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Trabajo de investigación presentado como requisito parcial

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Licenciado en Lenguas Extranjeras

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The Use of Authentic Materials to Improve the English Language Skills

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Abstract

This action research was conducted to learn how using authentic materials helps students improve their language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in a group of 11th graders at a public institution INEM Jose Felix de Restrepo in the city of Medellín. The data collection instruments included journals, surveys, student artifacts, focus group, CT interview, and advisor observation report, showing the necessary evidence of how the students, through the use of authentic materials like videos, articles, and comics could improve their language skills except for reading since lack of time and another obstacles that made impossible to implement more activities to deepen this skill.

Keywords: non-authentic material, authentic materials, language skills

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement for the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.

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First of all, I want to thank God for his faithfulness, provision and for the strength hegave me to finish this stage of my life. Also, to my wife for her support and patience throughout this process, to my parents for their unconditional support, to my teacher Lina Londono for her patience and her availability to help me in the development of this work and finally, to my classmates who were also a great support in this process.

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1. Preface

This research project aims to explore the usefulness of the use of authentic materials in the classroom for students in grade 11 of a public school in the city of Medellin. This project began on August 9, 2022, and ended on November 22, 2022. This paper describes firstly the context of the educational institution, secondly the presentation of the problem, thirdly the action plan and its development, and finally the findings, conclusions, and reflections of the whole process of intervention.

2. Description of the Context

The educational institution INEM Jose Felix de Restrepo is a public school located at Av. Las Vegas, Carrera 48 # 1-125 El Poblado, Medellín. It was founded in 1970 by President Carlos Lleras Restrepo and the Minister of Education, Gabriel Betancourt Mejía, with the purpose that "people with fewer resources in Colombia have institutes equal to or better than the upper classes of the country." The institution's population is quite diverse in terms of economic status and social condition, so it is possible to note the school integration and the inclusion of people from almost all neighborhoods of the city.

This institution provides formal education services at different levels: kindergarten, Primary, middle school, and high school with a diversified, flexible, and open curricular proposal for pedagogical innovation. It fosters the integral formation of its students based on values, environmental conservation, learning to be, know, do, and live together in a context of democratic participation and collaborative work. The institution is outlined as an educational scenario of high quality and technical and technological appropriation center in the Valle de Aburrá Metropolitan Area, which involves school research in educational processes. It also seeks to form autonomous, critical, and creative citizens; democratic and committed to the environment that values scientific knowledge, social and cultural, active subjects in the production of new knowledge; competent to continue in the chain of technical, technological, and professional training or to approach the world of work. (Institución Educativa INEM José Félix de Restrepo, 2020, p. 5)

INEM's current English program seeks to develop the communicative skills to read, understand, write, listen and express oneself correctly in the target language. It also promotes conversational, reading and writing skills, based on the objectives established in the Education Law 115 of 1994. Likewise, in 2019, the institution created the specialization

in Human Sciences with Emphasis in English, dedicated to the study of English in a more

cultural, formal, literary and pragmatic way, from which students will be able to study

foreign languages or translation in the future.

This research project is focused on the students of the eleventh grade, a group of 30

students of the technical specialty of commercial administration. These young people are

students between 16 and 18 years of age from different metropolitan area neighborhoods.

Their level of English is between basic and intermediate because many of them have not

had a constant process since they come from other schools to attend the last two or three

years of high school, which does not guarantee a homogeneous learning process. In

addition to this, the group is quite large with only two hours of English per week which

does not allow to dynamize the activities proposed during the class. However, most of them

know that English is essential for their lives and their professional and academic future. For

this reason, the students show interest in the language, especially in reading, writing, and

listening activities.

The Cooperating Teacher of this course has a bachelor's degree in modern languages

from the University of Caldas, a master's degree in education, and a specialization in

English from the University of California. He has been an English teacher for 16 years and

15 years in the institution.

The teacher is aware that it is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about

building knowledge. So, in the classroom, he uses different strategies to motivate students,

such as group work, games, explanations, and guides that allow students not only to

internalize knowledge but also to develop communicative competencies and be able to

communicate orally and in the written form. For this, the teacher uses the material

suggested by the Ministry of Education, such as the book English Please. He also uses

videos, music, applications such as Quizizz, lyricstraining, and other tools. This is also in order to help them achieve the competencies required by the Ministry of Education while still enjoying learning.

3. Statement of the Problem

In the Colombian context, the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) is framed by policies such as the national bilingualism plan created by the Ministry of Education. This plan seeks to strengthen the teaching and learning of foreign languages in order for students to achieve a B1 or B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

For many years it has been evident that teaching English as a foreign language in Colombia has focused on methodologies in which grammatical aspects predominate or where the language is taught through non-authentic materials. According to (Berardo, 2006) these materials are artificial and have pre-designed structures that are very different from what students encounter in a real experience in the use of the language. Though these materials are good for teaching structures and bringing students closer to the language, they are not enough for students to have sufficient tools to understand, produce and interact with English used in real life.

In the INEM Jose Felix de Restrepo educational institution, eleventh-grade students come with difficulties that do not allow them to reach the level expected by the Ministry of Education. In addition to this, after observing some of the first classes, different problems were found. In the first place, the students come from various educational institutions in the city of Medellín, which makes it difficult for them to have a homogeneous process that allows them to be level in the program proposed by the institution. Secondly, the students come after receiving virtual classes due to the covid 19 pandemic, which is why other problems were found, such as difficulty in socializing with each other, a lack of interest in the classes, and the lack of motivation. Third, the use of materials provided by the

institution such as textbooks is not enough for them to have a real interaction with the

English language.

Considering the afore mentioned aspects, the use of authentic materials in the

classroom is proposed to help students improve their language skills, since this type of

material can be selected according to their needs and with topics of interest. These

materials are also very useful for the learning process because these allow them to have a

closer immersion with English, facilitating the use of the language in everyday life

situations, in addition, they are of great help to develop the social skills of the language and

the knowledge of new cultures, promoting a higher level of motivation, and encouraging

them to participate in the tasks proposed in the classroom. Finally, it should be noted that

authentic materials are useful for students who learn at a slower pace than others (Rao,

2019).

In conclusion, it is because of these multiple benefits to students' learning that it is

pertinent to continue exploring the use of these types of materials and determine how they

help them improve their language skills.

4.   Theoretical Framework

This section introduces several important aspects that support this research project. First, we will find the definition of non-authentic materials and their characteristics. Second, we will find the definition of authentic materials and their classification. Finally, we will define what linguistic skills are, and how they are classified.

4.1. Non-Authentic Materials

Non-authentic materials are those that are designed specifically for language learning. These materials have artificial and constant language that focuses on a topic to be taught and often include a series of " fictitious cues" such as perfectly formed sentences and complete answers to grammatically structured questions with structures that are repeated over and over again. (Berardo, 2006), however, these materials can be beneficial in the comprehension of a foreign language from an auditive and grammatical point of view, offering opportunities to advance and reinforce learning according to the performance of the students (Colorado & Ángel, 2011).

4.2. Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are those produced by native speakers for native speakers in order to achieve some social purpose in a linguistic community, without pedagogical intentions, becoming part of the daily life of the speakers through images, audios, videos, advertising texts, press articles, literature, songs, cooking recipes, among others. (Wallace, 1992, as cited in Berardo, 2006). Additionally, these materials serve as vehicles for students to come into contact with the language in its actual use and context, forcing them to use their knowledge and communication skills in response to the challenges presented by the material. (Nunan 1999). According to this approach, learning takes place through activities

related to real communicative situations that help in decision making, autonomous work and the development of abilities in a learning-teaching experience in which language is a channel of communication, and a social communicative process that involves users and social agents, but not learners. According to Andrijević (2010) authentic materials have the following characteristics:

- are not created specifically for didactic purposes, but they must be didactically functional.

- are images of real linguistic uses in various contexts.

- are preferably linked to current events.

- show the reality of a culture.

- show learners a language in its synchronic state, a language that is a reflection of particular time, place, intentionality, etc.

- They must be in line with the interests of the learners.

- according to (Mochón Ronda, 2005, as cited in Andrijević 2010) these are materials that should not be manipulated or transformed, since they lose their identity and veracity.

An important aspect to take into account when defining authentic material is the term realia, which is generally understood as any object, linguistic or physical, that can be used in the classroom as a didactic resource by allowing the learner to manipulate and visualize the object itself, which often comes from outside the educative experience and is used for the purpose of illustrating, learning vocabulary and grammar. The use of realia in language teaching allows students to develop their language skills by better understanding other cultures and real-life situations, strengthening the connection between words and real objects. (Ng et al., 2020)

4.3. Language skills

According to Sharma (n.d) in second language teaching, the four language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) were divided into two domains: receptive/passiveskills (reading and listening) and Productive/active skills (speaking and writing). Linguisticskills are classified as follows:

4.3.1. *Listening*

Is a receptive skill, or a passive skill, as it requires us to use our ears and our brains to comprehend language.

4.3.2. *Reading*

It is a receptive or passive skill, as it requires us to use our eyes and our brains to comprehend the written equivalent of spoken language.

4.3.3. *Speaking*

A productive skill, or an active skill, as it requires us to use our vocal tract and our brains to correctly produce language through sound.

4.3.4. *Writing*

It is a productive or active skill, as it requires us to use our hands and our brains to produce the written symbols that represent our spoken language.

5.   Research Question

How does the use of authentic materials improve English language skills in a group of 11th graders in a public institution in Medellín?

5.1. General Objective

To establish how the use of authentic materials can improve students' English language skills in the classroom.

5.2. Specific Objectives

- To explore how the use of authentic material benefits English language skills in the classroom.
- To determine the effectiveness of using authentic materials for students to improve their English language skills.

6.   Action Plan

In order to achieve the objectives proposed in this action research project, an approach is established through different actions during the course of the second semester of the year 2022. First, an approach is made with the cooperating teacher and with the students to explain what the project is about, and at the same time, informed consent is made to be signed by the parents of the students since the students are underage. Second, for data collection, we plan to make use of journals, surveys, and interviews in order to identify the interests of the students and reflect on the development of the research process, and to know their reactions and opinions. Third, it seeks to implement the use of different kinds of materials such as audio, videos, articles of interest, and comics among others. These will be applied during seven class moments making use of strategies to integrate the different language skills. And finally, the final actions will be the analysis of the collected data and the realization of the final report.

7. Data Collection Instruments

For the implementation of this action research, different methods of data collection were used in order to answer the research question. First, the journals that were written during this process. Secondly, a survey was conducted with the students in order to know their perceptions about English, their tastes and interests. Thirdly, a focus group was conducted with some students to know their perceptions about the classes and the authentic materials proposed in class. Fourthly, the observation report of the supervisor. And finally, an unstructured interview was conducted with the cooperating teacher in order to obtain feedback on the performance of the preservice teacher in the process.

8. Development of Actions

For the development of this research project, there are seven weeks in which different activities will be implemented in one hour each week. Different authentic materials, such as videos, articles, and comics, will be used for each class session. These are chosen previously according to the needs and interests of the students to capture their attention and to discover to what extent they help the students improve their language skills.

9. Findings and Interpretation

In order to answer the research question and the objectives proposed in this action research, different data collection instruments are used, such as surveys, journals, unstructured interviews, focus groups, and observation of the supervisor. The analysis is made through triangulation which is a strategic aid to finding credibility and validity in the research work by using different kinds of data, methods, researchers, and theories to approach a research question (Bhandari, 2022). In this section the findings will be presented by categories with their respective evidence and interpretation.

9.1. Effectiveness

Using authentic materials in the English class is effective for the learning process of the language since students are exposed to more realistic forms of the language and grammar and structural aspects are learnt in a way that they do not need to really think about them (Colorado & Ángel, 2011). These materials are also effective since they allow them to immerse themselves in English, facilitating the use of language in everyday life, as well as helping them to develop linguistic skills learning about certain social and cultural contexts. (Rao, 2019). In the observation report the advisor says:

"The materials selected for the class are authentic comics which seem to be interesting for most of the students in the group. The idea of contrasting western and eastern materials helps students learn about other cultures and/or calls the attention of many of them". (Observation report, October 18th, 2022).

The effectiveness of these resources is also reflected in the opinions of the students.

"Student 4: A mí me gustó mucho el video sobre las comidas callejeras porque hablaba sobre de la vida de los demás y de lo que comen en otras culturas, también

me gustó lo de los cómics porque se ve entretenido y es un material para nosotros

así jóvenes y se aprende más fácil". (Focus Group Interview, October 19th, 2022)

9.2. Interest and Motivation

According to (Peacock, 1997, as cited in Morales 2014), Using authentic materials increases students' attention, interest, motivation and enjoyment. During the implementation of this project, some students expressed that the authentic materials created a greater interest in them because the topics were very interesting. Regarding this some students said the following:

"Student 1: Profe por ejemplo en mi caso la materia de inglés me gusta muy poco, pero con materiales diferentes siento que aprendo más y como que le tengo más interés porque eso fomenta mucho el interés y es como hacer algo diferente a lo que normalmente se hace. Student 2: A mí me interesa mucho la materia de inglés aunque yo no aprenda mucho que digamos, pero con los materiales que usted nos ha traído la clase se ha vuelto mucho más interesante como que con más ganas de querer aprender". (Focus Group Interview, October 19th, 2022)

It is important to highlight that the materials were chosen according to the interests of the students. Through the survey, it was found that the topics that the students liked the most were music, movies, food and drawing, among others.s (Survey #1, August 9th, 2022) Bringing authentic materials that are related to the interests of the students motivates them to learn the language since they learn in a more meaningful way avoiding memory learning and content isolated from their reality (Andrijević, 2010).

9.3. Improvement of language skills

Authentic materials help students gain confidence through activities that strengthen and develop their four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) using realistic problems that lead them to be creative, imaginative, and analytical (Colorado & Ángel, 2011). As proof of this, a reading activity related to identity theft was carried out with the students and they were asked the following questions:

1. How can you and your family be affected if a criminal hacks your personal information?

2. What can you do to protect your social media accounts?

3. If you have been a victim of a situation similar to the one mentioned in the video. What would you do?

These were the responses of a group of students:
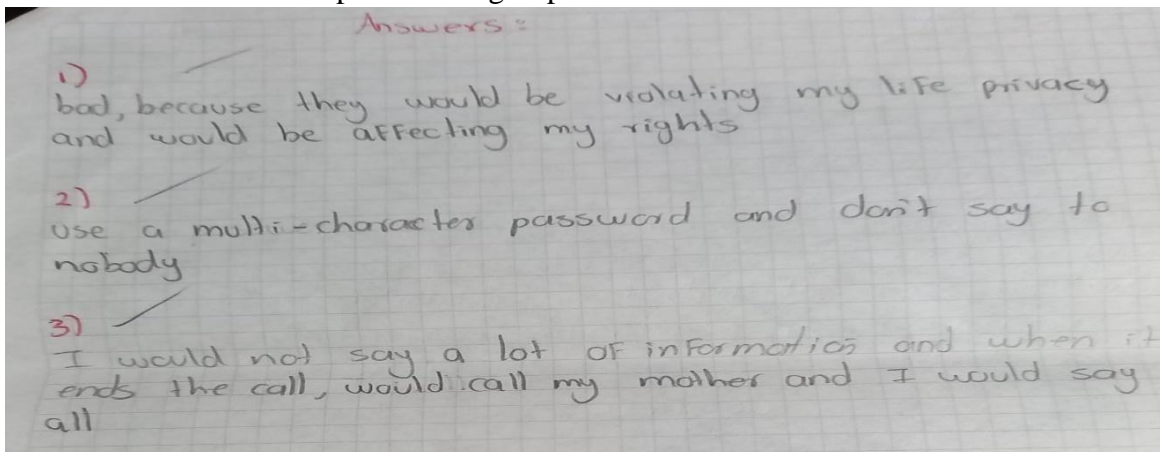
This shows that students learn through this type of material to solve situations that can directly affect them while improving listening, reading and writing using the vocabulary learned through the videos and articles related with the topic, and with significant learning. A student said:

"Student 1: sí estoy por el todo de proteger la identidad pues es algo a lo que nos

enfrentamos todos los días porque realmente el que tiene celular está expuesto y

aunque no quisiera se volvió algo muy necesario entonces como siento que también

es como aprender cosas para la vida y no solamente aprender a hablar un idioma".

(Focus Group Interview, October 19th, 2022)

9.3.1. *Speaking*

In one of the classes the cooperating teacher expressed that the students' oral

production improved in the evaluation of the presentations they had with them. (Journal

Entry #5, September the 27th 2022) The students also expressed:

"Student 2: Profe yo más que todo he mejorado la pronunciación y la escritura

porque yo antes no era capaz de pronunciar bastantes palabras como frases pero

ahora sí me siento en la capacidad de pronunciar bien aunque yo no hable fluido

pero lo pronuncio bien". (Focus Group Interview, October 19th, 2022).

Also in the journals, it was evident in some of the student's participation, they can

asked some questions in English related to the topics proposed in the different

materials(Journal Entry #1, August 16th, 2022) and (Journal Entry #1, October 18th, 2022).

Regarding this the advisor also said:

"Some students participate in using some expressions and even complete

sentences". (Observation report, October 18th, 2022)

9.3.2. *Listening*

In some of the classes where the subject of the video was presented to them, the

students showed expectations of what was going to be discussed. A student expressed the

following: "*Profe ponga pues rápido el video que eso se ve muy interesante y ya estoy que*

me escucho". (Journal Entry #1, August 16th, 2022) Although at the beginning it was not

easy for them, it was evident in the journal and in the focus group that the students, after

learning the vocabulary and asking questions related to the videos, could see themselves that at the end of the third listening they improved their comprehension (Journal Entry #1, August 23rd, 2022). At the end of the term some students said the following:

> *"Student 3: profe la verdad a mí sí me pareció que mis habilidades mejoraron ósea como le dije, para mí las clases de inglés siempre son como una herramienta algo donde puedo reforzar cosas y aprender algunas nuevas y en las clases que hemos estado trabajando si note que mejoro mi habilidad por ejemplo de comprensión del inglés o sea antes cómo que no captaba muchas veces bien las palabras cuando hablan las personas el inglés fluido, que hablan muy rápido y como que las estoy empezando a captar mejor entonces al escucharlas me permite comprender mejor cuando alguien habla inglés. Student 4: bueno pues la verdad yo siento que uno aprende mucho al escuchar y si el hecho de escuchar vídeos canciones pues como que le permite a uno identificar cómo se pronunciaría y también la verdad mi vocabulario es muy corto entonces siento que hay palabras diferentes que vi pues sí que se me quedaron grabadas entonces también me sirvió para expandir el vocabulario".* (Focus Group Interview, October 19th, 2022).

9.3.3. *Reading*

With respect to reading, it was not possible to make an analysis to demonstrate whether it helped to improve this skill, since not enough information was found in the data collection and due to the lack of time for the implementation of those kinds of activities.

9.3.4. *Writing*

Although the activities and materials used in this intervention worked on different language skills, most of them pointed to developing writing activities. This allowed the
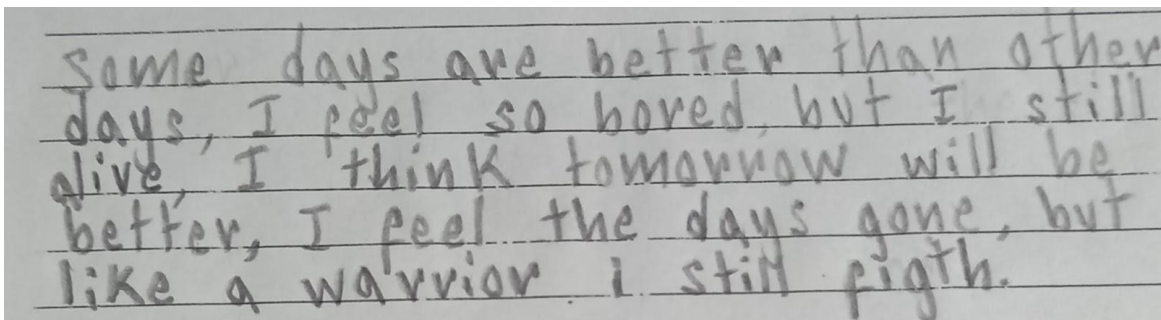
students to produce more in this aspect, which helped them improve their writing. In the

observation the advisor report that:

> *"Some linguistic integration skills take place when using oral and written language*
>
> *to deal with technical words related to comics".* (Observation report, October 18th,
>
> 2022).

Students begin to make connections between their interests and their needs by

working on this exercise. In the comics activity, the students practiced writing by

expressing everyday situations and illustrated through drawings. This reflects that they are

acquiring the ability to write in a more significant way that allows them to experience the

language naturally. Students begin to make connections between their interests and their

needs by working on this exercise. It can be seen in the production of these students:

Regarding the evidence reflected in the evaluations, it can be said that the students were able to express thoughts and emotions through the song activity. Through the questions the students begin to easily identify the thoughts and feelings in the song which makes it easier for them to express them in the written activity. It also becomes easier when they do it with the song of their choice. (Journal Entry #5, September the 27th 2022). The result of this activity was evidenced that the students were able to express what they thought and felt spontaneously, as can be seen in the following example.

Some days are better than other days, I feel so bored, but I still alive, I think tomorrow will be better, I feel the days gone, but like a warrior i still figth.

10. Conclusions and reflection

This action research was done to explore how authentic materials help students improve their language skills. There are many advantages found when making use of this type of material, such as the contact that one has with the language through real situations in social and cultural contexts that allow learning in a significant way (Rao, 2019). However, it is important to highlight that non - authentic and authentic materials must complement each other. Although authentic materials are a great aid to meaningful learning, it is also important to say that non-authentic materials can be beneficial in the comprehension of a foreign language from an auditive and grammatical point of view, offering opportunities to advance and reinforce learning according to the performance of the students (Colorado & Ángel, 2011).

During this process several difficulties were experienced that had to be faced.such as schedule changes in the educational institution, which implied having to change the group and which led to a shorter implementation time. In addition to this, the time intensity was very low since the CT did not allow the intervention two hours per week, but just one hour per week. It was also difficult to implement because on many occasions the students had extracurricular activities because they were in their last year. On the other hand, this type of activity shortened on many occasions the class hours to only 35 minutes. All these situations did not allow for a deeper study.

Despite the difficulties I had with the change of groups, the intensity of the classes, the schedule changes and the decrease in class time, I was able to make findings that support that authentic materials help students improve their language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As a reflection, I could say that this work was a great experience since I was able to face many difficulties that helped me grow as a teacher and as a person. Although it was a very short practicum, I learned a lot of things that helped me and will help me throughout my teaching career.

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Appendix A

Universidad de Antioquia – Escuela de Idiomas
Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras
CARTA DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Medellín, 09 de agosto de 2022

Cordial saludo,

El presente formato tiene la intención de solicitar su autorización y consentimiento para la participación de su hijo/a (o estudiante menor bajo su tutela) en el proyecto de investigación - acción: *El uso de materiales auténticos para mejorar las habilidades lingüísticas del idioma inglés*, el cual se llevará a cabo entre julio y noviembre de 2022 en el grado de 11-20 en el curso de inglés de la Institución Educativa INM José Félix de Restrepo, y que se realiza como cumplimiento al requisito de grado del programa Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras, de la Escuela de Idiomas de la Universidad de Antioquia, estudio que realiza actualmente el docente-investigador en formación.

El proyecto tiene como objetivo ayudar con el mejoramiento del inglés a través del uso de materiales auténticos

Al firmar este consentimiento, usted autoriza al docente-investigador Diego Leandro Orozco Puerta a recolectar información proporcionada por el/la estudiante durante las sesiones de clase del grupo, de manera escrita o consignada en audio, imagen y/o video. La información que el docente-investigador obtenga de las encuestas, grabaciones, documentos y demás fuentes se manejará de manera confidencial exclusivamente para el proyecto en cuestión. De igual modo, se garantiza la protección de la identidad del estudiante y en caso de hacer referencia a él/ella, se utilizarán seudónimos.

Si se le presenta alguna duda acerca de esta investigación, puede manifestarse en cualquier momento al investigador Diego Leandro Orozco (dleandro.orozco@udea.edu.co) o a la asesora Lina Londoño (lina.londono@udea.edu.co).

Confirmo que he leído la información aquí presentada y firmo como autorización para la participación voluntaria de mi hijo/a (o estudiante menor bajo mi tutela) en esta investigación.

Nombre del estudiante: _____

Nombre del acudiente: _____

Firma del acudiente: _____