

**THE USE OF VISUAL ARTS AS A STRATEGY TO TEACH VOCABULARY IN  
SECOND GRADE AT THE PUBLIC SCHOOL LA JULITA, SEDE PROVIDENCIA**

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**LICENCIATURA EN BILINGÜISMO CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS**

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**TRABAJO DE GRADO PARA OPTAR POR EL TÍTULO DE LICENCIADA EN  
BILINGÜISMO CON ÉNFASIS EN INGLÉS**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this project is to show how visual materials are used in the EFL classroom as a strategy when vocabulary taught and their effect on young learners from second grade. The use of visual aids such as pictures, posters, realia and videos can help young learners easily understand and perform the main points that they learned in class. The participants of this classroom project and object of our observation were young learners from public local school from second grade. This project was carried out over a period of three months with an intensity of two (2) hours per week in the second period of the year 2017. As a data collection method, we used reflections, observations and journals.

Despite of the short time frame to conduct the sessions, we obtained positive and satisfactory results regarding both, the vocabulary learned and the way they demonstrated their creativity. Moreover, the way they use language when it is presented through audio-visual inputs seems to be much clearer and easy to assimilate.

**Keywords:** visual arts, vocabulary, creativity, teaching

## Resumen

El objetivo de este proyecto es mostrar cómo los materiales visuales se utilizan en el aula EFL como una estrategia de enseñanza de vocabulario a niños de segundo grado de básica primaria y cuál es su efecto en ellos. El uso de las ayudas visuales tales como imágenes, carteles, realia y videos, puede ayudar a los estudiantes a entender y poner en práctica los puntos principales aprendidos en el aula. Los participantes de este proyecto de aula y objeto de nuestra observación, son niños de segundo grado de básica primaria de una escuela pública urbana local. Este proyecto se llevó a cabo durante un período de dos (2) meses con una intensidad de dos (2) horas por semana durante el segundo semestre del año 2017. Los métodos de recolección de datos que usamos fueron las observaciones, las reflexiones y los diarios de campo.

A pesar del tiempo limitado con el que contamos para desarrollar el proyecto de aula, obtuvimos resultados positivos y satisfactorios no solo respecto al vocabulario aprendido por los niños de segundo grado sino también por la forma en que demuestran su creatividad. Además, la forma en que asimilan y utilizan el vocabulario es mucho más clara y fácil cuando éste se presenta a través de recursos audiovisuales.

Palabras clave: artes visuales, vocabulario, enseñanza, creatividad

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## 1. Justification

Enhancing didactic materials and artistic ideas to teach English as a Foreign Language, could be the pathway for teachers to engage their students and facilitate vocabulary acquisition. In order to promote English as a foreign language in Colombia, the Ministry of Education decided to create a project which involves five strategies to improve second language proficiency in Colombian education. One of those strategies is the program *Colombia Bilingüe* 2014-2018, whose main goal according to *Colombia Aprende* is to raise for the year 2018 the Pre Intermediate B1 level from 2% to 8% and from 7% to 35% the students from Basic level A2.

Under this context, *Colombia Bilingüe* aims to collaborate with the academic system to help students communicate better in English and access to better opportunities in the professional fields. In order to achieve this, it has established specific strategies for teachers, methodology and materials. However, due to its high standards and lack of contextualized material, the government was in the need to make some appropriate changes in which the linguistic policies were aligned with the context and it was when *Colombia Aprende* arose.

With the intention of contributing to the projects created by the Ministry of Education mentioned above, it was decided to carry out this classroom project related with Vocabulary learning. According to Coady and Hucking (1997), vocabulary is a crucial component of communicative competence, and it is important for production and comprehension in a second language. Having this as a main concern, it was decided to implement Visual Arts with the purpose of making the most realistic and contextualized learning environment possible for the young learners.

After having analyzed in databases such as Springer, Proquest and the UTP online resources, it was disclosed projects regarding the use of Visual materials to teach English". The first study, "Using Visual Materials in Teaching Vocabulary in English as a Foreign Language Classrooms with Young Learners", conducted by Kaçani (2014) in Korça, Albania was performed with the intention to determine the student's learning reaction when

visual materials were used to present new vocabulary. The researcher concluded that children enjoy the English classes when they are surrounded by visual elements and these help them to expand their lexicon. The second study is called *Integrating art and literacy in the elementary classroom*; it was guided by Sorensen, M. (2010) in Iowa, U.S., aiming to find different ways for teachers to include visual arts in their syllabus. The study showed positive aspects in regards to the integration of arts with main subject areas, concluding that students were able to establish connections between goals achievements, critical thinking, and opportunities for self-expression. These projects are explained detailed in the Lit review section.

Similar propositions have been found in relation to the use of arts to teach English in Pereira, for instance, "The implementation of authentic material" conducted by Catalina Ortiz, Juan Pablo Osorio, Juliana Osorio (2015), with a group of forty-two (42) first graders between 6 and 8 years old at the public School *Institución Educativa Suroriental* located in Pereira. The purpose of the project was to teach vocabulary throughout the use of authentic materials in a group of students from a primary school. The study led to the conclusion that students increased the lexicon in the second language due to the implementation of authentic materials.

Based on the results of the projects applied in our area of interest, it was evident the importance of creating and proposing new ideas and to teach English facilitating the learning process of foreign language classrooms in Colombia. In a post written by de Mejía (2016) in the newspaper *El Tiempo*, the author states that "Ha habido muchos esfuerzos en Colombia para mejorar la enseñanza de inglés y estos han dado resultados. Sin embargo, creo que hace falta mucho trabajo por parte de los profesores, no solo en materia de actualización, también en sentir que ellos pueden implementar nuevos proyectos y formas de acercar a sus estudiantes al inglés"<sup>1</sup>. This is the reason why it was decided to include visual arts as a new project and contribute with a description on the impact of visual arts when teaching vocabulary to the second graders at *Complejo Educativo La Julita*, sede *Providencia*.

Accordingly, the pre-service teachers proceeded with a need analysis at the public school *Complejo Educativo La Julita*, sede *Providencia* to study the strategies used to teach

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<sup>1</sup> *There have been many efforts in Colombia to improve English teaching and these have given results. However, I think it takes a lot of work on from the teachers side, not only in terms of updating, but also in feeling that they can implement new projects and ways to bring their students into English.*



English. It was observed that the school does not consider arts at all; this means, that children do not have arts as a subject or as cultural matter. The purpose of this project is to incorporate visual Arts in English lessons and use them as a medium to present new vocabulary to second graders, projecting a fun and modern vision of learning using materials different than illustrated textbooks which are the ones currently being used for English instruction.

## 2. Objectives

### 2.1 Teaching objectives

**2.1.1 General.** To incorporate visual arts in the classroom to present new vocabulary.

**2.1.2 Specific.** To examine learners responses and attitudes towards the use of visual arts when learning English.

To identify how much can this strategy increase the vocabulary range in the participants.

### 2.2 Learning objectives

**2.2.1 General.** To increase the range of English vocabulary.

**2.2.2 Specific.** To recognize basic vocabulary presented in class through the implementation of visual arts.

To use vocabulary covered in the lessons that is related to their context and that is meaningful to students' age and interests.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Vocabulary

**3.1.1 Definition of Vocabulary.** Vocabulary is the basis and the very first contact with language. Even prior to knowing its meaning or use, we have a first encounter with the form (spoken, written, and word parts later on.). According to Nation (2001, pp. 3-5 ) the form of a word involves its pronunciation (spoken form), spelling (written form), and the word parts such as a prefix, root, and suffix . This means that after being aware of the form, the meaning and use of the words are learned, and in most cases the first approach is grammar instruction, which may be causing learners to feel frustrated at some point in their learning process; this happens when they do not have a vocabulary basis. We have found in classes that students want to participate or share an idea; however, they have felt inhibited to do this in view of the lack of vocabulary.

As Wilkins (1972, pp. 111-112) notated "...while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Acquiring vocabulary is therefore, essential when learning a foreign language to produce meaningful relations between the words and its structure in language. In the same sense, Douglas (2000) assured that instead of giving students long list of words without any context as teachers used to do in the past, some teachers are more and more concerned about effective ways to transmit knowledge of vocabulary to students. Some of the current techniques seems to be more effective in the sense that teachers started to combine more than one technique instead of using just one (Pinter, 2006). Taking into account the authors mentioned, we can conclude saying that vocabulary is the key to communicate in a language; in this case English as a foreign language. Learning vocabulary do not only implies to know the meaning of a word, but also how the words are used into the context of each student, and how the words are put together in order to create correct sentences.

**3.1.2 The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Learning.** When learning a foreign language the importance of vocabulary goes beyond knowing the meaning of words. It is the starting point for the learner to understand messages and therefore to have the chance to produce them naturally. As Schmitt (2000, p. 55) emphasizes, "lexical knowledge is

central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” . This lead us to think that a wide lexicum is an useful tool for language learners to find a base for successful communication. For example, we cannot expect a student to tell the class his favorite hobbies if he does not have enough vocabulary; perhaps he may know some structures like the verb to be and the simple present but at the moment of not knowing a word or a couple of words, he may feel a little blocked.

Similarly to Schmitt, Nation (2011) argues that in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing.) In fact, having a high degree of vocabulary proficiency is fundamental to all macro skills and their respective development throughout the process. We have already mentioned that vocabulary is the key for learning a foreign or second language, but we cannot forget the language skills; a good learning process is the one who involves all the skills including vocabulary. For instance, vocabulary helps to develop the receptive skills (listening and reading) in the way that if we have already memorized and used the words in the context, we are able to identify them and understand what is being communicated in a conversation or a text.

Thus, vocabulary helps to develop the productive skills (speaking and writing); students need a high range of vocabulary to start writing what they like, their daily routines or even an essay. The same happens with speaking; we prepare lessons with activities like discussions or expositions and students are going to feel inhibited about trying to communicate an idea. This happens since they are worried about making mistakes or because they lack of lexicon. The previous points conclude that vocabulary is important due to the fact that it is the basis to learn a language and if children have rich vocabulary, they are able to understand what it's transmitted and to be able to communicate their ideas.

### **3.2 Types of Vocabulary**

Various researchers have proposed different categories of lexical knowledge. For Nation word knowledge is compound by knowing the form, the meaning and the use. Then, each of these three categories are subdivided into three subcategories; the knowledge of form implies spoken, written and word parts. Nation (2001, p. 17) also mentioned that “receptive

and productive distinctions, such as form/spoken/receptive aiming to answer the question 'What does the word sound like?' and the form/spoken/productive to answer 'How is a word pronounced?'. Laufer & Goldstein (2004) made an important distinction, mentioning that productive knowledge is usually associated with speaking and writing while receptive knowledge is associated with listening and reading. In other words, the first type is the lexicon to which the learner is been exposed to and that is expected to be used in a written work or speech. Besides, passive vocabulary refers to the words that the learner will be able to recognize and understand in its spoken or written form but most likely not to produce/use within a specific context.

**3.2.1 Receptive Vocabulary.** This type of lexicon refers to the words that learners recognize and understand when they are used within a specific context, but that they are not able to produce. As notated by Webb (2005) it is vocabulary that learners recognize when they see or meet in reading text but do not use in speaking and writing. Reading and listening are language skills associated with this kind of vocabulary. Hu and Nation (2000) and Schmitt (2000) points out that a reading is difficult for students depending on the the amount of familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary. If students have a variety of words already learned, it is easier for them to understand texts; in this way, they are not going to understand just the main idea of the text, but also some details.

On the other hand, if we give students a text to read without a vocabulary background, they are going to find it difficult or may misunderstand the main idea, so they will have to resort to the translation method through the teacher or a dictionary, which would be the cause of a non internalized language. Listening is also associated with this situation since when listening to audios if students do not have a high range of vocabulary and have not been exposed to the language, the information given in the audio would be confusing and misunderstood.

**3.2.2 Productive Vocabulary.** In addition, Webb (2008) defines productive vocabulary as the words that the learners are able to understand and pronounce, communicating meaningful ideas in speaking and writing forms. It involves what is needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write properly. Productive vocabulary,

furthermore, can be addressed as an active process since the learners can produce words and convey ideas coherently to express their thoughts to their listeners or readers. For instance, when having a conversation or making activities like discussions or roundtables, students who lack vocabulary do not feel comfortable since they do not know how to express themselves. However, speaking correctly also implies having a good manage of intonation and pronunciation, for a message to be successfully transmitted. As happens with the other skills. spelling the words correctly and having good manage of the grammar rules, also demonstrate if a student actually know how to use the language properly.

### **3.2 Arts**

In the previous session, we discussed the importance of vocabulary in the development of English as a foreign language, the types of vocabulary and techniques to teach this skill. In the following session, we will present the definition of arts, the importance of integrating them into the classroom and the most relevant types of visual arts to be implemented in our classroom project.

**3.2.1 Definition or Arts.** Art is a subjective area, as Clive (2012) states. It means that it does not have an exact definition. The meaning is created by each individual and it's perception of the world. However, in the most general terms, art is the physical representation of human creative skills and imagination through visual, auditory or performing artifacts. Integrating art into vocabulary teaching is an added value to develop learners creativity and self expression to become active and creative users of the language. Grundy, Bociek, & Parker (2011, p. 10) claim that “one of the most significant methodological issues in language teaching is the issue whether we learn language in order to use it or whether we learn a language through using it”. Working with materials such as textbooks usually directs just to one expected outcome; involving art in the learning process will allow learners to creatively make use of the language and what is handy, to be successful in the corresponding task focusing on real cognitive processes. After giving a general idea of what art is, we will develop in the next session the specific area in which we will focus in our project; visual arts.

**3.2.2 Visual Arts.** Visual arts can be defined, generally, as all of what can be seen and perceived in art forms such as ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design,

crafts, photography, and video. Each person has its own way of perceiving and understanding the immediate world. The perceptible and the visible is key for a meaningful, structured and enjoyable learning experience. As notated by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999, p. 8) “Children first learn to respond aesthetically to their environment through touch, taste, sound and smell, and their natural curiosity suggests a need for sensory experience”. Visual arts can be most helpful in early childhood to develop sensory awareness, enhance sensibilities and emphasise particular ways of exploring, experimenting and inventing the world. Lynne and Seam (2010) share the same idea when they state that “Students can construct and demonstrate their understanding in many ways. Traditionally, they are asked to communicate their learning through a report or on a test. However, when they are involved in arts integration, their learning is evident in the products they create. Visual arts carries on many techniques, mentioned above; nevertheless, for this classroom project, it was decided to use mainly drawing, painting, pictures, realia and crafts.

**3.2.3 Importance of integrating visual arts into the language classroom.** Now that the definition of arts has been presented, we will discuss the importance of the integration of visual arts into the classroom as the core of our classroom project. There has been considerable studies in the recent years concerning the impact of Visual Arts throughout all academic areas. One of the most relevant ideas we have found is the one stated by Eubanks (2012) there are no right answers, so students do not experience as much pressure to do well. This is to say that students tend to feel more comfortable working with arts since they are able to take risks and they feel more motivated to communicate what they want since they do not fear of being wrong. One of the most relevant to our project were the following findings reported in *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on re* (Fiske, 1999) that should be noted by all those involved in education:

- The arts reach students not normally reached, in ways and methods not normally used. (Leading to better attendance and motivation)
- It changes the learning environment to one of discovery. (Redefining learning in students tired of traditional direct instruction)
- Students connect with each other better. (Reducing conflicts within the classroom, and providing greater understanding of diversity, and peer support.)
- The arts provide challenges to students of all levels. (Each student can identify better his/her own strengths)

- Students learn to become sustained, self-directed learners. (Promoting autonomy)
- The study of the fine arts positively impacts the learning of students of lower socioeconomic status as much or more than those of a higher socioeconomic status. (Providing options to develop skills depending on the learner interest regardless their socioeconomic status.)

Furthermore, in a recent study a group of researchers from the University of California in Los Angeles, CA discovered that students participating in artistic activities develop higher performance in maths, reading skills, critical thinking skills, and a considerable increase in their motivation to learn if compared to those who are not involved in these type of artistic activities demonstrating that, as Jensen (2001, p. 2) notated “The arts enhance the process of learning. The systems they nourish, which include our integrated sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities, are, in fact, the driving forces behind all other learning.” This project is aligned with the previous ideas to integrate visual arts into the classroom to serve as a meaningful approach to learn English as a foreign language using the immediate resources and context to actively built and experience learning.

### **3.3 Techniques to teach vocabulary through visual arts**

Learning new vocabulary means not only know the meaning of a word, but also how the word is used in their context. Teaching vocabulary is one of the most challenging parts of teaching English as a foreign language and while conducting this classroom project, it was observed that students easily forget the words they learn. This is why teachers need to look for the most appropriate strategies to help students develop the ability of internalizing the language. In order to enrich English vocabulary it was chosen activities for children related to arts, so the vocabulary acquisition process was more enjoyable and significant for them:

**3.3.1 Using Objects.** Implementing the realia as a teaching strategy, is one of the most enjoyable for teachers and students. Through this, it is planned to teach new vocabulary since children will learn while watching, touching, feeling, smelling and experiencing with the object. This way it will be more memorable for them and it will be easier to create a connection between the object and the word that represents it. The use of realia in the classes expand and create new spaces that help to evolve the learning process of English as a Foreign Language in young learners. McGuire (2005) points out that realia can enliven a classroom, using the senses to involve the audience in what is being presented. The learning is natural,



not forced. Children enjoy learning through the use of the materials, such as clay or plasticine, colouring pencils, crayons, cardboard, paper, etc. Some advantages of teaching through this technique are the developing of creativity, interacting with others to become dynamic and efficient.

**3.3.2 Drawing.** Fay, B (2013) refers drawing as a mark-making which is an innate ability that each human develops and uses with the purpose of communicating and understanding their context. Before children develop the productive and receptive communicative skills, they express naturally their ideas by using a piece of paper and a pencil; which will be enough materials for them to resolve their communicative problems in certain settings such as: school and home. In the same way, artists also used this method since the Fine Arts (Painting, sculpture, architecture) provides options for people to communicate what they need with the visual vocabulary that they are unable to articulate. At this point, we could define drawing as the process of visual representation through the use of appropriate materials such as pencils, ink, color pencils, and paper, that infants or adults can employ whose objective will be always to emit a message.

**3.3.3 Using Illustrations and Pictures.** Several authors have found out that using pictures into the classroom is a good strategy to teach English. For example, a study made by Carpenter and Olson in 2012 shows that “the use of visual materials such as pictures when teaching vocabulary in a foreign language is both effective and more easily remembered than independent use of words”. The illustrations and images make children relate the object with the meaning. In this way, the translation method is not necessary which helps students to stop thinking in their first language and start thinking and interpreting in the foreign or second language.

**3.3.4 Crafts.** According to the National Society for Education in Art & Design (no year) “Craft is the designing and making of individual artefacts or objects, encouraging the development of intellectual, creative and practical skills, visual sensitivity and a working knowledge of tools, materials and systems”. Crafts are normally taken from granted in formal education. However, including crafts into the english classroom is a good strategy, since according to Shin, J. (2006, p. 2) “having children involved in creating the visuals that are related to the lesson helps engage students in the learning process by introducing them to the context as well as to relevant vocabulary items”. Crafts can be used to teach and assess any

communicative skill and will develop techniques to create solutions, to solve problems, and to develop kinesthetic competences while they use their creativity when learning the foreign language.

#### 4. Lit Review

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) requires to be aware of the importance of an effective vocabulary instruction since it is the key to develop the communicative competences. This project aims at how future English teachers can develop children's vocabulary through the use of visual arts. This study focuses on two specific areas that show the relation between English and arts and how can visual arts benefit the development of vocabulary in children. In the following section, we will explain the main areas that we are focusing on: Vocabulary and Visual Arts, For this purpose two research studies were analyzed, finding positive results by implementing visual materials and learning through the experience. On a first instant, the study focused on the impact using visual materials by Kaçauni (2014) will be taken into account. The second contribution to be explored is intended to find different ways to include visual arts in English teachers' syllabuses carries out by **Sorensen, M. (2010)**.

It was decided to select a study conducted by Kaçauni (2014) using mixed-methods that aimed to discover impact using visual material sources to present new vocabulary, as well as the attitudes and behaviors from both, learners and teachers. It was implemented in a primary school at Korça, Albania in which the participants were 26 3rd and 6th graders. The main point was to show how some visual materials like realia, posters, pictures, charts, picture books, and similar materials are used in the EFL classroom for vocabulary instruction and what is their effect in young learners. The data collection process started by asking the teachers to complete a survey regarding the implementation of visual materials in their syllabus, what were the materials they used and the attitudes towards these materials. Afterwards teachers and students participated in interviews to determine if the use of these materials was enjoyable for children; finally, in the observation stage, they compared the use of books and the use of flashcards and pictures to present new vocabulary.

At the end of the session the students were assessed (with the topic "fruits"), in which they were asked to match the word with the picture. Since a 97% of the answers were correct, Kaçauni came across the conclusion that young learners enjoy the role of the visual tools when learning English as a Foreign Language and that they definitely create a connection between the word and the image/object to enrich their lexicon.

The previous research showed how visual materials like realia, pictures, and posters are successful in the EFL classroom for vocabulary instruction. This is why it was taken into account a similar study carried out by Sorensen, M. (2010) who intended to find different ways for teachers to include visual arts in their syllabus. She also examined matters such as the benefits, and challenges that may be faced at the time of including art into elementary classrooms. In order to do this, she used qualitative methods, she started interviewing and giving surveys to twenty teachers from 8 rural and urban elementary schools to get an idea of the current condition of arts integration in Iowa, U.S. Afterwards, she started bringing arts to the classes, and continued with the research by observing the sessions that incorporated the art materials proposed, and visiting the school frequently to do a follow up of the process..

In this research, she considered the possible inconveniences when implementing arts in the curriculum, which are the financial aspects, the lack of time, and that some teachers may not have the ability to manage visual art materials. Therefore, she also exposed some solutions, so the teachers had the opportunity to attend to art courses to improve their skills, and the arts were implemented in the subjects to avoid high expenses. The results led to identify a number of positive aspects regarding the integration of arts with main subject areas, allowing students to establish connections between goals achievements, critical thinking, and opportunities for self-expression.

These studies previously mentioned are relevant for our project since both showed positive results when making use of these visual and artistic materials. These investigations were implemented in a context which is similar from ours; in public schools and with the participation of teachers and students. They also used the same data collection methods (surveys given to teachers, interviewing all the participants and observing the lessons in which the visual and visual arts were brought) to get the results. These methods were used since they evidenced that this way they will get more precise details about how the participants feel towards the arts performance in the classroom. The first study helped us to have an expectation about what may happen, and we consider that we will get satisfactory results since we will develop our project in public school with children that are already involved in a context that acknowledge arts as one of the most important subjects.

Furthermore, we will take into consideration the relevance of getting the approval from the administrators as well as from the parents for their children to be part of the study. Although the first research was based on visual arts as drawings and images, we want to focus on our project with materials similar to those used in the second research, which are sculpture, drawing and painting. We can conclude saying that due to the similarities of the materials and methodology from both of the research already mentioned, we expect positive results after the implementation of our project.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Description of the practicum

It was carried out with the purpose of describing and analyzing the impact of using plastic arts to teach vocabulary in a natural environment to learn new words in English. It was made with the intention to serve as a medium to promote learners' freedom of expression while being exposed and have the opportunity to interact with their creations with L2 vocabulary and being consciously aware of their own understanding.

### 5.2 Context

This classroom project was carried at the public school *Complejo Educativo La Julita, Sede Providencia* which is located in the neighborhood *Providencia* in Pereira, Risaralda. The school works "Jornada continua", meaning that it works from 7am to 3pm.

As this is a public school, its population corresponds to all the socio-economic strata. Furthermore, this school counts on a PEI developed by teachers, directives, and institutional staff. The classrooms count with TV, and DVD, but most often teachers work with text books, board and copies. Each classroom has between 25 and 30 students. They follow the standards of teaching English in Colombia, named "*Guía 22*". This project was implemented two hours per week, in a period of two months.

### 5.3 Setting

The second grade students were located in a big and lighted classroom that included the chairs in good conditions, a TV, a DVD, and basic objects such as a board and desks. However, the principals gave the space and permission for the sessions to take place in the yard which is spacy and enclosed by shrubs.

### 5.4 Participants

For this classroom project, there was involved two types of participants; twenty-five students of whom were selected five to be the sample of the project whose purpose is to collect the data in order to obtain the results. This means that their process through the

implementations were followed up, and taken for writing the results. Besides, three practitioners; two implementers and one observer. Details of both can be found below.

#### **5.4.1 Students**

This classroom project was carried out with twenty-five students from 2nd grade of primary, consisting of twelve girls and thirteen boys between six and eight years old. These students were never exposed to English classes in the regular studying schedules, which is why their level is estimated to be A1 or lower. This project was implemented weekly during four hours for two months. The students have been reported to be very active and hands-on learners by the teachers pertaining other areas in the school, other than these details, there were no further characteristics that could be relevant to our project.

#### **5.4.2 Practitioners**

The project was developed by three students of ninth semester from *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo* from the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Regarding the teacher-practitioners' role, one them, being the observer and two of them being the implementer. It was decided to keep the same implementers and the same observer, since students were adapted to the implementers' voice projection, teaching style and the way they interact with each other.

## 6. Instructional Design

After identifying our context and participants, the design of our project followed a **backward approach** and the implementation of **Task-based methodology**. Richards (2010) argues that “the third approach to curriculum design (Backward design) define first the learning outputs to use as the basis for developing instructional processes and input.” To clarify this method, the learning outputs are the main objectives in terms of knowledge and skills we want students to achieve after the lessons.

After defining the different steps of the backward design, we proceeded to describe how these steps were meant to be applied. As “input”, each lesson was planned taking into account the thematic standards proposed in *El Reto*, the learners’ interests, level, and the specific objectives of the lesson. Furthermore, we took into account some of the aspects that we gathered from reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as well as the notes regarding what each one of us could perceive from the lessons, focusing on the most relevant and successful techniques that the learners showed more interested. For the “process”, we decided which type of learning activities, procedures and techniques were applied in the lessons. Last but not least, learning was assessed by measuring understanding through the specific visual/crafts outcomes from the lesson.

Along with the backward approach, this project followed a Task-based methodology which focuses on the use of authentic language through meaningful tasks that are communicative and student-centered. According to **Olenka Bilash (2009)**, among its characteristic we can find:

- Students are encouraged to use language creatively and spontaneously through tasks and problem solving
- Students focus on a relationship that is comparable to real world activities
- The conveyance of some sort of meaning is central to this method
- Assessment is primarily based on task outcome

Although Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has given very positive results on some contexts such as small class sizes of immigrant students (**Olenka Bilash, 2009**) there



are some other authors arguing that TBLT may not be that effective in some other cases, for instance **Broady (2006)** states that TBLT may not provide sufficient "Interaction Opportunities." **Bruton (2005)** identifies other concerns:

- There is no acquisition of new grammar or vocabulary features
- Some students need more guidance and will not or cannot 'notice' language forms (grammar) or other elements of accuracy
- Students typically translate and use a lot of their L1 rather than the target language in completing the tasks.

## 6. 1 Development and Implementation

Driven by the relevance of visual language, the main focus of this project is to use plastic arts to present English vocabulary to second graders. Goller, Phillips and Walters illustrates this point, explaining that visuals 'attract the students' attention and aid concentration, that they 'add variety and interest to a lesson', and that they also 'help to make the associated language memorable'. (2005: 70-1.) The intention was to stimulate students cognitively as much as possible in the second language with a minimum use of their native language. This was ultimately help learners to recognize the importance of their L1 as much of their L2.

This classroom project was carried in the public school *Institución Educativa La Julita* - sede *Providencia* with twenty-nine students from fourth grade of primary. Students were impacted in the way that implementing a new and attractive way to present vocabulary to the young learners of this institution is highly relevant considering that they are very active and hands-on learners. The intention of this project, was therefore, to serve as a medium to promote learners' freedom of expression while being exposed and have the opportunity to interact with their creations with L2 vocabulary and being consciously aware of their own understanding, as Eubanks (2012) states, "(...) there are no 'right answers' students do not experience as much pressure to do well." This is to say that students tend to feel more comfortable working with arts since they are able to take risks and feel more motivated to communicate what they want having not fear of being wrong.

## 6.2 Materials

For this classroom project, considering the financial factors, practitioners tried to collect by their own all the materials that could be used to construct the crafts. Students only had to bring their pencil, colors, ruler, scissors and glue. Practitioners provided the worksheets, tissue paper, cardboard and tin-tacks. In order to design the materials that were going to be used in each activity, we took into consideration the objective of each lesson and each activity planned.

## 6.3 Assessment Procedures

“Assessment practices can help to make the language of content areas more visible to children and also to give teachers the chance to progress in academic language” (McKay, 2006, p.34). In this stage, assessment is important since it provided the evidence of effectiveness of the integration plastic arts into the EFL classroom to teach vocabulary. **McKay argues** on this respect that “children, particularly those who are learning through a foreign or second language need to be taught explicitly and not ‘invisibly’ in a way that ensures that they learn [...] the language (vocabulary, structures, genres) of the new discourse”. It is important to mention that the lessons were monitored in order to avoid feelings of insecurity or anxiety on the students.

In this project, learners were assessed taking into consideration formative assessment, in which students were evaluated during class activities. In order to ensure this objective is addressed, assessment techniques were particularly chosen to monitor the students’ performances, such as smiley faces, word association, and quizzes.[1]

**6.3. 1 Word association.** As cited by Sarah Barrow (2011) [L1] recently there has been a growth of investigation into the L2 lexicon Fitzpatrick and Izura (2011), Zahedian (2010) and Marinova – Todd (2010) suggests that word association can support ESL pupils with lexical development and vocabulary growth. For this reason, a specific topic was selected on each WAT (word association test.) For instance: The Animals. In piece of paper the names of ten animals were deposited in a bag, and each student had to take one. Then, they were asked to draw in their notebooks the animal that was given in the paper in such a way that the students could associate words instead of comparing L1 and L2.

**6.3.2 Quizzes.** Quizzes are an effective way of providing students with feedback on their learning progress as well as to show understanding regarding the course content knowledge. As per Macquarie University's iLearning application states that quizzes can be used to test memory and recall, and also basic reasoning. In this project, at the end of a selected lessons, quizzes were given to the students in which they did not only need to relate a word with an image, but also with the meaning of the word.

**6.3.3 Students final artefacts.** At the end of each lesson, there was a final task in which it was evidenced whether or not the students were able to accomplish the expected outcome. The artefacts used to measure their performance were mostly drawing and painting worksheets and crafts. According to Wan Ng (2015) Students artifacts demonstrate the knowledge acquired, understanding and application and at the same time fosters the development of creativity.

## 7. Data Collection Methods

### 7.1 Reflection

One of the most important aspect when teaching is reflecting about the results gathered in the classes. According to Richards (1990, p. 1) “reflection, refers to an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose”. Reflection is important since we can know what went well in the class and how we inferred it. For example; we may have written in notes or in the journal that students were motivated with an activity. Reflection then helps us to analyze how we knew students were actually motivated. Were the students excited towards the activity? Students wanted to participate?. These aspects are faced in the reflection stage altogether with aspects like the problems faced in the class and the possible solutions for future classes.

In order to gain the best of reflection, it was taken into account the concepts **reflection-in-action** and **reflection-on-action**. Schön (1983, p.68) proposed the idea reflection-in-action as “when someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context”. Taking into account that each context and moments are unique, **Schön** also notes that surprising incidents occur in every situation in which people use knowledge gained in other/similar situations that are inappropriate for the current and unique situation. In action refers to the fact of thinking what we want the students to learn, what we learn from them, from the activities in which they are participating, what is causing impact (students' attitude, behaviors regarding what they are learning) on pre-service teachers. Moreover, it also implies the way in which pre-service teachers are communicating with the students, physical contact, the voice tone, the way we clarify the information when they request it, and these items lead us to reflect on what we are doing well and on what is needed to be changed.

Likewise, reflection-on-action involves an analysis on how practice can be implemented or changed after the event “We reflect on action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome”. (Schön, 1983, p. 26). Hence, the relevance of reflecting during and right after the class in order to get the best of both.

## 7.2 Instruments of reflection

In order to collect information we need to measure students' linguistic outcomes developed in class, it **was used students' artifacts, observations, and journals**. On the other hand, in order to collect the information regarding teaching professional development, it **was used journals and observations**. In the following section, it is described each of these artifacts.

### 7.2.1 Reflection in action

**7.2.1.1 Observations.** The observer was aware in every moment of students' behavior when they performed an activity through the use of plastic arts. According to Merriam (2009), observation is a research method which consists of a detailed analysis of people's behaviors, attitudes, reactions, and assumptions that are necessary to obtain data from the subject that is being researched. The observer was aware of students' performances like motivation and behavior and she wrote a general description of what she saw regarding these two aspects; moreover, the three practitioners took those notes into account to plan the next classes and make solutions to problems that may occur in the classes.

According to Family Health International argues that "we should document what we observe, taking care to distinguish it from our expectations and our interpretation of what we observe". The observer needed to pay attention to every aspect of the class and each of the participants; the one who implements the class and the students. Furthermore, the observer had take notes of what was happening in the classroom in order to see the students and teacher performances and the effectiveness of plastic arts to teach vocabulary.

## 7.2.2 Reflection on action

**7.2.2.1 Students' artifacts.** According to **McGreal T., Broderick E.& Jones J. (n.d)** “all material used to teach and facilitate learning are artifact due to the fact that those are objects or tools which shown human handiwork or modification (p. 20)”. As this project focuses on students' production regarding plastic arts, students had the opportunity to make a final representation of the vocabulary learned in class; the final productions may be drawing, pictures, and representations with recycled materials. These artifacts created by their own hands, were taken into account to measure the effectiveness of the class.

**7.2.2.2 Journals.** Journals are important since they help us remember the small details about a specific aspect. Pre service teachers can observe the class and what happens in it, but there was not going to be remembered every detail later. The notes taken by the observer became part of a journal, in which each one of the practitioners wrote students' behaviors and reactions. Richards (1990) argues that journals “may be used as a basis for later reflection. The diary serves as a means for interaction between the writer, the facilitator, and, sometimes, other participants”. In this way, practitioners identified the positive things of the lesson and the aspects to improve.

Smithsonian Institution (2006) argues similarly that a field journal is a brief entries about work which describes in a calendar notebook daily changes in a specific place. Journals were very helpful for our professional growth, since it was known what needed to be improved; this was applied with the help of our partners, providing each other constant feedback. As we were both implementers and observers, there was the opportunity to analyse our own performance as well as the other practitioners' performances. In this way, it was written our observation and conclusions about each class and feedback from and for our partners was received.

## 8. Results

In the following section the results will be presented in terms of professional growth, students' responses and linguistic outcomes as a consequence of the process of this project. From the beginning, students were exposed to different visual inputs focused on learning new vocabulary in a meaningful way and on increasing their lexicon. During the project and after some reflection different conclusions resulted that contributed to our professional growth regarding classroom management and giving instructions. On the other hand, students' responses were a significant part of the project considering their individualities and interests as well as motivation to be involved in the classes. Additionally, the linguistic outcomes throw significant and very positive results regarding vocabulary learning through the use of visuals and crafts.

### 8.1. Professional growth

The following results for professional growth are the product of the compilation of reflections written by one of the pre-service teachers once the class session was finished. Two aspects were considered as the most relevant for this purpose: classroom management and instruction giving.

**8.1.1. Classroom seating arrangements.** Our observations demonstrated that from the very first class it was evidenced that these second grade students were very active. They were clearly motivated to learn English and showed a positive response towards a different seating arrangement that allowed them to move, play, share their ideas as well as hearing their classmates' voice. Furthermore, it allowed a more significant communication between teacher and .students. Getting them to sit in circles, for instance, allowed them to interact with one another, focus on the class and at the same time be engaged and motivated. To evidence this, an extract from the reflective journal (*RJ 1.25.10*) was chosen:

*Regarding classroom environment teachers need to consider that children will be always moving around. They like talking, playing, and teachers should not pretend students to be quite all of the time.*



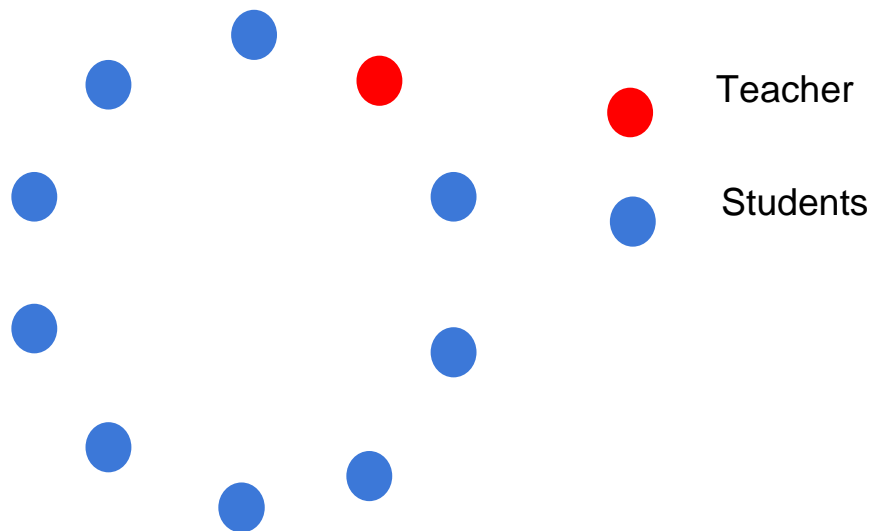
**E1;31/10/2017:** As it can be evidenced, in this teaching section students sat down on the floor in circle and all of them had the chance to participate in the activity called "Magic Box".

*Students liked the idea of sitting on the floor, since it was a different way to work and it was easier for them to share materials, such as scissors (O5;LV; 27/10/17).*

According to McCorskey & McVetta (1978) the physical setup of chairs and tables in a classroom can significantly influence learning. It is important to use the available spaces wisely and make sure the communication between teacher-student is the most appropriate to have a positive impact and to support the learning process. Rands & Gansemer-Topf (2017), say on this respect that generally speaking, spaces designed in a student-centered manner focused on learner construction of knowledge as a consequence of interaction in our case, can



support student learning. The following diagram is an example of how students were arranged:



**8.1.2 Giving instructions.** During the data collection procedures, it was noticeable the importance of giving clear and concise instructions, since the success of the activities depend on how clear the students understand what they are expected to do. Some crucial aspects to give understandable directions are: being specific, using simple vocabulary and explaining the tasks step by step. Besides giving one or two examples of what they are supposed to do after the explanation. It is important to mention that students can get the wrong idea of the purpose of the activity and feel frustrated, as evidenced in .O3; LV; 13/10/17 and O6;LV; 03/11/17:

*Instructions were given in Spanish because students felt frustrated when listening English. However, when teachers were saying some words in English, students were always pending on the gestures and every possible thing the teacher could do to grasp meaning,*

*Students felt confused because instructions were never given in Spanish. But they started inferring the message when the teacher used body language, pointing the parts of the body she was talking about.*

As stated by Scrivener (2012; Ur 1996) the meaning of the words are clearer when teachers demonstrate what they hope students to do. When giving instructions, it is relevant to model through gestures, with a student or asking a couple of students to tell their classmates what they understood.

(Ofelia Garcia, importancia del uso de L1 con propósito específico (translanguaging as a second option)).

## **8.2 Students' responses**

In this section, there are two categories that will be addressed in order to analyze the students' responses, taking into account the observations made in each class and the reflections made after the implementations. The specific topics to be explored are acknowledging creativity in the classroom and the importance of students' interests when planning and teaching a lesson.

**8.2.1 Acknowledging creativity in the classroom.** Society, context, family, and media, are some crucial factors that influence children's imagination. It has been found that when students work with crafts or different types of visuals associated with their environment, teachers have the opportunity to acknowledge their possibilities of being creative, and thus their learning process to be more enjoyable for both, teachers and students. It is essential for students at any age to manipulate materials that allow them to develop their imagination. Art materials give children the opportunity to express themselves verbally and nonverbally, develop thinking and problem-solving skills.

An appropriate and comfortable work space for the activities to stimulate children's minds, is pertinent when they are working with crafts. Creativity is a way of embracing originality and uniqueness. This was a factor that influenced positively this project as most of the children created crafts adding and giving some other functions that the ones that were expected. Students also went beyond and looked for other materials other than the teacher provided to make it more appealing to their likes and interests, which was assimilated as a sign of developing high order of thinking skills. As stated by Beghetto (2010. p. 5) "When

teachers view unexpected ideas as disruptive and habitually dismiss them, they are seriously undermining opportunities for students to share and develop potentially creative ideas”. This is reflected in the following crafts created by students 1, and 5:

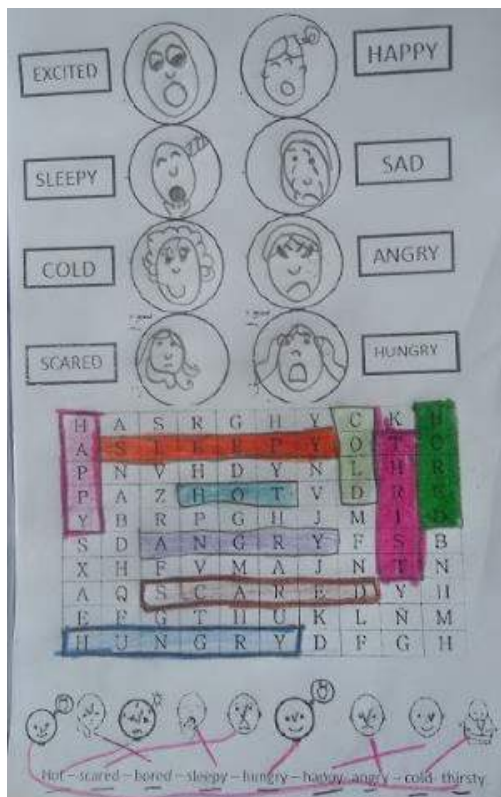


**A8;17/11/2017;S1:** As it was evidenced in this craft, student used cotton to create the tale of a bunny, which was not a material given for the development of this task.



**A8;17/11/2017;S5:** In this sample, it was clear that student tried to cut paper in different shapes and pieces, to give a more realistic appearance to his tiger.

**8.2.2 Importance of students' interests.** Keeping in mind children's interests and ideas is the pathway to achieve plenty of opportunities to play with creativity. Listening carefully to what they say, paying attention to their conversations and attitudes, is the mechanism through which teachers identify what items to implement when planning and designing a class. It is evident that when tv shows, music or movies familiar to learners are used, they get more involved into the learning process. As an example, to introduce the topic Feelings and Emotions some gifs from the movie *Inside Out* were presented. Children showed excitement when teachers started to talk about this movie and most of them wanted to participate and say something about a character or about the movie in general.



As an example of this, in the worksheet activity A3; 13/10/2017; S4 it was noticed that children enjoyed drawing the feeling it was asked for, since they could associate the activity with the emoji's from the application *Whatsapp*.

*Students seemed to enjoy the activity of the word search. They said things like Encontré*

*happy, me falta angry, encontré five feelings, teacher. O3; LV; 13/10/17*

As stated by Paswan & Young (2002), “Student–teacher interaction refers to the opportunity to ask questions, express ideas, and have an open discussion in class. Nonthreatening interactions allow students to ask questions, practice the free expression of ideas, develop their own skills, and improve class discussion” (p. 961).

**8.2.3 Motivation.** Equally important, it was found a close relationship between students’ interests and their motivation to learn English. Motivation is an essential component when learning a language; since it affects learners’ performance.

On this respect, Gardner (1985, p. 10) mentioned that “Motivation is an important contributor to language achievement in terms of linguistic outcomes, which traditionally embrace the knowledge structure of the language, i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation and the four basic skills of the language, including listening, understanding, reading and writing.”

As could be found in O7; LV; 10/11/17

*In the painting activity, students seemed very motivated to complete the task. The most of them were excited to paint, even though they could not paint as they wish.*

And in E6; NT&PR; 03/11/2017

*It is relevant to mention that when children do not want to work and the teacher sits next to them, they feel motivated and do the effort to start working on the task.*

### 8.3 Linguistic outcomes

On this section, linguistic outcomes will be addressed by presenting the results obtained in the classes, taking into consideration the reflections and observations made by the teachers and the observer. The following subsections will expose the understanding of the concepts in terms of vocabulary range and language use.

**8.3.1 Language Range.** Given the fact that students have been immersed in a traditional classroom, and have just a few hours per week for English Instruction, it would be proper to mention that they tend to forget words easily. However, after the implementation of different and meaningful visual inputs it was evident that the students, apart from recognizing the new words visually, they also learned how to relate the concepts with the physical representations (images) rather than translating. It could be seen in the next extract from the journal 5:

*In some situations, when one of their classmates asked, they gave them the meaning by translating or showing such part in their craft. Because of this we could say that those who were giving the meaning to others, understood the concept by associating the word with the illustration. E5; NT&PR; 10/27/2017*

Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (p. 55) and such was one of the main purposes of this project. Students became the main part of the classroom and started using language to communicate and participate in their own learning process which means they took advantage of the input that was purely receptive and went beyond to produce language.

In other words, it was clear that the learners could relate the images to their background knowledge as well as their interests which was a top priority for this classroom project and its corresponding lesson planning. Furthermore, we also identified some patterns of language use such as relating the new vocabulary to the learners themselves. The following is one of the journal entries supporting this point:

*“We noticed that some students after finishing this activity, started to point out in their clocks how they felt at that moment. One example of this is when a student said: Teacher, yo estoy sad porque...”* **E4; NT&PR; 31/10/2017**

**8.3.2 Interlanguage as a Resource of Communication.** It is relevant to mention that all the topics were connected in such a way that students could relate what was learnt in the previous classes with the new subject matter. To make this possible, teachers planned the classes implementing activities that allowed children to reuse and practice the vocabulary already taught. All these tasks always had a functional perspective and fostered a communicative use of language. However, since students did not have knowledge about English grammatical structure, most of the times they combined L1 and L2 with the purpose of interacting with their classmates or teachers. This idiolect is known as Interlanguage. For instance:

*Profe, necesito 4 legs, 2 ears, two eyes.*

Or chunks such as:

*Profe, blue.*

*This was clear evidence that they are now making connections to communicate effectively and get the task completed.* **O8; LV; 17/11/17**

Griffiths & Parr (2001) consider Interlanguage as a strategy used to facilitate the second language learning. This lead us to think that they showed understanding on the concepts seen during these 8 sessions and made connections of their knowledge to

communicate. On this regard, the observer also mentioned:

*Some asked things like “¿Teacher, la head va arriba, cierto?”* **O5; LV; 27/10/17**

Despite the students use of interlanguage most of the times in the classroom as their resource to check with the teachers if what they were doing was correct, teachers always responded back in English to reinforce/check understanding and to try to develop listening skills, so they could get used to the way the words sound. For instance, “Yes, the head is above”; using body language, speaking clearly and slowly.

**8.3.3 Recognizing vocabulary through visuals.** In the second language acquisition process, teachers regularly use visual materials such as objects, images or videos, with the purpose of enhancing word recognition. Visual aids help teachers to bring the real world into the classroom, making the learning process more meaningful and more exciting for students (Brinton, 2000). It was perceived that when teachers used visual input such as gifs, music videos, poppets or objects to explain the meaning of a word, students understood faster and it was more significant for them rather than giving the translation directly.

This was seen and analyzed in **E7; NT&PR; 10/11/2017**





**E2;21/11/2017**

*Next to the video, there was an exercise with finger puppets. Students enjoyed the role of realia, since some of them wanted to see, touch and play with the puppets.*

In this picture, it is evidenced the activity with finger puppets. This was implemented in the second stage of the class (practice). After the presentation stage of the animals, the implementer showed some finger puppets; students needed to say in English which of the animals was the one shown by the teacher. Students enjoyed the role on realia since they wanted to touch, play and practice with the finger puppets.



**E3;03/10/2017**

Regarding this image, it depicts the students enjoying the use of videos and songs. In this case, it was presented the video of the feelings and emotions. Students recognized the pronunciation of the feelings, and at the same time, they were able to recognize visual representation of the feelings. Thus, the evidence demonstrated that students identified the feelings by representing the actions. For example: When the song said *if you're scared, say "oh no"*, students immediately started to sing the song and to perform the action.

## **9. Conclusions**

In the process of planning the lessons, we started with activities that allowed us to know students regarding their interests, attitudes, socio-economic status and also to figure out what English level they had which was crucial for us when planning our lessons.

Furthermore, the psychological and cognitive aspects played an important role due to the fact that students do not learn at the same rhythm, neither they have the same learning styles. In the same way, learning styles and multiple intelligences must be taken into account and try to mix them in such a way that all these are addressed. We opted for a *Getting to know you* activity as a strategy to locate and identify the level of English of the students as well as to know what their interests were and prioritize them when planning the sessions. When planning, we need to put ourselves in our students' shoes to think of what it's appropriate for their age and English level. This gave us some positive insights for our project as students felt motivated and engaged during the sessions now that they were the focus of the class and the content was contextualized and adapted to their preferences and learning styles.

Moreover, successful outcomes do not only depend on a careful planning but also on its execution. During the sessions, we focused our attention to encourage students to do their best, to participate, to display their creativity; besides, we gave them freedom to perform the activities the way they felt more comfortable, as long as the purpose of the activity was accomplished. There were singular cases in which some students lost their focus due to lack of didactic materials required for the class or external matters; therefore they felt they needed more attention. However, we noticed that when we got involved along with the students in the activities that we proposed, they did not hesitate to start working. Moreover, we discovered that their motivation was also linked to the way we praised them for participating, which made them feel that all their ideas were valuable and that they contributed to the class.

Last but not least, the results were generally satisfactory and not far from what we expected from the classroom project. We learned from it some key points regarding classroom seating arrangements and giving instructions as we mentioned in the first section of the results, giving us valuable items that contributed to our professional development. Additionally, students were creative and participative throughout the sessions and the outcomes regarding language development were quite acceptable in terms of vocabulary range and language use. Most importantly, they were very intuitive and attentive when vocabulary was shown through visual aids. Nevertheless, if we had the opportunity to implement this project again, we will opt to ensure a better planning for the resources needed as well as making a study of the school before implementing the project to avoid unexpected setbacks.

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