

# **BECOMING A TEACHER:**

## **A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS**

---

Final Dissertation – June 2013

**Andrea Ruano Esteban**



**Universidad**  
Zaragoza



Facultad de Educación  
**Universidad** Zaragoza

## **INDEX**

	<b>pp.</b>
INTRODUCTION	1-4
JUSTIFICATION	5
CRITICAL REFLECTION	6-15
Unit of work	6-10
Research Project	11-15
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE	16-17
REFERENCES	18-19

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this final dissertation, I will explain how the Master's degree in Training of Secondary, Professional, and Language Teachers has helped me acquire the necessary knowledge and tools for working as an English teacher. These pages will cover an in-depth analysis on what I have learned and what the consequences of such learning will be in my professional growth as a teacher in the future. The analysis will include the reflection on two of the assignments completed as part of my course of studies as well as a final conclusion. The Master's degree has been divided into two main periods, in which the second term follows on from the previous one. Together they have made a coherent whole which has allowed me to work on how to become a language teacher.

I always wanted to become a teacher; however, I did not just want that: I wanted to become a committed teacher. During my years as a student, I always admired what my good teachers did for me. They helped me be the person I am now by guiding my learning in the best way they could. That is why I have always wanted to help others learn, form their own opinions, be able to have a place in society. I am very thankful to my former teachers, as they helped me become a good professional and an honest person. That is what I want to devote my life to; I would love my students to be thankful for how I worked with them. Even if it seems too philosophical, this is the main reason I decided to take on this Master's degree.

Before starting, I thought I knew a lot about teaching since I had already given some private lessons to teenagers and students of ESO. Nonetheless, this degree has shown me how far I was from what being a good teacher means. I have learnt many interesting aspects that I would not have been able to learn without participating in the different subjects I studied. I see myself as a dedicated teacher, since I deem I have all the necessary tools for starting a promising professional career. I am just lacking some experience, which I hope I will be acquiring during the next few years. The following lines are to describe why I am now confident as a good English teacher. I will try to explain how I see my future as a teacher owing to what I learnt during this academic year, and how this will be useful in my future practice as an English teacher.

The Master's degree has consisted of varied subjects which have dealt with the process of teaching and learning, including its main components. Accordingly, I have been able to learn about important aspects such as lesson planning and implementation as well as all the relevant factors to be considered while planning or giving a lesson; among these, I now know more about the needs of the learners, the role of psychology in teenage students, the importance of motivation within their process of learning and how important self-confidence is when learning a foreign language (affective filter hypothesis by Krashen, 1982). Furthermore, during the past months, I have been given the most important theoretical bases which I must consider when working as a teacher. These theoretical principles have been complemented with some practice periods that have been very rewarding for me.

As I said before, all the subjects in the degree helped me learn varied and useful things related to my wish of being an English teacher. From the very first moment, we were taught how important educational regulations are in the process of teaching and learning a language. I learnt what the national and regional regulations state for the students of *ESO* and *Bachillerato* to learn. As a teacher, those are some important things I will always have to take into account, especially when designing and planning the lessons I will implement. Most of the subjects in the degree let me

acquire some useful concepts on how to implement the national and regional curricula. The differences in the evolution of the educational system were worth knowing as well.

Apart from the way in which the educational law must be implemented in the classroom, it was very useful for me to deeply understand what the process of teaching and learning actually consists of. Even if I had a previous idea on the matter, I was not really aware of most of the aspects of such a relevant process. I am currently aware of the complexity of the mentioned process, and how I must deal with its varied aspects such as motivation of the students, evaluation by the teacher, theories of learning to be considered as a teacher, and ways of implementing ICTs in the classroom. These are just some examples of the components of the process of teaching and learning. As a teacher, the success of such an important process depends mainly on taking care of all of its components by having a final aim: helping our students learn.

As mentioned above, the syllabus designing was one of the points on which we focused more during the Master's degree. Working in groups and discussing the best way to design a good year plan which would meet both students' and teachers' needs turned out to be a highly motivating challenge for me. During the past months, we were able to put into practice what we had learnt about different teaching approaches, and accordingly create a year plan and a didactic unit which was feasible and interesting for our future students. It was not an easy task, but the result was far better than expected. I will further comment on this task in the second part of this final dissertation.

Before starting the Master's degree, I was totally unaware of how the current way of teaching and learning a language has evolved throughout history. The degree has also given me the chance to review the evolution in teaching methods. I have studied the main principles of each of the approaches which have been used in order to teach a foreign language. In addition to that, I have been able to give my own opinion and to evaluate what the strengths and weaknesses of each approach have been. In short, I would say I have developed my critical view, since now I know what I should not do as a teacher and why I should not do it because of having seen the weaknesses in previous teaching methods. Accordingly, I can now affirm how strongly I believe in the importance of using a communicative approach in my lessons, since I totally agree with the importance of Nunan's (1991) five communicative principles in the classroom nowadays. As I will explain in detail in the second part of this dissertation, I seek my students to be not just aware but able to use the language, thus to be capable of developing a complete communicative competence as described by Canale and Swain (1980).

Even if theory is doubtless important to find a basis for my future job, the Master's degree has given a lot of importance to practice as well. I have been able to see the most practical aspects of teaching and working with teenagers in many of the subjects I have studied. I have paid attention to the characteristics of the students I am going to deal with in the future. Apart from that, I have also worked on some remarkable features worth considering which will have an important impact on our students' way of learning, such as the learning atmosphere in which they are working or living. This atmosphere must be taken into consideration, owing to the fact that it can be determinant to the success or failure of a student. It has been really interesting for me to see how age plays an important role in the way a person acts, or even learns in this case a foreign language.

As I was saying, the theory of teaching was really useful but incomplete until we worked on several aspects related to the very practice of giving a lesson. This practice was significantly enriched thanks to my experience in the different school placements (Practicum) I took part in. In my days as

a teacher in practice, I learnt how theory is put into practice in real contexts of teaching and learning a language. These days helped me understand how teaching theory and practice are actually linked. As I have mentioned in my Practicum reports, theory differs quite a lot from practice in many cases. Nonetheless, I consider theory was very helpful for me to understand how I should work as a teacher, adapting all the time to what my students demand from me. The periods of the school placements have been unforgettable for me. I consider the experience to be absolutely positive for me as a future teacher, since they have been a first approach to reality in the classroom. I have been very lucky to implement my didactic unit, as I will comment afterwards, I am very proud of my work during these days. It was very challenging for me to try to bear in mind all the things I had learnt during the degree during the few days of practice I had. It was a first real experience that I accepted as something positive and useful for my learning. It was really rewarding, and as I have been describing, all of the important things I had studied in the Master's degree were very useful for these periods. My impressions on giving a lesson and preparing it have changed greatly because of what I have learnt. I am currently aware of essential things that I did not take into account before this time.

Among these things, I would insist on the idea that practice differs much from theory. It is no good mastering theory without applying it to the specific context of the practice. It is doubtless useful to be aware of what theories draw and use them as a guide to success for a teacher. However, a good professional will always superimpose the actual reality of the classroom and will adapt to what their students need. In this sense, I have learnt I have to be chameleon-like somehow, since theory does not always cover what the real practice of teaching means. In my view, theory does not always account for the human side of learners; this means theory cannot handle how different learners are, and thus how specific their needs are in every particular case. This is a teacher's task, our task: I will try to carry out such a task in the best way I can, always bearing in mind the teacher I want to become.

In effect, I have always thought of the kind of teacher I wanted to be. As I pointed out before, the starting point from which I began to see myself as a teacher were the good memories I have concerning my high school teachers. I saw how they loved teaching, the way in which they cared about us, their students, and their important role in society: they were the ones to make learning possible. Despite the positive role models and vocation that I felt, I see now that I lacked essential knowledge until I decided to complete this Master's degree. I still want to become a committed teacher, who cares about them and loves her job, who is able to face unplanned situations while helping her students learn. My aim, therefore, has not changed at all. What I have learnt has not modified my previous intentions of becoming a good teacher. What has changed is that I am currently able to do so, I have been equipped with some of the necessary tools for such a purpose, and gaining experience will help me improve day by day.

However, there is still much to be learnt. I already mentioned experience as a key to learning day by day. The professional development I will carry out during my years as a teacher are just an example of lifelong learning. Although I have learnt some important keys of being a teacher in the Master's degree, in my opinion learning is a process to be continued over the years. From my point of view, there is never a state of complete knowledge. That is why experience plays such an important role in teaching: there will be always something new to learn, some new ways to approach teaching and many different realities in which I will have to teach. I intend to be learning throughout my entire life. Being a life-long learner (Keller, 2002) entails aiming at continuous professional growth.

I consider every teacher should take part in lifelong learning since we are aware of how important learning is, and we know learning does not have a definite end. No doubt I will always bear this in mind.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

After having commented on my main impressions on the Master's degree and having reflected on what I learnt during the last months, I shall now discuss the reasons why I chose the assignments "Unit of Work" and "Research Project" for this final dissertation. It is relevant to justify why I decided to comment on these two assignments and not to discuss any other assignment. The main reason which led me to include the analysis of these two essays is how well they illustrate two very different roles of a teacher; furthermore, both assignments are clear examples of the kinds of principles behind an effective teacher's day to day decisions.

In my view, a good teacher should always be multifaceted. He or she should be somehow polyhedron-like. I became aware of this after writing an essay on the different roles of a teacher. Already in the classroom, the teacher accomplishes the task of playing different roles such as a helper, a guide, an assessor, a counselor, a provider of input and many others in relation to his or her students. That is why being a good teacher involves much hard work covering many different aspects of the process of teaching and learning; a teacher not only has to explain, but also has to help students integrate the input they are receiving. Following Larsen and Freeman (1986), there is a series of teaching strategies and techniques that a language teacher should master. However, such techniques are just one of the components of varying roles a teacher has to play in order to insure high quality teaching and learning.

Apart from the aforementioned roles that a teacher plays in the classroom, there are two major roles in the daily routine of a teacher, which are perfectly reflected by the two assignments commented upon in this dissertation. Being able to plan and organize the students' learning is a fundamental part of a teacher's task. No learning is meaningful if it does not follow a process and a progress which is led by a guide (the teacher). A good teacher must always be a good planner, since planning is essential for the success of the process of teaching and learning. Planning entails considering the students' needs and providing them accordingly with the necessary learning tools.

As well as planning, there is another role of a teacher which should never be left unfulfilled. This refers to the role of investigator. A good teacher always seeks to improve, to find ways to provide better solutions for his or her students. I consider that the lack of interest in researching impoverishes a teacher's professional development. Likewise, taking part in research and investigation strengthens it.

In short, both the unit of work and the research project I will comment further on are good proof of two of the main roles or facets of a teacher. They cover two of the sides of the multifaceted teacher: a facilitator of improvement (researcher) and an organizer of the process of learning (lesson planner). That is the reason why I chose to discuss these projects by commenting on their strengths and weaknesses and how I will be able to play upon all of these to continue developing and growing as a teacher in the future.



## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

The following sections are intended to cover a critical reflection on two of the projects I have completed within the Master's programme. This reflection will be divided into two parts, each one being devoted to one of these two projects. I have already discussed my motivation to select these two assignments as the projects to evaluate in this final dissertation. The following critical reflection consists of analyzing the main aspects of such projects so as to ponder learning from the experience of carrying them out. The mentioned assignments are attached to this final dissertation and can be consulted, so they will be briefly explained and the next lines will focus primarily on the process and achievements of their elaboration.

The two projects which I will discuss below allowed significant teaching practice for me and let me acquire new knowledge both in the field of planning and researching. I hold the belief that all of the projects I have carried out during this year have offered me the opportunity to learn valid and interesting aspects related to the process of teaching a foreign language. Particularly these two projects reflect two good examples of challenging tasks which I had to face during the second semester. The unit of work was an individual task and the research project was elaborated as a group, together with my classmates Julia Pérez, Laura Pablo and Rodrigo Muñoz.

### **1. Unit of work *Welcome to the Competition***

As far as the unit of work is concerned, this assignment consisted of planning and preparing a didactic unit including methodology and evaluation among other aspects. Always bearing in mind the fact that it was going to be implemented, I intended my unit of work to be a realistic 'product' which would lead to a final and real outcome for my students. It was a challenging project which entailed integrating most of the knowledge that we had been acquiring in the lessons of the Master's degree, and which had to cover plenty of important aspects of the process of teaching and learning, such as preparation of the lessons, implementation in the classroom and evaluation of the process.

By following the directions provided by my teacher, I tried to produce a unit of work which was successful both for me, as a teacher, and mainly for my students. Taking into account what my tutor in the school told me, I aimed at combining my tutor's instructions (in the school), my professor's directions (in the Master's degree) and my main impressions and ideas. At first, it was hard to integrate all of these aspects, but the final result was wholly satisfactory.

My unit of work dealt with a competition of extraordinary skills, in which students would take part by scoring points depending on their use of English and performance in the English classroom. The students had to work in groups since I tried to promote cooperative work as a basis for learning. Following the directions by my tutor in the school, I was asked to cover modal verbs as a grammar point and then work on sports vocabulary. That is why I decided to design a real contest in which we would work on the rules of a contest, the advice given by members of the groups, the prohibitions of the competition and the abilities of the participants (all of these items had to do with modal verbs). In this way, students were working on the grammar their teacher wanted them to learn without even noticing.



This competition was a creative idea that let me apply the theory I had been reviewing in my lessons during the Master's degree. Even if ambitious, my main aim was that students used English for a real, final and achievable aim: winning a competition. In this sense, I promoted an approach to Task-Based learning (Willis, 1996) since I did not want my students to reach a final linguistic outcome but to accomplish a meaningful task based on a gap of information. Accordingly, I asked my students to organize a team to participate in a contest in which they would have to accomplish tasks to achieve a communicative purpose; for instance, I would ask them to know what to do according to the advice given by their mates. They were not told to write advice using grammar structures such as 'should'. They were just told to give advice to their mates in order to succeed in the competition.

This Task-Based approach is one of the branches of the Communicative approach that we had reviewed in our theory lessons during the Master's degree. I decided to include this approach since I considered that it has become predominant over the last decades and it has proved to be more successful than previous methods. Before starting the process of lesson planning, I was really convinced about the idea of using such an approach. However, I found that it was far more difficult to really implement such a kind of approach, since I discovered my students were not used to working under this method at all. From the very first moment I realized that my tutor in the school wanted me to cover grammar points and teach my students a series of vocabulary lists, and it was difficult for me to integrate this idea into my desire to design a unit of work based on ongoing communication in English.

All of the lessons planned and included in my unit focused on one of the important components of the final contest: rules, advice, parental consent and knowing the members of one's team. This offered me the possibility to work on a final aim-based unit in which all the tasks looked upon a final contest. This meant no lesson made any sense without the previous or the following one. Students had to follow a process of preparation for the contest in which they would already score points owing to how they performed in English during the lessons. Such an integration of tasks included the integration of the five skills as well, and the instruction was mainly student-centered as defined by Cannon (2000): "the learning environment has learner responsibility and activity at its heart, in contrast to the emphasis on instructor control and the coverage of academic content found in much conventional, didactic teaching".

According to what we have been learning in the degree, integrating the different skills in language learning was an idea to be taken into consideration. I promoted this by the continuity of the process of my unit of work. The unit of work consisted of a whole process which led to a final aim, participating in a competition. Therefore, a process had to be followed in order to accomplish the entire task towards the final competition. This let me work with all the skills in an integrated way, since I asked my students to read a text with the aim of discussing about its ideas afterwards. After this discussion, students were asked to write and listen to authentic opinions on the matter. In short, all the skills were absolutely linked and one led to the other as a natural process of preparing the final contest.

Authenticity of resources and materials was another of the principles of my unit of work. I decided my unit of work would include authentic articles and listenings for the activities and to use real input as a key to learning in a communicative way. Given that my main aim was that my students gave English a real purpose, I could not ask them to do so if we did not work with authentic

sources. All but one of the activities were completely designed by me and that allowed me to be really aware of what I wanted my students to do. It required hard work on my part but I was the owner and creator of the activities and therefore knew how to address and adapt them to my students' needs, levels and interests.

The unit of work I implemented turned out to be a huge success. I was able to implement it in the school and I managed to make my students learn what they had to according to their year plan and their teacher. However, this was not the main reason why my unit of work was successful. I realized that the approach I had given to my unit was significantly appealing for my students. They felt challenged since they were provided with comprehensible input (Krashen, 1977) which gave them the possibility to acquire knowledge at the same time that they were extremely motivated to take part in a competition.

On the one hand, the unit of work proposed challenging tasks for my students since they had to make the effort of accomplishing the goals I set out for them. They had to work hard in order to reinforce and practice the five skills in English and sometimes they found little difficulties or problems which they had to solve. In this sense, they were asked to go a little bit further from what they already knew and in this way acquire language naturally.

On the other hand, my students were intent on taking on the challenges proposed because of their motivation which was a key factor of the success of my learning unit. Students felt so motivated about participating in a contest that they overcame any difficulties they found by asking for help freely. In McCombs & Whistler's words (1997) "learners find the learning process more meaningful when topics are relevant to their lives, needs, and interests, and when they are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge". The selection of the topic and the whole idea of the didactic unit was doubtless relevant to the students' needs and interests. Who does not have an instinct to win in a competition? Naturally, we are all competitive and usually enjoy participating in contests with final rewards; teenagers are generally even more interested in this kind of activity.

Motivation was one of the main aspects that we worked on most during the lessons of the Master's degree. I tried to promote most of the motivation strategies that my professors in the degree had focused on, which were part of Alonso Tapia's (2005) motivation strategies. As a matter of fact, these strategies were also some of the bases to inspire my idea of organizing a competition. I mainly tried to follow a process which paid more importance to learning than to passing an exam.

Actually, I did not prepare any exams for my students. Their evaluation consisted in continuous assessment throughout the lessons with the help of rubrics and observation tables. Students knew as well if they were working properly or not thanks to the dynamic of giving points for good performances. If they participated and proved that they had learnt, they would score points. This way, students were aware of their own process of learning. The final competition tried to include an overall view of all the contents we had been seeing previously and actually consisted of a test of abilities that they had to perform in English. As an example, students were asked to comment on the performance of their classmates by using the right English (*you shouldn't have done this...*). Students were also given feedback during the lessons and were given back the assignments they were told to do at home (especially writing exercises). On the whole, they felt that assessment was a direct result of their work during the lessons, on which group work would have a significant impact.

I considered feedback essential from the very first moment. As a student, I have always appreciated that my teachers helped me know how I was doing and accordingly I have always considered that I would give feedback the importance it merits.

During the last decades feedback has gained a major importance in the classroom as a key to success (Black et al., 2003). Students intrinsically demand more and more receiving clues on their performance, since both positive and negative feedback usually have an impact on students. However, success feedback makes motivation increase and failure feedback decreases our students' expectancies (Förster, 2001). That is why I tried to apply the positive reinforcement I had been taught about in my classroom and provide my students with proof of success and positive feedback to encourage them in their improvement. Feedback was given primarily through direct correction on the mistakes, points for successful performance and marks for written assignments.

As I commented before, I tried to promote cooperative work as a basis of my didactic unit. The fact of enhancing group work in the classroom covered many of my teaching goals as regards my students: they had to develop social skills, be able to work with others and establish a positive interdependence among them (Johnson and Johnson, 1995). Prior to forming the groups of the contest, I asked my teacher in the school, who knew my students better than me, advice on how to group my students. She suggested that they should get in the groups they wanted to, since this would motivate them even more. Despite this fact, not every task was done in groups; students had to do some of them individually. All the same, the core of the unit was cooperative group work, and the individual assignments were few in relation to the ones they had to do in groups.

### **Implementation of the project: problems and solutions**

The implementation was, generally, really satisfying and rewarding for me thanks to the work I had prepared. However, I came to some conclusions regarding the problems that I faced during its implementation in a real classroom.

The main aspect I shall comment on is the drawback of not knowing my students while I was designing my unit of work. Knowing the students is fundamental in order to design personalized and adapted materials and activities which fully meet our students' demands. In my case, I tried to know them by asking my tutor in the school about their interests and needs. However, I could not draw a definite idea from this since the only information I received was that they were teenagers who did not like English so much. Consequently, I knew I had to think of an idea that would please everybody and would have chances to succeed in teenagers. That is how I came to the idea of a competition.

The fact of not knowing my students was determinant for some of the problems I had in the classroom. I did not know their names until some of the later sessions. Knowing the students' names is just a simple way to personalize teaching and engage them into the lesson. I would have loved to know their names since I critically think that teachers who do not care about their student's name show little interest in them. One might ask: is it that important? In my opinion, it is just a sign of respect that contributes to the success of a lesson.

Some other problems that I had during the implementation of the unit of work were related to the timing. Once again, not knowing my students' made it difficult to adjust timings to their needs. Sometimes the tasks were planned to be done in a few minutes and they did not manage to have them done in time. On the contrary, some other activities were thought to last for more minutes than

they actually did. This problem was not difficult to solve since I was flexible and devoted the minutes they needed to accomplish the tasks and I improvised if I had more time than expected. I knew had to react and adapted to what my students required from me.

I have learnt significant things while preparing my unit of work. It has made me develop my consciousness as a future teacher. For the first time, I have understood how complicated it is to integrate all the good practices that teachers are asked to perform. In short I have realized that teaching is not an easy task. This unit of work gave me a strong sense of responsibility; I was in charge of a group of students and their success or failure would depend mainly on me. It was a challenge that I accepted as positive from the very first moment and I am really proud of having been able to carry it out beyond all expectation.

I was lucky to be allowed to try out my unit of work in the school but still I am not very satisfied with the general idea of its implementation. Honestly, I see some advantages and disadvantages of implementing a fully new unit of work in a classroom with unknown students. Whereas I think students enjoy having a new teacher for a few days and changing their routine, I believe it is a significant impact at the same time. Suddenly their teacher and methodology changes and they encounter a different learning atmosphere. Some aspects such as participation in the classroom suffer a notable decrease due to the fact of not knowing their new teacher. In addition, they are sometimes asked to learn in a different way; that is, all at once students are asked to work in non-stop English and they have never done it previously. I consider that this huge change for students makes the implementation of the learning unit somehow unreal.

I would like to insist on the idea that I am fully satisfied about the implementation of my particular unit of work. Nonetheless, I critically consider that having spent some days with the students before starting to prepare the unit of work would have led to a better and more appropriate outcome for this project.

The unit of work, as well as all the materials, worksheets and tasks which it covers are included in appendix to this final dissertation. References for its elaboration are also specified in the annex.

## 2. Research Project: “The reading skill in non-bilingual and bilingual academic contexts: a case study”

Regarding the research project, we were asked to do some research on one of the aspects of the process of teaching and learning, that is, a research topic within the field of education. The subject *Evaluación e Innovación docente e investigación educativa en el ámbito de la especialidad de Inglés* covered an analysis of the importance of evaluation, innovation and investigation on the part of teachers. In this sense, evaluation was defined as a means of analyzing the actual situation of a teacher's practice in order to implement future and possible improvements; innovation was defined as the incorporation of new ways or procedures while teaching, bearing in mind that such changes always have a positive effect on students' learning. Finally, investigation was defined in terms of an in-depth analysis based on reliable resources so as to collect useful data for a teacher.

The research project had to deal mainly with one of these three important processes and try to give answer to some research questions posed at the beginning of the plan. The research project carried out by my group (composed of Julia Pérez, Laura Pablo, Rodrigo Muñoz and me) consisted of a case study of the differences in reading techniques and strategies existing between bilingual and non-bilingual models of education.

We decided to center our investigation on such a topic due to the fact that relevant reports such as PISA 2009<sup>1</sup> showed poor reading comprehension in the case of Spanish students of English. It would be pretty ambitious to say that our final aim was to contribute to find a solution to this problem. However, we did want to find the main reasons leading to the aforementioned situation so as to try to make improvements in our future practice as teachers. In a few words, we hoped to work towards detecting ineffective practices when working with reading and substitute them with better reading strategies or techniques.

Apart from that, we aimed at analyzing the differences in this field regarding bilingual and non-bilingual schools. Half of our group had their school placement at bilingual schools and the other half had it in non-bilingual schools. Taking advantage of this situation, we found it interesting to verify if actual differences exist concerning the reading strategies and techniques which are used nowadays in schools. We departed from a general assumption that we deemed interesting for this assignment: society holds the belief that bilingual students have better results in English than non-bilingual students. If true, is that related to the reading practices teachers promote in class? Finding answer to this question was the basis of our curiosity as researchers.

In addition to the reading strategies and techniques to analyze in the two models of education, we decided to devote a great section of our project to a key factor related to academic success: motivation. As a matter of fact, one of our research questions set out the importance of having a good attitude towards reading as an academic and leisure activity. This had much to do with motivation and how students were pushed to read by their teachers.

Prior to analyzing this project critically, I would like to state that our research project does not intend to establish any generalizations concerning the differences between bilingual and non-

---

<sup>1</sup> International study launched by the OECD to assess educational systems. (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>)



bilingual schools. As explained in the project, the fact of analyzing three concrete schools does not lead to a general situation but on the contrary to a set of particular contexts being evaluated. That is why our research project's name includes the categorization 'case study'. In Yin's (1984) words, a case study is "*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used*". We followed the specifications provided by Zainal (2007) on case studies as a successful research method.

In the next lines I shall reflect on the process followed while carrying out this project, as well as the chief principles I drew based on the problems arising. To start with, I would like to describe briefly the research questions of the project.

The first question dealt with how bilingual and non-bilingual schools work with the reading skill. Our group wanted to see if there was a difference between the teaching methods for these two different models of education. We designed our own rubric and observation table to take notes on how these two types of dealt with the development of reading skills. In this section, we talked about text types, authenticity of topics, integration of language skills, reading procedures, and purpose of the reading activities.

The second question referred to the specific techniques and strategies used when reading. These included reading aloud, skimming and scanning and analyzing the reading text among others. We collected data on this matter by interviewing the English teachers in the schools and then asking the students, the very participants of the learning process. In addition to that, we decided to pass round a questionnaire in which students would affirm or deny having followed certain reading strategies and techniques we had described in a list.

The third question of the research applied to motivation and the attitude of students related to reading. Our goal was to verify if students felt demotivated or, on the contrary, whether they enjoyed reading. Furthermore, we tried to look into the main factors leading to a better or worse stance towards reading. This third question let us establish possible relations and draw significant conclusions on how the use of different reading techniques or reading procedures had an impact on motivating students. The interview for the students included questions which mainly referred to the degree of motivation of students with respect to their reading skill. Following Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), we considered that children's motivation when reading is multidimensional. That is why we thought the way in which they work with reading at school could be significantly related to their motivation.

Trying to give answer to the mentioned questions required an important previous step: reviewing relevant literature. All of the members of our group considered that it was necessary to start the project by analyzing what had been said so far on the research topic. We reviewed the report by the OECD in which Spanish students had one of the lowest reading comprehension rates in the world. We deeply believed that reading comprehension was closely related to the reading strategies followed by the students in the classroom. Accordingly, we decided to begin the review of literature by analyzing in depth both the Aragonese curriculum, followed by non-bilingual schools in Aragón, and the curriculum proposed by the British Council used in bilingual schools.

This first analysis stated some of the main differences existing within the two models of education, showing that the Aragonese curriculum was more descriptive and the British council more prescriptive. This contrast is explained more in depth in the project attached to this dissertation.

Later on, we referred to how motivation is determinant in children and teenagers. In the case of reading, the same thing applies. We decided to focus on two main types of motivation, which are extrinsic and intrinsic, and establish a relation between both of them. By 'extrinsic' motivation, we meant how teachers helped their students feel motivated towards reading. On the contrary, 'intrinsic' motivation depended on the students' own interests and reasons to enjoy reading.

Finally, we followed Edward's (2013) approach to reading strategies in the current trends of English as a second language. With this we intended to cover the main considerations nowadays regarding the reading skill and its successful strategies. We confirmed the importance of developing effective reading techniques and strategies and found it interesting to see no distinction was made related to the different models of education; in other words, the efficient reading strategies are valid for students, regardless of their school and teacher. All the same, every single personality will find his or her own techniques when reading a text.

After having a look at the literature on the matter, we exposed the procedures and methods we would carry out in order to collect relevant data which would respond our research questions. The methods turned out to be insufficient and not really successful. On the one hand, each of us had to complete an observation table in which the variables were rather personal to evaluate. I consider the term 'varied texts' can mean something for me which is completely different to what it may mean to my research colleagues. On the other hand, the interviews and questionnaires did not really please the teachers in our school placements. In my opinion, they felt somehow pressured by the fact of being asked about their way of working. This makes me think the data collected is not close to reality at all. I would say students were also influenced in a certain way since they were completing our forms with their teachers staring at them. Apart from that, some of them did not really care about completing our questionnaires and therefore their answers are not an accurate image of their actual reading practices.

In my group's opinion, the results were not accurate enough to establish any solid conclusions. In spite of this, we found valid and interesting information on reading strategies and procedures and we were able to witness how the reading skill is put into practice in three different schools. We were allowed to carry out our research methods in the classrooms during our Practicum III and every school collaborated well with us for our project. However, I would have preferred to have more time to prepare this project, since I can now conclude that such broad research requires more preparation.

Once we gathered data, we got together to analyze it and all of us agreed on the main conclusions to be commented. Even if we were aware of the weaknesses of our project, we tried to list a series of facts that we had been able to see and finally give answer to the research questions we had suggested at the beginning.

The main conclusion of our project was that bilingual and non-bilingual schools unfortunately share an important lack of motivation in their students. Generally, readers from both models affirmed that they felt demotivated when they had to read at school. This fact caught my attention since I thought that there was going to be a difference regarding this aspect; I had assumed that students from the



bilingual model would be more motivated due to the fact that they read more varied texts and devote some specific hours just to reading. Likewise, I was right when I foresaw that students from the non-bilingual model would lack motivation after having seen the type of reading texts they work with.

Bandura (1986) attributes motivating students when reading to their own concept of self-efficacy. In other words, the author states that the awareness of self-efficacy of a student will have a positive effect on how he or she feels motivated towards reading. In this sense, I observed that the students did not feel they were making any progress nor did their teacher congratulate them on their reading. They are mostly asked to do exercises related to a text which have much to do with vocabulary and grammar. Their success thus depends on whether they made proper use of vocabulary and grammar related to the text. I could see that no positive reinforcement is ever given to students when they have to read a text. They are just supposed to do the exercises in the right way and teachers warn them not to make mistakes. In my view, this becomes extremely important concerning motivation.

Secondly, we wanted to see how the reading skill is put into practice in the schools and if they followed the regulations they were supposed to stick to. We found that the role of the teacher acquires more importance than the prescriptions given by the curricula. In spite of the general guidelines of these documents, teachers are the ones to promote reading and to actually direct the students learning process. That is why I honestly think that teachers should have a more active role so as to seek students' success when reading. In my opinion, they should not confine themselves to using the readings from the textbooks. This is not enough for our students, as has been proven by our results. They could create a different way of promoting reading, such as a reading club in which students would choose their own reading texts and improve their reading skill. This is just an idea to illustrate alternative ways of helping our students read.

Finally, concerning the reading strategies and techniques that students adopt in the bilingual and non-bilingual schools, I can state that they are significantly different. This is something I could observe by contrasting my results to my colleagues' in the bilingual school. The former school promotes innovative and more interesting reading techniques whereas non-bilingual schools do not make that much of an effort. Bilingual schools give more importance to reading and therefore devote more time to reading different types of texts. In addition, they usually organize debates and commentaries, completing pre-reading and post-reading tasks. The reading texts they use are often taken from authentic English literature. They also work with magazines and varied reading media (they sometimes read on the computer). Non-bilingual schools just offer the possibility of reading a book for English learners apart from the activities in the coursebook. From what I saw, the teacher does not foster any other reading practices.

To conclude, I would say this research project has not been as satisfactory as I expected. All of the members of the group made great efforts and the result are not a good reflection of what we thought at the beginning. Working with three other people has been very useful since we have been able to learn from each other. However, and in spite of our work, we are not so proud of the final outcome. I would have liked to use this project to evaluate the current situation of reading but also to complement it with a new proposal on how to change it. I honestly think that this project is incomplete and something is missing. When I thought of a research project, I came up with the desire of producing my own hypothesis. I aimed at investigating to then evaluate results and finally make a contribution to the field of study. I thought this is what the subject was all about. However, the lack of time and the difficulties in finding a 'feasible' topic of research led us to poor results.

I am somehow disappointed with this project since I had the opportunity to take my first steps in the interesting field of researching and I feel I did not make the most of it. Nonetheless, as time went by, I became aware of the impossibility to carry out an entire research project within such little time. I therefore consider this assignment was a first approach to research and it mainly made me aware of how difficult it is to develop a formal investigation. I learnt much about research procedures and the different stages of an investigation process. The fact of not finding definite results is not unnatural since this short approach to research could not have led to absolute conclusions because we lacked time and experience in research.

As I already explained, I deem that teachers should never quit researching. The teacher who is not concerned about innovating, finding ways of improving and finally learning is doubtless missing an important part of his or her job. From my point of view, research is sound evidence of a teacher's desire to learn. My short experience in researching has shown me how important it is to devote much time to develop a great project. From my improvable experience, I would suggest delimiting a very specific topic in order to focus the investigation and the attention on a main subject. Furthermore, I would suggest using precise methods to gather data which could not be subjective but objective. Having reflected on the process and the results, I consider that improving some aspects of the research project would have had a great impact on the final outcome we got.

Summing up, our research project gave me the possibility to look into different realities of working with reading. However, we found common and different aspects that did not really lead to absolute conclusions. I already commented about the low reliability of our results and its causes and why I do not trust in this research project as much as I would have loved to. I doubtless was able to observe the weaknesses of the current reading practices and I learnt that a change has to be made. Nonetheless, I still have not found an appropriate way to give solution to the problems which arose. I believe experience will make me think of new ways to work with reading, and knowing my students, once again, will be a key factor to success.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

The previous pages have consisted of an analysis of two assignments carried out during the Master's degree. This final dissertation has been a perfect final touch for what I have learnt during the last months. Reflecting upon my learning process and outcomes has made me realize how I am finally becoming the teacher I have always wanted to be. The process which I have undergone, reflected in this essay, is a good sample of how to learn from success and failure.

On the one hand, I have been able to describe and reflect on an important successful project: my unit of work. It has been really rewarding to see that I accomplished most of my goals, and that now I am more prepared to face the teaching reality as far as lesson planning is concerned. I have learnt the basis for implementing communicative ways of teaching and I have been able to create an original piece of work which has met my students' requirements.

On the other hand, analyzing a project with which I was not completely satisfied has shown me how to learn from my mistakes. I have been able to reflect on improvable aspects of my work as a researcher and I have proven that now I know what I should change in the future. I have been able to pinpoint the importance of experience as a basis for effectiveness. My lack of experience in researching has been a determinant factor for the outcome of this project. However, I currently know that making mistakes is not such a big problem as long as learning is made possible. Mistakes are, in fact, the premises for just as much learning as is success. This invaluable lesson can be transferred to the learning process through which I would hope to guide my future pupils.

Reflecting on these assignments has been a good opportunity to start designing the teacher I want to be. If possible, in the next few years, I will start working as a teacher of English. One year ago, I was not aware of how important it is to have a set of clear teaching principles. I have now been able to establish my own and I hope to implement them with my students.

Firstly, I have learnt something essential: not only do teachers have to teach students, but also students have to learn from teachers. Even if this seems obvious, for me it is important to distinguish what it means just 'to teach' and what it means that 'students learn'. A teacher may know theory well and feel ready to explain contents to students. However, this is not sufficient to achieve the final purpose of students' learning. A good teacher will facilitate, adapt, be flexible and, above all, be a helper for students. Eventually this means leaving the classroom platform to approach students and make them feel confident. Education is much composed of psychology. In the end, we have to be aware of the fact that we work with people, and thus consider all the personal factors (including motivation) leading to a better or worse attitude towards learning.

Secondly, I have confirmed how challenging it is for me to become a good teacher. Theory has always been easy to understand for me, but the periods of Practicum have shown me that knowing the theoretical principles behind teaching is not always enough. Teaching is an enormously complex task; I already knew this and I have been able to strengthen this thought during this year. The variety and difficulty of the roles a teacher has to play makes it absolutely necessary to feel vocation for this profession. Sometimes we take for granted how important it is to help students. Teaching them is just not providing them with input but also it is about differentiating their needs within a whole group. I have learnt this in the implementation of my unit of work and during our design of the research project.

Finally, I would say these two assignments reflect perfectly the kind of teacher I want to become. I would define such a teacher as someone who places students in the center of her job; someone who seeks motivation for her students constantly; someone who learns from her own errors and discovers new ways of enriching her teaching abilities everyday.

I feel prepared to work as a teacher; However, I am absolutely cognizant of an important factor which I am lacking at present: EXPERIENCE. Experience in capital letters, given the importance of this concept. I have had the opportunity to see how a short period of time already changed some of my ideas on how to give a lesson. From that, I assume and hope that I will constantly and continuously be learning through experience.

As I commented in the introduction, I plan to be a lifelong learner. I am willing to never stop learning; learning from my learners, from my colleagues, from my research, from my mistakes and from my effective steps. The professional path that I am about to start will have hard and good moments. Both of them will help me acquire new values and principles to improve my activity as a teacher. I have learnt this thanks to the successful and non-successful tasks I have accomplished during the Master's degree.

To end up, I would like to refer to the journalist Sidney Harris in his quote:

*“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows”*

In my view, and following these words, educating means broad opening of minds. It makes full discovery of the world possible. My task as a teacher is to help my students reach further, to help them be always eager to know more, to give them a hand to satiate their learning curiosity. Knowledge is there, just in front of us. It is accessible to everyone, but sometimes we seem blind to find it. Let's help our students find the way to reach knowledge. Let's give them the tools they need to configure their own path to success in learning. We are just helpers for such a cause: I have always known I wanted to help and I now know how.

## **REFERENCES**

Alonso Tapia, J. *Motivar en la escuela, motivar en la familia*. Madrid : 2005.

Aragonese Curriculum. EducAragón. 2009

Bandura, A. *The explanatory and predictive scope of self-efficacy theory*. Journal of Clinical and Social Psychology. Florida : 1986.

Blac, P. et al. *Assessment for Learning: Putting It into Practice*. Buckinham, Open University Press. Maidenhead : 2003.

Canale, M. and Swain, M. *Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approacheds to Second Language Teaching and Testing*. Oxford University Press. Oxford: 1980.

Cannon, J. *Influence of an Extended Elementary Science Teaching Practicum Teaching Experience Upon Preservice Elementary Teachers' Science Self-efficacy*. Science Educator. Reno : 1999.

Edward, S. *8 Ways to Foster Reading Growth in Multilingual Learners*. K12reader. Retrieved May 15<sup>th</sup> 2013 <<http://www.k12reader.com/8-ways-to-foster-readinggrowth-in-multilingual-learners/>>

Förster, J., Grant, H., Idson, L.C. & Higgins, E.T. *Success/failure feedback, expectancies, and approach/avoidance motivation: How regulatory focus moderates classic relations*. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology. Wurzburg: 2001.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R. *Learning together and alone, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning*. Needham Heights, MA: Prentice-Hall. 1994.

Keller, J. *Teachers As Life-Long Learners: Designing A Theory For Professional Development*. Retrieved May 28<sup>th</sup> 2013. <[http://www.indiana.edu/~istb/conferences/2002/IST\\_Conf\\_2002\\_keller.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~istb/conferences/2002/IST_Conf_2002_keller.pdf)>

Krashen, S. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: 1982.

Larsen-Freeman, D. *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford University Press. Oxford : 1986.

McCombs, B. L., & Whisler, J. S. *The learner-centered classroom and school*. San Francisco : 1997.

Nunan, D. *Communicative Tasks and the Language Curriculum*. Oxford : 1991.

*Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2009)*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved May 20<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/46619703.pdf>>

Wigfield, A. and Guthrie, J. *Relation of Children's Motivation for Reading to the Amount and Breadth of Their Reading*. Journal of Educational Psychology. Maryland : 1997.

Willis, J. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. London : 1996.

Yin, R. *Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, California : 2009.

Zainal, Z. *Case Study as a Research Method*. Jurnal Kemanusiaan. Faculty of Management and Human Resource Development. Malaysia : 2007.