THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTFOLIOS FOR ASSESSING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROCESS IN SECOND GRADE STUDENTS FROM A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN PEREIRA

JHON ALEJANDRO MARÍN GONZÁLEZ

UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA
FACULTAD DE BELLAS ARTES Y HUMANIDADES
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA INGLESA
PEREIRA-COLOMBIA
2015

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JHON ALEJANDRO MARÍN GONZÁLEZ

Trabajo de grado presentado como requisito parcial para obtener el título de
Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa

Asesor: Rosa María Guilleumas García

UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA
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Acknowledgements

After this process that has given me a lot of experience, I had the opportunity to know people that were significant in the development of this project and of course, influeced in my professional development.

First of all, I'd like to thank my parents and my aunt that have given me all the strenght, the motivation, and the support to accomplish the goals I have proposed, no matter what they are. To all my partners that shared with me all the laughs, the tears, and the frustrations we've experienced through this travel. To my project advisor Rosa Guilleumas to be so patient and supportive and all the professors who shared their knowledge with me, that is the best gift I took for this new path I start walking today.

To the university that gave me all the opportunities to continue pursuing the dream of being a professional.

And finally, I like to thank myself for being able to achieve this goal, that even though all the hard work I did to be here and hurdles I had to pass, made me to realise that all the efforts made in life always bring good things like the opportunity to be an English teacher.

Abstract

This document presents a classroom project developed in the Jorge Eliecer Gaitán School in which a group of second graders were the participants. This project was intended to identify the effect of the implementation of portfolios to assess the English language process during the first two terms of an academic year in 2014. Firstly, it is exposed the variety of definitions around the significance of assessment, the different types, methods, and approaches, besides, the definition of portfolios. Finally, it is presented the results obtained during the implementation which showed that portfolios help to raise students' motivation and decrease the levels of anxiety by the time they are being evaluated. Likewise, the report includes others aspects related to teaching like professional growth, linguistic outcomes, and students' responses about the class methodologies and the English as a foreign language.

Key words: Assessment, types of assessment, portfolios.

Resumen

Este documento presenta un proyecto de enseñanza del inglés desarrollado en la Institución Educativa Jorge Eliecer Gaitán en la que un grupo de estudiantes de grado segundo fueron los participantes. Este proyecto se propuso implementar la estrategia evaluativa de los portafolios para valorar el progreso de los estudiantes en la asignatura de inglés durante los dos primeros periodos de año académico 2014.

El informe del trabajo se inicia exponiendo las diferentes definiciones que se tejen alrededor del significado de la evaluación, sus diferentes tipos, métodos, y enfoques, además, de la definición de portafolios. Finalmente, se presentan los resultados que se obtuvieron durante la implementación, los cuales mostraron que el uso de portafolios ayuda a elevar la motivación y disminuir la ansiedad en los estudiantes al momento de ser evaluado. Asimismo, este informe incluye otros aspectos concernientes a la enseñanza como lo son el desarrollo profesional del docente a cargo de la implementación, los resultados lingüísticos, y las respuestas de los estudiantes frente a la metodología de clase y la lengua extranjera: inglés.

Palabras clave: *Evaluación, tipos de evaluación, portafolios.*

Content

JUSTIFICATION

Evaluation is an important part of any educational process since it not only allow to value the students' linguistic progress to decide about their promotion to the following level, but also to gather information about their personal interests, characteristics, learning styles and development rhythms. This information should help consolidate or reorient the educational processes related to the integral development of learners as well as provide information that allows to implement pedagogic strategies to support those students with either weaknesses or higher achievements in their educational process. (MEN[1], 2009)

Mertens supports this position when she states that *"Evaluation is the process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about affairs, value, merit, worth, or significance […] of a program"*. (2015, p. 48)

This view of evaluation highlights the relevance of implementing assessment methods that allow teachers to gather information about students' linguistic progress, personal features, learning styles, as well as their abilities for creative thinking, problem solving, and reflection.

Traditional evaluation has frequently been based on the results of written and oral test that students have to take at the end of each term. According to Baxter (1997), although filling the blanks, true and false questions and multiple choice questions are among the most popular types of tests questions, they only test *"single items of vocabulary and grammar through single sentences"*, ignoring other type of relevant information such as students' preferences, strengths or

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[1] Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia

dominant learning styles. Besides, the importance given to the results of these tests by parents and teachers is such that students often suffer from anxiety that raises their affective filter and may affect their linguistic performance.

This was the case observed at Jorge Eliecer Gaitan school, where 2nd graders' English achievements were evaluated using traditional methods that only produced a grade for their school bulleting but left little information about their individual progress, interests, learning styles, and development rhythms. As a consequence, students resented being evaluated in this way and rejected the English subject.

Concerned about this situation, I decided to explore the use of portfolios as an alternative method for assessing students in the English subject.

Portfolios are considered as an alternative method to evaluate learners, particularly because *"it reveals both the capability and the process of the learners (Cameron, 2001:237)"*, *"assess what students can do and not just what they know (Damiani, 2004:130)"*, *"the process and outcomes of [this] assessment [tool] can motivate learners; and, [the] assessment activities, and feedback from it, can support further learning. (Cameron, 2001, p. 220)";* finally, "*learners are [involved as active] participants in, rather than object of assessing (Paulson et. al., 1991:63).*

Besides, portfolios can provide a better appraise of the student's performance because they may identify personal features of each student, measure students' progress over a period of time and include evidence of performance at specific skills as it was stated by Delett, et al. (2001); Banfi, (2003); Yang (2003); Allen (2004); Nunes (2004); Bahous (2008); Lo (2010) cited

by Huang (2012) that indicate that *"using portfolios in foreign language education have lots of benefits: offering a multi-dimensional perspective of student progress over time, promoting self-reflection and learner autonomy and integrating learning, teaching and assessment (p.2)".* This information will allow teachers to redirect the educational process in order to assist students to improve their weaknesses and enhance their fortitudes.

Based on the advantages previously described, the use of portfolio is proposed as an alternative assessment tool that will allow 2nd graders from Jorge Eliecer Gaitán School to cope with the objectives stated by the Colombian Ministry of Education.

OBJECTIVE

To Implement Portfolios for Assessing the English language process in Second grade from Jorge Eliecer Gaitan school in Pereira.

Specific Objectives

- To explore and value alternative options to traditional assessment in the implementation of portfolios in a second grade class.
- To identify students' reactions towards the use of portfolios for assessing English language process.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To provide a conceptual framework to this classroom project, two notions were explored:

The first one was **Assessment**, which is defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary as *"the act of making a judgment about something"*. Within this field, the different types of assessment, the instruments that allow us to collect data from students and the characteristic of evaluation were also explored. Our second construct were **Portfolios**, which are defined as a useful collection of student's progress, and achievement in certain area.

Assessment and its types were examined through the studies of Cameron (2001), Shabaan (2001), and Berry (2008). Finally, Portfolios were explored by the contribution of Paulson et al. (1991), Arter & Spandel (1992), and Tilema (2001).

Assessment

In the following lines, we will present different definitions of assessment, a concept that is often interpreted in a very restricted way.

Assessment is required to assist teachers to value students' competences and take decisions about where to place them according to their level of proficiency and achievements.

Shabaan (2001) interprets this concept in a wider sense and describes it as a tool used by teachers not only to provide feedback to the students and make

them aware about their strengths and weaknesses; but also to assess the methods and techniques used by the teacher himself. As it can be seen, this author values the importance of evaluation as a tool for improving teaching.

However, the most comprehensive definition of assessment is the one provided by Berry (2008) that is worth quoting at length:

> ***"Conscious and systematic activities used by teacher and students for gathering information, analysing and interpreting it, drawing inferences, making wise decisions, and taking appropriate actions in the service of improving teaching and learning (p.6)".***

In other words, the process of assessment does not only consider judgements about students' achievements but also about the teacher's decisions and planning; both parts, the teacher and the students, are benefited from the process of assessment, the first improves his or her teaching and curriculum, and the latter improves his or her language proficiency.

This fact is acknowledged by Shabaan (2001), who considers assessment as an integral part of teaching, since the information produced in the process can help the teacher improve the course dynamics.

Types of assessment

When talking about assessment it is important to be aware of a number of distinctions based on factors such as the content to be assessed, the time at which assessment takes place, the purpose that will be served and others. The Common European Framework presents the following taxonomy:

1. Achievement versus Proficiency Assessment:

An achievement test assesses what has been taught. Usually it is performed at the end course book unit or at the end of a term.

Proficiency Assessment values what the user knows or can do with the language in the real world. This type of assessment is commonly implemented to help the users to know in which language level they stand.

2. Norm Referencing versus Criterion Referencing:

Norm Referencing helps to rank students depending on their language skills in relation to their peers.

Criterion-Referencing assesses students' abilities in the language regardless of the ability of their peers.

3. Mastery Criterion Referencing versus Continuum Criterion Referencing:

Mastery Criterion Referencing establishes a single *"minimum of competences"* that divides learners into "masters" and "non-masters" of the language without degrees of quality in the attainment of the objectives being recognised.

Continuum Criterion Referencing is an approach to assessment in which *"an individual ability is referenced to a defined continuum of all relevant degrees of ability in the area of question (p.184)."*

4. Continuous versus Fixed-Point Assessment:

Continuous assessment refers to the assessment that takes into account students' performance throughout a course, project, or pieces of work which is reflected in the final grade.

Fixed-Point Assessment is a type of assessment in which learners are examined at certain point of the process, usually at the end of the course. The results of the student in the particular method of assessment employed are decisive.

5. Direct versus Indirect Assessment:

Direct assessment assesses students by asking them to perform real life activities. This type of assessment allows the teacher appraise if the student would be able to face the reality *(the performance)* and rubrics are usually employed to measure different aspects of the task.

Indirect assessment usually tests students on enabling skills like grammar, vocabulary, and other aspects of the language.

6. Performance versus Knowledge Assessment:

Performance assessment requires learners to provide a sample of their language proficiency in a direct test.

Knowledge assessment involves learners to answer questions which can be of a range of different types and items in order to evidence their linguistic knowledge.

7. Subjective versus Objective Assessment

Subjective assessment refers to the judgement made by the teacher about the quality of the students' performance.

Objective assessment relies on a quantitative scale. Each test has a question with a single right answer.

8. Rating on a Scale versus Rating on a Checklist:

Rating on a scale place a student at a particular level or band (within a number of levels or bands stated). This emphasis is vertical, otherwise stated, how far a student is able to scale.

Rating on a checklist makes emphasis on the topics that have been covered, how much content students have accomplished successfully?

9. Impression versus Guided Judgement:

Impression judgement is the appraisal made based of the experience of the students' performance *(fully subjective)*.

Guided judgement refers to the mixture of subjectivity and conscious assessment *(objectivity)* in relation to a specific criteria.

10. Holistic versus Analytic:

Holistic assessment is based on a student global judgement of the language. It differs from ***analytic* assessment** in that it assesses different language aspects separately.

11. Series versus Category Assessment:

Series assessment involves a series of isolated tasks, which are graded based on a holistic view.

Category assessment entails a single assessment task, which is graded based on an analytic view.

12. Assessment by Other versus Self-Assessment:

Assessment by other as its name indicates the assessment is done by somebody different from the learners themselves, it can be the teacher, other classmates, an external institution while **self - assessment** is a judgement that one does about his or her own proficiency in the language.

13. Formative and Summative Assessment:

Formative assessment *"is an ongoing process of gathering information on the extent of learning, on strengths and weaknesses, which the teacher can feed back into their course planning and the actual feedback they give learners (CEFRL, 2001, p 184)".* As it can be seen from the above definition, this is the most complete type of assessment since it involves giving specific feedback to the student with the purpose of helping them to overcome their weaknesses in language. The focus of this assessment is rather to provide useful information to the learners about how to improve their mastery of the language than to simply certify their level.

The Northern Illinois University Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center (NIU, 2012) describes the following methods of Formative assessment

- Observations during in-class activities.

- Homework exercises as review for exams and class discussions.

- Reflections journals that are reviewed periodically during the semester.

- Conferences between the instructor and student at various points in the semester.

- Student feedback collected by periodically answering specific question about the instruction and their self-evaluation of performance and progress.

Formative assessment has its counterpart in **summative** assessment, which is more focused on measuring "*attainment at the end of the course with a grade (CEFRL, 2001, p.184)".* The NIU (2012) identified some methods of summative assessment:

- Examinations (major, high-stakes exams).

- Final examination (a truly summative assessment).

- Term papers (drafts submitted throughout the semester would be a formative assessment).

Approaches to assessment

Berry (2008) describes three approaches to assessment. The first approach is ***assessment of learning*** which is the most commonly used by teachers and involves assessing students through quizzes and exams at the end of each unit. The only feedback provided by the teacher is in form of grades according to the number of correct answers obtained t by the student. We could identify this approach with summative *assessment.*

Opposed to the previous approach, Berry (2008) considers that ***assessment for learning*** is the best option to grow into good teaching and learning given the fact that it provides more opportunities to reflect on the language learning process. This is an interactive approach and *"it happens in the middle of learning, rather than at the end (p.47)"*. In other words, assessment for learning permits the students' continuous appraisal of their activities and performance; therefore, students have the opportunity to reflect on what they have produced. This approach is commonly identified with *formative assessment.*

Berry (2008) highlights that the implementation of *assessment for learning* provides an interactional approach in which students are aware of their learning process and provide teachers the evidences they need to prove learners real learning.

The author proposes a final category of assessment labelled as ***assessment as learning****,* that involves having students to self-evaluate their achievements in language. This view of assessment is particularly interesting to appraise students' language progress since it highlights autonomous work and the students' capacity to self-reflect and think critically. In other words, this sort of approach requires more commitment from the students. For this reason, working with this variety of assessment in elementary school provides difficulties to evaluate language progress since at this stage students are just building their autonomy and reflective skills. This view is closely related to the implementation of self-assessment and peer- assessment.

Language learning assessment methods

There are many different processes and activities that teachers can employ in order to collect the necessary information for assessing their student's linguistic skills and performance. In this section, we will briefly describe the most popular methods to assess students in the educational field:

Testing

According to Baxter (1997) traditionally assessment has been done through tests. This sort of assessment is formal and standardized and the information provided by students shows what they know or are able to do in one single occasion. In this sense, this *"test scores cannot tell about the progression of child (Dikli, 2003 p.15)"*.

On the other hand, Shaaban affirms that there are some classroom assessment techniques like role-plays, written narratives, oral interviews, presentations, student-teacher conferences, self-assessment, peer-group assessment and students' portfolios that facilitate students' appraisal. These techniques, that also allow carry out assessment, tend to cause a lower anxiety level in the students and help to obtain a more complete concept of students' abilities.

According to Cameron (2001) *"children will encounter stress anyway in their educational lives, and that well-designed assessment may help them learn how to cope with more stressful examinations later in life (p.233)"*. It is essential to understand what assessment implies when it has positive effects. Cameron (2001) depicts that assessment should motivate students and assist teachers to plan more effective lessons, therefore, assessment becomes in an interactional

rather than an isolated experience.

Therefore, it seems advisable and useful to combine traditional methods of assessment, like testing, which only provide partial information about students' communicative competence with alternative assessment instruments, since they look more closely to the growth and performance of the student; therefore, *"if a learner fails to perform a given task at a particular time, s/he still has the opportunity to demonstrate his/her ability at a different time and different situation (Dikli, 2003, p.15)"*.

Portfolios

In the practice of teaching and learning a foreign language, teachers are requested to implement alternative assessment tools that permit a continuous appraisal of students' achievements.

Among the different tools used for assessment, portfolios have been selected as a learning tool suitable to evidence students' progress since they provide opportunities, not only for students being aware about their mistakes, but also to monitor and appraise their performances (Tillema, 2001).

Paulson *et al.* (1991) define portfolios as *"a purposeful collection of student's work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas (p. 60)"*. Therefore, portfolios capture what learners are able to do and what they know about the foreign language, the teacher communicates to students what is valued, and finally, they represent the processes and steps by which work is accomplished and integrated with language instruction (Arter & Spandel, 1992).

Moreover, Arter & Spandel (1992) affirm that a student's portfolio is not only a collection of student's performance, but also, it includes the students participation in the selection of content and their self-reflections about their performance in those activities, in this way, *"learners are [active] participants in, rather than object of assessment (*Paulson *et al.* 1991 *p. 63).*

Concerning this, portfolios permit to collect certain amount of students' performance when learning a second language. In this sense, portfolios organise the students' tangible evidence in the language process (Olson, 1991 cited by Tillema (2001) p. 127) which will serve to "appraised, scrutinised, and arranged to be of use for future action or development (Tilema, 2001)". Consequently, the compilation of the portfolio evidence "provides a framework to monitor and coach [learners'] performance (Tilema, 2001 (p. 128)".

The aim of the use of portfolios is to *"enable the learner to be in control of the collection progress, receiving feedback to accomplish learning goals (Bound, 1995 cited by Tilema, 2001)".* Besides, portfolios enable students to get more involved in their language learning process than other instructional assessment tools (like tests and quizzes) that are executed at the end of each unit since portfolios allow students to notice their own progress. (Paulson *et al.*, 1991).

Even though it is advisable to use portfolios in assessment, the strategy will not work successfully if there are no clear objectives for each specific educational context since every setting has different necessities and audience, and the design needs to be adapted to them in order to reap the expected benefits. As expressed by Buell cited by Arter & Spandel (1992): "*when designed and used well, portfolios can be very beneficial for students learning, teacher*

professionalism, communication with parents, and measuring certain types of students' learning (p. 42)".

Considering the previously stated benefits that could be derived from the use of portfolios, this classroom project selected this assessment instrument in order to implement a formative evaluation process that allowed students to benefit from the information collected by the teacher about their learning development at the same time that provided the teacher with the necessary information about the efficacy of his teaching methodology.

Characteristics of portfolios

The Council of Europe proposes *"The European Language Portfolio"* (ELP) as *"a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language […] can reflect on a record their language learning and intercultural experiences (2006 p.2)"*. In this sense, the use of portfolios serves to have students in touch with their language proficiency and progress. According to the Council of Europe (2006) portfolios help learners to:

1. "The ELP is the property of the learner and can be taken from school to school, to college and into the workplace". In other words, whether students move from one school to another, teachers will always have the chance to notice the students' achievements in the language and this will permit to continue the process from that point.

2. "All competence is valued, regardless of whether it is gained inside or outside of formal education". Students will be able to enrich their portfolios

using what they learn out the school, in this sense, students use autonomous learning methods using resources and content they like that motivates them to become more proficient in the language.

      3. "The ELP encourages lifelong language learning and motivates learners to take responsibility for their own learning by providing self-evaluation and assessment". In other words, a language portfolio assist students to build autonomy since they are responsible for the own learning.

METHODOLOGY

Context

This classroom project was carried out during the first academic semester of 2014 at a public school in Pereira (Risaralda) called Jorge Eliecer Gaitán. English teaching at this school was not oriented by the standards established by Colombian Ministry of Education, which are specified in the guide No. 22 *"Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: Inglés".* The school did not have qualified teachers to facilitate the English class, which had two (2) hours per week assigned in the schedule.

Participants

This classroom project was carried out with second graders, whose ages ranged between 8 and 9 years old. There were 19 students: 7 girls and 12 boys. After an informal assessment of students' communicative competence in English it was found that their level was under A1 according to the Common European Framework. Students were very active and dynamic and they enjoyed participating in class.

The participants were also two pre-service teachers in ninth semester from English Teaching program from Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. One of them had the role of *observer* while the other acted as *teacher* and implemented the activities. The *observer* collected data taking notes about students' and teacher's actions, which occurred during the classes. Both the *observer* and the teacher had to complete some reflection formats *(See appendix #1)* about the students' responses, professional growth and linguistic outcomes. By doing this, both pre-service teachers explained the most relevant events, thoughts, opinions,

and feelings towards the classes, and looked for alternatives of how to improve implementation weaknesses. In addition, the *teacher* developed the classes, interacted with the students and collected the data from the activities developed in the classroom and the portfolios.

Design

In order to implement a design that integrated the use of portfolios to assess students' learning processes, there were included in the portfolios activities like matching images with its corresponding meaning, puzzles, crosswords, connecting the dots to find images *(That helped learners to improve their fine motor skill)*, completing words with missing letters, colouring and drawings which were aimed to value listening, reading comprehension, vocabulary and writing. At each final school term, students were given pieces of paper in which they wrote comments using their native language (Spanish) and drew the new concepts they had learnt in English. This was aimed to have an overview about the students' fellings towards the use of the portfolios. Finally, students were provided personal feedback based on the activities developed through the term using the portfolios as an assessment tool.

Implementation

The present strategy was implemented in six (6) steps: socialising with students the portfolios as tool to assess their progress in the English class, planning and determining possible learning tasks that would be included in the portfolio *(This step was developed by the practitioner),* establishing criteria for assessment, monitoring portfolio and students' progress, giving feedback and implementing

reinforcement activities, and reflecting on the portfolio process.

At the beginning of the implementation, students were given a coloured folder which they had to customise using images, drawings, and photos they liked in order to raise students' creativity. The aim was to help students feel they owned the portfolio and created an emotional bond with it. At this time, students were allowed to take their portfolios home *(See Appedix #2, image #1).*

Throughout this process, the teacher created and adapted the activities to be implemented to the students' level. These activities were developed after having exposed students to the engage and study stages from the sequence proposed by Harmer (2009) in which students are *"emotionally engaged with what is going on (p. 84)"* and *"where the focus is on how something is constructed (p. 84)",* in other words, the introduction of the topics and the practice of the patterns of the language taught.

During the phase of production and compilation of evidence *(Activate Stage)*, students used the knowledge learnt to complete tasks given by the teacher and the *teacher* monitored and coached students' performance in order to provide feedback.

Students received feedback one by one since every student presented different difficulties, and therefore needed different explanations. Doing this, students were given short activities that allowed them to enhance their particular mistakes in the development of the activity. This type of continuous assessment offers a *"concrete way for students to learn to value their own work […] and to value themselves as learners"* (Paulson et. al., 1991). This strategy facilitated that students could evidence a meaningful learning and awareness of their own

English process.

Finally, after the topics of the unit were covered, students were involved in reflective activities. Here, students were asked to portray what they had already learnt and express what they thought about the content of the English class *(The activities, games, and dynamics)* by the use of drawing and writing simple sentences in Spanish ***(See Appedix #2, image #9).***

The purpose of this activity was to promote students learning since the success of this process lies in engaging them not only in the collection of samples and pieces of work, but also in the reflection about the knowledge they have acquired from the topics *(Vocabulary and patterns)*.

REFLECTION STAGE

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Challenges

During the process of implementation of this Classroom Project, the main challenges to face were related to four specific fields: checking portfolio's activities and giving feedback, classroom management, time management, and finally, the lack of teacher's experience.

Checking portfolio's activities and giving feedback

In the design of the implementation to be carried out, the revision and assessment of portfolios was an integral part of the lesson. I had planned to review the students' portfolios at the end of each class in order to obtain relevant information of students' progress that could inform me about the efficacy of the activities performed in class, provide the starting point of the following lesson, and point out to the necessity of implementing extra activities to help children achieve the communicative goals of the course.However, reality showed me shortly after the first weeks of the course that my plan was not going to work.

The number of students in the class that was initially 19 was suddenly increased to 30. This implied that the time necessary for completing the class activities also increased. Besides, controlling discipline and supporting the students in the performance of the activities involved more time and efforts on my part. Often it was impossible to finish all the planned activities and it obviously implied reducing the available time for assessment of the portfolios.

In relation with this aspect, Fahim & Jalili (2013) state that *"portfolio assessment (…) can be very time consuming for teachers and educators (p. 497)"*. Otherwise stated, portfolios provide a variety of aspects and information which allow teachers assess students' English process in a broader sense, but it consumes much time that delays the feedback procedure.

An evidence of what has just been explained is the following note from my reflections at the end of the lesson:

> **April 29, 2014**
>
> **"the last activity couldn't be developed as there wasn't enough time. I have to check time management since in several classes time has not been enough"**

In order to continue with the strategy of the portfolios I started taking them home with me. However, this solution was not devoid of problems: first, I had to carry the portfolios around the city with me in the bus what was very cumbersome. Secondly, checking portfolios in this way demanded that in the following class I had anyway to call the owners of the checked portfolios to share with them my assessment. For these reasons, I decided to select just 3 or 4 portfolios per lesson, and take advantage of solo activities performed by the children to provide feedback to individual students.

Reviewing my reflections in relation with the practicum, it is clear to me that my writing was particularly focused on those aspects that I knew my observer would take into account for assessing my performance, and that I did not include much information in relation with my reflections related to the implementation of

the portfolios. However, this fact does not mean that those reflections did not take place.

Looking back in time to those classes, I can definitely attest to the attention and interest that students felt when receiving individual feedback based on their portfolios. I noticed that they took advantage of those moments to ask questions, something they did not do when the whole group was assembled, probably in order not to lose face.

Their attention and the usefulness of the strategy was showed in the following classes, when I could notice that those students who have received feedback in relation with a particular error, corrected that error and showed the expected performance.

Based on this, I can affirm that even though the use of portfolios is time consuming and presents a number of problems in big classes is nevertheless a really useful strategy even with young students, who are able to appreciate and incorporate to their knowledge the information provided by the teacher.

Classroom management

Classroom management, and particularly grouping students, were some difficult aspects for me. The development of the topic and the activities were affected as too much time was consumed when trying to organize the class and control students' behaviour.

Harmer (2001) affirms that pair work is fairly easy to organise; however, the author also states that one of the disadvantages of pair work is that it is *"frequently noisy… and teachers particularly worry that they will lose control of their class (p. 116)"*. In other words, when students usually present discipline problems, pairing them can become a difficult task for the teacher, and so, the flow of the class is fragmented.

This is what I observed in my teaching experience. Even though strategies like working in pairs and small groups are supposed to be advisable and common in language classes to maximize language use by the students, these particular students did not seem to be familiar with them, what caused that an important portion of the class was spent trying to organize them for work causing great frustration.

I tried to manage this problem by using simple structures in English for providing instructions, but it did not work as well as expected since the learners complained of misunderstanding. This behaviour led me to think that maybe the language was still too complex and demanding for the students. For this reason, I made an effort to monitor and improve the way in which I gave instructions. To start with, I tried modelling the instructions for grouping, showing students that two people *(pointing repeatedly at two fingers)*, should work together; however,

this strategy did not work. Next, I tried bringing two students to the front of the class and pairing them so the rest of the group could realise that they had to work in pairs. Even though this time they understood the instruction, discipline problems continued due to the fact that some students did not want to work together and started causing disturbance that extended to others pairs.

In relation with this problem, Harmer (2001) portrays that *"The actual choice of paired partner can be problematic, especially if students frequently find themselves working with someone they are not keen on (p. 116)".* In the experience we are discussing in this report, the opposite was also observed: when students are used to working with the same partners, at the moment they are asked to work with other students, they start disrupting the class.

All these problems related to grouping and organization of the classroom work generated that after three (3) frustrating classes, I decided to avoid pairing students and focused on individual work, instead.

After reflecting on this experience, I would say that it is advisable to spend at least two classes at the beginning of the course in order to teach students about how to make groups using ludic activities *(For instance, providing students pieces of papers with vocabulary they already know; and then, ask them to find the partner who has the same image);* this might be seen as a loss of time for some teachers, but throughout the course, the process of pairing will become easier as students will not spend so much time organizing the groups.

Kratochwill (2006) supports this idea since he highlights the importance of teaching students the strategies and skills they need to perform efficiently in the class since it helps to *"create classroom lessons (…) that interest students,*

ensure that there is a match between student's skills and classroom instructional level".

Time management

The previously described problem about grouping students efficiently spawned an associated difficulty with time management. Since the time for giving instructions, transitions, and modelling of an activity had not been appropriately measured, most of the time it was impossible to fulfill the activities and goals stated in the lesson plan.

Time management is really important because *"The efficient utilization of time gives an individual the opportunity to maximize their potential to do what it is they will do with their time. The efficient utilization of time improves efficacy, productivity, and personal satisfaction."(Nicols & Baum, 2001)*

As a consequence, I consider that the time for all these necessary classroom procedures needs to be included into the lesson plan timing in order to raise productivity in the development of the class. Moreover, I will devise other strategies for pairing students and transforming that dead time of grouping into revision or practice time.

The lack of teacher's experience

In other order of ideas, the lack of the teacher's experience was another factor that affected the progress of the class, as they were thirty-one (30) very talkative young students and to control them and catch their attention was difficult and time consuming. Fontana (2000) states that beginner teachers and practitioners are in disadvantage because of their lack of experience; moreover, as teachers are not empowered with the authority that the in service teachers

have (Fontana, 2000) learners misbehave and always try to test the new teacher's abilities to manage the class.

As it was my first time as a teacher, my inexperience and lack of empowerment provoked that the students misbehaved since I did not know what to do in specific situations like when students were shouting, fighting, or running around the classroom; thus, I found myself using Spanish as the only way to call their attention.

As a strategy for coping with these situations, I introduced activities in which students had to draw, colour, or write in order to calm them down. Students responded positively to this method as they focused on the tasks and gave up the disturbances.

Another strategy used to control students was the implementation of a game in which students had to follow commands similarly to what we do in the total physical response method. In this way, students could spend part of their energy while standing up and sitting down repeatedly and then they feel more willing to continue with the planned activities *(Like stand up, hands up, hands down, turn around, etc.)*, in this way, students kept silent and paid attention to the teacher's instructions.

Seeing this, according to the British Council (2010), the combination of stirring activities –in which students are asked to move around and use their bodies- and the settling activities –*"which are designed to calm students down"*-, help teacher to complete lesson goals without learners *"becoming over-excited or […] bored"*. In other words, successful lessons integrate not only different activities that assist teachers to comply the lesson avoiding students'

misbehaviour and raising students' motivation, but also, to improve time management while giving instructions and explaining the topics.

For these reasons, I consider for the next time, to state authority when I get involved in a new group in order to let the students know that they must behave themselves when they are in the English class, so that, they must respect the class and their classmates.

Strengths

Design of the Activities

One of the most remarkable strengths evidenced in the process of implementation was the design of the activities. As children are full of enthusiasm and energy by nature, *"they have an advantage of being great mimics, and are often unselfconscious and are usually prepared to enjoy the activities the teacher has prepared for them"* (Phillips, 2001 cited by Çakir, 2004:3). This helped a lot in the development of the classes taking into account that these activities maintained students highly motivated and stimulated positively the language experience. Students enjoyed participating and being part of the activities.

This is particularly important since when students are captivated by the activities, students wanted to continue developing them, and *"it will give them more exposure to language input and more chance to practise the language"* (Çakir, 2004:3). In other words, the more time students were exposed in an engaging activity, the more benefits they obtained in terms of language practise and improvement. These elements were extremely exciting for the children who

became attentive and disciplined at the moment of introducing the new vocabulary and language patterns.

Among the activities implemented in this process, the task from the topic "School Supplies" was one of the most engaging for the students. In this activity, school supplies like pencils, colors, erasers, rulers, and markers *(This objects were real)* were located in different chairs around the classroom; the students had to go to the different places, count the elements they found, and write how many objects of the same kind there were. If they did not remember the name of an object, they had to take their portfolios in order to get the names and complete the task.

Besides the previous task, the students enjoyed very much the listening activity from the topic "Means of Transportation". In this activity, students were given pieces of paper with sketches of means of transportation like trains, airplanes, motorcycles, buses, and cars. The teacher said one of the names previously mentioned and students had to write a number in front of the image depending on the order in which the word was said and complete the words of the means of transportation *(See Appendix #2, image #6).*

In this activities, the use of portfolios was intended to help students when they did not remember vocabulary or patterns.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Challenges

Attitude towards English Language

At the beginning of the English process, I realised that students had a lack of interest and motivation towards the English language. Chalak & Kassaian (2010, p.1) affirms that *"motivation has been regarded as one of the main factors that influence the speed and amount of success of foreign language learners"*. In this sense, motivation is one of the main factor that influences the language learning process. For this reason, it is relevant to affirm that no matter the amount of hours your immerse learners into a language atmosphere if they are neither willing, nor interested to learn.

During the first English lessons with the group of students, they expressed that they were unable to learn the language because it was difficult; they did not like it since they did not see the purpose to use the language for; and they had bad experiences with previous English teachers. All these factors affected the students' motivation, and that, affects the development of the class.

Knowing this and in order to raise students' motivation, I started to implement activities that involved body movement *(Kinaesthetic Activities)* like Simon Says, matching *(Pasting flashcards around the classroom, then, giving students the names in order to link the words and the images)*, acting like animals and making sounds that represent each one, and competitions*.* Because of students at this age *(7-9 years old)* are *"more enthusiastic and lively (Cameron, 2001:1)"*, they responded positively and were expected to participate in the whole

class. In the following classes, I asked students –as a warm up- information from previous classes. When I showed them the flashcards, most of them raised their hand to take the floor. It seems that those activities used were so engaging that students responded positively with the structures and with the vocabulary expected. Seeing this, I continued to implement these sort of activities.

Strengths

Establishing Rapport

The perception students have of you as the teacher is key in the development of the classes *(Brown, 2000)*; moreover, it affects the students' interest of the subject. That is the reason because of establishing a good rapport with the students made them to be more engaged and willing to learn the language. During this implementation, it was evidenced that students had a poor perception of English teachers since, what teacher explained to me, they didn't like to work with practitioners and when I arrived to class, they complained for having me there.

To avoid the issue previously mentioned, I tried to create a comfortable and positive atmosphere in which students felt free to express their feelings towards the English class and encourage them to propose activities which they enjoy and assist the language learning. In other words, to create *"rapport"*, which is defined by Brown (2000) as *"the relationship or connection you establish with your students, a relationship which is built on trust and respect and that leads to students' feel capable, competent, and creative (p.421)"*. Therefore, after the third or fourth class, students started to show happiness for having me there, by means of their behaviour and expressing words of thank like *"-Teacher, tan bueno que*

vino" or "-¡Por fin la clase de inglés!". They started telling me about their school day and showed me the homework they have done; they started valuing the boundaries we were built since they showed respect and they trusted on me.

Based on this experience, I filled myself with positive energy, the energy that *"drives students towards higher attainment (Brown, 2000:422)"*, and that allowed me to carry out lessons successfully.

Portfolios as a tool to motivate students

The use of the portfolios was a very helpful strategy to motivate students at the beginning of the English classes and the reason was that students appropriated the portfolio as their own. They were captured by the idea of being allowed customize their portfolios using images of characters they liked and materials like glitter and foamy paper.

The idea of asking students to create and decorate their portfolios instead of simply providing them with a folder came to me during my initial role as observer of the group, before I became their teacher. It called my attention in one of those classes how much students liked Arts and Crafts, and for that reason I decided to try to engage them with this strategy from the first day we started the English class.

LINGUISTIC OUTCOMES

During the implementation process, lesson planning was aligned to some of the standards proposed *in the "Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lengua*

Extranjera (Guide 22)". This guide informs teachers what are the competences learners should achieve in English at the different levels of Colombian education.

The time for English class was two (2) hours per week during three (3) months, two academic terms approximately. However, it is important to notice that students did not have all the classes since there were different activities that interfered with the schedule of the class, like teacher's meetings, children's day celebration, or festivities. In total students received fifteen (15) hours of English class. This scarce exposure to English learning activities made it impossible to attain the initial language goals proposed at the beginning of the implementation and take students to the target level of language proficiency, which was A1.

Moreover, it is relevant to explain that the school had two groups of second graders which were assigned to two practitioners respectively. By the time the English classes began, there were nineteen (19) students in my group. They were the ones the portfolios implementation started with. However, after one month of time, the two second grade groups became one; thus, the group finished with thirty (30) students, that is to say that my participants were increased in a 5o% approximately, what caused to have to review and practice the topics already taught with the new students in order to balance students in terms of proficiency and knowledge. This slowed down the progress of the group and affected the implementation of portfolios, since we could not complete all the activities that had been planned for the portfolios.

At this stage, the portfolios used for the students who began the implementation with, contained the information of the topics that the new students were started to see; therefore, the portfolios helped to remember and perceived

what students have learnt so far and served as a tool to balance the new students since between them they shared their portfolios.

Despite this, by the end of the process students were able to introduce themselves using the pattern *"My name is…."*, to count from one to ten (1 to 10), to describe fruits and animals using colours and numbers, and to mention some means of transportation like car, train, boat, and airplane. This information, could be found in each of the students' portfolios *(See Appendix #2).*

Development of the language skills and assessment

According to the students' profile in the development of the four skills *(Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking)*, it was noticed that:

1. In Reading, even though learners were not used to practicing this skill neither in the native language, nor in the foreign language, they associated successfully images with vocabulary and simple sentences already taught.

2. In writing, as students were still so young, they were just starting to learn how to write in their native tongue. Although they answered questions, wrote words and sentences accurately, they spent much time doing these activities. This was a difficult task for them, but at the end, they showed progress. They were able to answer questions about personal information, their families *(their relatives),* and the description of some fruits and animals *(See Appendix #2, image #3).*

3. In Listening, there was a noticeable advance, and students progressed from not understanding anything at all to being able to follow my instructions and questions when using simple structures like *"Show me the marker", "point the*

boat", "Is that a car?", thus, they answered correctly with the requested information.

4. In Speaking, students were highly motivated since they wanted to participate and always raised their hands in order to take the floor and answer what I asked them. At the end, they were able to ask and answer questions related to school supplies, members of the family, fruits, animals, and means of transportation. Additionally, in terms of pronunciation, they evidenced their progress in the great effort made to pronounce accurately the vocabulary of the new words, especially in words like "mother" and "father" that contain the phoneme *"ð"*.

Finally, the use of portfolios permitted to collect all these information about the students' progress in three skills: reading, writing, and listening.

In relation with the speaking skill, this ability was difficult to be recorded for the portfolio; however, students were assessed in this skill using different activities performed orally in which they answered the questions asked and showed their mastery of words and simple structures studied in class.

Although the portfolios are supposed to collect the best work done by the students, they included almost all the activities developed in class even if they were not done correctly. That problem was due to students' youth and lack of a critical view about their performance. In other words, if they liked an activity because it had images, they put it in the portfolios just because they liked the drawings even if it was full of mistakes. Anyway, students felt comfortable showing their productions and for this reason, students were not afraid, nor anxious to show their products since they did not perceive the appraisal in which

they were involved in those moments as an actual test. Besides, guided by the teacher, students were able to show in their portfolios their comments about the classes, the activities, and their own language process. Thanks to those activities the practitioner learnt interesting information not only about students' progress but also about what kind of activities were more successful and interesting for the children as well as those that did not work at all.

Language Learning Strategies

Based on the learning strategies students used in order to accomplish the goals, it was identified the following:

1. For reading strategies, the most remarkable learning strategies evidenced were the use of prior knowledge to think about the topic and make predictions about the probable meaning of the text. These strategies were specially demonstrated when students were showed images and words they already knew. Students participated by saying aloud what they thought about the text; besides and their partners added their ideas to the ones already stated. It was seen that students used their portfolios to show the teacher the information related to the topic; therefore, they created an association between what the teacher said and the images they had in their portfolios.

2. For listening strategies, it was noticed that pupils were trained to think about what they were going to listen. In other words, learners were showed some images or told some words related to the topic, then, they were asked to pay attention to what was being asked. For instance: Learners

were showed some images related to a farm; after that, they were asked to focus on the farm animals *(the names of those animals).*

3. For speaking strategies, the use of minimal responses was promoted. I assisted them to *"build up a stock of minimal responses that they can use in different types of exchanges (NCRLC[2], 2004)".* This included statements like *"Excuse me, I don't understand"*, *"Could you repeat?"*, *"It's clear!"* among others. In this sense, these statements helped students to indicate *"understanding, agreement, doubt, and other responses to what another speaker is saying (NCRLC, 2004)".*

4. Related to the writing skill, students were just starting to learn how to write in their mother tongue; therefore, they were constantly asked to copy sentences in their notebooks related to the topics and taught worksheet with words dotted the have to follow for them to enhance the quality of their handwriting.

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[2] The National Capital Language Resource Center.

CONCLUSIONS

Portfolios were a useful tool to provide feedback due to the fact that teacher and student focused their attention on specific mistakes made in the activities and in class. In this sense, learners took advantage of this time to make questions about topics or patterns they did not understand when the whole group was present. Students appreciated these corrections and in the following classes they were able to come up with the expected performance. Besides, portfolios aimed to help students when they did not remember particular vocabulary or patterns in order to complete the task successfully.

Portfolios allowed to have a frame of reference about what kind of activities were more successful and useful in this context in which the English class took place. This permited to have more engaging and interesting classes that motivated students.

Moreover, portfolios provided a framework to examine students in a broader way since it was possible to observe all their work; nevertheless, this strategy demanded plenty of classes and continuous production of artifacts in order to have a good frame to assess students, what is not always posible in a context similar to the one this implementation.

On the other hand, portfolios can be a hard tool for teachers to implement since they are time consuming. This is especially significant when they are being implementig in large classes.

Finally, when the students have the opportunity to create their portfolios, they became engaged and motivated in the English classes and they appropriate

portfolios as their own. In this sense, they feel that they are participating and being integrated in the language process.

  As a final note, it would interesting to start exploring the use of e-portfolios which would provide a large range of resources that can help students to portray their progress in all language skills and assist teachers in the development of interesting classroom activities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix # 1
Observer Reflection Format

Task No 1: The Colours		Date: March, 11th/ 2014
Linguistic aim: **At the end of the lesson students will be able to describe flags using the colours.**	_Professional aim_: **At the end of the lesson teacher will be able to develop learners writing skills using vocabulary related to colours, also to notice if the lesson plan developed fill all the necessities that students need to develop writing skills; besides, teacher will notice if the seating arrangement stated was successful for learners interaction.**	_Background knowledge:_ *I assumed that most learners know the names of the colours.*
Materials and resources: *Flashcards, markers, board, worksheets, and portfolios.*		
STAGE	**PROCEDURE**	**DESCRIPTION**
Engage	**T. will show Ss. some flashcards about colors (Blue, red, yellow, green, orange, violet), then, T. will ask Ss. about the name of this colors, they will repeat it, after that, Ss. will be shown the name of the colors.**	**-It was perceived that the learners already knew the name of the colors in view of the fact that when students were asked for the names of the colors the answer them in English.**

Study	**T. will put, in several parts of the floor, some flashcards of colors, then, T. will say one color, Ss. must go to the color T is saying, and then, T. will say other color and they will do the same, and so on.**	
Engage	**T. will be shown some flags of countries in the world, Ss. will identify the colors of each flag.**	**-This activity was successful as students were able to follow the instruction when playing the game; nevertheless, when students were asked to organize the classroom in roads again, they started to fight and to make a lot of noise, so time was wasted, in other words, problems of discipline may occur when developing activities that imply to move chairs in order to leave a space in the classroom.**
Activate	**Ss.will be delivered a worksheet about flags. Here they will write, with the help of the T. the name of the country that each flag corresponds to, then, they will fill the gaps of some sentences, and finally, using the name of the colors, the will describe the flags. After this, Ss. will be given a flag, they will write, taking into account the sentences provided before, to write the description of the flag, finally, Ss. will have the chance to create their**	**-Students identified the countries that**

	own flag, using the colors they want, and then, write the description. **Ss. will pick the images and the stickers they brought to start customizing their portfolios.**	correspond to the flags successfully. **-Students were motivated as they had the opportunity to colour the flags, also, students had the chance to start improving their writing skills inasmuch as they had to fill the gaps using the vocabulary of the colors that learners have already learnt. However, the activity could not be completed as there was not enough time.** **-Time was not enough to achieve the activity, so it was leave it as homework.**
Remember that reflection must revolve around the following questions: When giving instructions, students understood what they had to do as body language to reinforce the understanding, so Little of Spanish was used. Nevertheless, when asking learners to reorganize the chairs in roads, problems of discipline were presented, so for the next time, if there an activity which imply students movement or space, will be performed in the court.		
Reflection on action:		
Student's responses		

A. The instructions were well provided, that was evidenced due to the fact that students did what he asked without the necessity of using L1. Also teacher has good voice projection and body language. As Brown (2002) states that one of the keys of good teaching is good voice projection; in order to be heard by all the students in the classroom and body language to help the students to understand the messages that we as teachers want to transmit. Also it was evidence the importance of good articulation instead of slowed speech to help the students understand the meaning of the words.

B. All the material used by the teacher was appropriate to the age and was well manage to facilitate the student's language process. Also, it was adapted to the grade using simple vocabulary.

C. The four skills were developing although the lesson was focused on writing. They practice their listening at the time in which they hear the instructions and questions, reading; when they wrote the colors by reading from the board and also in the worksheet, speaking due to the teacher asked to all the students said and repeat the colors' name, and finally writing due to they wrote the colors' names many times.

D. The use TPR in basic level is a good way to support the verbal messages with actions. According to Asher (1969) it is good for synesthetic students who need always be active in class and also, students enjoy spending time out of their chairs. This was evidence since all were actively participating.

E. Something to improve at the moment of use TPR activities is the use of techniques to avoid misbehavior problems due to some students misunderstand the activity doing something different and started to play rude. The next time is important to

consider the time that the students probably will take moving their chairs and organizing the classroom in order to have time to explain and finished all the activities during the class time. Because there was not time to finished the worksheet and had to be assigned as homework.

F. The students had good response toward the activities. In the first part, most of the learners were actively participating, and others we consider are shy so for this reason they did not participate but the teacher asked them to participate and told to those who were participating actively give to their partners the opportunity to participate and they did it

G. During the "frozen" games which involved TPR all the students were excited to participate and do what the teacher ask them. Although some of them were rude the teacher remembered them that they have to respect their partners and participate in a good way.

H. In general during the class was evidence the students' understanding due to the fact that they use the language and perform most of the instructions given in English.

I. Students see the teacher with respect and for that reason they try to do what he ask and also when they have doubts they do not feel afraid to ask him.

J. They feel comfortable toward the teacher and as brown (2002) states that is very important body posture and showed confidence in the classroom in order to create an environment of respect and authority, which is very important in order to control the class and the teacher be seem by the students as a model.

Professional growth

A. The lesson design was at the level of the Ss. as it was achievable due to the fact the amount of input they received, so it was reflected in the production. Nonetheless, the activity was too long to Ss. finish in class, so T. had to leave the activity as homework.

B. Teacher provided enough input to Students. To carry out the activities; besides, Teacher monitored Students. In order to assist them in the case they did not understand and needed more explanation.

C. The material used was according Ss. likes, and it was colorful and the size needed which they can see even if they were in the back.

D. As Ss. had previous knowledge about the colors (It was perceived in the engage activity since they were asked the name of the color, and they know the name in English) they were motivated to participate; also, they had the opportunity to improve

their listening skills in view of the fact that they had to listen carefully the instruction when they were playing the game "Frozen".

E. Since they have already known the name of the colors, it was easy to explain them how these adjectives fixed in the discretional sentences.

F. The lesson was guided by the T. to the Ss., they worked individually and the T. monitored them.

__Linguistic outcomes__

A. The activity was implemented in order to provide Ss. a lot of input for them develop the last activity which were focused on writing, they had write accurately the words in the blanks of the descriptive sentences; besides, they had to listen carefully in order to pronounce accurately the words.

B. It was evidenced interest by the students, they try do their best at the moment teacher were doing the activities right.

C. The activities performed during the class allowed interaction between the students and also with the teacher when they ask and participate.

Appendix #2

Image 1: Student's portfolios

Image 2: Writing and Matching activity

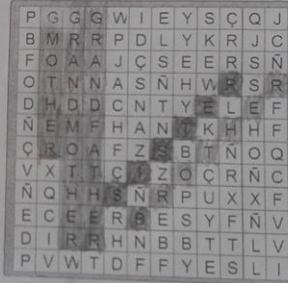NAME: CAMILO Q°O

DATE: TODAY IS WEDNESDAY MAY 7TH/2014

1. Write the relationship between the members of the Phineas' Family and Phineas.

He is Ferb.
He is my BROTHER

She is Candance.
She is my SISTER

He is Lawrence.
He is my FATHER

Hello, I'm Phineas.

She is Linda.
She is my MOTHER

She is Betty Jo.
She is my GRAND MOTHER

He is Clyde.
He is my GRAND
FATHER

2. Answer the following questions.

- Linda is the Phineas MOTHER
- Lawrence is the Phineas FATHER
- Ferb is the Phineas BROTHER
- Candace is the Phineas SISTHER
- Betty Jo is the Phineas GRAND MOTHER
- Clyde is the Phineas GRAND FATHER

3. Look for the words related to Family Members.

P	G	G	G	W	I	E	Y	S	Ç	Q	J
B	M	R	R	P	D	L	Y	K	R	J	C
F	O	A	A	J	Ç	S	E	E	R	S	Ñ
O	T	N	N	A	S	Ñ	H	W	R	S	R
D	H	D	D	C	N	T	Y	E	L	E	F
Ñ	E	M	F	H	A	N	T	K	H	H	F
Ç	R	O	A	F	Z	S	B	T	Ñ	O	Q
V	X	T	T	C	U	Z	O	Ç	R	Ñ	C
Ñ	Q	H	H	S	Ñ	R	P	U	X	X	F
E	C	E	E	R	B	E	S	Y	F	Ñ	V
D	I	R	R	H	N	B	B	T	T	L	V
P	V	W	T	D	F	F	Y	E	S	L	I

- MOTHER
- FATHER
- SISTER
- BROTHER
- GRANDMOTHER
- GRANDFATHER

HOMEWORK: Is your turn. Look Phineas family tree, and make your own, write, draw, and color your family tree.

"Es tu turno. Mira el árbol familiar de Phineas, y haz el tuyo escribe, dibuja, y colorea tu árbol familiar".

Image 3: Writing Activity.
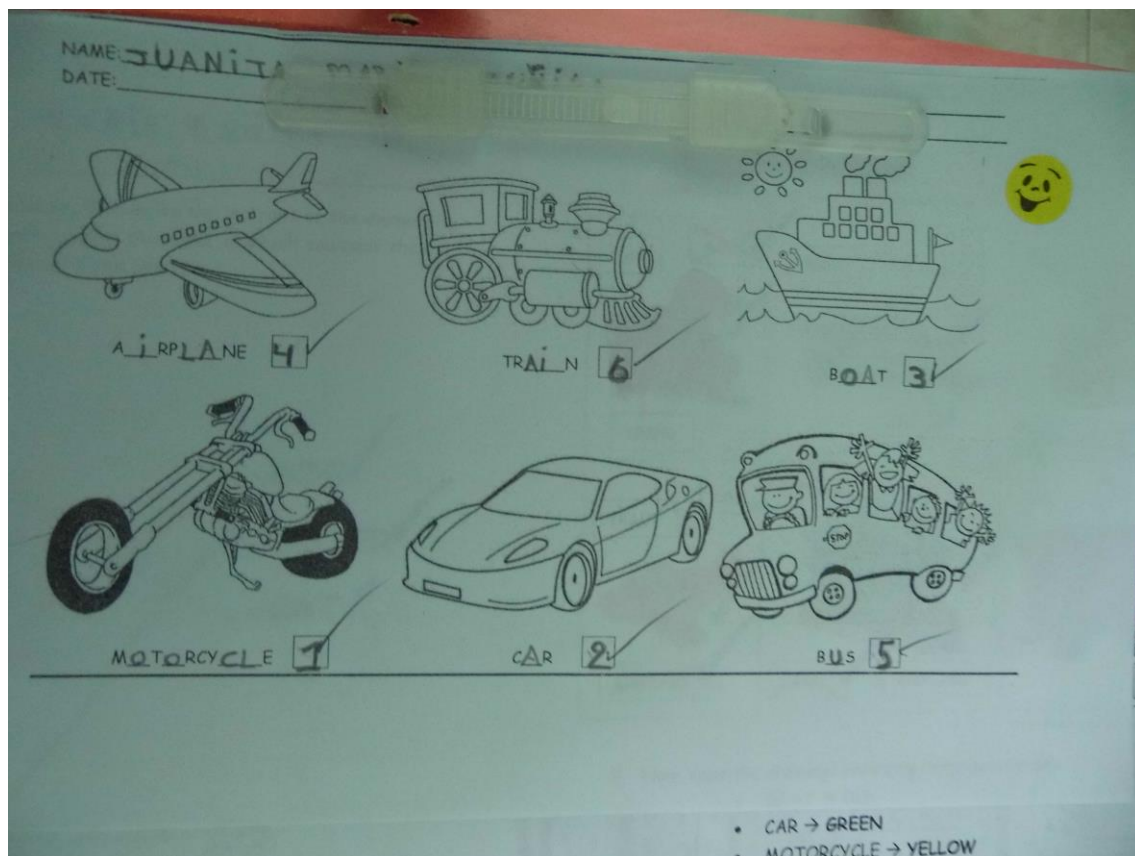

Image 4: Listening and Reading Activity.

Image 5: Reading Activity.

Image 6: Listening Activity.

Images 7 & 8: Flashcards.

Image 9: Student's Comments.