Classroom Case Study: ¡3...2...1... acción! Comparing Scratch to a telenovela

In a Nutshell

Teachers introduced programming and storytelling elements in bilingual language arts classes through an analogy between Scratch and a familiar medium: the Telenovela!

Vital Stats

- **Grade(s):** 6th, 7th, and 8th grade
- **Subject:** Language arts
- **Language allocation:** Spanish-English dual language bilingual program (language of instruction alternates by day, though teachers implemented the policy flexibly)
- **Teachers:** Ana Castillo (7th) and Ashley Guilamo (6th)
- **Timing:** Approximately seven 45-minute sessions

Students’ Backgrounds

Nearly all of the children were classified as Multilingual Learners / English Language Learners. Most immigrated from the Dominican Republic. A few were from Mexico, Colombia and other parts of Latin America. Most had arrived within three years, and some had had their formal education interrupted in their home country. Most students used Spanish for oral and written tasks and had a range of text-based literacies. Students frequently used the “accountable talk” sentence stems their teachers had introduced to guide classroom conversation. A handful of students were more comfortable using English than Spanish.

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<th>Mariposa was a bright, motivated, and social 11 year-old 6th grader who arrived in NYC from DR at age 9. She worked some evenings at her father’s deli, she loved math class, took thorough notes during class, and enjoyed watching Spanish-language TV.</th>
<th>Andy was a confident, creative, and inquisitive 11 year-old 6th grader who came to NYC from DR a year ago. A gender non-binary student, Andy loved animation and using “fancy” words in both languages. They participated in online fanfiction communities.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Álvaro was a playful and active 11 year-old 6th grader and avid gamer who came to NYC from DR in the 5th grade. He used mostly Spanish, read haltingly, and wrote with invented spelling. He used oral language and gestures to fluidly express his ideas.</td>
<td>Julio was a friendly, funny, and curious 12 year-old 7th grader who came to NYC from DR in the 6th grade. He liked watching TV and was interested in pop culture artists like Shakira. He used mostly Spanish and described feeling comfortable writing, but not speaking English.</td>
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Unit Rationale

A common way to introduce the Scratch programming environment is to use an analogy to a play: both employ actors (sprites), a stage, costumes, sounds, and scripts. With her language arts students in mind, one of the teachers on the PiLaCS team, Ana Castillo, remarked during a design team meeting, “let’s make it a telenovela instead—that’s what our students watch with their families at home every night.” Taking Castillo’s suggestion, the team designed the following activities.

Students merged their telenovela “literacy” with the Scratch interface and code, learning the names and functions of the different parts of the interface in the process. They also remixed a Scratch project that depicted a telenovela to tell their own story, helping them recognize programming could be a tool for self-expression in language arts.

The teachers brought together conversations from three areas to design this project, creating Syncretic Computational Literacies.
Objectives for the Telenovela Unit

Teachers drew on the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts for grades 6-8 when crafting their unit’s expectations, specifically regarding comparing and contrasting similar texts across media, and using narrative techniques such as dialogue to develop events and characters in a story.

During this unit, students practiced...

| Computing concepts and practices | - using the telenovela analogy to identify parts of the Scratch interface  
|                                 | - making connections between real-world instructions and codes/scripts in Scratch  
|                                 | - describing the functions of different Scratch codes in a script |
| Community Objectives | - analyzing telenovela genre conventions  
|                      | - sharing their own “telenovela” dramas with classmates and teachers |
| School Discipline Objectives | - comparing and contrasting the Scratch interface to a telenovela scene  
|                           | - expressing themselves by remixing the code, images, and text of an existing dialogue  
|                           | - writing dialogue for telenovela characters |
| Language Objectives | - deciding the language of their telenovela dialogue depending on audience  
|                      | - incorporating Scratch specific words in English and Spanish into their compare-contrast writing assignments  
|                      | - pronouncing the English words for the components of the Scratch interface |
Activity Sequence

In this approximately 7-lesson sequence, teachers facilitated the following activities...

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<th>Activity Sequence</th>
<th>Details</th>
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| Acting out a telenovela skit (1 session) | - Students and teachers surfaced the genre-specific elements of telenovelas  
- A pair of students picked costumes while the rest of the class voted on a backdrop.  
- Using a pre-prepared script, the students acted out a “telenovela” dialogue using their words and intonations as well as their bodies. |

Opportunities for translanguaging:
- The students selected to be "actors" did more than just read the Spanish dialogue written on their scripts -- they demonstrated their embodiment of telenovelas as a genre, mobilizing acting conventions including intonations and gestures.
### Comparing and contrasting elements of Scratch to a telenovela (1 lesson)

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<th>Students watched a Scratch project that used the same dialogue as the telenovela project and discussed similarities and differences.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Students labeled the different parts of the telenovela on one half of the page and the Scratch interface on the other half.</th>
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### Opportunities for Translanguaging

- Ms. Castillo asked students to repeat the words for the various parts of the Scratch interface aloud in both English and Spanish to encourage them to begin using that specific vocabulary.
- Teachers also valued the terms students used to refer to components of the interface, such as “muñequito” (little doll) for the sprites and “vanderita” for Scratch’s signature green flag. Students shared that certain words were different in their home countries -- for instance, while Ms. Guilamo shared that the Spanish word for “script” was “guión,” Andy suggested “libreto,” a word they were more familiar with.
- As Ms. Guilamo talked through the elements of a telenovela, she drew on students’ prior knowledge of stages, backdrops, and scripts from their theater class, and flagged when particular words were Spanish-English cognates (such as actor / actor).
Examining Telenovela Scripts and Going “Under the Hood” in Scratch (2 lessons)

- Students viewed the telenovela script on one half of a folded page, marking the dialogue, sounds, and movements in different colors.
- Students then unfolded the paper to view the code for the telenovela project, drawing lines between parts of the script and their corresponding colored blocks in Scratch.
- Teachers helped students point out contrasts between the two media by identifying Scratch blocks that did not have a script equivalent and vice versa.
- Students synthesized the ideas from the previous activity in a compare/contrast writing exercise, which also served as an assessment.

Opportunities for Translanguaging:
- Students and teachers used their voices and bodies to help them make sense of the code. In one moment, Álvaro got up from his seat and slid across the floor, as if he were a baseball player sliding towards home plate, demonstrating his understanding of the “deslizar” or “glide” code and making a connection to a sport he enjoyed.
- When Ms. Guilamo asked what the X and Y represented in that code block, Mariposa used Spanish, English and gesture, and her knowledge of math, saying “eso es como un de estos” crossing her arms to denote a coordinate plane -- and then saying “they use that in math.” Ms. Guilamo stepped in to build on Mariposa’s gesture with the math vocabulary, “ordered pair.”
- Teachers provided students with compare-contrast sentence-starters and a word bank in English and Spanish.
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<th>Planning out and remixing the telenovela Scratch project (2 lessons)</th>
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<td>● Students planned the changes they wanted to make to the existing Telenovela Scratch project code on a piece of paper (left).</td>
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<td>● They were encouraged to change and add sounds, dialogue, and backdrops. This initial plan helped them stay on track while working in Scratch, even though their plans changed as they explored the program.</td>
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### Opportunities for Translanguaging:

- Students could use any and all language, drawings, and annotations to help them plan their projects.
- Teachers showed students how to change the language of the Scratch interface, a resource several students used.
- Teachers had students model pair programming interactions, providing and soliciting English and Spanish sentence starters for these interactions.

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<th>Presenting telenovela remixes (1 lesson)</th>
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<td>● During presentations, students described and ran the code of their programs.</td>
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<td>● Students asked each other questions about the choices they made in their remixes, allowing them to practice analyzing authors’ and creators’ choices.</td>
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### Opportunities for Translanguaging:

- Understanding an author’s purpose and intention is a key skill developed in language arts classes. Here students apply those skills to understanding how creators of multilingual, multimodal Scratch projects make choices about the codes, images, sounds, and dialogue to use.
Variations

We hope you will adapt this activity for your own classroom context! Keep in mind:

- **The genre your students will connect to Scratch.** Our team knew students watched telenovelas with their families. Take time to learn about the media your students and their families are familiar with.
- **Where do I find a telenovela Scratch project for students to analyze?** While our telenovela Scratch project is available for you below, we encourage you to create (or ask a student to create), the project that students analyze in this activity.
- **What are your content, language and CS objectives?** This activity can be adapted to more deeply engage with particular CS practices/concepts or language arts objectives, such as:
  - Pair programming roles and guidelines for collaboration
  - Making and following a plan before creating a project
  - Reading code and inferring its functions
  - Resolving challenges faced in completing remixes in various ways
  - Providing constructive feedback to classmates’ Scratch projects

Materials to Remix

- [Telenovela Slide Deck](#)
- [Telenovela handout](#) (includes script for skit at the end)
- Telenovela Scratch project: [In Spanish with English Subtitles](#) | [Spanish text only](#)

Suggested Citation