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION THROUGH  
LIFE HISTORIES IN GRANJA ESCUELA AMALAKA, TEJIENDO VIDA  
AND MAESTRA VIDA SCHOOLS

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*Faviola*

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*Diego*

*This project is dedicated to*

*My God, my parents, my brothers, my sisters, my teachers, my grandparents, my cousins, my uncles, my aunts, my nephews, my sisters in law, my brothers in law, my little girl and my friends.*

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*Andrea*

## ABSTRACT

This research project was developed at three Alternative Schools in the Department of Cauca: Granja Escuela Amalaka, Corporación Maestra Vida and Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida, which shows the way this kind of education encourages the students' learning process when offering meaningful sceneries for knowledge. We developed our research project based on the Life histories of the creators and their own schools, taking as reference the objectives proposed by authors like: Celestin Freinet, Paulo Freire, Estanislao Zuleta, María Montessori. Bearing in mind these noble intentions of these precursors, we hope that this research motivates teachers to seek for alternative perspectives of teaching that profit the integral life, which is a salient constituent to shape profitable life histories.

Este proyecto de investigación fue desarrollado en tres escuelas alternativas del departamento del Cauca: Granja Escuela Amalaka, Corporación Maestra Vida e Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida, el cual muestra la manera como este tipo de educación fomenta el proceso educativo de los estudiantes al ofrecer escenarios significativos para el conocimiento. Para el desarrollo de este trabajo de investigación nos basámos en las historias de vida de los creadores y sus respectivas escuelas, tomando como referente los objetivos de una educación alternativa planteados por autores como Celestin Freinet, Paulo Freire, Estanislao Zuleta, María Montessori. Teniendo en cuenta la noble intención de este tipo de precursores, esperamos que los propósitos de esta investigación puedan motivar a los maestros a buscar perspectivas alternativas de enseñanza que beneficien una vida integral, teniendo en cuenta las experiencias de alumnos y maestros, lo cual es un componente esencial para formar fructíferas historias de vida.

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## A LITTLE DREAM TO CREATE A SCHOOL

This story took place in the Hacienda Puente Alta. This place is located in the West of the Department of Cauca, close to El Tambo. The principal founder was Aidé, a person who has shown motivation and enthusiasm to create an alternative school. There are a lot of trees over there and they have been witnesses to the founding of Maestra Vida School. People there have myths the same as other rural schools and isolated regions. They have listened to the witch and the elf in the trees, some of them are: *la madre monte, la mama de la madre monte, el hijo de la madre monte, el hermano de la madre monte, la mata de guadua, la desvanecedora, el abrazo de la muerte, el árbol caído, el árbol que habla, la mata de guagua and el níspero del Japón.*

A long time ago, in the forest there were some Indian communities and a lot of animals that made the place a beautiful one to live in. Aide was a girl and she gave her first steps in the forest called Hacienda Puente Alta. She grew up with the most important values and the sense of commitment with people and think about the future generations. She was very respectful and as soon as she got into the forest she asked for the permission of la madre monte, who was the queen of that place. This was one of the best stories we heard as soon as we visited the region. Everything was quiet, everything breathed silence and Aide went with her friends to play on the ground. Aide was a smart girl and she studied in a traditional school but unfortunately she was uncomfortable with the educational system she lived in the classrooms. She wanted a natural school, an alternative one, in which she could work for life, serving others. She decided to study in a religious school to try something different; then she went to the *Normal* school, where she graduated, thinking that she wanted to create a school. She learnt a lot of pedagogical principles and decided to put them into practice, teaching in some other schools.

From her long process as a teacher, she knew that the traditional system had to change some things, so she decided to make a team with Claritza, an important friend and the woodcutter, a person who lived in the forest. They asked for the permission of La madre Monte to create a school and she authorized them with the condition that they took care of her family in the forest. They accepted immediately and started to explore the forest more deeply. They wanted to change Government perspectives about education and apply their own alternative one which they would create. When they started to walk they found la

Mata de guadua y la desvanecedora who told them to take care of the different illness they could get in the forest. For their protection they decided to spread la desvanecedora on their bodies and they continued walking. They were very sociable and respectful with everything they found in the forest. In the middle of the forest they met the bear-hand tree that gave them a hand sowing coffee, lemon, bananas and other plants, since they thought that the school could be an agricultural one.

When they harvested the first coffee, they decided to sell it and buy the main things to create the school. La Mata de guadua offered them her help if they wanted it and they created the first classrooms with the Mata de guadua family. They kept going, discovering new things like a tree called the death hug. He offered them his energy to attract the sun to the forest and to settle its hold on the Maestra Vida School. El Arbol Caído y la Madre Monte's family advised them to sow more trees in order to get water and beautiful natural surroundings for the school. The witch and the elf offered their help, as did some Indian communities that lived close by and also some parents who wanted their children to study in a natural school.

In this way, everything was done and they started to work with the alternative pedagogy of Freinet. Children started to arrive to the school and they were motivated to take care of nature and to work for the preservation of the school. Indian communities, parents, children and teachers watered those grounds with their work and they continued sowing trees everywhere, in order to save the planet and to have a clean school. They had mingas every day at first, and then they decided to work every Sunday. They used guadua to build the auditorium, the restaurant, the offices and some classrooms. Aidé married the woodcutter and they worked together every single day of their lives. Now she is a teacher of Freinet's pedagogy and her husband is an arts and crafts teacher. He is always teaching his students to work with wood. They have made flowers pot, rings, motorbikes, horses, buckets, and cups among others. Claritza was a Maestra Vida's teacher a long time and now she is working in another alternative school. We could say that now Maestra Vida has her own seeds: children and they were the reason why teacher Aidé and her team had the initiative to create a school, a school called CORPORACION EDUCATIVA MAESTRA VIDA and they are living happily ever after.

*Roland*



## INTRODUCTION

*"It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education" (Albert Einstein).*

Taking into account the reflection of our own life histories in terms of education, we realized that sometimes conventional education did not pay close attention neither to specific problems that students had to face during their learning process, nor to an alternative education in order to improve the educational processes at schools. For this reason, we decided to inquire about the alternative education given in some educational institutions, which seems to make emphasis, mainly, on humanism and through the same line of thought today we present our project called "Sceneries for dreaming and living. *An ethnographical perspective of alternative education through life histories in Granja Escuela Amalaka, Tejiendo Vida and Maestra Vida schools*"; these kinds of schools offer a different way of teaching and learning which implied that students could build other life histories; an appropriate condition of learning can become in sceneries for dreaming and living.

In this sense, we chose three specific schools that work with alternative education: Granja Escuela Amalaka (Totoró), Tejiendo Vida (Popayán) and Maestra Vida (El Tambo) where we developed our research project based on the founders' life histories. Thus, we raised a main question in order to focus our research project: which were the founders' main reasons for creating an alternative school? With this in mind, we devised a general objective which is to comprehend through the founders' life histories, the reasons for applying and developing an alternative education at Granja Escuela Amalaka, Corporación Maestra Vida and Tejiendo Vida schools in Totoró, El Tambo and Popayan. Likewise, some specific objectives were developed: The identification of the educational processes (practical and conceptual orientations) in the alternative education at schools, the description of the socio-cultural contexts of an alternative education at schools, identifying the difficulties this kind of schools face on the educational processes, as well as the way the English language is taught and adapted to this kind of alternative pedagogy. In short, to explore in a deeper way the beginning of these institutions, their precursors and their expectations; and the most relevant ethnographic and social aspects that influenced this project as well. Hence, this research looked for alternatives of education in English language teaching and the other subjects as well, where teachers, students, family and educational contexts are closely related in order to create a connection between life

experiences and learning processes, where students are the real participants in their learning process and in that way, the teachers change their figure of being the one who has the whole knowledge and instead of it, they become a guide who makes the learning process interesting, so, both teachers and students enjoy learning and getting knowledge through the experiences inside and outside the school.

In order to develop this project, we carried out observations, readings, seminars, recordings and interviews to the founders, some students and teachers. Consequently, the interviews and all the information accumulated that we used were analyzed through reflection articles, and content charts. Later on, more specific examples were taken through the research project. Additionally, we can say that those schools have similar characteristics such as a particular environment that plays a remarkable function to develop an alternative way of teaching and learning. On the other hand, it is necessary to mention that the final report is divided into six chapters: Chapter 1: Learning from the context; Chapter 2, Conceptual orientation, Chapter 3: Discovering realities, Chapter 4: Overcoming obstacles, Chapter 5: Sceneries fro dreaming and living: How problems for a few became into solutions for many, Chapter 6: Final considerations: Alternative Education allows students to explore and experience their surroundings.

In the wake of significant concern and frustration surrounding our current public school system, forms of alternative education continue to increase and abound. Many parents are dissatisfied with the quality of the education their children receive in the public school system. Others may have religious or political reasons to seek alternative schooling. All these groups often turn to one of four types of nontraditional alternative schools, home schools, charter schools, and independent schools.

Nontraditional schools are just that a form of alternative education with nontraditional methods. They often teach in a radically different manner, sometimes without using grades or the typical teacher resources, such as rubrics, lesson plans, and worksheets. It is difficult to place all of these schools in one category because they vary so differently based on their individual philosophies on education. Often, parents who place their children in these institutions do so because they agree with the school's educational philosophy. Other forms of alternative education, known as independent schools, are often more traditional in their methods, but the worldview of their curriculum differs significantly from

that of the public school system. Religious schools are an example. While their methods are similar, their content has a religious element in almost all aspects of each course. Teachers build religious elements into their lesson plans, and teacher resources include ideas and worksheets for incorporating religion in the classroom. Parents who place their students in these schools often do so for one of two reasons (or both) - either they agree with the school's worldview, or they feel that the religious schools offer a more rigorous, and therefore superior, education.<sup>1</sup>



With this in mind and taking as references these alternative schools in the Department of Cauca, we could observe how much the Alternative Education has influenced the students' life histories and we realized how this pedagogy enriched our experiences in the role as teachers. By means of this pedagogy, we also experienced how humanism is applied in those sceneries of learning; therefore, we consider we learnt about a new perspective regarding to human relationships.

Consequently, one of the most significant motivations to perform this research project was to go beyond our pedagogical knowledge. Since, having the lack of this aspect, we feel that there is emptiness in our learning processes. Talking about emptiness, we noticed through our lives and other people's experiences that education can cover more than academic issues, so that, students can have an integral education. That's why parents, teachers and students should be linked with the purpose of getting a complete education. Henceforth, students create a natural connection between life experiences and learning processes, which facilitates to construct meaningful life histories.

With these noble intentions, we elaborated this project to work on other questions too: why were Granja Escuela Amalaka, Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida and Corporación Maestra Vida created? What are their main purposes? And who are their founders?

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<sup>1</sup> (Our translation) Some ideas taken from <http://www.educationrevolution.org/> (04-02-11)

## CHAPTER 1

### LEARNING FROM THE CONTEXT

Alternative Education is a proposal that looks for different strategies for teaching and learning not only at Colombian schools but around the world. In Colombia the concept of alternative education has had a great impact in some schools, because this concept breaks the idea of a non-adequate educational system and proposes an appropriate environment at schools, especially in the relationship among students-families-teachers-school. Teachers should assume their roles in a suitable way where the main focus is that the student can be seen as a human being able to think and feel. In the Department of Cauca, we can find three institutions that are very concerned about this, they are: Granja Escuela Amalaka, Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida, and Corporación Maestra Vida.

#### **1.1 Granja Escuela Amalaka**, “Todos enseñamos a todos. Todos aprendemos juntos”.

An institution created in Popayan in 1991 as a proposal of non-formal education, since then Amalaka has been trying to transform the vertical and authoritarian relationships of the traditional school. This school is located at the outskirts of Popayan in the township of Totoró, this school has six hectares where students can develop different projects such as farming of organic coffee, sugar cane, fruits; also animals such as cows, horses, hens, rams, what's more natural and reforesting forests; productive projects such as: school vegetable garden, coffee, bakery, workshop and printing, imitation jewelry, beekeeping, and alternative technologies like digester, dry latrine, and solar dryer.

This school has as the main purpose to offer an integral education with quality that can be useful for the present and future of children and young people. They work based on the principles and educational techniques of Celestin Freinet, a French educationalist who promoted a popular type of education motivating the school for the work. It means a school interested in qualifying people with a humanistic formation. In Amalaka, children are

educated in several projects and workshops, where they put into practice the theoretical, technical and practical thing.<sup>2</sup>

This institution is based on some Philosophical principles such as:<sup>3</sup>

- ✓ The school must be the space where the child discovers his/her vocation and develop his/her aptitudes for life.
- ✓ Living and learning are integrated in the relationship family – community – school – child – teacher.
- ✓ To come into contradictions and conflicts with oneself and others are part of the process.
- ✓ Knowledge is not transmitted but it is produced.
- ✓ Social and human values of the popular education such as: participation, cooperation, autonomy, solidarity, dialogue, and speech are encouraged.
- ✓ Education has to be developed in a kind environment surrounded by confidence, self-esteem, respect and the acceptance of the other, with the purpose of reminding child his/her humanity constantly.
- ✓ In a natural environment, children are encouraging to the created work, freely chosen and assumed through practical, intellectual, artistic and spiritual activities.



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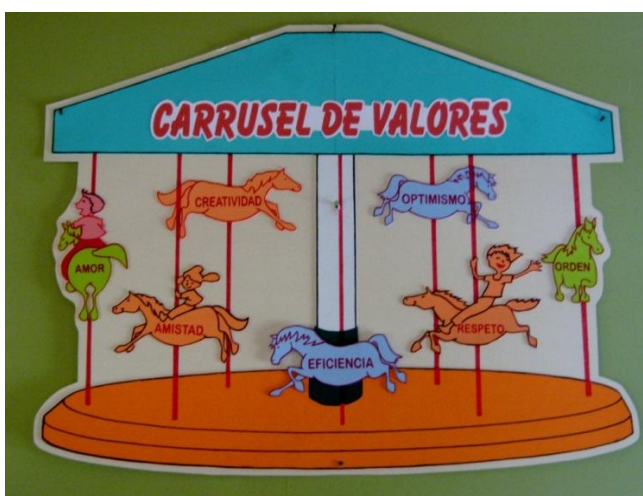
<sup>2</sup>(Our translation) Information taken from Amalaka website [http://amalaka.com.co/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=10&Itemid=32\(10-04-11\)](http://amalaka.com.co/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10&Itemid=32(10-04-11))

<sup>3</sup>(Our translation) Taken from [http://amalaka.com.co/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=32\(10-03-11\)](http://amalaka.com.co/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=32(10-03-11))

## 1.2 *Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida*, “En tejiendo vida está la educación de nuestros sueños: Formar niños felices e inteligentes”.

Ten years ago (2000) this institution was born, a “dream” like its principal Rosalba Villamarín calls it, an institution based on values and ethics, where the most significant is that children there can think, feel and act. Like its name, this institution has the main goal to weave the life of the children who study there.

Values are instilled in children’s lives, values such as self-esteem, gratitude, justice, honesty, tolerance, responsibility, love, peace, respect, friendship, and commitment.



This institution is located in the southern of Popayan (at the outskirts); it is a place where children feel comfortable enough, surrounded by green zones, animals (Dogs, monkeys, parrots, hamsters, guinea pigs, wild dog, turtles, sheep, peacock), farming, and quietness. In this school a child is seen as a human being able to think, to feel and to act;

they follow “*El camino de la vida*” (*The life path*)<sup>4</sup> where education is based on words, feelings, intentions, effort, attention, concentration, behavior, and living ways. it also carries out projects like: *A wonderful place, This is me, the brightness of the soul (Christmas), The little Colombian, Defending children of the planet, Philosophy for kids, and Children’s gastronomy.*

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<sup>4</sup>According to its principal Rosalba Villamarin says in her educational proposal.

**1.3. Corporación Maestra Vida, “El mundo es una casita, muy redondita, muy redondita”**

In 1.996 Corporación Maestra Vida started, in the east of Popayan, a township called El Tambo. This institution is located six kilometers away from that township. This is an educational Project approved and financed by La Comunidad Castilla La Mancha, thanks to the support of SODEPAZ. The school has been built based on a handcrafted style, made of giant bamboo, with bedrooms to lodge 32 people, with catering service, a big hall, animals (Rabbits, pigs, ducks, geese, cows, birds), green zones for recreation, ecological path, landscapes, fresh air to recreate and calm the spirit. This institution has had a direct impact in some Veredas such as La Muyunga, La Laguna, El Tablón, Loma de Astudillo, Río Sucio, Chisquio, Cuatro Esquinas, Puerto Rico, Puente Alta and El Tambo itself.



Based on alternative techniques Maestra Vida has as main goals<sup>5</sup>:

- ✓ To promote the human and agro-ecological development of the region, encouraging education and investigation in order to generate productive, environmental and intercultural alternatives in the community
- ✓ To support rural women in the process of education, training for improving their performance in the development of the family and the community
- ✓ To maintain an agro-forest unit as a referent for the environmental community education.
- ✓ To encourage in children, and young people the sense of enjoying knowledge, autonomous thought, the creative doing, all this to keep the happiness at the school.

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<sup>5</sup>(Our translation)This information is taken from Maestra Vida website <http://www.maesvida.edu.co> and interviews done there.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

#### 2.1 TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

The traditional school considers that the best way of preparing a student is to shape his intelligence, his ability of solving problems, his possibilities of attention and effort. Transmission of knowledge and culture has great value, as they are considered useful for helping the kid in the construction and formation of his personality.

At the very beginning, the traditional school represented a vital change in the style and the orientation of teaching. However, over time it has become a strict system, with no dynamism and has not been propitious enough for innovation. In traditional education sometimes it is possible to find several teachers who are complaining about their personal situations as teachers. It seems to be that they practice their profession like a kind of obligation without taking into account that their way of teaching is affecting the individual experience of each student. In other words, when they find obstacles they are used to criticize or complain about them instead of doing something that looks for a change or at least to contribute to solve the educational problems. Furthermore, some of them have a rude and indifferent behavior toward students. Hence, the students' life histories are being affected in many aspects, bearing in mind that these crucial experiences are going to mark the students' present and future. It does not mean that all teachers who work in the traditional schools have the same negative attitude because there are some teachers in these schools who love their profession and are doing a beautiful and hard job in order to help students to have an integral education. Unfortunately, those teachers who use an inappropriate way of teaching have left sad memories in some students. For this reason, some teachers have decided to create their own schools, where they can use a different method of teaching offering an alternative education. With this in mind, the main purpose of these founders is to create a school where students can experience an integral education based on humanism; in other words, this idea proposes an education that allows students to be seen like human beings. Besides, they want to have a place where it is possible to dream in order to achieve their goals regarding a new pedagogy with the purpose of improving the students' learning process.



Traditional Education transmits to the students many skills and standards of moral and social behavior of previous generations that permit them to get more educational progress taking into account the traditional schemes. The traditional system creates students that do not intrinsically value learning on its own but are only concerned with extrinsic motivators. Most students at school are not there to learn but to graduate based on grades. This is not the fault of the student but the result of the value-system and structure of the system. The traditional educational system promotes this value set that is damaging to the actual education of students. The learning itself is not what is important, nor is the self-improvement that comes as a result. Only the social and financial benefits of receiving a degree motivates those students that have had their views dominated by the system. The lack of instilling personal value into education for its own sake is another reason the traditional system is not appropriate.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Alternative Education is designed to meet the needs for all students who are not succeeding in the traditional setting. Students are provided with a variety of options that can lead to graduation and are supported by services for the student and their immediate family that are essential to success. Some alternative educational schools are considered the most appropriate in the research and it is very common at alternative schools<sup>7</sup>. For instance, Alternative Education offers another kind of education, in some cases it depends on the context by taking into account different methodologies that allow students to think for themselves; thus, they have the chance of creating their own ways of learning and interacting not only with their own classmates, but also with the teachers. These Educational proposals look for different strategies for teaching and learning not only at Colombian schools but also around the world. In Colombia the concept of alternative education has had a great impact in some schools, due to the fact this concept breaks the idea of a non-adequate educational system and proposes an appropriate environment at schools, especially in the relationship among students-families-teachers-school. Teachers should assume their roles in a suitable way where the main focus is that the student can be seen as a human being able to think and feel.

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<sup>6</sup>Taken from <http://es.scribd.com/doc/38418/An-Evaluation-of-the-Traditional-Education-System-by-Kevin-Bondelli>, (20-04-2011)

<sup>7</sup> Taken from <http://www.doe.in.gov/alted/altedlinkpg.html>, (20-04-2011)

## **2.2 EDUCATION AND HUMANISM AT SCHOOL**

We think that traditional education is based on statistics that mean results, results from the educational process, but unfortunately, not everybody agrees with those kinds of methods. The reasons could be that our society is looking for a more humanistic model of community and humanistic methods to learn at school, which can be found in the alternative education. The model followed by Amalaka is a meaningful model for our society because this school looks for more opportunities to be in community, opportunities to be more sociable, opportunities to get in touch with people, a close relationship among teachers and students and some others that make part of the daily life of the institution. In terms of traditional education, we can find a lot of buildings in our country around all the departments and cities of Colombia. We would like to talk about regular schools that follow the traditional education implemented by Government which first objective are grades that are reflected in terms of statistics, making people submissive to the same methods.

In order to develop this Project, it was necessary at first to be sure about what we were supposed to do at school. We considered that education has several currents, but it was not correct to start considering our knowledge as complete. As we chose to study Alternative Education in Granja Escuela Amalaka, we knew that Humanism was the main current in which this kind of education was based on. It was common to notice that teachers and students usually have a special treatment to each other, which showed us that human aspects go first and academic ones go in a second place.

Humanism is a school of thought that believes human beings are different from other species and possesses capacities not found in animals (Edwards, 1989). Humanists, therefore, give primacy to the study of human needs and interests. A central assumption is that human beings behave out of intentionality and values (Kurtz, 2000). This is in contrast to the beliefs of operant conditioning theorists who believe that all behavior is the result of the application of consequences or to the beliefs of cognitive psychologists who hold that the discovery of concepts or processing of information is a primary factor in human learning. Humanists also believe that it is necessary to study the person as a whole, especially as an individual grows and develops over the natural life. The study of the self, motivation, and goal-setting are also areas of special interest.

It is very significant to take into account that nowadays humanism and education play an essential role in human beings' behavior, especially at school. Teacher has become an advisor and has lost the word imposition in his profession. Students want to find a friend, someone who listens to them, someone who is always there. It is true that there is and maybe will always exist a great tension in the school between students and educators, but that is the challenge of the school applying humanism in the education.

“The work on affective factors has been greatly supported by humanism. Wang (2005) explains that humanism emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the human being and places the individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions at the forefront of all human developments. Affect is not one of the basic needs of human beings, but the condition and premise of the other physical and psychological activities. To Wang, educators should focus their efforts on the development of human values, the growth in self-awareness and in the understanding of others, the sensitivity to human feelings and emotions and the active student involvement in learning and in the way learning takes place. With regard to humanism, Stevick claims that "in a language course, success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom". Taken from *Guilian Wang* titled "*Humanistic Approach and Affective Factors in Foreign Language Teaching*" (May 2005, Volume 2, No.5, Serial No.17)

According to Gage and Berliner (1991) some basic principles of the humanistic approach that were used to develop the objectives are:

1. *Students will learn best what they want and need to know.* That is, when they have developed the skills of analyzing what is important to them and why as well as the skills of directing their behavior towards those wants and needs, they will learn more easily and quickly. Most educators and learning theorists would agree with this statement, although they might disagree on exactly what contributes to student motivation.
2. *Knowing how to learn is more important than acquiring a lot of knowledge.* In our present society where knowledge is changing rapidly, this view is shared by many educators, especially, by those from cognitive perspectives.

3. *Self-evaluation is the only meaningful evaluation of a student's work.* The emphasis here is on internal development and self-regulation. While most educators would likely agree that this is important, they would also advocate a need to develop a student's ability to meet external expectations. This meeting of external expectations runs counter to most humanistic theories.
4. *Feelings are as important as facts.* Much work from the humanistic view seems to validate this point and is one area where humanistic-oriented educators are making significant contributions to our knowledge base.
5. *Students learn best in a non-threatening environment.* This is one area where humanistic educators have had an impact on current educational practice. The orientation espoused today is that the environment should be psychologically and emotionally, as well as physically, non-threatening. However, there is some research that suggests that a neutral or even slightly cool environment is best for older, highly motivated students.<sup>8</sup>

The main objective of humanism applied to education is to provide a base for personal growth and development so that learning will continue throughout life in a self-directed way. We as teachers hope to be able to face on the difficulties we might find in our country and around the world, this is our job and the idea is to contribute in the appropriate way to students' well-being, reflecting this to their ordinary lives as human beings.

Humanism has helped education to evolve. Thanks to a more reflexive perspective about the world, man has increasingly been considered as human, real and complete; therefore, the humanism is an act of strengthening and reunion with his essence. The changes involved with these reflections have appeared thanks to a philosophical viewpoint of education, which looks for a more social human being taking into account his/her behavior with himself/herself and equals.

In the field of pedagogy, ideas and doctrines with a high humanistic level defined since the Renaissance a new character and value of education, which acquired since that moment qualities from the liberalism, realism and integrity. (García Fabela, 2004). These qualities are focused in the well-being of the student taking into account that social and spiritual

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<sup>8</sup>Taken from; Gage, N., & Berliner, D. (1991). *Educational psychology* (5th ed.). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin

issues were involved with the process of education. This is how, liberalism recognizes the student as the most significant part of his/her education as well as his/her authenticity as man; the realism also recognizes the environment where the student has interacted with as an important factor, and the integrity refers to the consideration of the student to exploit his/her capacities and develop all his/her potentialities.

Some authors agree with the tendency that should have the priority of making a student become a humanistic and reflexive person than a student full of knowledge. Consequently, this kind of pedagogy looks for the integral formation of the personality in order to develop in the student values as the equity, solidarity and tolerance, which encourages the respect for others in a reciprocal way.

### **2.3 INFLUENTIAL TENDENCIES IN EDUCATION**

Some authors mentioned in the entire degree project might be familiarized with some tendencies like Constructivism which is a theory based on observation and scientific study about how people learn. It is said that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In the classroom, the constructivist view of learning can point towards a number of different teaching practices. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing<sup>9</sup>. Another tendency is Positivism, a philosophical system that confines itself to the data of experience, excludes a priori or metaphysical speculations, and emphasizes the achievements of science. The term designates the philosophy of Auguste Comte, who held that human thought had passed inevitably through a theological stage into a metaphysical stage and was passing into a positive, or scientific, stage. Believing that the religious impulse would survive the decay of revealed religion, he projected a worship of mankind, in churches, calendar, and hierarchy<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, we also find Structuralism defined by psychology, as the study of the elements of consciousness. The idea is that conscious experience can be broken down into basic

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<sup>9</sup>Taken from <http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/constructivism/index.html>, (20-04-2011)

<sup>10</sup>Taken from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/471865/positivism>,(20-04- 2011)

conscious elements, much as a physical phenomenon can be viewed as consisting of chemical structures that can in turn be broken down into basic elements.

## **2.4 FREINET'S PEDAGOGY**

Education has been changing constantly, and nowadays it has greatly evolved, for this reason lot of people who suffered this educational system, thought and worked against this educational method. One of them was Celestin Freinet, who worked very hard against politics, governments, life styles, beliefs and so on; he contributed to the creation of the way of teaching at schools, he offered an alternative way of teaching and learning, a different education that involved every significant part of the students' life such as: Family, values, likes, nature and abilities. For Freinet, the most important thing was to create a great environment at school, where students could go to have fun and feel free learning and sharing with people like them, therefore the teacher started being seen as a leader who was also a friend, a man who did not know everything and moreover the students started trusting him; as a result, children could participate, speak, propose ideas and interact inside and outside the classroom.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Freinet's pedagogy based on cooperation is essential, since it foments the collective labor in a social group, and it generates a helpful pedagogy through the years and the experiences. Nevertheless, to fortify an alternative pedagogy it is primordial to take elements of the traditional one, with the purpose of taking advantage of it by means of feedback. In brief, cooperation is a significant factor in Freinet's pedagogy since it makes possible to improve it in order to analyze the way children behave in their environment, and so teaching them with a method which makes learners feel comfortable with their education basis in their own social context and the commitment they have in it.

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<sup>11</sup>Information taken according to Freinet techniques; Técnicas Freinet de la Escuela Moderna. Ed. Siglo XXI. México, 1976.

## CHAPTER 3

### DISCOVERING REALITIES



This research project started in eighth and ninth semester, in the Emphasis I subject where we formed a group of five people, and later two more joined this group, with a common interest for developing the degree project. During these two semesters, we established the main topic for doing the research, which was the alternative education in three schools in the Department of Cauca.

Taking into account that our research project is about understanding the educational processes at Alternative Education schools such as GRANJA ESCUELA AMALAKA, CORPORACIÓN MAESTRA VIDA and INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA TEJIENDO VIDA, as well as to comprehend the reasons of creating these alternative institutions, we have thought that the fact of having a natural contact with students and teachers from these schools was one of the most significant ways of achieving our purposes. With this in mind, we decided to take advantage of our O.P.E. process<sup>12</sup> in order to get a profound knowledge by means of our processes as teachers at alternative schools.



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<sup>12</sup>O.P.E. means: Orientación del Proceso Educativo which is the process students of Foreign Languages Program at the Univeristy of Cauca develop as a requirement to put into practice their skills as teachers of English, in order to analyze and improve their role as future teachers.

The qualitative social research presents to the researcher diverse ways to comprehend and perform social reality. To present the project we have chosen Life History and Ethnographical research, two of six methods of the research proposed by Galeano and Velez (2000, pág. 37- 47).

The Life History according to Deslauriers (2004): “es una técnica de investigación en la cual el investigador busca comprender el medio social, los procesos sociales a partir de experiencias de una persona, pero también de un grupo o de una organización” (p. 41). Añade además, “La historia de vida puede ser definida como un relato que cuenta la experiencia de vida de una persona. Se trata de una obra personal y autobiográfica, estimulada por un investigador de tal manera que el contenido del relato exprese los puntos de vista del autor frente a lo que recuerda de las diferentes situaciones que ha vivido” (Chalifoux, en Deslauriers, 2004, p. 41 cited by Garrido, 2009, p. 24).



At the same time, we also used Ethnographic Research, which is the most suitable for organizing the elements in the research. Ethnographic research is defined as the description, systematic register and analysis of a specific field, of the social reality, of a cultural scene, of patterns of social interaction. The object is to grasp the point of view of a concrete social group, describing the actions and the facts that develop the context, bringing the reflection of people about beliefs, practices and feelings and identifying the actual sense themselves have. Besides, ethnographic research emphasizes the access and permanence on the stages that are object of study and on interactive relationships with the actors; it can be mixed up with documental research as a way to confront information, to specify the problem of research or to construct categories of analysis. (Galeano, 2008, pág. 69).

As requirements, we interviewed some teachers and founders at these alternative schools. Some students were also interviewed about their perception of alternative education in relation to their own learning experiences. Collecting life histories has offered us a wealth of details and





elements about individual and collective life. Life history research is a technique in which the researcher seeks to understand the social environment, social processes from a person's experiences, but also of a group or organization. Life History can be defined as a narration that has the life experience of a person. It is a personal and autobiographical work, stimulated by an investigator so that the content of the report expresses the viewpoints of the author against what he remembers about different situations that he has lived. (Chalifoux, 1984, pág. 280) It also has taught us the practice of the individual, how the person has faced diverse situations in life, through his/her individual experience. It is a technique of investigation in which, we as researchers look to comprehend the social context, a social process from the experiences of a person, but also from a group or organization. Therefore, information based on their experiences has been relevant to develop our research project in order to analyze it with the purpose of establishing efficient practices in education and improving previous ones.

Moreover, we want to mention that the fact of reflecting upon our own life histories has helped us to make broad comparisons, contributions, reflections in order to understand the educational processes at alternative education schools. To this end, we think that some interviews, field notes, the Diary of Experiences<sup>13</sup>, videos, movies and records were fundamental to get enough information that made possible to achieve our purposes.

To support these ideas and arguments we can highlight the movie “L'école buissonnière” based on Celestine Freinet's life, which has close relation with the topic we analyzed. The movie showed us the way as he began to make some changes in the school of traditional education implementing his creative and innovative techniques. This movie also allowed us to establish, some differences between the traditional methodologies and the alternative ones that Freinet carried out. In the movie we could see how children were very bored at studying, the school was a torture for them and some of them got sleepy. In the same way, children learned with very old manuals, and they had to repeat and repeat every word that teacher said. The oppressor system of education in that time, as well as teachers, stood and will stand in the ups and downs of traditional education. The movie helped us to reflect upon a child's world, not as a passive individual that receives an

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<sup>13</sup> The Diary of Experiences is a document that both students and teachers build up with the product of their perceptions, experimental actions, observations and rationalizations of their experiences during the process of Knowledge Realization in the school. Its keeping is voluntary and the document is personal, that is, it is not to be graded or revised by the teacher. The only objective of keeping the DE is to have an instrument to rationalize experience.

unknown knowledge, but as a human being who is the essential motivation in the educational process, for those intentions the activities of the classroom must stimulate the interest towards the class, encouraging students to learn.

Concerning readings, we took as a first reference the book: *The Celestine Freinet's pedagogy*, in which we developed a seminar that was divided into chapters for each one of us. The main topics of the book were: society, nature, cooperation, the work and the games, children's development and the educators. Thus, after having discussed these different aspects, we reflected on the fact that the individual relationships with the contexts were analyzed by Freinet taking into account "The role of the resources-obstacles" or elements from surroundings that interact with the individual facilitating or obstructing his improvement from the situation of these resources-obstacles; depends on the individual's behaviors respect to the setting. Likewise, Freinet stated that there were four types of resources-obstacles: family, society, nature and individuals. Each one of them can assume different functions and being in this way; auxiliary generously, selfishly monopolizing or brutally expulsive. On the other hand, the individual's reactions can be: of provisional advantage, of abandon, of dissatisfaction and of shelter. They are managed by the same principles that manage the individuals' resources, that is to say, the enquiry-based learning, mechanic at the beginning, and oriented and intelligent later.

Readings about pedagogy "Invariantes Pedagógicas" (Celestin Freinet, 1996), *Técnicas Freinet de la Escuela Moderna* (Celestin Freinet), "Educación, un campo de combate" (Estanislao Zuleta, 1998), "Pedagogía del oprimido" (Paulo Freire, 1970) among others were also used to complement and support our analysis.

In terms of the history of life methodology, we read the following texts: *Jugando a la mamá* by Carlos Bolívar Bonilla Baquero and Jenny's Ann Cubillos, *Que la muerte espere* (Chapter 1) Author: Germán Castro Caicedo, *On the bus with Vonnie Lee* by Michael V. Angrosino. On the other hand, referring to the research topic we found the following research projects: *Maestra Vida. A humanistic approach for the acquisition of English as a foreign language in "Maestra Vida Corporation"*. Authors: Juan Pablo Prado and Otero Hever Manuel Romero Mera, Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas, Universidad Del Cauca. Place: Popayán, Cauca. Year: 2000., "Humanistic Education In Amalaka As An Alternative Proposal That Tends To Break The Schematic Teaching,

Promoting Freinet's Techniques Which Foster And Fortify The Educational Process By Means Of Freedom, Nature, Family, School And Community". Authors: Maria Isabel Castro et al. Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas, Universidad del Cauca. Place: Popayán, Cauca. Year: 2010.

**Our sceneries.** As we already mentioned, we conducted our research at three schools situated in the Department of Cauca. We chose three specific schools that work with alternative education: Granja Escuela Amalaka (Totoró), Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida (Popayán) and Corporación Maestra Vida (El Tambo).

**The school is moving on... the participants.** The participants in this study were some teachers and the founders of these alternative schools as well as some students who we contacted during our teaching practice and research process. The fact that we already knew many of the participants colored our description of them as well as our analysis of their comments. The brief portraits brought up facts that have been experienced by the interviewees but also from our relationship with the teachers and students. We have also had the opportunity to see many teachers in numerous teaching situations during our teaching practice, which has made possible for us to relate their comments to their teaching process and thereby get a better understanding of their perspectives.



**Breaking schemes, the interviews.** Based on the aims of our research we felt that the best tool for collecting data was by interviewing teachers and some students of the three alternative schools. The interviews used in this study have been in-depth interviews characterized by a flexible structure, and in a way in which the teachers had free expression according to their experiences.

In order to acquire the appropriate information we prepared some guides with question areas and open-ended questions to discuss. Since we wanted to receive exhaustive data and also because the interviewees requested too, we also provided the informants with these question areas prior to the interview. Seeing as the interviewees were prepared, we were able to assume the role of the listeners and the participants were able to speak freely around the topic areas. When it was necessary, we also used so called follow-up questions related to the participants' responses where we asked the interviewees to clarify their ideas or develop their points of view. During the interviews we also avoided formulating complex questions and concepts that might confuse the interviewee.

The interviews were carried out in the school environment, in a calm setting during school time and given that we already knew the teachers at our respective school placements, we decided to interview individually. We felt this benefited our research since there was an already existing confidence. Our relationship with the interviewees also contributed to the outcome of the interviews, since those who contributed to our research with their expectations and their viewpoints expressed what we were expecting from them. In order to make the interviewees feel secure and willing to share their thoughts and experiences with us, we carefully pointed out that we were there because of a genuine interest in their thoughts and reasoning concerning alternative education. In general, we interviewed founders of each institution, two English teachers, one literature teacher and one ex-student, the daughter of the founder of Amalaka School. Likewise we interviewed some students in those schools.

During the interview, we assumed the role of interviewer and a video camera recorded and documented what was being said. Our personal connection with the interviewees was nevertheless an advantage as the interview situation became more relaxing and less formal. We expected that the already existing confidence was reflected in more sincere and honest answers.

When we analyzed the recorded material, we divided it into sections in order to make a transcription. We read through the interviews and looked for recurring themes, patterns and relationships related to the interviewees' answers and their pedagogical experiences, which resulted in categories with which the teachers' thoughts and reasoning were described.

In order to collect these data, we considered necessary to divide this process into three stages. *First*, we visited, observed and were in contact with some people (the Principal, teachers, students and the founders) in the already mentioned schools and at the same time, we took advantage of our process in O.P.E., where we had the opportunity of working as teachers of an alternative school for one year. Nevertheless, the fact of having a deep knowledge concerning to this particular education was a fundamental factor to carry out our research project.

*Second*, we interviewed the founders and some teachers of each institution with the purpose of obtaining information about their Life history as participants in this kind of education. In this way, it is remarkable to mention that our research project was based on the life histories of three founder and some teachers that belong to each specific school; hence, their life histories were relevant elements to take into account. For this reason, to develop the whole process we had in mind the moments that according to Ochoa (1.996) in Galeano (2.008) cited by Garrido (2.009).<sup>14</sup>



Finally, we can say that this work developed a topic: Life history at Alternative schools. It refers to particular experiences in life of some people. (Deslauriers, 2004, pág. 44, en Garrido, 2009)<sup>15</sup>. That is, we inquired about their experiences as participants in the Alternative Education at those schools and the reasons for creating institutions with this

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<sup>14</sup>El primer momento –exploración- implica a cercarse al contexto etnográfico del entrevistado, interactuar con el actor, establecer pactos y acuerdos, lograr que fluyan los recuerdos y que se esté dispuesto a compartirlos. En el segundo momento –descripción- es necesario construir una historia y una radiografía de la historia y de la cultura del actor social, una etnografía de los espacios públicos y privados donde transcurre la vida del protagonista con sus tiempos y compañías, un recuerdo ideográfico de los escenarios recorridos en el pasado y de las personas presentes en sus recuerdos, construir la ruta de vida. El significado de este momento se relaciona con ordenar los elementos de la vida del protagonista en torno al objeto de estudio. El momento del análisis, implica pasar de la reflexión concreta a la reflexión teórica. El análisis comienza con el conocimiento íntimo de los datos, con la lectura y relectura de las transcripciones, notas y documentos, con la elaboración de la ruta de vida, con la codificación y clasificación de los datos de acuerdo al ciclo vital o a las categorías de análisis y con la compaginación del relato para producir un texto coherente (p.64).

<sup>15</sup>Taken from the Research Project: El sentido de aprender una lengua extranjera en jóvenes del Programa de Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas Ingles-Francés de la Universidad del Cauca en Popayán, 2009, presentado por la profesora Maria Cristina Garrido en el marco de sus estudios de la Maestría en Educación en la Universidad del Cauca.

kind of characteristics. Likewise, we researched the teachers' role not only at present but also in the past and at the same time teachers and people that were involved in the creation of Granja Escuela *Amalaka*, *Corporación Maestra Vida* and *Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida*.

The information that we got was analyzed in an organized way by means of some content cards. Likewise, these allowed us to compare the different elements that we found along the research project. The content cards were gotten from Maria Eumelia Galeano M. in her book "*Diseño de Proyectos en la Investigación Cualitativa*". Each one of us wrote the analysis taking into account these requirements: the location where we were or the information was taken from; the classification of the resource, a movie or a reading; the number of the card, for keeping the accounting of cards; the description or title; the content which is the explanation of the analysis; the key words for better organization and finally the observations that we found at writing the card.

Moreover, we took into considerations some tools and techniques to gather information with the different interviews at these Alternatives schools. In this way, we established some indicators related to a qualitative research and descriptive explorations along our conceptions about alternative and traditional education. We worked in the previous alternative schools and we established some indicators or shortenings in order to well understand the interviews. They are the following:

<b>S:</b> School <b>GEA:</b> Granja Escuela Amalaka <b>TV:</b> Tejiendo Vida <b>MV:</b> Maestra Vida <b>I:</b> Interview <b>F:</b> Founder <b>F1:</b> founder 1 <b>F2:</b> Founder 2 <b>F3:</b> Founder 3	<b>T:</b> Teacher <b>T1:</b> teacher 1 <b>T2:</b> teacher 2 <b>St:</b> student <b>St1:</b> student 1 <b>St2:</b> student 2 <b>Ex-St:</b> ex-student	<b>R:</b> Report <b>R1:</b> Report 1 <b>R1:</b> Report 2 <b>R1:</b> Report 3 <b>Ref:</b> references <b>Ref1:</b> reference 1 <b>Ref 2:</b> reference 2
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## CHAPTER 4

### OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

***Uno como educador siempre encuentra realidades que atropellan los derechos de la niñez.*** (As educators, we always find facts that violate Children's rights).

#### 4.1 TO KNOW FOR TRANSFORMING: GRANJA ESCUELA AMALAKA

Ana Maria Frankhausser was born in Switzerland. Her profession is educator; she has lived in Colombia for 25 years, and she is a person very concerned about children's education and children's rights. (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 1)



For this woman it is very important to take into account: socio-cultural, socio-economical and ethnic aspects as significant items for the children learning process in order to construct a life project. Children are exposed to high rates of mistreatment in schools, the educational system in Colombia is not a very appropriated because it is so excluding; for this reason there are a lot of social problems in Colombia, children prefer to belong to gangs or armed forces. However there are some teachers in Colombia who try to teach in a different way, providing a different school space, which is more tolerant, more generous, with goodness, with much more interest with the intention of allowing children to develop their abilities and knowledge in a better way. (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 2)

***Un cuento muy familiar*** (A very family story). The main idea to create Amalaka was born from a family situation. Her older daughter was seven and she was studying at a traditional school, she rejected this kind of education. In the second week of the period year (1<sup>st</sup> year), she had some complaints because she believed her name was ugly, so she started hating her name and her parents because of her name; all this came up because she had to write in some sheets her name over and over again, and she could not write skipping

line or out of these ones; so, Ana Maria thought about creating a different educational proposal, where the human being was taken into account, a human being who is not afraid of learning, of making friends, who enjoys the school, who loves what he/she does. On the other hand, her daughter's school demanded too much from her daughter and it was foolishness for Ana Maria. It is essential to say that the life goes on outside of the classroom not inside of it, since there is life, a river, trees, birds, people, it is not appropriate that a child has to beg for education, children learn more living and enjoying their lives.

As a consequence Amalaka was born in 1996 due to Maya's (Ana Maria's daughter) experience at a traditional school. For this reason, Ana Maria helped her daughter to be happy, because she did not want to do anything, she did not read, paint or talk; this situation was so painful; it is a big mistake that a teacher considers that things a child paints or draws even expresses are not right because it is not what the teacher wants. Still there are some teachers who apply these mouthy practices as in most educational systems in Colombia.

***Así nació Amalaka, en el 96, tenía un rancho viejo donde empezamos a trabajar con más o menos 15 niños de la vereda aquí abajo!*** (In this way, Amalaka was born, in 1996, it had an old hovel where we started working with around 15 children from La Vereda down here!). A different education not based on standards was born, a pedagogy that put into practice theoretical things (Freinet's pedagogy). It was a challenge for the community for the reason that they had a concept about what is education and what is the teacher's role at school. For the population it was strange to see their children having fun, laughing and taking classes outside the classroom; consequently, this way of teaching broke with the paradigm of authoritarianism at school, a teacher who had to be serious, angry and strict and a school built only for teaching in a room. At this point we started giving value to education and children. (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 6)

***Las escuelas tradicionales educan niños para obtener un empleo no para tener un buen futuro.*** (Traditional schools educate children with the intention of getting a job not for having a good future.). In the traditional school you find a strict educational system where the rules are the important thing, children follow these rules from 7a.m. to 1p.m. or



whatever the school schedule is, the fact here is that children transform the concept of life to follow an authoritarian educational model. (S: GEA/I: T1/R: 23)

***La escuela alternativa busca un ser social, es decir un ser capaz de desenvolverse y vivir en sociedad.*** (Alternative school looks for a social being, it means a being able to deal with life's problems and able to live with other people). Over time it seems education has changed, there are some positive or negative changes for sure; for most people in this world education never evolves and parents think their children have to follow models, rules, and standards, it does not matter how their children learn, the important thing here is to learn no matter how.

We can see man is and always will be considered a thinking animal, the difference is that in traditional education man is taken as a learner, man is not seen as a person, an ordinary person who has problems, faults, abilities, feelings, desires, hopes, likes and so on. The alternative education looks for a social being, it means a being able to act and live in the society, able to think, to express his own ideas or perspectives, a smart being who could face on all the difficulties life has day by day.<sup>16</sup>

Alternative schools teach everything that regular schools do. Meanwhile, alternative schools encourage many important qualities that contribute to the happiness and success of the children while they learn. We think that traditional education is based on statistics that means results, results from the educational process. Nowadays, our society is looking for a better model of community and humanistic methods to learn at school, so, we consider these elements might be found in the alternative education.

A meaningful education for our society takes advantage of students' experiences to create a life history within the learning process. It can help them to be accepted in the community, giving them the opportunity to be more sociable, to get in touch with people, to get a close relationship among teachers and students and their families who make part of the daily life of the institution. In terms of traditional education, we can find a lot of buildings in our country around all the departments and cities in Colombia. Nowadays, we can observe

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<sup>16</sup>Taken from J, Benavides Traditional education vs. Alternative education; A text written for Emphasis class, University of Cauca, Foreign Languages department. 2010.

that there are many schools that follow the traditional education, accepted by the Government institutions, which first objective is the grade that is reflected in terms of statistics, making people submissive to the same methods.

We consider that as Colombian citizens and future teachers, we should focus on issues of affective factors and learning strategies taking into account the critical reflection and carrying out action research projects. In this way, we can see how teachers acquire a kind of humanism because they implement affective characteristics in a humanistic education in general, not only in learning a second language in order to carry out the autonomy for the student and even for the teacher.

***El hecho de que haya una granja les enseña que ellos pueden tener un proyecto, que ellos son los dueños de los proyectos.*** (As a matter of fact, they have a farm where they can have a project, projects owned by them.). At GEA, the farm plays a significant role for children. They can have or lead a life project and the idea of sharing with other people makes the life at GEA better and easier, academically it does not matter they are not the best ones, the best is that they learn to live and share with other people, it changes students' lives. (S: GEA/I: T1/R: 25)

***Lo importante no es el fin sino el proceso.*** (The important thing is not the end but the process). While at a traditional school you learn the vowels, at GEA, you learn them in a process; it means the important thing is not the purpose but the process; at schools, you have to learn with punishment, at GEA you experiment by yourself surrounded by nature. At GEA children do not know what other schools demands, maybe children do not know a lot but they know how to live in a society. (S: GEA/I: T1/R: 26)

***El colegio está organizado por componentes, y es como una mesa, todos somos patas de esa mesa, los profesores, los estudiantes, los papás y los administrativos, si todos estamos fallando en algo pues no va haber un equilibrio.*** (This school is organized by elements, it looks like a table; we all belong to that table, teachers, students, parents, and administrative personnel, if we don't do things well, there won't be equilibrium). There must be an equilibrium between the Principal, teachers, families and students, in this kind of education (the alternative one), because it is necessary that every single person can contribute to the well-being of the school. No matter if the school is

private or public, it is necessary to count on special programs for example psychologists, speech therapists, nurses and so on; there are some students who have some difficulties for learning, so, in this way they could help them to have an adequate learning process at school.

***Esos primeros 5 años del 96 al 2001 fueron años, muy muy difíciles.*** *(Those five years from 1.996 to 2.001 were so difficult).* “Entonces después de eso se empezaron a acercar los chicos de Popayán, se empezaron a transportarse los primeros niños y niñas en un viejo Suzuki blanco; nosotros hacíamos todo, íbamos a recoger los chicos, dábamos clase, preparábamos las onces, el almuerzo, todo, más la dirección”. (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 1) When Granja Escuela Amalaka started a lot of difficulties surrounded this Project since its founders did not have a lot of people who helped them. So they had to do all the work related to school management. This dream was built to open the opportunity to students who came from other places with many difficulties to have the pleasure to be accepted in an environment full of knowledge to discover; for this reason, founders began this School with a lot of sacrifices during the first years to build this dream called Amalaka.

***Algunos vieron un peligro en nosotros y empezaron a montar unos chismes muy peligrosos.*** *(Some people saw a danger among us and they started slandering).* “Fue como una lucha en el sentido de que varias escuelas de la zona pensaron de que nosotros íbamos a quitarles los estudiantes porque coincidió con esa coyuntura de que en los salones tenían que haber un número de estudiantes para que se mantuviera la plaza; entonces, ellos vieron un peligro en nosotros y empezaron a montar unos chismes muy peligrosos, que eso fue ilegal eran falsos, que esa escuela era ilegal, que no se aprendía nada”. (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 1)

Some difficulties arose with the school's foundation since schools which work with traditional education only see education in an only way where the teacher is a person who knows everything and student don not have the opportunity to explore the world which he is surrounded by, and can share his knowledge with other classmates. Besides one of these difficulties was generated by some schools located near there and they argued that new school would take all the students, since a coincidence appeared about classrooms had to be crowded to continue with the work then, schools invented some dangerous and

false rumors about Amalaka school saying that school was illegal, kids were going to learn nothing, and so on”.

***Amalaka lo cogimos nosotros antes para el predio.*** (We chose Amalaka because of the piece of land). Supimos de un chasqui de estos artesanos músicos y locos que recorren toda Latinoamérica, que de esa anécdota de cuando llego Hernán Cortez a México había un pueblo que denominaba su territorio Amalaka y cuando bajaron después por las costas y llegaron a Perú se encontró con un pueblo muy diferente, de una lengua muy diferente pero, tenía el mismo término para decir lo mismo, territorio, tierra, entonces nos pareció muy interesante, no lo hemos podido comprobar pero, nos gustó mucho la anécdota y de ahí lo cogimos.

The origin of the name of School was chosen during a conversation with a Chasqui, the founders liked this name because it was their land and they had bought this ground to build their home; but when time gone away and the need to create a school where all kind of students could learn exploring their environment started this named of this land to become in the name that school has currently.

### ***Gossip people complaining about Amalaka School***

“Hubo un chisme en el que se le involucraba a la profesora Ana María con tráfico de niños, debido a de que ella tomaba fotos, las mandaba a Europa yo conseguía millones por esas fotos cosas así! Que eran chismes muy peligrosos porque por los grupos armados que no estaban o están muy lejos y a mí me podía hacer un daño grandísimo, pues por un lado a uno le daba risa cierto esas pendejadas, pero por el otro lado uno decía no realmente es mal pensante, son comentarios muy mal pensantes y exactamente muy riesgosos”. (S: GEA/I: F1/ R: 1)

An idea of education could be a place where students had the opportunity to learn all they want. But in this case this idea was wrong because traditional schools looked for destroying this new alternative way to teach and share the knowledge between students and teachers. However, Amalaka School overcame these difficulties and their expectations have constantly grown.

***Profundo sentido humanista de comprensión del otro.*** (A deep Humanistic sense of understanding.) Ana María talked about her conception of Freinet's pedagogy and some of its influences, on children "Se parten los intereses, se tienen en cuenta, los intereses se escucha etc. y se deja participar, había un gran y hay todavía un gran nivel de participación de los muchachos; aquí eso es muy importante". (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 1)

Here we notice the real meaning of Freinet's pedagogy, which has a lot of influence, could generate in children a lot of interest to explore their environment, to satisfy some needs, taking into account the creation of a real meaning of knowledge. Thus, children have the chance to participate; the student is the real character in his/her learning process, giving him/her the opportunity to touch, feel, build and create his/her vision about world surrounds him.

***Uyyy no Ana María hábleme en español porque yo no sé Ingles.*** (Uyyy no Ana Maria talk to me in Spanish because I don't know English). "En Nariño de una profesora muy querida tantos colegios que uno conoce, tantos maestros, entonces a los profesores de inglés yo les empiezo a hablar en inglés, y ahí dice pero si vos eres la profe de inglés, si tú supieras mejor dicho yo trabajo, pero con ese libro, mire, yo llevo tantos años de profesora de inglés, en cinco años me voy a pensionar, pero yo no hablo inglés; es decir, póngalos a escuchar Peterson no sé qué ahorita que hay otros músicos, pero póngales canciones que les gusta y a traducir con eso, pero vos no hablas ingles ella no habla inglés, es profesora en un colegio de Pasto ni siquiera en la porra en un colegio de Pasto." (S: GEA//F: 1: R: 1)

We as English teachers must have a real commitment to apply this new alternative education based on humanistic way where students are real characters, since boys and girls build their sense of knowledge as Celestin Freinet explained in his book about pedagogical invariants, teachers must change some pedagogical practices which do not let student get the real development inside society.

***Ahí nace la duda y la indagación.*** (It was born the doubt and the inquiry). "Para que uno se equivoque conjuntamente con los pelaos sí o no pero, que se equivoque no que se quede callado, "pero uno no se puede equivocar", me dice ella, profe si eso es lo mejor y ahí a los pelaos les sirve".(S: GEA/I: F1/ R: 1). Every day the student feels the need to

discover his world, to find new ways to get knowledge; we as teachers have to help the students to find the best way to increase this passion to explore, to overcome his doubts, to create new solutions to his world.

***Exclusion, a bad memory into the students' life histories.*** The founder of Amalaka is worried about exclusion that happens all the time and which is very common in our society. In fact, this is a serious problem because in that way democratic participation is avoided allowing inequity in any community and at the same time, this situation is a hindrance when only adults' decisions are taken into account while children's ideas are thrown away. For this reason, Ana Maria says:

“Todo el tiempo estamos excluyendo; excluimos al que hace un gran esfuerzo. Se debe promover el liderazgo. Pero con un indígena, donde todo es colectivo, excluir al chico es muy fácil, porque la niña tenía un novio que era afro. Le dice el profesor “¿cómo se te ocurre, tú que eres tan bonita que andas con ese negro?, la chica salió y el chico salió, todos dos salieron. Además, la exclusión tiene que ver con el nivel de participación; esa es otra palabra grande: el de equidad, de diversidad, la participación de inducción en cuantas escuelas se toman decisiones y luego después de que ya se han tomado decisiones se informa... entonces ya está todo decidido.”(S: *GEA/I: F1/R: 1*)

***Children's participation.*** However, there are other places and institutions where children's participation is very important since their ideas are the base for creating a new model of teaching in education such as in Amalaka. In that sense, Ana Maria talks about the importance of children's participation. “Pero hay otros niveles donde los estudiantes participan en la toma de decisiones y participan en la ejecución de la propuesta”. (S: *GEA/I: F1/R: 2*). in that sense, the way of participation on the part of the students is successful when the teachers' guidance and pedagogy is in fact appropriate. For example, “Y en Amalaka se ve mucho eso, no se ahorita porque hay muchos profesores nuevos, la pedagogía no se desarrolló plenamente pero cuando aquí se trabaja como se debe trabajar, los niveles de participación son buenísimos”. (S: *GEA/I: F1/R: 3*)

**Parents' assessment.** The founder of Amalaka considers the parents' assessment relevant in order to know how their commitment to their children is, since it would allow carrying out other strategies in case of troubles or lack of commitment on the part of the parents with their children. For that reason, Ana Maria says: "Creo que este año se van a evaluar los padres de familia que me parece una super idea, me parece bacanísimo". (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 4)

**Weaknesses at Amalaka.** One of the weaknesses in Amalaka as in any school is the lack of resources for paying some things related to economic factors which sometimes does not allow a full development when carrying out educational activities. In this way, Ana Maria expresses her point of view concerning the economic problem. "La parte de infraestructura, de gestión de recursos esa es la debilidad. Yo pienso que llegamos a una de las más grandes debilidades. Pero por mejorar también está la parte académica, la parte pedagógica, la parte de la estructura, el nivel de proyectos como esto nunca deja de estar listo". (S:GEA/I:F1/R:5)

**Los pelaos son los que le dan los argumentos para analizar las cosas.** On the other hand, to keep in mind children's ideas in Amalaka permit to develop new ways of teaching where they are the core of teaching and things are brought according to their perceptions and impressions of their environment. So Ana Maria considers that: "Los pelaos son los que le dan los argumentos para analizar las cosas. Yo no sé cómo están utilizando el manual de convivencia ahorita. Supongo que ha sido construido con los chicos. Yo creo que hay muchas cosas por analizar". (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 6)

**Amalaka recibe maestros, aquí se hace formación de maestros públicos.** (*Amalaka receives teachers; here teachers are trained as public educators*). Another important aspect to emphasize is related to the formation of teachers in Amalaka for public or private schools. In that sense, the Government should supply more support in order to create more institutions like that. "Yo pienso por ejemplo Amalaka recibe maestros aquí se hace formación de maestros públicos y privados y eso lo vi ahorita estando allá moviéndome en escuelas públicas; sería una grandísima oportunidad para el Gobierno apoyar experiencias como estas donde se fortalezca la capacitación de maestros hacia fuera; uno lo ve con los maestros que llegan aquí y dicen uy! me gustó esto tiene algo para leer de

esto y uno les dice, sí, llévense esto. Porque son esas pequeñas experiencias que realmente pueden abrir los ojos a estos maestros”.(S: GEA/I: F1/R: 7)

***Se habla de calidad educativa, pero van a ver muchos menos recursos.*** (*It talks about educational quality but there are not enough resources*). The problem is the support from the Government for institutions like Amalaka, since instead of investing more money; it makes a drop in the budget for these schools. Unfortunately it is like that and maybe it is the biggest weakness that an alternative school can have. “Hay un estudio, te lo voy a hacer mirar María Cristina el CESTE el Centro de Desarrollo para la Educación tienen un estudio sobre costos educativos y tengo la presentación de la Ministra sobre recortes o sea la misma presentación que hizo ahorita la nueva Ministra sobre el recorte del 40 por ciento en estos 4 años. O sea, se habla de calidad educativa pero van a ver muchos menos recursos; es una locura, para que analicen eso con los estudiantes y obviamente el estudio arroja que Colombia use el 11 por ciento en educación y se requiere el 27 por ciento para cumplir con lo que se requiere; eso es comprobado y todo un estudio serio; entonces, una de las debilidades más grandes en estas experiencias alternativas es la falta de recursos; eso sí es duro, durísimo.” (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 8)

***A more vital and pleasant education that feed all the children on an attachment to learning.*** La Granja Escuela Amalaka (GEA) started from the idea of forming and having a school where the students could strengthen their abilities and at the same time, they could feel more identified with the knowledge they are acquiring with the purpose of getting a more vital and pleasant education that feed them of an attachment to the learning.. “*La idea de contribuir y por una educación más vital, más amena que nutra a todos los niños de un apego hacia la educación (The idea of helping for a more vital and pleasant education that feed all the children of an attachment to the learning)*” (S: GEA/I: T3/R: 1) and thus, to get an education more focused through what the real necessities of the children are. “*Es papel de la escuela entrar a fortalecer a cada uno de ustedes, de manera individual (It is the role of the school to strengthen each one of your abilities.)*” (S:GEA/I/T:3/R:2).For that reason, GEA has been a great Project that has contributed to educate children into an alternative education, but as all the new projects at the beginning had its difficulties and even now have some ones. However, the most important aspect here is the perseverance of getting always ahead and we have to never surrender until the



end. *“Un proyecto es algo que se va construyendo poco a poco (A project is something that builds step-by-step).”* (S: GEA/I: F2/R: 1)

**Education can turn into a great adventure.** In this manner, alternative schools like GEA give the students the opportunity to acquire a new method of learning which made them possible to think and learn in a more comfortable and free way than traditional schools. *“La educación podría ser más que un tablero y un pupitre, que podría transformarse en una aventura muy importante para una joven que apenas empieza a vivir y a gozarse el conocimiento con esta técnica pedagógica de Celestin Freinet: “donde la vida se construye con la vida” (Education could be more than a board and a desk, which could turn into a great adventure for a young who is just beginning to live and enjoy yourself with the knowledge of Celestin Freinet's pedagogy: Where life is built with life).”* (S: GEA/I: St1/R: 2). Another important aspect is that children learn to live in harmony with nature, respect all the living beings we find in it, and at the same time, to respect the people who are around them, such as their classmates, teachers, family, neighbors, and so on. *“Me fui envolviendo y apropiando de pensamientos alternativos, del acercamiento a la naturaleza que se vuelve algo cotidiano, de amigos que se preocupan del comportamiento personal, el conocimiento. La poesía, el trabajo colectivo, los valores, las reflexiones, la crítica, las artes, y de siempre ser tú mismo; esto es Amalaka para mí (I was engaging and appropriating alternative thinking, the close relation to the nature becomes daily, friends who care about personal behavior, knowledge. Poetry, teamwork, values, ideas, criticism, arts, and always be yourself that is for me Amalaka)”*(S: GEA/I: St1/R: 3)

**Traditional education: a way of being educated by the Government.** This category shows us a perspective that a student and also many people have about what kind of education they are receiving in the traditional school and the only purpose is forming students who be part of the working class by making learners feel solitary, egocentric and in some cases bored with their lives. *“Tuve la oportunidad de venir de una educación tradicional [...] convirtiéndome en una persona solitaria, egocéntrica, y competitiva, así es como el Estado moldea a sus ciudadanos(I had the chance to come from a traditional education [...] by becoming solitary, egocentric, classicist and competitive, this is how the state shapes its citizens)”<sup>17</sup>, como dice Rousseau: “Una bárbara educación que sacrifica el*

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<sup>17</sup>La democracia del mañana se prepara con la democracia en la escuela. Un regimen autoritario no puede formar ciudadanos demócratas.

*presente a un futuro incierto sometiéndolos a una lluvia de conceptos y miedos, que suprimieron todo el ser que querías mostrar, comenzándolo a hacerlo desdichado, condenados a tareas continuas sin estar seguros de qué tanto les será útiles y la edad de la alegría se pasa entre lágrimas, castigos, amenazas y esclavitud” (S: GEA/I: St1/R:1).* Therefore, many students drop out of school; since they get bored of always attending at the same classes.

### ***The acquisition of a foreign language in the traditional and alternative education.***

There are a lot of difficulties in the acquisition of a foreign language (English) in Colombia, because we are in a continent where most of countries have Spanish as an official language, so it makes it difficult to interact and know other cultures which use a different language. Another problem we find is that in some cases, the teachers who give for example an English class do not know anything about what they are teaching by following a book. *“ella no habla Inglés, y es profesor de Inglés de un colegio en Pasto (she does not speak English, and is a professor of English at a school in Pasto)”(S: GEA/I/F: 1/R: 1).* And they ask the learners not to make mistakes by preventing them from the ability of doubting and inquiring. *“pero un alumno no se puede equivocar me dice ella (Referring to an English teacher) [...] pero si eso es lo mejor, lo mejor porque de ahí nace la duda, si y la indagación y ahí los pelados les sirve eso (but a student can do no wrong, she says (Referring to an English teacher) [...] but it is the best because creates the doubt, inquiry, and this is important to them.)”(S: GEA/I: F1/R:1).* For this reason, the pedagogy proposed by Freinet consists of the interaction with the students of others countries, in this case it would be students from countries that have English as its native language, and nowadays it is easier due to the Internet. *“Es excelente esa técnica Freinetiana del intercambio con otros países que hablan otro idioma (This Freinet technique of exchanging is excellent, exchange with countries that speak another language)”(S: GEA/I: F1/R: 4).*

***Inclusive education, an equitable education.*** Inclusive education consists of being equitable since all societies need to have access to knowledge; therefore, the Government has to look for alternative techniques, which help find some solutions to this problem where the individuals no matter what kind of difficulties or disabilities have, can adapt themselves to any curriculum. *“La inclusión es tener unos currículos tan flexibles que no hay que adaptarlos, que simplemente están ahí disponibles para cada uno (Inclusion is*

*having flexible curriculum that it is not necessary to adapt them, they are available for each one)*”(S: GEA/I: F1/R: 9)

**Freinet as a model.** In Ana María’s interview we could observe a radical criticism of the traditional public education system, and she has integrated all her own ideas with her daily work and life experiences during a long time. In the twelfth report she said: “ninguno ha hecho escuela como Freinet y dejado un movimiento instalado”.

Taking into account that there were some other authors like Freire, and Piaget, who were not teachers, there were others like Freinet and Vigotsky who dedicated their lives to teach. This fact makes us reflect upon the importance of Freinet since he guided children to walk with his essential concepts of his pedagogy based on humanism and respect. Freinet intended that school be alive, a school with the continuation of people’s life and the environment with its problems and realities. “La Concepción de una escuela viva. Continuación natural de la vida de familia, de la aldea, del medio. “No formamos un hombre prefabricado sino hombres vivos y dinámicos”. Técnicas Freinet de la escuela moderna. (S: GEA/I: F1/R: 12)

**Hey teacher! Leave the kids alone!!!.** Free expression is the manifestation of life and children are totally immersed in the discovery of the world they are surrounded by. They want to know what they do not know without any obstacles or without the presence of an adult or teacher who does not allow doing what they want to do or to know. While writing this part, it came into mind a reading called “Imaginar soluciones” taken from the book “La culpa es de la vaca” which was a history attributed to Albert Einstein and it shows us the relevance of an adult’s words in the children’s decisions:

“En una tarde nublada y fría, dos niños patinaban sin preocupación sobre una laguna congelada. De repente el hielo se rompió, y uno de ellos cayó al agua. El otro cogió una piedra y comenzó a golpear el hielo con todas sus fuerzas, hasta que logró quebrarlo y así salvar a su amigo.

Cuando llegaron los bomberos y vieron lo que había sucedido, se preguntaron: “¿Cómo lo hizo? El hielo está muy grueso, es imposible que haya podido quebrarlo con esa piedra y sus manos tan pequeñas...”

En ese instante apareció un abuelo y, con una sonrisa, dijo:

—Yo sé cómo lo hizo.

— ¿Cómo? —le preguntaron.

—No había nadie a su alrededor para decirle que no podía hacerlo.

Einstein dijo: Si lo puedes imaginar, lo puedes lograr.

**“Aquí la profesora me acaba de destruir un trabajo”**. (S: *GEA/I: F1/R: 13*). It was told to Ana Maria by a child once. This is one of the well-known impediments presented in several traditional schools. We consider that it is inappropriate to block the imagination in children, even worse, when they are drawing since their drawings are the complement in what they are expressing. That`s why they give them a complete expression of their own personality and they satisfy their creative needs. (S: *GEA/I: F1/R: 13*)

As an illustration we have the experience in Ana Maria’s second son. When he was 8 he could not read, he just drew some little snails and shapes.

“Yo decía, ay mi hijo nació “Feniciano”, o sea, y no quería cambiar, si me entiendes? Saben cómo aprendió él? Con nueve años y medio. Con la enciclopedia de arte porque como era tan visual, tan de cuadros de pinturas, una noche llega a la cama y dice mamá. Sobre todo lo expresionista, que cambiaron un niño de 8, 9 años, y dice este cuadro, hasta yo sé cuál es el cuadro, todavía no se me ha olvidado. Este cuadro lo pintó Picasso o Miró? Yo digo, ese cuadro aquí dice Miró, aquí dice Picasso. Si tú pudieras leer, tú pudieras saber quién pintó todos esos cuadros. De verdad mami? – de verdad Simón. Entonces uno dice: que tal un niño de esos en una escuela de esas bien troncha toros, o sea donde lo obligan con 6, 7 años a ta, ta, ta, no estuviera estudiando arte ahora, y quién sabe qué estaría haciendo... se le hubiera frustrado el talento, pero ahí toca uno, miércoles, tengo que asumir que aquí se trabaja la pedagogía Freinet, y más con un hijo”. (S: *GEA/I: F1/R: 14*)

***Amalaka since the early beginning*** . . .Amalaka was created due to the necessity of a school where Maya and her mother felt more comfortable with the way things were taught according to their perspectives of education and their own experiences involving traditional education too. Both of them felt what it was to be sitting in a place where they were not happy “[...] *era tortuoso tener que sentarme en frente de un tablero y escuchar todos los días a una profesora [...]*” (“it was torturous to sit in front of the board and listen to a

teacher everyday”) (S:GEA/A:I/Ex St), but what can be considered as more significant for their lives, was the fact that those were places where they did not want to learn or have learnt. Their educational processes showed them how complex our development as students can be and also as human beings according to the position educators assume, therefore, we can say that Amalaka exists thanks to their non-acceptance of traditional education.

**“No mami, yo no quiero ir” (“Please Mom, I don’t want to go!”).** Maya’s experience showed her how interested her mother was in her educational process, therefore she always counted on the fact that her mother was going to be there when she wanted to express her feelings about her first experiences at school.

As she started studying in a traditional school, she had to face very young those “uncomfortable” situations people have to live in these kinds of schools, and it was to be forced to consider her perspectives as wrong ones. She was once asked to do a drawing that showed how she saw herself, but her teacher did not like the drawing, she erased it and did a different one affirming that this new drawing was a better one. This experience really made Maya sad to the point of saying to her mother *“No, mami, yo no quiero ir”* (“Please Mom, I don’t want to go!”) (S:GEA/A:I/Ex\_St), which was a sign showing the disagreement she felt with this kind of teaching and also a message expressing her inconformity and feelings about the activities performed in this school. Freinet affirms in the invariant number 18: *“Nadie, niño o adulto, gusta del control de la sancion que siempre se considera como un atentado a su dignidad, sobretodo cuando se ejerce en público”* (“No one, children or adult, likes to be controlled or sanctioned, which is always considered as an attack on his dignity, particularly when it is done in public”) (Freinet, 1964. P.40). This and other events made her mother think about the way she wanted her daughter to be educated, therefore, the necessity of an alternative was growing bigger.

**“Yo no me voy a aguantar eso!” (“I am not going to tolerate that!”).** Ana Maria (Maya’s Mother) is a woman who passed through these kinds of experiences while she studied her primary school, which is one of many reasons she disagrees with traditional education, therefore, walking in the shoes of a student and also being a mother generated in her the desire of not putting at risk her daughter’s happiness and educational process; *“Yo no me voy a aguantar eso!”* (“I am not going to tolerate that!”) is what she said after

seeing Maya disappointed at the way she used to see herself because of her teacher's attitude, then she considered that it was up to her to educate her daughter in a different way, taking into account that she believed that her way of teaching was going to take much less time than traditional schools do to teach a lesson, as well as she also believed that her daughter deserved another kind of treatment.

The initiative of creating this institution was complete with the presence of some children of Ana's friends, boys and girls from vereda Bellavista and also some indigenous boys and girls; consequently some displaced students entered the school, which was a great experience for elder students as a way to learn about situations lived by other people; this can be considered the beginning of Amalaka, although we consider we have to emphasize the importance of the very humanistic attitude of Ana Frankhausser, producing feelings like "*[...] comencé a crecer en un ambiente diferente, entonces la escuela era muy agradable, todos los días era muy agradable levantarse, ir a la escuela y tener contacto con todos [...]*" ("*[...] I started to grow up in a different environment, therefore the school was very nice, it was very nice to get up everyday and have contact with everyone [...]*") (S:GEA/A:I/Ex St) or "*[...] la verdad es que es un colegio sin igual*" ("*[...] the truth is that there is not a school like this*") (S:GEA/A:bd/St:5).

***"[...] traté también de ser tolerante [...]" ([...] "I also tried to be tolerant")***. Maya's educational process was very enriching since she had the opportunity of getting to know both traditional and alternative schools due to the fact she had to finish her high school in a traditional one. Although she considered she was going to get back to what she did not like from traditional school, she also considered it was going to be interesting to experience these kinds of methodologies being older. Maya's considered she "*[...] estaba como muy formada [...]*" ("*[...] I was really formed [...]*") (S:GEA/A:I/Ex St) taking into account her perspectives and tendencies, therefore studying in a traditional school was going to be totally different, but "*[...] también fue muy bacano conocer esa experiencia de la escuela tradicional*", ("it was also nice to get to know the experience of the traditional school") (S:GEA/A:I/Ex St) thus, we can say it was not useless at all.

Living this process from this perspective really makes it important taking into account that although it could have been seen at the beginning as a "try", we can say that it can be assumed as a valuable challenge for a person who practices alternative methodologies. As an issue

she had to deal with, Maya expressed she “[...] *traté también de ser tolerante, y aceptar el cambio para bien [...]*” (“tried to be tolerant and accept the change for good”) (S:GEA/A:I/Ex St) to graduate, but this process was more educational than she thought due to the fact that she could personally experience studying in a traditional school, therefore she could notice by herself the methodologies practiced on it; as a result, she came to her own conclusions which are not so distant to some pedagogues expressions and thoughts about these two tendencies: Amalaka was a school where “[...] *puede ser usted, sin miedo a nada porque le dan esa libertad, de usted decidir [...]*” (“you can be yourself, without fear because they gave you the freedom of deciding”) ((S:GEA/A:I/Ex St)), which is something Freinet considered as an essential practice: “*Todos gustan de escoger su trabajo, aunque esta elección no sea favorable*” (“Everyone like to choose their chores, even if this choice is not favorable”) (Freinet, 1964, pág. 33)

Something she also considers was not practiced in her last high school, where “[...] *usted tiene que aprenderse lo que ellos le dicen, le guste o no le guste usted tiene que memorizar [...]*” (“you have to learn what they say, you like it or not, you have to memorize”) (S:GEA/A:I/Ex St), which is very close to what Freinet says: “*Por desgracia, toda la enseñanza escolástica está fundada sobre la memoria [...]*” (“Unfortunately, all the scholastic teaching is based on memory [...]”) (Freinet, 1964, pág. 37)

**“[...] que sigan cambiando las personas” ([...] “keep changing people”)**. The academic situation at Amalaka is different from some institutions in the Department of Cauca (Except for Tejiendo Vida School and Maestra Vida School), due to the fact that students, ex students, teachers and administrative staff really appreciate what it is happening at this school; besides, all these people put in practice a humanistic education that is really concerned with students’ present and future well being.

*“El comportamiento escolar de un niño depende de su estado fisiológico, orgánico y constitucional”* (“The scholar behavior of a child depends on his physiological, organic and constitutional state”) (Freinet, 1964. P. 30) is what Freinet says in his invariant number 3, and it is a fact that Amalaka has taken into account the student’s educational process. From the beginning of the institution, Maya experienced what it was called “Reconociendo territorio”, which was a subject involved with students familiar contexts, showing them the way each other used to lived thanks to visits to the rural and indigenous districts as well as

visits to Popayán. This experience was really enriching for her and her classmates due to the fact that they had the possibility of noticing how other people live but what is more significant, they could notice “[...] *la existencia del otro* [...]” (“[...] the existence of others [...]”) (S:GEA/A://Ex St) since very young, considered by Maya as completely inspiring (she is nowadays studying sociology) and educational: “[...] *entonces eso fue muy bacano;*” (“[...] so it was great”) (S:GEA/A://Ex St).

Students and, teachers and directives call Amalaka “La Familia Amalaka” (The Amalaka Family) because of the way they feel about it, and it is not due to the techniques used in the educational process, but because of the new perspectives of education and life they acquire after experiencing this kind of education.

On the celebration of the 14<sup>th</sup> birthday of Amalaka, there was a kind of ritual where students, teachers and administrative staff expressed their feelings about the school. After having noticed the changes on him through his educative process, a ninth grade student expressed in a really grateful way: “[...] *que siga cambiando personas*” ([...] “keep changing people”) (S:GEA/A:bd/St:7), as a way to encourage the labor this institution has made on students like him, which really made us to be proud of having contributed in the educational process of students in Ganja Escuela Amalaka.

#### **4.2 THE BEGINNING OF A DREAM. CORPORACIÓN MAESTRA VIDA**

Bearing in mind that good intentions are always accompanied by plenty of difficulties, we could observe that Maestra Vida was not the exception.

Esto era antiguamente una hacienda donde estamos La hacienda Puente Alta. Pese a que comenzó como resguardo luego quedó como vereda porque después de un proceso de recuperación de la tierra, se parceló y ya se quedan las familias. A partir de ahí nosotros ingresamos acá, luego esta hacienda se acabó, se acabó con los bosques, sólo quedó esta área y las veredas que están aquí son con las que nosotros trabajamos sobre todo llevándoles lo que la escuela no les ofrece o sea, artes, agricultura. Se trabaja con la elaboración de cuentos y también con las artes plásticas; se trabaja con la literatura, la imprenta y con el ministerio de agricultura



generamos proyectos, o sea ese es más o menos el trabajo con las escuelas y además se han trabajado los procesos de producción agrícola-ecológico y así pretendemos minimizar el impacto de la agricultura, uno de los elementos esenciales. (S: MV /I: F1/R: 1)



It is mandatory to consider the importance of these kinds of projects based on the pedagogy of work, since children learn some knowledge; they learn to preserve the environment they are surrounded by, consequently, they learn to work as well.

***The practice of social work according to Freinet's pedagogy.*** When we read about Freinet and his proposal we can see that one of the most relevant proposals is work and we can state that this factor is the cornerstone in the building of a social person. According to this, teacher Aide states: “[...] entonces el trabajo aparece como la única manera de tener su capital y entonces, pues, no es por ahí, es cómo el trabajo como tal, posibilita transformación y ese concepto de trabajo lo plantea Freinet”.

*No es el juego lo propio del niño, sino el trabajo.* Nuestra pedagogía es precisamente una pedagogía del trabajo. Nuestra originalidad es haber creado, haber experimentado, difundido instrumentos y técnicas de trabajo cuya práctica transforma profundamente nuestras clases. (Freinet, C., 1971, Pág. 36)

“[...] y entonces nosotros vemos que el trabajo es fundamental, no es el trabajo explotador, cuando decimos cómo los chicos entienden que el trabajo es una cualidad del ser humano y la idea de transformar el mundo cuando lo vivencian en ese proceso que ustedes vieron.” (S:M.V./I:F1/R4)

***“Por fin se acabó esta vaina”.*** The experiences in traditional education of the teacher Aide, was a factor for the creation of Maestra Vida. She sadly realized the fact that the

students seemed to be compelled to attend class. “Uy, uno estudiaba porque se enojaban mis papás en la casa”. (S:M.V./I:F1/R6) Therefore, we asked her to tell us about the creation of Maestra Vida.

“Yo creo que de la reflexión que uno hace a partir de la práctica como maestro. Yo trabajaba en el colegio nocturno del Tambo, un colegio convencional”. When the classes finished, the students threw away their books and said: “Por fin se acabó esta vaina”. Even though they respectfully said, this teacher Aide asked herself why? And she wondered about that education, if it was right, or it was torture for the students, a kind of obligation. She was impressed. How was it possible that the best years of life, childhood and adolescence, were full of suffering and anguish? We are in agreement when Freinet states: “Lo que fatiga tanto a los niños como a los adultos, es el esfuerzo en contra de la naturaleza, aquello que se hace porque se está obligado a ello” (Freinet, C. 1971, pág. 40), since it is remarkable the fact that studies, must be considered as an opportunity instead of an obligation, with the purpose to be prepared for life.

Besides, all kind of strategies for escaping emerged, and some kinds of facts made teacher Aidé understand that education was creating in the students the ability to be dishonest. As an illustration she related us:

“Yo trabajé un momento muy cortico en la Normal de la Cruz, y ahí había internado; entonces, los muchachos se iban a bailar o se iban por la noche y llegaban a la madrugada y cuando el profesor iba a mirar, había una persona acostada y bien tapada y lo que era, eran dos almohadas”. “Entonces todo ese tipo de cosas nos llevan a entender que lo que la educación está haciendo es desarrollando capacidad de infamia, capacidad de ser deshonesto y los famosos chancucos que en esos hay unos empeños impresionantes que alguien decía que hacen unas cositas y que desarrollan una capacidad visual, al parecer muy grande que con una letra muy pequeña alcanza, o puede ser que ahí se pierda la capacidad visual, pues con el esfuerzo uno piensa, entonces, uno dice: eso no puede ser así, y porque también desde el sistema educativo, el profesor tiende a que el estudiante responda lo que yo quiero que me responda, y si no da con eso que yo quiero que me responda, le coloco una mala nota. Entonces eso nos llamó la atención porque eso no puede ser así. O sea que el sistema educativo de hoy en día tiene muchas cosas que deben

cambiarse”. (S:M.V./I:F1/R6) And she had in mind that the conventional education must be changed.

**Educational models: human beings attitudes.** Nowadays we can see that in traditional school, children are maybe pushed to achieve what teachers say, or to develop any kind of activities no matter if these are appropriate for children. For example, a child can be good at drawing, but weak in Spanish grammar due to the fact that he is a dyslexic child. He is also good at playing musical instruments. But instead of being joined in these activities, he is obligated to participate in any other activity, except in the ones he likes to do because of the “Manual de Convivencia” or even worse, he is not allowed as a punishment. Besides, he is labeled as “indisciplinado”. In most traditional schools this concept is not only used, but also misunderstood. “La disciplina es la consecuencia natural de una buena organización del trabajo cooperativo y del clima moral de la clase... No hay desorden sino cuando hay una falla en la organización del trabajo, cuando el niño no está ligado a la clase por una actividad que responda a sus deseos y sus posibilidades”. (Freinet, C. 1971, Pág. 36) Most teachers in traditional schools believe that discipline is the fact of being quiet or in silence, children are supposed to remain absolutely inert without any possibility of doing something opposite to teachers’ desires.

On the other hand, human beings’ attitude is also a relevant matter in Maestra Vida School, referring to this teacher Aide says:

Tratamos de encontrar por qué se motiva. De ahí viene lo más importante, igual, un chico con energía, era súper aficionadísimo a todo lo que tuviera que ver con electricidad. Hace un tiempo tuvimos que tapar los tomas porque el chico estaba muy pequeño y él traía cosas y decía: “pues profe, esto lo armé en la casa y esto funciona así, él se mantenía en ese tipo de cosas. Igualmente, no le interesaba para nada el inglés. Hace poco tuvimos una visita de un chico que vino de Francia. Él estuvo un tiempo aquí viviendo y empezó a conversar con ellos un gran tipo de cosas, entonces se motivó él por los idiomas y lo acondicionamos con inglés. Ya cuando él sintió que era tan interesante, aprendió otro idioma. Ahorita también es tecnólogo en electricidad porque en la del Cauca no encontró, bueno, hay ingeniería electrónica, pero no hay electricidad. Entonces la opción para él era el Valle o

Bogotá. Entonces se metió al SENA para estudiar y ahorita está trabajando en su campo. (S:M.V./I:F1/R7)

At Maestra Vida School, everybody works for life and for an essential aspect, to serve the society. In this conception one of the founders affirms: “Nos enfocamos más en la parte de la vida o sea que la educación sea parte de la vida”. (S: MV /I: F1/R3) This particular model has been taken by Maestra Vida in order to encourage both students and teachers to work for life. One essential element here is the familiarization between teachers and students. It comes to our mind the cooperative work from Freinet’s pedagogy, such work permits us to socialize all those ideas and life experiences that every one of us develop in the classroom. Teacher Aide refers to Freinet with these words:” El trató de quitarse de la zona magistral donde el profesor habla y los estudiantes solo copian”.(S: M.V. /I: F1/R: 3)<sup>18</sup> This should be the educational model nowadays, but unfortunately, teachers are just following orders in the traditional system, teachers with an authoritarian concept of life, teachers that just want to hear what they want to.

*“Ser mayor no significa necesariamente estar por encima de los demás”.*

La tarima y la mesa son elementos indispensables de la pedagogía tradicional en la que reina la palabrería con sus lecciones, sus explicaciones, con las preguntas que se practican efectivamente con mayor autoridad y eficacia en la medida en que no se está al nivel de los que las escuchan. La posición de lucha entre maestros y alumnos necesita para la vigilancia, la autoridad y la disciplina, esta elevación material y simbólica. Pónganse al nivel de sus alumnos. Penetrarán con paso firme en la pedagogía moderna. Se verán obligados a reflexionar y a comunicar la reconsideración de sus actitudes y de su comportamiento pedagógico. (Freinet, C., 1971, pág. 30).

It is so important that teachers and students learn to listen to others, because if we pay attention to those experiences of life that every single person has, we are going to learn more things, possibly positive facts that complement our own concepts. In other words, it is relevant to know about students’ needs and propose to get a solution to all those

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<sup>18</sup>“He intended to leave the magisterial zone where teachers talk and students just write”. (Our translation)

problems of learning they can have. Jones and Jones (2000) examined the academic needs of Junior High School Students in the USA. Those needs include feeling important and secure in their learning goals, having time to integrate learning, understanding the learning process and receiving feedback. In this way, we are going to get positive changes in students' learning processes, trying to give them more communicational possibilities in order to support their ideas and help them in the activities that could provide all those necessary elements to be part of possible solutions to the problems students express, "[...] Nosotros también venimos del sistema convencional pero nosotros, al momento de recoger y decidir, vemos que hay que hacer otra cosa" (We are coming from the traditional system but when we meet to talk, decide and apply, we think that we have to do another thing). (S:MV/I:F1/R:5) That conception of changing a traditional system by an alternative one is now a real possibility, because we have so many examples of schools in which the most important thing is the human being. It would be significant if we create alternative schools, in order to get people with positive thinking, people with a lot of special aspects to get involved into the discussion and comments about what we agree and disagree with people with special aspects that help other people to be motivated in their occupations. In particular teacher Aide, referring to her students, says: "[...] Tratamos de encontrar por qué se motiva; de ahí viene lo más importante". (We try to find students' motivation and somehow, and that's the most important) (S:M.V./I:F1/R6). Motivation is a concept that involves all the teaching processes, because when we motivate our students to do their best in what they like to do, they are going to demonstrate us that they can do it, probably their dreams come true. Brophy (1.998), reports that students frequently do not know why they are participating in learning activities.

On some occasions, students are lost because of either the way the class is being taught or the different learning problems they are living at school or at home. In fact, one of teachers' roles is motivation and this is our daily homework, to motivate our students to make them feel important in class, to be confident, to express their ideas, to share their experiences of life. That's why our education, nowadays, needs to form students with more capabilities to communicate with others and students that aren't be afraid to express their ideas. Students are more enthusiastic about learning, when their teachers demonstrate them sincere expressions, an environment of respect in the classroom and understanding of feelings. The most significant facts of our lives, are those beautiful experiences lived in our learning process, those strategies we have learnt with our teachers, those significant

ideas we can use now to work in the classroom. Feedback relates closely to challenges, setting goals serve as objectives for learners. When learners understand how they are attaining those goals, they can adjust their behavior to learn more effectively. (Martens, Hiralall and Bradley, 1997, pág. 33-41) What we have said throughout in these project is that teachers and students must work together in order to achieve the objectives of the class. Teachers must orientate students with appropriate methods of learning and teaching and students must respond to teachers' conceptions, in order to conceptualize all the ideas. In the same opinion, Teacher Aidé referred:" [... Nosotros decíamos, la maestra es de quien uno aprende...]" (teacher is the person from whom we learn) (S:M.V./I:F1/R:7) experiences of life. In the real world, we have to learn from our teachers. But, we have to



take into account that a teacher is not just the person who is in charge of education, the teacher is also the person that contributes in our development as integral people, those who help people, step by step to get their goals, probably like second parents; people that give the best in order to do the best possible.

**Evaluation in alternative pedagogy system.** Assessment of new developments in education have brought what is known as Alternative assessment, referring to the new procedures and techniques that can be used within the context of education and incorporated into the classroom daily activities

Unlike traditional assessment, alternative assessment can:

- Focus on documenting the growth of the individual at a certain time, rather than compare students to each other.
- Emphasize the strength of the students rather than weaknesses.
- Consider the learning styles, language skills, cultural experiences and educational levels of study. (Hamayan, 1995, pág. 213)

The challenge is, therefore, to develop assessment strategies that meet in particular, integration and interpretation of knowledge and transfer this knowledge to other contexts. Eisner (1993, pág. 226-232) suggests some principles that we believe relevant to take into account to better understand the process of evaluation and selection of instruments. For him, the assessment should:

- Reflect real-world needs, increasing resolution skills problems and constructing meaning.
- Show how students solve problems and not only serve the end product of a task, since the reasoning determines the ability to transfer learning.
- Reflect the values of the intellectual community.

Do not be limited to individual performance since life requires the ability for teamwork.

- Allow more than one way of doing things, as real life situations rarely have only one correct alternative.
- Require students to understand the whole, not just parts.

...**Breaking schemes.** Concerning evaluation in Maestra Vida School, teacher Aide talked to us about:

“[...]Entonces si bien ellos llegan a la Universidad y el sistema de calificación de la universidad es el numérico, aquí nosotros no hacemos eso para calificar, sino que se va haciendo observación y si hay dificultades, entonces en el informe uno dice por ejemplo que en sus trabajos no se fortalecieron tales conocimientos de tal cosa que evaluamos o que estaba siendo irrespetuoso con sus compañeros[...]” Then, in a meeting with the students’ parents, they asked for the way of testing their children learning. “Igual para ellos es un proceso y ahorita esta experiencia se va sistematizando en una organización, en un instituto español y en la Organización para la Paz. Entonces justo ese día, estaban ellos, y dicen por qué acá no hay una especie de manual que llegue y se trabaje en esto, entonces yo les dije que los manuales son para los seres humanos que poco funcionan y esa es la decisión de uno como ser humano, ellos tienen que entrar en un proceso de ver y hacer su propia reflexión, y entonces decidir: yo califico, no porque me digan, sino que llega el momento en que si no sabes, tienes una mala nota. Entonces usted sabe o no sabe de matemáticas y si no sabe, yo le coloco un dos. Es como complicado

además, porque en la respuesta siempre va algo que no está definido y también porque pueden haber otras maneras de responder” (S: MV//F1/R: 8)

To establish a similarity about what we have mentioned above, we cite Freinet: *Las notas y las calificaciones son siempre un error*. “[...] ¿qué decir entonces de las clasificaciones establecidas sobre la base de estas notas falsas, y cómo decidir que tal alumno se encuentre antes del que le sigue con algunas centésimas de puntaje por delante? [...] (Freinet, C., 1971, pág. 41). Nowadays it is common to see in traditional education the way of discriminating students by means of tests and grades that cannot measure their skills at all. In alternative schools we can appreciate that teachers have the opportunity to evaluate students according to their achievements.

### 4.3 **KNITTING A DREAM. INSTITUCIÓN EDUCATIVA TEJIENDO VIDA**

When we think about dreams, several ideas come to our mind but in this specific case, we are going to share how much a domestic craft helped to build a kind and beautiful dream, which was lived by Rosalba Villamarin, being this one a salient element in Rosalba’s life history. Hence, she told us that our specific conditions of life could be one of the main motivations to come our dreams real.



It depends on our attitudes towards life in general. In this particular example, Rosalba told us that being very young, she used to knit which was very significant in her life because she loved that and she kept her mother company. Later on, this beautiful memory motivated her to create Tejiendo Vida, an alternative school, in which one of the main goals is “to weave life”. That is to say, she wants every child who studies in this school to have meaningful and valuable experiences, which are going to be positive and nice memories in the students’ life histories.



On the other hand, when some people think about dreams they can imagine another project of life, which could be finished in an undefined period. In this case, this new project started like a new way to transmit knowledge taking into account the student's needs. For this reason, Tejiendo Vida School was created to explore and improve some student's skills based on some pedagogical models proposed by Celestin Freinet and Rosalba's pedagogy as well, in order to help children understand, act and know inside their environment.

At first glance, we want to make a brief description of the School Tejiendo Vida. This school is located at the south of the city going to Timbio. In fact, this is a country school but inside the city, where it is possible to find a lot of wide green zones, big and beautiful rooms appropriate for children because the walls are decorated with nice messages and pictures. There are also games for children, fruit trees, farm and wild animals such as parrots, turtles, dogs, sheep, peacock, monkeys, guinea pigs, ducks, a wild dog, and birds. All those animals make of the school a nice place to visit and learn however, they are not usual in other schools. At the same time, you can find a room, which is especially devoted to gastronomy and the preparation of products such as Manjar Blanco. We are going to show some excerpts of the founder's life.



First of all, we are going to mention some Rosalba's personal information. So she was born in Uribe (Tambo)-Cauca on 27 March of 1957. She is 54 years old. She did her elementary and high school in San Agustin. Later on, she studied a technology in preschool education in UCICA, and after this, and she took a degree in preschool education in Santo Tomas de Aquino. Concerning a historical situation that she can remember from her school years, she remembers two significant experiences that seem to have marked in a positive manner her way of teaching. Thus, one is a kind nun at San Agustin School from who she learnt a lot, especially the love of God. The second one is related to a teacher called Stella Milan who helped her to love gastronomy. Hence, it is possible to imagine the big influence of these situations in the Rosalba's pedagogy due to the fact that in her pedagogy God and gastronomy are immersed.

On the other hand, she is the oldest sister among four brothers. She was a person who grew up without her father. From so early, her mother helped her and she admired her because she was a visionary woman, who thought about her future and took her daughter away from the town where she lived in order to construct a better future for them. She based her teaching on the alternative school taking into account the students' needs and that is why, such school was created in order to transmit the knowledge in a more appropriate way. In this place children enjoy what they do and they feel pleasure using the dynamics of work such the gastronomy that she loves so much.

When she started this Project of life, there were only seven students and at the beginning, she only started with her child who was three years old. To be out of an institution or being without working is very difficult since sometimes there are tracks not easy to forget. And it is more difficult when you know that some students always want to be with you. You will miss them and at the same time, they will miss you. Fortunately, a significant aspect to overcome this was the creation of the institution Tejiendo Vida and as it was already mentioned, it started with seven students. Nowadays, the institution has 135 students and 14 teachers (Data from September 2010).

With the first 14 children, a workshop "Taller de tareas" (Homework workshop) was carried out in the founder's house at Alicante neighborhood. Then, on Fridays as a reward for children, they were taken to a Kiosco where they prepared Gelatina and Melcocha. It is important to make clear that what started as a Kiosco to visit, a long time ago, is nowadays the School Tejiendo Vida. Anyway, what she looked for was to give an integral formation for children where they learn to be participative, autonomous from now on when they have to make crucial decisions for their lives.

After having listened to Rosalba's life history, we began to do the interview analysis where the following categories have emerged:

**Hace diez años ya que tengo mi colegio.** We as future teachers could see this experience presented by a teacher who worked on traditional education and one day she decided to follow one of her dreams, which was creating an institution where students were able to recognize their surroundings to interact with them to discover and to

understand their world. According to Rosalba Villamarin, she created her own school 10 years ago called Tejiendo Vida, a place built and based on some concepts of Freinet's pedagogy, which involves students in their own world allowing them the opportunity to get knowledge in a different way. It means, teaching in a more active way and not in a traditional one, changing the pedagogical model established by some schools where the teacher knows everything, and the student is considered as an empty object to be filled in. "Hace diez años ya que tengo mi colegio y el cuatro de octubre ya cumplimos los once años [...] Estamos ya en el alistamiento para celebrar estos once años [...]" (S: TV/I: F2/R: 1)

**Muchos creen que la docencia es como el escape o el escampadero!** Our profession is the most beautiful in the world since we can feel the biggest satisfaction when students call us teacher and run to hug us. These little things create in our life a real commitment with students, to look every day for new pedagogical techniques to get student's attention and create a high interest in classes.

Ustedes que han elegido el camino de la docencia muchos creen que es como el escape el escampadero o que fue lo único que uno pudo hacer, les digo que es la profesión más hermosa y se lo digo desde mi experiencia que fueron 23 años allá y ahora 11 que llevo aquí entonces uno dice la mayor satisfacción usted la van a sentir es cuando uno escucha a un estudiante pequeño profe que le gritan a uno y que corren y se le enrollan en el estómago esos son los regalos más grandes son los estímulos que uno como persona necesita uno no necesita regalos ni cosas sino ese reconocimiento. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 2)

**Yo no tengo que sacar pendones ni andar haciendo propagandas.** Teacher Rosalba explained some reasons to work hard and avoid some publicity to get students. In that sense, it is interesting to see her motivation when she says that if we plant with love, we get a good harvest. This experience lived by her around 23 years working in a private school taught her about the needs that the students have to deal with during their stay at school. "En tejiendo vida llevamos once años; yo no tengo que sacar pendones ni andar haciendo propagandas, sino que uno cuando siembra con amor y siembra bien, por ejemplo en el Champagnat yo trabajé 23 años, van y me preguntan, todos los que tengo aquí yo empecé con 7 estudiantes, empecé con mi hijo de 3 añitos." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 3)

**My best efforts are now for him since I do not work anymore.** This new Project starts when another one finished. On the other hand, after 23 years of traditional experience parents felt a real trust in their teacher who taught to their children in a different way. Teacher thought to spend more time with her son to help him with his homework but she did not think that a new project would start after this experience into another school. “[...] Inicie con él cuando llegó al otro día una persona y me dijo ¿qué está haciendo?, yo le dije: “me le voy a dedicar a él porque ya no tengo trabajo”, y me dijo: “le voy a traer a la niña”. Llevó la noticia al Champagnat y los papás me dijeron que continuara con los niños que yo había dejado.”(S: TV/I: F2/R: 4)

**No se contagien de la pereza, ¡innoven!.** Teachers who work in Tejiendo Vida School have the opportunity to innovate their skills every day, to improve their way of teaching to work with environment full of new things to discover and explore. Besides teachers leave the idea of a classroom, look for knowledge surround them, and work together with students as a work team to avoid some behaviors that some teachers who work in traditional school have. Sometimes these situations make teachers lazy people who are not able to create new pedagogical strategies. “Lo que están haciendo es no dejándose contagiar de los públicos perezosos que no quiere seguir sino como por las mismas entonces ellos han ido a innovar eso me da una alegría porque yo siempre les decía no se queden, no se contagien de la pereza innoven.” (S: TV/I: F2/R: 5)

**En verdad se trata de enseñar en la vida, para la vida.** Teacher Rosalba took into account the pedagogy based on work team proposed by Celestin Freinet, besides this, the experimental touch that emphasizes that student discover their worlds and with little kids teachers, work based on Maria Montessori pedagogy, which applies more of daily activities inside classroom.

“Nosotros tratamos de que al mismo tiempo que las clases se hagan lo más practicas posibles, practicamos mucho la pedagogía de Celestin Freinet, se tiene que buscar el trabajo en equipo, el tanteo experimental que uno no esté tan encasillado en un aula, entonces así trabajamos aquí, con los pequeñitos trabajamos mucho con la pedagogía Montessori que son cosas de la vida cotidiana. Tratamos en lo posible de verdad enseñar en la vida para la vida”. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 6)

**In Tejiendo Vida, there are teachers who have a salient commitment to the deep implications that education has in the students' life histories.** In Tejiendo Vida the founder, Rosalba has a serious commitment to the students' knowledge. That is to say, in her school the different things that teachers know about students play a remarkable aspect in the daily activities. Consequently, she gives the teachers some advice to improve this factor. As a result, teachers who work in that institution are helping students to build positive life histories because by means of this knowledge, teachers are in advantage to look for any kind of strategy in order to help their students. Moreover, the previous situation is showing us that in Tejiendo Vida there are teachers who have a salient commitment to the deep implications that education has in the students' life histories and in the society, which is focused in the sensibility which allows to see students like human beings. In this sense, teacher Rosalba tells us: Por ejemplo cuando los padres de familia preguntan por sus hijos en muchos colegios dicen bien sin dar argumentos; yo por el contrario, les enseño a los profesores que tienen que dar argumentos si dicen bien dar la explicación o si el niño necesita fortalecer algo en específico porque solo decir bien demuestra que no conoce al estudiante. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 7)

**No nos faltan los padres a las reuniones.** Hence, it is possible to imagine that the students' parents have a different point of view concerning meetings. Because of this, they enjoy the fact of going to the school meetings because they have present that their children are studying in a special school. It does not mean that all these children have any kind of handicap but in Tejiendo Vida as Rosalba expresses everybody is knitting life and parents are aware of it. "Aquí, por ejemplo, no nos faltan los padres a las reuniones y se cuestionan antes de venir en que irán a encontrar de nuevo." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 8)

**Tejiendo Vida is full of toys.** Tejiendo vida is full of toys which allow interaction and at the same time it is a clear fact that shows that games are also a fundamental to learn. "Yo tengo varios juguetes. Por ejemplo, este gatico cuando llora les digo que el salón no está dispuesto para continuar. Entonces yo tengo una cantidad de juguetes por ejemplo dados para enseñar las matemáticas."(S: TV/I: F2/R: 9)

**No hay cosa más linda que uno sorprenda a la mamá.** The human values are one of the bases of this pedagogy. In this way, Rosalba makes emphasis in expressing love and respect towards their close relatives. “Entonces yo les digo que chévere que un sábado ustedes sorprendan a su mamá con un desayuno bien delicioso. Que le pongan el plato más bonito que la sirvan. No hay cosa más linda que uno sorprenda a la mamá.” (S: TV/I: F2/R: 10)

**Some new strategies for learning.** Apart from learning through games, children also develop other skills using tangible elements such as gastronomy in order to learn new things. In this way, they play to go shopping practicing the mathematics when buying something.

Caminen les muestro acá lo de gastronomía. Esta es una ollita y ella trabaja con pilas entonces sale vapor. Esta es la cafetera, uno le echa el agüita y así va pasando y aquí el lavaplatos también se le echa agua y sale el agua por la llavecita. Y aquí tenemos el colador, la estufita, las ollitas. Aquí tenemos como tienen que organizar todos los platos grandes juntos, las cacerolas, las jarritas, las cucharas van todas acá y ahora tenemos los productos. Estos los venden en el éxito y hablamos de cada uno de los productos con esto armamos la tienda. Entonces por ejemplo la mazorca de donde viene y hablamos que es de América y que se puede hacer con ella. Porque a veces uno no tiene ni idea de donde viene lo que uno se come. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 11)

Application of what is learned through games that encourage facing daily situations when children are interacting with the rest of the society.

Por ejemplo les enseñamos a preparar el sándwich yo tengo el queso, el pan, el tomate, la mortadela. Entonces aprenden a manejar el orden, la secuencia. Aquí tenemos para armar la hamburguesa tenemos el pan, la carne y ellos deciden si la quieren por ejemplo con lechuga o sin lechuga. Le ponen tomate y la arman, las galletas y esto para hacer los



perritos también. Entonces miren ellos toman esto y arman la tienda y juegan allá y comienzan a vender y les colocamos precios para aprender matemáticas y contabilidad. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 12)

**A los niños hay que sorprenderlos siempre con algo.** Regarding the class, we realized that Rosalba is a very creative teacher. Due to this fact, day by day, she is looking for new things in order to get the students' attention which allow for the development enjoyable classes and which is expressed by students who are learning in the middle of several games. "Entonces al otro día llegué a la clase con ese pollo porque a los niños hay que sorprenderlos siempre con algo."(S: TV/I: F2/R: 13)

Tejiendo Vida is like a box of surprises because the socio-cultural environment allows complete, practical and real knowledge, which sometimes begins inside the classroom but at the same time is completed outside taking advantage of the particular and nice socio-cultural environment. "Tengo caballitos, sapos, osos. Tengo una bolsa para cada tema. Así voy sacando uno a uno para que los expliquen y los saco afuera para que los relacionen con el medio."(S: TV/I: F2/R: 14)

The different toys also play a remarkable aspect at Tejiendo Vida because they are useful tools to entertain children and, at the same time, through the toys and games, they can learn and practice things related to math. "Yo tengo varios juguetes. Por ejemplo este gatico cuando llora les digo que el salón no está dispuesto para continuar. Entonces yo tengo una cantidad de juguetes por ejemplo dados para enseñar las matemáticas." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 15)

Rosalba is looking all the time for new strategies of learning in order to give students an amusing class. With this in mind, she tries to think as children to understand them and get ideas concerning their personal likes. "Cuando a usted le surja la pregunta que puedo usar para una clase vuélvase niño. Así si yo fuera niño que me gustaría que me trajeran y ahí está la respuesta. Y lo otro es que yo visito muchos lugares y de ahí yo retomo muchas ideas y las trato de adaptar a las necesidades de los niños."(S: TV/I: F2/R: 16)

The different pedagogical strategies that are developed in Tejiendo Vida help students to participate in an amusing, positive and productive way. These strategies are developed in all the subjects being English class benefited in many aspects. Por ejemplo este juego es para enseñar inglés. Este es para enseñar los números. Con esto también hago que formen grupos de dos para ver cuánto se demoran armando esto. ¿Cómo se ponen de acuerdo para manejar el tiempo? y los ponemos a pensar y a adivinar. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 17)

Rosalba advised us that we as teachers should have several materials to live an alternative class which is an indispensable element to call the students' attention and in that sense a students' productive learning. "Ustedes como maestros tienen que llenarse de mucho material y no pensar en grandes cosas por ejemplo ustedes ven que yo tengo desde lo más elemental, hasta lo más sofisticado". (S: TV/I: F2/R: 18)

At Tejiendo Vida parents are part of the students learning who help to complete their children's learning. Moreover, they take advantage that this school has a nice socio-cultural environment for example the presences of several kinds of animals, which play a remarkable aspect to improve the students' motivation toward their learning. "Aquí la ventaja es que como estamos en este mundo de los animales ponen a los papas a moverse, los papas los llevan a otros lugares a complementar el conocimiento." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 19)

Rosalba not only practices humanism with students but also with teachers. So she has some small but meaningful details to show teachers how important they are in that process. Consequently, these small details help teachers to feel motivated now of teaching, which can have positive consequences in the students' life histories.

Para comenzar el mes de amor y amistad les dije a los profesores que los necesitaba a las 7 pm en Play Park porque ahí los recogen. Todos llegaron a las 7pm y todos lucían como esperando cual era el bus que los iba a recoger. Entonces yo les dije cuando uno se porta bien es premiado entonces ustedes han sido premiadas son ganadoras y vamos a entrar a cine y a cada una le pase su boleta. Son detalles que enamoran a los maestros y nosotros como directores tenemos que tenerlos porque el maestro también se cansa, hay que estimularlo. Entonces yo manejo esas cosas. Por eso es clave no solamente darle el sueldo cada mes." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 20)



The detailed pedagogy is lived at Tejiendo Vida. With this in mind, Rosalba wants to establish them all details as one of the love expressions towards human beings.

Aquí por ejemplo celebramos el cumpleaños de todos recogemos una cuota para todos. Estamos muy pendientes manejando la pedagogía del detalle. Si los niños están cumpliendo años sacamos la cosecha de guayaba, mandarina o naranja y se las damos a los niños o cuando han sobresalido en algo y les decimos que todas estas pepitas son las personas que los quieren. Entonces ellos aprenden que el ser detallista no necesita de mucha plata, de grandes cosas. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 21)

For this reason, Rosalba trains in this pedagogy but in a practical and real way teachers who arrive for the first time to Tejiendo Vida because when human beings are loved is easier to express this feeling to the others, in this case children. “Por ejemplo ahora con unos maestros nuevos que llegaron trabajé 2 meses la pedagogía del detalle y que ellos vieran que hacía yo con ellos para que de la misma manera hagan lo mismo con sus estudiantes.”(S: TV/I: F2/R: 22)

At Tejiendo Vida school children are part of decisions in teaching because their points of view, ideas, feelings and personal likes are taken into an account. “Y a los niños siempre les pregunto ¿qué les gustaría que hiciéramos para tal cosa? Los tenemos muy en cuenta. Entonces ahí uno aprende a conocer como los gustos, los intereses.” (S: TV/I: F2/R: 23)

The founder is interested in the parents’ participation regarding the children’s learning. Hence, parents have to participate in some workshop in order to build human values in a real way. Thus, parents reinforce Rosalba’s pedagogy at home, because she assigns homework to parents.

Miren aquí esta una parte de lo que hicimos en el taller de padres de familia. Están los tres abrazos el primero de la sobrevivencia no te va a pasar nada. El segundo es el del sentir, te vas a sentir bien hoy vas a estar bien con tus compañeros y el tercer abrazo es el del pensar todo lo que te van a enseñar hoy lo vas a asimilar lo vas a aprender. Pero el papá no va a decir este abrazo es por esto, ellos simplemente dan el abrazo y ellos ya saben a qué se refieren.” (S: TV/I: F2/R: 24)

Rosalba teaches human values and manners in a creative and enjoyable way by means of some kinds of projects that are developed during all the year. "También trabajamos el proyecto así soy yo de pequeñas damas y pequeños caballeros donde el hombre tiene que ser más generoso con las damas. Que si tenemos que correr una mesa que lo hagan los pequeños caballeros. Aquí están los modales que ustedes vieron en las carteleras." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 25)

In Rosalba's pedagogy, God plays a crucial role because she teaches them the importance of loving him. For this reason, this pedagogy has been successful in many aspects. "Trabajamos tres momentos al comenzar el día la ubicación con Dios que es la oración, la ubicación con el tiempo entonces que ellos sepan en qué fecha estamos, el mes y la ubicación con el espacio, que ellos sepan que en tejiendo vida hay un espacio, que hay un salón que esta mesa y este asiento le corresponde a tal persona que como tal deben cuidar entonces se empieza ya la clase. Esta es la escalerita estos son los valores que ustedes vieron allí en el muñequito. Las tres "r" que mencionamos relacionarse, repetir y re- encuadrar". (S: TV/I: F2/R: 26)



Rosalba's creative pedagogy motivates parents to participate in this. Therefore, children, parents and teachers are participating all the time in nice projects that help them to train like human beings. Taking into account that it is not common that parents have a big commitment with the daily school activities they are awarded by teachers.

"Entonces a los padres de familia se les dieron unos diplomas por re encuadrar, el hecho de venir a recibir clases primero ellos era ya cambiar el esquema y aquí están los nombres de los proyectos. Un lugar maravilloso que fue el que terminamos. Luego esta así soy yo pequeña dama pequeño caballero, el brillo del alma que es en la navidad como tenemos que limpiarnos tanto por dentro como por fuera. Acá atrás esta los niños sentimos, pensamos y actuamos y aquí tenemos los tejedores de vida que son los maestros." (S: TV/I: F2/R: 27)

Rosalba has in mind that her pedagogy demands hard work on the part of the teachers. For this reason, she was clear that when they began to work in Tejiendo Vida they have to be in a constant learning in order to innovate all the time. Hence, she advises them to develop some projects before starting a class.



Aquí se trabaja muy duro por ejemplo los lunes los maestros pasan derecho cada uno trae su almuerzo yo soy clara con los maestros que empiezan a trabajar aquí. Todos los días desde 6 30am a 7am tenemos que aprender algo nuevo y lo primero que hacemos es la oración en cadena y ofrecemos el día por los niños o otra cosa. Los lunes avanzamos en los proyectos porque ellos en vacaciones tienen que adelantar ya lo traen listo. Cada lunes un maestro escoge un tema y lo comparte entonces nos vamos fortaleciendo.” (S: TV/I: F2/R: 28)

Rosalba admits that in public schools there are many obstacles to do any kind of activity due to the lack in Money. Similarly, she recognizes that in her school she does not have any problem concerning money because parents collaborate in this aspect responsibly.

Nosotros hacemos talleres para padres de familia y a veces profesores quienes trabajan en colegios oficiales y ven los cuadernos y se emocionan pero pronto se desaniman porque no pueden pedir un libro o no tienen suficientes herramientas. Yo tengo una amiga que trabaja en un colegio oficial y ve las actividades y se emociona pero dice que en su colegio no se puede hacer nada porque se les piden \$3000 pesos y no los llevan. Entonces eso es un problema porque las cosas también se hacen con plata. Aquí los papas colaboran siempre cuando vamos a hacer la salida de campo se les manda su nota de que vamos a hacer en la parcela cada uno trae su almuerzo les mandan a pagar el transporte entonces no hay problema; eso ha permitido que se avance.” (S: TV/I: F2/R: 29)

Rosalba showed us that she loves her profession a lot. In addition, she has a big talent as teacher, which she exploits to innovate and to feel motivated to work every day. “Los padres de familia saben que yo soy inquieta; había una vez una profesora que me dijo que le mermara a las ideas porque yo a las 3 de la mañana quisiera venir a dar clases, me despierto a la 1 y empieza esta cabeza y yo les digo a las profesoras se me ocurrió esta idea o esta otra. Entonces los he motivado a atreverse.”(S: TV/I: F2/R: 30)

Taking into consideration that Tejiendo Vida just has elementary school, when children have to go to another school to study high education she follows asking for their students. This showed us that this founder is really engaged with the students’ life histories. Lo importante es sentirnos satisfechos con el trabajo cuando pasan a bachillerato, yo sigo preguntando por ellos y son niños que marcan la diferencia en valores humanos.”(S: TV/I: F2/R: 31)

Rosalba likes to help teachers to know her pedagogy because in Tejiendo Vida it is indispensable that everybody is connected with this. Therefore, when they have to work for another school they begin to make the difference.

A mí me ha tocado aquí con maestros profesionales con un montón de títulos y he tenido que sentarme al lado de ellos para enseñarles. Lo primero que les enseñé a hacer es el abecedario, porque una letra mal colocada es definitiva. Así vengan con esos títulos de la universidad vienen como de cero. A mí me decían: “profe usted me formó acá”, y ella ahora está trabajando en otro colegio por el Tambo. (S: TV/I: F2/R: 32)

Rosalba finishes saying that in T.V. the emotional part takes a relevant role, which facilitates the children’s learning. “Aquí prima la parte emocional el conocimiento debe ir a la par pero abrazándonos, riéndonos, disfrutando. Esto aquí es un disfrute nos gozamos todo.”(S: TV/I: F2/R: 33)

## CHAPTER 5

### SCENERIES FOR DREAMING AND LIVING:

#### *HOW PROBLEMS FOR A FEW BECAME SOLUTIONS FOR MANY.*

"It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education" (Albert Einstein). We decided to begin with this quote because it writes down or gives an idea about the way traditional education forms children. Since, in traditional schools the curiosity of students is not fomented, they have to follow some rules limiting their free expression and curiosity that do not allow them to be creative. So, it is difficult that a student develops his/her abilities because through curiosity a child begins to discover his aptitudes; for example, he or she begins to paint, draw, explore his toys and so on; here is where parents and teachers play an important role, they have to realize what the kid makes to stimulate his skills.

Nowadays, the reasons for creating a school in Colombia are related to the growing population needing educational institutions, instead of taking into account geographical conditions as many years before. Social circumstances are these days being the most important issues to take into account if we consider the influences of educational processes of children, since these are facts that they are necessarily involved to, however, they have only been considered from the perspective of a child dealing with his life in a family living in a special context, and not as a human being continuously exposed to the way of teaching inside his school. The way of teaching has always been ignored when most of the institutions were created. Except for catholic schools and military academies where regulations are the main facts to take into account as well as public and private ones, where economic conditions are crucial on educational processes, which are superficial facts to take into account when educational processes are being developed.

Alternatives are other options we can choose from or can also be unconventional solutions, therefore, the existence of alternatives in all kind of situations have always been considered as necessary when there are unconformities. Unconformities are in most of the cases, the main causes for the search of changes; consequently, we have to move from traditional choices to alternative ones when we disagree with something.

It is true that the Colombian Government cares about education, but it is not enough if we consider that we should have the possibility to choose how to be educated... to have other alternatives. Alternative education was born as a result of many disagreements with traditional one, which is a common fact when people decide to practice a new way of teaching. Alternative schools in the department of Cauca are not the exception: they are the result for the need of new methodologies as solutions to avoid being victims of the same authoritarian school, but mostly for the future well-being of next generations.

For that reason, Alternative Education looks for stimulating the children's abilities by using methodologies that are focused on the students' real necessities in which the pedagogy is linked with their scenery, where teachers are not seen as leaders, as the persons who know in the classroom; here, teachers are seen as guides or friends to support in their learning process. However, children in traditional schools have not a real participation in society, being a negative aspect in the upbringing as a person since they belong to it and have the right to be involved in the different activities, which are carried out not only in the place they are living, but also in the family and the school. In Freinet's pedagogy the active contribution of children in a society context is very important for their education because they are engaging with their environment and at the same time, it gives raise the cooperation in them. *"Este tipo de educación, que contempla a las personas como seres aislados y en constante competencia, cae fácilmente en el egoísmo y la pereza y, además no tiene sentido en una sociedad comunitaria."* (1986, pág. 347)<sup>19</sup> Through this project we realized that there are facts that really touch people, moreover, why are these places so important as for students as for families even for teachers and the community?

It is very significant to start talking about what is traditional education; teachers at schools are supposed to be the only ones who know everything. There is not students' participation and the way of teaching or making transference of knowledge is from the books to the notebooks. In traditional education the child cannot ask, speak or propose any ideas, because the teacher is the one who knows and teaches.

So, many students are leaving school before the legal age because there are lots of students who fail at the end of the school year. At the same time, there are other students who have to repeat the year, and many of them do not even finish primary studies. It is

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<sup>19</sup>Tesis de Licenciatura, Sevilla 1986. La Pedagogía de Celestin Freinet. José Gonzales Moteagudo.

remarkable enough that in Traditional Education parents do not have any kind of participation although this situation has been changing in these days; the educational system is not the same anymore, however there are some teachers who are still applying this Traditional model.

A few years ago, an educational revolution started around the world, and Colombia was not the exception. To illustrate, in Popayan and the department of Cauca, there are three schools that were born according to experiences lived at traditional schools: Granja Escuela Amalaka (in Popayan), Corporación Maestra Vida (In El Tambo) and Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida (In Popayan); these schools were created with the purpose of giving another educational proposal where children cannot find barriers, and the teaching and learning processes are quite different from the traditional schools that work in the department, as a result, students feel comfortable enough because they are always surrounded by nature and the most remarkable is that these schools are schools with open gates.

In our research project we decided to research about the schools which have developed an alternative education. Their founders: Ana Maria Frankhausser (Granja Escuela Amalaka), Rosalba Villamarín (Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida) and Aide López (Corporación Maestra Vida) shared with us their personal reasons to create alternative schools. They had several points of view in common being the fight for a dream their main motivation to do a great effort to contribute to propose another way of teaching and learning. What is more, Ana Maria and Aide as students lived unpleasant experiences in traditional education. Even though Rosalba did not express bad experiences in traditional education, they wanted to apply another way of teaching, being the alternative education the way to get it. Hence, some authors such as Celestin Freinet were the pedagogues who helped them to develop the practice of social work. For this reason, many of Freinet's ideas have been significant elements in their styles of working in these schools.

So by means of our research project we realized that when teachers love their professions it becomes a kind of motor to dream and build a particular strategy of teaching based on humanism, where commitment, creativity, dreams and innovation play a remarkable role. In that sense, Granja Escuela Amalaka, Institucion Educativa Tejiendo Vida and Corporación Maestra Vida were the places that we chose to investigate and we realized by

means of these ones that when there is love, dreams and a real commitment to the teachers' role, teachers can build a successful way of teaching being the students' life histories benefited in a significant manner.

For this reason, when we talk about sceneries for dreaming and living we make reference to the particular influences that an appropriate environment can have at the moment of teaching and learning. Hence, the different experiences that students can live in these places become sceneries for dreaming and living because by means of these, students can enjoy learning and can build significant moments. That is why, these places are not common ones but special sceneries for learning that allow them to dream and live. Besides this, the school conditions help to create real scenery. Likewise, these sceneries depend on the teachers' attitude towards students' life and learning which mark in a positive way their life histories so that, they face day after day a lot of sceneries that help them to achieve their goals. It means that through this experience students are invited to dream and live in order to develop their projects of life.

Concerning our experiences in those places we can say that we learnt a lot, not only because these founders told us their special and particular experiences, but also because of their serious commitment to the teacher's role. This is a salient element to reflect upon teaching which makes us to feel motivated to do the same regarding the commitment, but by way of our own creativity. The quality of teaching conditions can encourage or constrain appropriate teaching and impacts student achievement.

We think understanding and improving teaching conditions can result in:

- Increased student success
- Improved teacher efficacy and motivation
- Enhanced teacher retention

Concerning creativity there are a lot of things to tell, but it is enough to say that when there are love and dreams, teachers have the capacity to create amazing proposals in spite of the obstacles because love becomes a kind of engine that allows improving the teaching methods. It seems to be that the alternative education improves the creativity and the way how students can learn not only academic aspects, but also social and integral aspects for



life. Hence, these founders want to offer through the alternative education another way of teaching which allows doing a kind of relationship between learning and life. It means that they want to propose a learning process that can be complemented with the contact with real life contexts, that is to say, learning for life. Thus, their schools have a particular socio – cultural environment which plays a big influence into the students' learning process because it helps them to discover their own skills in order to take advantage of their specific talents.

When we heard the word education we think of homework, students and pedagogy, and also on what is the best way to get students' attention to transmit knowledge and avoid the well-known "reject" that students feel when some topic is difficult to understand. When we were students we had the opportunity to experience traditional education, where the teacher was the only significant character inside the classroom; besides, students were considered as objects to be filled with information. Students did not have the opportunity to explore their world, and everything was said by the teacher, who follows the steps written in a guide text; then the teacher evaluates students' quality of repetition. After that, students who got excellent grades were the teachers' favorites and students who got low grades became into those ones the teacher did not like to help in their learning process, creating a frustrating feeling in children's life.

Nowadays, we talk about alternative education which gives the student the opportunity to explore, to know and to interact with the world that surrounds him. This kind of education regards students' participation since teachers and students work together to acquire knowledge based on experience from daily activities. Teachers become advisors inside child learning process, besides teachers let students explore their sceneries to find an answer and establish a real meaning of knowledge.

We mean by scenery, a group of places and situations that students live every day and they use to relate the lessons learned to real experiences, which motivates children to increase their enthusiasm to explore and know more about the world they interact with. For example, in Granja Escuela Amalaka, Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida and Corporación Maestra Vida, alternative education based on Freinet's pedagogy is applied, where both students and teachers have different and suitable meaning and sense for the word "knowledge", taking advantage of life experiences to create a life history inside the

learning process. According to that, the contexts are seen as important facts which schools include to their lessons in real environments, which students are living every day inside their daily activities, making easier to understand what teachers teach in their classes.

It is difficult to know what fitting method would be the most appropriate during the learning process; if we choose the traditional one, we could only repeat the old methods that stop students' being interested in lessons. On the other hand, if we propose to work on alternative education, where students have the chance to learn inside their scenery, which one would be the most convenient one, only working with both we could notice how appropriate the students' development is.

Alternative education was born to interact with life itself, since this education makes the student an active member of society who has the possibility to explore, change, interact and transform a new vision about the world and its needs. So, when we talk about sceneries for dreaming and living, we refer about those places in which we can contemplate the natural features of a landscape, where many events occur. The daily sequences of events make gather important information about the director, the characters, the scenes, the places, etc. In this case, the director is the teacher who is in charge of the teaching process; the characters are the students and they are responsible for the learning process; the scenes are going to be presented in the sceneries, those educational places where the director and the characters get in contact. These sceneries are the classrooms, the auditoriums, the scholar restaurant, the grass, and the mountains and so on. For teacher Aidé López, all the places in Maestra Vida are sceneries for teaching and learning. For example, when we were talking about the school she told us that: when they are not eating in the dining room, they use it as a classroom for working. In these sceneries we can dream even more, we can find a different experience and we can imagine beyond than we ever thought possible because they are alternative sceneries where we leave the traditional routine to pass to an alternative way of teaching and learning. As soon as we explored these sceneries, we found the most amazing places to dream, to teach, to learn and to produce knowledge.

Those particular places have been our second home and they were a kind of dream that became real, where we were the directors or the main part, as teachers of foreign languages. At Granja Escuela Amalaka we were at the top of the mountain and our teacher role made us experience the highest purposes of education. Living an alternative education was the most extreme goal for us, because the characters of this institution touched our hearts and they are now a beautiful experience in our lives. Every time we observe the sceneries with the main characters, we don't find any end, in those dreams they want, we help them to come real. It is really excited to live a situation like that because we were persuaded by those magic words that every single student expressed to us and we have learnt a lot about those dreams. We were involved with the scenery and the people there, and every single time and every single day we knew more things about them, we felt them, breathing oceans of dreams every time we went to see them. In these sceneries, the director or the teacher is going to be introduced like a friendly person, the person in charge of the teaching process and the students are going to follow the rules in order to get goals in the year.

The most important part of the sceneries is that both students and teachers have something to do, something to present, and something that is going to help them to achieve the objectives in the learning process. If learners had the key for learning and teachers had the key for teaching, our dreams could come true easily. It depends on how director's and characters' roles contribute to successful outcomes for everyone. The director must be introduced like a leader, but as a great one, because the person that occupies this position must know about character's needs, problems, weaknesses, interests, hopes, etc. As soon as the director carries out leadership roles, he is going to have a significant influence in the sceneries. He also has to understand the problems of the characters as a group and as individuals. The characters must learn from the director how to form leaders in order to try to be one of them.

The continuous communication in the sceneries is categorized like progress in some abilities that help to understand language more. If we help our characters to see more possibilities of leadership in their presentations, if we help them to give a sense in their actions, to know each other better, to encourage and to help them set and reorganize their goals in their real contexts, they are going to find their progress in every single word they say, in every new trajectory they give to the interaction in class and all these things give

them a real sense of achievement. The students are going to be tested in order to know their development and it is over here where the director plays an important role. He has to give to the student clear and detailed information about those tests and about the aims of their learning, with sensible arguments, to demonstrate that these aims are relevant to their needs. There is nothing more disappointing for a person than to feel ignored, neglected, or to feel that his work is not important or interesting for the public. As we said before, this must not be the position of the teacher because he has to be the example of leadership; therefore, he has to encourage and guide the students to achieve their objectives. So, the scenery is presented to improve our abilities, our skills, our capabilities with those scenes that make part of our lives in which we can consider new elements, new actions, new objectives, new goals, new alternative scenes to pass the test. With these new tools, we are going to accomplish all those purposes we have intended to make real, during the required period of time. We were looking for those purposes during our research project and we have used a lot of techniques and strategies to help our students to develop their creativity, to have more opportunities in their learning process and to help them to improve their participation. Traditional methods do not let children participate actively in class. It is necessary to look for new alternative methods that give them a high degree of motivation to participate actively in the scenes. When motivation appears in the educational process, the characters are going to learn with pleasure and happiness and the teaching/learning process is going to be fun.

We have to motivate children to be responsible, honest, and tolerant in life. All these values make part of our dreams, fantasies, imagination, because we dream of making them real in the sceneries. All the previous elements feed children to be in a fictional situation in which they can dream about real experiences of life, because in every step we make in the sceneries of fantasy and imagination, we are going to fill them out with real surprises that invite them to believe that the impossible can be possible.

Finally, the three alternative schools we visited have something in common; they began as a project consisting in looking for an alternative way of educating children who are not accepted in traditional one or have had some difficulties in their learning or a different style of learning by giving them a new opportunity and at the same time, an alternative education. As a lifetime project, these schools have had a real commitment to all the children no matter their socio-economic conditions, or learning difficulties, they study in

appropriate sceneries according to their necessities by improving the creativity with the purpose of fomenting their aptitudes and giving them a new opportunity for living and dreaming.

It would not be correct to say that we are teaching in a “right” way, and the others, who do it in a different one, are “wrong”, but experiences can show us the variety of the methodologies we perform. However, as we as teachers are supposed to do what is the most appropriate for our students, we must learn to identify what is not appropriate to do in a classroom and also to look for more than academic issues, that is to say, to take care of our students. Consequently, our work was not focused on discrediting Traditional Education, but it was helpful to highlight the virtues of Alternative Education in order to emphasize on the necessity of practicing methodologies based on humanism, which we consider as necessary inside a classroom.

Our research was useful to know many theories proposed by several authors thanks to our own experiences, but what it was really significant for us was noticing that Alternative Education precursor’s main reason for the search of alternative methodologies was seeing education from another perspective, where the well-being of the student has the most important role. They considered the respect for the students as necessary to apply, therefore, students’ position were more relevant due to this way of considering them.

The main purposes of these kinds of educators were many, and most of them were born from the complaints but also from what they consider is necessary to avoid in educational processes. In addition to respect, freedom was taken into account in those cases. As a consequence, authoritarianism was the first issue to remove from education, where student’s point of view was not taken into account and activities were imposed in a controlling way.

We could have said in the past that seeing education from the position of the educator is not as difficult as it is from the student’s one, but it can be the opposite. The difficulty of our role lies in the commitment we have with it, consequently, the more we care about students, the “less easy” is going to be to develop an objective class, while students’ attitudes have always been subjective unless they could be obligated to do totally different things.

Now we invite you to share with us the different experiences that we have lived in each school by means of our research work, which we hope that can help you to value the big responsibility that we as teachers have with God and with the society.

**Alternative paths for life. “Dar amor, constituye en sí, dar educación”. (Eleonor Roosevelt).** Granja Escuela Amalaka, Institución Educativa Tejiendo Vida, and Corporación Maestra Vida are schools very concerned about Alternative Education and all their work is based on this Educational proposal; they are oriented toward the student seen as a human being not as a machine who is limited to receive information and knowledge in order to apply it in a near future. In those schools, the children work freely and can discover their world they are surrounded by at their own rhythm. They can also propose ideas and they are taken into account, sharing with their teachers and partners. Knowledge is also considered as a vital element in those schools because as the teacher has a knowledge the student can get and there is a feedback between teachers-students with the intention of having an appropriate environment in the classroom, likewise the student can have an autonomous development in those institutions, since, the educational is based on students’ needs which are developed with the tools that these schools give to them.

These schools take elements of Celestin Freinet’s pedagogy but, in Granja Escuela Amalaka these elements are applied in a stronger way. Each school takes the best of this author and some other ones like: Paulo Freire, Montessori, among others. All these schools are located at outskirts of Popayan (TJ, GEA) and El Tambo (MV), these locations allow students working and feeling healthier like Freinet said: *“La naturaleza marca irremediabilmente nuestros pensamientos y sentimientos, y es con su rica gama de goces y exigencias la más segura de las educadoras. El medio natural y físico, en opinión de Freinet, constituye el medio más rico y el que mejor se adapta a las necesidades variables de los individuos” [.....] “necesidades naturales, necesidades fundamentales”*<sup>20</sup> So, as this author proposes, these schools have applied this educational model following what Celestin Freinet proposed with his techniques and pedagogical invariants. For this reason the students are motivated to live surrounded by nature and to take care of it, because living in a health environment helps not only the body and mind but the spirit too. Consequently, the children are encouraged to be part of processes looking for a better

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<sup>20</sup>Monteagudo, J. 1.988. La pedagogía de Celestin Freinet: Contexto, Bases teóricas, influencia. P. 233

environment not only at school, we also noticed how children are very worried about what is happening nowadays in our planet, likewise they learn how to farming, recycling, take care of animals, milking, laying hens, organic products, water care.

Hence, these children can take classes not only in a classroom but they can take a class, at the river side, under a tree, on a mountain, in any places where they can be in touch with nature. The spirit thinks better when it is in touch with its roots, for this reason there are no rules to stay in a classroom because the teacher has autonomy to create his class environment like he considers more convenient for the students; it is to say the teacher has a different didactic from the traditional schools, in these schools there is no a guide text, the guide text is the life itself, it means, children's necessities.

These schools are always organizing events for sharing and learning more, among the institution-parents-students-teachers; they all are integrated in only one team, the school and children's learning process. Activities like: mingas, parades, fairs, bingo, market festival, Colombian and world celebrations and holidays, and own activities are developing through the school year.

*La cooperación escolar, es decir, la gestión de la vida y del trabajo escolar por los usuarios, incluyendo al maestro, debe ser, en consecuencia, una actividad eminentemente social y por ello puede hablarse, con propiedad, de una sociedad de niños y que la clase se convierte en una agitada colmena". [.....] "La cooperación escolar presupone la colaboración entusiasta de alumnos y maestros. Los adultos, precisa Freinet, no deben explotar a los niños, pero estos tampoco a aquellos. Esto es así porque no debe haber ni criados ni sirvientes, sino colaboradores de una misma comunidad, con los mismos derechos cualquiera que sea su edad o su función, que, además, deben formar juntos un verdadero equipo"<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup>Monteagudo, J. 1.988. La pedagogía de Celestin Freinet: Contexto, Bases teóricas, influencia. P. 255

**Teaching a foreign language at alternative schools.** As a general perspective, we have seen that teachers who learnt English in a traditional way consider that teaching a foreign language in an alternative school is a very enriching experience. As a contrast to their learning processes, these teachers applied a humanistic concept in order to get more in touch with students' needs and feelings. Actually, these methodologies have helped our role as teachers in the O.P.E. According to the way we see the students, but have also influenced our personal conception and way of acting.

In the schools we visited, it was common to see students feeling comfortable with the way lessons were taught. In fact, as alternative education promotes real daily life activities and situations, we saw that teachers emphasized their English lessons on issues related to nature students are surrounded by, therefore students' homework and tasks were always proposed in order to practice the lesson applying the theoretical information in issues involving projects and activities planned by the school.

As the alternative education proposes to avoid repetition, it was interesting to see how teachers developed their English lessons due to the fact that repetition can be considered as useful when teaching a language. Actually, school assignments were proposed by the teachers instead of being imposed, which is an important fact in alternative education.

Our experiences showed us that school assignments based on what they usually do is useful in order to achieve their understanding and comprehension as well as avoiding repetition. Vocabulary was also easy to teach as it was always related to real things they were familiar with.

What we consider as transcendental were the changes of perspectives from life and education. The points of view of the students were taken into account in order to motivate them to participate and practice. On the other hand, their viewpoints were considered as useful due to the fact that teachers believed in the possibility of feedback. As a result, students felt freer to express their feelings and ideas through the dialogue, which is a way to look for students' comfort when learning a new language.

For instance, in G.E.A. students of all grades have the possibility of choosing which project they want to work with, which is an activity the school proposes in order to let them



experience daily life activities. English lessons are mainly taught related to what they are surrounded by, as well as how they were relate to their projects. Vocabulary was always focused to the environment around them, therefore, as they were always in contact with nature, they were, at the beginning, interested in knowing names of animals as well as fruits, and it was continuously changing according to the lessons taught. In this way, projects such as the truck garden were represented in posters and drawings, which main purpose was describing each project process in English, increasing vocabulary and improving grammar as well. As a previous project, the process of Recycling was also described in English, where teacher Maria Fernanda Soto proposed mixing the theoretical process of teaching how to recycle with English language, which was a much appreciated activity thanks to the school approach.

Another example was the practice of English in Tejiendo Vida School. As they celebrate many events, celebrations like Valentine's Day included a previous production of phrases in English represented in posters which were put up around the school. Tejiendo Vida teacher gave the class 50% in English and 50% in Spanish and she was interested knowing how we taught English in our schools. We said to her that we gave it totally in English and some vocabulary students did not understand we explained it in Spanish sometimes if they wanted to.

Another example is the Corporation Maestra Vida in Tambo Cauca, where teacher Aide tried to motivate students to learn a foreign language. She had an example of overcoming at school; this student did not study English but he liked to work with electrical appliances. So, teacher Aide motivated him to work in English what he wanted to do the most. That motivation helped him in learning all the things related with electrical appliances because all the instructions were written in English and he needed to apply it in his work. In that time, the school was visited by an ex student who was working in a foreign country. He went to the school and he tried to help students in some problems with the foreign language. He talked a lot with the guy that did not like to study English and he said to him how important English was, nowadays for his job. This guy understood the advice and finally he was conditioned to learn English to apply it in his job too. Now he is a professional in electricity after having studied in the SENA. Now all the guys are involved in a total commitment with the language and they see their real perspectives to learn the language and even they would like to learn another one.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION ALLOWS STUDENTS TO EXPLORE AND EXPERIENCE THEIR SURROUNDINGS**

It is necessary to take into consideration that Alternative Education is nowadays the different choice of education not only in our country but also around the world. Based on this research we concluded that these kinds of schools are significant for the educational process; we mean, education has to evolve its techniques and didactics. We as teachers must get ready for the present and future in all Colombian schools, this is the challenge we need to assume in order to improve an obsolete educational system in Colombia. For that reason, it is primordial to bear in mind how relevant and difficult the role of teacher is in society, since teachers must not only teach following a methodology or a book, but also awaken the students' creativity and create different activities in order to motivate and encourage students to learn. Teacher must be interested in discovering students' strengths, abilities and weakness. By means of this proposal, the learning must be developed through activities that allow students to explore and to experience their surroundings in order to learn in a practical way, without leaving their social, cultural and familiar context out. Since, these are imperative elements in the rapprochement of students to the educational process.

For instance, we must clear more our conception about alternative schools in order to get involved in the alternative teaching and learning process, because we have to work the alternative methods; for example, the student's experiences of life made us to reflect more about how important it is to keep writing the Diary of experiences. In this way, we encouraged our students to reflect upon sharing ideas. Therefore, the implementation of new teaching methods helped us to experience a different role based on the teaching-learning experiences lived in daily activities. The founders' experiences of life and the skills learners have developed inside and outside the classroom incited us to continue working with Alternative schools and that is the education we consider the most available to teach and learn at school by developing important skills in the sceneries of dreaming and living. An evident thing is the exchange of information with everybody and it is mandatory to give

the possibility to the students of sharing their experiences to clarify what they think about them, since the implementation of new alternative methods is necessary to achieve the objectives, we have considered in our role as teachers, where Alternative Education emerged from the necessity of avoiding all negative issues of the traditional methodologies since teachers increased their commitment at class. Consequently, to know more about Freinet's techniques and pedagogy is one of the premises to improve our way of teaching in the classroom. In addition, humanism played an important role in the alternative schools we have visited and we had the fortune to experiment it with the special treatment to the human being in different alternative schools, taking into account the values that schools are reinforcing. Since, in Alternative schools, the human being is the principal model to take into account and we have learnt that the human aspect combines the use of modals and values with others. For that reason, teacher must be continuously learning, due to the fact teaching is a challenging activity that demands improving day by day and humanism is a current that emerged many years ago and has changed many people's life, as well as it might happen with coming methodologies.

Furthermore, we have advanced in those necessary processes to develop meaningful skills in the sceneries for dreaming and living. Because, through the founders' life histories we comprehended the reasons for applying and developing an alternative education at Granja Escuela Amalaka, Maestra Vida and Tejiendo Vida schools in Totoró, El Tambo and Popayán. Moreover, we enriched our knowledge regarding pedagogy, which allowed us to have a different perspective concerning to the big responsibility that teachers have with education and society. In addition, we reflected upon the socio-cultural contexts influence of an alternative education at schools to identify practical and conceptual orientations that the alternative education schools develop in their educational processes by means of our observations, readings, comparisons, interviews and analysis.

Thus, we explored in a deeper way the beginning of these institutions, their precursors and their expectations; and what are the most relevant ethnographic and social aspects that influenced this project as well. Recognizing the difficulties, that alternative education schools face in the educational processes, deducing traditional or Alternative education must be modified according to evolution, in order to improve or change their strategies. To give students the opportunity to communicate their ideas, respect what they think about the process of learning, teaching and asking them how they feel in the classroom.

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