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CRITICAL MULTIMODAL DESIGN IMPLEMENTED IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE
CLASSROOM

BY

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THESIS

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AFFIDAVIT

I, Giselle Isaza Velásquez, hereby declare that this master's thesis has not been previously presented as a degree requirement, either in the same style or with variations, in this or any other university (Article 92 Advanced Education Student Code, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana)

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Abstract

This study is an exercise in the exploration of strategies that aim to promote critical thinking through the use of multimodality in the second language classroom. The project was applied to English students of a private university in Medellin, Colombia, where their task was to develop media products by using their creativity, analyzing their chosen topics in class and approaching the structures of the target language. This research project focused on the main topics related to critical literacy, along with new literacies and multimodality, used as a background for the development of teaching and learning strategies applied in the classroom.

This study found that students faced with the challenge of making multimodal products in class engage in deeper learning processes. It found that activities where their own point of view is expressed and their creativity is promoted can help them take in the target language in a more dynamic and meaningful way. This study concluded that students using technology find the tasks more alluring and thus can achieve a greater language skill development. The combination of multimodality with critical thinking strategies led to discussions in class connecting students' assignments to their own world and pushed them to construct their own opinions.

This process involved concepts such as: agency, divergence, conceptualization and multimodality, embedded in new literacy studies. Some of the future implications of this study involve the creation of strategies which lead to a change in paradigm in the language classroom; that is to say, a classroom where students are more involved in creating knowledge, and use language as a way to be critical of their own learning process. Also, this study suggests a change in the perception of technology use inside the classroom so that new classroom practices can be adopted from the teacher's role.

Key words: *multimodality, critical literacy, agency, pedagogical strategies, learning/teaching processes*

To my mother

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this body of work first and foremost to my family who has always supported me on my endeavor to better myself as a professional and reach a certain level of qualification that empowers me to be recognized in my chosen profession. I wish to thank specially my mother Yolanda Velasquez, for her financial support and for her advice and guidance during this whole process. This is another step towards becoming a better teacher, and my mother is the main person who has selflessly helped me to achieve it in any way she could.

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To introduce social change in society is a long process that is not achieved overnight, but this is a start; as many scholars say, it only takes one to make a difference, even though in this field others have already started, my study seeks to propose a supporting theory that could promote change in institutionalized schooling. In light of this, I hope to continue studies in this field in the future, for I feel it is a necessary change that needs to be brought on sooner rather than later.

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Chapter One

Critical Multimodal Design: Exploring the theory

This chapter proposes an overview of the theories which are the central axis of the study. As I reviewed the concepts and the theories carried out by scholars in regards to *New Literacies* (Street, 1993/2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003/2006/2011/2014; Gee, 2003; Gee & Hayes, 2011), *Multimodality* (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen, 1999; Kress, 2010; Bateman, 2008; Jewitt, 2005/2006), and *Critical Literacy* (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke, 1988/2000/2012; Morrell, 2005/2009), I will also explain why I consider these to be important issues to be explored in the Colombian context as a way to provide a global cross-cultural understanding.

As a second language teacher in a country that is just starting to gauge its own potential in today's digital world (Lehner & Bredl, 2011), I deem most important the need for students to get in touch with the use of new literacies in the classroom, because as in many countries in Latin America which are still considered "Third World", the use of technology in Colombia has been slow in many aspects of society, most of all in the education sector. This idea will be expanded later in this chapter. New literacies and their focus on new technologies bring a myriad of possibilities to the second language classroom that can enhance students' critical thinking in amazing ways (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). That is, if teachers transform their teaching practices and empower students to transform their learning strategies.

The use of media and different ICT's in classrooms is not new. In fact, all current education institutions in Colombia have tried to implement it in more than one way (Henao, 2013; Ávila, 2002). However, in most institutions there has been an effort to try to please the administration of the time, but not a real effort to improve the learning and teaching processes of teachers and students (Henao, 2013). The gap between what has been tried and what is actually

achieved is shown in the permanence of traditional teaching strategies based on lecture and the role of the teacher perceived as the giver of knowledge. This gap is mainly due to cultural ideas present in the teachers' minds which influence them to teach the way they were once taught (Oleson & Hora, 2012), so the cycle continues indefinitely; this issue together with the resistance to adopt or change certain beliefs (especially in this case towards technology) limit the reach of changes that could improve the language teaching environment (Oleson & Hora, 2012).

Today's academic instruction in general around the world has been traditionally stuck on teacher-student relationships, where knowledge is not constructed in a common effort but is always presented in the dichotomy of the master and the learner. This is a space where the teacher does not propose new ways to find knowledge which comes from analyzing the world outside the classroom, but from the square pages of textbooks.

The proposal presented here aims to step away from this dichotomy and explore the need of academic instruction based on the notion of critical literacy. This concept takes knowledge out of the exclusive hands of the teacher and makes it a social construct focusing on the analysis of student-related realities, the need for social change, and the questioning of established beliefs that influence behavior and the way we see our world. Thus, critical literacy brings to the classroom notions of social equality, democracy and how power relations influence our belief system (Luke, 2012; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Morrell, 2005, 2009).

New Literacies and New Forms of Communication

According to Pahl and Rowsell (2006), there are several scholars who deem literacy as a social practice that impacts new communication systems and how we make meaning today. Critical literacy scholars differentiate this concept from the one traditionally regarded by

governments as a set of skills, or functional literacy, shown by Brian Street to be “in fact culturally and ideologically situated (Street 1984, 1993)” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006, p. 1). These authors place the emphasis on literacy as a social practice and in the processes of meaning making and communication in multimodality. There have been different studies regarding literacy and meaning making, but it was Gunther Kress who opened up the field in the latter by placing the importance on the use of multiple modalities in communication and in classroom practices. These multiple modalities (linguistic, gestural, aural, and three-dimensional, among others) broaden the domains of literacy to include multimodal literacy, multiliteracies, critical literacy and others that belong to the new literacies umbrella (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008).

Pahl & Rowsell (2006) pointed out in the introduction of their book that in today’s theoretical background, New Literacy Studies focuses on the field of literacy not as a constant set of skills we acquire in formal education. Instead, it looks at how people use literacy through different contexts and for different purposes in everyday life, and how this practice is shaped by global and local contexts. It is a challenge to try to change the paradigm when people perceive literacy as only reading and writing (Street, 2007) and when people do not realize how media today uses different modes in everyday communications. It is the authors’ belief that to achieve this change in perspective, the study of multimodality is necessary. For Pahl & Rowsell (2006) and authors like Kress (2010), multimodality provides the physical textual dimensions which are increasingly shaped by exterior and global contexts, and are necessary to analyze the texts produced in the literacy practices performed by everyday people. In other words, “We need the multimodal in the New Literacy Studies in order to understand texts as material objects” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006, p.8).

To talk about new literacies is to talk about technology; how to implement it to improve learning processes effectively in the classroom is the big question on scholar's minds today. On this topic, Kalantzis and Cope (2009b) said that technology sometimes can be a double-edged sword. They alerted us of the danger that new media can adapt seamlessly to old didactics and traditional teaching methods. The idea behind new literacy is to change the learners' relationship with knowledge in a significant way, although new media does not necessarily mean new learning (2009b, p.4). Moreover, as the authors point out, technology alone is not social change; it is a symptom of social changes, and an agent of transformation within our society which provides a means of cultural production.

Nevertheless new technologies bring to the table new possibilities of interaction and meaning-making that can be used to bolster learning processes within students. These new possibilities are brought about by significant qualities inherent to new media. These qualities can be summed up in four dimensions, as explained by Cope and Kalantzis in their article *New Media, New Learning* (2009b), as *Agency, Divergence, Multimodality* and *Conceptualization*.

In sum, *Agency* refers to the possibility which new media bring to users in terms of interaction with the content exposed. The users of these new technologies can be the main characters of stories in video games, they can make custom playlists with their favorite music and share them with the world with apps like Spotify. They can invite others to a personal dialogue of interests or feelings in blogs. Also many authors can contribute and construct knowledge through sites like Wikipedia or Google Docs. These, among other changes, influence the way we see the world and our relationship with it. All in all, new technologies inevitably change the people who use them (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b, pg. 6 -7).

The level of agency has advanced to such an extent that “audiences have become users” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b, p.7). They are invited to participate in the creation of the media they consume by providing feedback and constantly interacting. This is what the authors mean when they talk about “a ‘shift in the balance of agency’, from a society of command and compliance to a society of reflexive co- construction” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b, p.7).

The concept of *Divergence* relates to the possibility of creating and developing the user’s own voice. In some ways, it is the counter reaction to mass production as it is replaced by mass customization. In today’s media world, you do not need special equipment, nor do you need to be an expert programmer or producer. You can be exposed to millions in your own voice, all digitally through the web, on video or by digital text. As the authors asserted, “New media provides channels for differences to represent themselves” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009b, p.10).

Multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009c) is the quality that enables new technologies to produce meaning by integrating different ways to present information such as: complementing text with images, moving pictures with sound, etc. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009c). All of this is made possible with the knowledge to bring multiple modes together with different colors, placements and designs. Now that everything digital is made of pixels, different visual elements can come together more seamlessly to create new meanings and to be more appealing to a more diverse audience. Multimodality, or the possibility to mix modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009c; Kress, 2001; Jewitt, 2006), makes new media emerge, making it necessary for the implementation of new literacies. The tendency that new technologies have to intertwine and make accessible these mixes of modes has broken the traditional privilege held by written text. Currently, in areas such as advertising, other modes are

directly taking over the place held predominantly by written text (2009b, pg. 12). This dimension will be explained further in the next section.

Conceptualization is a dimension needed by the new user/creator that is a part of the new literacies media world. As the authors Cope and Kalantzis (2009b) suggest, to be part of this new order there some “social and technical architectures” you must get familiar with. This dimension points to the way in which you can structure the content you put on the web, designing the different hypertext, linking, tagging, menu making, and categorizing information (2009, pg. 12).

As many scholars in the field of literacy like Kalantzis and Cope stated across their work, discussing new literacies means talking about the possibilities and changes that new media have brought to communications in general, and to our daily lives (Chen, 2012; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kieran 2009). Since the beginning of this technological era, many changes have come in the communications field. From writing to print, from print to digital, the changes in text production are only one part of the evolution in communication (Van dem Boomen, Lammes, Lehman, Raessens, & Schäfer, 2009). The idea that everything can be made out of ones and zeros (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009a) is the new basis of the current technological age, where information can be transferred all over the world, in the blink of an eye, thanks to the advancements of internet connections and the new forms of media production. Technology is all around us in our daily lives, bringing us information from all over the world and from different points of view, with the touch of a screen through such devices as cellphones, tablets, and laptops. Just to bring this into the Colombian context for a minute, according to international studies carried out in 2015 (Redacción Tecnosfera, 2015, March 17), Colombia currently holds the second place in a 51-country list in term of accessibility to internet access. This means that home-based internet and mobile internet connections, along with regulations, policies and market

prices, are analyzed to determine the conditions the general populations has in access the internet. Thus this study says that almost half of the population uses internet regularly and that 25% of those users use it through mobile devices (El Tiempo, 2015). Government policies and infrastructure development play a very important part in terms of bringing internet connection to people in faraway areas, and in this aspect, Colombia obtained the highest score because of the government’s continuing efforts to bring internet to everyone with policy plans like “Viva Digital” which are the flagship of Colombia’s ministry of ICTs¹. In addition, the Colombian government also conducts studies regularly in order to measure how many people connect to the internet. For example, this figure shows the progressive increase of said connection up to the first trimester of 2015:

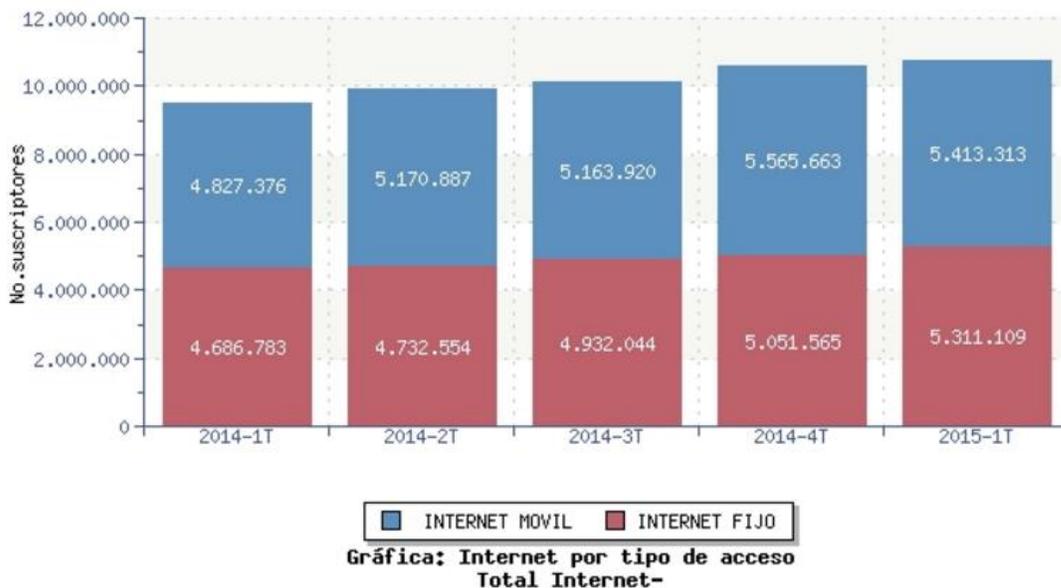


Figure 1. Internet access in Colombia (Source: <http://estrategiaticolombia.co/estadisticas/stats.php?id=26&pres=content&jer=1&cod=>)

¹ For more information visit the official website in Spanish <http://www.mintic.gov.co/porta/vivedigital/612/w3-propertyvalue-6106.html>

Nevertheless, the question remains to be answered: How can we as teachers start using communication media in our classes effectively?

Technology for its own sake has to become a thing of the past, and it is in the education system that this view of the world has to change. As Luke (2012) said, the implications of new literacies and critical literacy have to be about finding ways for students to use these technologies and information as a way to “analyze, critique and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social field of everyday life” (Luke, 2012, p. 5). Or, as Freire (1970) puts it: Empower the students to “read the world”, dismantle myths and distortions, and build new ways of knowing and acting upon their realities. One very important aspect of the way we can achieve this goal is by empowering the students with the ability to analyze the media and create their semiotic products, taking into account the concept of multimodality as an intrinsic dimension of today’s media products. This is a concept that can serve as a way to determine the different components of communication messages present in media.

Multimodal Theory of Communication

As expressed by the New London Group (in the voices of scholars such as Cope & Kalantzis [2009b] and Kress [2010]), multimodality has existed since the beginning of communication media, in one way or another, the idea is that today’s technologies bring different affordances that allow the different modes to be ever present in the media products we experience on a daily basis.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), multimodality can be defined as the use and combination of different semiotic modes in a design of a semiotic product or event. In said product the modes may perform different functions such as reinforce each other, fulfill

complementary roles or be hierarchically ordered. In this same sense communication is defined as a process in which a semiotic product is articulated or produced, and then interpreted. In other words, communication is seen as the production and use of designed objects or environments.

Consequently, this process of creating semiotic events or products can be divided into categories or strata. Primarily, *content* and *expression* which result from the invention of writing as a way of organizing information sequentially. Content can also be stratified into *discourse* and *design*. Later, with the coming of innovative communication technologies, the immediate audience changes into a long distance public which can repeat the experience at their leisure; thus, expression becomes stratified into *production* and *distribution*.

In the world of multimodality, there are key concepts that are important to talk about, the first of them being the concept of *mode*. In the words of Kress himself, modes are semiotic resources which can provide meaning when they are expressed through different ‘materialities’, thus providing the different realization of discourses and types of (inter)action (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.21). For example, language is a mode because it can be realized in different ways like speech or writing, which are called production mediums (or media). A mode in itself is not a message or a medium of expression, it is a more general concept which holds together the whole theory of multimodality. Thus, the modes provide the raw materials from which the tools of expression are made. In turn, *media* is the channel through which modes find their means of expression. Media are the tools and the materials through which designs are created; in other words, media represents the “materiality” absent in the mode; media is its physical representation.

There is another set of abstract concepts related to multimodality, as Kress (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) continued in his book. He described the concept of *discourse*, which is defined

as a socially constructed knowledge of reality, developed in specific social contexts, appropriate to the interests of the different social groups. *Discourse* in this context can be interpreted as the way a social group experiences the world and forms its own opinion about it. It is independent of *genre, mode* and sometimes of *design*.

The close relationship between the concepts of *discourse* and *design* brings us to the second part of the dichotomy. Design is a means to realize discourses in the context of a given communication situation. It makes communication situations possible; it changes socially constructed knowledge into social interaction. The design translates the discourse into actions through the use of a particular mode. Design is not the physical production of the semiotic event; in the design, the semiotic modes are still abstract and capable of being realized in different media.

Another dichotomy presented in his text relates the concepts of production and distribution. Simply put, production is a physical creation of the semiotic artifact; it involves a set of different skills, both technical and physical, and ones related to semiotic media (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 6). On the other hand, distribution is considered a means of preservation and helps make the product accessible. Nevertheless, *distribution media* may turn into *production media* when some parameters are used to add meaning, such as the sense of certain spatial qualities to music when recorded, in order to recreate a specific sensory experience. For example the feeling of listening to music with the echoes of a large opera house or auditorium, or the quality of sound of an old vinyl record and its scratches, which provide different meanings on their own for the listener. In the digital age, production and distribution become one and the same.

In the theory of Multimodality it is important to remember that, as the authors point out, the choosing of a specific mode of expression depends on the intention of the speaker as well as on the content. As in the example shown in the book by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), on topics such as architecture or interior design, an image is much more appropriate to relate the description of the spaces than text. Text falls short when relating visual descriptions in a practical media such as magazines, where literary language would be out of the question, and would also leave room for unnecessary ambiguities.

The importance of multimodality in today's world is an important point to make, given that it has really been around (although not initially researched) through the history of media used in communication. Ever since the printed text, with its specific organization, spacing, the use of different font style and size, visual markings and in general different semiotic resources (i.e. the inclusion of color and later, image), multimodality has been present to aid in the process of meaning making. As Jewitt (2005) asserted, "print-based reading and writing are, and always have been multimodal" (p. 315). According to Kress (2003), one of the main differences in today's media is that we are reading through a screen as opposed to paper; this makes an epistemological difference in terms of how we read. When we read on paper, information is presented to use through the 'logic of writing', thus it can be seen in a more linear structure because all the other modes present are subordinated to that logic.

Conversely, when we are reading material in a digital format through a screen, information is present through the logic of images, this makes the presence of other modes more prominent. As Jewitt (2006) suggested, the role of images and other modes is much more important when facing a digital text than a printed one; in the digital text, all sources of information are perceived equally by the reader, in other words, image is not a rival or

complementary to the written language, here image and text are absorbed as a united source of information where both sources carry the same degree of importance. Nevertheless, as Jewitt (2005) explained, both page and screen are influenced by one another, giving image an overall dominance of either media, given that “image overshadows word in a variety of texts, on screen and off; [...] images are increasingly given designed prominence over written elements” (p. 317).

Now, more than ever, in order to convey messages effectively (and effectiveness is key in today’s high-speed information world), multimodality is necessary. Although scholars have only been talking about it for the last decade, multimodality has been creeping up on us since the beginning of mass-media communication. At this time, magazines, radio and television began changing the perspectives regarding communication, and the people in charge of those media (editors, copies, journalists, etc.) began to see the effect certain changes would have on the public.

These changes were especially felt in the area of advertising, where the effectiveness of the message could be measured by the consumption of the product shown. As we can see in series like “*Mad Men*” (Weiner, 2007), the world of advertising had already achieved a certain status in the American publishing industry in the 1960’s, when major businesses set their sights on advertising companies that could boost their sales by creating messages that appealed to the public. In those early years, ads were created by intuition and began combining several modes, comprising of text, image, and sound (music and speech). In many ways, the world of advertising made it necessary for others to use a variety modes to convey different messages, by showing how effective a good combination can be. This combination of modes in media like television and video games, is a glimpse of the affordances new technologies bring to the table;

even if multimodality has been around since the printed text, today's technology makes possible new ways of communicating information where images, sound, gestures, movement and text can work together to support an idea, create a character or tell a story. It is "the designer's decisions about when and how to use writing and speech [as well as other modes which] mediate the flow of the narrative as a multimodal sequence" (Jewitt, 2005, p.320).

In today's world since the era of digital communications, where communication media lives its peak moment, we don't even need to think about combining modes anymore. It comes naturally (especially for our students) to use different modes to express a message in a more complete way, always relying on a good design that helps the combination flow with a natural rhythm, because they have been in touch with complex media information since childhood. For people born in the midst of this digital boom (pretty much since the 1980's), with all its advancements in communication and information, it seems incomplete to present a media product that does not combine modes of representation, though their combination is unconscious. As the New London Group proposes in their theory of new literacy pedagogy (1996), the process of forming any semiotic product consists of three basic elements: *the available designs*, that is to say the creative application of existing conventions and materials which are combined in *the design* (the second element), that are, in result, transformed and reshaped into new meanings, thus becoming *the re-designed*. In this scenario multimodal design "represents the patterns of interconnection among the other modes" (p.198); it is this interconnection which mediates communication between the designer and the recipient.

Indeed, according to the authors (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), communication only happens when there is a process of both articulation and interpretation, which is constructed by the designer. This means that it is not only a process on the producer's end, but also on the

recipient's. In this sense, the recipient becomes an interpreter which must distinguish (subconsciously) between the four different levels talked about (discourse, design, production and distribution) and use the same layers to interact with the product. Then, the user takes a stance, deciding if the product is designed appropriately for their use or not, if it is a reproduction or an original piece (as in art), if the discourse can be interpreted differently from the way it was intended, etc. In truth, each interpreter brings to the table different notions associated with certain values and ideas, related in turn to their own place in their social and cultural world. The relationship between these notions and the content of the product depends on context. Context determines if the intention of the producer is a match to the interpretation of the user; for given changes in the context can change the interpretation of semiotic media products in general.

In this order of ideas, the producer makes decisions according to what elements to incorporate in the design. It is in this stage where the affordances of new technologies enable users to “manipulate and design the visual and written elements of their texts with ease [while being engaged] in a series of decisions and negotiations” (Jewitt, 2005, p.326). Meanwhile, the interpreters must decide how they react to the information presented upon them; given the interactive nature of today's technologies (e.g. video games) users must work out the meanings made through the different modes used by the designer, consequently, their response differs in relation to their previous experience and other notions, which are in turn dependent of the context provided by the designer (2005, p.320).

Critical Literacy

Another important concept at the base of this research is critical literacy. There are several kinds of literacies discussed by the scholars of the New London Group (1996) mentioned

before, but in their main theory of their *Transformative pedagogy of Multiliteracies*, they identified four major dimensions which they translated into four ‘pedagogical acts or knowledge processes’ namely: “Experiencing, Conceptualising, Analysing and Applying” (2008, p.17). Focusing on the Analyzing act, as they asserted on their manifesto, true learning entails developing critical thinking. In other words, learners should develop skills that enable them to not only analyze functionally (in terms of reasoning logical and textual connections) but to also analyze in terms of power relations; evaluating others’ perspectives, interests and motives behind meanings or actions, interrogating also their own thinking processes (2008, p. 18).

As Janks (2014) stated, critical literacy relates new knowledge to the world around the student, making him in turn be more critical as he learns. Critical literacy focuses specifically on the role that language and discourse play as a social practice, which can maintain or transform these orders (Janks, 2014). The relationship between power and language is always a strong one, for as Janks (2014) says, language and power need to be in balance in order to enact curricula based in critical literacy.

Nevertheless, there are certain specifications that teachers need to take into account when inserting critical literacy in the classroom. As Janks (2014) explained, there are several steps to note in order to incorporate critical pedagogy into a regular classroom lesson. In general, these steps entail getting in touch with the reality of the students, be it the small classroom world or the whole world as an international entity, or examining who benefits and who is damaged by the social views exposed by certain topics and their social implications. Finally, she asks us to imagine possibilities for making a positive difference. The idea being that the students must be led to discover the power of questioning their own beliefs.

Most importantly, it is crucial to analyze the relationship between power and language in terms of who is granted access to certain resources and who is denied it. By scrutinizing text construction, students can establish how these views are carried out according to the use of language exhibited to serve certain interests, and how these views influence our identities. When students understand how textual representation influences social practices, and that when you ‘re-design’ these given representations, you are actually on your way to changing others’ view of the world, students’ consciousness begins to awaken, and they realize they can change the world to one that is more just and sustainable. The need for such a change in perspective is what will always validate the need for critical literacy.

Historically there have been many scholars who talk about critical theorizing, as Willis and colleagues (Willis, Montavon, Hall, Hunter, Burke, & Herrera, 2008) stated, “The roots of critical theorizing extend to many geographical locales and embrace varying aspects of criticality” (p.30). Since the beginning, critical theories have addressed oppression, power relations, and social justice. They have also addressed topics like equality and democracy. The notions of thinkers like Freire and his *conscientização* (Freire, 1999; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Mora, 2014a), explain how meaning-making is a social construction, a product of culture, language and ideology. Critical theory enhances the voice of the oppressed, those whose voices are left out of the mainstream, and those who are imposed a certain way to see the world.

Critical thinking is a product of critical literacy. In other words, critical thinking is a way to see the world, and steer away from the social standards that a globalized world imposes. Critical thinking is what pushes the individual to go beyond what social media feeds him constantly, and drives him to draw his own conclusions by analyzing the true beneficiaries behind a certain ideology, information or news report gone viral.

Critical literacy focuses on the relationship that language and social discourse have, that is to say, the way that language is used to promote certain socially accepted discourses and ideologies. In this sense, critical literacy goes beyond literacy as a functional need, and establishes literacy as a social practice with the aim of making the students participants in social changes towards equality and social justice (Ko, 2013).

Pursuing critical literacy in the classroom helps students to be active readers and writers in the sense of shaping and re-shaping their own realities in order to bring change to their social conditions (Lau, 2012). However, as Lau stated in her article, it is an area left behind by English students, mainly because their teachers feel that the language gap will be too difficult to breach in order to talk about sensitive issues that include moral and cultural perspectives. One of the main objectives of researchers like Lau is to begin challenging this point of view and demonstrate that critical literacy does have a place in the second language classroom and should always have a place in it, given that it is through language that social and cultural ideas can be discussed and more importantly changed in the long run.

When examining texts through critical literacy, one discovers that they are invested with power and are never neutral, always dosed with political agendas or cultural bias (Ko, 2013). Therefore critical literacy pursues to analyze the hidden agendas behind texts in order to uncover “their ideological workings and power relations” (Ko, 2013, p. 92). It is important to say that this critical practice focuses on questioning procedures and challenging established social orders, the status quo and existing knowledge (Gee, 1999, cited in Ko, 2013). We use critical literacy to become aware of how texts are constructed and how particular social interests are served.

According to Ko (2013), critical literacy combines three distinct schools of thought: post-structuralism, critical social theory, and Freirean critical pedagogy, which in turn means that

knowledge in critical literacy is never neutral but is constructed socially thus being an ideological product.

In terms of teaching in critical literacy, there are no magic formulas, but there are varied strategies acknowledged by top scholars in the field (such as Luke and Cervetti, cited in Ko, 2013) which include “textual analysis, dialogue, and questioning or problem posing” (p. 94). Nevertheless, critical literacy teaching is always changing and each situation demands that it is refined and restructured according to the needs of the students and of the teacher.

For a teacher, to transcend functional literacy means to move beyond grammar and vocabulary recognition teaching and make the leap towards meaning construction. When reading a text, students do not have to understand word for word what the text says in order to understand the meaning. In other words, to teach the meaning embedded in language means transcending language form-based teaching with the confidence that word/grammar acquisition is sure to follow close by. However, meaning making is only the middle step in the road towards critical literacy, for this practice also entails assessing the intention of the text. That is to say, the author’s purpose, which commonly is to influence others for their own benefit (Ko, 2013).

Moreover, critical literacy can help the students analyze “how different identities and representations are constructed through language and thus become independent thinkers” (Ko, 2013, p.101). Critical literacy pushes students into realizing their own social situations, analyzing why certain groups have more advantages than others, and the ideologies behind oppressive social structures. With critical literacy, students realize that the discourses held to be ‘the truth’ are nothing more than socially constructed devices that can be changed just as easily when they construct a fair-minded discourse in the endeavor to bring a change in the mindset of others, thus creating a better world in which to live in for everyone.

As Ko (2013) asserted, it is difficult to bring all this social change into a classroom because traditional instructional literacy holds fast in the students' and teachers' minds. This means that the students are used to being lectured and teachers are used to being the givers of 'knowledge', where as critical literacy demands a constant dialogue in order to bring about reflection and analysis on social matters.

This radical change in classroom practices can prove difficult at first for both, but it is not impossible. In fact it is necessary, for teachers must become facilitators and leave behind the role of the lecturer. The role of the teacher comes with the responsibility of balancing basic language skills, like grammar structure identification and vocabulary building, with an open dialogue, analysis and open discussion of topics related to the students' lives. It is imperative to provide materials which address topics that have been seen in class, an environment that supports conversation and gives opportunities for students' to not only find their own voice, but also for those voices to be heard and validated in an academic setting. The students find in critical literacy what grown-ups often deny them: confidence in finding that their opinions matter and the sense that they can contribute to generating new ideas about issues that are important to them as members of society (Lau, 2012). These are the elements for a healthy learning experience embedded in critical literacy.

A teacher that uses critical literacy, has to be aware that it is a gradual process where the teacher sets in motion the students' use of their own "linguistic, cultural and cognitive resources" so that they become critical language users (Lau, 2012).

Critical Multimodal Design

After reviewing the background theories, it is necessary to address the needs of education hand in hand with communication and technology. We become increasingly aware that those needs change constantly as students and society undoubtedly change. Teachers and institutions also need to change and develop new theories and strategies that integrate different aspects of modern life into a more unified thread. Today's modern world is all about the advancements of technology and how technology in turn has changed the face of communication. Media makes it possible for modes to find different ways of expression. Every day more people become aware of the endless possibilities brought to the table by a world infused with technology in every aspect of life.

If technology and communication media have invaded every aspect of our daily lives with constant bombing of information, it is still valid to question the fact that it has not been integrated into the school curriculum. In the case of Colombia, for the past few decades every institution that taught English was expected to implement some strategy where technology was involved. The idea was endorsed by government policy, and had the notion of bringing technology into the English classroom, as a way to provide an opportunity to practice basic language skills like listening. These policies began to take shape in the 90's, when in 1996 the "*National New Technology and Bilingual Program*", which promoted the installment of "1500 computer multimedia classrooms connected to the Internet [...] to help students learn to use scientific and technological information in English" (de Mejía, 2005).

Even though in Colombia there is widespread poverty and, in general, the population has underdeveloped reading and writing skills when compared to other countries, according to Henao (2013) it is a well-known fact that businessmen are interested in hiring employees "skilled

in using digital technologies, and who are able to search quickly and efficiently for information, to assess the quality of this information and to solve problems” (2013, p. 30). In this sense, it is clear that there is a need for digital literacy; people need to learn how to use technology critically and effectively. With the support of the national, regional and local governments in Colombia, some programs that introduce technology into the classrooms have been implemented. As Henao (2013) continues, there have been 3 programs that aim to address the need to bring technology to everyone, everywhere, regardless of their social or economic circumstances, and as a medium to enhance education.

First, the program “*Computadores para Educar*” started in 2001, with the idea of distributing computers that were disabled in major companies, after being refurbished and updated so that they could be used in public schools throughout the country. This opportunity provided initial access to software and internet where there was none before. The other two programs still underway are “*La Red Integrada de Participación Educativa*” (in Bogotá) and “*Computadores e Internet Gratis para la Educación*” (in Medellín). These programs have not only brought computers, software, and infrastructure to support the community in integrating them into their school practices, but they have also built up educational communities which are now more in touch with worldwide information access and more participant in the betterment of their cities. These policies integrate hardware with computer training, educational centers and virtual learning environments. Alongside these implementations, the National Ministry of Education has also begun efforts to include ICT’s in education with a strategic alliance with Microsoft (Henao, 2013, p. 31).

Ever since the implementation of these programs, the attempts to bring technology into the classroom occur every day in schools around the country, but never separated from the

traditional way of teaching which is centered on the development of language skills and proficiency; because as Samacá (2012) claimed, “We [teachers] sometimes forget that our classrooms and the outside world have a reciprocal relationship” (p.196). In this sense, teachers are called to adopt a more critical approach towards making a classroom a place to analyze society and show students the kind of society they could help create by acquiring the right academic and critical skills (Samacá, 2012). Raising critical awareness in our schools is one of the main purposes behind my critical multimodal design proposal.

The notion of a critical multimodal design I propose attempts to relate known elements to English teaching practices in a new way; elements which go towards including the ideas of critical literacy and multimodality. One of the crucial ideas behind critical literacy is not only that students analyze their world and their surroundings, but also that they create media products which in some ways are a physical expression of their own point of view in an attempt to begin social change. As Mora (2014b) stated,

Critical literacy is a necessary and powerful tool to discuss imperialism (Nic Craith, 2007), equity (Ammon, 2000) and social justice (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009) in language education. Therefore, it should be a key element of teacher preparation [and classroom practices] at all levels of higher education (p.16).

In this context, the creation of multimodal media is a validation that the students’ point of view is important and should be shown to their peers without fear of being judged, regardless of out-of-the-box their ideas may be.

For the creation of media, it is proposed that students go through the whole process of choosing what mode they would focus on; their media could use language as a mode, or the aural mode, or visual mode, to name a few. Then they should work on designing the media which best

presents the mode that they chose. Within the design, every aspect should be thought out as to what it can express. The last step would be to organize the space in which the media can be presented and explained by each student in terms of what they wanted to express with their design.

The idea in bringing these elements into the classroom is to change it from a teacher-centered experience, to one where we shine the spotlight on the students and let them propose a dialogue that is meaningful to them by letting them create knowledge and use it to practice language in the classroom. The main focus of this theory is to engage the students with topics that they can relate to their everyday lives. For, as Lau (2012) asserted in her article, critical literacy should bring the curriculum closer to students' real concerns relating to social equality by analyzing situations from the place of study or from the country.

The teacher has the task of bringing topics and information that are meaningful to the students' lives from which they can form their own thoughts and ideas and begin to think critically of what they are exposed to. The teacher is expected to balance language proficiency goals with critical literacy activities that open the minds of the students to using language in their own way with the purpose of expressing their own ideas.

A critical multimodal design should bring the students closer to a holistic approach to learning, one not solely based on language skills, but also on language function. This theory should impact the students on how they think about their own lives, about society, about advantages and disadvantages among social groups, and challenges which they face on a daily basis. This approach is aimed to take English out of the classroom and make it a part of the students' lives. In other words, in this approach to use language is not only to learn vocabulary,

grammar or syntax; language use is the ability to express yourself and to be critical, using language to analyze and scrutinize today's world, and how it affects each and every one of us.

Chapter Two

Reviewing the Literature:

Concerning Critical Literacy and Multimodality

This chapter introduces an overview of other research articles and studies in the field of critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke, 1988/2000/2012; Morrell, 2005/2009) and multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress, 2010; Bateman, 2008; Jewitt, 2005/2006). In order to establish the pertinence of this study, first it is shown what other researchers have evidenced within their context. It is important to note that this field is currently being explored in many different cultural contexts, countries and through the use of different media from graphic novels, to video games, to television, to online applications. Multimodality is in every one of these new media that engulf today's world and that influence the new changes studied by scholars in the second language education arena.

Critical Literacy in Research Studies

Currently, quite a few education scholars are turning their heads and looking into literacy studies as a way to turn learning and teaching strategies on their axis. Studies in critical literacy have been conducted in the last decade, with promising results. As Janks (2014) explained, critical literacy should empower students towards connecting their lives to the textbooks brought into the classroom; critical literacy is viewed as a gateway to engage the students in their learning process. Furthermore, without the connection critical literacy brings to classroom practices, contents come up empty in the students' minds, which is when they turn to memory to respond to the demands made of them in examinations. Even though there have been some studies regarding the issue of critical literacy in the field of English teaching, most of these

studies have been conducted in ESL settings and very few in EFL scenarios, this goes to show that a “critical approach to EFL teaching is still under-explored” (Ko, 2013, p. 92).

Other studies in critical literacy explore the significance of bringing new media into the classroom. This is the case of Christian Chun’s study, where he explores the possibilities of learning through graphic novels. He stated in his article that “The more students are exposed to and grounded in multiple modes of representation, the more they would appear to have a chance to succeed in school and beyond” (Chun, 2009, p. 146). He went on further to state that the analysis of different types of media promotes critical thinking in the students, as they acquire the academic literacy they need to perform well in school while they question topics that are close to their real world realities. Chun’s (2009) study shows that on the road to promote critical literacy using different kinds of media, it is very important to plan out the topic so that it is engaging for the students and relates to a real-world problem, making it possible to touch the students in a very real way. He mentions the need to include multimodal material in the English curriculum as a way to provide students with varied points of view and different creative expressions, with the objective of guiding them on the way to critically observe the world they live in.

Regardless of its importance, studies like Beck’s (2005) also warn of the dangers of pursuing a critical literacy road in school curricula. The idea of introducing critical literacy into the curriculum supposes the risk of immersing the classroom in “lively sometimes heated, [controversial sessions] deeply relevant to student’s lives beyond the classroom” (Beck, 2005, p. 392), that could clash with the notion of order or discipline which is the pinnacle of education institutions. As various scholars asserted (in Beck, 2005), critical literacy strategies are designed to bring to the foreground issues relating gender equality, race, social class, and sexual orientation, among others, which are often silenced and not openly exposed; students are not

used to having the space to think about them in an academic setting. This situation is unique to critical literacy as it is a field which has as a main objective of throwing salt on the open wounds of social problems which surely affect the students outside the classroom. Critical literacy raises controversy in the classroom with the aim of fostering social responsibility towards facing inequality and injustice in its various forms.

Some Approaches to Critical Literacy Research

Reviewing the literature shows that when talking about critical literacy, one of the most common approaches is to engage in case study as shown in research projects pursued by scholars like Morrell (2005, 2009), Izadinia & Abednia (2010), Feger (2009). These scholars showed great results in the field of literacy through different angles, in the endeavor to develop the main characteristics of critical thinking among the participants of their study; empowering them through topics of their interests and giving them tools to create other media from the information the students took upon themselves to gather. “The students took to the project immediately. In addition to writing drafts of essays, the students collected digital photographs, created artwork, and put together a short film of their work” (Morrell, 2009, p. 101). As the author asserted here, critical literacy projects go beyond reading and writing; they empower students to talk about their realities using different media and formats which can lead them to form theories and conclusions, ultimately leading to social change.

In each of these studies, the participants were asked to contribute certain common materials like journals, participate in interviews, engage in discussions, and create media from their own reflections on the topics addressed. Also, a reflective journal was kept by the teacher-researcher as fieldwork evidence of the perspective of the teacher. These materials were

recovered as evidence of the process followed, and used to collect observable data to be analyzed.

In this field, case study is a much used approach which seeks to achieve consistent research which yields significant and relevant data surrounding “a phenomenon that hasn’t been investigated in depth” (Feger, 2009, p. 79) by past researchers. Case study is limited in the sense that the findings correspond to a specific setting, participants, and variable factors, which render specific results. The researcher’s role is to take the findings and form conclusions applicable to the field as a whole and to generate viable future implications based on those findings. As Fink (2000) asserted, “The researcher using qualitative method will argue that another human being (e.g. himself) is the only instrument that is sufficiently complex to comprehend and learn about human existence (Lave & Kvale, 1995)” (2000, *para. 7*). In other words, “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events,” (Yin, 2013); in this way, the researcher can maintain focus on a specific phenomenon occurring in a real-life context. As such, the case study approach is ideal to generate hypothesis and building theories.

The importance of critical literacy research lies not only in how the students can be critical about their own world, but also how the researcher can analyze critically what the students have produced, how the students are learning, and how the students are beginning to understand their world and their place in it. As Case study Morrell (2009, p.99) stated, critical literacy research enables teachers to assess how the students see themselves and how literacy education helps students explore this sense of identity. Literacy as the use of language, can help students define themselves as readers, writers, participants of a community, users of technology,

or members of a particular group. When a student names himself he becomes aware of his place in the world. Identity development is a crucial part of critical literacy.

Research on Multimodality

Multimodality is a field related to new literacies, which is gaining interest in the educational arena. Currently, multimodality is present in media all around us; moreover, as Schwartz, Rubinstein and Ávila (2006) suggested, media like video games, television, and comics have been stigmatized as being the culprit of students' short attention span and their bad results in the school system. Nevertheless, these authors suggest a change of view, arguing that the skills necessary to interpret multimodal text in fact help the reader develop skills of analysis rarely promoted with traditional kinds of media. In other words, they invite teachers to step out of their comfort zone and welcome other types of media which require simultaneous forms of interpretation as they integrate different kinds of literacy and representation (2006, p.47); the printed word is not everything anymore. They propose for example, media like *manga* to be used as a way to develop visual critical analysis of texts. Multimodal texts are rich in semiotic meaning and push the consumer into a fast-paced, deciphering of images and practices (2006, p. 48).

Other studies such as Kitson, Fletcher & Kearney's (2007), explore the possibilities of not only multimodal text in the classroom but also the inclusion of technology. In their report at the time the study was under way, the inclusion of technology left many questions unanswered in terms of the changes that needed to be made in the education paradigm. The inclusion of technology and multimodality in the classroom supposes deep changes in classroom dynamics, given that new technologies bring a change of pace to the traditional schooling practices. As the

authors asserted, “missed opportunities remain invisible for most teachers as they go about their daily work and potential learnings may not be realized” (2007, p.39). This is true today, where, in most institutions, technology is rich and present everywhere, but teachers do not know how to make use of it in effective ways that enhance learning. In this case, technology is different from multimodality, in that the first is the means (medium as defined by Kress, 2001) by which we can create a physical way to carry the message; that is to say technology can be a pencil and a piece of paper, but these are only the means by we can design a multimodal creation by writing text, drawing pictures, creating a layout, etc. However, the authors are referring to the use of new technologies in the classroom, such as computers, video, internet, etc., which can also serve as medium to create, produce and distribute messages.

Turning to Latin America, the use of multimodal texts to enhance learning is still underdeveloped. After running a sweep through some databases (EBSCOHOST, ERIC, Google Scholar), it is evident that the number of studies carried out in Latin America regarding the relationship between multimodality and second language learning do not even get to a handful. Studies like Vicky Saumell’s in Argentina are few; in her case study she implements a strategy called digital storytelling, where she continually assesses the students’ progress in class through observation. The idea was to integrate technology into the curriculum providing opportunities for the students to be autonomous in student-centered activities where they combine images, audio and video. For her, “the key is giving the learners more choice” (Saumell, 2013, p.57).

Regarding multimodality, researchers such as “Cope, Kalantzis, McCarthy, Vojak, and Kline (2011)” (in Gouthro & Holloway, 2013) envision students of all ages working together in the creation of “multimodal projects by accessing a range of sources on the web” (Gouthro & Holloway, 2013, p. 56). These researchers propose that students will one day undergo projects

anchored in technology and multimodality which will provide continuous formative assessment opportunities in literacy courses, and put aside summative or traditional forms of evaluation.

This change in schooling entails embracing multiliteracies as a part of the curriculum, and relying on other means of instruction other than printed text. As Gouthro & Holloway asserted in their article, “the heuristic impulse of learning in relation to technology gets lost if teachers do not understand the philosophical underpinnings of multiliteracies” (2013, p.57).

In the multimodality field, found in close relationship to multiliteracies and new literacies (New London Group, 1996/2008), researchers also favor the use of case study over other methods of research (as found in the studies cited in the following section). The main reason for this is, as was stated earlier, is the possibility of forming hypothesis and theories from the studies conducted in the field. When conducting research in this field, some researchers favored interviews as a source of data (as in Gouthro & Holloway, 2013), others like Hundley & Holbrook (2013) preferred to collect the products made by the participants (in this case, teachers) as part of the course, and use videotapes of class discussions as observation material. These studies and many others serve the purpose of shedding light on the subject of applicability of multimodality in the language teaching arena, mainly in a way that is related to critical thinking, social change, and as a possibility to bring different literacies into the classroom. This effort to change the classroom setting is an attempt to relate to the students’ world, which, now more than ever, is infused with changing technologies. These studies find ultimately that the appeal multimodality brings to the table is the possibility of interaction, of agency, of finding your own voice and place in the world. This makes for a fertile ground to promote social conscience and possible social changes from within the classroom.

ELL/ELT: Important background to take into account

Throughout the description of the afore-mentioned concepts, it has been stated that the research used to back-up this research study has been taken from an ELT arena. The articles mentioned in this section come from inquiries and studies made by teacher researchers, who have taken up the challenge to change set paradigms and propose new theories and new ways to improve classroom activities. Researchers like Hillary Janks (2014), Ko M-Y (2013), Christian Chun (2009), Morrell (2005, 2009), Izadinia & Abednia (2010), Feger (2009), Saumell (2013), among others, view different aspects of the concepts illustrated in this body of work from the educational stand point.

Their studies, carried-out in diverse classrooms settings, bring promising results in terms of relating new technologies, multimodal media or critical literacy, within different strategies with the idea to promote English language learning and practice. In their studies, they propose mainly project-based activities, which include the students' point of view or their social-cultural background. This type of projects focus on the students; the activities may be developed using different materials or resources but their core focus is always on making the students the center of their activities. While providing a safe space for discussion, the teachers also have literacy goals in mind, such as helping the students acquire new structures, vocabulary, or developing language skills like fluency and listening. These language goals are pursued through the use of real world topics, situations, or problems which are developed by the students through the use of different materials and often by creating new media themselves.

In general, these researchers conclude that the use of alternative media, multimodal products, and new technologies is necessary to bring up-to-date activities to the students in the language classroom. Furthermore, that these activities should be taken to the next level where the

ultimate goal is not to learn a language (in this case, English), but to be critical about your own world and your place in it.

Methodological Considerations: Lessons Learned

Reviewing these different sources of material helped me choose the direction in which I wanted to carry out my study. As many other scholars, I found appealing to set academic ground in a case study approach, given that the basis of my study is to answer questions of applicability and benefit for the students. Moreover, case study offers a possibility to develop theories based on a specific setting, which provide academic grounds for creating teaching strategies for similar contexts, namely in this case, Latin America.

Having taken into consideration the many possibilities for data collection like journals, interviews, observation videos, or products, I reflected upon the issue of studying literacy and multimodality. Consequently, I chose to focus more on multimodality, and in doing so, the main sources of data for this study are the multimodal projects developed by the students, which serve as evidence of the process engaged in the classes. These same products, and a survey developed by the students in order to assess their opinion on the process, serve to analyze the development of critical literacy that was observed throughout the process. In order to take into account the teacher's point of view, a research journal is also used as a data source. This helped triangulate the data gathered from the other sources and compare the findings from each one.

Chapter Three

Outlining the Research Methodology

This study attempts to reflect on situations relating to education and society in general, and this entails a focus on qualitative aspects rather than on quantitative, statistical analyses. By qualitative I mean simply that it is a type of study that takes into account personal experiences, intuition, perceptions and reactions of the various parties involved. Qualitative research gathers all these different pieces around a situation in order to help refine a certain theory or experiment. As Stake (2010) asserted, qualitative thinking is highly interpretative and experience based; this means that each researcher will develop it differently but always with the goal of conveying a story showing the complexity of the background and focusing on a holistic treatment of a phenomena. For qualitative research, phenomena is intricately related to many conditions like historical, temporal and spatial, political, economic, cultural, social, and personal, among others.

This study is also based on case study research elements. It takes into account a specific group of people (described below) that is part of a community. Also, it uses data collection tools proper to a case study research method such as diaries, which give detailed observations of that which is relevant to the objectives of the study; interviews, which register the opinions of the participants of the study and also materials developed by those same participants susceptible to the interpretation of the researcher. Regardless, these are only elements of case study research, a proper case study requires an in-depth analysis of several sources of data providing rich qualitative information that, given the limited amount of time in which this study was conducted, provide only some insight upon the matter. To further the inquiry, a larger study should be conducted; one of the purposes of this minor exploratory study is to open up the field in this

topic so that others can perform more in-depth studies on the applicability of the teaching and learning strategies proposed within the topic of research.

Main Research Question

How can students at a university undergraduate level benefit from creating multimodal materials inside the second language classroom?

Secondary research questions.

- How can students develop multimodal projects in a classroom setting?
- How can these projects help foster critical literacy in the language classroom?
- How can teachers and students use technology in this scenario?

Participants

The case study is based on material developed during English classes from the language center program for undergraduates of different areas of study who attend classes at a private university in Medellín, Colombia. The students are required to view 10 levels of English instruction during their undergraduate studies mandatory by university policy. During these levels they study English grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure and build reading, listening and writing skills. In the first levels of instruction (1-3) the courses are structured to provide students with a first access to the language, as way of an overview. These levels are designed to begin the student's journey towards understanding the basic structures of the present, past and future tenses. In the subsequent levels of instruction other tenses are viewed paired with expressions, vocabulary to talk about different situations and in different contexts. By the time the students achieve the last levels from 7-10, they are exposed to all the different tenses of the

English language such as the progressive tenses, perfect tenses, passive voice, modal verbs for a variety of intentions, among other structures and vocabulary needed to express themselves in conversation, presentations, written articles or stories. By attending these courses the students are expected to graduate at a B2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001).

The product analyzed in this case study was part of the class program developed during the first semester of 2015. The students were attending class in two groups: one in level 2 and another in Level 7. The total of students involved in the study is 15, ages of 19 – 23; the students in level 2 were at the beginning of their undergraduate studies, and students in level 7 were near the end of their curriculum, most were in 8th semester. The process lasted 10 weeks and was developed during class.

Procedure

The materials that the students created were produced as part of an on-going project developed through a period of 8 weeks. These products were analyzed alongside a research diary written by the teacher where the activities in class are described and the students are surveyed at the end of the course to assess their opinions on the strategies developed in class assignments.

Data Collection

In order to carry out this research study, data collection tools were very important to gain insight on exactly how multimodality and critical literacy fit into the second language classroom together. For the purposes of this research various data sources were used in order to explore the meanings and the activities pertaining this study.

Materials created by the students (articles and blogs). The materials created by the students serve as an example of how they can create multimodal products without even being aware of it. They were given creative license in order to gauge which tools and medium of expression they chose to present their topics. The objective was to present the students with the opportunity to deliver a product they could create with the media at their disposal, and later ask them their opinion on what doing such products meant to them via survey. The production of these materials served the purposes of this study by exemplifying how the students are already familiar with the use of technology as a tool to develop creative media in which they apply multimodality instinctively.

The students were asked to develop a series of articles with topics of their choosing and present it like either a magazine article or a blog entry; the total body of work was divided into 3 moments, first a general showing and reading them aloud in class, where they showed their material and creativity to prepare a visually pleasant work. A second moment where they should express the reason behind choosing the topic for their article, why they thought it was important and some information about it in their own words. The third moment consisted in adding to the previous article the opinions expressed orally and more information on the topic as a way of conclusion, and also, show it to the class as a final oral exercise. All the materials were prepared in class with the guidance of the teacher. The specifics of the articles are as follows:

- The products must be in the form of a magazine or blog article.
- Each article can be done by no more than 2 students.
- The article have to be produced in English, applying the topics seen on each level.
- They are to be 150 words long each.

- The students have creative license.
- The grammar structures to be applied vary from level to level; being present simple in level 2 and various forms of the past tense in level 7.

Research diary. The research diary or journal serves as an observational account of the happenings that occurred in class. In this case it is developed according to the recommendations addressed by Altrichter and colleagues (Altrichter, H., Posch, P. and Somekh, B., 2000.) regarding the use of research journals in education research studies. The authors discuss the benefits of using a research journal for qualitative research in general by stating, “research journals can contain *data* that are obtained by participatory observation and by conversations and interviews in the field [...] they can contain written *reflections* on research methods and on your own role as a researcher” (p. 17). The teacher narrates the activities developed during the sessions along with her impressions of the students’ performance during the tasks. The diary is divided by weeks, in which there were two sessions with each group. The journal recounts the events which happened during a period between January 19th and March 12th, 2015. The diary is narrated in first person throughout the entries, both where the activities are described and also when giving a statement about her personal opinion on the developments of the class activities. The research diary was started after the first sessions passed and was finished by the time the course had ended. It serves the purposes of this study as a tool to describe how the students were guided during the process of the project.

Survey. The surveys have the function of collecting the students’ opinion on the making of the materials themselves and how the exercises changed, or did not, the dynamics of the English class. For instance, they are asked which digital tools were used in the project; if they felt the activities were engaging or boring; if the use of topics of their interest and creative

freedom facilitate the use of the language and if they think this type of activities should be used more often in class. It is especially important to note that the survey also asked if the learning/teaching activities were motivational and provided an extra element to the course. The surveys were administered by the teacher/ researcher at the end of the course after the grades were turned in; the students were fully aware what their answers were being used for and were asked to answer truthfully with no consequence to their grade or result in the class. The survey was administered to 16 students in total and collected the answers to 9 open questions².

Data Analysis: Categories

In the process of data analysis, the following categories were taken into account according to concepts developed in the conceptual framework and the research question:

Creating multimodal materials in an English class setting. This category is based on the main research question which navigates this study: How can students benefit from the creation of multimodal materials in a second language classroom? To further develop this question it was important to consider the concept of multimodality and what it entails, specifically the integration of different elements into the design of a particular media product. In this case the product was an article which had to be visually appealing and creative, and practical in terms of presenting the information. As such multimodality is the integration of a variety of meaning-making elements such as image, text, color, placement and design (Cope & Kalantzis, page 6, 2009). According to Gunther Kress, modes are semiotic resources expressed through different representations or media. So, in this category the cluster of analysis is defined by the modes used by the students in order to convey the messages they propose. Therefore it was quite important to analyze how the students integrated the different modes such as image, text and

² See Appendix A for a sample of the format.

color, blending them together in the design of the multimodal product. Multimodality also includes the concept of how the shared view of reality, interests and experiences, help shape what is expressed visually in the semiotic product; mostly by exploring the combination of visual design with the selection of the topic proposed by the student.

In this sense, I explored this category by looking into the students' materials and comparing the modes used between the different products created. I did this by making a list of different modes and cataloguing the ones that were used, along with how frequently they were used. It is in their products where this category is evidenced clearly, given that it is second nature for the students to use different modes of expression without even realizing it.

Fostering critical literacy. This category is focused on the assessment of the strategies in terms of promoting critical literacy. The purpose is to analyze the students' voices throughout the materials gathered by comparing their oral performance, their use of the target language and their opinions at the end of the project. All of these sources of data will serve to assess if truly there is a presence of critical literacy which can be fostered throughout activities during a language learning process. As such, this category seeks to find out if there are elements of critical literacy in the students' products and participations given that the topic they developed was their personal choice. According to the theory and previous studies explored, to have this choice should increase their motivation and give them the chance to inquire further.

In society in general, as Street (2007) points out, literacy has been deemed as a skill acquired in academic instruction to read and write well enough to be functional in society; from this point of view there are other types of literacy which only speak about gaining a certain competence. "For the individual, illiteracy implies 'misery', by impairing the ability to function in everyday life [...] to earn a living, to be part of society and even to think" (Street, 2007, pg.5).

According to this, literacy is not only something to be studied in primary school, when you learn how to recognize alphabet and phonics in order to produce texts, it is a field deeply related to how we function in society influencing every aspect of the relationships we establish with those around us. It is my belief that the study of literacy leads to inquiry in a broad range of social, political and ideological issues. Thus, literacy should always be considered critical, never just as a set of skills. Therefore this category proposes the use of literacy as going beyond the words and analyzing reality outside academic topics: in the words of Paulo Freire (1970) “reading the word and the world”. This is the notion of critical literacy taken into account for the purposes of this study.

Going beyond the use of technology. This category focuses on moving away from the use of technology as a way to ‘modernize’ the English classroom, and go towards an approach that views the use of technology as medium to enhance language learning. This epistemological approach seeks to offer a different view from the one teachers have, where technology does not change their traditional teaching strategies.

Within the cluster of technology use in the classroom, there are some aspects which are crucial in the analysis of what new technologies bring to society in today’s world. These aspects are divided into four concepts: *Agency*, *Divergence*, *Multimodality* and *Conceptualization* as explained by Cope & Kalantzis (2009).

This category seeks to analyze the presence of these concepts or elements in the products developed by the students. As such, these concepts are said to be the natural elements which compose today’s media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). The goal is to assess if the students can truly develop materials which are formed by these characteristics by simply following their instincts; and in turn, develop other competences through them. By triangulating the different

data gathered through the resources, this study seeks to find if the creation of multimodal products through the use of technology, serves as a medium for enhancing language learning. This is measured in terms of the development of students' own voice (Divergence); the possibility of interaction and co-constructing material (Agency); through the integration of different modes of expression in the creation of new media (Multimodality); and by structuring the content through the use of different tools which make online media more accessible (Conceptualization). These 4 variables are the aspects analyzed in this category throughout all the data sources collected in the study such as the students' products, the research diary and the survey implemented.

Data Analysis: Data Reduction Strategies

All the data collected in the various sources of information present different elements related to the concepts that are central to this study. However, in order to narrow down the analysis and provide better results it is necessary to visualize the categories in a concrete manner throughout the different sources of information.

The idea is to show how each category is present in each of the sources like the products made by the students, in an effort to evidence the categories as they show in the materials. For example, for the first category explained as the creation of multimodal texts inside the second language classroom, it is important to note the aspects which make a product multimodal; given that all the students presented something that can be classified as multimodal, the idea then is to separate which aspects of multimodality were present in those products. As such, variables like images, text (language represented in letters), color, design (differences in layout and visual effectiveness), and the placement each student chose to present their work.

For the second category, the materials are analyzed by taking into account the critical aspects the students explained during the presentations, and also, after the project was finished, via survey.

In terms of the third category, which is about the use of technology, the data is analyzed by the comparison between how the different aspects of new technologies are present throughout the materials. The analysis includes discerning the levels of agency, divergence, multimodality and conceptualization that can be found in the whole experience of the classroom project.

Data Analysis: Trustworthiness

The analysis provided in this case study is by all means treated with the highest level of professionalism. In order to exclude bias from the researcher, the decisions regarding all the materials developed were taken by the students; all the creative products, from the choice of topic to modes and design, were developed how the students saw best in order to fill one requirement, the creation of a magazine article. As described in the research journal, the student's creative products were developed in class under the guidance of the teacher, who oversaw the language use in the texts, but in no way participated in the design. Moreover, in order to preserve the ethical foundation in this study, the surveys were answered by the students in total anonymity, with no intervention from the teacher researcher. The students developed the survey after the process of the course had ended and the grades were final; also, they were aware that the answers provided were merely for the academic purposes of this research and in no way influenced the outcome of their grades in the course.

Role of the Researcher

My role as teacher researcher started when I was pursuing my specialization in TEFL in Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín, Colombia. At first, my focus was on exploring an issue that interested me at the time, which was how the native or non-native English teachers influenced the learning processes of English students. Two years later, I started my journey in the Learning and Teaching processes in Second languages master program, in the same university, where I wanted to research on a topic that could have a large impact in my local context.

My topic of research developed during the classes in the master program, where I started looking into topics like multimodality and critical literacy, which opened up my eyes to other alternatives in the English classroom, usually limited to exclusively teaching language tools, vocabulary and grammar.

As a teacher researcher I chose to focus now on the development of critical literacy through the creation of multimodal products in the classroom. Furthermore, how the development of these products changes classroom practices and the perception of students towards learning English. As such, my topic of study is embedded in fields that are still mostly unexplored by mainstream education researchers; this is why the field of critical literacy and its relationship with multimodality were attractive to me early on, and why they are fields in which I would like to continue researching.

The specific interest in this topic relates to my personal needs as a teacher as well. I saw that in our local context there is a need for students to get more in touch with technology and use it in a more critical way when facing the call to learn another language. It has been my experience, that there is a “fear” among teachers to let the students use new technologies during

classroom activities, mostly because they are considered to be a distraction. I believe that students can be taught to use technology in a productive way; not just use an online dictionary, teach them to create knowledge, express their thoughts and opinions, while interacting with others through technology. I still haven't met a teacher who consistently tried to improve their practice by empowering students in this way. Thus, I feel this study can have a deep impact on how teachers in our local context use technology within effective and creative educational strategies.

Furthermore, this study aims to serve as reference for other researchers in the field who wish to innovate and change the way they see the English classroom, so in turn, the students can be prompted to change their own perspective.

This topic is special for me as a researcher because I think technology is very important in everything we do in our lives today and it seems a waste to not take advantage of all the tools at our disposal that can make a class come out of the ordinary, thus enhancing the learning experience of our students, who are by now sick and tired of following text books and filling in the gaps.

Chapter Four

Moving Towards a Critical Multimodal Design Implemented In the Second Language Classroom

This chapter describes the outcomes of the data analysis, as documented through the materials collected during my project with the second language course students. Here is presented the process of what was done in the class setting during the case study. This account is constructed from the information gathered through the data collection strategies implemented. It features materials developed by the students shown as photo stills, excerpts from the surveys conducted on them which state the students' opinions after doing the project, and the observations recorded in the research diary carried out by the teacher. Most of the descriptions are taken from the researcher's journal, where all the happenings of the class and the process the students took part in was recorded during the development of the study. First the process of the development of the materials is described, detailing each step and what it entailed for the students. Later the main variables analyzed throughout the data are explored; namely the components of today's communication media, critical literacy and its development in an English classroom.

This data collection and its further analysis set out to answer only one question: How can multimodality and critical literacy work together with technology in order to enhance second language learning? This critical multimodal design proposal was created with this objective in mind, and through the data resources gathered, I aspire to show that curricula today needs to look into these two disciplines so that second language teaching can advance along with the technology present in the students' minds.

Process Carried Out in the Classroom Setting

During regular classes, the students usually carry out workshops, prepare and present dialogues, practice reading comprehension and develop grammar exercises. Normally, language skills are practiced through traditional teaching methods, where students pay attention to the teacher's presentations and later develop some exercises in order to practice the topics. Students' oral participation is elicited in some activities like presentations and games. Audiovisual aids are used regularly as to help the teacher's presentation, while students take note on their pads and participate when prompted. Regularly, as a product of traditional instruction, students are not faced with the possibility of producing their own material using new technologies to aid them in the design process and help them explore their own creativity.

During the process of this project, the students took it upon themselves to read about the topics they chose, bring the information to the class, and develop their products with the teacher's advisory. Most students already brought drafts of the text they wanted to use, and wanted help correcting them. Another part of the process was the visual design. This aspect was also developed, in some cases, during the sessions where the students brought in their own tools, like laptops, where they had applications specialized for design or blog creation services. They were provided with the time and the council that would help them feel secure when developing their project. They looked eagerly for the teacher's advice in order to help them express themselves more clearly, create texts coherently and present proudly their own ideas about the topic they were developing. During the sessions, all students worked responsibly, either creating information, searching for pictures, constructing their design, or correcting their material.

Creating Multimodal Materials in an English Class Setting

After the students chose their topics, it was time for them to start applying the language skills in the first article according to the level of their instruction. The opportunity was theirs to sit in class and write their articles, bring them in for corrections, or work on their presentation and design, if they so desired. Nevertheless, the first task was to present the article orally; in other words, share the article with the class by reading it aloud and showing off the design that they chose. They also were asked to share with the class why they chose the topic.

Given the grammar they were supposed to apply, in level 2 [where the students are starting to get in contact with English as a foreign language] the topic was up to the students and they asked me for advice if the topic could be used for the language objective. On the other hand, in level 7, as a group it was decided that everybody would pick a famous character to do their articles on in order to be able to apply the language tenses (forms of the past tense) easily. (Research Journal, January 23rd).

In the first session of the week, the students brought their drafts to class for feedback. The students showed a lot of responsibility by bringing in their work and their questions. In both levels/groups the students left with their articles finished and promised to prepare them for the presentation next class. The students took the project to heart, continually bringing to class their research, images, media and ideas for text or design. This can be evidenced in the cover design they presented:

MAGAZINE

English Nvl 2

POLITICAL NEWS

*Islamic State.
"In my opinion I think that the
Islamic state is a group with a
high risk to the world".*

TECNOLOGY

*News apps of Twitter
Tinder*

DISCOVERY

*The coffin of Miguel de
Cervantes*

SPORTS

*THE BEST OF THE SPORT IN
COLOMBIA AND THE WORLD.
The Colombian Teofilo Gutierrez
receives the best player award of
America
Juan Guillermo Cuadrado is the
new player of the Chelsea's team.*

HEALTH

*MENTAL HEALTH
What is the mental health?
The importance of mental
health
Advantages
Disadvantages*

ENTERTAINMENT

*Colombia Tex
MOVIES Fifty Shades of Grey
and Ouija*

Figure 2. Still from Magazine Cover Design Level 2

In the second session of the week, the students showed their articles/blogs to the rest of the class. There was a major difference between the students of level 2 and level 7, aside from the pronunciation, the students from level 7 seemed better prepared overall, due to more commitment in preparing their topics; the sense of security shown can also be explained due to the tools they have acquired in the program, but they showed more disposition in producing texts which were familiar to them, in order to do well in their presentations.

Each student/group showed their article and read it aloud, after which they explained some reasons of why they chose the topic. After that, students were asked to keep in mind the other students' topic so that for the next oral presentation, each student in the audience should provide questions for their peers. Some students used their article as a visual aid:

The coffin of Miguel de Cervantes

Scientists believe they found the coffin of legendary Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes in a tiny chapel in Madrid.



After a nine month search, forensic experts have now reported that they've discovered two series of tacks from the thumb-sized initials "MC" on the coffin in the crypt the remains of the Cervantes.

The bones inside the coffin which are apparently mixed up with those of other burials are now being analysed to see if they belong to the writer.



Archaeologists and anthropologists at the site say they cannot confirm they are his remains but are very excited about the coffin they've discovered.

Often known only as Cervantes, was a Spanish novelist, poet, and playwright.



His magnum opus, *Don Quixote*, considered to be the first modern European novel, is a classic of Western literature, and is regarded amongst the best works of fiction ever written. His influence on the Spanish language has been so great that the language is often called *la lengua de Cervantes* ("the language of Cervantes"). He was named *El Príncipe de los Ingenios* ("The Prince of Wits").

He was buried on 23 April. The cause of his death, according to Antonio López Alonso, a modern physician who has examined the surviving documentation, was Diabetes 2, a result of a cirrhosis of the liver. This is the best explanation for the intense thirst he complained of. The cirrhosis was not caused by alcoholism; Cervantes was very productive, especially in his final years.

Figure 3. Still from Article Level 2

After a couple of sessions where language skills were discussed and practiced, the students took time once again to prepare for the second presentation event. This time they were sharing with their own opinions on the topic, explaining some additional information in their own words and expanding on why the topic (or person) was interesting for them.

Level 2 group began their oral presentations. According to the research diary, the time limit was set at a minimum of 2 minutes per student but most went over 3 minutes talking in front of the class. They had the opportunity to present a visual aid of any kind but most chose to show their article again as a guide for their presentation or nothing at all. Most students only had a short guide that they glanced at as they spoke but there were some (1 or 2) who read most of their speech, and this was not the guideline. The idea was to give them the opportunity to get more comfortable speaking in English, not from a memorized text but from something created in their own words from their own opinions. Most of them did this exercise very well, others preferred the security of information that was researched, but this proved to backfire in the end.

News apps of Twitter

Twitter is going to improve the app for his users trying to make it more interesting.



For now twitter starts adding group chats and also you can share videos, that cant last longer than 30" those improvements would be for ios's initially but the app hopes to make these improvements to the androids too.



With this, twitter search becomes more interesting given that it has had lower results than expected.

A Study informed that facebook, pinterest, instagram, linky pin liken are ahead of twitter in the polls.

Tinder



It's new free app for mobiles with whatever can Get potential mates, dates and new friends , but is a more interesting way to do, this app is based on your location and age range you are look for.

The app works as follows:

- Download the app
- Make a new account
- Enable location
- Choose new profile photos



Finallysearchpeoplethatyou're interested in and "like" them on the app, if this person "likes" you, it is a "match" and they will be able to start talking. though the chat is bad, the app is a hit.

Figure 4. Still from a magazine Article Level 2

As the research diary stated, “On the next week of class we began the presentations in level 7; there were very good presentations due the mastery of the language that the participants already had” (Research Journal, March 4th). Most students did a very good job providing more information about their topics and expressing their own opinions in English, though some still had difficulty using verbs in past tense, which was one of the focuses of the course. All in all, the participants had a good level of fluency and pronunciation. Even though some words proved difficult, they managed to continue and make sense with their speech. Visually some students used their own article or blog to talk about their topic, and others made other examples of media (power point presentations) to visually show the information added, aside from their article.

According to the research diary, most students provided evidence in their performance that they knew their topic and had done a lot of research; they also proved that they had tried to master the information in the target language and were able to express it with a medium to high level of fluency. “In my assessment I find that still a few students have some difficulty producing oral texts in English, even when they tried very hard, their difficulties in pronunciation and vocabulary, sometimes hindered intelligibility. My feedback to the students was positive but always pushing for more practice.” (Research Journal, March 6, 2015)

Norma Jean Baker Mortenson better known as Marilyn Monroe, was born on June 1 of 1926 in Los Angeles, in United States, California. She was one of the most popular actresses of the twentieth century, and even today is considered as a pop icon and sex symbol. In 1945 Norma began her career as a model and actress in Hollywood with the artistic name "Marilyn Monroe" when she starred in various films of the era.

She was married to James Dougherty, Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller and attributed engagements with Bobby and John Kennedy brothers.

She had a very sensual and feminine personality, but she developed a neurotic, depressive and obsessive personality that revealed shortcomings of affection in childhood and early youth. She died on August 5 in 1962 due to an overdose of barbiturates in never clarified circumstances. The first hypothesis that gave the American justice was suicide, but this could never be corroborated.

Marilyn Monroe's life is in many ways an inspiration. She was a woman who overcame enormous odds to become not only an adored and respected actress, also she became one of the most famous and biggest movie actress in the world.

She was much more than a famous movie star, she was a vulnerable soul, a generous spirit and a misunderstood story.

Marilyn Monroe

DANIELA MONTOYA CORTES
LORENA LOPEZ PEÑARANDA

*"Fear is
stupid so are
regrets"*

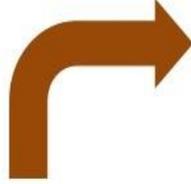


Figure 5. Still from a magazine article Level 7

Because the students watching the presentations had to ask questions at the end of each one, it was possible for the students to maintain focus on the topics, achieve some analysis, and take the conversation further towards an attempt on a critical literacy exercise.

On the final week of classes, from March 9th to March 12th in level 2, after having finished the project and due to their low level in proficiency, the final assignment for the course was a written exam that focused on vocabulary and text production.

However, in level 7, the students proved they could handle different assignments that challenged their ability to research and produce information, so I divided the final test in 2 segments; first, the students did a presentation on English Speaking countries, their culture, places of interest and history, for which they should provide visual aids and apply topics seen during the course. The information was presented in a creative way, using multimodality, design and conceptualization again, and completely on their own using the information they deemed important for the topic. The aspect of agency was also promoted, enabling the students to choose the information about the given country and explain an opinion about the situation that these countries are living right now; economically, politically or socially.



Today, 80% of the population in South Africa is black and they also govern the country.



Figure 6. Still from a Power Point Presentation Level 7

The second part of the final assessment was to complete the article with information from the first part, the presentation and added information; the idea was to have a body of work that presented their opinions and research about a topic of their interest, and make it possible for them to present it as creative as they wanted within the limits of a magazine article or a blog.

ROBIN WILLIAMS

MENU ☰

ROBIN
BIOGRAPHY
ARTICLE
PICTURES



STARRING GENIUS

Robin was a very important actor in the United States, but his legacy arrived to the all world, not only for his performances but also for his personality, he had good luck because he could interpret diverse and complex characters, for example Mrs Doubtfire, the faux Scottish nanny he disguised himself as in the 1993 hit, and the shape-shifting genie in Disney's Aladdin - a free-wheeling force no bottle could contain. His life was marked with different problems for example drugs, alcohol and depression.

He had three wives, and three children Zachary (his son with Velardi), Zelda and Cody (his two children with Garces), his family was the most important thing to him, they were his balance and support, for them he was in rehab many times, but this intention failed because the depression arrived and the drugs came back.

In August 2014 he was diagnosed with Parkinson's, this disease for Williams was very difficult and he was scared because he thought that he was going to be disabled in old age; all this took him to a severe depression that finished in his death when he took the decision of killing himself.

we can say that he stood out for his movies for example Patch Adams this movie was very important in all the world, because all people can see his human quality .

robin delighted millions of fans with his films full of fun, which made his followers who wanted to see more of him in his movies.

provided fun with gestures, phrases and characters that marked the lives of the followers. It was a great loss to the world of acting for both the filmmakers and actors and friends.

Robin Williams is still remembered for his movies next we talk about one of them, called Patch Adams. Adams was a different doctor, not only a clown, he says that "cure can be an exchange of love and not an economic transaction" After he was accepted in the University of George Washington, he became a political activist. Patch started to dream with a place where the patients could go to get cured without paying, a friendly and funny place. Patch studied medicine to use as a tool of social change. Patch and other friends founded the Gesunhert Institute. Finally Patch became a successful doctor in the world.

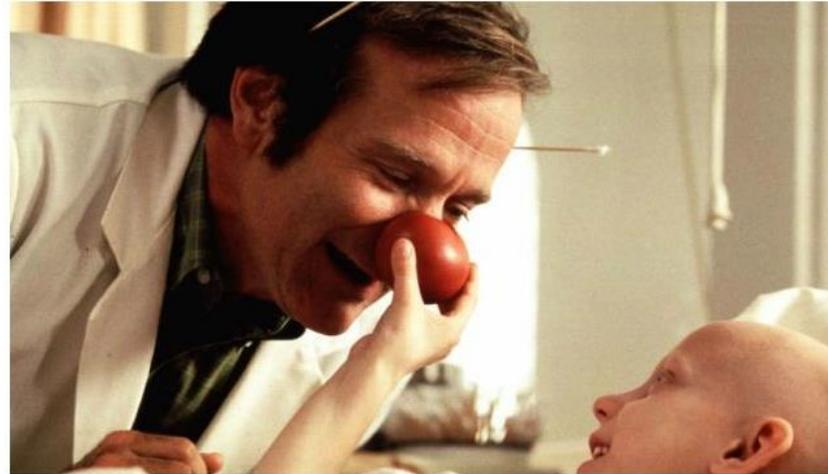


Figure 7. Stills from a participant's Blog Level 7³

³ For more information visit the blog: <http://robinwilliams15.weebly.com/>

The survey cited on this analysis (see appendix 1) was filled out during the final week of class in order to get perspective on the project from the students' point of view. The questions presented to them were geared towards collecting their personal opinions on making media products where they used their creativity as a tool for learning English. They were asked if having the freedom to choose the topics enhanced their learning experience and if the use of technology proved to be an engaging element in the development of the activities proposed. As described in the research method, the students answered freely the questions posed to them on the survey; furthermore, their development of the project gives faith that their answers were sincere, given that they were very proud with their results and their level of responsibility and language use were greatly improved by the end of the course. Both on their texts and their presentations, the delivery of the contents showed their commitment and how much they were invested in their products. The students' surveys served as source of information by registering their opinion on the level of participation they had while developing the project. This survey was conducted after the students had received their grades on all the assignments and it was explained that the results were only used for academic purposes.

This next table presents the description of each research question (as shown in the survey provided in Appendix 1) along with the answers given by the students. This data is presented as evidence of the answers obtained in the survey.

Table 1.

Grouped Survey Answers

Question 1: As a student, did you ever find doing assignments like presentations, articles or blogs, interesting activities to learn English?		
Answer		Comments
si	no	All students found the activities interesting
100%	0%	This is also when the answered question 4
Question 2: From the following options, which assignment did you like best?		

	ORAL PRESENTATION OTHER	BLOG	ARTICLE	NONE
Answer	Number of Ss	Comments		
Oral presentation	3	students were allowed		
Blog	5	to choose more than one		
Article	10	option		
None	0			

Question 3: What tools did you use to create the products?
**SPECIAL SOFTWARE IMAGES INTERNET COLORS DIFFERENT
 FONTS PERSONAL DESIGN OTHER**

Answer	Number of Ss	Comments
Special Software	4	students were allowed to choose more than one option
Images	10	
Internet	5	
Colors	8	
Different Fonts	2	

Question 4: Do you think these learning activities are:

Boring	Interesting	Challenging	Terrible	why:
Answer	Number of Ss	Comments		Number of Ss
Boring	0			
Interesting	13	motivation learning research	7	6 1
Challenging	2	different activities more writing	1	1
Terrible	0			

**Question 5: Do you think that students should participate in these
 types of activities more often?**

YES.	NO.	WHY:	
Answer		Comments	Number of Ss
si	no	fun, freedom, express our opinion,	5
100%	0%	promotes practice, participation, learning opportunities	10

**Question 6: Do the use of topics of your interest help you learn more
 vocabulary?**

YES. NO. WHY: _____

Answer		Comments	Number of Ss
si	no	yes: found familiar topic helps increase vocabulary	13
87%	13%	no: new topic equals more vocabulary	2

Question 7: Do you think the use of topics of your interest would help you gain confidence when speaking English?

YES. NO. WHY: _____

Answer		Comments	Number of Ss
si	no	yes: gain more confidence speaking about a topic of interest	14
84%	6%	No: speaking in public is what helps fluency	1

Question 8: Does creative freedom motivate you to learn English?

YES. NO. WHY: _____

Answer		Comments	Number of Ss
si	no	learning, autonomy	10
100%	0%	pursuing preferences fun activities	5

Question 9: Does the possibility of creating your own media product using text, images and color, give an extra ingredient to a learning activity?

YES. NO. WHY: _____

Answer		Comments	Number of Ss
si	no	yes: motivates learning, dynamic, is easier	14
84%	6%	No: not necessarily, only more striking	1

Developing Agency, Divergence, Conceptualization and Multimodality

Since the beginning of the research, the idea was to propose a project to the students where they could use these concepts (inadvertently) while developing products that showed the practice of language skills explained in class. So at the first sessions with the two groups/levels

that were under my charge, I presented the idea of developing a project where they could use technology creatively. This is shown in examples like these stills taken from one of the articles:

one hand to burn your style

Kase 2, is the graffiti tag or nickname of a graffiti legend, he was one of the most important writers in the history of graffiti, Kase was born in New York in 1958, his real name was Jeff Brown, he started his journey in graffiti when he was a teenager, he was only fifteen years old, that was in 1973, later Kase 2 started painting many trains of the New York subway, and in three years he had painted more than fifty trains around the city.

An important characteristic of Kase2 was his original style, and that he only had one hand, yes, Kase lost his arm in an accident on the subway. When he was a child, an electricity cable burned all of the muscles of his arm, Kase was transported to a Hospital, and there, the doctors had to ampute his arm.

The style of Kase2 was recognized because he uses a new static style, with blocks, arrows and lines that the people had never seen before.

To much people have doed tributes to kase2, because he is an important influence to all graffiti writers in the world, also he is an acclaimed icon of graffiti and hip hop in the bronx.

Kase 2 turned into a new icon of graffiti of that time, he continued painting with more friends and created a crew named TFP, "The Fantastic Partners", they painted many trains in the group, but the mostactive member was Kase2.

Other recognized graffiti writers of the 90 'S like "Seen" Called the godfather of graffiti and "Cope2" of the crew "Kings Destroy" do graffiti props on the walls, a graffiti prop is a form of respect that the graffiti writer bring to another writer, with the props around the city, the real graffiti friends of kase kept him alive from his death to this time. Other graffiti writers of the new school, do more tributes to kase2, because he was their influence, they paint some trains with the nickname or tag of kase2, like him in the old times, the trains was erased, but the memories keep alive and the other writer see this like a big form of respect. In 2012 "Neks" an other graffiti writer died, an the peoples comes again to do tributes to kase2 and nekst, we can find walls around the world tagged with the name of kase2 and nekst. I tagged in an action of graffiti that means write the tag or nickname in a wall (and a tag is a firm or a nickname). Kase2 died in August 14, 2011 in a medical and mental center in the Bronx. I only have to say, Kase2, king of style, which only needed one hand to beat them all, may he rest in paint, he keep alive on the walls full of tags, and remember. "A legend never die"

KASE 2
1958 - 2011

one hand to burn your style

Kase 2, is the graffiti tag or nickname of a graffiti legend, he was one of the most important writers in the history of graffiti, Kase was born in New York in 1958, his real name was Jeff Brown, he started his journey in graffiti when he was a teenager, he was only fifteen years old, that was in 1973, later Kase 2 started painting many trains of the New York subway, and in three years he had painted more than fifty trains around the city.

An important characteristic of Kase2 was his original style, and that he only had one hand, yes, Kase lost his arm in an accident on the subway. When he was a child, an electricity cable burned all of the muscles of his arm, Kase was transported to a Hospital, and there, the doctors had to ampute his arm.

The style of Kase2 was recognized because he uses a new static style, with blocks, arrows and lines that the people had never seen before.

To much people have doed tributes to kase2, because he is an important influence to all graffiti writers in the world, also he is an acclaimed icon of graffiti and hip hop in the bronx.

Kase 2 turned into a new icon of graffiti of that time; he continued painting with more friends and created a crew named TFP, "The Fantastic Partners", they painted many trains in the group, but the mostactive member was Kase2.



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Other recognized graffiti writers of the 90`S like "Seen" Called the godfather of graffiti and "Cope2" of the crew "Kings Destroy" do graffiti props on the walls, a graffiti prop is a form of respect that the graffiti writer bring to another writer, with the props around the city, the real graffiti friends of kase kept him alive from his death to this time. Other graffiti writers of the new school, do more tributes to kase2, because he was their influence, they paint some trains with the nickname or tag of kase2, like him in the old times, the trains was erased, but the memories keep alive and the other writer see this like a big form of respect. In 2012 " Nekst" an other graffiti writer died, an the peoples comes again to do tributes to kase2 and nekst, we can find walls around the world tagged with the name of kase2 and nekst. (tagged is an action of graffiti that means write the tag or nickname in a wall) (and a tag is a firm or a nickname). Kase2 died in August 14, 2011 in a medical and mental center in the Bronx, I only have to say, Kase2, king of style, which only needed one hand to beat them all, may he rest in paint, he keep alive on the walls full of tags, and remember: "A legend never die".



Figure 8. Stills from an Article, Level 7

In the materials developed by the students, Agency, Divergence, Conceptualization and Multimodality showed throughout the development of the project. Students were interested in expressing their opinions, showing off their design skills, and combining different modes of representation. This kind of project takes the focus out of the written language as a separate thing; normally language is studied out of context, only as structure and grammar. I believe that during this project, language was seen through a context that made it valid for the students, when they used it to express their opinions and were given the license to do so creatively.

In order to foster agency, the students' opinion was asked when the project was proposed; their suggestions and willingness to develop the project was taken into account. The students

were all eager to participate in the project (they chose to as an option of assessment) where they would develop a series of articles under my council during class with the condition that they had to choose the topic they wanted to talk about throughout said articles.

In every one of the students' projects, these four variables are undoubtedly present again and again. The development of multimodal projects makes it possible for the students to use the target language in a creative way, and through the use of technology, apply other skills that help them asserted their agency and divergence. By conceptualizing the information they want to share, they create a specific order in which to present that information. Finally by using multimodality, they combine all the other components in order to present a more complete body of work in different modes which help carry the message, thus making it more comprehensible and visually engaging.

When analyzing the data collected in the materials developed in class, they all show the students' interests, and how they instinctively apply different modes of meaning into one text without effort. This makes the process of creation more engaging for them and a great way for the teacher to assess if they comprehend and reflect about what they are writing.

16

Colombia Tex

Colombia Tex is a fair held in the city of Medellin, at the beginning of each year, where textile samples, inputs, machinery and chemicals for clothing and household leader in Latin America.

Medellin, opens its doors to the fair where big businesses related to fashion and fabrics are made. This industrial city, where several countries have these three-day fair to do business with companies that make clothing.

Colombiatex also allows visitors a glimpse of how the market is today, what new ideas can have for they business, how this fashion and fabric market is in Latin America.

That's why, Medellin is filled with tourists at this time of year, to publicize big



business and everything great expectations. At the were 500 exhibitors and and international buyers.

MOVIE

Fifty Shades of Grey is directed by Sam Taylor-Wood

The movie premier will be in the International Movie Festival of Berlin on February 11 of 2015. In Colombia will be on theater on February 14.

The movie is inspired in the novel of the British writer, E.L. James published in 2011. This movie describes an erotic relationship between

Figure 9. Still from a magazine article Level 2

Going Beyond the Use of Technology

Throughout the participants' works, one can see the traces of the basic concepts that form new technologies according to Cope and Kalantzis' (2009b) work. Agency is shown when the students take it upon themselves to create new media and interact with existing media and information in order to create something new. Divergence is thrown into the mix when the students participate with their own opinions about the topics they chose, and express their voices through the design and colors chosen. In this same sense, multimodality is shown as the students structure the contents using a special layout, colors, pictures, fonts and designing their own products from scratch. Conceptualization is the way the information is presented so that it shows a logical order or progression to the reader. This concept is especially shown in the power point slides and in the blogs, given that these media provide a chance to organize the information so that it transitions in the way the presenter wants it to.

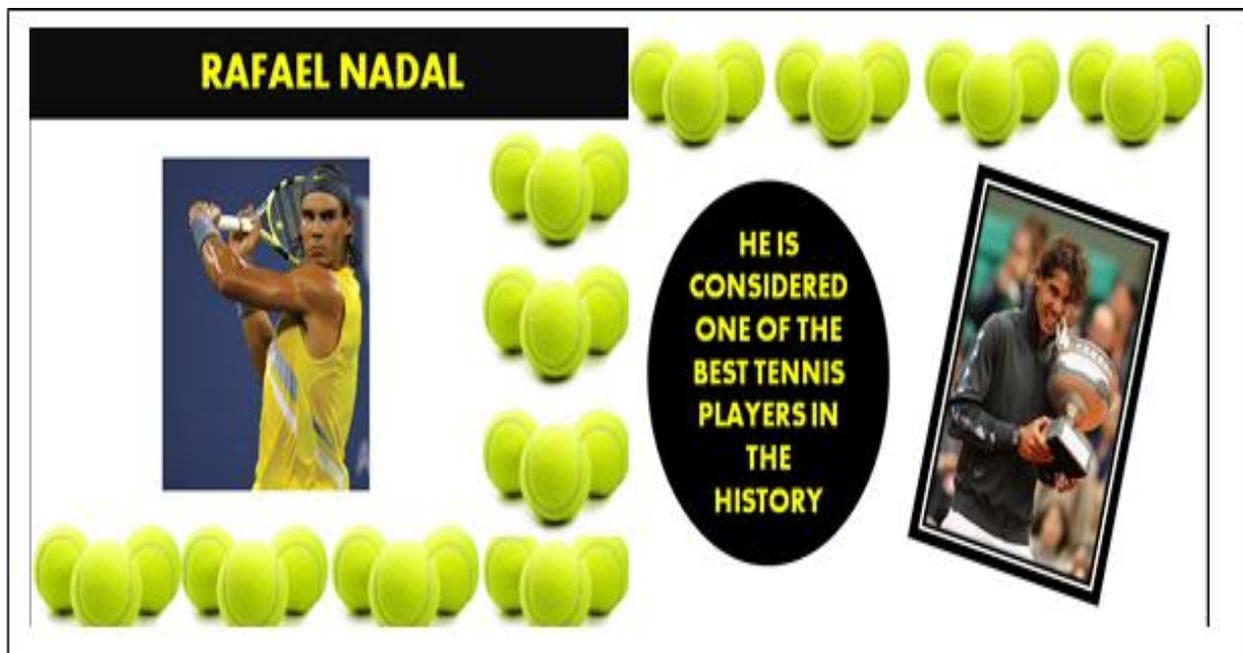


Figure 10. Still from a Power Point Presentation Level 7

One of the basic ideas behind this project was to show that the tools to apply these concepts are already there, and the students know how to use them; the element amiss is the motivation from the teachers, and the leeway for creative and academic freedom that students desire in order to pursue their own interests.

As shown in the next table (Table 2), the analysis of the students artifacts according to the presence of Agency, Divergence, Conceptualization and Multimodality (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009b), is arranged by level of instruction. In the first part of the chart we can see the students from Level 2, with numbers chosen at random from one to nine. In the second part of the chart, we can see students from Level 7, with the numbers ten to fifteen. The scale used to measure the presence of each variable in the artifacts collected responds to the information shown in Table 3.

Table 2

Student Artifact Analysis.

SAMPLE	LV2				LV7			
	AGENCY	DIVERGENCE	CONCEPTUALIZATION	MULTIMODALITY	AGENCY	DIVERGENCE	CONCEPTUALIZATION	MULTIMODALITY
1	3	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
2	2	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
3	2	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
4	3	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
5	2	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
6	3	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
7	2	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
8	3	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
9	2	3	4	5	x	x	x	x
10	X	x	x	x	3	5	5	5
11	X	x	x	x	4	4	5	5
12	X	x	x	x	3	4	5	5
13	X	x	x	x	3	5	5	5
14	X	x	x	x	3	4	5	5
15	X	x	x	x	3	5	5	5

Table 3

Value Scale for Table 2

Scale	Value
1	Not Present
2	Low Presence
3	Average
4	Moderately high
5	Very High

In Level 2, the level of Agency is considered to be low to average given the few chances of interactivity the product presents by itself, and considering the use of information to create a product of their own. Different from what can be seen in Level 7, where some Agency levels are high given the fact that their product was presented as an online blog, where the chances of interactivity with the content are significantly higher, and also the way the students took information and made it their own product.

The Divergence level is different between the two groups of students because of the chances the students took when expressing their points of view in their articles and during their oral presentations. Although in both groups Divergence is more noticeable than the level of Agency.

Conceptualization is present in a significant way in both groups, but it is important to point out that in this case, the main difference is that Level 2 group chose to present a visually consistent project, where the design of each article offers little variation; whereas all the articles from level 7 offer different design decisions based on each student's criteria.

Multimodality is highly present in all of the articles given the use of different colors, texts and images integrated within the design and in their PowerPoint presentations.

Fostering Critical Literacy

Looking into the method that took place in the project, the participants were asked to analyze their topic several times throughout the process. They had to explain in their own words the importance of the topic (for example in the second presentation in level 2) or they had to face the questions of the remainder of the group (in the second presentation level 7). The objective behind these analyses was to get the students thinking about their own learning process, and why they are doing what they are doing, especially given the fact that all the aspects of their product were chosen by them. The participants were asked to give their personal opinion about the topics and, in doing so, they related the topic to their own personal experiences.

The mere activity of setting the stage for them to reflect upon their own production and topic choice is a good start to begin promoting critical literacy aspects in the classroom, and proves that it is possible to leave it to the students to create and propose new ideas from the development of communicative tasks.

Cristiano Ronaldo THE RECORD BREAKER

Written by: Santiago Duque García - santiago.duqueg@outlook.com

When we speak of a three-time winner of the FIFA Balon d' OR and, recently appointed by the Congress of Portugal, as the best player in the history of his country, we talk about Cristiano Ronaldo. He was born in Madeira, a small island located west of Portugal. Just turned 30 last February 5 and is going through one of the best moments of his career.



As a football player, Cristiano Ronaldo debuted at Sporting Club of Portugal in 2002 being only seventeen years old, but he wasn't professionally

known until the following year when he came to the Premier League with Manchester United, one of the most traditional clubs in Europe.

He inherited the number 7 shirt left by David Beckham and since then the CR7 legend began.

In 2009 Cristiano was transferred to Real Madrid and, since then, the beast was released. In England "El Bicho", as he is known in Spain, started to show his potential and quality as a player, and it was in the Spanish capital where he began to break records and marks like he was playing with kids.

His growth was so great that today he has become the reference and the captain of the portuguese national team, where legends like Eusebio and Luis Figo have played.

Now, he seems limitless and once he leaves football he is going to set a very high bar for new generations, that will try to beat this goal-making machine called Cristiano Ronaldo.



Cristiano Ronaldo last season in Real Madrid

STATISTICS, TROPHIES & AWARDS

- 2** Times UEFA Champions League winner
Times FIFA Club World Cup winner
- 3** Times FIFA Balon d'OR winner
Times FIFA Golden Foot winner
- 17** Goals in 2013/14 UCL
Record for a season
- 52** Goals with the portuguese national team - Historical record



Figure 11. Still from an Article. Level 7

QUOTES ABOUT CRISTIANO RONALDO

“He has magic in his boots”, Eusebio. “A machine. Incomparable”, F. Torres.
 “Cristiano Ronaldo is priceless”, Florentino Pérez.
 “He can do whatever he wants as a footballer. There are some things he does with the ball that make me touch my head and wonder how he did it”, Luis Figo.
 “When Cristiano gets the ball, you can just leave him to it while he beats player after player”, Ryan Giggs.
 “He makes the most difficult plays look easy”, Henrik Larsson.

KEEP GOING, CR7

Football is a sport of moments, of instants. The present is all that matters. As humans we fall, but the important thing is always moving forward. Cristiano Ronaldo is an example of perseverance and hard work and, regardless of their personality, every day proves his worth in the field.

With goals, assists and dribblings shows the world that he is, and always will be, one of the best players in the history of this sport.

When he was a little boy in the humble Ma deira, he dreamed of being the best, and now after years of dedication... he is. Bravo, Cristiano!

Keep going. Continue to amaze the world. Continue showing that everything is possible.



Cristiano Ronaldo & Gareth Bale this season with Real Madrid

The students were asked to give their own point of view on each of the topics presented. This exercise was an open invitation on developing critical literacy. The students related their own view of the world onto their work and expressed it orally and in the design chosen. During each oral presentation the students were prompted to answer within their speech questions like: Why did you choose the topic? Why do you think it is important? Explain to the class your own opinion about the topic.

In order to carry out a numerical analysis of the material gathered, it is safe to say that given that the students had creative license to choose and develop their projects, the results show a high presence of almost all the variables that were looked upon, as described in the first part of this chapter and as shown on the charts. Upon analyzing the materials constructed by the students in light of the components of multimodality and what it entails in today's world, one can conclude that all the products made by the students evidenced Agency, Divergence and Conceptualization. In truth, each project developed them autonomously showing the individual process of the students and their own creative vision.

Chapter Five

Developing Multimodal Learning/Teaching Strategies in a Second Language Classroom

This chapter presents the conclusions according to the units of analysis which group the main aspects that were studied in this research project. Also, this chapter summarizes the implications these findings have for second language teaching in the future. In this chapter there are also some disclosed limitations that were found while implementing a critical based approach in the second language classroom, paired also with some suggestion for future studies on a critical approach to multimodality in the English classroom.

How Implementing a Critical Multimodal Design Impacts Students Learning Process

Before talking about each of the categories analyzed, I would like to answer the research question directly. The idea behind this project was to present evidence that the learning processes of the students can be enhanced through the use of technology and the development of multimodal products inside the classroom; presenting them with the opportunity to express their opinion and find their own voice. I believe that at the end of the process and based on the analysis and inspection of the data, the students benefitted greatly from this exercise, for not only they were able to practice/learn language forms through topic of their interests, but also, they began to see the classroom setting in a new way. During the classes it became their own space for autonomous work. I saw that the students found this to be a fulfilling experience (as evidenced on the data charts), something they enjoyed, because by working together and using technology they did not really feel locked up in a classroom, they became masters of their

learning process. This situation became a stepping stone towards a real progress in learning a second language.

Creating Multimodal Materials in an English Class Setting

One of the basic ideas of this study was to explore the application of a critical use of technology and its benefits for the students in the second language classroom. The academic grounds for this exploration were set on multimodality and critical literacy, with the goal of helping students acquire language tools in order to express their own ideas and voices in English. In this way, it cannot simply be to present ideas that promote technology within the same tired strategies that involve the teacher as a “giver” of knowledge or lecturer. The use of critical literacy in the classroom implies the presentation of some tools that empower the students to express themselves in a different language, but it is their own visions of the world and their reflections on their world that should nurture the learning and teaching processes in the classroom.

The literature review confirmed my initial speculations. According to the studies I explored as a framework of my research (Chun, 2009; Saumell, 2013; Janks, 2014; Morrell 2005, 2009; Izadinia & Abednia, 2010; Ferger, 2009, etc.), an explicit marriage between the concepts of critical literacy and multimodality is still in question, due mainly to the focus of most studies on issues like reading comprehension, developing writing skills and vocabulary building. This is also true due to the fact that studies focus on fostering critical literacy through different exercises, but do not mention multimodality in the background, though most of the time it is there. I believe that due to the nature of current media, multimodality is present in every product the students make even if we as teachers are not aware of it. In several studies I reviewed, there

is no direct mention of multimodality, but there is of digital literacy as a way to enhance autonomous decision making, critical awareness, participation and information analysis via different formats (or modes) (Chun, 2009; Saumell, 2013; Janks, 2014).

However, the idea of creating multimodal material in the English classroom is not new. As seen in the previous literature review, some studies conducted by different scholars such as Janks (2014), address the implementing of technology in the classroom by developing multimodal projects with the students. These projects prove that students develop language skills in a more practical way when asked to implement them producing different kinds of media related to topics they are interested in. This study explored this possibility in the Colombian context paired with the idea of promoting critical literacy. The development of projects anchored in multimodality, in this case, resulted in a total collaboration with students; their commitment to the project was full scale, more so than with traditional classroom practices, where they seem uninterested and bored. One of the conclusions of this study, as the participants themselves state, is that the implementation of multimodal projects motivates the learners by giving them the chance to apply language skills on topics they find interesting, or that they can relate to in everyday life. This was a positive experience for students, because using topics on which they can express their opinions creatively and in doing so, engaging an audience through their speech in English, was a new experience for a lot of them. This experience motivated the students by giving them the opportunity to use the target language to talk about topics that interested them.

In addition, some of these findings may shed light onto possible issues regarding the different uses of technology in the classroom, showing that it cannot only be used as an enhancing agent in the students' process, but it can be used in new strategies that promote critical

thinking, expanding the possibility of student's agency, divergence and conceptualization while utilizing multimodality.

For the students, having the space in class to develop their projects liberated the students from the stress of having to develop the language alone. It was taken as an opportunity for learning and acquiring new skills, as they knew that later they would have to use this same language to explain their projects orally in front of the class. This opportunity was greatly appreciated by them, as they expressed during the later survey, and gave them the chance to focus on the creative side, not feel frustrated with unknown language or vocabulary, and leave behind the laziness of just copying/pasting content found in online resources.

Furthermore, as they point out in the surveys, creative stimulation is very important for them, and they believe it helps them learn the language skills necessary to begin expressing themselves more clearly. As one participant stated when asked an opinion about the learning activities: "Is interesting because is more different to traditional way for teach and learn English, is more dynamic and more positive" (Survey Excerpt, March 2015). The students found that this process promoted participation, which paired with the opportunity to express their own personality and opinions throughout the project, can be seen as a clear sign of the divergence present in the multimodal products.

Developing Agency, Divergence, Conceptualization and Multimodality

As shown in the products collected in this study, students' creativity paired with the use of technology can result in beautiful outcomes. As the figures in the last chapter illustrate, the participants used a varied array of resources; from colors to highlight information, pictures and fonts to shape it, to intricate designs that make the products visually appealing in a way that

captures the attention of the reader. All of this is multimodality. It is not necessary to build elaborate explanations or charts to further repeat what can be simply seen in the materials themselves. Without even teaching the students to use these resources, they do it naturally which goes to show that in this day and age, and for several generations, multimodality has become as common as the use of a computer. Every piece of media we experience has intricately combined modes, meanings and layout in a way that continues to capture our attention.

This study shows that teaching strategies can be used to promote the basic elements which combine new media communication technologies. Agency, divergence, conceptualization and multimodality, can and should be present in the classroom. These concepts pave the way for critical literacy unlike anything else present in the real world today. New technologies have the power to help people share their own individual voice, by producing their own media as they find it. Consumers today have the power to change the media; it is a known fact that through interaction, consumers have a say on what is offered in any kind of industry. This power has to be harnessed by education; the struggle between teachers and students cannot continue and it is through the promoting of agency and divergence that we as teachers can empower the students towards finding their own voice.

This study found that students faced with the challenge of making multimodal products in class engage in deeper learning processes. As Gunther Kress (2001) stated all around his work in multimodality and teaching, the use of these kinds of strategies helps students transcend the mere act of memorization, as the content is transformed in their brains in order to create something new with it. Multimodality helps the students internalize language structures because it places in their hands the different ways to convey messages, not only through text but also through creative design.

Fostering Critical Literacy

The basic elements of critical literacy propose a change of pace in the classroom dynamic. Here, the objective is to leave the reflection and analysis exercises in the hands of the students, after proposing a set of activities or goals and defined way of reaching them. For example, in this project there were “imposed” certain aspects, such as how many presentations, the necessity for oral and written production, and the format (written article). But, they were left free to choose the topic, and all the creative aspects of the project. Critical literacy does not mean to leave the students without guidance in the hopes that they come up with a way to practice the language solely for class interactions.

This study shows that even what can be seen as simple topics can guide the students to analyzing what happens in their own reality. Projects like this one, can empower the students to express their own opinions and views on the world, while using target language skills. This finding confirms what scholars like Morrell (2005, 2009), Izadinia & Abednia (2010) and Feger (2009) have concluded from their studies; saying in sum that this type of projects empowers students to talk about their realities using different media which leads them to be critical about their own world, ultimately resulting in social change.

When talking about critical literacy, one of the main tools to assess the effect the activities of the students were the surveys. In these surveys there is a general tendency in the participants towards regarding the development of products as a valid and entertaining way to learn English. Participants regarded this opportunity of making media products as a proactive, dynamic and fun way to learn and practice vocabulary. They also talk about feeling a higher level of participation in their own learning process after being involved in every step of the production of their own products; this shows that enhancing the possibility for agency in the

students provides a valuable experience for them, given that they are accustomed to having virtually no influence on the decisions made regarding class activities, as they are filled like recipients in the traditional schooling system.

As various studies suggest (Janks, 2014; Beck, 2005; Chun, 2009) critical literacy should be a component of educational curricula, and not be set aside for advanced studies. In this sense, one of the findings of this study is that the students found a more meaningful approach to learning English, and this is achieved in a great part by the inclusion of critical literacy into the activities. The students were challenged to think why what they were writing was important to them, and that alone differentiated the activity from any other project that they had experienced before, this can be seen in the answers provided in the survey which can be referenced in chapter 4. For example, questions 6 and 7, pose the inquiry of what the students think of using topic of interest and how they help them learn English; their answers show that using topics close to them feels like a better way to approach the language giving them the opportunity to express their point of view and start engaging in critical literacy practices.

Going Beyond the Use of Technology

Technology is used throughout the making of all the materials of the project; what is inherently different is that the participants bring their previous knowledge, creativity, and personal opinions into the making of these materials. The use they give to technology is entirely theirs. This is not an exercise where the teacher uses a tired video or tape recorder and calls it using technology, nor is it an exercise to apply technology within a lecture class, using traditional methods of instruction. The use of technology here is to empower the students, promoting agency, autonomy, divergence, while developing language skills necessary to

promote second language learning. Moreover, this study confirms findings by other scholars that link the use of technology as a teaching tool for literacies within the classroom has improved the literacy learning of text and image comprehension (Kitson, Fletch & Kearney, 2007).

The strategy proposed in this project shows that it is possible to motivate the students through the use of technology in the classroom; although the teacher should be always monitoring it in order to foster the development of activities which serve as a vehicle to practice language skills, and which also present the students with the opportunity to create, innovate and state their own point of view. Also, oral presentations promote peer discussion, paired with the use of technological tools, which enhances the chance for participation from all of the group.

Regarding the use of technology, the students remarked on the survey's responses, and how the use of technology made things easier and more interesting for them by giving them the possibility of creating their own design and exploring creative ways to show off their topic. The majority of opinions given by the students, deem the development of creative products an interesting or challenging experience, saying that the making of these products changed the class dynamics by providing a different way to practice and gain language skills. Furthermore, this study found that through a multiliteracies approach students can benefit from the use of technology as it enriches the learning experience and can serve as a medium for raising critical awareness, as also found in studies conducted by scholars Cope & Kalantzis (2009).

In general, throughout the development of this project, the students showed that they were engaged and motivated; during the classes which were the writing workshops, every student had material to review, had questions, tried to correct their material, researched vocabulary and structures that they wanted to apply, and dedicated time to present a visually

appealing and grammatically accurate product. At the end of the process, the students were proud of the results, and happy to have made something by their own efforts.

In conclusion, this study found that students faced with the challenge of making multimodal products in class engage in deeper learning processes. It found that activities where their own point of view is expressed and their creativity is promoted can help them take in the target language in a more dynamic and meaningful way. This study concluded that students using technology find the tasks more alluring and thus can achieve a greater language skill development.

Limitations in Second Language Teaching

In terms of limitations, promoting critical literacy is an aim that faces many. During this project, and because of its parameters, the topics chosen by the students sometimes did not enhance the possibility of relating them to their own reality in a substantial way. Any topic can be related to society but sometimes the analysis carried on by the students left a lot of reflections unexplored. For future studies, I propose that the researcher set aside a session that is entirely a discussion of the topics and place for the students to reflect and think about how the topics influence their own lives or society as a general.

During the application of this multimodal project there were some limitations that are worth mentioning regarding the creation of the multimodal products. As in any project that involves creation, the existence of resources is a must; in this case the presence of technology was necessary, and there were times when students could not bring their own laptops to class and the teacher had to sort it out, either by making the class a writing workshop where they bounced ideas off each other to create their articles or by getting access to a faculty laptop for them to

work on. This can be a limitation for institutions where technology is not easily acquired, and I believe that the teacher should take this into account when formulating a multimodal project.

Also, implementing technology in the classroom can sometimes be troublesome. As a researcher I was lucky enough to be in a university where there is easy access to technology (e.g. computers, laptops, projectors, etc.). Nevertheless, I am aware that having a classroom setting where digital technology is available is not easy in some schools of Colombia; so, with this situation in mind, I hope that teachers with this limitation can implement some aspects of the critical multimodal design using the resources at hand even if they are not the most up-to-date. As a teacher-researcher I feel the most important thing is to enhance critical literacy through whatever medium comes easier in practice.

Implications for Second Language Teaching

For the future implications of this study it is important to point out that the integration of technology into the classroom is a first step towards changing the mindset of traditional teachers, but it is necessary that practices shift towards empowering the students to make their own choices guiding them towards finding and exploring their own interests in the classroom. It is important that classrooms become a setting for the students to develop their opinions, in a safe space where they can construct knowledge from comparing their ideas with their peers. Student-centered instruction is key for raising critical awareness in schools. This study shows that students find stimulating and encouraging having creative license when creating a product in a classroom setting; moreover, the freedom to choose the topic and express their opinion about it, pushed them (in most cases) to reflect and analyze the information they faced. In light of this, a critical multimodal design implementation is a step towards taking language teaching out of

textbooks and tired activities, and in diving into real-life use in the students' minds, as they feel they can use a different language to express their thoughts and ambitions, and become aware that ideas can change the world around them.

Real-life use of English. One of the most important implications of this study is that it serves as a background for the development of multimedia products that can be seen around the world (thanks to the Internet). Moreover, these products can contribute to changing paradigms in relation to critical thinking, analyzing society and presenting real solutions to social problems that are a reality in the students' world. Using the classroom as a platform for analyzing social issues, should be implemented in order to enhance the students' view of English as a language that can be used to communicate and talk about issues that are important to them; not just in the classroom for an assignment, but for a large audience. This change in perspective can set forward a myriad of social changes; actually, make students aware that change starts in each one of us. The strategy proposed in this body of work, attempts to give the students the opportunity to present ideas that touch their reality by using new tools. Being able to use English in a real context provides the chance to apply knowledge while being critical about their world and express their thoughts about real problems around them.

A change in teachers' perspective. The implementation of a critical multimodal design has the power of changing mindsets in all places in society, but the first change should occur in the teachers' minds. As it is reviewed and implemented in schools and universities, it is my belief that teachers will start to change tired dynamics, and become interested in what students have to say, as they try to say it in a foreign language that they are beginning to master. The teaching strategy proposed in this study, attempts to show how new technologies used properly can become real assets in classroom practices because of the way they can promote interaction,

peer correction, and motivate language use by giving students a real purpose to use the target language. This strategy requires that teachers adapt to these new technologies so that they can use them with the students, and change classroom practices while developing a more student-centered approach. Teachers will have to open up to new possibilities in a world where anybody can become a creator of knowledge and social change.

Development of media products. It is a reality today that for knowledge to be meaningful it has to be shared. This strategy proposes a way for students to learn a new language through the creation of multimodal products that can be shared through the different platforms that new technologies provide. The main idea is that by developing these products the students are interacting, creating, correcting and acquiring new language skills in a way that is meaningful for them. Creating meaningful ways for students to apply language is what teachers strive to do nowadays, because it is well-known that meaningful knowledge tends to be remembered more easily than memorized information. Developing media products through multimodality and sharing them through new technologies is a way to create meaningful learning processes that go beyond the classroom.

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Appendix A

Student Survey

1. As a student, did you ever find doing assignments like presentations, articles or blogs, interesting activities to learn English?

YES

NO

2. From the following options, which assignment did you like best?

ORAL PRESENTATION BLOG ARTICLE NONE

OTHER _____

3. What tools did you use to create the products?

SPECIAL SOFTWARE IMAGES INTERNET COLORS DIFFERENT FONTS

PERSONAL DESIGN OTHER _____

4. Do you think these learning activities are:

Boring Interesting Challenging . Terrible

why: _____

5. Do you think that students should participate in these types of activities more often ?

YES. NO.

WHY: _____

6. Do the use of topics of your interest help you learn more vocabulary?

YES. NO. WHY: _____

7. Do you think the use of topics of your interest would help you gain confidence when speaking English?

YES. NO.

WHY: _____

8. Does creative freedom motivate you to learn English?

YES. NO.

WHY: _____

9. Does the possibility of creating your own media product using text, images and color, give an extra ingredient to a learning activity?

YES. NO. WHY: _____

Author's Biography

Giselle Isaza Velásquez is currently a professor of English as a second Language, for the Language Center in Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, in the undergraduate programs. She has been involved in education projects that seek to improve the quality of life of the less fortunate, carrying out English programs in association with the local mayor's office and the university mentioned above. Also, she worked for some time as an English teacher in the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana's high school, teaching in the girls' section, experience which influenced her in choosing the topic of this study.

Even though her undergraduate studies were not relating education, it was always a sure thing that would become a teacher, having known English her whole life and being in touch with this profession through both of her parent's experiences. She is currently looking to continue with research projects related to education and technology.