

PODCASTING DESIGN AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEVELOP NEW MEDIA
LITERACIES WITH 21ST CENTURY STUDENTS

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Carla Cristina Pulgarín Mejía

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carla Pulgarín', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Firma de la autora

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Abstract

This senior thesis will describe the findings of a study conducted at a private Catholic school in Envigado, Colombia regarding the use of podcasts as an alternative to develop new media literacies in the classroom and to improve student's performance in a second language; in this case, it will be English. This study was conducted with sixth grade students. These students were categorized in two groups (6th a) and (6th z). First, the thesis briefly introduces the idea of podcast design, followed by the problem statement which brings to light the issue of not accounting new media literacies in the Colombian setting. Then, all theory regarding literacy will be shown and how it was integrated with particular work. Later, the execution process of the design of podcasts will be presented along with student samples and experiences. Finally, the author will present some pedagogical challenges ahead, especially, for the field of new media literacies.

Keywords: Literacy, new media, podcasts, EFL, motivation, sixth graders, production.

Resumen

La presente tesis plantea los hallazgos de un estudio realizado en una escuela católica privada en Envigado, Colombia acerca del uso de podcasts como alternativa para desarrollar nuevas literacidades mediáticas en el aula y mejorar el desempeño de los estudiantes en una segunda lengua; en este caso, será en inglés. Este estudio se realizó con estudiantes de sexto grado. Estos estudiantes fueron categorizados en dos grupos (6° a) y (6° z). Inicialmente, esta tesis expondrá una corta introducción para embarcarnos en la idea de diseño de podcasts, seguida del estado del problema el cual trae a la luz la problemática del no reconocer las literacidades mediáticas en el contexto colombiano. Luego, toda la teoría relacionada con la literacidad se mostrará y el cómo se integrará con este trabajo. Posteriormente, se presentará el proceso de ejecución del diseño de podcasts junto con muestras y experiencias de los alumnos. Finalmente, el autor presentará algunos retos pedagógicos que se avecinan, especialmente, para el campo de la literacidades mediáticas.

Palabras clave: Literacidad, nuevos medios, podcasts, EFL, motivación, estudiantes de sexto grado, producción.

Podcasting Design: A Classroom Experience

Defining the Term

Before describing my classroom experience, I consider it necessary to provide a brief introduction to podcasting. A few years ago, podcasts were not well-known as today, what we called as “geeks” were the population who was familiarized with the term, podcasts had their big break during 2000’s, their impact was so huge that for the year 2005, the New Oxford American dictionary selected the word podcast as the “word of the year”, also, it was defined by it as: “A digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the internet for downloading to a personal audio player” (para. 2)

This definition looks precise and synthesizes the nature of podcasts. Anyhow, we must highlight some key elements of these revolutionary technological tools. A podcast can be defined as any sort of radio-style broadcast that one can share online, in other words, a podcast can be defined as any sort of audio with a radio-style format uploaded to the internet. (Mora & Pulgarín, 2014, para. 1).

It is very important to highlight that when it comes to a podcast, its nature lies mainly in the fact that it can be shared online providing users open access to it. Otherwise, it will be only an audio file. (Laing, 2006, p. 514) In the World Wide Web, podcasts can be found in many different websites and online platforms, such as iTunes, YouTube, Soundcloud, Spotify, among many others. Also, on the net, podcasts may appear in many different types of formats, for example, along with videos and images (Vodcasts) or they can appear as only audio dealing with a variety of structures, sometimes as a one voice author (individual effort) or as many authors voices (collective effort).

Additionally, if we talk about their content, podcasts are very versatile, they are useful as entertainment or as informational pieces. Along the web, podcasts appear in the

form of music shows, opinion pieces or newscasts, in summary, their range is very large. (Yamaguchi, n.d, p. 3) Even though most podcasts are not created with educational purposes, many educators around the world have ventured in their creation, educational podcasts can be easily found on a lot of websites, some of these podcasts involve lesson plans too or viceversa, some lesson plans require listening to a podcast whether is educational or just and entertainment piece. However, podcasts have been used mainly with the purpose of bringing “authentic materials” into the classroom or to promote listening skills and metacognitive awareness. Although this angle might hold some validity, it is oversimplified too. This senior thesis aims to expose podcasts as tools with broader potentialities especially in terms of literacy research. Personally, I believe that podcasts have plenty of potential in our classrooms if we engage students in activities that involve their creation, some of these potentialities range from “social agency” to “content appropriation”, among others. But the most important proposal that will guide this work, refers mainly to changing the paradigm of consuming media passively rather than producing it.

How It All Started: My Experience As A Podcast Listener

In accordance with the previous section, I also consider it necessary before exposing how I implemented podcast design in my classroom to narrate my experience as a podcast listener. As I see it, this is a good starting point to understand more deeply this present work. I used to hear the word “podcast” very commonly around me without paying much attention, it was clear that the “boom of podcasts” was just emerging. Yet, as time passed, curiosity aroused and the term gave me an interesting impression. I started reading

articles about the subject and one day I decided to jump into listening to a couple of podcasts recommended by some websites. As far as I can recall, those podcasts captured my attention for a short period of time. Podcasts really became a habit for me over time, especially, when I started to

share my experiences as a listener with my friends and colleagues, in other words, when I was able to start building a community. I used to enjoy mainly podcasts related to personal growth or podcasts whose main audience were women. Some of my favorite picks were *Women of the hour* by Lena Dunham, whom I still admire greatly. *Modern love* with its captivating stories, among others, which provided an interesting mixture of narrative genre and so to speak “lady matters”. Within time, I took a more eclectic approach and started listening to quite a variety of podcasts, genre was no longer a relevant aspect, on the contrary, motivation was all. I was able to move freely around podcasts. Frankly, I think that the link I had established with podcasts allowed me to propose a classroom experience from my students, to some degree, their experience began when mine did too.

As a novice teacher, I felt deeply obliged to propose a classroom experience for my students which could help them to gather elements to face our present time.

Why Design?

I took the idea of design mainly from the *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* manifesto (New London Group, 1996, p. 73), in this text, the whole metalanguage of multiliteracies revolves around this concept. Design, according to the authors, refers mainly to “forms of meaning” or the “grammars” of language and how these are implemented with the purpose of “creating meaning”. Nevertheless, this meaning creating activity should also take into account “new media”, in (Mora, 2018, para.1) words, “We can conceive design as part of the process of meaning-making through texts, as espoused in multimodal theory.” This quote exposes that it would not be advisable to think about the process of design from a monolingual standpoint. In addition, we should not forget how important the concept of

design is to meet our present needs. As a novice teacher, I wanted to provide these possibilities or “grammars” to my students. Also, I often felt nervous about the future that my students will face. I think that

oftentimes, we do not reflect much about our teaching and educational practices, in terms of the challenges different students will encounter as time passes, they will be asked to do things differently from ourselves and to be a different type of citizen, worker, etc. (New London Group, 1996, p. 73)

In an attempt to fulfil this current need, students began being exposed to the grammars of podcast design, a process that will be further shown in a detailed manner. Regardless, I must explain my work logic. Podcast design was conceived through getting to know all the available elements in order to create podcasts.

Hereunder, I will describe the whole process in which I implemented podcast design. It is important to mention that I took a scaffolded approach in which I was aiming to empower students gradually to create content by themselves. And, the idea of design guided my work. Also, I will expose how this present work is structured, to provide a clear idea of what will be provided next. Initially, this senior thesis will present a short overview of Colombia's status, when it comes to teaching and learning English. Followed by the problem statement which can be summarized as students experiencing difficulties when learning English as a result of not acknowledging student's own literacies predominantly the ones who are related with media use. Later on, I will introduce the purpose of this study, where the idea of promoting creation of media content is exposed and then introduce the literacy theories that comprise my conceptual framework. Then, I will introduce the implementation process for podcast design in my classroom which took place in two stages (Modeling stage and Creation stage) As for the data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews and permanent observations, both instruments were interpreted in the data

analysis and valuable conclusions came up.

It is important to mention that students' creations were a vital subject for analysis as well. Finally, I tried to analyze all of this in light of literacy related concepts, all contributions found regarding the field of literacy, particularly new media literacies will be presented. These contributions apply mainly for our Colombian context.

Situating The Problem

English Status Worldwide

For quite some time, English has acquired a predominant status worldwide due to several causes. Since the British Empire's dominance to the phenomenon of American Imperialism, until our modern days, when we talk about discourses, such as, Globalization or Information revolution, English seems to be the language of choice by many inhabitants around the world. Approximately 20% of the world's population speak English with multiple purposes, some of them which can be categorized into; economic, political, cultural, among others. Such impact in our world dynamics, allowed English to be recognized as a "Global language" "Bridge language" "Trade language" or more precisely, as a "Lingua franca", a term which refers to "English as the common language of choice among speakers who come from different lingua cultural backgrounds." (Jenkins, 2009, p. 200), in other words, English seems to be a powerful vehicle for many countries to communicate effectively. Its spread has come to a point in which some notions like "Standard English" or "Proper English" are dissolving, while some others, as "World Englishes" are becoming more noticeable.

Along with this understanding of our current reality as world citizens, we must pose

the next question: What is Colombia's placement in this whole English phenomenon? And from there, other interrogations that emerged from this thesis will be presented.

English in Colombia (A Short Overview): Status & Policies.

At the present time, English still has the status of “Foreign Language” in the Colombian setting regardless of its increased use. Additionally, the government of Colombia clearly states “Bilingual education” as mandatory, whether it refers to, integrating Spanish with an Indigenous Language or integrating Spanish with English. (Artículo 21, Ley 115 de 1994). Chronologically speaking, starting from the early 2000s, some initiatives promoted by our Colombian government are: The National Bilingual Programme (2004-2019) whose objective was inserting the country in universal communication, global economy and cultural openness. The Basic Standards of Competencies in English (2006) whose objective was strengthening teaching and learning of foreign languages in Colombia. And, simultaneously, the Decade Education Plan, which stated that students must learn at least one foreign language and education should take into account discourses like globalization, autonomy and 21st century competencies.

Not much has changed since the beginning of the early 2000’s, some of these documents have been updated while others keep its legitimacy, the National Bilingual Programme it is now known as the Foreign Languages Competencies Program in Spanish Programa para el Fortalecimiento de Lenguas Extranjeras (PFDCLE) since the year of 2010 and its purpose to develop communicative competences in both teachers and students to improve Colombia’s insertion into the economy of knowledge, also, some complementary programs have emerged some of the most significant are: The Law of Bilingualism launched in 2013 in which some changes are presented towards the Law of Education of 1994 and some new guidelines are given in terms of Bilingual policies.

At last, the English National Programme was launched in 2015 with the purpose of turning Colombia into the most educated country of Latin America and the country with the best level of English in South America by 2025.

Issue in Depth

Despite all the efforts made in our Colombian context to improve English language use, it seems that we are still failing at fulfilling this purpose (Shohami, 2006, p. 46). Simultaneously, secondary English classrooms in our country appear as not really accounting students' own media literacies, literacies in which they are fluent. Both phenomena seem to me equally concerning and deeply intertwined, to illustrate this idea, we must analyze carefully in which ways students from the 21st century are approaching learning.

Nowadays, learning occurs in the most unconventional settings, out of school literacies are more common than expected. In fact, schools are struggling to keep up with what is happening outside its walls (Mora, et al., 2018).

The spectrum of our reality has changed tremendously, a huge scenario that has transformed the ways in which students learn is the world wide web. Our paper-bound world has transcended into more multimodal spaces and access to technology is no longer that big of an issue. Through the internet, students often engage in activities that potentiate learning in ways almost impossible to estimate, possibilities are endless.

From a pedagogical perspective, I firmly believe that this should represent an opportunity to be explored rather than a problem. Schools cannot afford to disregard technology for much longer.

Additionally, the way I see it, by tackling the whole technological sphere which surrounds our students' daily lives, one might find that learning a language, in this case English becomes an easy task, quite involuntary.

Down the road, ignoring and neglecting new media literacies in our classrooms will be a massive problem because the media will not stop evolving. On the contrary, media complexity could increase over time and students should not be left behind. From a prospective point of view, the 21st century students will encounter a completely new world, a world that is going to require from them a different sort of technological involvement. Students will be requiring to assume a more active role, one that will allow them to transform and reshape the places they inhabit.

In sum, this senior thesis will present the findings of a study conducted in a private Colombian school dealing with the use of podcasts. In this particular study, as mentioned above, I understand podcasts as an important and powerful alternative for the development of new media literacies in secondary English classrooms. This whole thesis aims to expose that if we promote “new media literacies” integration in the classroom, one might find a positive impact in student’s performance in communicative tasks involving English and students will gain several tools that will allow them to create media content in a natural manner. Ultimately, the whole speculation of this work will be condensed in the next research question, *How can the implementation of a podcast design project in a secondary English classroom empower students in the creation of media content?*

With this study, I expect to open up interrogations towards the use of podcasts in a secondary English classroom and its benefits in terms of empowering students in the creation of media content, as well as for providing opportunities for furthering English language use. Until now, passive consumerism has become a common way of approaching media,

however, as a society, we need to move away from this position in the direction of providing students with the tools to create media content effortlessly.

In this modern era teachers hope for students to critically assess the information they receive from multiple media sources. What is more, it is very important for students to interrogate and analyze online spaces, they should be able to transform them too. That is why we should propose a transition from passive consumerism to designing. As Jenkins (2009) would say, students must have an active role in media production.

This study aims to provide students with some of the possibilities, they will need to become designers of media content and to reshape the spaces they inhabit. In this sense, one of my biggest expectations is to make podcasting a vehicle for students' participation and transformation within online spaces. In a more concrete note, podcast design was proposed as an alternative to integrate new media literacies in the classroom and further English knowledge in a very specific setting. Two groups of English learners belonging to a school located in Envigado from Sixth grade, I categorized them in two groups (6th a) and (6th z).

Conceptual Framework

Literacy: The Grand Scheme

The main concept that will guide this research is literacy. From a simplistic point of view, it has been understood as the ability to “read and write”. For example, in the Merriam- Webster dictionary it is defined as “the quality and state of being literate”. (n.d para. 1) Anyway, what does it mean to be “literate”? Apparently, there is a common understanding of “literate” as a person who is able to “decode print”. Nonetheless, in our current world dynamics, these paradigms generate multiple debates.

In the last few decades, new ways of contextualizing literacy's reality in today's changing world have emerged. One of the most salient was the proposal by the New London Group, a group of ten scholars who met in 1994 in New London, New Hampshire (USA) and

who understood the reality of literacies in today's changing world. these scholars argue that, "Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write, in page- bound, official standards forms [...] restricted to formalized monolingual, monocultural and rule-governed forms on language" (New London Group, 1996, p. 61). A notion that, according to them, neglects accounting for a "burgeoning variety of text forms" associated with information and media technologies. One of the main concerns of this present work. For the purposes of this work, I will stick to the next definition of literacy, "The process of interpreting and creating text using multiple means and media, including technology, multiple languages, and diverse aesthetic forms of expression, in addition to the written and spoken word" (Mora-Vélez 2010, p. 1)

This definition provides a deeper understanding of today's world reality acknowledging different ways of communicating besides the traditional ones, it clearly states that written and spoken word are not the center of our contemporary forms of communication. On the contrary, our society seems to be evolving towards more multimodal forms mediated through technological tools. In addition, for a long time, as a society, we have had a misunderstanding of language as an artifact and we have forgotten its function within a social basis. Perhaps, we need to return to Vygotsky's earlier assumptions towards language as socially situated. That is why, we should not ignore another theorist position, and according to Brian Street Literacy should be viewed as a social practice. (Street, 2003, pp. 77-78) Another conceptualization that targets some of early concerns posed by the New London group.

Literacy in Latin America

Currently, in our Latin American context despite some valuable insights emerging in the past few years, one could say that the concept of literacy needs to be further explored, to

mention some examples of quite outstanding works in the field, we must account for the following studies: Critical literacy (Monte Mór, 2006; Mora, 2014a), New Literacy Studies (Lorenzatti, 2013; Marinho, 2013), and even multiliteracies (Areiza, Berdugo, & Tejada, 2014). Still, all these efforts look as if they are small if we compare ourselves with the international arena.

Literacy in Colombia

The Colombian case is not very different from our continental reality, a common vision towards language teaching and learning from a paperbound perspective persists, although legal initiatives have become more solid, it is simply not enough. Major efforts to pose new views and perspectives towards language and literacy in our country come mainly from the Ministry of education (MEN) and a few experts from high listed universities.

The field of literacy in Colombia keeps growing, with critical literacy as one of its main avenues of exploration (see Mora, et al., 2021 for a detailed review). However, as was discussed before, research in terms of literacy should be treated more carefully and profoundly. This present work aims to expose a classroom experience at the light of some more current theories that understand literacy as a powerful mean to understand language itself and classroom interactions. Literacy is a wide-open concept, we can talk about in and out school literacies, literacy practices, literacy events, etcetera. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this work I will guide my research by the conceptualization of new media literacies. I will begin by talking about new media, what does it mean? And, how it converges with literacy.

From Literacy to New Media Literacies

Throughout human history, technology has played quite a significant role, since our first inventions until our present time. As humans, we have a tendency to create gadgets and equipment to facilitate certain tasks. In the early history of humanity, we needed to improve shelter, access to food, protection, among other aspects mainly related to our survival. At this point of history, our technological needs seem quite different; we are existing in digital times. A couple of decades ago, we used to talk about media from a quite limited point of view, for us media consisted mainly of three means of mass communication: *TV, radio and press*. It was unthinkable that new and more complex ways of communicating could arise; media seem motionless, still, changes develop faster than expected.

New Media

At this time, the dominant paradigm is what we call new media. From a simpleminded standpoint, new media refers to all the “new” forms and ways in which we communicate now by using “new technologies” which refers mainly to all the affordances provided by the digital era, it opposes to the “old” media and its format might seem less “monolingual”. This angle holds some truth, (Kress and Leeuwen, 2001, pp. 1) state that our means to communicate have changed, they are more interactive and they provide new experiences.

However, we still need to widen our assumptions a bit more. The next definition will help us in doing so, according to the official website of the New Media Institute, “new media” is a 21st Century catch-all term used to define all that is related to the internet and

the interplay between technology, images and sound. (New Media Institute, 2020, para. 5)

In fact, the definition of new media changes daily, and will continue to do so. New media evolves and morphs continuously. Along with this definition, a new approach appears towards “media”, as fluctuating and always evolving, that is why, it will be an error to predict

all the affordances that “new media” might provide in the early future. As well, “new media” is situated in a particular setting; very often, we hear the words: “21st century” a common denomination to talk about our present time needs.

In simpler words, 21st century education refers to all the abilities and skills, which students should develop to succeed in today’s world. As we have now established some clarity about “new media”, we should ask ourselves, what is the link between “new media” and literacy?

New Media Literacies

Similarly, to the concept of literacy alone, media literacy has been mistaken as the capacity to “decode media messages”, a simpleminded but agreeable approach for many. Nevertheless, current research on this field indicates otherwise. The participants at the 1992 Aspen Media Literacy Leadership Institute proposed a concrete sentence, which defines media literacy as, the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms. (Center Media Literacy, n.d , para. 1)

This short definition shows clearly how media literacy is a broader concept, which transcends simply decoding media. Media literacy involves a set of abilities related to not only consuming media content but also producing it. Nonetheless, this definition still might look a bit narrow. When we talk about media in a variety of forms, we might ask ourselves what the authors mean by that? there is still a necessity to expand our horizons.

According to Gee (2010), media literacy also involves accounting for all multimodal forms in which we communicate nowadays, which seem more common in digital environments. He proposes the next definition:

Media literacy as a field was concerned with how people give meaning to and get meaning from media [...] And giving and getting meaning from media can, of course,

involve giving and getting meaning from images, sounds, and “multimodal texts” (texts that mix images and/or sounds with words) as well. (p. 13)

As we can see, these new conceptualizations that keep emerging go beyond written or oral language. Here and now, we are being asked to recognize new facets of language. For example, images and sound as we can see have been recognized as a vital part of language too.

New Media Literacies in Colombia

If studies in terms of literacy in Colombia are few, studies in Colombia towards new media literacies are fewer. Although there are a few studies analyzing advertising (Lara-Páez, 2017) and media (Domínguez, 2019), we need to expand this field of research in our country.

New Media Literacies in My School

For me, there was a huge concern not only about the ways in which my students were approaching the English language, but also, for the way in which they were using technology in the classroom. They still experienced some significant difficulties when interacting with technology. As an alternative to targeting both issues, a class project dealing with the use of podcasts, seemed quite accurate.

The Triad: Participatory Literacies, Multimodality, and Agency.

Another set of concepts that will provide deeper understandings will be presented ahead, as a starting point, I have chosen the next introductory passage:

If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, it could be said that its

fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, [Creative] and economic life. (New London Group, 2000, p. 60)

From it, one can clearly state that the main objective of education is to provide students with all the tools they will need to participate fully in our society. This angle looks reasonable and hard to invalidate. This is why; I will propose a framework around the notion of today's literacy from a participatory perspective and focusing on the idea of producing rather than consuming. To put it in another way, this work expects to empower students to create their own content. Creation is key while passive consumerism is an issue that should be targeted particularly in Colombian schools.

First, I will introduce what I mean by a participatory perspective. In order to explain this, it is important to indicate that I will guide my work mainly from the concept of "participatory culture" proposed by the American scholar Henry Jenkins. Later on, I will explore other theorists' understanding to solidify my work. Jenkins (2013) describes participatory culture placement in our reality, as, [...] a world in which everyone participates, where we take media in our own hands, where we have the capacity, often, to produce media, share media. (Jenkins, 2013, 00:25) As this short quote exposes, we are living in a world in which people have the possibility to not only consume any kind of media, but we also have the means to modify it and produce it. Without question, this is our current reality; it will be silly to ignore it, especially in the realm of education.

Educators worldwide should be asking themselves how to approach this imperative reality, teachers should understand it and take a stand towards it. Undoubtedly, these possibilities mentioned above come up with challenges. But these challenges should be faced from a clear understanding about not only what participatory culture is but also its implications in the educational setting. An adequate definition for participatory culture

provided by Jenkins is:

A culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's own creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another. (Jenkins et al. 2006, p. 3)

This definition exposes the ways in which people can express themselves creatively within a social context and talking about things that feel important to them. Also, this passage shows a kind of participation or involvement requires a set of skills that are not learned formally, on the contrary, most of these skills seem to be more organic, fostered by small communities in which informal mentoring is key.

This kind of learning goes hand in hand with the newer theories in regards to language exposed earlier in this work. Teachers should focus their attention on introducing these newer skills set into their classroom to provide students with more up to date knowledge that will be more helpful to their future lives. Our educational system should be evolving at the same speed of society. A great advantage of introducing these skills into the classroom and not neglecting them allows teachers to promote in students a critical position towards all the flow of information that they constantly receive through various channels. Schools should not be separated from their circumambient reality. In this sense, critical thinking becomes crucial.

Participatory culture is closely related with "popular culture" as well, one might say that is its underlying concept, but, what is popular culture? Expressions of popular culture or "pop-culture" can be found everywhere, when you access the internet, when you play a

video game or when you are exploring apps. The digital world is the arena in which pop culture

travels freely. Pop-culture refers to all the discourses, forms and objects legitimized by a certain society. Podcasts and their narratives are tangible forms of participatory culture.

In relation with participatory culture, some other conceptualizations have appeared. One that holds quite a broad spectrum is the concept of participatory literacies. From this perspective, language is viewed as a vehicle that allows participation. Roccanti (2014) described participatory literacies as a variety of social practices that have evolved around the use of new media technologies in networked cultures. As we can see, the concept of participatory literacies refers to the ways in which language appears socially situated through media. This gives origin to networked cultures or in other words communities who use language with a specific purpose and who are immersed in certain common narratives.

Multimodality

Multimodality offers us possibilities to understand this work from its complexity referring to language use. This podcast design experience involved many different elements that transcend traditional paperbound forms of language. Underneath, I will expose how multimodality came to be and why it is such a valuable concept for this research.

For quite some time, our society was shifted by ‘monomodal’ ways of communication, this meaning, we used to have a preference for all that was ‘written’, however, communication keeps evolving and written texts are appearing more often in conjunction with visuals, sounds, among others. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 1). These changes pose a need for new conceptualizations that might offer deeper and more accurate perceptions of our changeable reality. To fulfill this need, concepts such as multimodality materializes, that is to say, become tangible.

Multimodality can be defined in opposition to our old monomodal forms of communication. If monomodality refers to the use of one “mode” of communication, to

rephrase it, using only one resource to communicate meaning, in this case, “print” or “written words”, multimodality accounts for the combination of different resources or “modes” to convey with text, suchlike, color, images, sounds, etc.

A misinterpretation of the concept will be to think that multimodality excludes text; this mode or resource should be interpreted as significant as others that appear in the “mix”. Multimodality suggests each mode or resource as serving a purpose in the construction of a certain message. In summary, messages are built as a combination of modes; this combination is seen as a necessary one because text will not fulfill the mission of delivering a significant message by itself. The whole point of multimodality is the construction of powerful messages.

Agency

In education we have heard about concepts such as meaningful learning, appropriation, or others that are somehow related to the concept of agency. Nonetheless, agency opens up a new conversation. In agency, one might find some angles that were not envisioned before. In order to embark ourselves in the comprehension of this concept, I will begin with some common interpretations of it. According to the Renaissance Dictionary, this concept refers to:

Student agency refers to learning through activities that are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests, and often self-initiated with appropriate guidance from teachers. To put it simply, student agency gives students voice and often, choice, in how they learn. (Renaissance Dictionary, n.d, para. 1)

This definition is assertive, because it exposes students placing in terms of their

own learning. However, this concept goes beyond students being driven by their interests and motivation. In the educational context, agency refers to a respectful and more empowered

positioning of students to be active agents in their own learning lives. Student agency encompasses both the power of possibility in learning contexts intersecting with the personal desire and will to act. (O'Rourke & Addison, 2017, p. 2) In accordance with what I said before, student agency is a concept that does not limit itself to a driven interest perspective, this short passage clearly shows students as having a more active role in correlation to their education and by this their future working and public lives.

Students have the possibility of shifting their everyday life and future according to their interests and desires. In this day and age, possibilities are endless, for example, in terms of media our students do not only have the possibility of transiting through various roads but also have a responsibility to become designers as knowledge belongs to everyone. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2007, p. 78)

Implementation Of Podcast Design

In this section, I plan to describe in detail how the whole podcast design project was implemented. At first, I tried to establish a connection between students and podcasts because most of them had never heard one. Then, students were asked to create one micro-podcast taking into account some aspects of the first model that was exposed to them and some additional criteria. For that reason, this process will be presented in the next two stages: Modeling and Creation.

Also, the modeling stage is divided in three parts, the first one will expose before listening activities, the second one during listening activities and the final one after listening activities. In this one, I will briefly mention some strategies that were used in

order to make students gain comprehension. But before all of this, I will present a short overview of the podcast that was chosen as a model for students to create their own.

Serial Podcast: Why?

Serial is an investigative journalism podcast hosted by Sarah Koenig which narrates a true-life story over multiple episodes. Season one researched the 1999 murder of Hae Min, an 18-year-old student at Woodlawn High School in Baltimore who apparently was killed by her boyfriend Adnan Syed. I decided to choose this podcast mainly because of its intriguing and intricate story. Also, I perceived these kinds of stories were of my students' interest. Previous observations led me to believe that my students were particularly drawn to narratives related to the genre of crime and horror. Students were often engaged by these topics through video games, TV shows, etc. For me, this meant an opportunity rather than an issue. I believe that sometimes we tend to avoid certain aspects of our reality and this might not be the most adequate approach. Instead, we could evaluate and discuss those narratives along with our students, providing them with new viewpoints.

In addition, a non-fiction podcast allowed me to review the content proposed for the term (narrative tenses) and to propose an interesting classroom project for the kids.

As I mentioned earlier, *Serial* was a series of several episodes, for example, the first season contained twelve episodes of approximately 30 or 40 minutes each, logically accessing to all of them in class would have been impossible, that is why, I chose to focus on one episode, a short overview of it will be presented below.

Episode One: The Alibi.

The episode I chose was called "The alibi," which was the first one of the series and the basis for this entire project. The episode starts with a short introduction by Sara Koenig exposing how hard it is to recall time many weeks back, especially if you are a teenager,

but why does she talk about this particular subject? Sara Koenig was a well-known reporter who was trying to figure out the alibi of a 17-year-old boy six weeks earlier, this boy was called

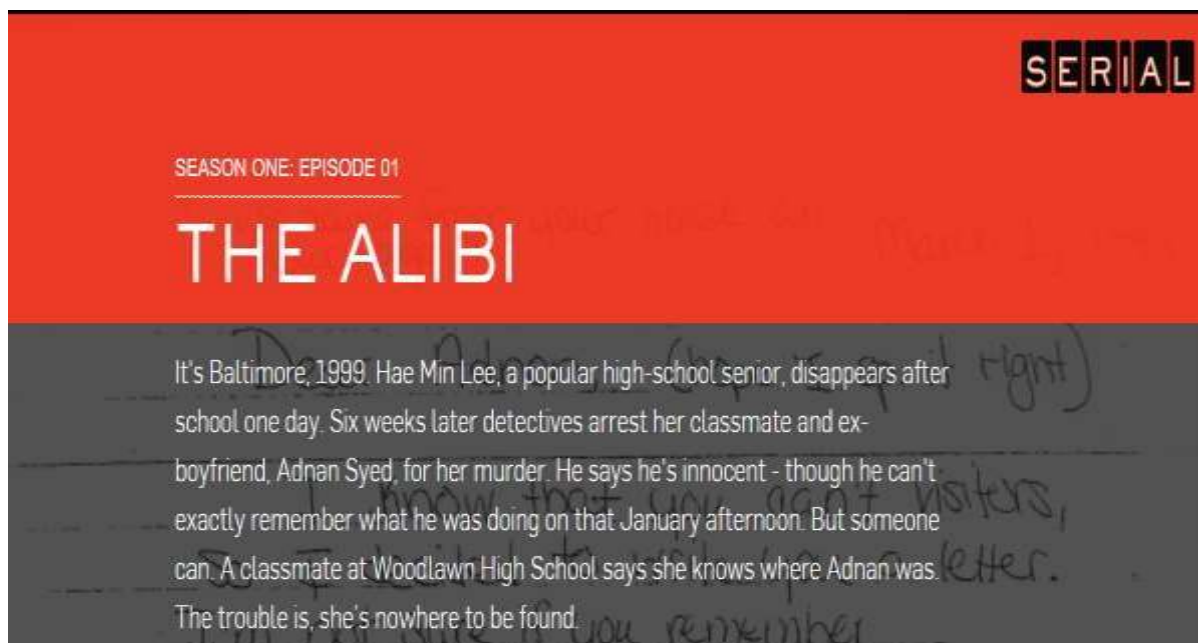
Adnan Syed who was accused of killing her girlfriend. Her name was Hae Min Lee, she was Korean. But why was Sara involved in the case? Sara was contacted by Rabia, a Pakistani woman who had a brother, his name was Saad, one of Adnan's best friends. Both characters appeared at the beginning of the podcast, they are convinced he did not do it, they start portraying Adnan as normal kid who was painted as a killer at court just because he did normal teenage stuff, he liked to party and he had a girlfriend, something that his parents did not know, Adnan used to hide certain aspects from his life from them, just because he was afraid of not getting their approval, he was Pakistani too. Later on, another character appears, his name was Jay, he used to be Adnan's friend and his testimony was the only evidence that court had. Jay said that Adnan told him that he was going to kill Hae, Jay took him to school and picked him up again after track practice to hide the body, however, Adnan's alibi appears, a girl called Asia McClain says that she saw him at the library at this precise time. In short, this was the episode's storyline.

Stages Of Podcast Design

Modeling Stage: Before Listening Activities

In the first stage, students' did some activities before actually listening to a podcast because I thought it would be a demanding task to them, who needed to be introduced by first triggering students' motivation and through a calm manner. The first activity regarding the project consisted of watching a short clip which described the podcast storyline and reading some materials provided by the podcast official webpage who offered more information that was relevant. The first element that students explored from the webpage was a short text that presented the story's plot.

Fig. 1 – The alibi: Episode’s summary



Note. Adapted from <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/1/the-alibi>

Then, students read two letters presented as well by the official website and they were asked to provide their opinion in relation to the criminal case through the opening question: Do you think he did it? Students were supposed to unravel a mystery.

Fig 2. Guiding Question




Fig. 3 – Asia's Letter to Adnan, March 1, 1999

it's late.

I just came from your house an hour ago. March 1, 1999

Dear Adnan, (hope I sp. it right)

I know that you can't visit, so I decided to write you a letter. I'm not sure if you remember talking to me in the library on Jan. 18th, but I remembered chatting with you ~~was~~ throughout your actions that day. I have reason to believe in your innocence. I went to your family's house and discussed your "calm" manner towards them. I also called the Woodlawn Public library and found that they have a surveillance system inside the building. Depending on the amount of time you spend in the library that afternoon, it might help in your defense. I really would appreciate it if you would contact me between 1:00pm - 1pm or 8:45pm -> until... My number is [REDACTED]. More importantly, I'm trying to reach your lawyer to schedule a possible meeting with the three of us. We aren't really close friends, but I want you to look into my eyes and tell me of your innocence. If I ever find otherwise I will hunt you down and wip your ass, ok friend...!!



Note. From <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/1/the-alibi>

Fig. 3- Asia's Letter to Adnan, March 1, 1999 (Part two)

I hope that you're not guilty and
~~I want~~ I hope to death that you have
 nothing to do with it. If so I will
 try my best to help you account
 for some of your unwitnessed, unaccountable
 lost time (2:15-8:00; Jan 13th)

The police have not been notified yet
 to my knowledge maybe it will give
 your side of the story a particle
 head start. I hope that you
 appreciate this, seeing as though
 I really would like to stay out
 of this whole thing. Thank...

Justin, he gave me a little
 more faith in you, through his
 friendship and faith. I'll pray
 for you and that the "REAL TRUTH"
 comes out in the end.

"I hope it will set you free" only trying to help

Asia McClain

* P.S. If necessary my grandparents
 line number is [REDACTED]. Do not call
 that line after 11:00 O.K.

Like I told Justin if your innocent
 I do my best to help you.
 But if you're not only God can help you.

If you were in the library for
 awhile, tell the police and I'll
~~continue to tell what I know~~
 even longer than I am. My boyfriend and
 his best friend remember seeing you there too.

Your Amiga

Asia McClain

Note. From <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/1/the-alibi>

Fig. 4 - Asia's Affidavit, March 25, 2000

Affidavit a.l.m.

Asia McClain having been
duly sworn, do depose and state:

I am 18 years old. I
attend college at Catonsville
Community College of Baltimore
County. In January of 1999,
I attended high school at
Woodlawn Senior High. I
have known Damon Dyeal
since my 9th grade freshman
year (at high school). On 1/13/99,
I was waiting in the
Woodlawn Branch Public Library.
I was waiting for my book from
my boyfriend (2:20), when I spotted
Mr. Dyeal and held a ~~15~~ 15-20
minute conversation. We talked
about his girlfriend and he seemed
extremely calm and very caring.
He explained to me that he just
wanted her to be happy. Soon
after my boyfriend (Derrick [redacted])
and his best friend (Yerrod [redacted])
came to pick me up. I spoke to Adrian (briefly)
and we left around 2:40.

EXHIBIT
2

Note. From <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/1/the-alibi>

Fig. 5 - Asia's Affidavit, March 25, 2000 (Part two)

A.R.M.

No attorney has ever contacted me
about January 13, 1999 and the
above information

Asia McClain 3/25/00
1100 Lincoln St. S.W. #100
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74106-1100

Note. From <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/1/the-alibi>

Modeling Stage: During Listening Activities

Students first listened to the serial podcast first episode called ‘The alibi’, for them this task was quite difficult, students were only asked to try to grasp what the story was about and take notes. In previous assignments, they did similar note taking exercises but in this case the task was a bit more complex. As expected, students had trouble in terms of comprehension and the teacher's intervention was necessary.

Modeling Stage: After Listening Activities

Students listened to the podcast a second time. I did a retelling focusing on important information like characters, setting, storyline, etc. At this point, students created an outline of the story. With a visual bulletin board, next to it. By this time, their comprehension of the story increased significantly, but some clarifications were needed too, which led to a final group discussion in which I presented the key elements of the story through a handmade bulletin board. At the end of this discussion students had a clearer idea of the episode.

The retelling strategy helped me greatly to improve comprehension in students, this strategy has been commonly used in the territory of reading comprehension, however, they can be used for other text formats, in this study, retellings were used to improve student’s comprehension towards an audio piece. (Kalmbach, 1986, p. 120) Also, a visual representation of the story, in this case, bulletin board provided a clearer idea for students.

Creating Stage

This stage will present the steps students followed in order to create their own

micro- podcast. The process was divided into four parts correspondingly called: Scripting, Recording & Editing and Sharing.

Step 1: Scripting

Students' first task regarding the creation of their own podcast was writing a short script (3 pages long) about a criminal case, fictional or not, in small groups (4 students). They had to include story elements and some specific grammatical content reviewed during the term, mainly narrative tenses and connectors. Also, students were asked to define some aspects of their scripts, such as, scene heading, action description, characters names, annotations and finally dialogues. Once their draft was approved they could start recording. Students were given a timetable which included three specific dates to present their draft. Also, students who wanted to show their texts in front of class did, this whole process enriched students writing immensely.

Step 2: Recording

For this step, students were asked to bring their own electronic devices from home, such as, cellphones, tablets, computers, etc. So, this process could have been done in an easier manner. This part of the process was done quite organically, students were provided with several spaces around the school in which excessive sound was not an issue, they were given a schedule and while some of the most advanced students were recording, other groups were practicing with their teachers' help.

Students received recommendations in certain aspects like intonation, pronunciation, etc. A valuable resource that was given to them was an online pronunciation dictionary called Howjsay (<https://howjsay.com/>). This strategy was used in order for students to gain

autonomy.

Step 3: Editing

Before starting with the editing process, students received detailed instructions on how to use a computer program to record their podcast; in this case, the program of choice was audacity. We watched a video tutorial in our classroom and at the same time, I wrote on the board all the necessary steps for them to record their podcasts with all needed requirements.

Students registered those steps in their notebooks and we proceeded with the editing process in the computer lab. Once their audio was completely edited, students started creating their bulletin board or crime board on PowerPoint, most of them decided to join both their audio and visual support through a slideshow, a technique previously learned by them at technology class.

Step 4: Sharing

At the end of the term, each group prepared a final presentation of their micro-podcast for the whole class. Besides presenting their micro-podcast, students had to include a crime board or bulletin board as was mentioned above. As students were presenting their work, they were being assessed according to particular criteria.

Assessment Criteria

In this section, I will present the assessment criteria used to evaluate students during the entire podcast design project. These criteria will serve as the foundation for my data analysis as well. When evaluating students, it was very important for me to go beyond formative and summative assessment and their derivations, instead, I tried to take a multiliteracies assessment approach. (Jacobs, 2013, p. 623) As the author mentions in this text, a cognitive approach is simply not enough, we must try to assess twenty first century

skills.

A mixed approach was necessary, students received a rubric which assessed aspects like their script in terms of mainly content (Narrative tenses and connectors) and they were expected to use a minimum number of both. Length was vital too, students were expected to write a 3-page long script. Also, their micro-podcast was evaluated in terms of related aspects to oral production, such as, fluency, intonation, pronunciation. As far as multimodal elements use, sound-effects were the main element assessed, they were expected to empower the story a bit more. And, to be integrated smoothly. In order to motivate students and to make multiliteracies evaluation tangible, students were offered an extra score if they managed to include noteworthy effects.

Table 1. Project's Evaluation Rubric

Written discourse: Script		Oral discourse: Audio		Multimodal elements: Sound effects	
Length: 3 pages' long		Length: 2:30 to 3:00 min		Background music: Adds a distinctive sound empowering the audio piece.	
Font: Times New Roman 12 / Arial 12		Fluency: Can speak spontaneously, quickly and comprehensibly.		Noises: Adds sounds of objects, actions, weather, etc.	
Spacing: Double space		Intonation: Can speak changing their vocal pitch.		Transitions: Adds and integrates effects smoothly into the audio piece.	
Grammar and narrative tenses		Pronunciation: Can speak pronouncing words properly.		Volume: Adds several sounds adequately without creating interferences, especially with spoken word.	

Furthermore, students received a timetable with the purpose of helping them acquire time management skills and assessing their collaborative work. Each student received their own copy of it.





Table 2. Project 's Timetable

PROJECTS TIMETABLE
<p><u>FIRST PRESENTATION:</u> Date: April 26 For your first presentation, you must have a clear idea of: -What are the roles of all team members? E.g. (Speaker, editor, etc.) - What are the storyline elements? E.g. (Characters names, setting, plot and resolution) Show evidence of the 25 % of the written work (Half page)</p>
<p><u>SECOND PRESENTATION:</u> Date: May 10 For your second presentation must answer to the next questions: -What are the troubles that you have encountered as a team? And, how did you solve them? -Show evidence of the 70% of your written work (2 pages and a half)</p>
<p><u>FINAL PRESENTATION:</u> Date: May 31 In the final presentation you must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The script (Printed or digital) Length: 3 pages. • Micro-podcast (Usb/ Cloud) Length: 2:30 or 3:00 min.

Gamification

An important aspect that was assessed were 21st century skills, such as, assertive and respectful communication, responsibility, conflict resolution and creativity. This happened through a gamified design. Students were told that they were going to be detectives and they should unravel the mystery of who killed Hae Min Lee. As a continuation of this idea, students received a chart to assess the aspects previously mentioned, if they were able to integrate them into practice, they would gain a figurine which had a value in points, if they reached a certain amount of them, they would receive a special prize at the end of the term.

Table 3. 21st Century Skills Rubric

<p>Assertive and respectful communication (5 points)</p>	
<p>Responsibility (5 points)</p>	
<p>Conflict resolution (5 points)</p>	
<p>Creativity (5 points)</p>	

Research Methodology

Along this chapter, I will present the methodological approach that guided my study. This research followed a qualitative approach; I chose this approach because my main interest was to research in depth student's opinions and thoughts towards their learning experiences. (Pope & Mays, 1995, p. 43) I implemented both semi-structured interviews and observations, common methods used in qualitative research that will be further explored down below.

Setting: My School

This research was conducted in a private all-male school in Envigado, Colombia. This school was led by a Catholic community and had approximately 800 students. The school is not considered bilingual, as many popular private schools around the area are.

Still, it provides an English intensification program, meaning that English is essential in the school curriculum, each group of students both 6th a and 6th z had 7 hours of English instruction per week which were divided into 6 hours of regular class and one hour of “English lab” who consisted in a short space interacting with digital media selected by their teacher related with the content reviewed, if one makes an analysis, this amount of hours is higher compared with the public school system in Colombia.

Moreover, the school implemented a PBL (Project Based Learning) methodology, which allows students to approach knowledge quite adequately. For our school, the projects are conceived as spaces for negotiation between the students and the teacher; they promote collaborative work and help students to assume responsibly language-learning activities in various settings.

On the other hand, project work focuses on language as a means and not as an end. This involves a series of steps ranging from brainstorming and exploring topics to presenting a final product. The students are the ones who decide what and how to do it, always counting on the help of the teacher since sometimes the teacher's perception also participates in the development of the project. Thus, the teacher provides constant support and serves as a model, facilitator and evaluator.

Participants

As mentioned above, my school had approximately 800 male students, but I focused my attention on sixth graders. As they are an interesting population who provided some challenges in terms of language and technology use but who had the capability to face them and to improve significantly.

Each group of sixth graders had 25 students, a small number again if compared with the public school system in our country; also, each group had two teachers, which meant that per each class students were divided in two groups of approximately 13 or 12 students. It is important to highlight that both teachers planned all activities collaboratively (Co-teaching) and students received the same instructional plan even if they did not have the opportunity to share the same teaching experience. All of these made PBL easier to conduct in a more personalized way.

Student Samples

My sample consisted of eight students. I asked four students of each group 6th a and 6th z to engage in a short informal interview. Student's families were informed first in order to conduct our research in the most transparent and ethical way, these families allowed their kids participation through a consent form and as soon as this process was finished, I proceeded with the interviews. The students who participated in this process were not selected with a particular criterion in mind. I simply chose those students who had families willing to help me in my research. My students' real names will not be exposed for this project, pseudonyms were used, I took their podcasts name and kept their initials.

Table 4. Students sample

<i>6th a</i>	<i>6th z</i>
<i>F (Jimmy)</i>	<i>S. C (Robber)</i>
<i>S (Jessica)</i>	<i>N (Mateus)</i>
<i>J(Criminal2)</i>	<i>J. M (Chris)</i>
<i>F (Ryuk)</i>	<i>M (El Suárez)</i>

Instruments and Procedures

In order to collect the necessary data, the following instruments were used: permanent observations and a couple of semi-structured, additionally; a couple pictures of the student's final work (Bulletin board) were added. Below, I will specify the reasons why I chose these instruments and procedures.

I decided to implement permanent observations because observing participants allowed me to understand their world. (Kawulich, 2012, p. 15), my main interest was to understand through the process of observing what was my students' relation to the knowledge imparted.

I also decided to use semi-structured interviews because they allowed me to access in depth information of students' views, opinions, attitudes and perceptions (Harrell & Bradley 2009, p. 178) related to the process of podcast design. For me, this information was vital to assess the project's real impact.

Also, this was a strategic move in order to make students feel comfortable during the data collection process as they are young learners and maybe they could feel less overwhelmed if they felt that they were having a casual conversation with their teacher,

also, I expected the information as being not bias and more focused in the perceptions and emotions students experienced, which could emerge easily if students felt in stress-free.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, I will focus on our observations and interviews. My observations were hand-written; I used a small notebook in which my perceptions and insights were registered, as for the interviews these were transcribed conventionally, no programs were used. Hereunder, I will explain how I conducted both of them.

Interviews

For the interviews, I created a set of questions that I later divided into three main categories. The first category was related with the process of podcast design, the second one was related with student's perception towards their own learning during the project, especially in terms of languages skills (Listening/Speaking/Writing/Reading) and the content reviewed during the period. (Narrative tenses). Finally, in the third one I wanted to measure if students felt motivated and engaged with the whole project.

Per each category, I have selected small fragments of student's responses. It is important to clarify that all interviews were conducted in English language; for this reason, some of student's responses have some common mistakes that occur when learning a second language. I will validate mainly their thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Also, when conducting the interviews, I was attempting to provide a safe environment for my students to express their feelings and perceptions calmly; my main concern was for students not to feel as if they were being assessed.

For the first category, I wanted to know how students felt towards the implementation of the project. I wanted to provide an experience that was as natural and organic as possible and in accordance with emerging theories of new media literacies. My

main goal was a successful integration of media literacies in our classroom. Hopefully, this part of my data analysis will be understood from this perspective.

At first, students were asked about the way in which the project was conducted, I asked them if they felt that the whole process was organized in an easy manner for them to understand and what they felt about each step of the process (individually), mainly if they thought that each step served a purpose. Most students agreed with this perspective. They said comments like: “Yes, teacher. For me.. was very organize (Wrong conjugation)” or they simply said yes. When it came to the first step of the process, most of them liked the introductory videos, however, some others found them not very interesting and most of them agreed that they felt a bit scared. “I like the videos because I like mystery”, for students the most uninteresting activity was when we read the letters, we could also feel the lack of impact of this activity. “The script was very very difficult because the revisions,” “Record (mispronunciation) was easy.” Although, most students viewed the first tasks regarding podcasts as difficult or tedious, they were able to recognize their importance and they valued all extra activities their teachers implemented for them to gain comprehension.

Later on, for the next category students talked about their feelings towards their learning process in terms of language abilities and the content reviewed during the period, as well as if they were able to perceive an improvement in both aspects.

For this part of the interview, we asked students to compare their knowledge at two specific moments of the process at the beginning of the period and at the end of it. All students agreed in the improvement of their abilities and surprisingly the content was not mentioned as frequently as some aspects of language, most students felt a significant improvement in terms of their pronunciation and fluency.

One particular student recalled a strategy that helped him into achieving this, a pronunciation dictionary recommended by its teachers, “I learned a lot in my pronunciation,

when I was confused with a word, I was using the pronunciation dictionary.” Also, they enjoyed writing their script collaboratively and they felt that they learned quite a lot from their peers. “Teacher, the script in groups was easy” Most of them felt confident before even presenting their advances to their teachers. We attribute this fact to an adequate distribution of team members.

Finally, in order to understand how much students, felt engaged and motivated towards the project, I simply asked them what they enjoyed more during the whole project. Students felt particularly drawn to creating their own story and their character’s features: “I like creating the story, the names of the people, the arms (weapons) (wrong word choice)”, also, they recall enjoying a lot adding their sound effects and impersonating their characters. “The effects were very funny” a student recalled from our classroom exhibition. However, their perception towards the project’s difficulty appeared again.

Observations

As mentioned before, all the observations were kept in a small notebook and they were written organically (mainly after class), as it was difficult to juggle instruction and observations, most observations were held ‘in situ’ and later on systematized, observations will be presented in a chronological way according with the stages in which we named our project: Modeling & Creation. It is important to highlight that often both teachers involved with this project engaged in casual conversations after classes and those became valuable subjects to analyze in this work.

Modeling Stage Observations

At the beginning of the project implementation, I was able to perceive that the

introductory material chosen triggered motivation in our students, students felt especially

drawn by the videos and our guiding question. Nonetheless, when I started reading the letters students were not as motivated as expected.

Once I started playing the first episode from *The Alibi*, students felt overwhelmed by the podcast, some students openly expressed their emotions. In a similar way as the students, the teachers felt frustration because significant difficulties towards comprehension were evident; my first impressions seem quite tense since the majority of students did not comprehend easily, very few students were able to grasp key elements of the story.

After all, this tiny number surprised me because they approached the task in a flawless manner.

From each group of 12 or 13 students, 3 or 4 of them showed great skills in terms of listening, students were able to engage in conversations with their teachers and classmates later on, this served as a great help for students who were facing difficulties. Anyway, we attributed these students' amazing performance to their personal experiences, abilities and motivations referring to English. Most of the students had difficulties and we were much more interested in them.

It is important to mention that I expected this phenomenon not only based on my previous classroom experiences but by knowing our own students' proficiency level, from an organic standpoint, students could be ranked in levels oscillating between A2 and B1 in accordance with the European Common Framework of Languages. That is why, I anticipated students that they were going to embark on a difficult task and if they did not understand every detail perfectly it was just fine. This strategic move had a positive impact in our

students, as they seem less stressed by the task, their main concern at this point was the length of the episode not its content, a natural phenomenon as well because when it came to tasks

related to spoken word, students only had listened to songs or smaller conversations during their primary years.

With this scenario, something had to be done in order to help students gain comprehension, some strategies were implemented and we were able to observe that students felt calm by their teacher's intervention and reassurance during the process. My first strategy was to implement a retelling of the episode, students were at used to this type of strategy and they were expecting it. As I did not want to give everything handed to my students, I started asking questions in order for them to identify simple elements of the storyline, such as, characters, plot, etc.

I was able to observe that they catch some of them. Nonetheless, it was not enough and I started creating an outline of the story on the board to clarify key elements. Along with this outline, I showed students some real life pictures of the characters. At this point, we were able to observe that the student's motivation was increasing again.

In summary, during the modeling stage, I was able to observe that the student's motivation was inconsistent and affected by the task's difficulty and as much as we try to make it a less overwhelming process, students felt frustration. Yet, I believed that this was something that I had to experience with them.

Creation Stage Observations

As a first step in this stage, we must remember, teachers asked students to create their own stories in the form of an outline, students started drafting their characters, plot, setting, weapons, etc. In this particular task, the student's motivation was at its highest, they did it in a very natural and fun manner, they were even getting a little 'silly' in their

creation and we allowed them to move freely. Some aspects in their outlines seem absurd and out of the

ordinary, still we were more interested to see what was ahead and how they were going to portray the whole story.

After this step, students created their own script of the story; students were motivated by using their electronic devices to do so. Nevertheless, they felt scared by the required length; a curious fact because at the end of the project most of them exceeded it. For us, this was an indicator of how much students were enjoying the writing process. The writing process was conducted smoothly; students implemented their teacher's recommendations with ease and we realized that our timetable strategy gave them autonomy.

I was particularly shocked to see the ways in which students were applying content with no complications, often students corrected their classmates who also admitted not including content (Narrative tenses) because of their distraction most of the time. Additionally, I realized students took several elements from pop-culture, something that felt natural. Below, I will show a picture of a group of student's scripts and a couple of bulletin boards, which illustrate this idea clearly. In addition, students also decided to use famous actors' pictures for their characters.

Fig.6 - Student's Script

(Gotham Central Bank)

CRIMINAL 1: Ok, is the money in the bag?

CRIMINAL 2: Yes sir it is.

CRIMINAL 1: Hey 3, is the silence alarm deactivated?

CRIMINAL 3: Yes sir, the silence alarm is deactivated

CRIMINAL 2: I can't wait to meet that Joker

CRIMINAL 3: Me too

CRIMINAL 2: Hey 1 aren't you excited or anxious?

CRIMINAL 1: No. Actually, im not.

CRIMINAL 3: 1 you suck

CRIMINAL 1: Maybe

CRIMINAL 1: Hey 2, you know. I just remembered that the J asked me to kill you.

CRIMINAL 2: What? Who is the J?

Criminal 1: (Takes off the mask) The J is The Joker and I am the Joker. (The Joker kills criminal 2)
bye bye flumpy, yeah im going to call you flumpy. Ha ha ha ha ha ha isn't that funny ha ha ha he
he hi hi ho ho. Hey 3 come down here.

CRIMINAL 3: I heard a gun shot

Fig. 7 – Crime Board

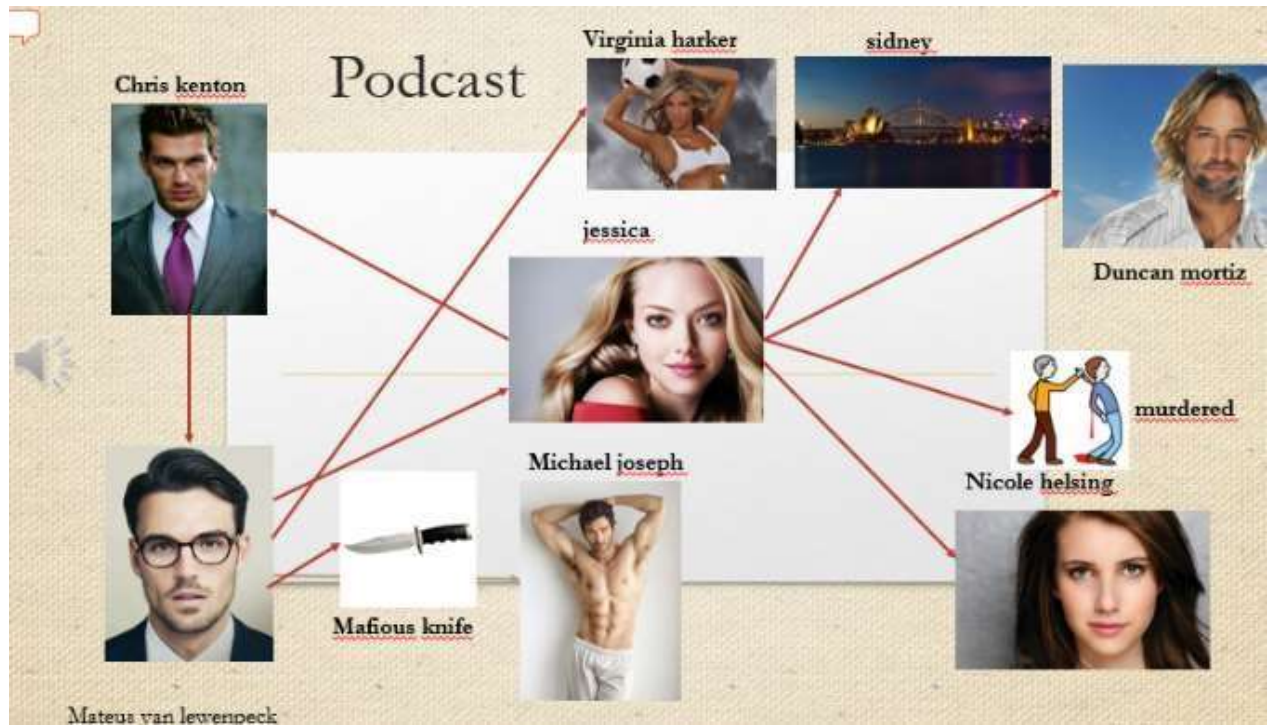
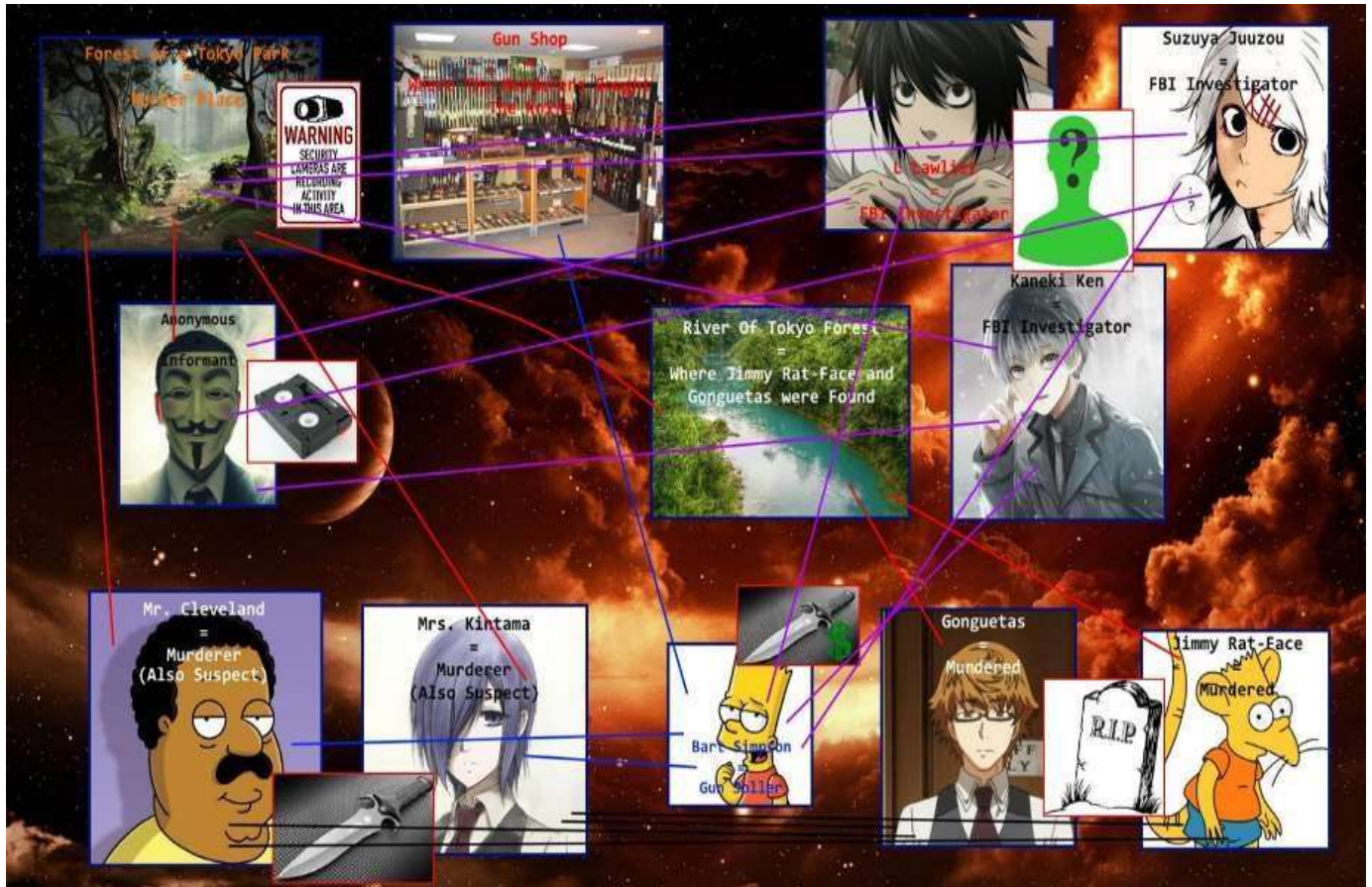


Fig. 8 – Crime board 2



Findings: Shifting Into Media Content Designers

Taking into consideration the initial interrogations presented in this senior thesis and in contrast with what appeared in the data analysis process, it is not daring to ensure that students' gains due to accounting their media literacies were too many. In each step of the podcast design process, students were gaining knowledge which allowed them not only

to become at short scale creators of media content but also to improve significantly in their second language performance, in this case, English. I will start supporting this claim by

displaying students' gains in both areas. These gains will be presented by first acknowledging the strategies which allowed them.

Getting To Know the Mechanics of Media Design: Students' Gains

Before the actual creation of media content, I wanted to provide my students with an appealing experience, in order to create a desire for creation. As soon as I was able to perceive my students' fascination towards mystery and crime, I knew what had to be done.

To me, this kind of narratives provided opportunities rather than issues, my main interest was for students to establish a link with the podcast format, which for me without motivation involved could have been extremely difficult to approach.

The most important gain to me regarding this aspect was observing the ways in which my students built a relationship with podcasts. As the data shows, some students even started to enjoy listening to podcasts, they explored several platforms looking for content just for fun.

Strategy 1. Exposure

21st century students spend a significant amount of time of their daily lives in digital environments. Yet, their practices are not as refined as one might think. Quite often students lack knowledge on useful media formats and how to create them, this information will become more valuable over time, as we live in a world shaped by media content. A world that in the future students will transform.

For me, at this moment, young learners are in great need of changing their perspective of media, as media means more than pure entertainment.

I wanted to allow this change of mindset without misjudging or forcing my

students. Also, podcasts meant to me a sophisticated tool with greater possibilities for their future lives than other media formats. From several casual observations, I was anticipating my students

to not have a particular relationship with podcasts. My personal perception led me to think that podcasts were mainly targeted to adults and my students seemed to be consumers of other kinds of media content, mostly related to gaming digital environments. Indeed, as shown in the data analysis, my impressions were correct, most of my students had never encountered podcasts before.

In short, my main goal at this point was to create a sense of familiarity with podcasts and once I could ensure this initial encounter, I could move on to creation. After all, creating from scratch is not a simple task. Familiarity with this genre was a huge gain for me too, I wanted my students to dive into podcasts and to feel comfortable about a wider range of digital tools, some of which they will benefit greatly in their future lives.

Strategy 2. Video Tutorials

I have never been quite the geek myself, but, I wanted to give my students an adequate guidance and tools to create their podcasts, I had to embark on a research process, platforms were too many, which led me to decide to look for an expert, a friend of mine, one of those “techy lovers specimens” advised me to try Audacity to help my students edit their audios, at first sight, Audacity seemed a complex platform for young learners, anyhow, I was confident that through a good guidance, my students will be able to learn easily.

I found a tutorial on the internet which had a great visual support and step by step guidance and I showed it to students, simultaneously, they were asked to write in their notebooks all the steps her teacher extracted from the video and display it on the board.

Audacity tutorial:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCisC3sHneM&ab_channel=DavidTaylor-

PeakWriting

Strategy 3. Engaging in Actual Design

All of these podcast design project, will be for nothing if students were not engaged in the actual creation of a micro-podcast, a common error in our educational system is integrating instruction and practice, students at the end of the day were producers of content with the elements they could acquire at such a young age, but surely in the future if instruction was successful, they will be able to polish their practice.

Strategy 4. Exhibitions

Finally, at the end of the process, students were very excited to share their podcasts and to see what their classmates had made too. We prepared an event in the library only for sixth grade students. Exhibitions were approached from a sense of ownership and joy. Students happily showed their crime boards along with their podcasts.

Personally speaking, I think that no matter how successful a classroom project is in the making, final results are a great chance to acknowledge students' hard work and effort.

Getting To Know the Mechanics of Media Design Conclusions

By creating content, students were empowered to participate more actively in society. As the purpose of this study showed, I wanted to prepare my students to stop consuming passively and start creating content of significance for them and their communities. I believe this goal was fulfilled at a short scale. A huge gain for me was being able to provide my students with resources, resources that might be useful to navigate into the creation of media content.

English Language Performance: Students' Gains

When it comes to students' gains in terms of English language, I would like to

expose them from two different angles, the first one consisting of student's improvement towards comprehension of complex audio files, such as podcasts. And, the second one consisting of

student's improvement in terms of their written and oral production. All gains meant to me quite a lot, since language has always been my main focus, learning a second language provides several opportunities for students to access knowledge, cultures and new life experiences.

Comprehension

At the beginning of the process, as the data showed, students experienced substantial difficulties when it came to accessing podcasts, they were not familiar with these types of texts, in fact, most of them had never experienced hearing one. To me, this was not a surprise, instead, it was something very likely to occur.

From various observations, I was able to identify that in the course of their academic lives, students were working along with their teachers on their listening skills by accessing mainly to short audio clips and songs, a very common approach in second language classrooms, especially in Colombia too.

So, it was only natural that their transition towards far more complex texts, in spite of my efforts when trying to make it less traumatic, was not. Students openly expressed feeling overwhelmed not only by specific aspects language-related they discovered inside podcasts, such as, different accents, slang words, speakers speed, among others. But also, because podcasts were longer texts. I was expecting this sort of reaction too.

Podcasts are more demanding texts in terms of comprehension, also, they require a different disposition from listeners, one that implies for example a higher attention span, something we know is difficult for young learners. As I said it before, my intention was to make their experience enjoyable. Right before we started listening to our podcasts, I

anticipated students that they were going to embark on a difficult task and if they did not catch every single piece of information, it was just fine. However, reassurance throughout

the initial process was not enough, strategies to increase comprehension had to be implemented. Even if some students performed better than others during the task, this phenomenon, as was mentioned before in the data analysis, should be attributed to personal abilities and motivations. The set of strategies prepared for students to gain more comprehension and establish a link with podcasts will be shown hereby.

Strategies Implemented: Overview and Effects

As was above mentioned, an intervention was needed with the purpose of making comprehension available for students. And so I did, all strategies that proved value are going to be presented below.

Strategy 1. Media As Motivation Trigger /Provoking Question

Chronologically, students began the podcast design project by watching some clips which offered a short overview of the criminal case. As teachers, in my humble opinion, we should not underestimate the power of screens, our 21st century students relate better to visuals than to written texts. As data showed, when students were exposed to the letters, motivation was not at its highest point, on the contrary, videos created another type of impact in them, one that was more factual.

Once input was presented, it was the moment of exposing students to another strategy. One that is very common when working PBL with students. I tried to come up with a question that could allowed me to engage students during the whole term. This question was: “Do you think he did it?” The question was presented through a multimodal manner, something very important to take into account.

Strategy 2. Repetition

In the sphere of listening, repetition might not be one the newest or more revolutionary strategies, Nevertheless, its efficacy continues to proves its value. According

to (Rouhi et al, 2014, pp 75-76), repetition has several benefits, some of these are: enhancing syntactic forms clarity, integrating new information into the memory structure, and increasing self-confidence.

From an experiential perspective, I was able to see this into reality, when listening to our podcast for a second time, students were gaining confidence and grabbing more information. One of them especially highlighted this aspect during the interview.

Strategy 3. Oral Retellings

As was shown in the implementation process, oral retellings were used precisely as a strategy to increase comprehension, this has been a common strategy in my teaching practices. I believe that in a second language classroom and with young learners, they engage better with their teachers' voices, gestures, movements, etc.

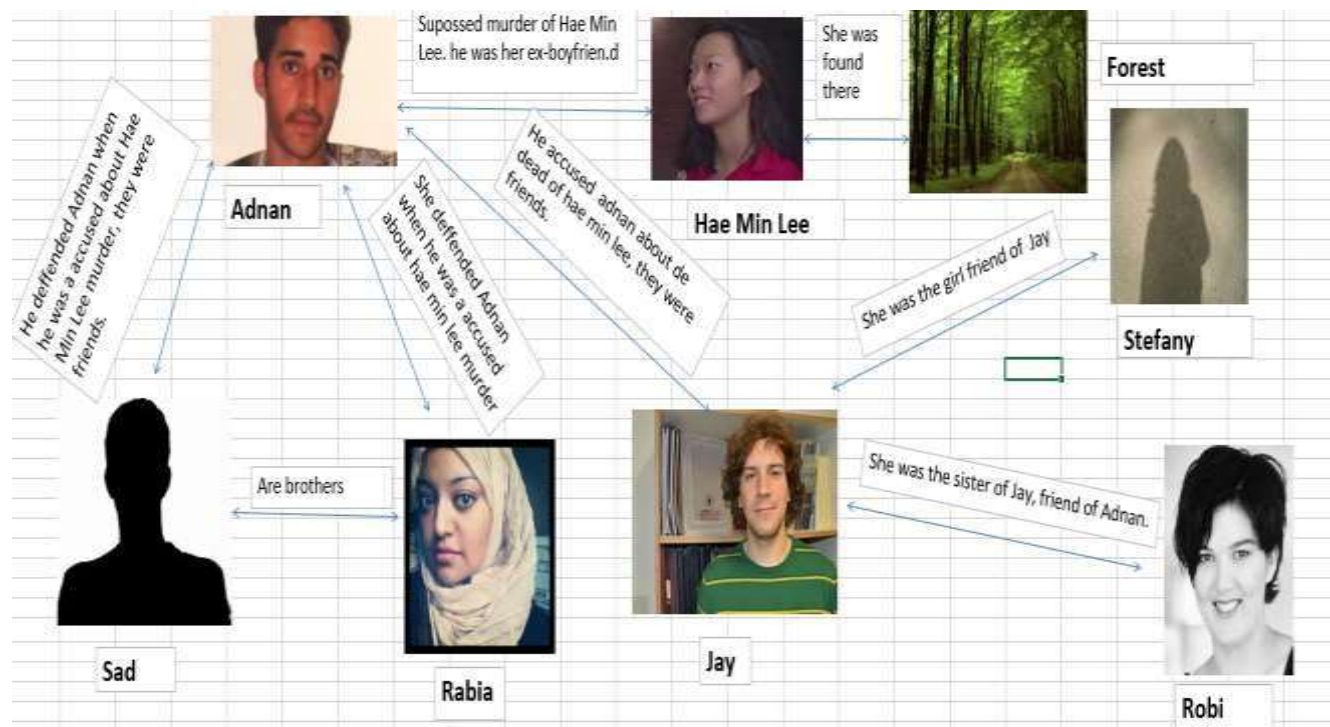
This claim shows its effect immediately, while I was doing a retelling of the podcast, quite a few aspects were clarified right away, students expressed through several interventions.

Strategy 4. Crime Board

This strategy was one of the most important, as far as verifying comprehension in my students. For me, a visual and written representation offered concrete information to be assessed. Initially, students were expected to do a reverse outline of the story, but as they did so, I asked them to add not only keywords but also drawings of the characters, setting, weapons, etc. And, organically the crime board idea appeared, through using it, besides checking if students were able to recognize story elements, I wanted to see if students were able to pinpoint aspects like how the characters were related to one another. Here below I

will show an example of a crime board made by one student.

Figure 10. Crime Board (Retelling)



This strategy helped me mainly to recognize the importance of including multimodal elements into practice. Visual, aural and gestural elements make comprehension an easier process, also, when integrated with technology provide better affordances both for students and teachers.

Comprehension Conclusions

In sum, due to all strategies implemented particularly (multimodal ones), students were able to comprehend better complex audio texts, which for me are more likely to appear for them in real life situations, podcasts have an interesting correspondence with language used in real contexts.

Written Production: Students' Gains

In the same way, their listening skills began being more fluid, writing did too.

Students were exposed to a project which involved collaborative writing, something that was

uncommon and challenging for them. I was concerned students were going to experience serious difficulties communicating or making decisions as a group, however, their teamwork issues were few and we managed to find solutions together.

Strategy 1. Zone Of Proximal Development

A great strategy that helped them gain more knowledge was taking into account Vygotsky ZPD, more advanced students were paired with students who struggled a bit more when they had to deliver a written text. Their peers' help was a great part of students' progress. Students looked as if they were gaining more vocabulary over time, polished their grammar and internalized the term's content.

Strategy 2. Feedback (Teacher's and Classmates')

Another strategy that helped students was having several deliveries during the period in which they showed their texts in front of class, this allowed feedback not only from the teacher but also from their peers. Even so, all of these strategies helped their writing a lot.

Strategy 3. Hearing Students Voices

In my opinion, the most significant strategy was allowing students to build their own narratives. When students had the chance to do this, one could not deny that motivation was at its highest point, students loved having the freedom to create stories as was exposed in the data analysis process. So, their writing pace was faster and more natural, students were very engaged with the task. From my perspective, students do not experience enjoyment when they are asked to write a particular text about a topic that is not meaningful to their lives. And, very often in our schooling system students' voices are not

being heard.

Written Production Conclusions

In summary, students gained not only a better disposition to teamwork but also through motivation and feedback, an improvement in their writing skills, something that they will continue using in the course of their academic and professional lives.

Also, agency became a concept which allowed students to boost their writing skills, as was mentioned above, hearing students' voices and their narratives allowed them to gain knowledge.

Oral Production: Students Gains

Later on, when students had the opportunity to record, their gains in terms of fluency, intonation and pronunciation were evident, their devices removed some of the anxiousness they would have experienced in another type of oral assignment. Students' performance referring to spoken word progressed exceptionally.

Strategy 1. Act it out!

Before actually recording their podcasts, students were asked to perform their scripts in front of the teacher, as they did, they received some recommendations as far as the aspects they were going to be assessed in. Their peers' help was very significant too, in the same way in which their writing improved due to collaborative work, their spoken word did too. Students gave tips to each other, coming from a place of understanding the criteria related to oral production.

Strategy 2. Record it!

As mentioned earlier, electronic devices gave students new affordances, they had the opportunity of polishing their discourse by avoiding common mistakes which occur

easily in real life interactions. Personally, I think that in the long term, this stress-free environment

will allow students to improve progressively taking trauma out of the equation. I will now introduce links to some of the student-created podcasts:

- **Superhero holiday:** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N1SDWlvM9lvHrPv-vFvsJa3LtAlue34a/view?usp=sharing>
- **Verdad o Reto:**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bw7lFvnSdFvSc2pQR25DdWdsM19LaEpVNGIOd2NKQUtHQWlr/view?usp=sharing&resourcekey=0-IgugftDJIGj1SxAQsIXEig>
- **Jessica dies in Sydney:**
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1o0S10ptBGrMPOJTfOpgr80aC8kRai96o/edit?usp=sharing&oid=104184804124125503336&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Oral Production Conclusions

As was mentioned at some point of this research, students felt one step ahead, when it came to writing and reading, but when they were asked to engage in a casual conversation, they felt insecure and nervous, as a way of improving their speaking abilities, their were exposed to podcasts, at the end of the term students were seen more secure and confident when they spoke, this was one of the best gains for me, in terms of language skills because students need tools to face real life situations, situations that will appear to them when they travel or they encounter people from all around the globe.

Implications of This Study

This study has produced mainly a variety of considerations around the implementation of new media in the classroom and their effect in the direction of improving students' performance in English language. Considerations that might offer some valuable insights for our particular reality as Colombians, a reality that was widely discussed during this work as still having significant challenges to face when introducing a second language in the classroom and no less important integrating technology. I humbly attempt to make available a classroom experience that could be considered ingenious in our archaic scenery. A scenery that urges more classroom practices aligned with newest theories of teaching and learning languages, otherwise, Colombia will stay in disadvantaged position globally.

At a local level, the main purpose of this research was to target student's immediate difficulties in relation to English language and technology use. Gladly, I was able to observe students advances during the period and I firmly believe that this phenomenon was possible because students were engaged and motivated to create their own content through means that seem natural to them, in other words, I was able to account students' literacies in which they are fluent and by this we targeted a particular concern towards schools neglecting student's literacies. This preoccupation was a very personal one for me. For a long time, I felt an enormous interest in the field of literacy and the ways in which practices related to it continue appearing in out-school spaces.

On a personal note, and as crazy as might sound, podcast design about a real-life criminal case allowed me to provide a "safety" or "comfort zone" for students because many

of them are constantly exposed to these kinds of narratives in their everyday life. I was able to trigger motivation easily by choosing narratives that they could find interesting and reliable.

Also, avoiding these topics might not be the proper way to promote critical thinking skills in them through engaging students in more critical and deeper discussions about topics that as adults we usually avoid, such as, crime and violence, etc. We flipped the whole story from a standpoint of fascination to a standpoint of awareness, something that I never imagined.

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