# How can the implementation of a teaching-learning cycle based on Genre Based Approach enhance students' written texts in a group of 11th graders at Institución Educativa CEFA?

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**Abstract**

The following paper relates the experience a pupil-teacher had at her practicum site with tenth graders at a public school, the school is located at the heart of Medellín. In this place, she discovered through class observations and conversations with her students that a teaching-learning cycle strategy along with a genre based approach helped her students engage in the writing of texts by connecting the aforementioned teaching approaches with the business area of the school. Strategies such as deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction along with student independent work and the teacher's role as knowledge mediator proved to have a positive impact on the students' language learning performance and attitudes towards English learning.

*Key words:* teaching-learning cycle, deconstruction, joint construction, independent construction, cross-curriculum.

## Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia. It was carried out at a public institution called "Institución Educativa Centro Formativo de Antioquia -CEFA-" in Medellín (Antioquia) Colombia.

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Furthermore, I would also like to thank my cooperating teacher and students at I.E. Centro Formativo de Antioquia -CEFA-, for their ongoing collaboration and commitment to this project. We worked together to implement new strategies in the English classroom that at the end brought improvement and motivation.

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## Preface

"Genre Based Approach enhances students' written texts" is the final outcome of my research project carried out with a group of tenth graders at Institución Educativa Centro Formativo de Antioquia, a public school located in Medellín's downtown, during the year 2017. The objective of this project was to describe the implementation of teaching-learning cycle to enhance students' written texts.

This project had two important phases. The first one includes observations and reflections of the English classes as well as some hours of teaching. The first action shows that the English practices and activities were mainly grammar-translation instructions and also, the requirement of the institution to integrate the English classes with the business areas had not been fulfilled. It helped me to identify the aim of this project and to create a series of activities to implement in the classroom. Thusly, in the second phase, I applied the action plan and designed some data collection instruments in order to analyze the plan implemented and answer my research project question.

This paper shows the context of the school, the description of the problem found in the English class, as well as the research question and objectives that conduct this project. It also holds the theoretical framework that supports it, and the process of data collection, their analysis and results obtained.

## Context

In order to obtain my B. A. in Foreign Language Teaching: English and French at Universidad de Antioquia, I carried out my academic practicum and my research project at one public school in Medellin. This process included class observations, the writing of a journal with comments and reflections of each English session, and my practicum as an English teacher. It is important to describe some relevant aspects that made this project possible such as the school's mission, the school methodology, the students' and the Cooperating Teacher's, hereafter referred to as CT, background.

First, Centro Formativo de Antioquia, hereafter referred to as CEFA, is located in Medellín's downtown, an area surrounded by several cultural, academic and educational institutions. The school was founded in 1935 by Joaquín Vallejo Arbeláez. His objective was to offer equal opportunities to women in Antioquia, who were highly discriminated against during those decades, as a chance for them to make their access to the universities possible. Nowadays, the school is still for girls only and its mission is to promote and educate women at an academic and technical level, based on a civil culture that prepares them for the basic labor initiation and the entry to a higher education.

CEFA offers education in different emphasis such as chemistry, nourishment, computer science, arts, business, oral health, pharmacy, mathematics among others. The emphasis seek the students' formation and preparation for both working world and academy. The school has different agreements with higher education institutions such as Sena, Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, Politécnico Jaime Isaza Cadavid and others. These institutions are in charge of the students' preparation in their focus areas. There are other agreements with other places where the girls have the chance to apply all the knowledge acquired during the preparation stages; example

of these places include public libraries, government institutions, hospitals, museums, universities among others. When the students finish their secondary school, they have the opportunity to continue studying their emphasis in the same higher education institution. The importance of the focus area is so high that the school seeks to integrate it with the other subjects such as English, Spanish and mathematics; this is called cross curricular subjects. All of these are defined on the curriculum programs.

My research project was carried out in a tenth grade group made up of 39 students. Their focus area is on Business (10C7). Their age range between 15 and 16 years old. Some of the girls I talked to wanted to start studying at a university once they graduated from high school, some others wanted to study a technical program or register in short courses that allowed them to start working fast. Finally, there were some other girls who only wanted to start working as soon as possible in order the support their families economically. Regarding their course load, they had seven hours per week to study their emphasis; they had three hours of entrepreneurship where they practiced what they were learning in the other emphasis classes. As for the English class, this group just had two hours of English per week. The girls came from different neighborhoods located in Medellín such as Manrique, Buenos Aires, Villa Hermosa and other nearby municipalities such as Bello, Copacabana, Envigado (Metropolitan area). The students came from public and private schools and they all had different English proficiency levels. As the students come from different areas of the city, they have different socio-economic strata.

My Cooperating Teacher holds a B. A. in Foreign Language Teaching from Universidad de Antioquia. She has been an English teacher for 25 years and has been teaching English at Centro Formativo de Antioquia for 13 years. Her methodology and principles as English teacher are based on grammar, translation and repetition.

The students' different English proficiency levels along with the CT's methodology made me think about the possibility of integrating the English class to the students' business emphasis and the other language skills. In the following section, I will explain how I came up with this idea.

## Statement of the problem

After my first observations as a student-teacher, I realized that the requirements of the cross-curricular subjects between their focus areas or emphasis and the English class were not fulfilled. Besides, I also evidenced that there was not a connection between the topics developed in the English class. I could notice that the activities developed in the English class aimed at grammar-oriented instruction, explicit teaching, and translation. An example of this occurred in a class where the students used the grammar structure to create sentences; as it was written in my journal entry #15. July 12th, 2017: *"they made examples together of affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentences in simple past and the teacher wrote the form on the board S + V (past participle) + C"*; therefore, the students did not have the opportunity to develop their speaking or writing skills. The use of repetition and memorization were part of the main activities as an example. This was also evidenced in my journal entry #4. February 17th, 2017: *"The teacher said, "stand up" to them and prayed "The lord's prayer", the students repeated after her. They repeated three times"*.

One of the biggest concerns for the English teachers in this institution was about the level students should have had for tenth grade. According to Guía No. 22 Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés, students who start tenth grade should have pre-intermediate 1 level (B 1.1) and during the grades tenth and eleventh, they achieve pre-

intermediate 2 (B 1.2). However, and according to the students' needs analysis carried out at the beginning of the research project, the students had different levels due to the lack of knowledge in their past schools. As they started in this school in tenth grade and they came from different schools (private or publics), this affected the students' level, because some of them had one or two hours per week for English classes and others had five or more.

Furthermore, some informal conversations with the students made me realize that, maybe, the class should not have been grammar focused and it should have taken into account the students' needs: *"Students said to the teacher they are not good at English"* (Journal entry #3. February 15th, 2017) and *"One of the students said to me "El inglés no me entra, no me gusta""* (Journal entry #4. February 17th, 2017).

Students should have had the opportunity to practice and use the language in a real context or situation. I wanted to integrate the English class with their focus area, in their case, Business, and open new spaces where they could apply their business knowledge and develop their writing skills. This way, the language learning process would have been more meaningful and enjoyable for them.

## Theoretical Framework

After the analysis of the issues inside the classroom, the study of theory was essential to understand and discover new ways to support my future practices. There were some principles that could help me to improve the teaching and learning process. This proposal was based on three main concepts: Genre Based Approach, The Teaching Learning Cycle, The Genre of Arguing and The Cross-Curriculum. Throughout this text, a definition of them and some of their characteristics will be presented.

## Genre Based Approach

The main key concept developed in this proposal was Genre Based Approach (GBA). The GBA has been applied in diverse curriculum fields to enlarge students' significance-forming potential. Where the text is the principal section of communication and teaching, this approach considers the language learning and its usage as a communicative, textual and aim-adapted procedure (Herazo, 2012).

> "The Genre Based Approach is a framework for literacy education that places text (i.e. coherent chunks of language larger that a sentence) as the centerpiece of instruction and curricula" (Johns, cited in Herazo, 2012)

The GBA has five principal features. First, it is a well-defined procedure that highlights students' needs and the way they should be evaluated. Second, it allows choosing specific grammar notions linked to the context of practice and the language need(s) in general. Third, it gives the teacher the role of a guide. So s/he is the one who helps students' develop capacity to shape meaning through the different activities. Fourth, the teaching process is seen as an opportunity to give power to students for opening, comprehending and challenging the usefulness of the texts. Finally, it intends to raise students' and teachers' knowledge of how texts work. (Hyland, 2007)

## The Teaching-Learning Cycle

The characteristics of GBA are well illustrated by the teaching-learning cycle. It allows transforming teaching practices (traditional teaching) into meaningful foreign language development experiences. The Learning-Teaching Cycle allows teachers and students to focus on a specific based instruction where they start creating the skeleton of the text together as a group

to achieve an independent construction of it in the end (Burns, 2010; Callaghan & Rothery, 1988, cited in Herazo, 2012).

The Cycle includes three main stages: deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction. The first stage, deconstruction is the stage where students study a real example from the studied genre.

> "In the modelling stage, students become familiar with the genre features and purpose by exploring several texts based on the selected genre. In this stage, students learn the rhetorical structure of the genre and the lexico-grammatical resources it uses to create meaning" (Derewianka, 2004)

After this, the second stage can take place. In the developments of the joint construction stage, students construct a new text related to the same genre with the guidance of the teacher. Working in groups, peers or as a whole group could be possible in this stage. The last stage is independent construction, where students elaborate another example with all the acquired features from the previous stages. This stage is developed by the students independently. The students can ask their teacher for help if they need it (Herazo, 2012).

**Specific Genre**

After explaining how the process is carried out, it is important to explicate the specific focus genre. The focus genre was the genre of arguing. According to Knapp & Watkins (2005), this genre can be defined as a:

> "Social procedure that argues through the process of expanding a proposition to persuade readers to accept a point of view. It is a process that involves reasoning, evaluation and persuasion" (Knapp & Watkins, 2005)

Another author called it Exposition genre.

> "Argues for a particular point of view on an issue. An exposition gives reasons to support a thesis and elaborates these using evidence" (Macken-Horarik, 2008)

**The Cross-Curriculum**

The Cross-Curriculum is the integration of different subjects or areas to the English learning and teaching process. It is a way of presenting to students language as an amazing instrument that allows us to interchange viewpoints and knowledge related to the real world. There are some benefits associated to the development of cross-curricular activities. It offers students the chance to practice and strengthen their prior knowledge about themes, structures, and vocabulary. It also helps students use their linguistic skills to establish meaningful interactions through themes and contents they can use to create oral or/and written texts with which they can convey their own messages and/or their understanding of knowledge previously studied; thusly, providing students with assistance to discover the connection within the curricula and their real-life experiences. The Cross-Curriculum allows students to explore and connect different themes and topics in English. (Svecova, 2003)

To conclude, when working on a specific genre, the GBA can help to achieve a set of goals in the classroom through the use of the teaching learning cycle. Where the center of attention is full texts rather than separated sentences. For the purpose of this research, this proposal aims at combining two subjects: the school's business area and English classes to create a new learning environment.

## Research Question

How can the implementation of a teaching-learning cycle based on GBA enhance students' written texts in a group of 11th graders at Institución Educativa CEFA?

### General Objective

To describe the implementation of teaching-learning cycle to enhance students' written texts.

### Specific Objectives

- To identify the stages that enhance students' written texts.
- To define the contributions of the stages in students' written texts.
- To analyze students' achievements in relation to the teaching-learning cycle.

## Action Plan and Development of the Actions

Taking into account the learning and teaching cycle as well as the main goal of my project, I divided my plan of action into three phases: Deconstruction, Joint Construction, and Independent Construction. Each phase has subjective purposes. In Phase One (Deconstruction), the students learned about the brochures- their purposes, language features, and structures. This phase was developed in July. During Joint Construction, the students created a travel brochure example with the help of the entire group. My role was to guide and support the decisions of the students while explaining what was learned during Deconstruction (Phase One) when necessary. This phase took place in August. In the final phase, Independent Construction, the students created their own brochures in pairs, using the features studied during Deconstruction as well as following the example created during Joint Construction. This phase was done in September.

First, I started implementing my action plan by establishing a series of activities that complied with what each of the phases defines. In addition, the creation of this action plan seeks to integrate the business area in the English class.

The activities of the first phase attempted to familiarize the students with the text they had to recreate and the language necessary to write one. Within these activities, it is worth highlighting the following: searching of information, understanding of the focus genre, reviewing of previous knowledge, analyzing examples, and defining structures. In that case, I organized activities around the brochure, its meaning, characteristics, benefits and structure. The students and I also analyzed two travel brochure examples as well as activities related to the language needed such as modal verbs, adjectives, the persuasive techniques among others. There were some evidence about the development of this stage. First, as it can be seen in my journal entry #20. August 11th, 2017: *"The students started to connect with their business area and they told me they need these kind of techniques when they are selling something or promoting a service or company"* and second, *"They students seemed to like this activity, some of them came to me at the end of each class and expressed that they wanted more activities like this one"*.

The second phase allowed me to guide the students in creating an example of the focus text, in that case, a travel brochure. At the beginning of this stage, I faced a difficulty when I did not feel comfortable with this stage at the beginning, because I was not sure how to manage this activity and how to organize the ideas they could give me. After reading more literature about Genre Based and The Teaching-Leaning Cycle, I understood my role as a guide and I needed to take into account students' comments without changing them. The students decided to choose Medellín to create the example since they all knew the city. The students decided on the structure

and the information included in Medellín's brochure. When we decided this part, it was not difficult and it was easy to have an agreement on the structure.

Finally, the students developed their own travel brochure during the third phase. The activity was done in pairs. They chose one Colombian city and started to apply the knowledge they got in the first stages, starting with a conceptual map in order to organize their ideas. In the three phases, the students could get my help to solve their questions or got explanations on topics such as brochure structure, brochure contents or grammar language. A short description of what happened in my class during the last stage is reflected in my journal entry #32. September 15th, 2017: *"Students did a great job and during the development of this part, they asked questions related to the first stage as grammar or spelling, but not real concerns"*.

Before beginning the development of these activities, a series of data instruments were developed to collect data. From each phase, I collected data that provided me with information to see how the implementation of the Teaching-Learning Cycle based on GBA enhances the students' written texts used in their business area.

At the end of August and at the beginning of September I implemented the data collection instruments that allowed me to check how beneficial or not my teaching and learning approaches were in class. I both interviewed the students and the cooperating teacher as well as wrote as many journal entries as I could, even though I wrote during the whole project. Plus, in order to apply them and collect data successfully, I planned and designed some actions I later implemented when I had the chance to teach so that the participants gained experience regarding the approaches I intended to utilize.

The interview I carried out with the students had as an objective to identify the aspects of the methodology that help them to improve their writing skills as well as knowing their opinions

about the activities that were implemented. I interviewed five students individually at the end of the third phase. The second instrument was the CT's interview. This was also done at the end of the third phase. With the interview, I intended to know the teacher's point of view about the GB instructional unit, also her perception on the students' performance. The last instrument was my journal, which I wrote, analyzed and categorized during the whole research process in order to see the actions, reactions, and products of the students.

After the data collection stage, I gathered the information I obtained from the instruments and based on what Burns (2010) suggests I coded it, compared it, and interpreted it to finally report the findings. Then, after the analysis and triangulation of the data I found that the implementation of the Learning-teaching cycle was useful for developing the students writing skills. This was evidenced in several categories that are explained below.

## Findings and Interpretations

After the triangulation and analysis of the data collection techniques previously described, I found that the implementation of The Teaching-Learning Cycle with a Cross-Curriculum had a positive impact on the students' production of written texts. The categories explained below will aim at explaining how this happened.

### Cycle flexibility

The students and my own experience during the development of this research project confirmed that The Teaching-Learning Cycle allowed us to follow a flexible sequence in which we had the chance to go back and forth through the different stages, i.e., once, when being on the third stage of The Teaching-Learning Cycle and the students needed to clarify an aspect from

one of the previous stages, we had the opportunity to back to it, check it, clarify it, apply it and return to the third stage, without this event affecting negatively the successful development of the action proposed. This brought the students the opportunity to overcome moments where the information or instruction had not been clear giving them chance refresh their memory. The following information was found in the data instruments *"when some topic were not clear, we checked again"* (Students' interview, September 15th, 20017), *"It was interesting that the teacher guided us to give good examples and if we had doubts we could explain again"* (Students' interview, September 15th, 20017), and *"In the third phase, students did a great job and during the development of this part, they asked questions related to the first stage as grammar or spelling but not real concerning"* (Journal entry #32. September 15th, 2017). According to Herazo (2012), the different phases of The Teaching-Learning Cycle are flexible and resourceful as they set the mood for teaching to begin at any phase or to go back to prior stages considering the students' experience with the text genre. During the implementation, I could observe that we did this all the time; we could go back and forth through the stages as needed by the learning situation of the students in the actions proposed. I had the chance to explain, once or twice more, aspects related to structure, grammar, and vocabulary, among others. All this process made it possible for the students to plan, design and develop a great final product and a better understanding of the grammar topics as well as the contents related to their emphasis area worked during the activities. . The following journal entry evidences the statement thereof, "*They did a great job [in the third phase] and during the development of this part they asked questions related to the first stage about grammar or spelling, but not rea concerns or complaints*." (Journal entry #32, September 15th, 2017)

**Cross-Curriculum**

The students and the cooperating teacher expressed that the Cross-Curriculum was a useful and positive aspect that we applied in the development of this research project. This allowed the students to use their prior knowledge in their focus area, in this case Business. They could integrate the information they had about the creation of brochures, the founding of a company and how to sell a product, to the English learning process. Some evidences that support this statement are as follows, *"We could apply the knowledge we had from other subjects to create an awesome final brochure and also there was an integration because in the final stage we applied what we learnt in stages 1 and 2"* (Students' interview, September 15th, 20017) and *"What a brilliant idea to connect English with the students' Business area, they could use their prior knowledge"* (Teacher's interview, September 20th, 20017). Svecova (2003) states that a Cross-Curriculum permits students to use their prior knowledge by giving them the chance to expand on this prior knowledge with the new topics. She affirms that teachers don't need to be scientists or experts to apply this concept inside the English classes. And some of the benefits related to this aspect are that the teacher can plan practical lessons, set the mood for a motivational environment in which the students are not scared or insecure and it permits the use of the language for real purposes. When I was creating the instructional unit based on the Genre Based Approach, I discovered that this approach allowed me to integrate English and the students' syllabi that emphasized on Business. After applying this unit, I noticed that when the students knew the topic and the connection with their business area, they were excited and they started telling me that they knew a lot about brochures "*We started to talk about brochures and the students shared their ideas about the benefits of a brochure and I wrote some of their ideas on the board. I pasted a little poster about brochure benefits that I brought*" (Journal entry #).

This event, in turn, seemed to trigger the students' good vibes towards the action I proposed as they started participating by mentioning the structures, purposes, contents of a brochure. They showed they had a really broad previous knowledge regarding brochures. The cross-curriculum was an opportunity for me to engage the students.

**Collaborative work**

The students as well the cooperating teacher declared that the instructional unit created around Genre based Approach allowed the students to work in pairs, groups, and/or individually. It produced a collaborative environment where students supported one another throughout the development of the different stages, made decisions related to the grammar and brochure structures and the information needed for the travel brochure. The following ideas expressed by the participants serve as evidence to support this category, *"The students helped one other build the bases as grammar, structures, vocabulary among others to develop the stages 2 and 3"* (Teacher's interview, September 20th, 20017) and *"We liked to work in stages because we could share ideas, make decisions, work in groups or individually. It helped us to respect others' opinions"* (Students' interview, September 15th, 2017). The implementation of The Teaching-Learning Cycle permitted me to work with the students in a different way, in small groups, the group as a whole, and individually. This teaching cycle enabled the students to help one another, to explain and clarify what we had already gone over and respect what the others said. When the students worked together they seemed to be more active and participate more in the activities.

## Conclusions and suggestions

Bearing in mind my research question: How can the implementation of a teaching-learning cycle, based on GBA, enhance the written texts of a group of 11th grade students at

Institución Educativa CEFA? I came to the conclusion that there was a positive fulfillment around it. At the end, each objective had a possible answer and some suggestions appeared during the development of this research project.

After the data collection was analyzed, it is possible to state that the stage that enhances student's written texts was the first stage, highlighting that all three stages integrated had accomplished this purpose. This stage provided students with the outline regarding the text they had to write (a travel brochure). It delivered context about the activity and the methodology applied, provided the students with the grammar, vocabulary, and the structural features needed to create the brochure. The students analyzed real examples of travel related brochures. With all of this, the students felt more comfortable to perform better and subsequently, they could apply the knowledge they already had.

Each stage gave the students a different exercise that helped them to reach the goal of each challenge. Stage One, as I mentioned before, gave the students all the necessary information for the project, in this case to create a travel brochure. Also, it allowed students to use their prior knowledge in other subjects with the purpose of analyzing, organizing, and defining a structure to be followed in Stages Two and Three. Stage Two encourages students to participate actively, to work as whole group, and to apply what they already learned in Stage One. At the core of this stage, the students maintained respect for all comments. The last stage gave the students the opportunity to work more independently and with autonomy, allowing them to make independent choices about their own travel brochure, as well as their questions and the help received from the teacher.

At the end, the students had emphatic and positive attitude toward The Teaching-Learning Cycle. During the elaboration of each stage, they were attentive, interested, motivated,

actively participative, and engaged with each proposed activity. They enjoyed this process, especially with the fact that they were applying what they already had learned in their Business area. Only at the beginning of the Second Stage, the students had some discipline problems because there was an activity that needed to be done with the help of all of us; forcing them to come to a decision was difficult, but in the end they learned to respect opinions and give good arguments to come to a decision.

Some suggestions that came up in this process were related with classroom management and the step by step process of this methodology. First, each stage allowed me to work differently; in groups, individually, partners or as a whole group giving the students the opportunity to interact with and learn each other. And second, in Stage Two, I had to understand that I needed to respect student's ideas and took them as original as the students had said them and not changing them in my own words. Another suggestion is related with the Cross-Curriculum, the integration of students' prior knowledge not only in English but in other themes helped to create an awesome and brilliant project that allowed them to acquire new knowledge.

## Reflection

The development of this practicum and research presented here had, for me, some strong and some weak points that involve my personal, teaching and research circles. The lines below explain some of these aspects and how I felt about them.

Personally, this experience allowed me to meet and work with new people from which I learnt and discovered new things. Even though meeting new people was a great thing to happen to me as they taught me a little bit about good judgement and treading lightly as a teacher. I faced some problems such as timing related to some classes being too short, and only two hours

per week to implement my research project and disagreements that I was, nonetheless, able to solve the best way by talking with them, giving some activities as homework and negotiating some class hours with other teachers. It was also a stressful time, because I had to quit my job in order to be able to complete the requirements for this part of my academic process.

Professionally, as a teacher and teacher-researcher the experience in a public school made me realize that being a teacher is not easy at all. It is a sort of a trial in the sense that I learnt that the students were always evaluating through their attitudes and body language the activities I or my CT proposed. I noticed that sometimes their body language would become more welcoming when I brought things to the course that were meaningful to them, things that related to their technical programme, for example. Some other times, when I did things that had to do with grammar explanations or memorization, their attitude and body language would be less open to trying, to learning. Being a teacher is a profession that demands constant preparation, effort, patience, willingness, enthusiasm, energy, resourcefulness and vocation. The aspects thereof along with the ones I learnt while I designed, planned and implemented this research project, listening skills, analytic skills, courage to bring new things to class, among others, helped me to improve my role as a teacher and ameliorate the teaching and learning strategies I used during this research/teaching exercise to fulfill the needs my students will and could have in the near future.

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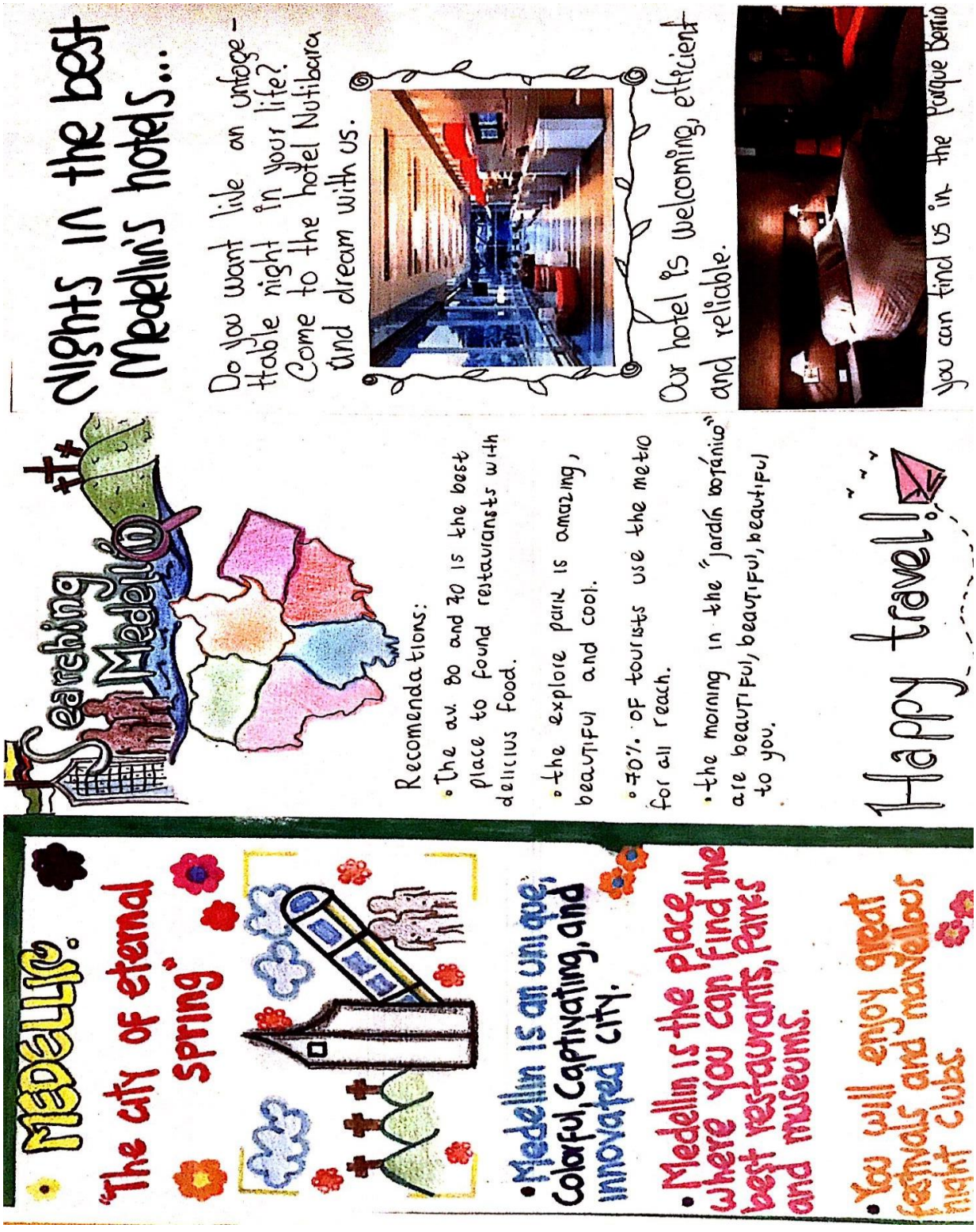
**Appendix A**

Joint Construction Phase: Final product (Front page)

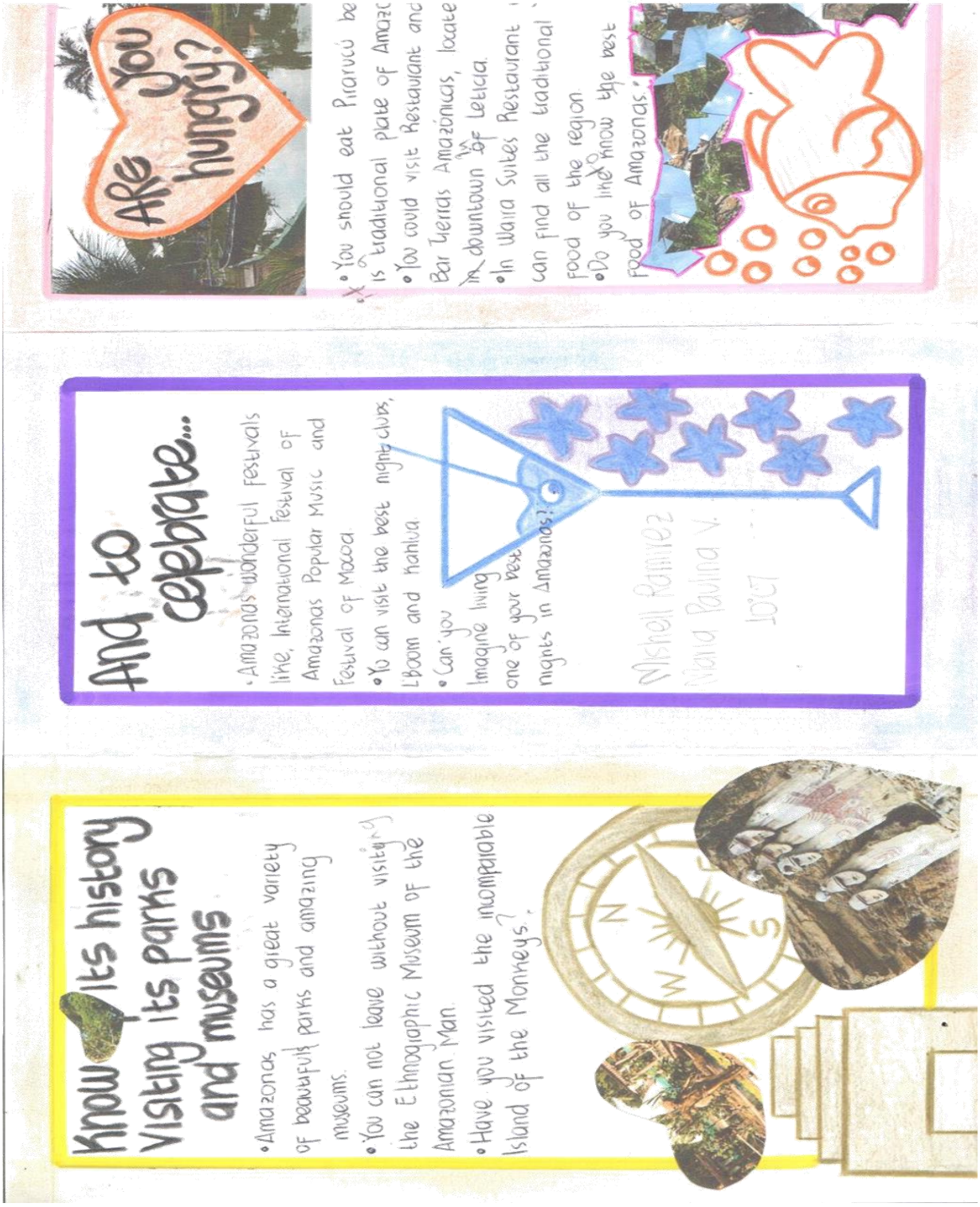


**Appendix B**

Joint Construction Phase: Final product (Back page)

## Appendix C

Independent Construction Phase: Final product (example of one group/front page)

**Appendix C**

Independent Construction Phase: Final product (example of one group/back page)