

**IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO TEACH  
ENGLISH TO BOTH THIRD AND FOURTH GRADES ACCORDING TO THE  
STUDENTS' CONTEXT AND PREFERENCES AT SAN AGUSTIN SCHOOL  
IN POPAYÁN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research was based on Communicative Language Teaching and was carried out at the third and fourth grades of San Agustin Primary School during the 2007 school year (February-November). The purpose of this research was to implement communicative activities in the English classes with groups of students from 7 to 10 years old. The activities were planned according to the students' context, likes and preferences. The communicative approach allowed the students to get involved in real life situations through dialogs, games and role plays.

At the beginning of this process the classes were devoted to give the students some basic topics in order to get them involved in the English learning. Later, the classes were focused on the development of communicative skills through short dialogs, interviews, etc. which allowed the students to participate in an active and enjoyable way in the classes' activities.

This experience was gratifying for every member of the research group since it allowed us to grow professionally and individually.

## INTRODUCTION

In most countries, English has become the most important language. It is the main foreign language people mostly choose to learn. Its implementation has been increasing due to the influence of the media, technology and globalization. For this reason, it is placed in the highest position in the hierarchy of languages spoken and used in the world.

For most people, to speak only one language is not enough. In a world that every day creates societies connected to each other, English has begun to take a very important place in human reality. According to the ever changing needs of the present world, a person needs to have a good proficiency level of English in order to face current situations, such as working, traveling, trading, studying, and communicating with others. In addition, the developed countries influence other countries to use English as a tool for self-improvement in personal, social, commercial, and cultural terms.

Colombia does not escape the influence of the developed countries, most of which comes from the U.S.A. Its influence has always had effects on the Colombian trends thanks to its media and advances in technology. Canada and the U.K. are other countries that are also exerting a strong influence on Colombia, due essentially to their film and music production. For this reason, English is playing an important role in a society which is turning into a globalized and trading one. In the street, shopping malls and on television, advertisements with texts in English can be found almost everywhere one looks, showing its relevance.

Throughout the years, English has been primarily taught as a school subject. The Colombian educational system did not consider the huge amount of possibilities that it could bring to its students. Then, it was just a requirement like mathematics or science. English as a subject taught and learned in the classrooms all over Colombia has implied a different analysis, especially in public institutions. Nevertheless, times have changed, people's needs have changed, and with the strong influence of the developed world, the perception of education has changed as well. Thus, many different teaching methods have been implemented lately, especially in private institutions, due to the resources, both physical and economical that they have and according to the profile they want their learners to have.

In view of the present situation of English teaching in Colombia, and in order to offer a more meaningful way of learning it, this research project proposes the use of Communicative English Teaching as the approach to teach this language to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students in the primary section of San Agustin School in Popayán. As in most public institutions, English in San Agustin is taught as another subject, therefore it is difficult to find students, especially in primary school, with high linguistic competences.



## 1. JUSTIFICATION

Everywhere in the world the learning of English has become as necessary as a car or as a cell phone in terms of global development. Therefore several approaches or methods of learning a language have appeared on the educational scene, especially during the last one hundred years, such as the Grammar Translation Method (1850-1950); the Direct Method (1890-now); Audio-lingual method Structuralist view of language (1960-1970); Structural-Situational Method (1960-1980); Humanistic approaches (1970-1980), a movement based on the assumption that language classes were places of fear for language learners; specifically associated with the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Suggestopaedia, and Total Physical Response; Functional syllabuses – Communicative Language Teaching 1 (1970-1990); Communicative methodology – Communicative Language Teaching 2 (1975-now); Test-Teach-Test (1980-now); Task-based approaches and Negotiated Syllabus (1985-now); Lexical views of language (1990-now); Output - Feedback (1995-now); Noticing (also known as 'consciousness-raising') (1995-now); Grammaticization (1999-now); and The Modern Integrated Language Teacher (2002).<sup>1</sup>

Some of these approaches have achieved good results; some others have been effective depending on the context in which they are used. Communicative Language Teaching, among those methods, is found as one relevant option in the learning of the target language as well as the most

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<sup>1</sup> LOW, Charles (2003). Integration not eclecticism: a brief history of language teaching, 1853 – 2003. <http://www.ihworld.com/ihjournal/articles/03ABRIEFHISTORY.pdf>

popular one, according to an important number of degree projects made in the Modern Languages Program in the University of Cauca that took this method as the basis for developing their ideas. This approach allows the learner to practice the language using conversations from different real situations. Besides, it allows the learner to be constantly thinking in the foreign language, in an attempt to communicate details about their daily life. Moreover, the Communicative Approach will be the basis for this research project since it emphasizes the development of oral skills. When you learn a language the first input you receive is always the spoken language and it is the first ability you develop. Therefore the application of this approach will allow the learners to learn English similarly to the way they learn their mother language.

The whole project starts from the premise that an average student from a public school has studied English for eleven years and after this his or her English level would be barely basic. That is, most of them hardly know how to say hello to someone or how to express themselves in certain situations. These statements are based upon personal experiences from the research group in various schools of Popayán and the Colombian Ministry of Education research concerning the Bilingual project. The statistics presented by the Ministry of Education show that only 450.000 of the Colombian people (less than 1%) have an intermediate level of English, while 35.000 (less than 0.08 %) have an advanced level<sup>2</sup>.

One of the causes of this problem is the teachers' training or education. Most teachers are only acquiring the level A2 (basic) in English. Most of them are not prepared to teach English, because they have either a poor level of English or a lack of pedagogical knowledge. This has to do with the problems

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education of Colombia (2006) [www.mineducacion.gov.co/cvn](http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/cvn)

that learners have in studying the foreign language in the English courses offered in some institutions, and building up their knowledge.

Less demand by the students means fewer requirements for the teachers. Everywhere in the city schools, English courses are being taught, but none of them can guarantee to their students a good communicative level of the language. Due to the fact that, in part, the English level required for the teachers in schools is not the highest, the teachers are not concerned with being up to date and improving their skills in the language (according to the statistics the MEN presented in 2006, shown above). As a result, the students are limited by the teacher's knowledge, leaving aside the desire to learn and investigate new things in terms of English.

A student in search of new experiences and new challenging goals, motivated by the competition for success in this modern world needs to have a basic knowledge of English. A foreign language such as English can provide the student with the opportunity to go abroad and have access to the modern world, a world in which technology has become one of the most important things in student's progress, as well as in the development of society. Speaking English allows the student access to other cultures and their ways of perceiving the world. Likewise, all this implies better opportunities for succeeding in life, with the possibility of obtaining a good economic position and an excellent academic level.

Another factor in this problem is the students' motivation. Due to the fact that Colombia is surrounded by Spanish speaking countries, most of its population does not face the need or motivation to learn a foreign language. When people want to look for job opportunities in the neighboring countries they can communicate there by using their mother tongue, Spanish. It is easier for

Colombians to migrate to those countries than to go to an English or French - speaking one because the latter are geographically too far from our country, in the same way, the travel costs, such as the fare and the visa, are very expensive for an average Colombian to afford.

In order to contribute in the solution to this problematic situation, it is important to take into consideration that learning English implies the development of both linguistic and communicative competences, which, when combined, enable the learner to use the language to interact with others in an understandable and meaningful way. Therefore, Communicative Language Teaching will be implemented in San Agustin School as a strategy to provide the students with the linguistic and communicative competence necessary to express themselves and to understand others in real situations; as well as exercises and frequent opportunities for conversational practice. In brief, the aim of this research project is to give the learners of San Agustin School a solid background, which they can internalize and apply in different situations, improving their English communicative levels.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Can Communicative Language Teaching offer the students of third and fourth grades at San Agustin School in Popayán a more effective way of learning English than the traditional one used in public schools?

In Colombia, education in public schools is facing problems concerning the level of proficiency of English teachers, students, and, even the structure of the educational system. Based upon these assertions, it would be appropriate to mention three relevant issues taken from our own experience as students from primary and secondary schools, as the starting points for this research: the students' lack of motivation in primary school; the number of hours dedicated to the teaching of English, and the methodologies used by teachers in public schools.

Lack of motivation is a problem that is present in education in Colombia, according to Zuleta (1985), because children are involved in acquiring knowledge without taking into consideration their interests. They are not respected, nor considered as "thinking people", nor as investigators. If they are obliged to repeat things they get bored with the activities in class. This issue has been a main factor in the field of foreign language learning.

In relation to that, certain behaviors can be observed in primary and secondary school students. One of the most common behaviors, and most relevant for this research project, is the indifference shown towards the teacher's methodology. Whether it is boring, misapplied, or suffers a lack of

complementary factors that would help the teacher to attract the students' attention, it, therefore, results in the students' lack of interest, leading to the low level that they show as the result of exams, homework, oral presentations, etc., which also has to do with the way methodologies and testing forms are being applied.

Another drawback that is considered relevant is time. That is to say, the number of hours dedicated to the learning of English inside and outside the classroom is not enough and not sufficient to develop the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. In the language learning community, the more contact the learner has with the target language, the more efficient his or her learning will be.

The third problem has to do with the methodologies used by teachers in public schools in Colombia, due to the fact that English has been considered as a class subject, without taking into account the way a foreign language should be taught. That is, not only writing any given topic on the board and getting the students to copy it in their notebooks and repeating it, but working on the communicative skills and teacher/student interaction as well. For instance, students in primary and high school, who have studied English for eleven years in their schools, do not have the communicative competence needed in order to understand or at least follow the gist of a conversation, nor the linguistic competence to understand what they read or listen to.

According to the Ministry of Education, less than one percent of the population of Colombia, including the public schools students, has an average level in this language<sup>3</sup>, which is, of course, alarming due to the importance that an English-speaking person has in the world today, in terms of working,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

studying and traveling opportunities. This is the reason for the search for new methodologies, leading the students themselves to identify and find a solution to a given problem with the help from the teachers.

In brief, the students' lack of motivation in primary school, the number of hours dedicated to the teaching of English, and the methodologies used by teachers in public schools are the problems which were considered the most relevant to be tackled in this research project, since they have always influenced the learning of English in Colombia, including, of course, San Agustín School in Popayán, which was the subject of our research.

### **3. OBJECTIVES**

#### **3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

- ❖ To implement the Communicative Approach as a basis for teaching English to both third and fourth grade children at San Agustin Primary School taking into consideration their likes and the context in which the project was carried out. .

#### **3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

- To identify students' interests, likes and dislikes through the interaction between the teacher and the students in the context of the classroom.
- To study different theories about the process of English acquisition in children that allow the practitioners to guide the learners towards a communicative approach of learning in which they are able to communicate in the target language.
- To provide the students with a comfortable, free-expressing working environment during the research process that facilitates communication inside the classroom.



#### 4. STATE OF THE ART

In the University of Cauca, more precisely in the Foreign Languages Department, we found a number of degree projects concerning the teaching of English through communicative means, mainly in primary schools in Popayán, which resemble, in various ways, our own project. The following are the ones this research group thought were the most helpful due to the similarities found.

In the degree work by Arenas, G. et al (2001), a similar process to the one implemented in our research project was carried out. They worked with intermediate English level students majoring in Modern Languages at the University of Cauca based on some communicative strategies used by students. They state that the students try to communicate in a system that they are building and which students do not dominate completely. Therefore, students use some strategies to grasp as much English as possible. Some of those strategies used by the students are: literal translation, foreignizing, circumlocution, word coinage, appeal for assistance, and message abandonment. (Refer to Conceptual Framework).

Similarly, in our project, the practice teachers noticed that some students from San Agustin School used some of those strategies while communicating. In both contexts, at San Agustin School and at the University of Cauca the input given to the students created a need to use some strategies according to different factors such as a lack of vocabulary, fear, and misunderstanding of a determined message. The use of those strategies allowed the students to be

able to cope with some difficulties in conveying messages, to elaborate their own speech, to take risks in speaking without worrying how many mistakes they might make, and finally to turn into active students participating in oral activities. According to the results of this degree work, the most important strategy used by the University of Cauca students was appeal for assistance. Similarly, the same outcome was observed at San Agustin Primary School by practitioners. The second most used strategy at the University of Cauca was literal translation which was not observed in the classes directed at San Agustin School because students were not still able to make sentences either due to lack of vocabulary or because of not knowing some English grammar structures. However, what the students from San Agustin School used as a second strategy was word coinage since in most classes the students created a non-existing word in the foreign language based on a word from the mother tongue. In spite of the fact that the students did not use the other strategies, they used some gestures and movements to express the non-understanding of the teacher's message. Frowning, shaking the head, and sometimes expressions of anger were the most common reactions shown by the students.

In the end, students showed some similar and different reactions at being exposed to an environment where English was spoken. In spite of the fact that the students did not have the same academic resources regarding didactic materials and equipped classrooms to attend an appropriate class, both groups showed a similar interest in the use of one or two strategies. Consequently, it was appreciated that in both contexts, at San Agustin School and the University of Cauca, there was a constant need of choosing a fitting strategy aiming to accomplish or improve a communicative English level concerning oral activities carried out in the classroom.

In the degree work by Valenzuela et al. (1986) another analogous process to the one carried out during this research project took place. It was developed at the Carlos Villaquiran School, in Popayán, taking into account Widdowson's theory, which relates to teaching and learning a foreign language by means of communication (the Communicative Approach). They state that they "accomplished communicative activities" involving the teacher and the students in the language acquisition process. This in relation to what they called "Real Participation" which "involves" the students in performing their activities consciously and voluntarily in certain conditions, through discussions, group work, etc.

Similarly, in our research project, many activities based on dialogs, pair work, group work were carried out, where the students could express themselves freely according to the topic chosen and some prior preparation in order to perform in the best possible way.

They also state that a foreign language course should help students to handle everyday situations in similar way to that of their mother language, or as they say "providing them with models of the language representing authentic situations in which they will find themselves in real life."<sup>4</sup>

The main idea of what they claim to have done in their research, based on the communicative approach, and which, therefore, is the basis of this research project as well, can be summarized by the following quote: "This approach is based on the fact that a child easily succeeds in learning a language by being exposed to an extensive variety and range of utterances, selected for their

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<sup>4</sup> VALENZUELA et al. (1986) *Language Acquisition as Communication: Psycholinguistics and Sociolinguistics Implications*. P. 46.

situational appropriateness at the moment, rather than by illustrating their particular grammatical principles.”<sup>5</sup>

They later state, about the role of the teacher in the class, that they play a very important part since they are the people who “guide” the students to perform, at what they do, as best as possible; keeping in mind that asking for complete accuracy at the first stages of the process would be counterproductive to the students’ development and the communicative purpose of the activity.

Finally, they conclude that this communicative approach, or as they called it, Real Participation, does work with people who are really interested in acquiring the language, and with a high level of responsibility, since it involves conscious and willing participation.

In the degree work “Implementing the Topic-based Approach to increase the fourth graders’ interest in learning English at Carlos Mario Simmonds School” submitted by Benavides Vela et al (2004), it is stated that the children’s integral development is necessary to foster their interest for the English language. That is to say, children must be taught about the use of English related directly to activities in which they are engaged; or English should be taught with other school subjects (p21).

A similar proposal was implemented at San Agustín Primary School, but with emphasis on the Communicative Approach taking into account some basic elements related to other subjects such as Mathematics, Biology, or Spanish. For example, there were classes devoted to cardinal and ordinal numbers,

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<sup>5</sup> VALENZUELA et al. (1986) *Language Acquisition as Communication: Psycholinguistics and Sociolinguistics Implications*.

wild and domestic animals, the use of adjectives, etc. The latter were used in almost every class in order for the students to review previous topics and learn new things about English at the same time. In this way, the students were engaged in pleasant activities, which let them explore their surrounding world; besides, they recognized that it was also possible to say in a foreign language what we commonly say in our mother tongue (Khan, 1991 in Guillermo Alberto Arévalo et al, 1994:35).

In the same degree work, it is also stated that students in primary school must be motivated to acquire a certain command of the foreign language, specifically speaking and reading skills (p1). Thus, through the Orientation of the Educational Process (**O.P.E.**) this was an important goal to be achieved. In a group and personal reflection we could say that many students nowadays do not like, or even hate English classes, due to the difficulties with grammar at the beginning of an English course. For this reason, we, as a group, tried to stimulate their interest for the English class through the combination of the students' daily life situations and games.

In the degree work "Some Approaches to Non-verbal Communication" submitted by Méndez Astudillo et al (1994), it is stated that "non-verbal language plays an important role in the total communication system". We as teachers must keep this idea in mind because non-verbal communication provides a tremendous quantity of information, not only in terms of academic topics, but in terms of personal feelings. In this way, gestures give us information about many particular situations in our daily lives (Birdwhistell, 1970).

At San Agustín Primary School, non-verbal communication was significantly used in every class in order for the students to make themselves clear about

the activities carried out throughout the **O.P.E.** Besides, the students and the teacher tried to use gestures as much as possible in order to convey the English messages in a clearer manner. In this way, it was possible to reinforce with gestures what both they and we were talking about at any time in the class.

Due to the obvious influence of our mother tongue in this research project, some of the activities were planned and undertaken taking the Spanish language as the starting point. In a previous research project at the University of Cauca called “The Realization of Language as Communication” (Popayán, Casquete Gómez et al, 1990), a describing activity was carried out that way, “using their mother tongue, the pupils described their classmates, famous people (actors, singers), pictures and common places. Afterwards the teacher translated the descriptions and made comments. This activity motivated the pupils to speak and produce concepts of their own, using the English language”. In fact, this activity permitted the students to improve their level of communication and motivation since the mother tongue created a kind of background which gave the students a feeling of confidence, that is to say, that once the students knew what the topic was going to be, they were not afraid of misunderstandings, mistakes, or not being able to grasp that topic.

This kind of activity played an important role at the beginning of the course, since one of the most important things at this stage was to familiarize the students with the things around them, the things which they deal with every day. In this way, the students were asked, in their mother tongue, about what they could see in the classroom. Afterwards, the teacher translated this vocabulary and as an additional activity, those things were labeled in order for the students to remember and to see them as much as possible.

It is relevant to mention the importance of the activities developed during the course of the classes, above all when those activities involve children. Games, for example, let children learn in a pleasant way and also permitted themselves to feel motivated instead of getting bored when facing with something completely new for them, in this case a foreign language. For example in the research project “The Realization of Language as Communication”, it is stated that they, the project members, as the researchers, were sure that recreational activities encouraged the students to participate more during the activity and that participation was vital for the students’ motivation. As well as the ones above, some of the recreational activities used in this research project were: lotteries, riddles, crosswords, contests and alphabet soups.

The degree project Language Acquisition as Communication, by Tribaldos et al. (1984), was based on the concept of Celestin Freinet, Franceso Tonucci and Widdowson, the pioneer of the Communicative Approach. The project was implemented at the Carlos Villaquiran School. The authors as practice students planned the English classes taking into account real situations of the students’ everyday lives which were written down in school diaries. The evaluation was made keeping in mind each students’ ability in a continuous process. At the end of this process, the researchers realized that the use of the Communicative Approach allows the real participation and self expression of the students in their knowledge acquisition process, and that investigation can be carried out as a pedagogical process.

Chávez et al. (1996) based their degree project “Cooperative activities to enhance motivation in the learning of English in eight to nine year old children” on the Cooperative Learning Approach, and put it into practice in Alejandro de Humboldt and Melvin Jones schools with third grade children.

They used the cooperative learning theories in order to provide the students with effective and useful strategies and alternatives which stimulated their creativity, spontaneity, imagination and observation taking into account their daily lives and their conceptions about the world. As a result of the project, the practice teachers found that the use of cooperative activities enhanced students' motivation and fostered meaningful and enjoyable learning of the English language, as well as creating a positive classroom environment.



## 5. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

The third and fourth grades of San Agustin School served as the contextual framework for this project. The school is located in Popayán at 6-45,7<sup>th</sup> Street. In socioeconomic terms the students belong to the middle class. The total number of students is 2059, divided into 103 students in transition, 704 in primary school, 1252 in secondary school. The school has 77 teachers, 73 of them working full-time. In the administrative area, 15 staff members look after the business of the entire school, including both the primary and secondary section.

The San Agustin School was founded by the Vincentian Community. It is an institution of formal education at pre-school, primary and secondary levels. The main objective of San Agustin School is to encourage the integral development of its students through ethical, moral, and spiritual principles in order to create their project of life in the environment where they live.

The vision of this institution is to offer an all-round development aimed at a good education. It considers the family as the base of orientation, with some educational alternatives that foster human development. The purpose is to produce committed people, through the practice of Christian and human values.

The history of San Agustin Institution began with the arrival of the Vincentian Sisters to Popayán. They came from France, devoted to two fundamental activities: Health and Education. Wealthy people helped the sisters to come

from Buenaventura and they arrived in Popayán in 1888. They were housed in the Primo Pardo Hospital. They helped poor people in terms of health. Then they wanted to expand their labor to the educational field, so they founded a little school in front of the hospital. That activity was well accepted by all the people in the city. Then a bigger institution was built next to the San Agustin Church. This new institution was managed by Sister Antonieta Lafay. The San Agustin School was devoted to educating the working class children.

The San Agustin Institution was founded by Sister Maria Rafols and the priest Juan Bonal who got the inspiration from San Agustin's pedagogy that was based on the solution of problems, and the search for welfare. This pedagogy suggests that the teacher be a booster and a constant evangelist, since the teachers are the base of the learning process, the parents are the creative and participative essence, and society is the place where education is used.

The San Agustin Institution is an academic entity, encouraged by the charisma of its founders Maria Rafols, Juan Bonal and the San Agustin thought. This community supports the integral formation of every individual in order for them to be part of his or her own development. That helps the student to become responsible, and to be able to follow the values of the Gospel freely; in this way, the students commit themselves to the construction of a fair and fraternal society based on spiritual, ethic and moral principles.

As moral and religious beliefs and concepts are crucial to the creation of the San Agustin Institution, it is worth speaking as well about the social conditions present in Popayán for the possible development of those beliefs regarding education.

Education in Popayán is divided into two sectors, public and private. In the public context, it may be said that the teachers' level of English is lower than the level of those working in private schools according to our personal observations. Likewise, public institutions have fewer resources to provide students with facilities: laboratories, books, pedagogical aids, among other things for them to develop their learning abilities. As a result, these students do not have the opportunity to keep in contact with topics related to English learning through the Internet, books or contact with English speaking -people, for example.

On the other hand, private schools provide their students with most of the elements needed in the acquisition of a foreign language, from the best dictionaries to the best laboratories passing through some of the best teachers, allowing them to develop a better level of proficiency, including, of course, better fluency and pronunciation. Likewise, the students in private schools have an additional reason for learning a foreign language: some of them have the possibility to go abroad to continue their studies, or simply for pleasure.

## 6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following are the concepts that will be used throughout the development of this research project. These were taken from different sources which were the most suitable regarding the topic of this project.

**COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING** (also referred to as The Communicative Approach to the Teaching of Foreign Languages): According to Orellana (1998) Communicative Language Teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Unlike the audio-lingual method of language teaching, which relies on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can leave students in suspense as to the outcome of a class exercise, which will vary according to their reactions and responses. The real-life simulations change from day to day. Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

**CONTEXT:** Kramersch (1993) claims that the notion of context is a relational one. In each of its five dimensions: linguistic, situational, interactional, as well as cultural and intertextual, it is shaped by people in dialog with one another in a variety of roles and statuses. Because language is at the intersection of the individual and the social, of text and discourse, it both reflects and construes the social reality called "context". The Communicative Approach as the main focus of this project is related to a context where a relationship between the teacher, as a guide and facilitator, and the student, as an active

recipient, develops through their dynamic interaction. Context seen as social reality is closely related to this research because some English situations are adapted to our own reality and or our own culture by means of needs and likes of the students, beginning with the active interaction in and out of the classroom among students, teachers, friends or parents.

**CULTURE:** Taking into account Woodward (2001), who claims that culture “is the feature that characterizes the way of life of a particular group of people, whether they are young, or old, women, or men, or of various national, language or ethnic groups. Culture is about difference and variability and that contains both the potential for opportunity and conflict”. In the Communicative Approach students and teacher interact. Therefore they are exposed to cultural difference, and at the same time, they are learning English and interpersonal relationships. An active exposure from different cultures (e.g. the teacher and the students’ culture) in a host culture, as it could be the case with the San Agustin School, implies working and taking into account students’ needs and likes in order to accomplish an excellent work.

**LANGUAGE:** According to Richards and Rogers (1986) the communicative or functional view of language is the view that language is a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning. The semantic and communicative dimensions of language are more emphasized than the grammatical characteristics, although these are also included.

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE:** According to Broughton (1978), in some parts of the world English is considered a second language, but in the rest of the world English is a foreign language. That is, it is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life. In Colombia as in other countries in the world such as Spain, Brazil or Japan, for example,

Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese respectively are the normal medium of communication and instruction: the average citizen does not need English or any other foreign language to live his daily life or even for social or professional advancement. That is why it is considered pertinent to talk about English as a foreign language throughout this research project.

*“The term ‘foreign language’ is used to denote a language acquired in a milieu where it is normally not in use (usually through instruction) and which, when acquired is not used by the learner in routine situations.”<sup>6</sup>*

Nevertheless, English is becoming more and more necessary for everybody as it is considered the most important foreign language (in non-English speaking countries) for it is the source of new and wider information and possibilities. Therefore its teaching should take a privileged place in our educational system.

SECOND LANGUAGE: According to Bright (1976), there is no learning without exposure. It may be wise to consider the kinds of English to which pupils are normally exposed to and therefore to what they have the opportunity to learn. Of course, exposure does need to be limited to school situations, and what happens outside may be important. It is immediately apparent that even in an English-language school the fields of discourse are restricted to the subjects taught. There will be no opportunity to learn the language of booking a seat in a cinema, answering the doctor’s questions or buying a new shirt. In a non English-language school there will not even be any exposure to the language of history, geography, mathematics or the sciences. The model provided will also be in the teaching mode and the social situation of a teacher in a classroom. Learner participation will generally be

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<sup>6</sup> KLEIN, Wolfgang (1990) Second Language Acquisition. P. 19.

minimal and will consist not of initiating or maintaining a conversation, but of answering specific questions.

*“A second language’ is one that becomes another tool of communication alongside the first language; it is typically acquired in a social environment in which it is actually spoken”<sup>7</sup>*

STUDENT-LEARNER: Champeau de López (1989) states that on the one hand the student is an individual who absorbs the linguistic aspect (“appropriation rate develops according to the student’s intellectual capacity”). On the other hand, in order to build up communicative competence they have to share their knowledge with others so that real language development may take place.

TEACHER: Champeau de López (1989) presents the role of a teacher as a facilitator who guides the students in the communication process and who respects and works on every learner’s learning. Likewise she claims that today’s language teacher must manipulate much more information in several different areas of knowledge. That is to say that it is not only about picking up the text book and teaching it. A much broader training in pedagogy is necessary in order to motivate students in their English learning. The teacher focuses on learning not on teaching, in other words, not on the results but on the process. The Communicative Approach implies a close follow up of the English learning process. This concept is appropriate to the Communicative Approach implemented in this research project since the meaning of Teacher corresponds to the practitioners’ work in the classroom. In other words, the teacher is considered as a person who guides, motivates and follows the students’ learning closely.

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<sup>7</sup> KLEIN, Wolfgang (1990) Second Language Acquisition. P. 19.

TRADITIONAL CLASS: According to practice teachers' experiences, a traditional class is one where the teacher is the core of the class, thus, the teacher is the person who possesses all the knowledge. He is the connexion between the books and the students, and he is the only one who knows what the objectives of the classes are. In addition, in a traditional class, the students present themselves as passive agents that simply receive information from the teacher as the absolute truth. In this class a speechless student is considered as an example of good behavior while a talkative student is considered as a bad one. In other words, silence means discipline and participation indiscipline.

The following concepts are related to the strategies the students used in the degree work by Arenas, G. et al (2001):

Literal translation: The learner translates word by word from the native language (I have 11 years old)

Foreignizing: Using a L1 word by adjusting it to L2 phonologically (computation)

Circumlocution: Describing or exemplifying the target object or action (the thing you open the bottle with)

Word coinage: Creating a non existing L2 word based on a supposed rule; learners make up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept. (natation)

Appeal for assistance: It is used when all else fails, then learners ask for help (what does it mean?)



Message abandonment: The learners start talking about a topic but abandon it because they are unable to continue.

## 7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several theories that support the process of English language teaching in non-English speaking contexts. Those theories provide teachers with broader dimensions on how languages should be taught.

Widdowson (1992) states that the language should not be taught as isolated notions, because people use language to convey meaning through different discourses. He suggests that, according to the learners' needs, likes, or environment, a number of situations could be created in the classroom in order to give them the vocabulary, idioms, sayings and pronunciation, that they will need to express themselves in an appropriate manner when the time demands it. Thus, the class should provide an atmosphere similar to real life in which the students will talk about common, every day situations in English.

Above all, the Communicative approach implies a continuous process which, aside from what is practiced in the classroom, demands a real commitment from the student to keep working and practicing at home, or outside of school in order to get the most out of it. In other words, this approach will generate very good results with active participation from both student and teacher.

According to Littlewood (1981), the Communicative Language Teaching theory pays systematic attention to both communicative and structural aspects of language, combining them into a more-fully communicative approach. The structural view of language concentrates on the grammatical system, describing ways in which linguistic items can be combined from a communicative view just as a single linguistic form can express a number of

functions. In this way, a single communicative function can be expressed in a number of linguistic forms, depending on specific situational and social factors. Based on that, this research intended to introduce students to a communicative environment through meaningful situations related to real life, having them learn the language by using it.

Gardner (1985) affirms that there are nine kinds of intelligences, which are developed by students according to their environment, education and the experience that they have. He states that learning can take place through the development of the logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, verbal-linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual-spatial, existential, and naturalistic intelligences. Unfortunately, the Colombian educational system is mainly centered on teaching both the logical-mathematical and verbal-linguistic intelligences. For this reason, they are culturally considered the most relevant, and the only way to solve problems and express ideas. In this sense, this research project also intended to take into consideration the Multiple Intelligences Theory in order to make the most of the implementation of the Communicative Approach at San Agustin School.

Lessard-Clouston (1997) explains briefly what the Language Learning Strategies theory (**LLS**) is and how it can greatly help both teachers and learners. Several definitions of **LLS** are given in texts like Tarone's (1983) who affirms that **LLS** is a way of developing foreign language competence, that is, linguistic and sociolinguistic skills. Rubin (1987) adds that **LLS** are strategies that the learners have to construct the language structure and apply it progressively in their learning. This theory also states that **LLS** are certain behaviors of the students that they use to help themselves learn new information. The activities of this project aimed at teaching students the communicative ability and facilitating the appropriation of new language,

making them responsible and aware of their own learning, since one of the main objectives of **LLS** is to encourage learners to continue the teacher's work at home.

Dobbs (2001) states that the board is an important language teaching tool because writing on the board offers many benefits; when teachers write while talking, the visual elements stimulate student's interest in what they hear. Besides, visual materials help students understand and remember the new information that the teacher is presenting. The use of the board is more effective and efficient if students also write on it since their learning experience becomes active and dynamic. In this project the use of the board and visual aids (pictures, games) was very useful and necessary when teaching oral exercises because it helped the practice teachers catch the students' attention while making the topics clearer. Therefore, supplying them with a visual record for the class was extremely important.

Byrne (1986) provides teachers with a great variety of practical lessons and activities which will be useful in their every day experiences in the classroom in order to make the class more active and help the students to use the language to communicate. The techniques given are intended to encourage accuracy and fluency in the teaching of English. The activities suggested are designed according to four main types of classroom interactions: class accuracy work, class fluency work, group accuracy work and group fluency work and can be adapted and used in almost any English class by any teacher. The importance of this information in the implementation of this research project is that the techniques described by the author can help the teacher to keep the students active and participating in the classroom by giving them the possibilities to achieve accuracy and fluency when interacting

in the classroom both in whole class and group activities which increase confidence and motivate students to use what they have learned.

Nunan (1989) states that the use of different kinds of tasks in the classroom makes language teaching more communicative since it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which merely goes beyond the practice of language. He defines the communicative task as a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is mainly focused on meaning rather than on form. Likewise he suggests that teachers use the information from learners in planning, implementing and evaluating language tasks as well as providing them with the opportunities to design and select the course content and learning experiences. The reading of this text contributed to this research project with ideas about how to design tasks to encourage communicative competence in the students of San Agustin School according to their preferences which they expressed throughout the school year.

Brumfit (1984) asserts that the use of small groups in language classrooms is recommended *whatever the model of language acquisition or of instruction being followed*. He also says that the quality of language practice may be increased due to the intensity of involvement that small groups provide. And adds that the setting of the group is more natural than that of the full class, which in our case was of 23-28 students, because the size of the small groups is more similar to that of common, regular conversational groups. In this research project the use of group work, especially pair work, was frequently used in the classes where short conversations were performed by the students, two, three or four of them. Consequently, they were able to establish their own pace and level of working in a more comfortable way compared to the scenario they would face in a complete class kind of activity.

In addition, Brumfit quotes a valuable excerpt from Jolly and Early (1974:2) in order to confirm his statement:

*“Psychologically, group work increases the intellectual and emotional participation or involvement of the individual pupil in the task of learning a foreign language. Some pupils are more intelligent than others, while some (not necessarily the same ones) are more gifted in learning languages, some pupils are outgoing, communicative, extrovert personalities, while others are shy, withdrawn introverts. In small groups, all these types of learner can meet and mix, compensating for another’s strong points and deficiencies as language learners.”*<sup>8</sup>

In the Content-Based Approach, Williams in Brumfit et al (1994) stated that the purpose is learning things other than language since the child has the opportunity of exploring the world, finding out pieces of information by themselves, in order to learn it through participating in activities that belong to a child’s world, as stories, songs, sketches, etc. In this approach the different topics allow students to manage their own learning in manageable bites, which have some sort of meaning in terms of how they comprehend the subject as a whole. To participate in these activities certain previous knowledge of the target language is needed.

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<sup>8</sup> BRUMFIT, Christopher (1984). Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching.

## **8. METHODOLOGY**

This research project was composed and developed on two main stages. The first stage consisted of exploring and evaluating the level and previous knowledge of the children of San Agustin School by means of the practitioners' interaction with them, and by the application of a survey (see appendix 1). From then onwards, the research group started teaching them some basic elements of English such as, the numbers, the alphabet, common animals, etc. As Williams and Burden state (1997) when teaching English to beginners, there is a need to start with simple tasks with more control over how they are solved, moving towards more complex activities in such a way that the learners experience their learning as a process. This first stage was planned as an introduction to what the project was intended to do, encouraging communication inside and outside the classroom. In this way, the second stage took the results obtained during the first stage from them, and a variety of conversations were created based on the preferences of the children taken from the survey and some other activities, such as games, songs and movies, in order to achieve that oral communication among students.

This research fits into two of the most commonly-known types of research, Exploratory and Descriptive Research, since the practitioners were interested in exploring the students' behavior towards the implementation of certain teaching methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching and the Multiple Intelligences Theory. In addition, the researchers describe what they

observe in terms of students' reactions to the applied methodologies and whether or not they were significant for the children's learning.

It is also concerned with Applied Research, since "it may at times compromise the methods and the rigor to get usable results needed for a particular purpose. Applied Research may manipulate the research into the setting at hand, balancing rigor against practicality."<sup>9</sup>

The first stage of the project started with testing the students' knowledge of English. In order to obtain organized and systematic results, a survey was designed in which the students had to answer questions related to the learning of English at school; for instance, if they had had any previous English classes before ours, what kinds of topics they worked on in those classes, what kinds of topics they would like to work on in this class, etc.

After having analyzed the data from the survey, the research group developed a class plan intended for the students of each of the groups the practice teachers were in charge of, taking into account a very important aspect that the majority of the students had not had any English class in their primary school life, which is something to be very concerned about, as it reflects the poor state of public primary English education in Colombia.

As it happens, when a new language is taught, the most commonly used topics to introduce that language to the students are, in most cases, the alphabet, the numbers, the animals, the fruits, etc. Despite the fact that this project was based on the Communicative Approach, during the study of these topics drilling activities were used in order to get the students accustomed to the way these new words are pronounced, as well as the way they are written

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sfu.ca/~rptoews/dimen.htm>. October 7th, 2001.



by making almost a mandatory use of their notebooks. This “mandatory” usage of the notebooks, even though it is important for keeping track of what is being studied in class for every learner, was mainly implemented because of the children parents’ requests to make them use their notebooks, and the school teachers’ methodologies. For example, the children asked every time that a new topic was studied in class whether or not they had to write it down in their notebooks, since they had to show their parents that they were, in fact, doing something in their class. This view became a sort of an issue for the research group since it is clear that keeping a written record of a class is not the only way to prove to others that you are learning, or that you are making the most of what is being taught in that class.

The students enjoyed very much learning about animals, numbers, fruits, etc., as this involved a lot of guessing, drawing, and writing-on-the-board games. They were very motivated as these topics are appealing to little children when taught through active processes, as our experience has allowed us to assert.

As the first stage of the project went by and the students started to improve their English level, the practitioners began to think about what kind of activities they would work on for the second part of the school year and the project as well. Based on the Communicative Approach the research group developed a set of conversations taking into account children’s answers in the survey, and their own suggestions, including their family, social, and personal experiences. For example, there was a dialog which talked about professions, so the students picked a profession which they were familiar with, such as pizza maker, housekeeper, secretary, etc. These conversations were designed for two or three students; therefore, establishing groups became a common practice in the class.

In general, the conversations were used to practice the topics studied during the first part of the project in context. For instance, the numbers were used in many dialogs, such as telling the time, phone numbers, describing people and things: two arms, five fingers, etc. In the same way, other conversations were designed to put into practice the rest of those topics and some new ones like the weather, and the parts of the body (see appendix 2).

Towards the end of the school year, the practitioners took some of the above mentioned topics studied throughout the practice to evaluate the students' progress in English. The evaluation was carried out orally, and consisted of establishing a sort of dialog between the teacher and the student(s), by asking questions related to those topics. The students were already familiar with this activity because it had already been used in previous evaluations.

The evaluation results showed that most of the girls liked and learned the content of the English course despite the fact that during this process they did not show the progress that was showed in the final evaluation, in which they were able to understand and to answer what they were being asked, something that did not occur as spontaneously in term evaluations.

## 9. ANALYSIS

### 9.1 SURVEY ANALYSIS

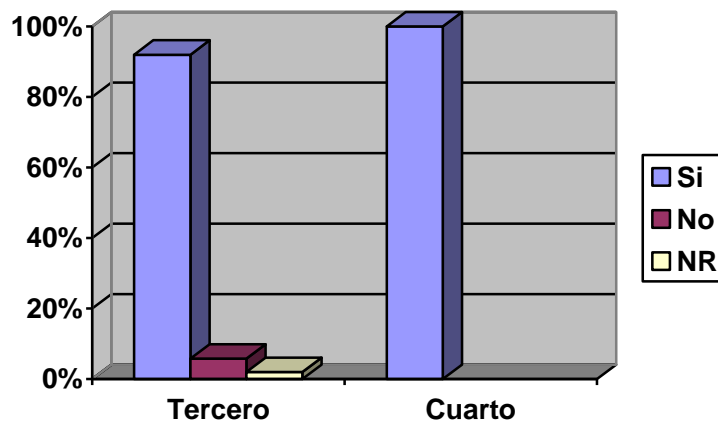
The following are the differences, in graphs, between the third and fourth grades' responses to the survey questions.

Third graders (A y B): 52

Fourth graders (A, B, C): 69

1. ¿Te gusta el inglés?

**GRAPH 1.**



THIRD:

Yes: 48(92%); No: 3(5.8%); DNA (Did Not Answer): 1(2%)

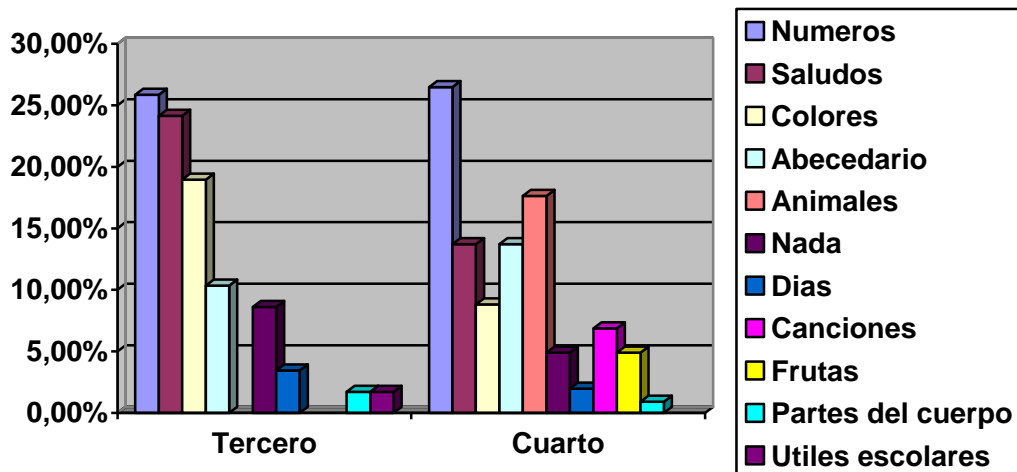
FOURTH:

Yes: 69 (100%)

It can be seen that there is a slight difference between the two courses regarding the liking for English. While one of them (fourth) showed a unanimous fondness to the subject matter, the other one had a few students who were, at first, presumably, not interested in the class, but as weeks went by, none of the practice teachers commented on having any problems with the students' attention and participation during the classes. This led the research group to say that whatever the doubts those students had about an English class, were, in the end, cleared, as the children's attitude towards the class was, most of the times, positive, active and cooperative.

2. ¿Qué recuerdas de lo que has estudiado en la materia de inglés?  
(Multiple choice)

GRAPH 2.



THIRD:

Números: 15 (25.86%)

Saludos: 14 (24.13%)

Colores: 11 (18.96%)

Abecedario: 6 (10.34%)

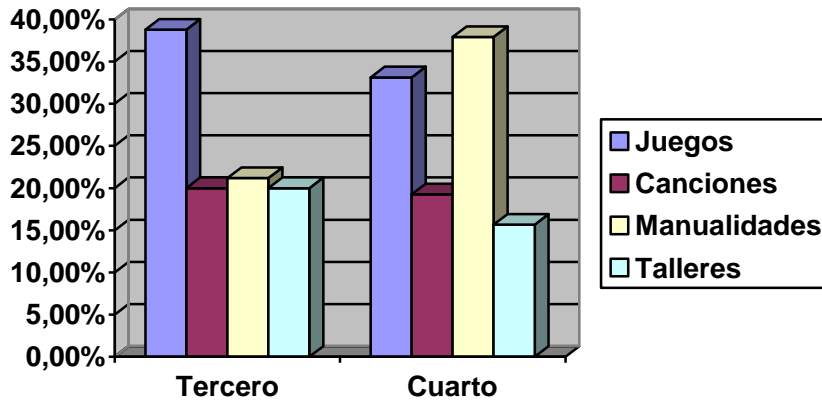
Nada: 5 (8.62%)

Casi todo: 3 (5.17%)	Abecedario: 14 (13.72%)
Días: 2 (3.44%)	Colores: 9 (8.82%)
Partes del cuerpo: 1 (1.72%)	Canciones: 7 (6.86%)
Útiles escolares: 1 (1.72%)	Frutas: 5 (4.9%)
Total: 58	Nada: 5 (4.9%)
FOURTH:	Días: 2 (1.96%)
Números: 27 (26.47%)	Partes del cuerpo: 1 (0.9%)
Animales: 18 (17.64%)	Total: 102
Saludos: 14 (13.72%)	

In this question the students had the possibility of choosing more than one answer, and from what can be seen on the graph, there is an important difference between the two courses in relation to the animals and the colors. The fourth grade students showed a considerable interest on these two topics, while the other group did not recognize them the same way. Other than that, the answers did not have major changes between one grade and the other. They agreed when saying that the numbers is the topic they remembered the most from past courses. In contrast, the songs and fruits were not mentioned from any of third graders.

3. ¿Qué clase de actividades preferirías hacer en clase este año?  
(Multiple choice)

**GRAPH 3.**



THIRD:

Juegos: 35 (38.8%)

Canciones: 18 (20%)

Manualidades: 19 (21.2%)

Talleres: 18 (20)

Total: 90

FOURTH:

Juegos: 55 (33.13%)

Canciones: 32 (19.27%)

Manualidades: 53 (31.92%)

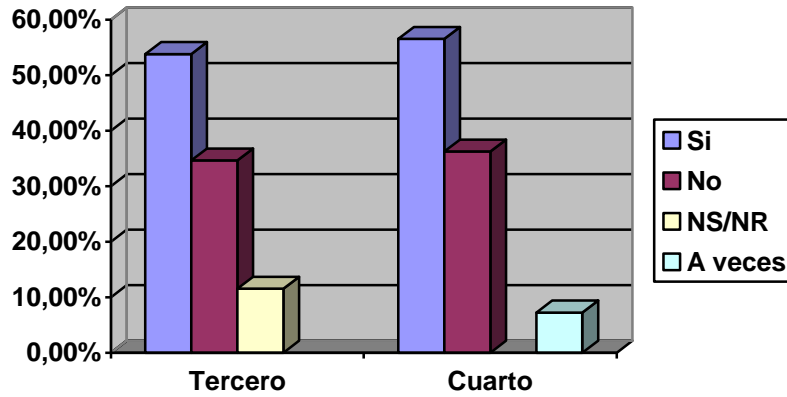
Talleres: 26 (15.66%)

Total: 166

In the question about the kinds of activities they would prefer to do this year, the third grade students showed an obvious tendency to work with games during the classes, due to their age. The other three options had an unvarying response, about twenty percent each, showing no special keenness on any of those three choices. On the other hand, the fourth grade students chose, namely, handcrafts, followed closely by the use of games. Songs and workshops were relegated to third and fourth options respectively.

4. ¿Ves programas de televisión en inglés?

**GRAPH 4.**



THIRD:

Yes: 28 (53.8%); No: 18 (34.61%); DNA: 6 (11.53%)

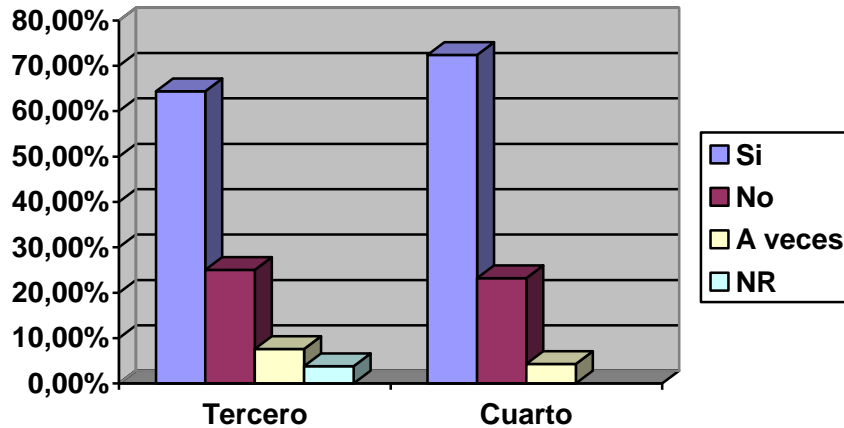
FOURTH:

Yes: 39 (56.52%); No: 25 (36.23%); Some times: 5 (7.24%)

In this graph we can see that the answers to whether or not the children watch TV programs in English are very similar between the two groups. This has to do mostly with the fact that both, students from third and fourth grades have, more or less, the same social-economic level. Therefore, the contact they have with such an important source of foreign language input barely exceeds fifty percent.

5. ¿Escuchas música en inglés?

GRAPH 5.



THIRD:

Yes: 33 (64.4%); No: 13 (25%); Some times: 4 (7.6%); DNA: 2 (3.8%)

FOURTH:

Yes: 50 (72.4%); No: 16 (23.2%); Some times: 3 (4.3%)

As it happened with television, here the majority of students do listen to some music in English, but, this time, they do it in greater number. Around seventy percent of the children gave a positive response to the question, which is an important quantity when it is seen from a language learning point of view. That is to say, that most of the language input at home is coming from music. And, as it was shown in an earlier degree project by Campo et al (2007), music is one of the greatest tools a foreign language teacher can have in a class, for oral and aural purposes.



## 9.2 1st STAGE ANALYSIS

The following are analyses of some of the classes taught at San Agustin School during OPE I and II during the period of February-November, 2007. These are mainly related to the classes' relationship with the Communicative Approach, on which this research project was based, and also to the results of the children to whom this project was aimed.

Most of the classes taught at San Agustin School were supported by or based on authors such as Widdowson (1992) who shed light on theories that were appropriate or suitable to be applied in a communicative way in the classroom. According to Widdowson there are four terms to take into consideration when speaking about teaching language as communication. The four terms are: use, usage, signification and value. Regarding this research project only two of these terms, use and value, were taken into account by the practitioners as tools to pave the way for carrying out the different activities concerning Communicative Language Teaching. Most of the activities carried out at San Agustin School were performed through dialogs concerning the students' everyday life experiences and situations. Therefore listening and speaking, which were considered the most relevant and used skills during the course, were put into practice by the practitioners and the students. By the same token, the practitioners chose the appropriate terms to create didactic materials and activities that were related to the classes taught. In this way practitioners used *USE* instead of *USAGE* and *VALUE* instead of *SIGNIFICATION*. *Use* could be appreciated in the way the students expressed themselves in a determined situation such as at a restaurant, telling the time, etc., while the whole class listened to them. In the same way, the practice teachers could notice that students were facing oral situations related to their own or classmate's experiences through dialogs that

allowed them to use *Value* as a way of performing orally rather than in writing. In this case, the context was always kept in mind for the students in the activities carried out in the class, because they had to identify some sentences as a whole and not as isolated words. Mostly the students had to recognize the situation which they were facing in order to identify the function of a determined sentence in a particular communicative task. The main goal of using certain terms rather than others had to do with avoiding the learning by heart of a large number of sentence patterns and a large number of words that fit into both of them without knowing how they are actually put into communicative use. The choice of every term, use and value, had to do with the practitioner's objectives, and the student's needs regarding free oral expression of daily life situations in and out of the classroom.

In the first class the research group started by giving the students a survey in which they answered questions related to their previous learning and contact with the English language, and the topics they would like to study during the course. The children showed in the survey that they had some knowledge of English in topics such as The Numbers, The Animals, The Colors, The Alphabet, etc., despite the fact that most of them had never had an English class before. Based on these results the planning for the course started to take shape.

Since this research is based on the Communicative Approach, the goal with every topic taught in class was to try to encourage the learners to speak in the most inviting atmosphere possible, considering respect as the very foundation of any relationship, especially in class; expressing whatever they wanted to say, which for a start is very important.

The research group considered that the best choice to officially initiate the course was with a topic the students seemed to have great interest in: the numbers.

As some of the students had some knowledge regarding the numbers, it was easier to involve the rest of them in the class topic and activities. The students showed no problem in counting from one to ten, and they seemed to know the numbers by heart when they did so in a consecutive way. But they had difficulties when they had to say only one of those numbers or when asked to count them in a random way. Therefore, the numbers were presented visually in order to make them identify which number was the one they were saying with the teacher's guidance for the correct pronunciation. Then, after some repetition, an exercise was carried out in which every student had to go to the front of the class to say their phone number aloud in units, those who did not have a telephone made one number up. The activity about their phone numbers was also practiced in a written way. After that, the whole group counted the number of desks for every row in the classroom as well as the rows themselves. The learners enjoyed saying the numbers very much; the practice teachers were very pleased because a nice sensation could be felt from the interaction between the students and them, as they were eager to participate.

During the next class the animals were presented, since the students told the practice teachers that they wanted to know about them, and moreover, because the research group had decided that the first classes had to be focused solely on input. As animals are very appealing to children, they were very enthusiastic throughout the class' activities. First, they had to draw an animal of their choice on a piece of paper writing the name in English below the drawing (see appendix 3). Then, they presented it to the rest of their

classmates reading aloud the name of the animal with the help of the teacher when they had to pronounce the word. A list with domestic animals in English was given so that the students could consult it whenever they needed. As an extra activity the students proposed working with some material from the biology class concerning wild animals. The use of this material managed to get the students' attention since most of them wanted to know the names of those animals. Besides, the students wanted to color and play a game with this topic. After learning every animal's name the students played a game where a person had to describe an animal using some topics already studied such as numbers and some previous knowledge they had about colors and the others had to guess what animal it was.

Through this activity the students showed a high level of imagination and creativity since, while describing the animals, they used extra elements such as animal sounds and mimics. At making the animal's sounds and the mimic the students used some gestures and body movements that had to do with the animal represented. Moreover, the students had been very cooperative with each other and with the teacher, and most importantly, they seemed to be enjoying the English class.

The alphabet was the following topic for the class. After presenting every letter and its pronunciation the students had to spell their names in English using the correct pronunciation with the teachers' assistance when needed; for more practice in this topic, the activity was also presented in a written way where they wrote their names and the alphabet on a piece of paper and the pronunciation of each one of the letters (see appendix 4). After that, the class was organized into groups where each one of them had to choose a word, but this time each member of the group spelled just one letter, in this way forming a complete word which the rest of the groups tried to write down or simply say aloud, with some guidance from the teacher. The learners had some difficulties at first spelling the letters without making mistakes; however, by

the end of the class most of them had overcome their shyness, improving their pronunciation which led to a considerable reduction in their error rate.

In the following class the colors were studied. To introduce the colors the teacher asked the students about some things inside the classroom using the question *what color is this?* They answered aloud using English when they could, since some of them knew some of the colors, and using Spanish when they did not know them. For the first activity they had to color in some balloons held by a clown with the name of the color written in English inside each of the balloons in order to make them start to establish relationships between the actual color and the way it is written in English (see appendix 5), noticing their similarities and differences. Later, the teacher asked the students the color of some animals already seen in class, and they answered aloud raising their hands, this in order to practice pronunciation, being more emphatic on the ones they had more trouble saying, despite the fact that, as with the numbers, the students showed an acceptable prior knowledge of the pronunciation of some of the colors. Finally, each one of them had to select two objects from the classroom and pronounce aloud what the color of those objects was, with the help of the teacher in the classroom vocabulary and order of words. Most of the learners did so in a very acceptable way, mostly because they seemed to have had a good time during the class and with the exercises done.

The first topics of any course are always very important, foretelling how the rest of the course will develop, especially when you are working with new learners of a second language, in this case children from 7 to 11 years old. That is why the research group decided to start the course with some of the simplest, but also most important topics for an English class. The numbers, the animals, the alphabet, the colors are all easy to learn and will also predispose the students for the upcoming classes, that is to say, if the

students felt comfortable with a first taste of English they will surely be motivated for the next class, and if they liked that class, then they will be motivated for the next and so on.

It was very rewarding for the research group to see that the children were always eager to participate and be open to whatever activity the teacher proposed, and also embraced every one of the teachers very kindly, so that a nice relationship could be formed from the very beginning of the English course.

Continuing with the vocabulary input, talking about their bedroom was the next topic on the class plan, taking into account that this topic was suggested on the survey given to the students in the first class.

For the first activity the children had to make a drawing of their bedrooms on a piece of paper, some of them told the practitioners that they did not have a bedroom of their own, so they asked if they could draw the living room or their parents room instead, and color it. It is interesting to see how from a certain point in the course some topics can be mixed, for instance, in this case they got to know the bedroom vocabulary, and they also practiced the use of the colors, as adjectives, when drawing/describing an object in the room. After they finished drawing, the teacher explained the pronunciation of the objects they drew, and, how in English, the color as an adjective is placed before the noun. Then, they went to the front of the class, and then read and named every colored object they had on the paper keeping in mind that the color is always first.

Since we only studied the numbers from one to ten in the first class, the next scheduled class was dedicated to making the students familiar with the rest of the numbers including the patterns used for two, three, and four digit numbers

and the pronunciation. The students seemed to comprehend well the differences between every group of tens, 20s, 30s, etc., especially on the prefixes and suffixes, but most of them had difficulties pronouncing or making clear the difference between the –teen suffix and the –ty suffix, e.g. fourteen and forty, fifteen and fifty, etc. However, after a lot of practice they made considerable progress. Then the children tried to say the most consecutive numbers they could from 1 to 100 with some help from the teacher and from their own classmates. As always, they seemed to have enjoyed the activity very much.

For the following class, keeping in mind the suggestions of the children, the parts of the body was the following topic. After learning the equivalent in English for the main parts of the body and their pronunciation, the children had to go to the front of the class and write next to each of the parts of a human body, drawn on a poster, (see appendix 6) its name in English, while the rest of the students made corrections if necessary. In this case again, the numbers were used to refer to a certain quantity of a body part, i.e. five fingers, one eye, two ears, etc, thus letting the children reinforce a previous topic while learning a new one.

Keeping a similar pace to the one above, one class was dedicated to getting to know the names of the fruits in English. After writing the fruit vocabulary in their notebooks, the learners had to choose a fruit, color it on a piece of paper and present it to the class with the teacher's guidance while pronouncing it (see appendix 7). Later, they chose the fruits they liked the most and again drew them in a basket on a piece of paper, then saying aloud "the fruits I like the most are..." This activity took some time because it was not easy to make all the children speak at first, but they gained confidence by watching the teacher and the students who participated the most do it, and, in the end, they did a fair job. Besides, it was the first time they uttered a long sentence.

Through these stages of introducing topics with new vocabulary the research was trying to build up a kind of data bank from where to introduce and work on another type of activities. This had to do with the central point of this project, which was based on the likes and suggestions of the students' real life experience, creating a set of simple conversations that allowed the students to interact among themselves in a sort of familiar context, but trying to use the elements given to them during the classes with careful guidance from the teachers to form clear, understandable utterances in a second language, in this case English.

### **9.3 2nd STAGE ANALYSIS**

Since this research project was based mainly upon the Communicative Approach, short dialogs or conversations were prepared from the following topics in order to have the children use English for everyday activities. As Klein states (1990:20) in communicative training very little grammar is used, instead there is "the tendency to use role play in imitation of real life communication in which the learner is guided to learn in a spontaneous manner".

#### **9.3.1 Telling the Time.**

Telling the time is a relevant aspect of daily life for any member of society, and children are not the exception: This topic caught the students' attention because the students were very concerned about knowing when the classes started, when the classes ended and what time the break was. Teaching the time allowed us to review the numbers as well, since its use was needed, especially from 1 to 59, to express the hours and the minutes. In this way, the



children could interact not only in the class but also in other contexts, such as at school break and at home. Some of the students mentioned later that they had tried to ask or tell their parents or friends the time, although they did not receive correct answers, according to them, the children showed that they understood the topic well and were able to start a short conversation outside the classroom.

### **9.3.2 Ordering Food.**

Ordering food activities allowed the students to have a wider and a more realistic way of learning English in the classroom. Through this exercise the students had the opportunity to act as if they were in a real restaurant, moreover, they used all their imagination trying to adapt the dialogs given by the teacher with ones created from their own context. In this exercise the students decided how and where to order food. During the class, the students showed a high level of commitment and enjoyment in performing the dialog, since every group created a restaurant situation, using fake money, little dishes, posters, and real food; besides, every member of the group was properly dressed to carry out their role in the activity. In this way, every day life experiences were brought to class. In this activity a high level of motivation was noticed due to the study of foreign and local foods, and due to the use of real food. Through this exercise the students had the opportunity to use English and Spanish in view of the fact that they used basic English structures to order, in most cases, local dishes such as tamales, arepas, or empanadas. The use of the two languages allowed the teachers to realize that context plays a relevant role in foreign language teaching since teachers need to take into account the students' context.

### 9.3.3 The Classroom.

In this activity the students studied the objects they had (pencil, pen, ruler, bag, book, etc.) and the furniture of the classroom which surrounded them, such as chairs, tables, posters, blackboards, doors, windows, etc. Then they had to build short sentences using the expressions *there is* and *there are*. For example: there are two boards, there is one board, there are four windows, etc. At the same time the teacher used the structure *how many* to ask the students about the number of things in the classroom with their respective colors. In this way, the teacher asked them how many tables, chairs, doors, windows there were in the classroom. Then they answered, for example, that there are *two* brown tables, there are five *red* pens, there is one *green* door. This exercise was firstly carried out orally through the interaction among the teacher and the students and, secondly, between two students. One of the students asked the question and another answered.

In the next class they reviewed the objects they had in the classroom such as colored-pencils, pens, erasers, books, notebooks, etc. The class activity followed the same strategy that was used at the previous of the class. It consisted of creating, orally, short sentences with *there is*, *there are* and using *how many*. But this time they had to be in front of their classmates to tell them as many things as they had in their bags as possible. They were expected to say, for example: “my name is Paula, in my bag *there is* one red pen”; “my name is Valentina, *there is* one blue notebook.” If the notebook had an animal on the cover they tried to say what color it was. In this way the practitioners put into practice the Content-Based Approach, which states that “the purpose is learning other things, other than language” Williams M. in Brumfit et al (1994:206). Afterwards, the teacher asked “how many pens are there in Paula’s bag?”, so they tried to give the number and its color. Through

this activity the students practiced listening and speaking. They listened to their classmates guess and say the answer while taking turns.

At the beginning of the activity there was not so much interaction among them, but when they realized that the exercise was not so complicated the students' interaction changed considerably. So the class became exciting, due to the new attitude of the students towards interaction.

#### **9.3.4 What's the Weather Like in Popayán?**

Weather changes are situations which children can perceive everywhere and at any time in their lives. During this activity, flash cards, posters, short dialogs and drawings were made, the latter ones, drawings, being created by the students themselves. The students showed great interest in this topic since they could express orally what they felt about any weather change at any time during the day, for example hot, cold, wind, breeze, etc. Moreover, this activity let the students study, at the same time, the parts of the day by saying at the end of each phrase the corresponding part of the day and what the weather was like, i.e. cold/hot/breezy/rainy/sunny morning, afternoon, or night preceded by the appropriate preposition, *it is cold in the morning*.

The students were eager to participate by acting out a conversation, even some of them asking to change some adjectives like cold, sunny and rainy for windy and breezy. As Williams M. states in Brumfit et al (1994:207) when students' attitude and motivation are positive towards what they are doing it is easier for them to learn a foreign language." In addition flash cards and posters let them have a point of reference to start saying something with respect to images (flash cards and drawings made by themselves) (see appendix 8). For example: a flashcard with a cloud was shown to them, so they had to build short sentences such as *it is rainy in the morning; it is rainy;*

or *the sky is blue*. With the drawings they made, they had to show them to their classmates, and the other students had to create new short sentences concerning the drawings asking the teacher for the vocabulary needed.

### **9.3.5 Talking on the Phone.**

Taking into account that the need for communication by phone plays an important role in people's modern way of living including children, the teachers decided to create a dialog related to "talking on the phone" since such a situation is part of their everyday lives. This activity caught the students' attention because they were interested in knowing how to say in English the different expressions used when talking on the phone. Besides, they could use some vocabulary studied in previous classes such as greetings and farewells, so they could feel free to express what they wanted to say spontaneously in a given situation. Later, after having practiced the dialog, the students paired up and created a new dialog with their own telephone numbers and with their names. At the beginning of the following class they acted it out; some of them brought their own cell phones or the ones belonging to their relatives to class. Besides, as homework they were asked to call each other in order to practice the dialog in a real context. This exercise was another opportunity to engage students in an everyday life situation.

### **9.3.6 Meeting People.**

Another topic in which a conversation was presented as the main activity for the class was the one related to meeting people. Wherever you are learning English, and no matter how old you are, you will always have to know how to introduce yourself to others in a simple and polite way. It is indeed one of the

first things every learner of a foreign language has to learn. Besides, some of the students of this class suggested the topic.

As they did with the rest of the topics in the class plan during the year, the students were very enthusiastic when they knew they had to work on the conversation in pairs and present it in front of the class. The children also played a part in the construction of these conversations, since they were mostly based on their experience and likes. The main objective of the class was to try to make the children speak to each other as if they were in a real first-meeting context. Grammar mistakes as well as the classmates' help were allowed whenever it was necessary. The aim was to try to convey a message, that is to say, make themselves understood by means of the language known at that very moment.

In brief, it can be said that the students did a fine job trying to express those ideas to each other. Although most of them showed to be somewhat nervous at the beginning of the exercise, they later managed to control that and produce understandable utterances.

### **9.3.7 The Interviews with the Children during the O.P.E. Process.**

Through asking and answering short and specific questions about themselves, such as their names, their ages, their favorite things (animals, colors), etc., and the fact that they could work in pairs, the activity became more pleasant and, above all, more comfortable for the children. Working in pairs gave them the opportunity to choose who they wanted to interact with. In this way, they gained confidence and the activity became more productive in terms of real communication, as Brumfit (1984:75) claims, in large classes, as it was the case in San Agustín, the use of group work (pair work) increases *massively* the probability of making the students produce and receive

language. Additionally, some of the words in the questions used in the interview had a certain resemblance to the mother tongue, Spanish, so in this way they could make a little bit less use of the translation into Spanish for a full understanding.

Talking or asking about things that they liked or disliked such as their favorite color, favorite TV program or their best friend interested them very much, since those are things that the students like to communicate; besides, they found out lots of common likes and dislikes which made them more interested in the topic.

The questions also allowed them to interview whoever they wanted, even the teachers were asked some of those questions. Likewise, this is an activity which they could apply in a different context from the classroom, so that they could ask about favorite colors or TV programs even at home.

One of the most important things was that a feeling of eagerness to be heard was present, and this also made them feel concerned about their pronunciation. With the help of the teachers all of the students participated very actively while performing the roles of the interviewers and interviewees.

### **9.3.8 Describing People.**

Another important topic for students starting to learn a foreign language would be the one regarding how to describe people. It is very common between the speakers of any language to refer to someone they may or may not know by that person's physical appearance or personality. Animals' descriptions were also put into practice.

The purpose in including this topic in the San Agustin's English class plan was to give the students another language tool to make the interaction among

them more plausible by using some of the vocabulary used in previous classes of the course, such as family members, animals, colors, body parts and numbers.

To introduce the descriptive adjectives selected for this class some flash cards, representing one adjective each, were used. These cards were very helpful to the children since they referred to the cards whenever they forgot the word they wanted to use to make the description. All of this resulted in simple sentences like *it's big, it's small, it's yellow*, etc. After that, the main activity started in which the students had to use more complex sentences like *he has green hair, I am tall, She is fat*, etc. In order to do this, considerable class time was dedicated to explaining the forms of the verbs *to be* and *to have*, as well as the pronouns, which were rather easier and less time consuming. These were the forms of speech needed to correctly utter the desired sentences. Because of this, a set of new flash cards was made describing now what they wanted to say at this point. That is to say, images of people, (see appendix 9) fat, thin, short, etc., animals, how many legs? what color? etc., were used to help the students describe what they wanted. Many questions arose from this new situation and it was difficult to try to be clear when answering, but with much effort, the way the learners were building the sentences improved considerably. The questions had to do mainly with the appropriate verb the students had to use according to what they wanted to say. For instance: if one of the children wanted to say "Mi perro es café", she was not sure whether to use the verb *to be* or *to have*, even though that was already explained to them, so being patient was a very important aspect for the success of the class, as well as for the rest of the classes.

It is worth noting that in cases like this is when one becomes aware and realizes that with sufficient time to work on every topic, very good results could be obtained from the way the students faced new challenges and the

eagerness they showed to learn whatever the topic the teacher shared with them.

### **9.3.9 ING verb form for Actions** (simple progressive tense).

In Spanish as in English the use of the ING form to express actions is commonly used, unlike in French. For that reason the research group decided to present to the children this tense with a simple type of question and answer in a short dialog. To the question *what are you doing?* posed by one student, the other one would answer *I'm doing this or that/I'm + infinitive of the verb + ing* to express what she was doing at that moment.

In order to make the students familiar with this form of the verbs, a first activity in which the students had to make a drawing about a person or an animal performing an action was carried out. With the help of the teacher the students were able to correctly form sentences like; *I'm studying, I'm writing, the dog is sleeping*, among others, by adding *ing* to the desired infinitive of the verb and writing it on the paper. The children, then, had to go in front of the class and say aloud the sentence they had written while the others listened. Up to that point the students seemed very confident about what they were doing and no important difficulties were obvious. Later, the children organized themselves into pairs and created a short dialog where one of them asked the question *what are you doing?* and the other one responded. Some of the students asked the teacher if they could read the activity but exchanging lines this time. They did very well indeed.

Since in a previous class the pronouns and the verbs *to be* and *to have* had been already introduced, the children tried to put into practice what they learned in that class and tried to form sentences like: *what is he, she doing? what are they doing?*, etc. and answers like: *she is dancing, they are jumping*,



etc. Including this on the sentences was again more complicated for the students since they tended to confuse the pronouns in both the question and answer.

As it is mentioned earlier in the text, time is a relevant factor in these kinds of activities given that significant improvement could be achieved if contact hours with English were increased. This assumption is made based on the fact that the students showed an acceptable understanding of the topics, as well as a good ability to perform tasks regarding class activities with only two sessions of fifty minutes each one per week of English class.

#### **9.3.10 Final Exercise.**

The last classes were dedicated to reinforcing the topics taught throughout the course. Here, the topics were combined. The students had to build short, simple sentences with the elements they knew, not only orally but in writing as well. For the latter they had to use the vocabulary that they had written in their notebooks. For the oral activity they had to tell their classmates the things they liked the most using the expression *I like* and *I love* “*something*”. For instance, I like apples, I love my dog.

The students had a good level of input because they were very active during the review activity. Some of them decided by themselves to create short dialogs in order to present them in front of their classmates. In this way, the other classmates felt drawn towards the girls’ attitudes. Then, the students were not afraid anymore because they felt confident about what they had to say in front of their classmates. However, sometimes some of them were worried about the mistakes they could make, but this attitude was not an impediment to continuing with the normal interaction that the class had at the beginning.

### **9.3.11 Onion Ring.**

Throughout the English classes, several activities were carried out by the students. Every activity was properly reviewed and reinforced over and over by the teachers themselves. After having carried out lots of activities, a final exercise was planned regarding information from almost all the classes. This final exercise was a game called the Onion Ring. In this exercise the class was divided into two groups. The groups stood in two circles, one inside the other, one of them facing inward in order for the students to talk to each other about different topics previously studied. The main goal of this exercise was to verify the goals reached by the students during the English classes in a practical and fun way. At the beginning of the exercise the students were insecure and nervous. However, while the exercise was being performed the students began to feel more comfortable and confident since they realized that they were performing something that they had already studied. In this exercise it could be seen how the students had the opportunity to speak and to listen to each other as much as possible as they were actively going around asking their classmates about their favorite color, animal, fruit, their age, and their names. What is more, the students had the opportunity to watch themselves in a video that was recorded by the teacher. Through this exercise the students looked at themselves while pronouncing, acting, playing and listening to each other. In this way, the practice teachers gathered the most common mistakes made by the students in order to give them a simple feedback about the pronunciation of some words.

### **9.3.12 Songs in the Learning Process**

Nowadays the media has allowed children to have important access to the English language, since new TV programs devoted to children let them hear the desired language. For example when the teacher asked the children if

they had heard some songs in English, most of them answered yes, and the most common songs among the ones they knew came from the famous Disney Channel program “High School Musical”. Even though they did not know what they were singing, some of the words they pronounced were clear and comprehensible. Besides, they found similarities with some of the words in Spanish.

Songs, as David Cranmer and C. Laroy state (1992), are like activities that help the teachers to teach whatever they want and they could be used as complement of topics already studied during the course. Its role in English learning is important not only for children but also for teenagers or adults; the effect that a pleasant rhythm has on our minds is, most of the times, positive. The activity with a song began by choosing the most appropriate one, keeping in mind the age of the learners, the topics they have dealt with, the rhythm of the song, the lyrics of the song, its level of difficulty, and above all the students’ fondness for music.

One of the procedures consisted in giving them the lyrics in order to follow the song by reading silently, so that in this way they could identify the words they already knew and, in some cases, the meaning of some sentences.

One of the songs (see appendix 10) contained topics such as the numbers, the alphabet and the colors; due to the speed of the song, the students made an important effort to try to follow the lyrics in time with the tune. In this way, by learning the song by heart, the learners had the opportunity to speed up their pronunciation and speech.

In this song little phrases were also found which they could use for communication in a specific context. Phrases such as “Can I bring my friend to tea?”, “Can I bring my friend to play?”, “I love you”, “skip the rope”, etc., are

not separated from reality and gave the children the opportunity to use them whenever they wanted. It is important to mention that the activity with the song allowed them to experience an enjoyable way to learn.

## 10. ACTIVITIES

- REVIEWING
- VISUAL AIDS
  - Flash cards
  - Movies
  - Videos
  - Posters
  - Drawings

(Materials used: paper, blank posters, markers, color pencils, stickers, crayons, costumes).

- GAMES
- LISTENING
  - Teacher input
  - Sing a song
- DIALOGS
- ASSESMENT

### 10.1 REVIEWING

At the beginning of every class the teachers went over the topic of the previous class orally asking the students in an individual and collective manner. In this way the input was reinforced and the students could grasp the appropriate usage, word order and pronunciation of the topic recently studied. This experience allowed us to realize that, even though the learners did not

show a full understanding of the topic at that very moment, as the classes went by, and especially in the second part of the practice the students showed a significant improvement in their learning, as Howatt states in Brumfit et al (1994:297) “the achievement of language skills depends mainly upon the amount of time that learners spend studying a language.” Likewise, this kind of activity helped them to increase their level of self confidence which was noticed and expressed in a higher level of participation inside the classroom.

## **10.2 VISUAL AIDS**

**10.2.1 Flash cards:** Some visual aids such as flash cards, movies, videos, posters and drawings were used in order to reinforce the oral work. In this way, a little English corner was created in the classroom which gave the children some space to be in real contact with the language, despite the fact that the English classes were only once a week, they always had the chance to remember the topics through the visual contact with the posters and the flash cards displayed on the wall as well as the drawings they made in their notebooks during the classes. It is important to mention that each drawing or poster was related to the topic studied in class. Visual aids were also necessary to maintain the students’ attention since it is in the children’s nature to learn with the help of images which complement the oral input.

Some of the classes were dedicated to audiovisual activities through the use of an educational video and movies. The former helped the children to reinforce the topics already studied in class, such as numbers, colors and the alphabet. This exercise allowed the children to listen to English from another source which gave them the opportunity to experience different forms of

pronunciation, accent and intonation. The objective of working with this video was that the students produced oral output through repetition according to directions of the main character in the video. It also contained images which attracted the attention of the children since the character was a cartoon who invited the students to interact with him through singing, acting or completing some phrases. In the same way two movies were presented to the children in order to complement and reinforce their listening skills, but these movies contained a wider range of vocabulary.

Among their preferences, drawing was one of the most common. For this reason part of the classes were dedicated to this kind of activity making them draw and color things related to the topic studied.

One of the goals of this activity was that after drawing the kids tried to create a short sentence related to the picture or a simple word. As the course progressed the children knew that after an activity of this kind they had to present an oral production, a sentence, a phrase or a word.

### **10.3 GAMES**

Some of the games the students played were: Broken Phone, Stop, Block Out, Hang Man, Lottery, Spelling and Vocabulary Soup (see appendix 11). The games had a great importance during the English class, because they allowed the students to practice English in an active and enjoyable way. Those games were useful to keep the children's attention and were a source of evaluation. Besides, the games produced better interaction among them because they had the chance of expressing themselves without pressure.

In addition, through games the practitioners showed the students some strategies to learn some English topics. For example, the practitioners told them that numbers must be learned from one to twelve, then up to twenty and finally, the multiples of ten in order for the students to get a better understanding of how English works, Ellis in Brumfit et al (1994:192). Moreover, the English class was the session where the girls could do some kinds of activities which let them forget the routine of the other subjects. For this reason, sometimes this class became an opportunity for them to show some kind of behavior which was not seen during the other subjects.

#### **10.4 LISTENING**

In regard to listening the main input for the students was the teachers themselves. They did not only direct the class using English as much as possible, but they also tried to give some commands such as : sit down, stand up, close the door, open your notebooks, write down, erase the board, etc., for the regular development of a class. Other kinds of activities, such as songs and videos, were used to reinforce the students' listening skills. As for the songs it was important to choose an appropriate one keeping in mind the age of the students and the topics studied. The children showed interest in this activity since a higher level of motivation could be noticed, besides the rhythm of the songs and the fact that they listened to a native-like pronunciation led to reinforce some of the topics already seen.



## **10.5 DIALOGS**

After having taught some language to the children, several short dialogs were planned according to the suggestions given by the students on the survey, taking into consideration the likes, needs, and experiences from their daily lives. Working with dialogs allowed the fostering of interaction among the students through the group work which resulted in the students' oral production (listen to appendix 12).

## **10.6 THE SKETCH**

After having seen the good results the girls showed performing the short dialogs, longer presentations were implemented as a way to practice oral skills and group work, which involved some new elements such as gestuality, kinesthetic movements, organization and acting out. Therefore a sketch was planned starting from a story called "The happiest man in the World", which was about a king who wants to find the true happiness so he travels around the World and asks different people whether they are happy until he finds the happiest man in the World. The story was told to the students with the support of flashcards with the pictures of the characters of the story in order to help the girls to understand the unknown vocabulary.

For this activity the class was divided into four groups of seven students, each of them had a role to play in the story which was chosen by themselves, and each group was in charge of organizing the classroom and of bringing the objects they needed to act out the sketch. Three classes were dedicated to this activity in order to help the students with the pronunciation of the words,

intonation and classroom disposition, and in the fourth section each group presented the sketch for which the students used some elements from the classroom like desks, brooms; and some things they brought from home such as crowns made of paper, mirrors, hairbrushes, hats and clothes.

The results of this activity were very positive since the girls were very enthusiastic and eager to perform the sketch and at the moment of the presentation all the students even the most timid and quiet ones did their best to play their roles. Likewise, although they had to learn it by heart, they understood what they were saying and some time later they still remembered some sentences, expressions, and above all, the vocabulary used in the sketch (see appendix 13).

## **10.7 ASSESSMENT**

During the course different kinds of evaluation activities were used. In the first part of the practice the way to evaluate, for the most part, was by using written tests, by grading homework, and sometimes oral production was also assessed. For the second part, teachers focused on the oral work through dialogs keeping in mind pronunciation, performance and preparation.

The evaluation formats were designed keeping the structure of the activities practiced in class based on the principle “test what you teach”.

There were different kinds of tests depending upon the activity which was carried out by the practitioners. The most common techniques used to test oral production were: interviews, flash cards, songs and role plays, all of these related to the communicative language testing. The main objective of

testing oral ability lies mainly with the reason that teaching a spoken language is the development of the ability to interact appropriately in that language, therefore, students need to be able to comprehend as well as producing.

Communicative language testing is intended to be a measure of the students' ability to use language in real life situations. On the one hand, when testing productive skills, speaking and writing, emphasis is placed on appropriateness rather than on the ability to form grammatically correct sentences. On the other hand, in testing receptive skills, reading and listening, emphasis is placed on understanding the communicative purpose of the speaker or writer rather than on understanding every single word. In communicative testing, both are often combined, therefore, the learner must understand and answer in real time.

Interviews: By using interviews, practitioners, along with students, were able to establish short conversations about common topics related to students' likes and dislikes. During this activity the practitioners were able to identify children's strengths and weaknesses. On most occasions the interviews were recorded to be listened by the students and the practitioners to have a wider and a more complete feedback about where and which were the most problematic and obvious problems regarding oral ability. Therefore, some of the recordings were used to plan the following classes in order to make improvements on mistakes found most frequently in the interviews.

Flash cards: The use of flash cards was a common exercise used by the practitioners of San Agustin School. When using flash cards the students were able to describe different actions or images concerning the pictures they were looking at. In this way the practitioners could improve the students' pronunciation while they repeated the different verbs or descriptions they found on the flash cards. Besides, the use of flash cards was a good method

to observe the different reactions that the students showed while performing this kind of exercise.

Role play: In this exercise the students had to assume a particular role in a particular situation. When students were acting out a role, the practitioners could determine their progress concerning pronunciation and comprehension. In this way, most of the grades obtained by the students were taken from how well they performed certain role plays.

## 11. CONCLUSIONS

Once the research was finished, and after having analyzed the data gathered during the school year and the subsequent months, there are several aspects that are worth mentioning as our final considerations.

- The Communicative Language Teaching theory has been commonly used as the basis for many research projects in the University of Cauca as well as in the national and international scenes, and it represented a meaningful and valuable experience to both the students and the teachers at San Agustín School. For this methodology gave the people involved in the research the possibility to interact with each other through didactic activities, conversations based from real life experiences, acting out sketches, etc. In addition, the relationship teacher-student was not the kind of relationship in which the teacher is the one who makes every decision concerning the class development and the student simply follows instructions, but the kind in which the teacher and the student participate equally in the decision-making for the benefit of the entire class. What is more, most of the classes taught throughout the year were based on the suggestions of the students.
- The reading of the different theories concerning both the Communicative Approach and methodologies to teach English to children provided the practice teachers with theoretical support required to cope with students' needs related to the children's particular behavior, age, context, social and educational level. These

theories when analyzed together helped us plan the activities throughout the school year aiming at the development of their English oral skills.

- The comfortable environment provided to the children during the English class was a very important factor to foster the learning of English since they felt free and confident to express their opinions and their doubts without being afraid of making mistakes. Although at the beginning of the process, the students showed themselves insecure to use the vocabulary studied up to that point in the course, over time they dared use what they had learned to express their ideas.
- Through **O.P.E.**, we, as practice teachers, had the opportunity to put into practice the methodologies learned at the university, as well as to face the classroom's realities at San Agustin School for instance, the number of students belonging to every classroom, the discipline management, the school regulations based on religious principles. Likewise, the fact that we developed our research and our professional practice simultaneously demanded from us a higher level of commitment and responsibility regarding our process as future professionals of the language and the students' English learning.
- As a group we created a good deal of motivation towards the English learning in the students. This could facilitate the work of the new practice teachers who will find a good students' attitude to continue working in the English language activities.
- Throughout the whole process at San Agustin School as practice teachers, we can say that it was an unforgettable and pleasing experience in our lives that helped us grow more confident both

professionally and personally and which led us have a wider perception of the current Primary Education in Colombia.

## 12. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Through the learning of English by means of practice, in this case, by developing oral skills in the first stages of the learning process, the students will most likely have stronger foundations when studying new topics related to the expansion of the knowledge of English.
- Regarding **O.P.E.** student-teachers this research can be used as a tool to teach their classes having the Communicative Approach as a basis. According to our experience and findings as practice teachers at San Agustin Primary School we can say that the Communicative Approach is a suitable alternative for the first stages of English teaching.
- Even though this research was carried out in the San Agustin primary section we consider that it may encourage the secondary English teachers to implement the Communicative Language Teaching in their classes as it offers the possibility of practicing and improving the students' language skills.



### 13. RECOMMENDATIONS

- In any learning environment it is always important to be, or stay in contact with the topics you are learning, therefore, we recommend San Agustin School to devote a space in the classroom, it could be a part of the back wall, to keep reminders of the previous or the most important English classes in the form of posters, flash cards, etc. This would allow the students the possibility of accessing any piece of information they need during classes, and, of course, the chance of getting that information.
- The number of hours dedicated to English are often too few in public schools, for this reason, we suggest San Agustin School try to draw more attention, and to be more aware of the importance the contact with a foreign language has on the learners. In other words, to try to increase the number of hours assigned to the English class, for it would certainly improve the students' learning pace.
- We recommend to the **O.P.E.** practice teachers to take into account the students' context, likes and preferences in designing or selecting activities no matter which methodology they decide to implement in the English classroom.
- Finally we would like to invite all foreign language teachers who want their students to learn the target language in a natural way to implement the Communicative Language Teaching in the class

activities which can provide them with new ideas and techniques to complement their own teaching methodologies.

## 14. LIMITATIONS

During the course of action executed at San Agustin School we had to face different kinds of limitations such as class time and number of students, that made the development of this project laborious.

- One of the main limitations seen at San Agustin School and at other institutions in Popayán, according to the suggestions made by other research groups from the Modern Languages Program, is the number of hours per week devoted to the study of English. At San Agustin School, only two hours a week were assigned to the English class. Even though we tried to make the most of time, and the objectives were reached, many other activities, related to the learning of a foreign language, could have been done, in order to broaden the students' English knowledge, by increasing the class time. This conception is corroborated when Brumfit (1984) states that only by a constant and continuing exposure to the target language the recognition or acquisition of a system may take place.

We tried to supply the lack of time by giving the students after every class some homework in order for them to practice at home what they learned in the classroom.

- Interaction is one of the principles that the Communicative Approach proposes. It requires a high level of enthusiasm and will from the learners to participate in the diverse activities which make part of the

development of the class. However, there were moments in which not everyone had the disposition to cooperate with it. Sometimes students' shyness made interaction and communication difficult. Additionally, every activity was appealing for some of the students.

- The practice teachers realized that some of the books read during the project made reference to contexts different from ours at San Agustín School. Those theories were applied in countries where children had a higher English level. On the contrary, at San Agustín School they had to teach their classes starting from basic topics like numbers, colors and so on since the English level showed by the students was a beginners' one, for this reason the practice teachers had to mix English and Spanish to convey a determined message.
- The activities proposed by the different books the practice teachers consulted were designed for small classes, around 10 students. On the contrary, at San Agustín School they were in charge of 22 to 33 students per class. Therefore, the practice teachers had to adapt themselves and the classroom activities to give each of the students the opportunity to participate as much as they wanted by dividing the class in small groups.

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## APPENDIX 1

50

### ORIENTACION DEL PROCESO EDUCATIVO EN EL COLEGIO SAN AGUSTIN ENCUESTA

1. ¿Te gusta el inglés? Si
2. ¿Qué recuerdas de lo que has estudiado en la materia de inglés? Saludo como Saludar a mis padres.
3. ¿Qué te gustaría hacer en esta clase durante este año? Saludar y mis hermanos y amigos
4. ¿Qué actividades prefieres?
  - Canciones
  - Juegos
  - Manualidades
  - Talleres X
5. ¿Miras programas de televisión en inglés? Si porque a mi me gusta ingles
6. ¿Escuchas música en inglés? Si

B


### ORIENTACION DEL PROCESO EDUCATIVO EN EL COLEGIO SAN AGUSTIN ENCUESTA

1. ¿Te gusta el inglés? Si
2. ¿Qué recuerdas de lo que has estudiado en la materia de inglés? Saludo, como Saludar a mis padres.
3. ¿Qué te gustaría hacer en esta clase durante este año? Saludar a mis amigos, hermanos y escuchar musica
4. ¿Qué actividades prefieres?
  - Canciones
  - Juegos
  - Manualidades
  - Talleres X
5. ¿Miras programas de televisión en inglés? Si
6. ¿Escuchas música en inglés? Si

APPENDIX 2

6

La hora



Reloj

EXCUSEME  
disculpe/perdone


DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?  
Sabes / ¿que hora es.

Can you tell me the time  
¿me puedes decir / La hora?

yes it is 11-30

thank you

El telefono



3 Angie Lorena Muñoz López

4 Lady Bibiana Bustamante Escobar

Dialogos

Leidy  
I: Hello Angie How are you?

Angie: I, m fine, thank you.

Leidy: Angie when is your birthday?

Angie: I, was born in febrari.  
Xisth 1999 nineteen ninety nine.

Angie: Hello Leidy How are you?

Leidy: I, m fine, thank you.

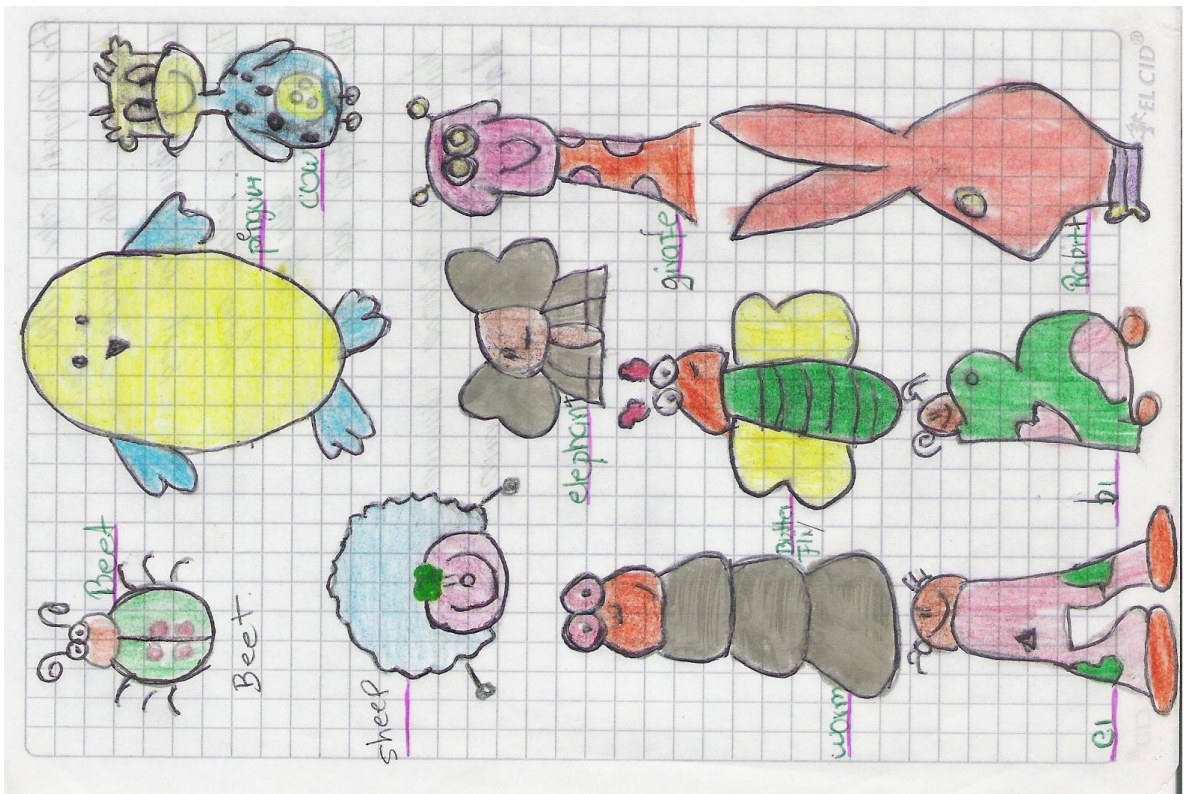
Angie: Leidy when is your birthday?

Leidy: I, was born in febrari.  
Xisth 1996 nineteen ninety nine.



APPENDIX 3







APPENDIX 4

Handwritten alphabet chart on grid paper. The letters A through Z are arranged in a grid, each with a phonetic notation written below it. The letters are drawn in blue ink. A pink cloud-like border surrounds the letters. The phonetic notations are as follows:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
ei	bi	ci	di	ef	ef	gi
H	I	J	K	L	M	N
eich	ai	yai	kei	el	em	en
<del>X</del>	O	P	Q	R	S	T
x	ou	pi	Kiu	ar	es	ti
U	V	W	X	Y	Z	
iu	vi	dabliu	ex	way	zi	

Below the chart, the words 'PROFESOR' and 'MIEFE' are written in capital letters. Under each letter, a phonetic notation is written in pink ink:

PROFESOR: P (pi), R (ar), O (ou), F (ef), E (i), C (ci), O (ou), M (em), O (ou)

MIEFE: M (em), I (i), F (ef), U (iu), E (é)

At the bottom of the page, there is handwritten text in Spanish:

It belongs to  
 Pertenece = Angie Valentina Lame  
 Curso = 4º C  
 Códigos = 9

Handwritten Chinese characters on a grid background. Each character is accompanied by its pinyin label:

- A: aī
- B: bì
- C: cǐ
- D: dī
- E: ē
- F: fǎ
- G: gǐ
- H: hǐ
- I: ī
- J: jǎi
- K: kǎi
- L: lǐ
- M: mǎ
- N: nǎ
- O: ōu
- P: pǐ
- Q: qǐ
- R: rǐ
- S: sǐ
- T: tǐ
- U: ū
- V: vǐ
- W: wǐ
- X: xǐ
- Y: yǐ
- Z: zǐ

Handwritten Chinese numbers and their pinyin labels on a grid background:

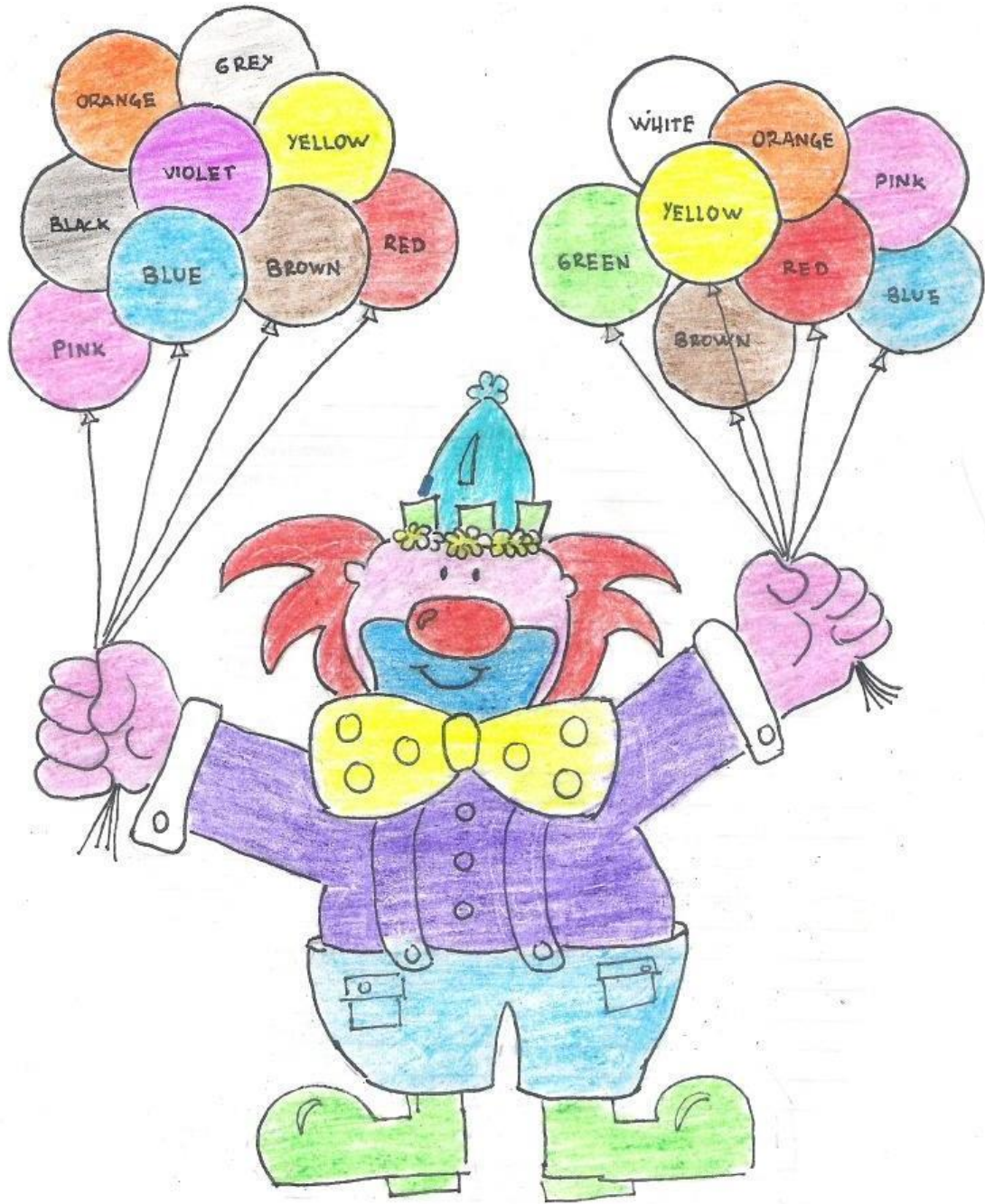
- 1) - eīmei
- 2) - ērīkǎ
- 3) - sānfǎn
- 4) - āngcǐlǐcǎ
- 5) - cǎnmǐlǐ

Additional text on the page:

- eight three nine six one Five Two
- eight thirtytwo fiftytwo twenty nine
- numbers



APPENDIX 5





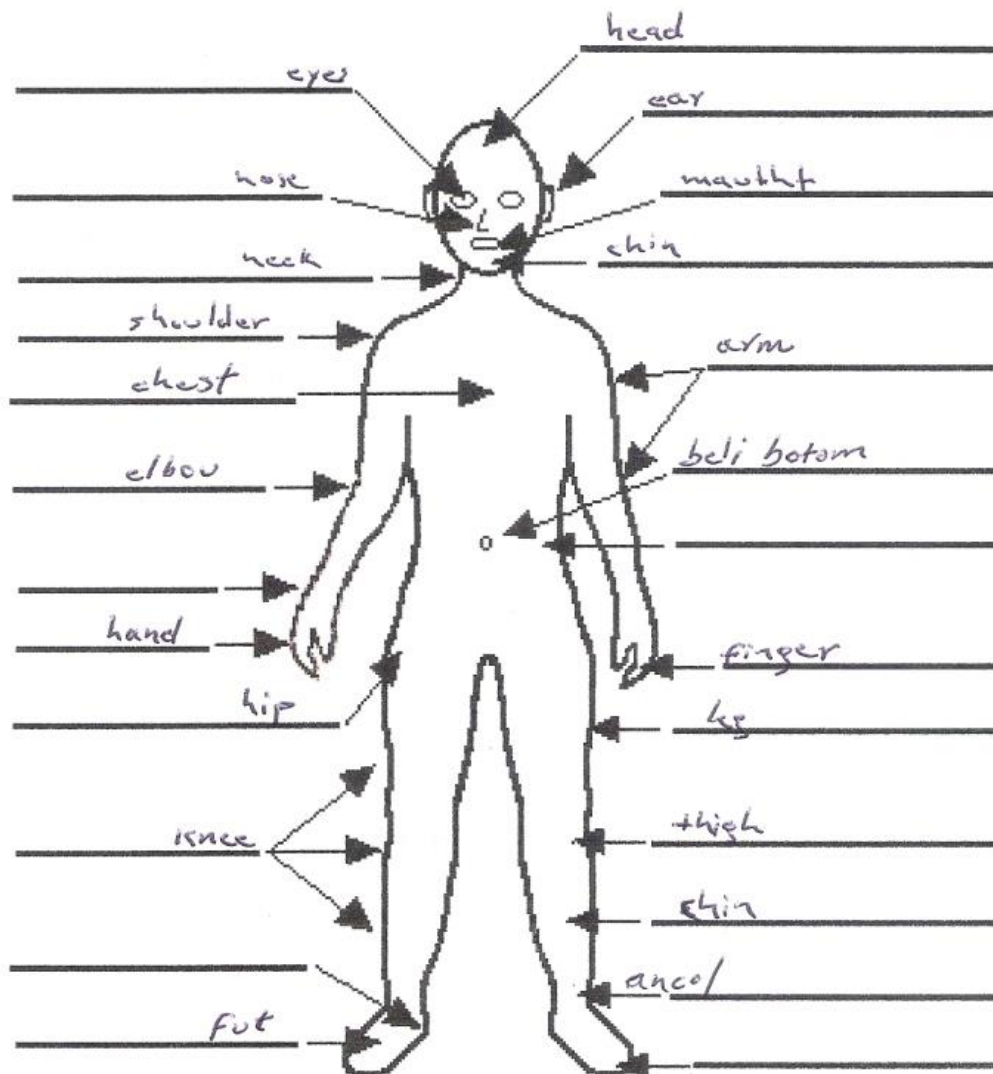


APPENDIX 6





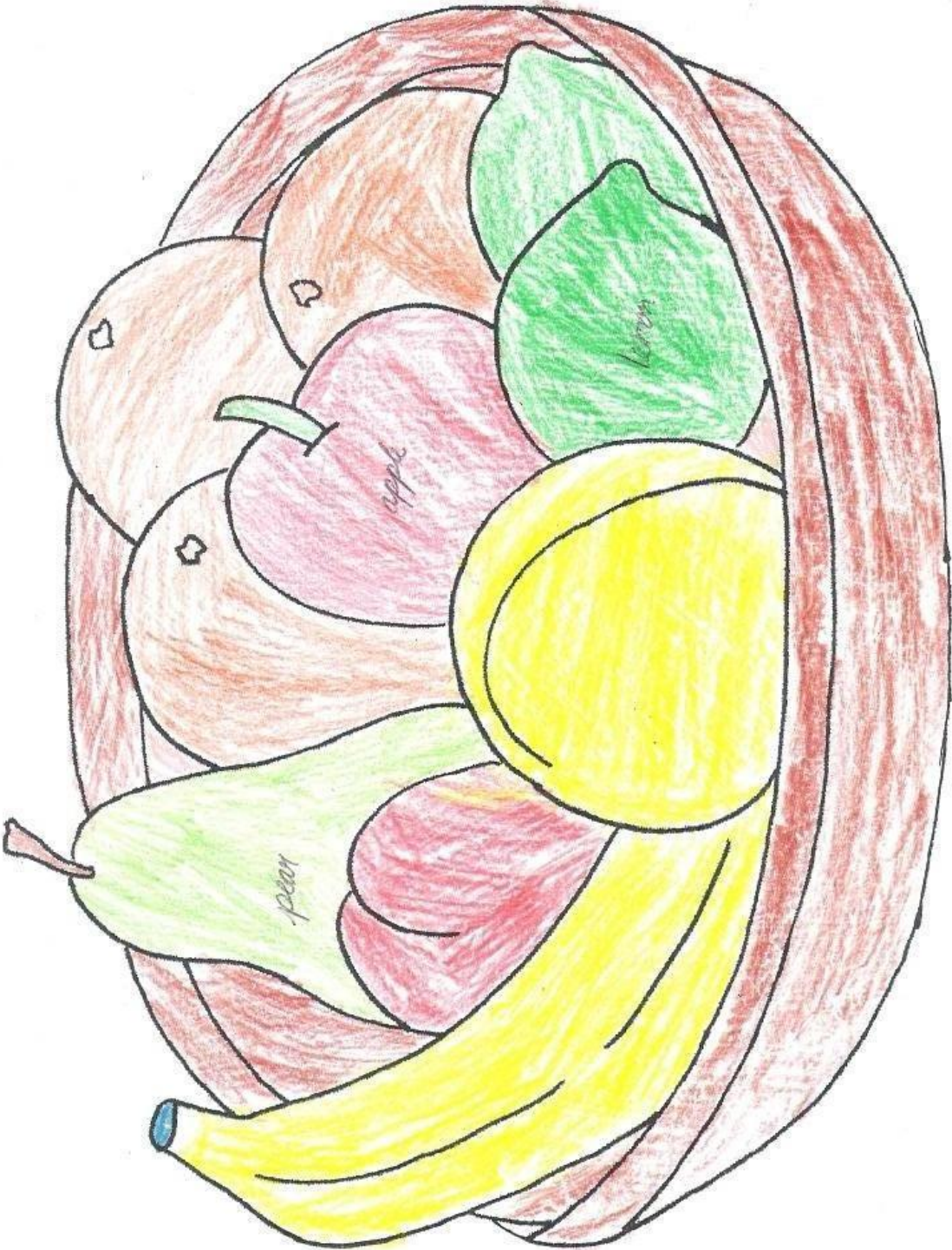









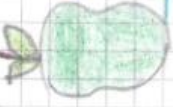






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ankle	ear	hand	leg	shoulder
arm	elbow	head	mouth	thigh
belly button	eye	heel	nose	toes
chest	fingers	hip	neck	waist
chin	foot	knee	shin	wrist

APPENDIX 7





 banana banana	 Durazno peach	 melón melón	 fresa Blackberry	 zandia watermelon	 Pera Pear
 manzana apple Apple 사과	 naranja orange	 Piña Pineapple	 coco coconut	 nuez Nut	 uva grapes

 naranja is orange	 fresa is red
 Strawberry is red	 apple is Red

APPENDIX 8



Leydy  
Bibiana

4-c

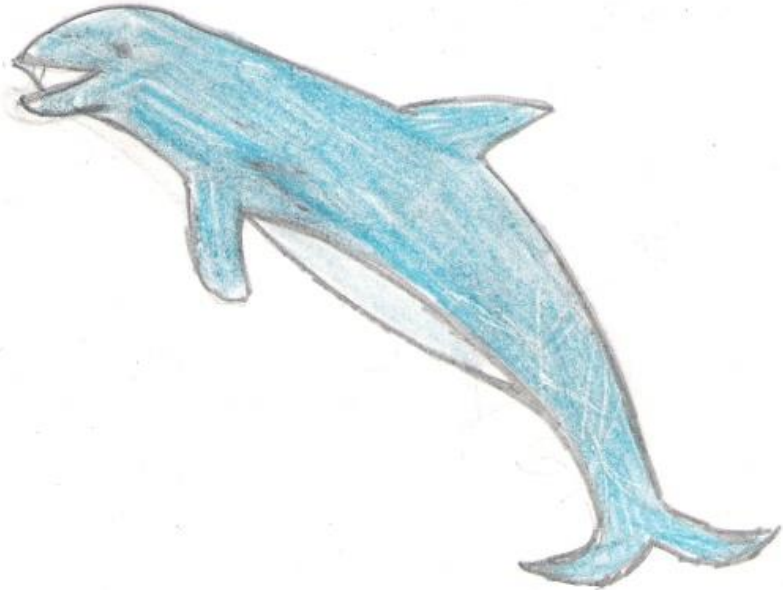


What's the weather like?

Natelia Liney Pino Sembrón 4-c.

en

otter - nutria





APPENDIX 9



girafa girafe

ar

Reno americano

Reindeer



GREEN



EYES



SHOXY



APPENDIX 10

**All together now**

The Beatles

One, two, three, four  
Can I have a little more?  
Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten  
I love you  
A, B, C, D  
Can I bring my friend to tea?  
E, F, G, H, I, J  
I love you

Bom, bom, bom, bom, pa bom  
Sail the ship, bom-pa bom  
Chop the tree bom-pa bom  
Skip the rope bom-pa bom  
Look at me

All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now

Black, white, green, red  
Can I take my friend to play?  
Pink, brown, yellow, orange and blue

I love you

All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now

Bom, bom, bom, bom, pa bom  
Sail the ship, bom-pa bom  
Chop the tree bom-pa bom  
Skip the rope bom-pa bom  
Look at me

All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now all together now  
All together now.....

APPENDIX 11

SAN AGUSTIN PRIMARY SCHOOL  
FOURTH GRADE

ALPHABET SOUP

Find the words that you know in the alphabet soup.

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

## APPENDIX 13

### SKETCH

### THE STORY

#### THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD

Once upon a time there was a king who was not happy. He said, "I think that nobody is really happy. I will go on a trip to find the happiest man in the world". He went to many countries. In Paris, he met the richest man in the world. The king asked him, "Are you the happiest man in the world?" But the man answered, "No, I am the richest man in the world, but I do not have friends. I am not happy.

The king continued his trip. He met the most beautiful woman in the world, the most important man, and the most powerful king. They were not happy. The king was about to return home when he met a simple man. He was a poor peasant who was working the land. The king asked him, "Are you the happiest man in the world?"

"Certainly!" he said. "I have a beautiful family, bread on my table, my health and my work. What else would any man want?" The king then said, "It is true! You are the happiest man in the world!" And he returned home and was happy ever after.

**MORAL:** Happiness is made of simple things.

### THE SKETCH

#### THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD

#### CHARACTERS:

- The narrator
- The king
- The richest man
- The most beautiful woman
- The most important man
- The most powerful king
- The peasant

**-THE NARRATOR:** Once upon a time there was a king who was not happy.

**-THE KING:** I think that nobody is really happy. I will go on a trip to find the happiest man in the world.

**-THE NARRATOR:** He went to many countries. In Paris, he met the richest man in the world.

**-THE KING:** Are you the happiest man in the world?

**-THE RICHEST MAN:** No, I am very rich. But I do not have friends. I am not happy.

**-THE NARRATOR:** The king continued his trip. He met the most beautiful woman in the world, the most important man, and the most powerful king.

**-THE KING:** Are you the happiest woman in the world?

**-THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN:** No, I am the very beautiful. But nobody loves me. I am not happy.

**-THE KING:** Are you the happiest man in the world?

**-THE MOST IMPORTANT MAN:** No, I am very important. But I do not have family. I am not happy.

**-THE KING:** Are you the happiest man in the world?

**-THE MOST POWERFUL KING:** No, I am very powerful. But people hate me. I am not happy.

**-THE NARRATOR:** The king was about to return home when he met a simple man. He was a poor peasant who was working the land.

**-THE KING:** Are you the happiest man in the world?

**-THE PEASANT:** Certainly! I have a beautiful family, bread on my table, my health and my work. What else would any man want?

**-THE KING:** It is true! You are the happiest man in the world!

**-THE NARRATOR:** The king returned home and was happy ever after.