

## **A critical Literacy through the knowing of our contexts**

### **Guarne: A Little Town with a Big Issue**

In the Easter of Antioquia, there is a little town called Guarne, with cool weather, a population of approximately 40.000 thousand inhabitants, most of them, living in farms and pathways with big forests of pines and yarumos, crops of red beans, tomatoes, blackberries and strawberries, surrounded by beautiful mountains and a variety of birds and flowers that translate you into a natural paradise close to the capital city of the state, with some of many problems of urban sites, like Medellin.



Illustration1.Guarne, Photo by Margarita Trujillo

Some social conditions like, lack of family accompanying to young people, single mothers, and dysfunctional families, alcoholism, drug diction, an unclear project of life, low level of education, determine the origin of some behaviors in young , who decide to spend time consuming drugs, surfing the internet, drinking alcohol, or playing video games, or the worst,

getting pregnant.

Since the end of 2008, when I came to this town serving as a teacher in one of the two urban public schools, I could not be indifferent to those kind of situations, that were part of most of my students of seventh, eighth and ninth grade. Although they were suffering those kinds of issues, they did not have awareness of their problems; because they thought it was part of their destiny. Academically they felt their efforts to get good grades, were not enough to get the high levels of competence impose by their school, because they did not have the motivation to do it. Therefore to write about that problematic in their mother language was hard, but to write and

read in English was for my students a challenge, because they did not consider it important to



Illustration 2. Margarita Trujillo is an Ethics and English Teacher in a public school in Guarne.

learn a second language. In my teaching experience, I have noticed that my students have some difficulty learning both American and British English. Although most prefer American pronunciation, it is helpful to allow the students to be familiar with one before starting to teach the other one. Another

problem is that there is a shortage of qualified English teachers. Although most private schools carefully choose their English teachers, an education degree is not a requirement to teach English (Gonzalez 2008). So, any professional can be an English teacher.

To write about the world around them was even harder. Because seeing our contexts with a critical view is not easy. It implies most of the time to say a negative concept of something and most of the people are not prepared to be criticized or do it, but if the person assumes a good attitude with the critical, it could be enriching for the growth of her or him. Professor Raul expresses in his discourse about this term: “Critical is a full time commitment”.

*Critical literacy, refers by A. Luke(2012) is to use of the technologies of print and other media communication to analyze, critique and transform the norms, rule systems and practices governing the social fields of everyday life.*

### **How to be conscious of the problematic around us?**

*A critical approach to education can help us to name and interrogate our practices in order to change those (Hanks, 2014)*

To assume a critical point of view of our reality is not easy, if we do not want to change the circumstances around us. Especially when we think the things happening are good, because it is the same we have seen all the time. For example for a girl, to be a daughter of her single young mother indirectly will lead her to do the same thing that her mother did. Then, to be an adolescent mother will be *normal* or the boy who looks at the example of his father, drinking alcohol on weekends and coming late to work Monday in the morning will learn this behavior is *good*. A testimony of one of my students relates her experience about being a single adolescent mother: “Six years ago I was pregnant, just when I was fourteen, and I was in ninth grade in the Inmaculada Concepción high School in Guarne. Everything happened, because I was not able to say no in the crucial moment and also I thought this never could happen to me, which was not the first time, we had relations. In the previous month, nothing happened, and then I was sure it could not happen this time (to get pregnant). My boyfriend was six years older than me, he seemed responsible, because he was working in Medellín, and he frequently visited me on weekends. My mom was agreeing with our relationship and my older sister too, my father abandoned us when I was three. I was the first in my class, and my grades were the best”.

“My name is Carolina, I am twenty now, I live with my mom and my sister and my baby in Guarne, my son is five years old, he is beautiful, and he is an active and healthy boy. Although, his father left us, I finished my eleventh grade and my mom and my sister help me to take care of my baby.

María del Carmen is Carolina's mother. She recognizes that to know that her youngest daughter was pregnant was hard, because she wanted a different life for her, because she was mother when she was eighteen, and she suffered a lot, because their father lived with them just for four years, and left them alone, she had to work and take care of her two daughters, and give them what she could give them. “I tried to be her example, but I understood that nobody lives the experiences of others”

“Do not worry, we will overcome all this”, were the words of María del Carmen, when she



Illustration 3. Andrés Mauricio Iral, teacher counselor of La Inmaculada Concepción High School

knew her daughter was pregnant. Since that moment the fear of Carolina was to have to leave her studies and to have to work. She was strong and could combine her studies and her responsibility as a mother. She waited for her baby and took care of him while she was doing efforts to finish her dream of graduating from high school.

According to the social worker of the Inmaculada Concepción, Andrés Mauricio Iral, the consequences of being pregnant in adolescence is to have to change the life's project, because a son or daughter is a big responsibility for all the life, not just in the financial part, but in the academic, moral and personal, because adolescents are not prepared to be parents in that age. I am member of a group of mental health belonging to the La Candelaria Hospital in Guarne, there we talk about the youth problematic of the town and we have noticed that Guarne has a high level of pregnancy in adolescents; the girls who are not attending school are without the program of orientation and prevention of family planning. That issue occurs with more frequency in low strata.

While Carolina, her mother and her sister assume the changes in their home, she is tried hard to finish her high studies, unfortunately she is not the best of her class, but now is tempting to be the best mom for her son. “Now that I am a mother, I think the best conditions for taking care of a baby are to have a stable job, finish my studies, and to have a family better built with a husband and to plan our children.

Other case is Tatiana, who got pregnant when she was sixteen; she was in eleven grade, now she is nineteen and works. She describes her experience as something like an unexpected. Now Tatiana remember that she was not able to communicate to her family that was pregnant, in that



Illustration 4. Tatiana with her son Miguel Angel

time was the baby's father who told them the situation, her mother said: "why you did not take care of yourself?" "Why are you not thinking in your future?" while her father just was in silence and angry with her for a while time. Although was hard for her and her family to assimilate their new role, now they are happy with the baby. Tatiana is working now, taking care of her son and many others in a nursery.

Finally she finished high school and got her diploma, someday she wants to be flight attendant. Although she is happy now, she understands that to be mom, changed her life, and she recommend to the girls, to take care of them and look carefully which person is with them now, must be a man for the future, not just for a moment, because a child is not anything and need her /his parents together, thus plan their lives in order to have a good future, with unity in family.

### **A tremendous Situation in the Town**

According to reports of Guarne's hospital, (Muñoz, 2013) in the first five months of the year 2013, was reported 38 cases of adolescent pregnancy between 14 to 20 years. An amount that projected and maintaining the rhythm that has will be report ninety one cases to the end of 2013. 12 case less than the last year, but 27 more than 2011.

A professional nurse from the hospital La Candelaria in Guarne notes that the outlook is improving. "Now we have the friendly consuler, where we serve women from 10 to 29 years, although our focus is on adolescents from 10 to 19, Besides, we will begin address a series of consultation in the schools, where we will talk about prevention of sexual ills, refused pregnancy and myths about sexuality" We will focus on rural areas, where everybody will have consultation



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of thirty minutes. We want that our youth understand that the care is of the couple, and that they learn both planning, both are who get pregnant.

Teenager's pregnancy can drive the person to abort, and it is a hard decision, sometimes taken by social pressing and fear of signaling. The adolescents do not have the maturity to make correct decisions in a moment of suffering or loneliness.

In our twenty first century, society notes, yet the girls get pregnant and, they feel the necessity to abort. In Guarne, many of the pregnant adolescents decided not abort, but their children are growing up with many difficulties, especially emotional and financial necessities. In most of the cases their babies are being raised by one of the parents or by their grandparents. Raising a child alone is not easy nor is it recommended.

In September 2012, Dr. Babatunde Osotimethin, UNFPA Executive Director and Under-Secretary General of United Nations visited Colombia and highlighted the high figures of teenage pregnancy in the country; one in five women between 15 to 19 years old has been pregnant. He said, "Colombia has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Latin America. This is an obstacle for the development of the country." More alarmingly, 64% of those pregnancies are not intended. (Smithson, 2013)

Another reason for UNFPA's visit to our capital city was to see how Colombia is progressing towards achieving some of the international development goals and politics about prevention of pregnancy in teenagers. They were surprised by government's commitment to the prevention of teen pregnancy. The programs youth-friendly service is an example for many countries in Latin America.

This program seeks to improve the quality of health services to adolescents, summarizes common health problems adolescents' face, offers overview of health services adolescents need and discusses what makes services adolescent-friendly.

### **The other side of the story**

A success story involving a teenage pregnancy, although with some sadness, is shown in the life of Marcela. She is house wife who has been married for 10 years and who has two children. Her daughter, Manuela, is 7 years old and, her son, Matias is 20 months and she believes that they are a gift from God. At the moment she and her husband work toward the restoration of families in Guarne. She thinks being a mother is a miracle and, for her, an opportunity to restore many things, according to God's purpose for her life. Maternity is so beautiful in God's hands, it knowing that each day is a miracle to see, love and take care of her children. She feels blessed to



**Illustration 5. Marcela with her husband and her little son.**

have a good man as a husband, to have a family, to show love to them, to be a professional and at the same time to be a happy house wife in the company of her husband.

She says, "To be a mother is to give time to others, to take care of others and I think young girls do not understand that." She

relates that when she was 18, she was studying and she had a boyfriend and at that

time she thought he was the man of her life so she had relations with him. As a result she got pregnant. When she told her boyfriend she was pregnant, he immediately said to her, "You must get an abortion." Since she was in the eleventh grade and wanted to get the high school diploma, she agreed with him that an abortion was the right solution. Part of her decision to abort was because her boyfriend was not supporting her in the pregnancy. She felt even more alone because he was not supporting her emotionally in the decision to get an abortion, and she felt ashamed for getting pregnant and for her decision to get an abortion. She was also afraid

because she had known of girls who disappeared after an abortion or dead. She states, “Although it appeared that I was alone, God was with me and took care of me. The abortion was in the apartment of the doctor, and was fast and without physical pain, but in my heart I felt spiritual pain. Time passed and I always kept silent, but when I came at home I usually cried and cried in my loneliness.”

As for the future, she says, “Years passed and I knew a good man who valued me no matter what I did in the past, now he is my husband and, we tried to do many things to feel good, but I was bad with my pain, until someday I knew a real solution, through the love of Jesus Christ. I understood his love and his pardon and then I was free. I am restored and I am happy with my family, they are wonderful gift from God. My home is beautiful, my husband loves me and had helped me and we are a happy family.

To get pregnant is a blessing; please do not take away the opportunity for the baby to live, because to abort is a big pain that remains in the heart and that can become anger and bitterness.

To establish a family requires a big commitment for all the life, and to do it in the right time and with the awareness of responsibility and love will guarantee a successful, not just for the couple, but their children too. Responsible families are building hope societies, with the vision of be a good example for future generations. Families, who are receiving advice and accompanying are being transform in their thinking and vision of life, with a firm purpose to take care of their children, not just offering them financial support, but emotional, educative and moral.

Also, now, my students are more awareness of their social problematic, and they are doing part of the transformation of their contexts, giving to the town their enthusiastic and participation in the leadership of the municipality.

When Yefrey (20) knew that her girlfriend of 17 was pregnant, he decided to changed his habits and careless behavior and assume a hard working attitude, and brave, that drive him to get a job, and take over a different view of life. He takes care of his partner and his daughter, now.



Another example of that are Jessica Mora, and her family, who are changing a neighborhood



Illustration 6. Jessica with some of her friends.

with a good life style. She is a girl who belongs to a youth group that meet to practice dance, sing and learn to be better persons through the study of moral principles. She annually participates in a march that promotes the life and the family union, expressing values as love, friendship, solidarity, and hope. She and her friends wear dance costumes, paint

their faces and share the good news of a transform life, used by God. While her parents are working in the companies of the municipality, Jessica and her sister Manuela attend school and dream with be professional and serve others.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the social environment, through a critical understanding, is a process of awareness that teachers and parents must to show to children and youth, in order to transform their behaviors and the way to see the life. The problem of pregnancy in teenagers lent itself to a critical literacy for several reasons:

- This is a common issue in a traditional town in the East of Antioquia
- Information about the situation is easy to find and to understand
- The problem permits to work with academic topics, especially in Ethics class.
- It is changing the composition of the families in Guarne
- The undefined project of life in adolescents had been a reason to use inappropriate their free time.

- The big numerous of pregnant teenagers in the last 6 years had grown.

To do awareness of our contexts can to help us to obtain information about causes and consequences of some social issues that affect the development of a region.

How our students learn about their reality, read and write it, but more especially how they act today, show the way how the world moves and change, because the world is in continuing change, it will not the same tomorrow.

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