MASTER'S DISSERTATION

MODALITY   A

TEACHING AND WEBQUEST

Author

Nelly Rocío Chingo Yanchatipán

Supervisor

María Pilar González Vera

Máster en Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanzas de Idiomas, Artísticas y Deportivas, especialidad Lenguas Extranjeras (Inglés).

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INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to integrate the knowledge acquired along the academic year in a cohesive practical materialization of it, being not only as a means of final evaluation but also as a conclusive implementation of our process of formation and as a valuable exercise of reflection on the instruction received.

I enrolled in this Master because the world has become very competitive and there is a current demand of real and committed professionals. Competent and qualified teachers can contribute to improve the educational system, leading to better-taught pupils. This Master would let me think about our role in the teaching and learning process. It would provide me with solid and practical methodologies to achieve my goals in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. The instruction received would also encourage us to develop a critical view of that reality, to mediate on it, to consider other realities and to start taking the first steps to develop small or big changes in teaching and learning process. Not only this, the programme would also provide me with the pedagogical practices needed to manage the classroom and produce a well-designed lesson that is delivered in an enthusiastic and engaging style.

The different courses that make up the *Máster Universitario en Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanzas de Idiomas, Artísticas y Deportivas* aim at introducing us into the reality of Compulsory secondary education in Spain. The Master offers both theoretical and practical work across the main areas of language teaching. The Master starts in October and can be completed over one year full-time study or two years' part-time study. The Master comprises two four-month periods that amount of 60 credits, distributed into the modules shown in table 1

Table 1

MODULES	FIRST FOUR-MONTH PERIOD MODULE TITTLE	CREDITS
1	*Contexto de la Actividad Docente*	4.0
2	*Interacción y Convivencia en el aula*	6.0
3	*Procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje*	4.0
4	*Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras*	3.0
5	*Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de Lenguas Extranjera.*	4.0
Elective Module	*Educación Emocional en el Profesorado.* *Atención a los alumnos con necesidad específica de*	4.0

	apoyo educativo.	4.0
	Habilidades del pensamiento. Desarrollo en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.	4.0
	Prevención y resolución de conflictos.	4.0
Practicum I	Integración y participación en el Centro y fundamentos del trabajo en el aula.	3.0

MODULES	SECOND FOUR-MONTH PERIOD MODULE TITTLE	CREDITS
6	Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje del Inglés.	8.0
7	La comunicación oral en lengua inglesa.	4.0
8	Evaluación e innovación docente e investigación educativa en Lenguas Extranjeras – Inglés	3.0
Elective Module	Tecnologías de información y comunicación para el aprendizaje.	4.0
	Diseño de materiales para la educación a distancia.	4.0
	Enseñanza del español como lengua de aprendizaje para alumnado inmigrante.	4.0
	Recursos didácticos para la enseñanza de lengua extranjera.	4.0
	Educación secundaria para personas adultas.	4.0
Practicum II	Diseño curricular y actividades de aprendizaje en Lengua Extranjera - Inglés	4.0
Practicum III	Evaluación e innovación de la docencia e investigación educativa en Lenguas Extranjeras - Inglés	3.0
Fin de Máster	Trabajo fin de Máster	6.0

As seen before, the Master is structured in two terms, which include several modules, three periods of school placement and Master's dissertation.

The general modules were done in the first four-month period and during these months I did the following modules: *Contexto de la Actividad Docente, Interacción y convivencia en el aula, Procesos de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje, Educación Emocional en el Profesorado, Diseño curricular de lengua extranjera* and *Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de lenguas extranjeras.*

Contexto de la actividad docente. It gave us the opportunity to reflect upon education in social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, this module introduced a general outline about the Spanish educational system: legal aspects, structure and organization of schools and the main documents on which they are based such us *Proyecto Educativo de Centro, Proyectos Curriculares, Proyectos de Atención a la Diversidad, etc.*

Interacción y convivencia en el aula. This module focused on the learner, the most important agents in the teaching and learning process. It let us understand how important the relationship between teachers and students is. It consisted on the basic knowledge about learners' socio-emotional development and a brief overview of the main learning theories developed throughout history.

Procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje: It aimed at providing the theoretical framework, the essential knowledge about the main aspects of the teaching and learning process such us motivational strategies, assessment, and theories of learning that can be applied in educational contexts. It was shown that everyone does not learn the way you do.

Educación emocional en el profesorado. This is one of the elective subjects. I think that emotions and feelings have to do with learning and teaching experiences for both teachers and students, and their significance considered by both learning theory and pedagogical practice.

Diseño curricular de lengua extranjera. It presented the stages to design a year planning based on Legislation: National Curriculum, Aragonese Curriculum and the Common European Framework, which provides common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, etc. In addition, it points out the need of developing an intercultural competence in our students, so that they can use the language for communication and learn in an effective way.

Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de lenguas extranjeras. It provided us with an outline of the main approaches and methods to language teaching that have been developed through history. It was complemented with a practical part composed by reflection exercises and the design of an activity for each of the methods. These activities gave us the opportunity to develop a critical view on those methods and thus build up an eclectic attitude, being aware of their strong and weak points, and taking from them those aspects that better fit the type of teacher we want to be.

The above-named courses were complemented with some practical sessions in which we could apply theoretical instruction to practical cases. The generic module composed by these subjects constitutes a very strong foundation for the development of the specific module devoted to my specialty, English Language.

The second term concentrates on Foreign Languages Teaching and it is made up of the following modules: *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje del inglés, La comunicación oral en Lengua inglesa y Evaluación e*

innovación docente e investigación educativa en inglés and *Tecnologías de información y comunicación para el aprendizaje.*

Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de inglés. This subject was a really practical one where we could analyse many teaching and learning activities that could be designed and implemented in teaching and learning process. In this subject, we also thought about the learners' differences and we designed the learning unit of work which is essential in teaching and learning process.

La comunicación oral en lengua inglesa. By means of this course, we were conscious of the features and communication strategies in English oral discourse and of their implications to teach oral skills in the EFL classroom. This course also counts with practical sessions where we played the learner's role and we could experience how learners can be encouraged to develop their oral skills by means of creative activities.

Evaluación, innovación e investigación educativa en inglés. First of all, it encouraged me to reflect upon my capacity as a future teacher. It introduces the main problematic aspects in teaching and learning process. It instructed us in the methodology of research process in order to be capable of designing innovative educational alternatives. From this subject, I received very valuable new knowledge. I had the opportunity to put it into practice by means of the research project, focused on the use of Blogs in teaching and learning process (included in the Appendix 2).

Tecnologías de información y comunicación para el aprendizaje. This subject also greatly contributed to arise in me a special interest in conducting research on effective variables and instructional aspects that I later materialized in the research project (included in appendix 2).

English language learners need a variety of language experiences and that is why I believe that it is not enough learning English at school. As teachers we must encourage our students to study English at home, too. Nowadays, we live in a digital society; we are teaching digital natives. Most of them have computers, internet, laptops, etc. and are good at technologies. The subject shows how teachers can take advantage of it.

Finally, The Master's dissertation hereby presented is divided into five sections. The first section includes a short introduction explaining the facts that made me take this Master and its structure. The third section concentrates on the analysis of the learning unit of work and the research project. In these sections I will think about their impact on the school placement (*Practicum*). The fourth section draws the conclusions from the analysis and the proposals for innovation. The last section provides a detailed description of the bibliography included in this dissertation. Finally, there are two appendices which gather the learning unit of work and the project of evaluation and innovation. Both the learning unit of work and the research project will be analysed in sections 3.1 and 3.2 respectively.

2. Justification

The current educational law in Spain (May 3rd, 2006) implements a new approach to the syllabus design within Compulsory secondary education with the introduction of the Key competences:

1. Competence in linguistic communication (L1 and foreign languages),
2. Mathematical competence,
3. Knowledge of and interaction with the physical world (science and technology),
4. Digital competence,
5. Interpersonal and civic competence,
6. Cultural and artistic competence,
7. Learning to learn
8. Personal initiative and autonomy.

Among these competences, digital competence stands out due to the relevant role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in our society. ICT have completely changed the way in which we access information and it has also introduced learning resources adapted to the new type of student who lives in a digital and technological world.

The educational system has to provide students with more than concepts and data. It has to let learners grow up and develop themselves both at an individual and social level. Empowering learners to engage in meaningful and challenging tasks was one of my aims during my school placement and ICT played a significant part in it. Efforts to promote quality education must shift from an emphasis on educating to learning since effective learning not only nurtures children and young people, but it also empowers families and communities, and contributes to national development. All these aspects were considered and gathered together in my learning unit of work about the environment and in my research project about the use of blogs in the learning and teaching process, and this is the reason why they have been chosen for being analysed in this dissertation.

The design of learning units of work is one of the things we have learned during this Master. It has enabled me to practise all I learned in class during its implementation as will be analysed in section three. According to the Learning Federation (May 2010: 8) the learning unit of work is a teacher-developed learning sequence that describes the pedagogical processes, the strategies the teacher uses, the skills to be developed by means of the activities, the details of the resources needed and appropriate assessment tasks in order to support an effective teaching and learning process. As happens with the syllabus and the units of work, lessons need to be carefully planned to ensure that all the different aspects of the syllabus are covered systematically. Richards (1998: 103) points out that lesson plans help the structure for a lesson, to provide a 'map' for the teacher to follow and to provide a record of what has been taught". Lesson plans are used to ensure that there is a balance of types of activities within the lesson, to confirm the coherent development of linguistic skills through the unit and to provide a unique, and ideally memorable, learning/teaching focus for each lesson.

Some assignments were developed in different subjects from the Master, and they became very useful for this dissertation; however, the learning unit of work, was one of the most complete ones as it combined theory, practice and implementation. I have been

able to see that a learning unit of work has a special value since you it includes your ideas that will be developed by means of activities. Furthermore, I have understood the connection between all the courses of the Master whose contents were embraced by the learning unit of work. Taking all this into account and the fact that the learning unit let me feel more confident thanks to its implementation, I have considered a critical analysis of it should be included in this dissertation.

The other task included in this dissertation is the research project on the use of blogs in EFL teaching and learning process. I include this research as I consider it an essential project in my learning process in this Master. This project aimed to show how students are given more autonomy taking decisions and how teachers can monitor the learners and observe their evolution more effectively. This research is also important as it covers different competences and the use of ICTs promotes the development of group activities. It allows pupils to learn how to work in teams, to develop the relationships in class and to interact in the target language and participate in a collaborative learning process. This project had to be included in this dissertation as it is related to new technologies, which are a bridge that keeps in constant contact students with the subject and the contents.

3. Reflections on the projects

The projects I have chosen to study in this section are my learning unit of work "Let's protect the environment" and my experiences while on teaching practice and my research project "The use of blogs in EFL teaching and learning process". I have chosen this learning unit of work because I think it contains most of the knowledge I have acquired in the Master. On the other hand, I have chosen the research project because I think that the use of blogs in EFL teaching and learning process show interesting results that will be relevant for my future teaching.

3.1 Reflection on the learning unit of work

Firstly, I would like to focus on the definition of the concept "learning unit". In the subject *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de inglés* we learnt that this is a teacher-developed learning sequence that describes the pedagogical processes, the strategies the teacher uses, the skills to be developed by means of the activities, the details of the resources needed and appropriate assessment tasks in order to support an effective teaching and learning process. Within each learning unit of work, all the different component parts of the syllabus should be presented so that the work is systematically and evenly distributed throughout the academic year. Once the unit has been planned and the number of lessons within the unit determined, the next step is the organisation of the features of the unit into lessons.

The implementation of the learning unit of work is the most important stage as the theoretical and idyllic situations face the reality observed in class. It is the time in which teachers may need to make certain adjustments on the aspects they took into consideration when they created the unit of work. Teachers have to bear in mind general aspects such as objectives, contents, activities, skills, resources, assessment, but also the particular pupils' interests, context, needs and their way and pace of learning as learners are the main agents in the learning process. The ability to inspire all pupils to do their best can have a lasting positive impact on young people's present and future. It lies in our hands to encourage learners to discover the passion for learning both in the classroom and out of it.

This unit was implemented in a private school in Zaragoza where there are nursery, primary and compulsory secondary education. The school has one hundred and eighty seven pupils in secondary education. There are two classes A and B in each course with twenty eight pupils in each. Pupils have four English classes during the week and each session lasts fifty five minutes.

During my school placement, I realised that unfortunately learners are characterized by a relatively passive role. They practise patterns provided by teachers, textbooks and audios, they spend most learning time copying and reproducing language written down by others. They learn how to communicate in model and predictable situations, but they do not learn how to respond appropriately in authentic communicative situations.

Furthermore, I observed that most of the time the teachers in their lesson concentrate on the pace of activities rather than the pace of learning since they bear in mind that all course book units should be covered. Pupils rarely have periods to read or discuss issues in class. Pupils' works are based on the textbooks activities even when they work in pairs or small groups, which actually do not create an appropriate environment to the learners' needs and interests.

During my implementation, students were fully engaged in interesting activities like games, races, songs, etc. In addition, it was used a wide range of relevant and useful resources, including video clips, power points, and flash cards in order to catch the pupils' attention.   I wanted learners to be involved during the learning process so I looked for active participation during the whole classes. Besides, slow learners were encouraged to participate as many times as fast learners. I tried to create a positive environment and provide learners opportunities to use, to practise and to reflect on language.

In my case, the learning unit of work was divided in seven sessions, it dealt with the environment and it was planned for the second year of secondary education. I used this topic as a mean of communication focusing more on fluency than accuracy. The pupils were really interested in the topic and most of the learners were familiarized with it in L1. As Little et al. (1989: 5) points out:

> When students are working on topics of interest to them, they are likely to adopt a more positive attitude to the task in hand, because their interest in the subject makes the task more enjoyable or more meaningful; and there is some evidence from psychological and psycholinguistic research that the greater the "personal significance" students attach to material, the more they will learn from it.

My mentor let me implement just three lessons in each class, A and B. I had two weeks to observe the pupils before implementing my learning unit of work, which allowed me to see the students' needs and interests. As I only had three sessions in each class, I decided to change the sequence of the lesson plans and implement the most relevant for them.

My unit of work contributed to enable students to:

- ✓ use vocabulary related to environment,
- ✓ use the foreign language both orally and in a written form to communicate in various real situations in a clear, personal and creative way,
- ✓ be aware of the problems that our planet is suffering due to climate change and other causes,
- ✓ discuss different types of major environmental problems,
- ✓ promote awareness of a particular environmental problem and what individuals can do to take care our environment,
- ✓ explore their own values and feelings of concern about the environment,
- ✓ get actively involved in learning and teaching process.

Regarding the methodology followed in my unit of work, the pedagogical framework is divided into behaviouristic account, effective learning and communicative approach (fig. 1). Within the pedagogical framework, the communicative approach is characterised by providing students with opportunities to use the target language through authentic and meaningful tasks in order to communicate something based around content and meaning rather than specific linguistic forms. Learners learn how to use language creatively by noticing, interpreting and negotiating the information. Thus, I attempted to create learner-centred lessons pupils played a more important role than in teacher-centred lessons.

Figure 1

Figure 1
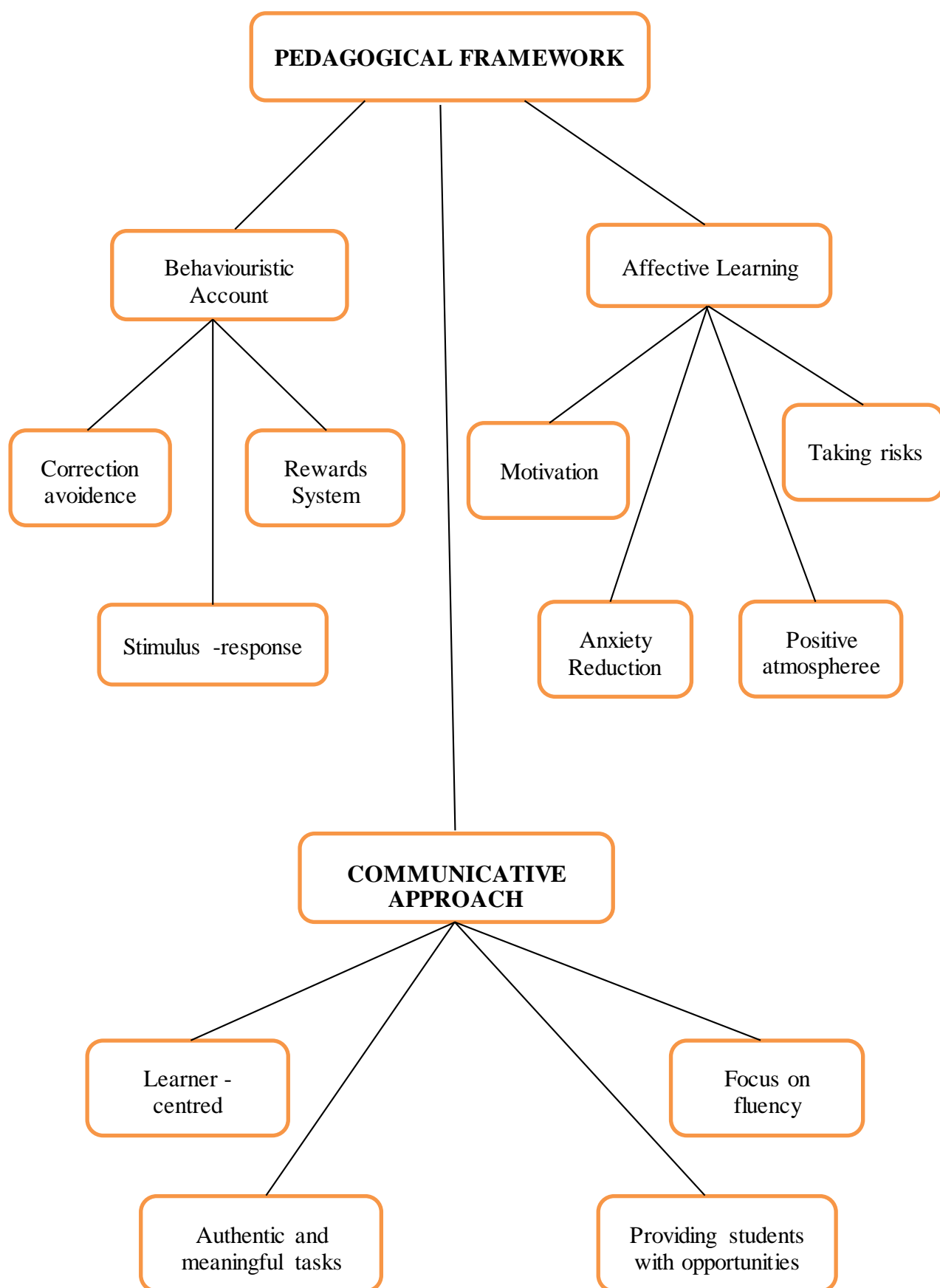
The teachers' beliefs and principles determine how students will achieve their objectives. It was essential to reflect on our methodology since the choice of an appropriate methodology would encourage students to keep on learning; otherwise the learners would get bored easily. Regarding methodology, although this Master has provided us with several theories and approaches, I opted for a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The principles of Communicative Language Teaching at this time can be summarized as follows:

- Make real communication the focus of language learning.
- Provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know.
- Be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
- Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
- Link the different skills such as speaking, reading and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world.
- Let students induce or discover grammar rules.

(Richards 2006: 13)

According to Richards and Rogers (1986) and Hedge (2000), being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence; it requires communicative competence. The list of communicative competences proposed by Hymes (1972), and complemented by other theorists includes:

- Linguistic competence;
- Sociolinguistic competence;
- Discourse competence,
- Strategic competence.

As such, communicative competence must be considered as an essential principle to be developed in the EFL teaching and learning process through interactive participation, meaningful activities and authentic resources. Language is communication, and as teachers we must develop in our learners the ability to communicate effectively in a wide range of professional and social contexts. So English language teaching is aimed at the importance of meaningful communication which is also reflected in Spanish state curriculum for foreign languages:

[…] *el eje del currículo lo constituyen los procedimientos encaminados a conseguir una competencia comunicativa efectiva oral y escrita, en contextos sociales significativos, que permita a alumnos y alumnas expresarse con progresiva eficacia y corrección y que abarque todos los usos y registros posibles, incluido el literario. (Real Decreto 1631/2006)*

CLT played a significant part in my unit of work since it emphasizes meaningful communication in the classroom. I combined CLT with TBL teaching since being meaningful is the aim too. However they have, few significant differences such as with TBL we need to make our students talk or use the language and then being aware of their gaps, focusing on the form; on the other hand, if we use CLT approach, first we can start activating the students' background knowledge focusing on the form and then students will do activities to communicate.

In order to establish an effective learning it is crucial to take into consideration learners and teachers' roles. Thus, with my unit of work I tried to move from 'knowledge to 'competence' and from teaching to learning, placing the learner at the centre.

When I chose CLT, I took into consideration the roles learners and teachers play in education. According to Tudor (2001: 14):

> We can no longer assume that our students are 'simply' students, or that they are bundles of discrete variables. They are complex human beings who bring with them to the classroom their own individual personality as it is at a given point in time, and this influences how they interact with what we do as teachers.

The learner must be encouraged to communicate – to communicate about the learning process. This is what I tried to do in my learning unit of work. I attempted to achieve the learner's interdependence by recognising responsibility for his own learning and by sharing that responsibility with other learners and the teacher. On the other hand, the teacher has to accept that different learners learn different things in different times.

> Language teaching need to acknowledge and work constructively within the diversity and richness of human experience that learners bring with them to their language study – which leaves little scope for neat, pre-packaged solutions to language teaching problems (Tutor 1996: x)

In units of work, the activities occupy a central position. As Clarke and Silberstein (1977: 51) suggest:

> Classroom activities should parallel the "real world" as closely as possible. Since language is a tool of communication, methods and materials should concentrate on the message and not the medium. The purpose of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life.

Taking this into consideration, I will explain several activities I implemented during my school placement and which were positively received by my students. I will also comment on those which did not work as well as I expected and I will make some suggestions to improve them in the future.

With respect to the first lesson, which dealt with vocabulary, I wanted to know their background knowledge about the topic so I introduced a video clip without audio about some environmental problems which lasted one minute and at the end of it we establish a whole group discussion. It was really interesting because they wanted to tell me what they had watched but they noticed that they had some gaps about the topic so some of them applied compensatory strategies such us foreignizing, mime or gestures in order to be able to talk. Examples of this are "reciclation" instead of recycle or "ambientation problems" instead of environmental problems. Some pupils asked me explicitly "how do you say...in English?" and few of them could talk about the environmental problems in the target language without being helped. Doing this warming up was very useful for me since I realized that it is more effective to make the pupils be aware of their language deficiencies than to give them a list of words directly and that pupils were able to develop their strategic competences.

They listened to the right word and then they practiced the word stress thus we integrated lexis and phonetics. Next, I provided them with flash cards in order to associate a visual image with the word so they could remember its meaning easily.

Furthermore, I gave them a vocabulary list with their definitions in L2, as Schmitt & Schmitt (1995) point out sentence examples, parts of speech, definitions and key words could also be added. The vocabulary list was not too extensive since I considered that it is more effective to study words regularly over several short sessions than to study them for one longer session as they usually do it in class. Finally, they were able to do the post task where they had to match the cut-out word definitions and to work cooperatively.

Regarding to the second lesson, this dealt with climate change which was interesting enough for the learners. I wanted to integrate listening, reading, speaking and spoken interaction skills in the same lesson, for which purpose it was essential to look for an authentic text in order to address and keep pupils' attention. As the current Aragonese curriculum states:

> *Se preferirán los textos 'auténticos', entendiendo por tales los no diseñados específicamente para la clase de lengua extranjera y dando preferencia a aquellos que un hablante nativo de su edad usaría (revistas juveniles, tebeos, Internet, libros de textos de otra asignaturas, de divulgación, narrativos, enciclopedias, vídeos, canciones, programas de radio y TV, etc.)*

First, as a pre-reading activity I used an interesting video about climate change with an appropriate linguistic level in order to activate the learners' background knowledge. Then we had a group discussion about it, most of them had understood and could speak about it. Next, we focused our attention on the reading. They had to read in silence a text which was accompanied by an illustration with the effects of climate change. In this way they were able to construct meaning from what was written in the texts. Then I encouraged some pupils to read it aloud to improve their intonation and pronunciation. In while-reading activities, they answered comprehension questions and they completed a chart with the causes-effects and some solutions to reduce the effects of climate change. As a follow-up activity, they worked in groups of four and they compared their charts. I have seen that providing opportunities for bottom-up and top-down process and integrating reading with other skills are beneficial for learners since they will be implicated in learning and teaching process.

When I was in my observation class, I noticed that learners do not like extensive or intensive readings so they spent much time doing the comprehension activity. I think that it is necessary to encourage the pupils to practise extensive reading in L2 as well as in L1. It would be so interesting and profitable that the time it takes would not be missed for the reason that they would develop their reading, writing skills which would help them acquire fluency and feel confident when using the language.

Intensive readings are done in class but the pupils need to be more engaged than usual. Then it is indispensible to improve our techniques when reading is applied in class. For example, we could ask the learners to bring one short and favorite text to be read or spoken during class, it could be done once a week so that pupils are seen more responsible for their learning creating a negotiation atmosphere in class and developing their personal initiative and autonomy competence.

As for the debate, I wanted to put CLT into practice and work on spoken interaction. Therefore, I encouraged the pupils to participate actively during the whole sessions. Spoken interaction is perhaps the most difficult skill to develop as interactional talk is more complex than transactional discourse since planned discourse is easily planned

due to the a great variety of resources that we can create for this situation. Working in pairs or small groups allowed them to feel more confident, and this is what we did as a pre-discussion activity, and then we were able to discuss it with the whole class. Each lesson began with brainstorming activities so that they could communicate in the target language and realized that the target language is a vehicle for communication, not just an object to be studied.

It is important to mention that pupils liked to participate but they did not do it since they feel insecure, nervous and embarrassed when they make mistakes on writing or reading. Therefore, during my implementation I provided a safe learning environment in which learners knew that they were respected since it is very important for me to make them gain confidence to use L2. Giving constructive, positive and useful feedback is really crucial. We had to reflect on the way we gave feedback because the pupils can sometimes feel humiliated. So I focused on the necessity of giving learners opportunities to participate rather than checking always their mistakes. So an appropriate feedback from the teacher contributes to foster the pupil's self-confidence and self-esteem and to encourage further progress. Moreover, I did not forget to transmit the pupils that mistakes are part of learning process.

My third lesson was focused on form-based activities because the pupils had to learn the use of modal verbs. In relation to grammar, Thornbury (1998) suggests that grammar has a mediating role, rather than serving as an end in itself: This is the reason why I think grammar does not have to be central to the teaching and learning of languages.

Considering the grammatical component of the unit, I did not teach grammar with a deductive approach because explaining the forms and rules and then drilling students on them may result boring for them. Students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom. According to Adamson (2003), "the deductive method is often criticized because: a) it teaches grammar in an isolated way; b) little attention is paid to meaning; c) practice is often mechanical." However, it can be a viable option in certain situations; for example, when dealing with highly motivated students, teaching a particularly difficult concept, or for preparing students to write exams.

I used CLT approach when I taught grammar since most of the pupils had not learnt about the use of modal verbs. I presented the pupils an activity focused on form without giving any preamble about how the concept is used. I expected that they would notice how the concept was going to be used and the students would determine the grammatical rules by means of activities. Then, I used a power point with sentences and images since grammar should be taught in connection with useful examples. As a follow-up activity, the learners had to use the language appropriately, applying the correct rules through a game focused on form. Finally, I monitored and gave feedback to those learners who did not understand the grammar structures.

The pupils usually learn grammar in isolation as mathematical formula and sometimes, the explanation is done in Spanish, teachers said that it was the unique form to ensure that everyone had understood the grammar rules. I think that it is a big mistake since they could be able to do the grammar exercises but they will not be able to apply those rules in real communication. Usually, we learnt grammar rules by heart and for a specific purpose: to do an exam and then we forget them easily. This is the reason why I think that the way of teaching grammar and assessing should be changed for example

instead of completing the sentences with the appropriate verb, we give them some topics and ask them to choose one and write a composition of forty words.

The pupils were engaged with almost all activities planned in these three sessions since they were not just sitting and listening to the teacher during the whole session. They were really involved during class, they had to work in pairs, in groups so that they can interact with each other. They also had to write on the blackboard, to compete, to play, to participate in discussions, to check their peers' answers, etc. As they said, it had been a new way of learning English and they had felt encouraged to participate actively without fear of making mistakes.

On the other hand, there was an activity which the pupils do not like. It was a listening activity of the first session. It did not work as well as I had expected. It was a song whose content was excellent because it was about the environment but now I realise that it was not appropriate for their age. Furthermore, I did not apply the pre-listening task so they were not able to complete the task well. Checking their answers on the board was another mistake because most of them had the incorrect answer. On account of this, I think that pre-listening is essential since you prepare the learners for both top-down and bottom-up processing by means of activating prior knowledge, making predictions or reviewing key vocabulary. Furthermore, it would have been necessary to do the post-listening phase so that the pupils could give opinions about a topic but I could not do it since I was not able to react after my failure of the pre-listening activity.

Regarding to learners' assessments, it was difficult for me to assess them since I only had three sessions for my implementation. However, one of the instruments that I could use at the end of the third lesson was one minute paper. It was very useful because it let me know the students' feelings about my implementation, since it was anonymous they could express freely.

Although I was not able to implement the other lessons (lessons 4-7), I would like to comment on them taking into consideration what I have seen during my school placement.

In my fourth lesson, I consider that the topic is interesting since it is about endangered animals, but I think that it is not necessary to do the stage 4 which is related to the use of modal verbs. It is essential to concentrate on the reading. However, the reading is too long so I would only use two of the four cut-out readings.

In lesson five which deals with water shortages, the assessment is too long and pupils would probably need more than fifteen minutes to do it. So I would not be able to implement the stages six, seven and eight. I would have to reduce the activities if I had implemented this lesson because there are too many activities.

Regarding lesson six that is about reducing-reusing-recycling, there are too many activities. In stage 4, which is a pair group discussion, I would use three of the seven questions for instance.

In lesson seven, pupils would do their oral presentation. I think that they would get bored after the second presentation so it would be necessary to involve the students by asking one question after each presentation and I would give them one extra-point if their answers were right, making a kind of competition.

In general terms, most activities of my unit of work let learners practise cooperating with other learners and with their teachers, making a creative use of the language they have learnt. As have been seen, the activities from my unit of work involved and promoted active learning. The combination of communicative language teaching approach with task-based learning has been crucial as if students work on an interesting topic and in an appropriate way, they are more likely to take part in the class spontaneously. This unit of work has been planned trying to foster speaking activities in the classroom in order to stimulate the development of students' communicative competence, which is frequently neglected in the English class. However, I am aware of the fact that speaking activities have a little space in English lessons since there is a more controlled practice than a communicative one. Because of that, I would change some activities of my learning unit of work as has been explained before.

3.2 Reflection on the research project

> Action research is a constructive enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the experience. It is a continuous learning process in which the researcher learns and also shares the newly generated knowledge with those who may benefit from it. (Koshy 2005: 9)

Implementing the research project let me put into practice what I had read about the use of ICT. I was interested in doing my research about ICT because I have always thought that using ICTs in language learning offers unlimited possibilities and there cannot be an effective education without the inclusion of ICT in the EFL teaching and learning process using an appropriate methodology.

Although the use of ICTs can mean a big challenge for teachers (Pennock.Speck, 2009) since they have to learn both how to use these technologies and how to implement them successfully in the classroom, it can be highly beneficial. It is a new opportunity for students to combine the learning in and out of the classroom. Time in English lessons is very limited and, with the use of technologies it can be extended offering students a good chance to receive input from real contexts out of the school time.

However, technologies have to be used carefully in and out of the classroom (Pennock Speck, 2009). Teachers need to be aware that the use of ICTs within the classroom is extremely flexible and they need to plan the purpose of ICTs in each lesson. As Sweller (1999) points out, technologies have to be part of specifically designed tasks in order to avoid overloading our learners with too much information. We cannot forget that technologies have to act as tools that provide advantages both for teachers and students in the teaching and learning process.

Taking into account the previous explanation and having in mind the crucial importance of ICTs and their use in secondary schools, I proposed my research project that deals with the use of blogs in the EFL teaching and learning process. These platforms constitute a good place where students can express themselves at different levels and work cooperatively in small groups or even as a whole class. With the use of blogs, teachers can construct a point of reference for their students, adding periodical information that can be used by students as a guide in their studies or tasks. The problem with blogs is that they are more limited in the interaction area since there are no spaces where students can communicate freely among themselves. Moreover, it can be more difficult to organise students if we want them to publish tasks as a new entry.

My research project consisted on designing a blog where my colleague and I posted activities related to the learning unit of work. By doing this, the research project was intertwined with the unit of work and contributed to the fulfilment of the objectives presented in the learning unit.

The activities posted on the blog allowed learners to practise these linguistic competences: listening, reading and writing. These following examples of activities posted on the blog were the most interesting for the pupils:

1. Wheel game: irregular verbs (see Appendix 4). It was a challenge for the pupils because they wanted to know how much they know about irregular verbs. Everyone tried to get the highest score and they did a race with their fellows.
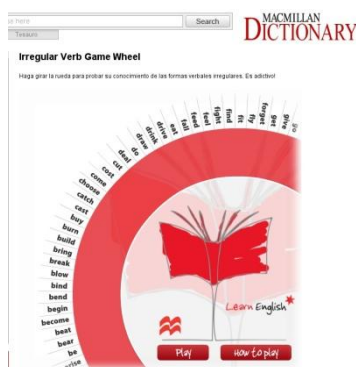
2. A self-assessment about the use of modal verbs (see Appendix 4). The pupils were very interesting in doing it, most of them wanted to get one hundred in their scores and they repeated the self-assessment until they get all the right answers.

3. This is a crossword related to the environmental problems (see Appendix 4). I think that although translation should be used for certain specific situations, teachers should present vocabulary definitions within a context. In my opinion, I have seen during this project that it is not useful to ask students to repeat the words ten or more times in order to learn vocabulary. We should create useful tasks where learners can practise vocabulary by means of readings, games, and so on. Thus, a crossword could be a good idea for enriching their vocabulary.
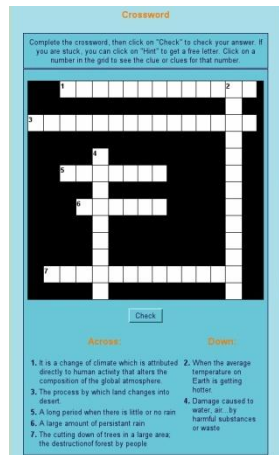
Unfortunately, we only had one session for each group to implement the research project. However, I observed that the relationship between teachers and students was more interactive and monitored, rather than a mere transference of information from teacher to student. The pupils put into practice what they had learnt. The students were the centre of the class and they knew what they have to do in each activity. Moreover, I was able to see the difference between the fixed point assessment where students feel anxious or nervous and this sort of self-assessment. I think that teachers should create a positive atmosphere in class when students have to be assessed by doing this kind of assessment because the pupils were very involved in it as it was like a game for them. Furthermore, one of the most constructive tools of ICTs is "hot potatoes", which has some programs such as: JCloze, JQuiz, JCross, JMix, JMatch and The Masher. You can design some useful and engaging exercises and write the feedback at the same time so that students get instant feedback about their mistakes. Also, this is very helpful and effective for teachers since most of the groups have more than twenty five students in each class. This could help them to ensure providing feedback to every single pupil at once.

I believed that learners do not like doing grammar exercises since when I did my portfolio for *Practicum II*, I noticed that they were bored and sleepy doing the grammar exercises of the students' book and grammar book. Besides, when they had to check their answers, both teachers and learners usually spent the whole session checking and writing the answers on the board. However, as you can see the most interesting activities for the pupils were grammar exercises posted on the blog. It is therefore very important both to teach grammar using the textbooks and to design other types of exercises that deal with grammar contents in context and in a communicative way. This will make it easy for the students to get involved in the learning and teaching process.

I observed that technologies with a visual dimension – digital video, photography, and so on, engaged pupils and provided a stimulus for collaborative working and discussion. In addition, when the pupils are control the technology, they get a feeling of ownership and control of the learning process. As it is reflected in European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages:

> ICTs play an increasingly central role in foreign language learning and require teachers to be familiar with information systems and computer-mediated communication. Collaborative learning environments as well as individual use of ICT information

17

sources foster independent learning and, if appropriately employed, promote learner autonomy. (EPOSTL, 2007: 44)

The use of blogs in and out of the class had a clear effect in the students because they demonstrated a great spontaneous interest in a learning activity, and the time and attention devoted to learning activities increased when they had to use ICTs. The use of blogs resulted an essential supplementary tool for both teachers and learners since it allowed us:

- ✓ to transform learning and teaching improving outcomes and sharing ideas,
- ✓ to develop a cooperative work,
- ✓ to build an open accessible system with more information and services online improving personalised support,
- ✓ to keep on lifelong learning.

As mentioned in the second section of this dissertation, the key competences can also be developed by using ICTs so the use of blogs could develop some key competences such as:

1. Competence in linguistic communication
2. Knowledge of and interaction with the physical world (science and technology),
3. Digital competence
4. Learning to learn
5. Personal initiative and autonomy.

Moreover, the different education and training systems should devote sufficient attention to key competences for lifelong learning, as defined and adopted in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences. Teachers must contribute to the development of them by using some alternative ICT tools. In my opinion, web 2.0 offers a great variety of software and programs and we should take advantage of them. Besides, I have put into practice what I have learnt about ICTs by designing not only a blog but also a wiki and a web and I am aware of their indispensable use in EFL teaching since wikis, blogs or webs facilitate the learning in and out of the classroom.

4. Conclusions

This Master provided me with the knowledge and the confidence to take my career ahead and has left me with a desire to keep on learning and stepping up to new challenges. One other thing worth mentioning about the Master is the relationship between the professors and the students. The professors are warm and approachable. They know how to make you feel confident as a new student. They are really expert teachers not only teaching but also listening to their students.

When I was in the school placement, there were some pupils very interested in learning English. They were in first year of secondary education and they asked me if I could tell them how they can learn English at home. I gave them the URL of my blog since there are some useful and interesting websites to learn English by themselves. Unfortunately, in my school placement, teachers do not want to assume other responsibilities as designing a blog, wiki or web because they said that they did not have time to do it. On account of this, I would say that it is necessary that teachers made an effort to promote and facilitate the learning and teaching process. It is essential to be innovative, creative, flexible, and tolerant in order to make learning environments more exciting, challenging and rewarding. If we can encourage learners' involvement and commitment and support language learners in making their own decisions they will develop a critical voice and a sense of responsibility not only for their learning but for the society in which they live. The current society demands more qualified professionals so it is in our hands to encourage as many pupils as possible to learn how to keep on learning. For this reason, we must choose appropriate methods, contents, activities and resources which will be attractive to the learners and answer their needs and interest. In this regard, Cox et al. (2003a) concluded that teachers' pedagogies had a large effect on pupils' attainment, with aspects such as the technologies selected, the ways in which they were deployed and the extent to which the teacher planned and prepared for the lesson, being significant.

Regarding to my professional development, both the learning unit of work and the research project have been the most useful of all the assignments submitted because I was able to implement them. I think that they are interrelated, in other words, the most effective use of ICTs are directly linked to curriculum, objectives, specific contents and skills become an integral part of the learning experience. In my opinion, there cannot be an effective learning without the inclusion of ICTs, and if you do not use ICTs efficiently and effectively, there cannot be an effective learning. Thus, ICT is a mean and not the result of the process. Moreover, Combinations of technology and English language teaching curriculum would give greater choice in relation to what, when and where to study, selecting according to students' interests, learning styles, preferences and needs. Such systems can give the pupil more autonomy and independence with regard to learning and a range of resources.

Likewise, as Graham and Thornley (2000) point out, trainee teachers need to have the opportunity to investigate the use of ICTs as a pedagogical tool, to experience the benefits of ICTs in teaching for themselves, and to explore potential applications in the context of their own teaching practice. However, this necessitates teacher educators being competent and confident with ICT resources and the associated pedagogy themselves (Yildirim, 2000). Teacher educators will need to be much more than expert users of ICT; they will need to be 'specialist educators who can make students secure in

the range of pedagogical uses soon to be required of beginning teachers' (Simpson et al., 1999).

Overall, I can conclude by saying that the flexibility offered by new technology questions traditional learning sequences. This flexibility makes individualised learning possible and offers opportunities for pupils to take a central role in the direction of their own learning, challenging traditional relationships between teachers and learners. Furthermore, we should highlight that it is not enough to design a blog, we also have to encourage learners to use it and to participate on the blog by proposing interesting activities, useful resources, and otherwise, learners will get bored easily.

Finally, as has been seen in this dissertation, technology needs to be part of the teaching and learning process in order to make it more real and familiar. It is also essential to take full advantage of the potential of technology to enhance students' learning and to help students become acquainted with strategies to integrate technology into the curriculum and to use technology as a learning tool. In this regard, if blogs are aimed at fulfilling the requirements set in the subject, they will become useful tools that will generate a revolution in the field of education.

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