

**LITERACY RICH ENVIRONMENTS: A TOOL TO FOSTER READING  
COMPREHENSION IN EFL**

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**BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Literacy Rich Environments: A Tool To Foster Reading Comprehension In EFL**

This research aimed to investigate the influence of a given literacy environment as a tool to enhance students' reading comprehension skills in English as a Foreign language. To reach the aim of this study, the qualitative research paradigm was used to collect the required data. This way, the group 104 from DFS School in Bogota, Colombia; was selected for the diagnostic activities and the interviews. The implementation of literacy rich environments enabled the students to engage closely with reading dynamics in English, besides providing them with the aids to develop further social and academic skills.

*Key words:* Reading comprehension, learning environment, literacy, EFL.

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## RESUMEN

### **Ambientes Ricos en literacidad: Una herramienta para promover la comprensión lectora en Inglés como Lengua extranjera**

Esta investigación busca obtener un mayor entendimiento sobre los procesos de comprensión de lectura en Inglés como segunda lengua. Para alcanzar estos objetivos, los datos se recolectaron bajo el paradigma de la investigación cualitativa. Las respuestas de los participantes fueron analizadas bajo el método cualitativo de la triangulación. De esta forma el grupo 104 del colegio distrital Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, en Bogotá, fue escogido para ser intervenido. La implementación de un ambiente de literacidad permitió que los estudiantes tuvieran un contacto más cercano con los procesos de lectura en inglés, proveiendolos además con un desarrollo en sus capacidades académicas y sociales.

*Palabras claves:* Comprensión lectora, ambiente de aprendizaje, literacidad, Inglés como lengua extranjera.

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<b>2. Descripción</b>
<p>Tesis de grado donde el autor propone el diseño y uso de un ambiente rico en literacidad como herramienta para desarrollar y potenciar las habilidades de comprensión lectora en inglés en estudiantes del Colegio Técnico Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, en Bogotá, con un nivel A0 (MCER). Este tipo de ambiente fue diseñado partiendo de las necesidades y gustos de los estudiantes. Las actividades e intervenciones fueron realizadas usando como principal herramienta los cuentos cortos en inglés apoyados en imágenes, audios y vocabulario. Además, las clases</p>

fueron desarrolladas en español e inglés haciendo uso del *code switching*.

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#### **4. Contenidos**

El presente trabajo se compone de seis capítulos. El primer capítulo desarrolla una descripción de los contextos externos e internos de la población con la que se desarrolló, gracias a esta descripción fue posible identificar el problema de aprendizaje a partir del diagnóstico de aspectos socio-afectivos, culturales y cognitivos que sirvieron como sustento para la formulación tanto de la pregunta de investigación como del objetivo general y los específicos.

En el capítulo número dos se hace una revisión de los fundamentos teóricos necesarios para dar soporte a la investigación. Allí se definen conceptos en torno a: comprensión de lectura, como un proceso que involucra tanto la decodificación de signos como la relación dialógica entre

el lector y el texto; la lectura en lengua extranjera y la implicación que esta tiene en los procesos de aprendizaje de lengua materna y lengua extranjera; los ambientes de aprendizaje definidos como los espacios en donde el aprendizaje es concebido de manera significativa; los ambientes ricos en literacidad, llenos de recursos y oportunidades que favorecen la interacción de los estudiantes con las lenguas y la instrucción del *Whole Language*, el cual propone que las lenguas deben ser aprendidas como un todo y no por los segmentos que las componen.

El tercer capítulo desarrolla la revisión de la metodología de investigación acción y su naturaleza reflexiva y cíclica. Además, los instrumentos de recolección de datos son también presentados y justifican la veracidad de las evidencias que se obtuvieron en la implementación de este proyecto. Finalmente este capítulo presenta las categorías que posteriormente servirán para el diseño y la implementación de las intervenciones.

El capítulo cuatro hace una introducción a los enfoques constructivistas como métodos de enseñanza para esta investigación y, una vez más, el *Whole Language* como método de instrucción de segunda lengua, apoyados en la técnica del *Codeswitching* como herramienta para promover la comunicación en el salón de clases. De igual forma desarrolla los cronogramas de intervenciones realizadas y el método presentación-práctica-producción (PPP) como guía para la planeación de estas. Igualmente, cada una de las fases y etapas de esta planeación presenta su nombre, duración, descripción de la misma y los objetivos que la orientan.

En el quinto capítulo se realiza una revisión exhaustiva de los resultados encontrados analizándolos por medio de la triangulación de los diferentes instrumentos de recolección de datos. Estos análisis son guiados por los objetivos trazados en el capítulo uno, y las categorías propuestas en el capítulo tres. Para dar mayor sustento y veracidad a este capítulo, una serie de evidencias fotográficas y vínculos a evidencias audiovisuales son adjuntados.

Finalmente, en el sexto capítulo se presentan las conclusiones y los hallazgos encontrados en el desarrollo de este trabajo. Se hace una revisión del impacto del ambiente rico en literacidad y las dinámicas que este propone en la población, las limitaciones encontradas a través del desarrollo de la investigación y las posibles recomendaciones para futuros proyectos que realicen un acercamiento a una problemática similar.

### **5. Metodología**

La metodología usada para el desarrollo de este trabajo fue la investigación acción y se desarrolló en el Colegio Técnico Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, con un grupo de 34 estudiantes de primer grado (104) entre los 6 y 8 años en la jornada de la tarde. Los parámetros de la investigación acción establecen un proceso cíclico que comprende el diagnóstico, el plan de acción, la implementación y la evaluación enfocados a lograr un aprendizaje específico. Los instrumentos usados para recolectar los datos fueron diarios de campos, encuestas, grabaciones de audio y vídeo, y trabajos de los participantes (artefactos).

### **6. Conclusiones**

Esta investigación reveló que los ambientes de aprendizaje influyen de manera directa los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje en la escuela. De igual forma, se encontró que los procesos de literacidad y comprensión de lectura deben ser apoyados en una gran cantidad tanto de recursos como de oportunidades para que los estudiantes interactúen con la segunda lengua. Otra de las conclusiones encontradas en esta investigación fue la gran influencia de la lengua materna en los procesos de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera; esto debido a que gran parte de los resultados obtenidos por el grupo de estudiantes fueron alcanzados gracias a la transferencia de

habilidades de lengua materna al aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera.

Los procesos de aprendizaje de segunda lengua y de comprensión de lectura deben ser diseñados de manera que respondan a las necesidades y a los gustos de los estudiantes.

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<b>Revisado por:</b>	Francisco Pérez Gómez

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## Tabla de contenido

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction to the study .....	1
1.2 Characterization .....	2
1.2.1 Context .....	2
1.3 Diagnosis.....	5
1.4 Rationale of the Study.....	8
1.5 Problem Statement .....	10
1.5.1 Description of the problem.....	10
1.5.2 Justification .....	11
1.5.3 Research question(s) and objective(s).....	11
1.6 Conclusion .....	12
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical Frame work &amp; State of the Art.....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Theoretical frame work .....	13
2.2.1 Reading comprehension .....	13
2.2.2 Foreign language reading .....	14
2.2.3 Learning environments.....	15
2.2.4 Literacy rich environments.....	15
2.2.5 Whole Language Instruction .....	16
2.3 Literature review .....	16
2.4 Conclusion .....	18
<b>Chapter 3: Research Design.....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	18

3.2	Type of study .....	19
3.2.1	Qualitative research.....	19
3.2.2	Action research.....	19
3.3	Data management procedures .....	20
3.3.1	Data analysis methodology .....	20
3.4	Categories.....	20
3.4.1	Overall category mapping .....	20
Table 1 Overall Category Mapping. ....		21
3.4.2	Artifacts' descriptions .....	21
3.4.3	Criteria description and justification.....	22
3.5	Conclusion .....	23
<b>Chapter 4: Pedagogical Intervention and Implementation .....</b>		<b>23</b>
4.1	Introduction.....	23
4.2	Visions of language and learning.....	24
4.2.1	Vigotsky's constructivism.....	24
4.2.3	Codeswitching.....	25
4.3	Instructional design.....	26
4.3.1	Lesson planning.....	26
4.4	Implementation .....	26
4.5	Timetable: .....	30



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to the study**

Literacy is one of the most important skills in life. Learning how to read and write may determine whether a subject becomes successful or not in a variety of areas in life. Most of literacy processes focus their aims on both writing and decoding texts. In Domingo Faustino Sarmiento School in Bogota, Colombia, a group of 34 students from 1<sup>st</sup> grade were chosen to evaluate the influence of a literacy rich environment in their processes of acquiring reading comprehension skills in L2.

The chosen population were developing their literacy skills in L1 and this research argued that, with the proper environment, tools and stimuli, some of those literacy skills in L1 might be transferred to L2 enhancing the reading comprehension skills in L2.

The group of students that went through the dynamics, activities and lessons implemented through an 11-week program showed great achievements in terms of reading comprehension, picture reading, writing in English and they also improved their interaction with the environment and their peers.

This sort of rich environment may be used to support the learning and teaching processes in any subject, language and population. Most importantly is the way the teachers and tutors take ownership of such ambiances and properly scaffold the dynamics to achieve their goals.

## **1.2 Characterization**

Through this section the aim is to provide both the researcher and the reader a clear idea of the population and the context the researcher was working with. In this case the research took place in an official school in Bogotá, Colombia. It was important, then, to contextualize the institution itself including educational paradigms and the socio cultural surroundings.

### **1.2.1 Context**

#### **1.2.1.1 *Local Context***

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento is an official school founded in 1972 in Rionegro neighborhood. It offers the community of this area the services of elementary and high school as well as technical formation for 11<sup>th</sup> graders on financial operation and assistance as well as logistics of sports in two shifts; morning and afternoon.

Rionegro neighborhood is situated between Av. Suba and Calle 100 in Bogotá. It belongs to the Barrios Unidos locality. The main economic activities in this neighborhood are small shops and plenty of mechanical garages; most of these places owned and ran by the inhabitants.

#### **1.2.1.2 *Institutional Context***

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento focuses its job on human and social development. Throughout its PEI; “Calidad educativa para la formación integral y laboral”, the school aims to the education of citizens able to transform and modify the Colombian society based on human rights respect, love and pacific coexistence.

Its mission aims for the formation of students through pedagogic processes for their human development. Knowledge, motivation, principles and values would lead students to create and perform a proper life project qualified on autonomy, creativity and diversity.

In regards to their alumni, the school expects to promote people that communicate, be active actors of the society and that interact in several contexts with critical thought. The student who graduates from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento School should be able to transform the context around him towards the benefit of the whole Colombian society. It becomes relevant, then, to revise the participants which are the basis of the research project.

### **1.2.1.3** *Participants*

The grade 104 was composed by 34 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 8 years old. Most of the kids lived nearby the school but 47% of them came from several neighborhoods such as Bilbao, Aures and Tibabuyes; located in Suba locality. All of the students stated they loved the school they went to and, according to the survey 1° (See Appendix A: *Survey N°1*) only one of them said he was forced to go to school.

In regards to their learning strategies, most of them said they did homework at home helped by any adult using resources such as the notes they take and the text books they had. These last two were full of notes and had information that the students could use both at school and at home.

Reading was one of their biggest interests. The group showed a great initiative when interpreting and getting involved with written input in Spanish. This did not necessarily mean that they did not enjoy English. Based on the field notes and several diagnostic activities, the kids showed an impressive response to English. They certainly had no fear of participating, mumbling or just getting along with activities in English.

Inside the classroom there was only a few of visual and written resources. To be fair, the only resources the students had were their text books and the guides –designed and- given by the

teacher. In class, the students participated a lot and most of the time the knowledge was built up by cooperative work between the students and the teacher.

The students also respected and followed social rules; they were respectful to each other and the teacher. Inside the group there were common and individual interests. Pretty much every kid liked a different T.V show, or a musical artist, but the whole group wanted to learn how to read in Spanish following a comprehensive and interpretative process.

This preference diversity did not affect the communication or the bonds inside the class group. Most of the time kids enjoyed working in groups and helping each other. They were able to distinguish the moment they were allowed to talk and also followed speaking turns.

Questions were not only formulated by the kids but also by the teacher. Some of them were in order to give the kids clues about the topic they were learning or to promote communication among the group. When the questions were done by the kids, most of them were intended to ask for a repetition, or to ask for permission.

Students often went in front of the class to show the group the way they solved a problem or did the homework. There was a “Cuaderno viajero” which gave the kids the opportunity to bring home some of the school dynamics and share with their families and so on with the class group.

To sum up, it is possible to affirm that students from 104 were active and participative learners. They did enjoy talking to each other and the bonds that exist among the students and the teacher were remarkable. The class group featured a respectful and participative environment in which the kids were constantly learning through their experiences and the interchange of ideas.

### 1.3 Diagnosis

To properly set the goal of this research it was necessary to find out the proficiency the students from course 104 had in the main 4 language skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening). Thus, a diagnose exercise was created (See Appendix A and B: *Guía N°1 & N°2*) along with an evaluation criteria (See Appendix C: *Evaluation Criteria*) in order to obtain and properly state their strengths and weaknesses in English. These interventions were designed and performed based on both “Estándares básicos en Inglés y Lengua Castellana”.

Even though the diagnostic was in L2, the exercises were conducted using written and spoken Spanish. This is based on the field notes (See Appendix E: *Field notes N° 1*) that establish that most of the participants did not catch along when English was taught. That is when Spanish came to place, to be used as a link, instructions were written and given in Spanish, and the dynamics themselves-audios, prints and vocabulary- were given in English.

The first diagnostic activity (See Appendix B: *Guía N° 1*) aimed for the evaluation of the four skills; speaking and listening skills were measured by listening to songs, charades and asking them basic greetings in English, and for the written part, the participants were asked to circle up the words they recognized out of a list provided.

Now, the first conclusion dragged out of the diagnose #1, and an extract of field notes, was that the whole group lacked a proper literacy process in English due to several reasons such as the little input they received, the lack of preparation from the assigned teacher, among others.

On the bright side though, when it came to relating pictures, or retelling a given short stories during other interventions, most of the participants showed an average score even though their response was in Spanish (See Appendix G: *Field notes N° 3*). The participants showed a 60% of accuracy when relating graphics to texts, and they also had a 40% of accuracy when

organizing images in a chronological way, which showed the researcher that they needed to work on their image reading skills.

Now, this brought up one very important conclusion: The 104 group seemed to have certain strengths to interpret texts by looking at pictures and relating these to texts. The group in general had a high competence when summarizing texts and identifying the main idea of these. To measure this it was necessary to perform a focus group in which the students participated by commenting and adding ideas, in a cooperative way, in order to recreate the plot and arguments of the story "Hansel and Gretel".

It was necessary then to design a second diagnose exercise to confirm that assumption; the activity this time was focused on Spanish reading comprehension (See Appendix B: *Guía N° 1*)

The second diagnose showed that the participants had an above average level of reading comprehension in Spanish (See Appendix C: *Guía N° 2*); this means, that they were not a 100% proficient but they were still working on that and improving day after day. Out of the 34 students, 61% showed a high proficiency when it came to making conclusions before reading a text only by looking at images and titles.

It is quite interesting that most of the groups had a 40% of accuracy when giving an order to the images and the story the students told in Spanish was concrete, coherent and clear.

The conclusions brought out of the English diagnose are the following:

55% of the group had a low competence when recognizing words and sentences in English and 90% of the group got low as well when matching illustrations and simple sentences. So it is possible to infer from these results that the kids have low vocabulary in English and as a consequence, they do not know how to read in English.

The results during the comprehension focus in English were good. The students got to organize the story sequence and tell the story using Spanish.

Once again, they certainly had great prediction and comprehension skills in Spanish but they did not have enough English input to speak this language properly.

When it came to the oral and non-verbal part they showed great results. 100% of the group participated actively during songs, charades and games when supported by modeling and body language which, according to the Estándares de Calidad, was adequate.

In regards to the response to oral questions 50% of the participants got a medium proficiency, this was measured by asking easy and quotidian questions such as “how are you” and “What is your name” which they were supposed to know.

- The group 104 from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento school afternoon shift had, in general, a good reading comprehension in Spanish. They supported this process by relating illustrations and texts, making suppositions and guessing what the texts were about.
- They also showed good competence when organizing images chronologically and creating stories out of these.
- In English language, the group had severe difficulties when it came to reading written texts and expressing their ideas speaking in English. Their oral production was limited to repetition and their use of non-verbal language depended on the visual stimuli they received from the teacher.
- On the other hand, they had great response to English. Even though they did not produce either oral or written texts, they took risks and participated with no fear of feeling ashamed. Their affective filter, during English activities, was really low which allowed them to feel comfortable and active during the several English dynamics.

#### 1.4 Rationale of the Study

Literacy skills in a foreign language can begin as early as the foreign language instruction begins. Some foreign language programs propose a delay to those literacy processes and focus more on the oral development. Studies have shown though, that this delay is not even necessary or recommended. (Shin and Crandall, 2014)

The transfer of skills happens on a daily basis. Students not only learn mathematics for the sake of figuring out somebody's age that is half the age of his father. They learn and apply those skills when going shopping, investing in real state and creating a savings plan (Perkins, 1988). Now this theory might support the fact that participants from grade 104 may transfer their literacy skills in Spanish to be applied in English. More concretely, their reading comprehension skills from L1 to L2.

Adding to this statement, Dlugosz (2000) states that initial literacy does not necessarily need to be in L1. Taking into account that most EFL teachers have a limited time in class, in Colombia for instance according to the "Estándares Básicos de Competencias en lenguas extranjeras" some elementary schools have got 1 hour in English class and some others have not been assigned class hours yet (P. 31) literacy skills might as well be incorporated to the syllabus leaving behind a focus merely on oral development, especially because learning to read is also proven to help in oral language development. In Dlugosz's (2000) words "...including the teaching of reading in language programs will benefit all young beginners, including preschoolers. Depending on the country, this group will include children below the ages of five, six, or seven. If reading is emphasized in their curriculum from the very beginning of their language education, these young children will progress faster not only in learning to read, but also in understanding and speaking the language" (P. 285)

Reading then, becomes an essential skill that might define the success or failure of students. It has been proved that 74% of students in grade 3 were poor readers in grade 9 (Foorman, 1998, p. 37). Once the students reach fourth grade, most of the information they need is given to them in written formats, from then on they have to switch from learning to read, to reading to learn.

This research implemented a literacy-rich environment in which students would learn how to read in English as a foreign language. The importance of a specific learning environment is supported by the idea that the physical atmosphere of the classroom can be a dominant instrument in support of the literacy skills (Loughling and Martin, 1987).

Ray Reutzel and Mary Wolfersberger (1996) present a study named: An environmental Impact Statement: Designing supportive literacy classroom for Young Children. Here, they propose four concepts that support the implementation of a literacy environment in this research.

- Children's literacy development and learning is highly influenced by the presence or not of literacy tools.
- Children's development is affected by the physical arrangement of the space and the placing of the tools within the space
- Children's literacy is affected by social interaction using literacy tools.
- Children's learning is affected by the authenticity of the context in which the tools are proposed.

Reutzel and Wolfersberger (1996) state that among the several advantages of using these environments, literacy ones can be used to enrich any area of the curriculum due to the joy that children feel when interacting, and learning, with literacy props.

When properly designed, these literacy environments are aesthetically pleasing to children and also stimulate a further growth of their language and literacy skills (P 279).

## **1.5 Problem Statement**

### **1.5.1 Description of the problem**

Taking into account the diagnosis and the several interventions made by the researcher, it is possible to state that the students of first grade (104) at Domingo Faustino Sarmiento School had quite impressive reading comprehension skills in Spanish that might be transferred to L2 as a medium of developing reading comprehension in English. In this specific case the so on called “problem” was not something to be fixed but something to be worked and strengthen. The “problem” was technically the basis to this research.

According to the “Estándares Básicos de Competencias en lenguas extranjeras” kids from first to third grade should be placed on a A1 level (CEFR) having proper abilities on the following criteria:

- Recognizing words and short sentences in books, commercials, and places at school.
- Relating imagery with simple sentences
- Reacting to oral stimuli supported on imagery and modeling
- Responding to greetings and easy questions about oneself.
- Using non verbal language to express thoughts
- Participating actively during games and charades.

The criteria presented previously are just a sample that compiles, somehow, what is important to be taken into account for this research. The complete document presents much more guidelines taking into account as well the students’ communicative competences such as linguistic, pragmatic and socio-linguistic.

The age of the group was a determinant factor as well, it helped identifying the students' likes and dislikes along with their motivations in regards to their approach to English activities such as songs, charades, use of visual materials and the reading of short stories in English.

Here it is important to establish the relevance of reading comprehension as a key process not only for literacy but also for several cognitive and socio-cultural skills and abilities. This research seeks to develop reading comprehension skills as the main ability to reinforce in beginners levels and this would help supporting the process of literacy in general.

To wrap things up, this research sought to enhance and potentiate the reading comprehension skills the group 104 through the transferring of skills from L1 to L2 supported by a literacy rich environment.

### **1.5.2 Justification**

This research aimed to develop an analytic process in which it would be possible to recognize the suitability of the application of a specific environment, designed and developed based on concrete needs and resources; and its influence on the development of reading comprehension in L2 carried on using skills transferred from L1. This analysis might as well set certain basis in terms of the strategies used to foster processes literacy both in L1 and L2.

### **1.5.3 Research question(s) and objective(s)**

How might the implementation of a literacy rich environment help improve reading comprehension in English as a Foreign language on first graders with A0 CEFR?

To properly answer this question, it was necessary to formulate certain objectives that would lead the research process in an organized and precise way:

- **Main objective:** To establish how effective is the implementation of a literacy-rich environment as a tool to improve reading comprehension in EFL for first graders.

- **Specific objectives:**

1. To describe the way that reading comprehension is fostered by the implementation of a literacy rich environment.
2. To evaluate the influence of a literacy rich environment in the reading comprehension and literacy development.
3. To evaluate the pertinence of the proposed strategies to improve reading comprehension of the grade 104.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

In general terms, the participants from grade 104 showed some impressive skills in terms of reading comprehension in Spanish. These skills were transferred to L2 in order to foster a process that might develop their reading comprehension skills in English. The main tool used to support such process was a literacy rich environment that provided the group 104 with the resources and ambiance they needed to enhance such skills.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework & State of the Art**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Recasting some general aspects from chapter one, it was necessary to bring to mind the main problem in students from grade 104 which was the lack of reading comprehension skills in EFL. It was precise to perform a review on the theoretical approaches that scientifically supported the pertinence of this research.

Now, the main concepts to understand and develop the research were: reading comprehension, foreign language reading, learning environments and skills transfer.

### **2.2 Theoretical framework**

#### **2.2.1 Reading comprehension**

It was once believed that reading comprehension was the process in which readers decoded written texts and oral stimulus (Hoover & Gough, 1990) that means, if readers got to decode the words on a page and understood what was being read to them, they were *reading*.

However, the construction of meaning goes beyond text decoding. This is a process that involves the reader's prior cultural, linguistic and literary experience. According to Smagorinsk (2001) each reading is placed and relates to other readings. Understanding readings as experiences and, in general, the reader's background.

Snow (2002) on the other hand, proposes that comprehension is the process in which readers extract the meaning from a text. Meaning, then, resides within the text a priori so the readers must be able enough to efficiently extract it. Snow's proposal conceives texts as a message container that goes from the writer to the reader. The text is then encoded by the writer and decoded by the reader.

One may conclude then, that reading comprehension involves the reader's experiences and prior knowledge with the physical and cognitive process of encoding and decoding information.

### **2.2.2 Foreign language reading**

The speech is undoubtedly the primary mode of communication in natural language; following the previous statement, teachers have underrated the role of reading in the process of foreign language learning in young children.

According to Dlugosz (2000) the teaching of reading in language programmes would help young learners, including pre-scholars, to progress faster not only in learning to read but also in understanding and speaking the language. This previous statement is one of the main reasons why this research was focused on reading comprehension in EFL with non-literate students.

Moving on a bit further in reading approaches, there are two main methods to introduce kids to reading. One is the phonic method in which students are taught to transform letters to sounds. This method goes along with writing so the kids identify the form of the word and what letters compose this one before they understand the actual meaning.

On the other hand there is the look-and-say method in which kids are given images and words altogether. With this one, the teachers and the environment are responsible of providing the kids with enough experiences of seeing, hearing and reading the target language. As established before, the population chosen for this research were not English literate but they showed good proficiency when reading images and relating these to texts in Spanish. This was the major reason why the look and say method was implemented through a literacy rich environment.

### **2.2.3 Learning environments**

During the 1990s the growth of constructivism and its spread on education and psychology represented a paradigm shift for educator and curriculum designers to a view of learning as a more social and conversational process than just as formal instruction.

The theoretical statement behind learning environments mainly proposes an ambience in which learning is a whole process that allows the learners to acquire knowledge in real life based contexts. These context are adapted to the learners' needs and interests.

There have been several researches that reveal that students perceive learning environments as a determinant feature in learning outcomes. Fraser (1998) states that the quality of learning environments at school directly affects the students' learning and their positive perception of those environments would pave the way through meaningful learning (7-33).

This is the reason why the execution of this environments might help fostering a better learning process not only for this research project but to any other academic program. As stated previously, reading comprehension involves interaction of the students with their experiences, culture and knowledge and then the environment promotes this sort of dynamics.

### **2.2.4 Literacy rich environments**

In a literacy rich environment, parents and teachers make sure that children engage with a given language about everyday life or events the children may find interesting (Clarke, T. & Ouellette, M. 2001). These environments include a regular process of reading, talking, writing, discussing and experimentation with books, prints and else. These spaces provide the kids with a chance to witness how printed language works and the several ways it may be used.

These environments have three core characteristics:

- Kids are exposed to numerous stimuli such as books, prints and oral language.
- Reading and writing are encouraged along with the sharing of the students' and teacher's ideas.
- Reading is conceived as a pleasant activity and group learning is also encouraged.

### **2.2.5 Whole Language Instruction**

Church (1996) conceives language as a whole, as something that can not be put apart.

This theory states that languages are acquired implicitly when, in a content and literacy rich environment, reading is taught in a contextualized setting with real life communication. Reading focuses then, on a regular exposure to real, vocabulary rich literature.

To complement the previous statement, Edelsky (1992) proposes five theoretical principles that support the whole language: (a) Language is a whole. It is not something that can simply be put apart in small pieces; (b) written language is language indeed; (c) knowledge is a social phenomena; (d) it is most advantageous and beneficial to look at people's language strengths rather than their lacks, and (e) reading and writing are transactional processes.

### **2.3 Literature review**

It is important then to have a second review, this time, on what other studies have tried to address problems related to reading comprehension in EFL and learning environments, in this case literacy rich environments.

To begin with, "Rethinking the role of reading in teaching a foreign language" by Dlugosz (2000) shows the importance of reading as a strategy to foster literacy processes in a foreign language with early students of English including those who have not yet learnt how to read in their native language.

Dlugosz (2000) establishes that the contact with reading during the first steps of teaching a foreign language will help the learners improve their understanding and speaking skills in a second language.

Out of the study conducted, the author proposes several factors that explain the beneficial role of learning to read in the process of acquiring a foreign language; some of them are:

- Using both the phonemic and the look-and-say method gives the kids two channels of perception speeding up learning and improving the functioning of their short-term memory.
- The graphic representation of a text helps children to isolate basic sentence meaning components, and helps them creating linguistic patterns. Moreover, these patterns help them speed up the development of their listening comprehension and language production skills.
- When kids get to read a short book they show great signs of accomplishment and success pumping up their motivation which is a determinant factor in learning success in general.

Moving on, Shin, J. (2015) presents “Literacy instruction for Young EFL learners: A balanced approach” based on the supposition that EFL teachers should integrate the four language skills in a language rich environment that provides the students with lots of opportunities of reading and writing meaningfully in English.

Shin (2015) is quite clear when bringing back the importance of using the students’ previous knowledge and giving children the chance to experiment with language in realistic contexts. The author proposes five building blocks for an effective EFL meaning-focused literacy program:

- Students should be immersed in print and literature having the opportunity to go through several reading experiences using all sorts of books.

- Use the students' prior knowledge as a way to transfer their learning and reading strategies from L1 to L2 so they can build academic and cultural language to be effective readers and writers of English
- Build and reinforce students' high frequency vocabulary following the idea that children must know at least 95% of the words in a text to fully understand it.
- Creating phonemic awareness and giving explicit instruction on phonic decoding and word spelling.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Improving the reading comprehension processes in the students from 104 would provide them with cognitive and formal skills so they can succeed both in the academic and social contexts. Working as well with a specific learning environment would give the students the necessary scaffolding to improve their learning process.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This research implemented two ways of directing its aims and goals. The theoretical framework and the literature review are the conceptual basis of this research, but when it comes to “shaping” the project, establishing how it will be done, it is necessary to bring two components that help the reader and the researcher constructing a coherent process. The first component is the type of study; in this case it is qualitative research and the second one is the approach which is action research.

## **3.2 Type of study**

### **3.2.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative research focuses its procedures on what people do and how they react and relate to their environment. This means that, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), qualitative researchers study happenings in their natural settings attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of what meanings people bring to them.

Merriam (2009) on the other hand proposes that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, this means, how people make sense of the world and the experiences these have with it.

Following these constructs, the reader and the researcher might as well find an answer to the question *why qualitative research?*

Qualitative research provides the researcher with non-ordinal values and data, compared to other research paradigms, which avoid for most of the parts, generalizing and allows the use of various data analysis methods and theoretical frameworks.

### **3.2.2 Action research**

Action Research, which is also known as participative action research, is an approach that involves a specific range of skills to achieve certain research goals; these skills include planning, observation and listening, evaluation and critical reflection.

Meyer (2000) establishes that the basis of action research lies in its focus on generating solutions to practical problems and its ability to involve both the research and the researcher on the development and design of changing activities.

Following the previous explanation on what action research is, the researcher finds this approach appropriate to study and develop the reading comprehension issues that students from grade 104 present.

### 3.3 Data management procedures

#### 3.3.1 Data analysis methodology

Once collected the necessary data, the analysis method chosen by the researcher is Triangulation due to the validity this method gives to the investigation. According to Patton (1999) triangulation provides a research with a rich, robust and comprehensive analysis of the collected data. This is achievable by using multiple observers and analysts, in this case the researcher, the tutor-teacher and the students whom the researcher has shared the analysis with. Using different methods, approaches and points of view certainly enriched this research.

### 3.4 Categories

#### 3.4.1 Overall category mapping

Category	Sub-categories	Instrument	Description
Reading comprehension in EFL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word decoding</li> <li>• Phonemic awareness</li> <li>• Meaning construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Handouts</li> </ul>	Examines the way students interact with different types of texts.
Imagery reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture reading</li> <li>• Prediction making</li> <li>• Relating imagery and texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Field notes</li> <li>• Videotaping.</li> </ul>	Revises how students relate to pictures and how they get to construct meaning out of these.
Students' interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactions SS-SS/SS-Environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Videotaping</li> <li>• Handouts</li> <li>• Field notes.</li> </ul>	Considers the ability students have to interact with their peers and the environment specifically designed for them.

**Table 1 Overall Category Mapping.****3.4.2 Artifacts' descriptions****3.4.2.1 *Observations***

Following Kalmbach (2006), observing is to watch as a participant in the classroom in a critical way. This statement recognizes that “live action” is a powerful information provider for the researchers. In this category one can place the video recordings and the field notes previously proposed. These observation were carried out during the whole research and split up unto three stages; the diagnosis process in which observation was key to identify the characteristics of the population, the implementation in which data was collected to examine the goals and achievements set up previously. Finally during the las stage of the research observations contributed to the data gathering process and helped in drawing conclusions and in analyzing the results.

**3.4.2.2 *Interviews***

Kalmbach (2006) refers to interviews as the process of inquiring, asking questions and listening to different people so the researcher may have different perspectives of the research that is being conducted. In this case, surveys are taken into account as well. These artifacts were used during the first stage to help drawing the characteristics of the population and during the final stage in order to know the perception of the participants towards the whole process. These two were key fot the research due to the opportunity nterviews provide for the participants to have their own voice.

### **3.4.2.3     *Artifacts***

Artifacts are defined any kind of physical documentation that sheds additional light on a given research question and topic (Kalmback, 2016. P 78).. The main artifacts used during this research were the interviews, previously explained, and quite a few hand outs and work shops used mainly during the second and third stage of the research in which the students were constantly working towards the achievement of the goals and, at the same time, providing the researcher with heaps of information and evidence in regards to these dynamics.

### **3.4.3   Criteria description and justification**

#### **3.4.3.1     *Reading comprehension in EFL:***

This category comprehends the way the participants constructed meaning from the several types of input they engaged with and the way they related their previous knowledge and cultural background during this interaction. To measure and support the conclusions on this category several videos were recorded and handouts were given to the students and collected after they worked on them.

#### **3.4.3.2     *Imagery reading:***

Taking into account that most of the texts the students worked with were in the outline of a picture book, in which images and visual stimuli primed over texts and words, it was necessary to work on the way both images and texts relay on each other and how either of them provide meaning to the lectures. That is why skills such as prediction making and imagery reading in general were promoted.

### **3.4.3.3 *Students' interactions:***

The literacy rich environment departs from the constructivist paradigm in which knowledge is built upon the interactions amongst the learners and the environment, set on a real life context. The main tool implemented during this research was the literacy rich environment, this is why studying the interactions and the effects produced on the students by the environment became essential.

## **3.5 Conclusion**

As a conclusion, the previous categories of data analysis provided the research with a rich source of information regarding the way students built knowledge surrounded by the given environment and the tools and resources they used to do so. Those categories were redesigned taking into account both the population needs and their cognitive strategies, furthermore, these categories provided the researcher with a more specific and coherent path to follow all over the investigative process.

Through the categories, the researcher sees a clearer course to proceed with the implementation of the project as well as the data gathering and analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Pedagogical Intervention and Implementation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Following the previous statements on the formal structure of this project, a pedagogical review must be done as it is the basis of this research; this becomes the part of the project in which both the reader and the researcher find the pedagogical theory that supports the project as a changing dynamic in regards to the reading comprehension in EFL from grade 104.

There are two main pedagogical theories here, both the vision of language teaching and the vision of learning have been chosen taking into account the learning needs of group 104 and their cognitive skills and strategies.

## **4.2 Visions of language and learning**

### **4.2.1 Vygotsky's constructivism**

Social constructivism provides an explanation for how learning can be achieved by pedagogical practices based on interaction. This theory makes emphasis on how learning takes place in a socio-cultural environment and places learners as “active constructors of their own learning environment. Vygotsky (1978) claimed that learning occurs through dialogue; this dialogue occurs between students, students and the teacher and even between the readers and the texts. Thus, learning occurs when the student interacts with himself, and with the individuals around it. These types of dialogue were the ones that supported the suitability of this learning theory to work as a support to the dynamics carried out in the literacy rich environment.

### **4.2.2 Whole Language Instruction**

The Whole language instruction claims that words should not be put apart in segments of letters and sounds to be decoded (Stahl and Miller, 1989), but they should be taught as a whole system full of meaning in which words are related one and other on a given context (Moats, 2007). Adding to this previous statement, Froese (1991, p.2) defines whole language as: “child centered, literature-based approach to language teaching that immerses students in real communication situations whenever possible”

It is clear to state now, that the whole language approach, on a real communication setting, may have provided the students from grade 104 with a chance to enhance their

reading comprehension skills in L2 by reading entire concepts instead of decoding letters and sounds separately.

### **4.2.3 Codeswitching**

There have always been discussions on whether or not teachers and students should use their L1 when learning a given L2 or target language. Macaro (2009) reviews two theories that support the use of L1 in the L2 classroom.

The first theory shows that, from a psycholinguistic point of view, language is perceived, stored and kept in the same way as other type of information. Then both L1 and L2 in bilingual and non bilingual speakers are contained in the same conceptual store for the speaker to use them when needed. This being said, L1 lexicon and resources are far much stronger and reachable than L2 ones, mostly in non-advanced bilingual speakers. Ignoring or suppressing this would be restraining the speaker/learner from a great learning tool (Ellis, 2005).

The second theory shows that codeswitching in the classroom may be used by the teacher to foster interactions in the classroom and to put across message-oriented information to the students.

These two theoretical approaches supported the implementation of codeswitching with the participants of this research due to the fact that these theories may have helped the participants to both use their lexicum in L1 to understand information in L2 and to promote the interaction as they would normally do in a real based context (Turnbull, M., & Dailey-O'Cain, J. 2009)

### **4.3 Instructional design**

#### **4.3.1 Lesson planning**

Lessons have been planned following the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. Criado (2013) presents the main features of such approach on three stages. Through the first stage the information is presented either in a deductive or inductive way, here the goals and the targets of the unit are presented. During the second stage, practice, the contents and information presented previously are to be practiced by the students. The goal of this phase is for the students to achieve a certain level of expertise that would be mastered later on during the production stage. The third stage of this model aims at increasing the expertise of the skills previously presented and practiced. Here, the students work through more autonomous and creative activities that may imply discussions, roleplays debates and such (97-115).

### **4.4 Implementation**

The research was planned and implemented through a 11 week program divided into 5 stages (See Table 2: Timetable) within 3 different phases (Yellow, blue and pink). Every one of the stages and phases was designed so the participants got to develop, little by little, some skills needed to improve their reading comprehension in EFL.

Since the very beginning the lessons were carried through in three stages following the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. Subjects and goals were presented and students had the chance to experiment, inquire, question and examine both the goals and the material used for the session. Then, they had the opportunity to practice and, literally, play with the information and materials they had around. The third step was focused on production in which students were free to produce what ever they felt like as long as they were using what they had learned.

This last stage was key because most of students produced different outcomes. It did not matter if they drew, painted, wrote or spoke. It was all about producing and getting them to realize that they can actually do something with the English language besides translating or repeating isolated terms with unclear aims.

This freedom must not be misunderstood. Every session had a different outcome, some sessions involved purely reading, some others drawing and writing and some others a short theatre play. It mostly depended on the aims of the research and whether or not it was necessary to collect evidences of those processes.

Following the previous introduction here are the three phases in which the lessons were developed.

**4.4.1 Yellow Phase:** 1 Week – 4 Hours. Students contributed with ideas to build their new environment in terms of the distribution of spaces, the places where the materials would be situated and such. They also created a vocabulary wall (See appendix K) and they nourished it every week according to the subject that was being worked in the program. The main goal of the research was presented to the participants, along with the dynamics of the environment. This last one was constantly built throughout the development of the lessons but at this stage some stimuli were already available for the students. The outcomes during this stage were merely spoken and by groups because most of the dynamics were lead for the whole class. During this stage the students helped building the vocabulary wall; a designated area inside the classroom in which every week both the researcher and the participants added new words, images and concepts that might have been useful throughout the project. Most of the practice and production activities were carried on focusing on the importance of the images and the relations these had with the texts. Risk taking was encouraged and mistakes were not penalized but those set the grounds to

deep reflections on the reasons why those approximations were correct or not. Images that recall known concepts such as “boy, love, teacher and student”.

The images were presented on a flat sequence and the interpretation of these was carried on using guide questions such as: “What may this mean?” referring to single images and then to the sequence as a whole unit of meaning. The students participated guessing what the sequence of pictures might mean and explaining why.

This stage was quite interesting and very meaningful to the students because, as stated in the characterization, they had barely explored English and now they had the chance to do so, in a student centered dynamic, feeling to make mistakes and try new things. This stage was the hook up for them to feel interested on the rest of dynamics.

**4.4.2 Blue Phase:** 4 Weeks – 16 hours. During this phase the students got to explore a considerable amount of resources and dynamics moving from reading and interacting with picture books, worksheets, storylines and scavenger hunts. The goal to this phase was giving the participants a closer approach to the materials and tools they would be using throughout the research. The researcher, the guide teacher and the literacy rich environment itself were all along the process to facilitate the scaffolding for the students. The main focus of this phase was discovering the way texts and, mainly, picture books were presented; the amount of text and the relation it has got with the pictures. The series of books used throughout the research had a common structure composed by a big image illustrating what was happening, e.g. “little red ridding hood walking in the woods”, some support images with precise and punctual vocabulary such as “Scared, basket, wolf, forest” and so on, and a small piece of text narrating what was happening.

This structure was the one used the most for the visual and written production of the students. Most of the reading sessions during this phase were made by groups alternating the book and the participants of each group. After they had read the books, or at least a part of it, they were asked to retell, act or draw a segment of the story, the one that caught their attention the most. They had to include as well any support images they felt were important to construct meaning and a bit of text too.

**4.4.3 Pink Phase:** 6 Weeks – 24 hours. At this point the participants had the opportunity to create in many ways. They got to design and create the situation diagram, explained in the time table, and they were free to choose what their situation would include, how many support images would this one have, the words accompanying these and so on.

Every student was free to interpret the story and to present an explanation, in both English and Spanish, to the rest of the classmates. Regarding their oral and written outcomes, they were allowed to use Spanish but they were highly encouraged to include English in their productions.

Throughout these two last phases (Blue & Pink) , comprehension was checked in terms of story prediction, picture reading and the links they made between the text and images. This situation making phase was very meaningful because it helped giving account of the cognitive processes the students went through to in order to design their situations and present them stating the reasons why they did it.

#### 4.5 Timetable:

Stage	Name	Time (4h per week)	Objective
1	“Exploring my world”	Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the new literacy environment.</li> <li>• Explore and engage with the tools and resources provided by the literacy environment</li> </ul>
2	“What is that you say?”	Weeks 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relate imagery and text, and how to obtain information out of these two.</li> </ul>
3	“Nice to meet you!”	Weeks 4 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore short stories and identify main characters and the basic structure of this type of text.</li> </ul>
4	“Hello there!”	Weeks 6,7 and 8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shape the students’ ideas and thoughts from the texts read.</li> </ul>
5	“Time to shine”	Weeks 9, 10 and 11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present the students’ outcomes in the shape of situations.</li> </ul>

Table 2. *Time table.*

## Chapter 5: Organization and analysis of the information

### 5.1 Introduction

Right after the implementation of the 11 week program, data was collected, classified and analysed according to the goals set for this research. Establishing certain categories and subcategories to organize and analyse these data was a key step before drawing conclusions.

### 5.2 Organization of the data

The process of triangulation was used to analyse the data and to provide precise and concrete conclusions of this process, that is the reason why several instruments were used to

collect data throughout the research process. As stated in chapter three, observation, interviews and artifacts were the means used to collect this data.

This type of data collection allows the triangulation process to draw rich, clear and founded conclusions of the processes giving the research a more trustworthy image.

The data collected during the process was then organized by sets, each one of them corresponding to the categories set previously in chapter 3 (See table 1). Both physical and digital evidences were named after the three categories previously mentioned. For organizational purposes, data sets were organized in a chart that includes punctual information regarding the date of collection and the instrument used.

### 5.3 Colleted data

<b>Data set (Phase)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Actions Implemented</b>	<b>Data Collected</b>
<b>Exploring my world. (Yellow Phase)</b>	May 16 <sup>th</sup>	Groupal imagery reading. Students looked at the board full of isolated images and they established relationships and patterns to construct meaning.	Audio recordings with the students participation.
	May 20 <sup>th</sup>	Groupal imagery reading. Students looked at the board full of isolated images and they established relationships and patterns to construct meaning	Audio recordings with the students participation.
	August 8 <sup>th</sup>	Groupal reading of picture books. Students went to the playground	Audio recordings with the students speech.

<p><b>What is that you say?</b></p> <p><b>&amp;</b></p> <p><b>Nice to meet you!</b></p>		<p>and in groups of 6 students read and identified the main characteristics of the books. After that they performed any of the situations present in the book. Both English and Spanish were used.</p>	<p>Field notes.</p>
	<p>August 19<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>Decoration of the classroom. Addition of new vocabulary to the “Vocabulary wall”</p>	<p>Video recordings, pictures from the classroom.</p>
	<p>August 26<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>Groupal reading of picture books. This time the students identified and presented to the classroom three elements of the situations or happenings present in the books; the setting as a physical space, the characters and their actions and the support images that surrounded these situations and the function they had.</p>	<p>Field notes</p>
		<p>Groupal reading of Little red ridding hood. Imagery and text relating to construct meaning. Students had to select any</p>	

<p><b>Hello there! &amp; Time to shine.</b></p>	<p>September 6th</p>	<p>fragment of the story and create a situation from scratch including drawings, supporting images and a bit of text. The use of English was encouraged though the use of Spanish was not punished or banned.</p>	<p>Field Notes. Handouts. Pictures from the students works.</p>
	<p>September 16th</p>	<p>Groupal reading of Goldilocks and the three Bears. Imagery and text relating to construct meaning. Students had to select any fragment of the story and create a situation from scratch including drawings, supporting images and a bit of text. The use of English was encouraged though the use of Spanish was not punished or banned.</p>	<p>Field Notes. Handouts. Pictures from the students works.</p>
	<p>September 26<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>Groupal reading of The Three Little Pigs. Imagery and text relating to construct meaning. Students had to select any</p>	<p>Field Notes. Handouts. Pictures from the students works.</p>

		fragment of the story and create a situation from scratch including drawings, supporting images and a bit of text. The use of English was encouraged though the use of Spanish was not punished or banned	
	October 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Students had to organize a storyline of the three little pigs, give it an order and retell the story they organized in English.	Field Notes. Handouts. Pictures from the students works. Audio recordings of the students' participation.

*Table 3: Collected data.*

#### **5.4 Analysis of the data**

The results obtained throughout the implementation and development of this research provided key information in regards the dynamics that can be used to enhance the reading comprehension processes in a foreign language in an official school with quite similar characteristics to Domingo Faustino Sarmiento School in Bogotá.

The results expected oscillated from basic spoken and written outcomes to the construction of more complex structures in L2. On the bright side though, more meaningful

results were obtained from this research. Most of them include an impressive improvement in the written and spoken skills of the participants.

These results become, then, a vast source of information that helps nourishing some of the English teaching practices here in Colombia and also highlights, once again, the huge contribution made by the environment to these practices.

Moving on, it is clear that the main beneficiaries of this research were the students from grade 104. They were the main focus, the information providers and the witnesses of the improvement they made.

It is also important to highlight the social and cultural impact made in those children due to the several dynamics they experienced and the way their previous knowledge and personal experiences were related to the most of the pedagogical interventions.

Second, the teachers and the elementary schools are also beneficiaries because they now have the chance to try these dynamics out and, hopefully, assess and improve their students' learning process not only in foreign languages but also in many other academic areas.

Moving on, the next step after gathering the data was to analyse it. To do so it was necessary to emerge with a system, a sort of strategy that provided the researcher with "a way of making and creating understanding out of the chaos of our practice as teachers" (Kalmbach and Carr, 2010. (101). Following, analyzing and shaping this information obtained out of the data gathering becomes a stage in which the researcher makes meaning and sense of the data leading both the research and the researcher to draw concrete conclusions of the implementation of such project.

In Freeman's (1998) speech: "The aim is to make the regular appear new, to put a different frame around what is usual and taken for granted in everyday teaching and learning,

and thus to perceive and understand it in new ways.” (p. 99). This means, to make the regular seem irregular, to make the normal attitudes and behaviours seem strange and provoking.

Now, Freeman (1998) proposes a series of steps to set off a process of data analyzing. These steps are: Naming the data, or labeling with codes depending from the source they come from, the research question, the data itself or they can be created by the researcher as well.

Once the data has been named the next step is grouping it by reassembling the parts of the data with the new names and putting them up together into categories. Such categories, Freeman says, may be grounded, emerging or a-priori. Once these categories have been defined it is necessary to establish links amongst them, this would strengthen the bonds and enrich the analytical process itself (1998, p. 100)

This being said, it may appear information that seems to have no relationship with the categories, information that does not fit into the emerging structures, these pieces of information are called outliers and they are quite important too. Freeman (1998) states that they may show weaknesses during the interpretation process. What can we do with such information? Where can we place it? Does it relate to any other category? These questions will enrich the interpretation process and, moreover, help drawing more conclusions (p. 100)

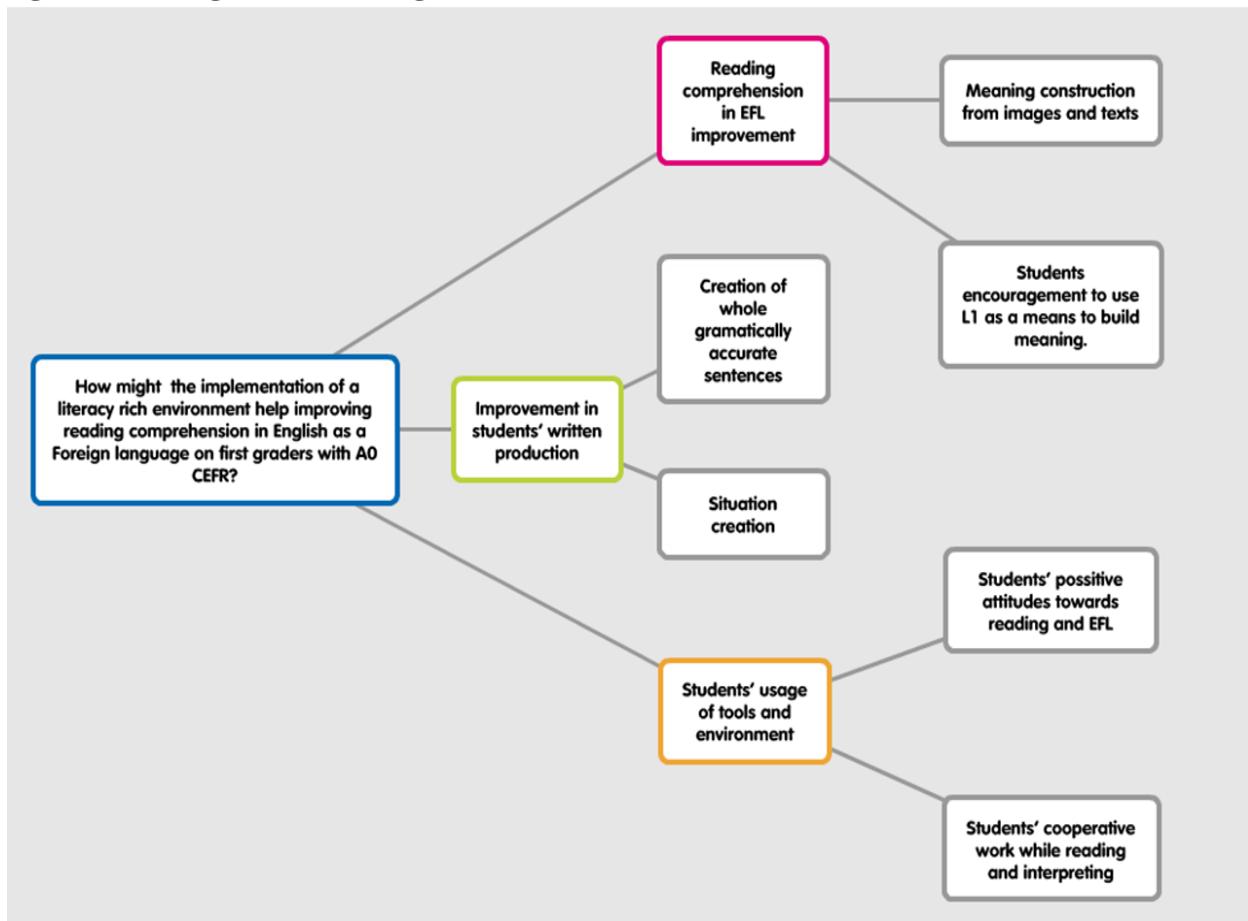
As the interpreting and analytic process moves on, it becomes necessary to have a blueprint or a plan to see how things come together, how the categories, outliers and such relate to each other. This step is called the data display, and as its name indicates it displays a rough shape of what may be the response to the main question or inquiry (1998, p. 100)

Following Freeman’s suggestions on data gathering and organization, the collected data was put into 3 groups according to the means used; these were artifacts, interviews and observation to start off, then, with the triangulation process. This being said, it was necessary to

adjust the information according to the goals set during the proposal of this research. This means, the data was organized and selected according to previous expectations, aiming at answering altogether the research questions and the objectives.

Once the information was re-organized taking into account the goals and objectives the category map was created to shape the analytical stage in a clearer way (See Figure 1). It also helped the researcher discarding data that might be confusing or that was not clear enough to start drawing conclusions.

**Figure 1: Categories of findings**



## 5.5 Findings

Once the data had been classified and analysed, it was necessary to interpret the information drawn out of these. During this process the research got to be seen as a whole and conclusions were brought up afterwards in a clearer and more trustworthy way.

It becomes important now to recapitulate a bit the population the researcher worked with. The students from grade 104 from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento School in Bogotá showed, at the beginning of the research, a huge lack of competence in English as a foreign language. Their main strengths and interests were imagery reading, reading comprehension and the construction of meaning from several written input but in Spanish (See Appendix B: *Guía N° 1*).

### 5.5.1 Reading comprehension in EFL improvement.

After the implementation of the 11 week program designed for this research, one of the findings is the improvement the students showed in their reading comprehension skills in EFL. Reading comprehension, in this case, understood as a complex process that involves word decoding, phonemic awareness and the construction of meaning from the interaction of the reader and the texts (Snow, 1999)

The participants began with very little knowledge about English in any sense, they were aware, though, of their strengths in picture reading in Spanish and the way this specific skill would help them develop and enhance their skills in EFL.

#### *Meaning construction from images and texts*

The main improvements were the fact that they began to construct meaning from relating images and texts. During the first stage of this research the activities designed to promote such processes were based on questions such as: *What may this mean? What would it mean if the order of the images changes?* And a deep process of identifying patterns in the way adjectives and verbs relate to the nouns and complements presents in a sentence without even focusing on

any formal structure, these patterns were brought up by establishing links and constructing meaning between a set of 2 to 3 images and some words related to these.

At the very beginning students interpreted such frames in quite a primal way. To quote an example, in one of the interventions there was a scheme composed by the word I+ An image of a red heart + Bogotá's coat of arms, after a few minutes exploring those elements, analyzing them and interpreting them, some of the students said:

**Student 1:** "El corazón de Bogotá, Yo tengo corazón, El corazón es rojo"

And little by little after a few of them had participated already one of them may have come up with:

**Student 2:** "Yo quiero a Bogotá"

**Teacher:** " Por qué dices eso?"

**Student 2:** "Por que en proyecto estamos viendo a Bogotá, además un corazón significa cosas lindas como amor y esas cosas. Entonces pues yo quiero a Bogotá."

This sort of activities were encouraged session after session with more complex sentences and schematas. Concepts such as school, home, playground, feelings and emotions were involved little by little and, as a means to provoke deeper thoughts from the participants, the reason why such things were happening was introduced too.

Hence, students went from putting images and words together and, somehow, presuming what they may mean, they also inquired for reasons, emotions and functions of the characters.

Everything was welcomed. Every one of their ideas was valid and contributed to the meaning construction for a whole sentence.

These sort of activities were a part of a scaffolding process for the participants to realize the potential meanings images have when isolated and how relevant they become when accompanied by words or complete texts.

During the second stage these exercises were made using a series of picture books with traditional folk stories, but this time their goal was to retell fragments of the story



*Image 1: Meaning construction from images N° 1*

When building meaning, reassembling stories and reading in general by groups, two students from each group were selected to show what part of the story would they tell and how they got to construct such idea. Interesting is that, in some cases, the remaining integrants of the group had different thoughts regarding the story, and if such things happened they had the chance to stand by their idea and provide the arguments to the statements (See appendix L: Students' Interpretation of a Short Story)

### *Encouragement to use L1 as a means to build meaning*

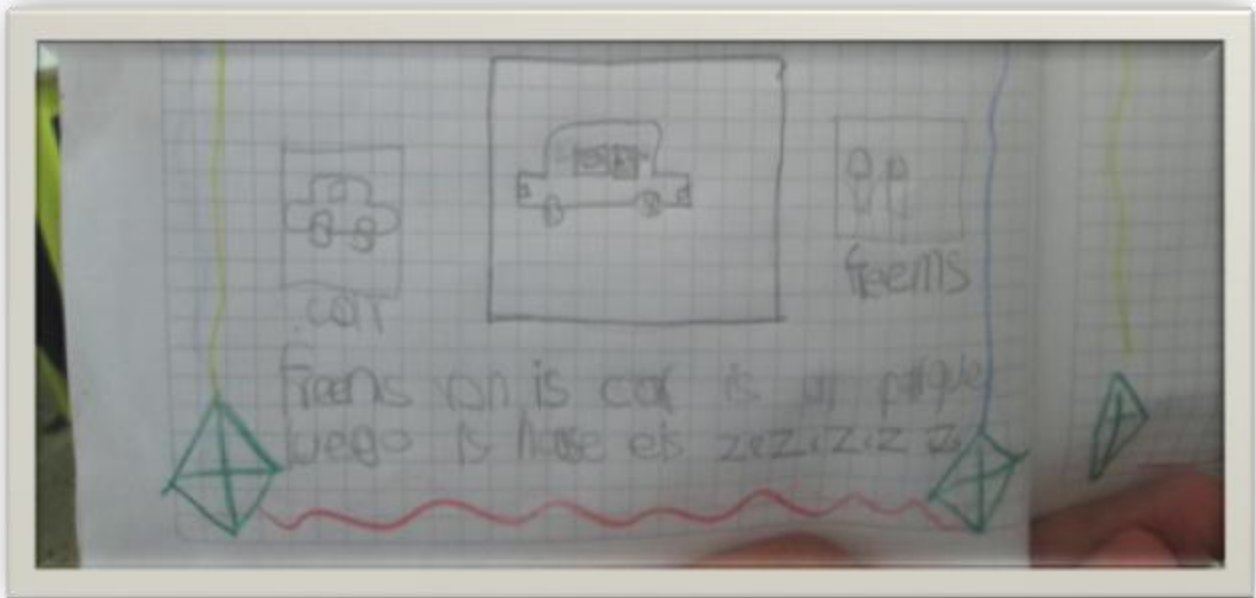
When it came to producing an outcome the students had two options, mostly during the second and third phase; following a pre-stated schemata they could create a situation either from the book or story they were working upon during that session or any other situation they wanted.

For instance, if during one of the sessions the story being worked was “Jack and the Beanstalk” the students had quite a good amount of input involving the story itself, an audiolingual input (Reading out loud activities or an audiobook) vocabulary sheets and storylines;



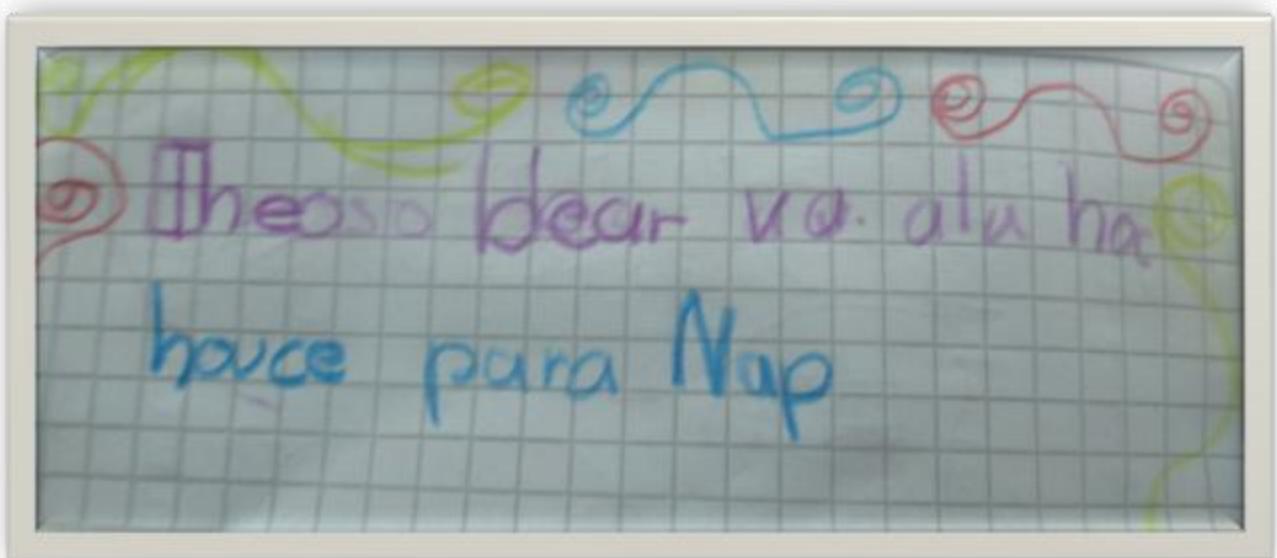
*Image 2: Storyline*

so they had a rich setting with several opportunities for them to create. But, if they chose to work on any other story or situation they were able to use input from their notes, the classroom or the so on called *Vocabulary wall* which was full of vocabulary regarding stories for kids, the alphabet, flashcards and such:



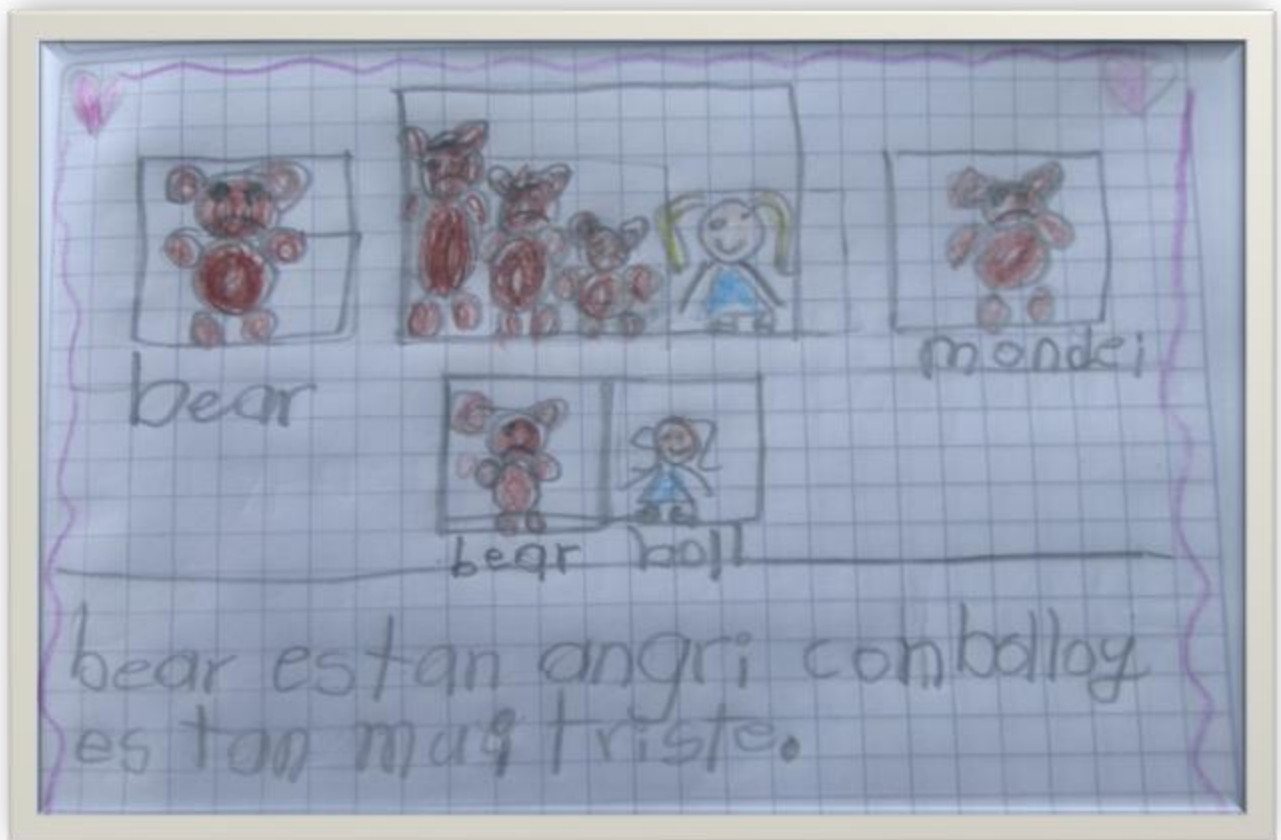
*Image 3: Meaning construction from Images N° 2*

Now, the process the participants followed to construct meaning and their final outcomes were presented and developed using both Spanish (L1) and English (L2). They were encouraged, though, to include, day after day, more English to their speech and productions (See appendix L: Students' Interpretation of a Short Story)



*Image 4: Inclusion of written English*

The reason behind such technique is explained in chapter 4 (See 4.3.2 *Codeswitching*) and mostly because students already know some of the stories and topics brought up during the implementation and they could find a great support to the proposed dynamics by using what they already knew in Spanish



*Image 5: Codeswitching, written outcomes*

### **5.5.2 Improvement in Students' written production**

Even though the main goal of this research was to improve the reading comprehension skills in EFL with the students from grade 104, one of the main improvements they made was in regards to their writing skills. This was evidenced mainly because the written speech worked as a

tool to measure the way students were building knowledge and to give account of the way they interpreted and comprehend the stories worked throughout the research.

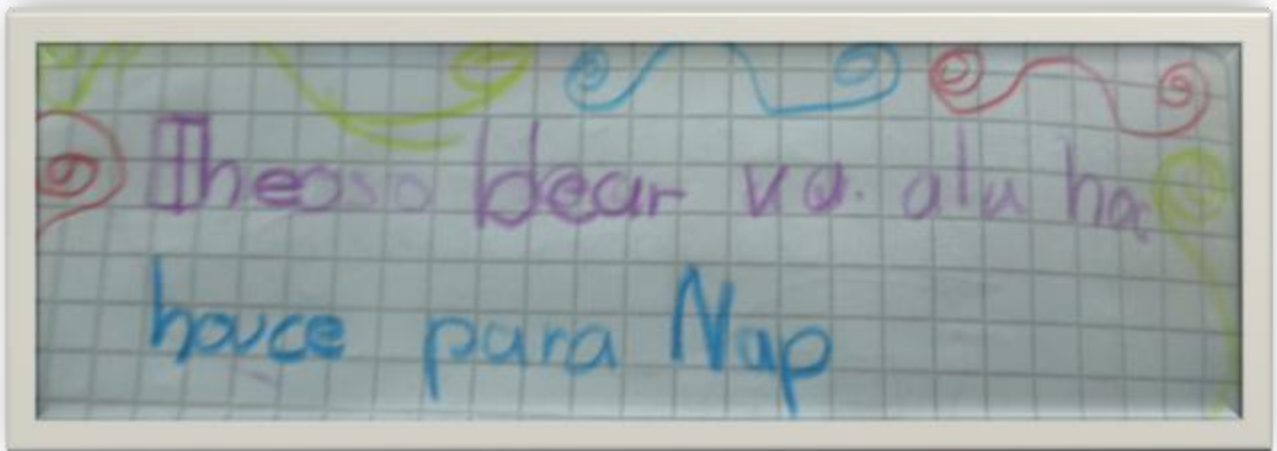
As stated on the diagnose chapter of this research the group did not show any relevant skills in writing in English. They were able to underline a few words they recognized but they did not go any further, plus, they were just beginning their literacy process in Spanish, a great number of students were barely writing in Spanish and the writing skills in English were not being enhanced by then.

As they moved on and they began interacting with more input, prints, books and the richness provided by the environment, in a lapse of 11 weeks they showed an impressive improvement in their writing skills in English. Not only did they write isolated words and sentences but they were able to produce full sentences, grammatically correct and mixing up both Spanish and English keeping an accurate syntactic structure.

#### *Creation of whole grammatically accurate sentences*

One of the main features of a literacy rich environment is the opportunity the subjects have of interacting with language set in real life situations and the chance they have to engage with reading and writing activities on a constant basis. In the case of this research the participants not only engaged with language using listening, reading and writing activities but they also had the chance to experiment, make mistakes and find their own pace for the development of such skills.

It may be said that most of the participants enhanced their writing skills in English in different levels. Some of them got to create sentences that were grammatically accurate



*Image 6: Inclusion of written English*



*Image 7: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 1*

Using both what they knew in Spanish and, little by little, included more English in their production. Most of their written outcomes were isolated sentences in simple present that described what, for them, was happening in the situation

schema: The+Subject+Verb+Complement / The+Subject+VerToBe+Verb-ING+Complement

Some examples of those Spanish-English sentences were:

- The fox is está metiendo in the house

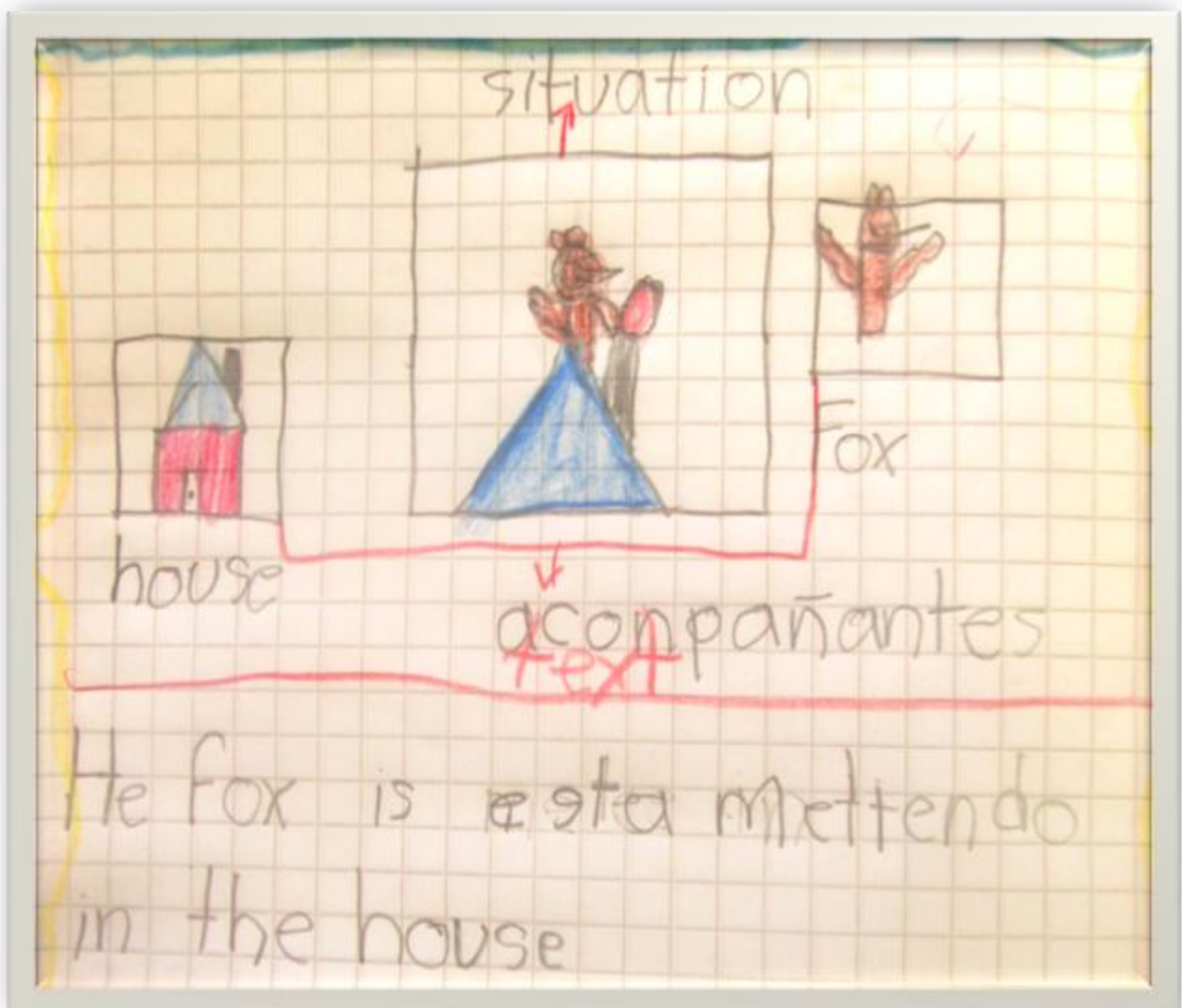
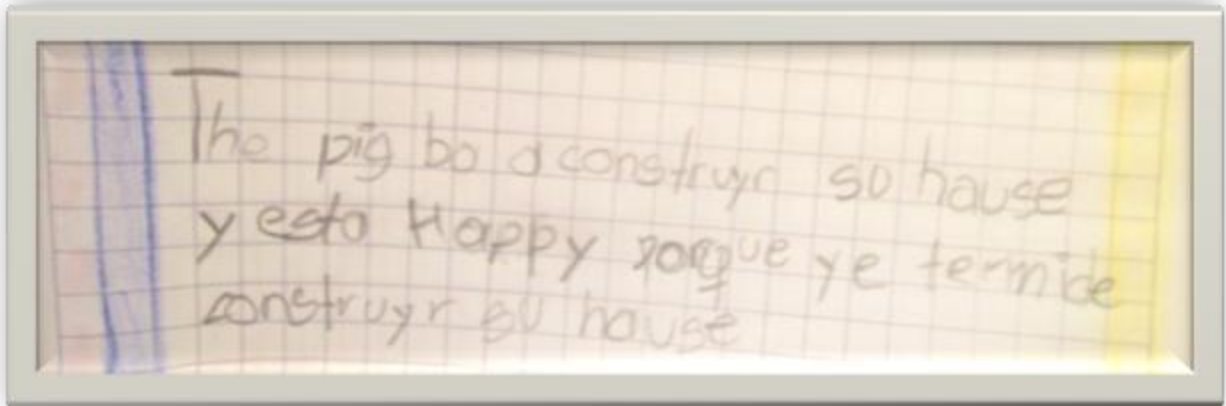


Image 8: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 2

-The pig ba a construir su hause y está feliz porque ya termide construyr su hause



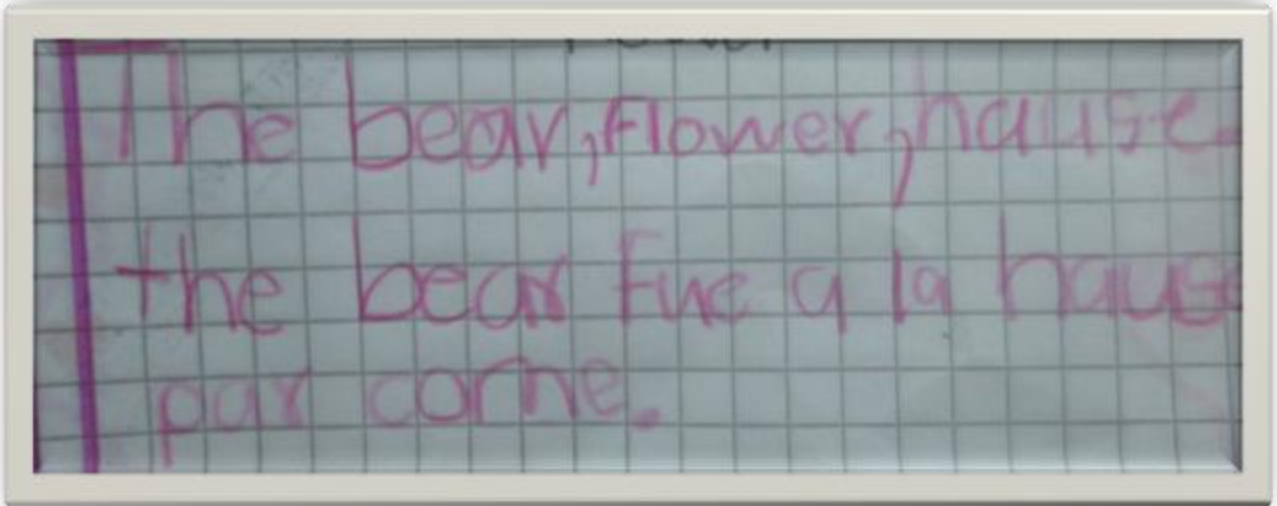
*Image 9: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 3*

- The bear go a su houce



*Image 10: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 4*

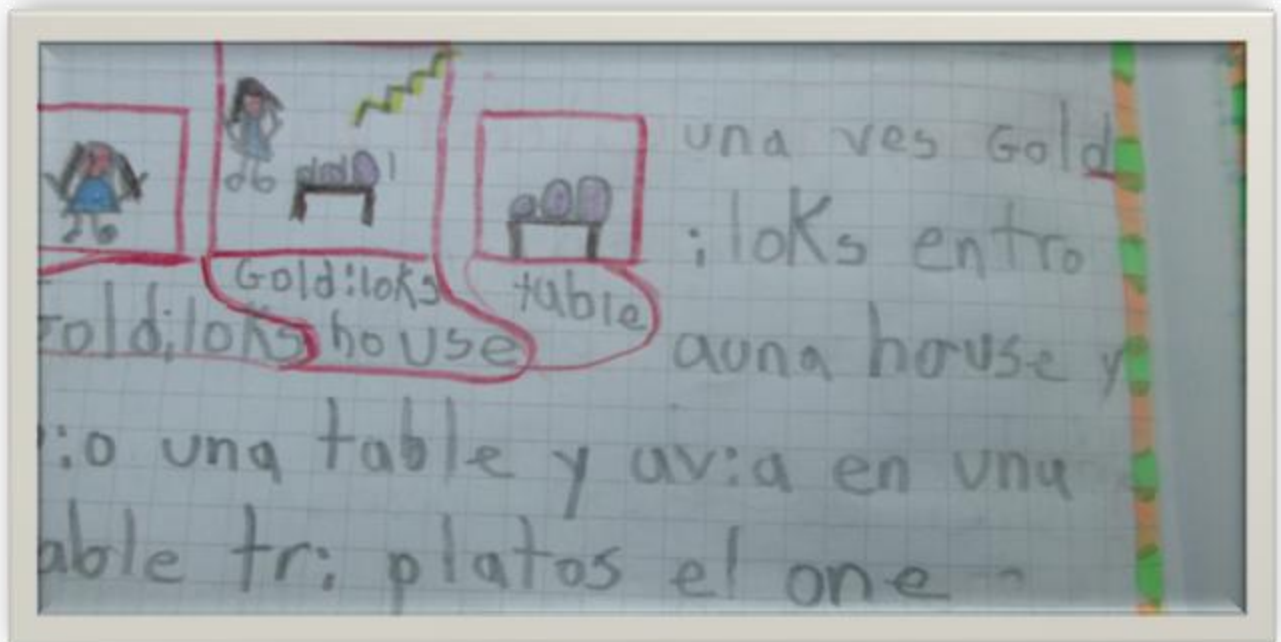
- The bear fue a la hause par come



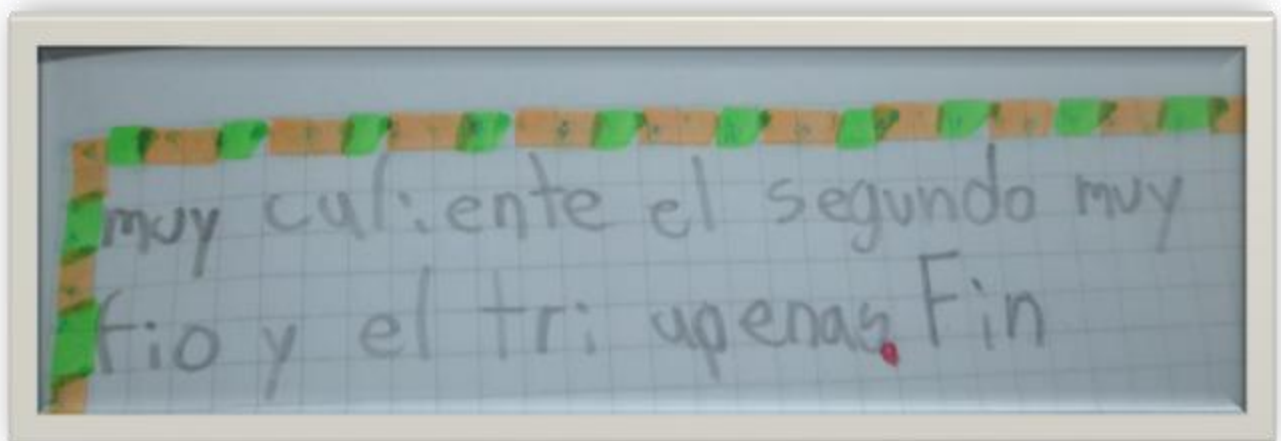
*Image 11: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 5*

Some other students though went further in their process and got to produce not only sentences but complete paragraphs like the following:

- Una ves Goldiloks entro auna house y bio una table y avia en una table tri platos el one muy caliente el segundo muy fio y el tri apenas. Fin



*Image 12: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 6*



*Image 13: Creation of gramatically accurate sentencesN° 7*

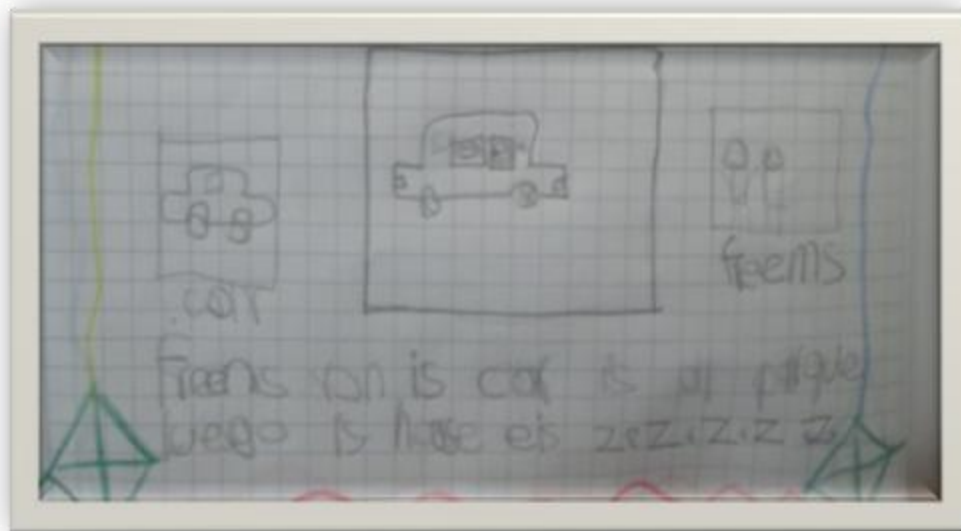
Even though there are some spelling mistakes both in Spanish and English the main improvement here lies in the fact that the students got to use English; whether it is spelled correctly or not does not matter here, they got to use it, the words they fitted in their production were syntactically correct and the sentences showed what they interpreted from the situations. In

this case, the form did not add any more value to their production, the content on the other hand did.

### *Situation creation*

The importance of this subcategory lies in the fact that the students developed a schema to condense information by using images and texts and relating these (See Appendix N: *Situation Schema*). The situation creation outcomes showed the way the participants interpreted any narration, story, tale or happening and how, very carefully, they chose what to draw as the main situation, which images would work as the vocabulary support and what words may complete such creation.

Whenever the lessons were focused on situation creation the students were free to either use the input worked throughout the lesson or to choose any other situation to work on



*Image 14: Situation creation N° 1*

The outcomes they made using the situation design show an impressive improvement and development in the students' metacognitive skills. As stated before, they were the ones who

created such structures revealing that some pictures and the relations these have with texts may be appropriate to condensate information, summarize and retain ideas or concepts.

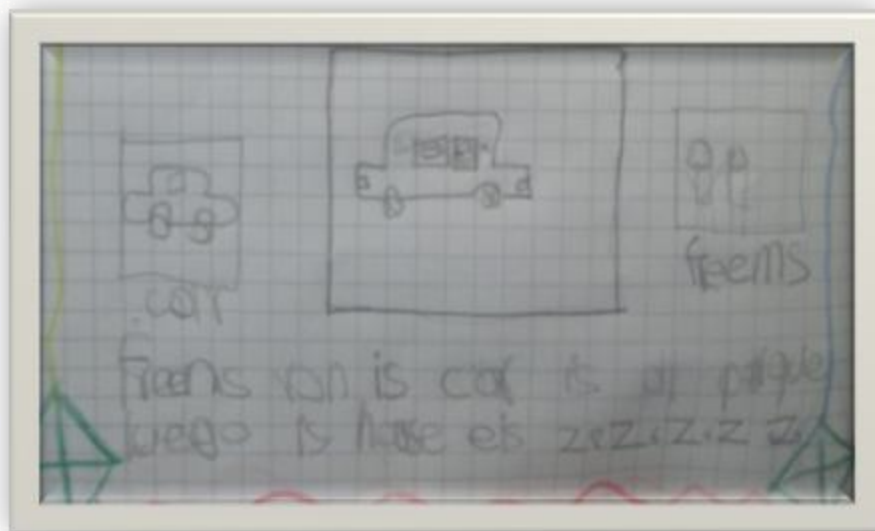
Once again, these structures might not only help them developing their language skills but they may also help them being successful in many other academic areas. Furthermore they also showed awareness of the opportunity they had to be as general or as specific when it came to describing a situation or retelling a story.

**Teacher:** ¿Y ahí qué dice?

**Student:** Ahí dice, “Los niños van en el carro al parque y luego van a la casa a dormir”

**Teacher:** ok, osea que estos son los niños /points at picture/ “freems” y este /points at a drawing of a car/...

**Student:** Un carro.



*Image 15: Situation creation N° 2*

### 5.5.3 Students' usage of tools and environment

The goal of this research was to improve the reading comprehension skills in L2 with the students of first grade from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento School in Bogotá. The main tool to

reach this goal was a literacy rich environment. These sort of environments provide the students with a considerable amount of stimuli and it is also rich in opportunities as the students have the chance to interact with real language in as many ways possible (Clarke, T. & Ouellette, M. (2001). These ambiances not only feature tools and resources but they also foster the interaction in between the students, the teacher and knowledge is built cooperatively.

This being said, the students not only developed their skills in English but they also developed a positive attitude towards English as a foreign language and reading in English.

### *Students' positive attitudes towards reading and EFL*

At the very first stage of this research, the students showed great interest on learning to read in English. The very few resources they had before the implementation of the literacy rich environment made this sort of dynamics a tedious experience for both students and teachers.

Once the environment was implemented students were free to add and enjoy as many stimuli as they could. Prints, textbooks, songs, charades, images, reading and vocabulary areas and else, were the ones that kept the interests but they also triggered positive attitudes and reactions towards most of the dynamics developed through the 11 week program.

These positive attitude development was a direct influence in the development of the dynamics. Most of students were not afraid of participating during the lessons. Activities such as readings and listening were the ones that showed this change the most because of the many opportunities the students had to participate, guess, comment and loose themselves in the language.

Students also learnt how to use the resources they had on their favor. When in doubt, at first, they would come to the teacher to ask for a clarification, the meaning of an unknown term or even ask for correction. Little by little the students learnt to rely on their peers when in doubt.

For example, they would come to the teacher with questions in regards to the dynamic of the lesson but the answer given by the teacher needed the students to ask each other for clarification.

When they had a question about vocabulary, some of them went straight to the resources they had (notes, vocabulary wall, previous reading activities) and then, as a last resort, they would ask the teacher. Even more, some of them became so confident of experimenting with English that, when framing their interpretations, they even changed some words or terms to make their ideas come to life.

During the lesson in which *The three little pigs* was worked, some students did not know the word *wolf* but that did not stop them from completing the tasks, they went to the vocabulary wall and, by looking at the pictures, they chose the one that might resemble the most to a wolf. Instead of writing *wolf*, they wrote *fox*. (See appendix M: *Vocabulary Wall and Interaction with Environment*)



What this means is that the students' attitude was affected in a very positive way. They showed no fear of participating or making mistakes, they were constantly encouraged to experiment and take risks when engaging with English, they developed their own pace and strategies to overcome difficult situations.

***Students' cooperative work while reading and interpreting***

As stated before, the literacy rich environment gave the students the opportunity to engage with language in real life contexts and to come together with their peers and construct knowledge from these interactions (Clarke, T. & Ouellette, M. (2001). During certain activities, mostly during the third phase of the implementation, students had to show their written outcomes and in some of the interventions they were asked to present to the rest of the class what they did, whether it was a situation, organizing a storyline, a theatre play and such; and all along these dynamics the group work was evident.

Students underwent a process in which working with every single one of their classmates was a possibility. Working with those they did not get along with was a challenge but at the end of the day they carried on the tasks assigned and produced an outcome. One of the challenges, even working with their close mates, was the construction of meaning. And it was as simple as the fact that not every kid thinks the same way. In some intervention, when the students were asked about the plot of "The ugly duckling" some of them said it was a goose and not a duck. Some others said the duck was black and that was the reason why he was being rejected.

Another example occurred when retelling the "three little pigs". This exercise required the students to organize a storyline, put it together in a piece of cardboard and then explain the group why they thought that was the correct order and what happened through the story.

During the exploring stage of the lesson most of the students agreed on the basics of the story's plot; three pigs being haunted by a wolf come together to overcome a difficulty. But, when it came to the specifics they had quite interesting interpretations.

A few of them stated they left their mother's house at the very beginning of the story while some others stated they arrived there after defeating the wolf.

It was clear that the first hut built by one of the pigs was made out of a natural material. Some of them said it was straw, some others said it was sticks, some others said it was grass, some others said branches and so on. What turns out to be interesting is that in most of the groups the students had different ideas and interpretations of the same story, nevertheless every one of those interpretations was valid.

This showed the way these students not only got to build knowledge, comprehend and interpret a given text but they also got to express their thoughts in a punishment free way. They had different interpretations of the story and this reflected the way every one of them conceived and understood the world around them. What ever they added or took off the story shows the reality the students construct by, actually, comprehending a text. Once again, this reading comprehension went beyond the phonemic awareness or the word decoding. Students had the chance to exchange ideas amongst them, with the teacher and with the author. It was a dialogic process fostered mainly by the richness of the literacy environment.

This results show that the students not only would be able to follow these dynamics towards the achievement of diverse academic goals but culturally showed a great outcome as well.

## **5.6 Conclusions**

At this point it is possible to affirm that the objectives of this research were reached. Evidently the students developed their reading comprehension skills in English by interacting

amongst them in an opportunity rich literacy environment. This settings, the methodology and the activites fostered a continous meaningful experience for the students. The evidences and analysis shown above support such achievements.

### **Chapter 6 Conclusions.**

The main goal of this research was to find out how might the implementation of a literacy rich environment help improving the reading comprehension skills in EFL with first graders with A0 CEFR, and after an exhaustive research process that entailed observations, diagnostics, the implementation of activities and the analysis of several data and their sources, the following conclusions can be drawn from the findings this investigation generated.

The environments in which students spend most of their time, whether it is at school or at home, have direct implications on their cognitive skills affecting in several ways their learning process. The responsibility of providing meaningful, content rich and contextualized settings relies then on the teachers, parents, tutors and, in general, the whole set of actors of the learning process.

The literacy processes must be rich in oportuntites for the students to engage with a varied set of stimuli. The input they receive and they way themes are developed around such stimuli will either strengthen or weaken the students' literacy development. If carried on successfully, literacy processes not only provide young learners with a set of language skills but it also implies a social, personal and cultural growth in the students. Literacy definitely goes beyond learning to read and write. Literacy skills mediate the way people interact and thus the way people succed.

Reading practices must be supported on the students' needs and interests so they become meaningful experiences. Students have to be aware of their abilities and weaknesses. This

awareness would foster the enhancing of metacognitive processes in the students helping them answer questions such as: How can I learn? How can I retain information? This may also allow them to feel more confident about their learning processes. It is also important to state that reading goes beyond word decoding. Reading involves a dialogue between the text, the author of the text, the images, the environment and the reader, his social and personal background, his experiences and the way he sees and interprets life.

Within the practices of foreign language teaching it is worth reconsidering the use of L1 by the learners. Teachers should not restrain the students from using L1 in the L2 classroom because their native tongue belongs to them, defines them and it is, literally, a part of their lives. The use of L1 should be encouraged as long as it is used as a tool to build knowledge, store information, express ideas and thoughts and supports the process of learning a second language.

**Recommendations**

It is important to take ownership of the environment we are working in. Students and their process are highly impacted by the way teachers handle and perform their duties in the ambiances classes are developed. It does not only mean that a well lighted place, with a huge amount of materials and resources will boost up the students' learning process. It depends on the way the whole community relates to the environment, the way they approach and act upon situations supported by the materials and the environment itself.

As teachers it is our obligation to care for our students' future. Teaching English needs to go beyond known verbs and structures. Learning English changes lives, and in a modern day society we should always thrive for changing lives in one way or another. These duties become more important when teaching in elementary schools. This experience will affect tremendously the lives and experiences at schools of our students, we need to make the best out of those moments.

Finally I would say that when teaching any population, any level, any subject or any grade, everything matters and even the smallest thing can make the difference. Future teachers and colleagues, do not take everything for granted and be open minded, willing to train and be trained, to give and provide feedback and make sure you encourage your students and yourselves to take risks, do not be afraid of failure and grow stronger from those experiences.

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**Appendix A: Survey 1**

**Universidad Pedagógica Nacional  
Facultad de Humanidades  
Departamento de Lenguas  
Licenciatura en Español e Inglés  
Proyecto de investigación en el aula**

**Nombre** \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Cuántos años tienes?
2. ¿Te gusta venir al colegio?
3. ¿En qué barrio vives?
4. ¿Te gusta el colegio?
5. ¿Quién te trae al colegio?
6. ¿Te gusta la clase de inglés?
7. ¿Te gusta estudiar en casa?
8. ¿Haces tareas en casa?
9. ¿Quién te ayuda a hacer tareas en casa?
10. ¿Te gusta ver televisión?
11. ¿Qué programa de T.V te gusta más?
12. ¿Qué música te gusta escuchar?
13. What is your name?

## Appendix B: Guía N° 1

### Guía N° 1

#### Let's play with English!

1. Usando líneas de colores relaciona las palabras con las imágenes a continuación:

The boy cries

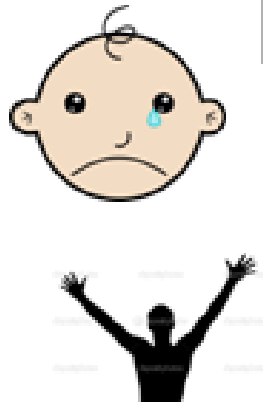
The girl plays

The dog eats

Hands Up!

Sit down!

Good morning!



2. De las siguientes palabras, encierra en un círculo las palabras que conoces:

**Exit**

**Students**

**Pencil**

**Write**

**Computer**

**Notebook**

**Mother**

**School**

**My house**

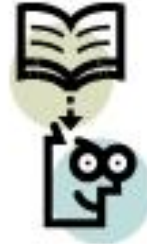
## Appendix C: Guía N° 2

## READING COMPREHENSION AND LITERACY ENVIRONMENTS

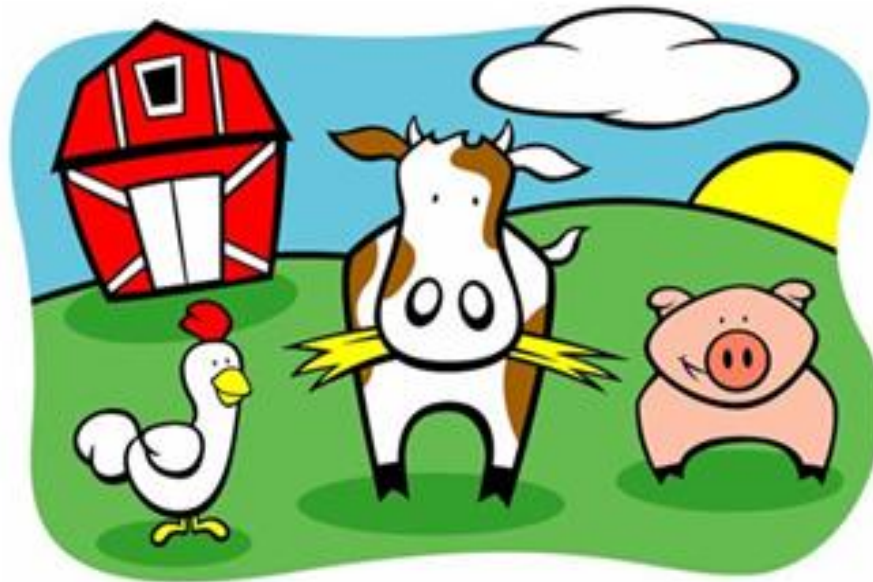
## Guía N° 2

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

¡Juguemos a adivinar historias!



1. Lee el título de la historia y observa muy bien la imagen que está a continuación:

*La Vaca Nicolasa*

Adivina... ¿De qué se trata la historia?

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Inventa una historia corta sobre la imagen.

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**Appendix D: Evaluation Criteria**

<b>Categoría de evaluación</b>	<b>Criterios de evaluación</b>	<b>Alto</b>	<b>Medio</b>	<b>Bajo</b>
<b>Comprensión lectora en español.</b>	1. Saco conclusiones antes del proceso de lectura apoyándome en imágenes o títulos.	x		
	2. Sigo instrucciones		x	
	3. Resumo textos de manera coherente y clara	x		
	4. Identifico la idea general del texto	x		
	5. Ordeno y completo la secuencia de viñetas		x	
	6. Relaciono gráficos con textos escritos	x		
	7. Describo eventos de manera secuencial de forma oral		x	

<b>Categoría de evaluación</b>	<b>Criterios de evaluación</b>	<b>Alto</b>	<b>Medio</b>	<b>Bajo</b>
<b>Comprensión de lectura en inglés.</b>	1. Reconozco palabras y frases cortas en libros, propagandas y lugares de mi escuela.			x
	2. Relaciono ilustraciones con oraciones simples			x
	3. Reacciono a estímulos orales apoyados en modeling e imágenes	x		
	4. Respondo a saludos y preguntas fáciles		x	
	5. Uso mi lenguaje no verbal para expresar mis ideas			x
	6. Participo activamente en juegos y rondas	x		

**Appendix E: Field Notes N° 1**

5. First intervention	5. SR: "Okay chicos, vamos a estar muy atentos, todos con las manitos arriba... arriba..." Student researcher uses easy commands such as "hands up, down, stand up" along with modeling and non-verbal language.	5. This was the first time I went in front of the class to perform one activity with the kids. It was in English, evidently, and it gave me the first clues on how the students perceive English. Their reaction in general was good, they knew about numbers and certain easy commands. Methods such as TPR would work just fine with them. It was necessary though to speak in Spanish most of the time and gradually use more English. They seemed to be lost when listening to me speaking in L2.
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**Appendix F: Field Notes N° 2**

Diagnose activity. 1. Song.	1. The students are given the instruction to listen to a song. The idea of it is to see how they react to this sort of input in English. ST: "Vamos a escuchar y después comentamos cómo nos fue."	1. Children this age are relatively easy to amuse. Having their attention, in this case, is as easy as being a total foreigner speaking in the classroom. Taking advantage of this, I decided to bring a song related to commands they know and parts of the body. As supposed, the students had a positive reaction to the song, plus it was followed by images drawn on the white board and modeling done by the student-teacher. This confirms once again the disposition this group has got to: input in English, Total Physical Response paradigms and modeling in general. The activity combined both English and Spanish, this last one when necessary. The group itself was attentive and had a good attitude. They said they loved songs and they loved English in general.
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**Appendix G: Field Notes N° 3**

<p>2. Reading comprehension.</p>	<p>2. Kids come to the board. There are a bunch of images with no text. The student-teacher reads a story while the kids follow the images.</p>	<p>2. The students showed during this activity a great pleasure for short stories and for having people reading at them. The reading was in Spanish. The aim to this activity was to see how kids can relate random images to a story. The whole group followed through and they identified the importance of the images by participating and giving interesting comments about the activity.</p>
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**Appendix H: Field notes template**

Field note: 1		Tutor	Student- Teacher: <u>Jesus Castaño</u>
School: <u>Domingo Faustino Sarmiento</u>		Grade: 104	Mentor-Teacher: <u>Isabel Pérez</u>
<u>Activity (Description)</u>	Textual Markers (Linguistic and non-linguistic)	Analysis (Meaning)	
1.	1.	1.	

**Appendix I: Sample of video recording as instrument**

Follow: <https://youtu.be/SH76FQy8Sy4>

**Appendix J: Vocabulary wall**



**Appendix K: Informed consent.****UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGOGICA NACIONAL  
CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO DEL PADRE O ACUDIENTE****Fecha****I.E.D Domingo Faustino Sarmiento****Sr./Sra. Acudiente,**

En calidad de estudiante de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional estoy realizando un proyecto de investigación en el aula con los estudiantes del curso 104 de la jornada de la tarde, relacionado con las dinámicas de enseñanza y aprendizaje del Inglés como lengua extranjera. Con el motivo de realizar mi trabajo de grado con este curso durante este y los dos próximos semestres, es necesario realizar la aplicación de instrumentos de recolección de datos tales como entrevistas, cuestionarios, grabaciones de audio y vídeo, entre otros, por lo cual es necesario tener su aprobación para que el estudiante que está a su cargo pueda hacer parte de esta investigación.

**La información, datos, fechas y nombres recopilados durante el desarrollo de la investigación serán guardados en el anonimato. Esta información será manejada con la mayor confidencialidad y profesionalismo posible. Las intervenciones en clase y los resultados de estas NO AFECTARÁN el desarrollo ni la evaluación del curso.**

Si está de acuerdo que su hijo haga parte de esta investigación, por favor lea y diligencie el siguiente formulario.

*Por medio de la presente, yo \_\_\_\_\_ identificado con cédula de ciudadanía N° \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_ y en calidad de acudiente del estudiante \_\_\_\_\_ del grado 104 del Colegio Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, doy consentimiento para que haga parte del proyecto de investigación en el aula desarrollado por el estudiante-investigador Jesús Alberto Castaño Vargas de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. De la misma forma autorizo la aplicación de instrumentos de investigación y recolección de datos.*

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*Firma y cédula*

**Appendix L: Students interpretation of a short story**

Follow: <https://youtu.be/7PxGTvzQ2eg>

**Appendix M: Vocabulary wall and Interaction with Environment**

Follow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iw6zsD1chWg&t=6s>

**Appendix N: Situation schema**