

**TFM**

**Modalidad B**

*Raising gender awareness in the  
English classroom:  
A PBL approach*



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## **1. Introduction: theoretical framework**

In the **society** of information where we live nowadays, new technologies are the basis in our everyday lives. The ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) can be found everywhere and they provide us with free access to any kind of information. This may sound attractive for many people since it generates a feeling of freedom. However, all this information can be used against citizens as we can see on television all too frequently. If we pay attention to TV news, we can notice how information is manipulated in the direction that suits the purposes of those who run the TV channel. For example, if the government decides to increase the price of electricity, the news will tell us about something very important happening in the Middle East. This is what is called *the smoke screen effect*. In short, the mass media control not only the information people receive but also the opinions and values they should have. Obviously, these values are in accordance with the interests of the capitalist system where we live. But, how can this affect teenagers nowadays? According to the Cantabrian Institute of Statistics, 99,44% of the adolescents and pre-adolescents in Spain have a television at home and 64,39% of them have access to the Internet. The same statistic shows that 47,13% of young people connect to the Internet at least five days per week. Considering these statistics, is it possible to say that teenagers are free to think and create their own conscience and opinion about the world? We can assure that it is almost impossible to avoid any kind of information and values reaching our sons/daughters or students.

**Adolescence**, “a period of life that approximately starts at the age of 11-12 years old and ends at 16-17 years old” (Izcovich 23), is characterized by the search of oneself in a world that was considered well-known before. It is like the second birth that everybody has. Everything that we believed we knew becomes unknown now. Similarly, models, ideas, beliefs or even truths become uncertain and it is the moment of reconsidering all these things. It is also a period characterized by the detachment from the family as a symbol of authority and by the search of new models among our peers. In that sense, importance is given to the fact of belonging to a group of peers and, consequently, adjusting to this group's “rules”. As it is also a period when boys and girls start relating, physical appearances become important as well. Fears, anxiety, shame, etc. arise in adolescents. Apart from friend relationships, first loves, partner relationships or even sexual relationships appear too. It is important to give space and

freedom to teens so that they can investigate, discover and learn by their own. However, it is well known that they are quite disoriented at this time of life and, although they will make their own choices, it is necessary to make them think. When I say “to make them think” I mean to enable them not to be carried along by what they watch on television or what they see in their friends but to reflect about the reasons of their behaviour in order to create their own ethics.

As I decided the following dissertation to be on the line of “critical thinking and gender issues”, it came to me that I could elaborate the learning unit of my Practicum in terms of **gender in English**. In this way, I could count not only on a theoretical basis to elaborate my dissertation (TFM) but also on practice and results. Besides, I consider education is one of the key pillars in the transmission of cultural patterns of gender but it is also a pathway of transformation. It is still possible to perceive the perpetuation of a segregated education in the school, that is to say, an education that differentiates what is appropriate for boys and girls. Similarly, everything related to females is made invisible and a unique way of understanding life is supported: that of masculine gender. In textbooks, for example, women's social contributions and cultural experiences are neither represented nor recognized. According to some studies (Sánchez, 2002; Barragán, 2001; Blanco, 2000), textbooks are responsible for the reproduction of gender stereotypes and social values too. Males are also victims of this situation since they have to adjust their expectations and attitudes to what is socially expected from them leaving aside their natural tendencies and being educated in masculine denial of sensitivity. Besides, teachers' discourse and value judgments are also affected by traditional stereotypes. They tend to believe that girls are constant, hard-working, mature and responsible while boys are intuitive and talented in the scientific discipline. Consequently, teachers behave in different ways depending on the person they are dealing with and, as the *Pygmalion Effect* shows, teacher expectations influence students performance. In fact, as Rosenthal and Babad argue, “when we expect certain behaviors of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behavior more likely to occur” (36).

There are some theoretical approaches which are recurrent in order to explain gender issues in education. On the one hand, Feminist Pedagogy is interested on what is

taught, how it is taught and how it is learned. According to Shrewsbury:

Feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning; engaged with self in continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change. (6)

On the other hand, Critical Pedagogy and more precisely Paulo Freire proposes two relevant ideas in this context: first, the relation between pedagogy and the social transformation and second, awareness-building as a result of a process of increasing awareness. Freire claims that the rising of the levels of awareness are related to the increase of responsibility in the transformation. Besides, according to Freire, awareness is basic and necessary to identify repression.

I chose three important areas where I think gender stereotypes and roles are widespread and have an effect on young people's image of women and men: toys, advertisements and fairy tales. Playing with toys, for example, teaches and reinforces stereotypical gender roles. As sociologist LaFreniere says, "by the time children are 3 to 4 years old, they have already formed an image of themselves as boy or girl" (Bryjak 214). This is due to what they see on their parents, teachers and the toys they play with. There are differences on the toys made for girls and boys. Female toys teach girls to sit and play quietly while male toys are active and adventurous. Playing with sexist toys, girls learn that their roles take place at home cleaning, cooking and taking care of children. They are also taught that their appearance is important for societal acceptance as it is possible to see through Barbie's image, for instance. Male toys are those of violent, adventurous activities and war experiences. These toys encourage aggressive and competitive behavior what influences boys' attitude.

When it refers to television, as I have already mentioned, it tends to follow the interests of capitalist society, as well as it reinforces the values of patriarchal society which is the one defined as a society organized and run by men. Advertisements, being

an important way of transmitting those values on television, portray males and females in sex role stereotyped ways. Courtney and Whipple claim that it is irrefutable that advertising is a major influence affecting the way children and adults view their sexism levels in our society. On the one hand, female occupations in advertisements are usually as wives or mothers, depending on others and at home. They are also used as decorative “object” to sell a product or as sexual objects (Courtney and Whipple, 1983). Males, on the other hand, are portrayed as intelligent, independent and decision makers (Courtney and Whipple 1974).

Children's literature or traditional stories, as I have been referring to, also affect the development of gender identity in young children since they portray different gender roles that influence how children perceive themselves. It is common in fairy tales that female characters are presented as pretty, sweet, passive and powerless because they usually need a man to save their lives. On the contrary, if a woman is smart, she uses her intelligence to manipulate and to be cruel. However, male characters are usually portrayed as strong, smart, brave, self-confidence and in power since they are often kings, princes, etc. These portrayals of women and men affect directly young people's image since it is what they are expected to be like.

Before designing my learning unit, I had already assumed that every kind of topic could be dealt with in English classes since I consider English as a vehicle for communication and learning. That is why I tried to visualize where gender issues had their place in education and to think about where I consider they should be. I observed that gender appears most often in the national curriculum as a topic within subjects or cross curricular themes such as health education, road safety education, consumer education, etc. Indeed, the Aragonese Curriculum establishes that “democratic values should be included in the different subject as a cross curricular content that our society demands” (92). Nonetheless, I consider education for equality should not be a topic to tackle only once a year; it should be put into practice in class everyday. In fact, my opinion is that the gender perspective should cover the whole curriculum and should be taken into consideration throughout all subjects and areas. That is to say, the first thing we should do in order to educate FOR is to educate IN equality. For instance, it does not make sense to talk about equality between people when the distance between the

teachers and the students is huge. For this reason, I was in the need of choosing a methodology that provides students with autonomy since this is the basis for individual freedom, but also a methodology that could adapt to current approaches to language teaching.

At the end of the twentieth century, the **communicative approach** started to gain importance in the field of foreign language teaching. As the *Common European Framework of Reference* prescribes, “the communicative competence involves linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences” (108). This means that learners of a second language do not only have to dominate the structural elements of the language, but also to be able to use those elements appropriately in different social situations. In fact, H.G. Widdowson, an authority that has contributed to communicative language teaching, argues that “language teaching should move away from an emphasis on the properties of sentences in isolation to a concern with the uses of sentences in combination” (47). The only way to achieve this is generating real communicative interaction in the classroom. It is through a communicative approach that a real context and a significant purpose can be created for the use of a language. C.J., Brumfit and K., Johnson state in *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching* that “communication not only takes place when we make use of sentences, but by using sentences to perform a variety of different acts of an essential social nature” (118). Taking into account this approach to English as a vehicle for communication, I think about my English lessons as very different to traditional ones. Education has to adapt to a changing world and, as the Aragonese Curriculum prescribes, children not only need knowledge but also skills. In fact, the national curriculum states that children should be enabled to develop different competences since they need to develop different skills as social beings.

Thus, in my search of a methodology that could adapt to the existing needs, I came up with Project Based Learning (PBL). This methodology comes from over a hundred years ago when a man called John Dewey reported the benefits of “experiential, hands-on, student-directed learning” (3). But, as the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) claims, it is not until twenty five years ago that “research in neuroscience and psychology has extended cognitive and behavioural models of learning [...] to show that

knowledge, thinking, doing and the context for learning are inextricably tied" (3). In the book *Project Based Learning Handbook* the BIE defines PBL as "a systematic teaching method that engages students in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks" (4). According to Phyllis C. Blumenfeld:

Project-based learning is a comprehensive perspective focused on teaching by engaging students in investigation. Within this framework, students pursue solutions to non trivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analysing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artefacts. (372)

There are different ways of implementing a Project Based Learning methodology: it can consist of small or more ambitious projects depending on the available time, individual or group projects, totally learner-centred where students' role is more participative in the whole process or even not so learner-centred, where teachers decide the starting point: that is, they select the topic and the learning outcomes. At any rate, in general the different ways of implementing the PBL follow the same nine steps:

1. Set the stage for students with real-life samples
2. Take on a role in the group
3. Discuss and accumulate the background information
4. Negotiate the criteria for evaluating the projects
5. Accumulate the materials
6. Create their projects
7. Prepare to present their projects
8. Present their projects
9. Reflect on the process and evaluate the projects

In the same way as the students' role changes from being more passive to being

more active, the teacher's role also changes. PBL puts teachers in the role of facilitator rather than classroom expert. As Katherine Bilsborough claims, "the teacher's role is monitor and facilitator, setting up frameworks for communication, providing access to information and helping with language where necessary, and giving students opportunities to produce a final product or presentation".

Considering all this, I think about the PBL method adapting perfectly to the curricular objectives of the foreign language in the ESO because it is through this methodology, in which students work in groups and towards a common objective, that they develop autonomy to plan and control their learning process as well as their work habit and the necessary strategies for the acquisition of the foreign language (*Aragonese Curriculum* 203). Not only this, but in order to achieve their objectives, teenagers must get information, do some research and communicate; therefore, both listening and reading to comprehend the information are necessary skills that must be developed (203-204). Besides, when the project is finished they have to present it to the rest of the class and it is in this way that both writing and speaking in the foreign language are guaranteed (203). When it refers to the curricular contents, the PBL method can perfectly adapt to the minimum contents of each stage of the ESO since there is freedom to choose different topics so that students can learn what the law prescribes (204-205).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Setting**

The high school where my unit plan was applied was the Secondary School Pilar Lorengar, which is located in the neighborhood of La Jota in Zaragoza. Some students come from the neighborhood of Jesús but in recent years the number of young people from other areas of the city has increased. La Jota is a neighborhood with a tradition of citizen participation in which there are all the basic services except a public library. The students in the high school are between 12 and 19 years old. In the Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO), most of the students achieve the expected objectives and competences but there is a small group that shows a total lack of interest in these purposes. This high school also offers Professional Qualification Programmes (PCPI), Middle-grade Training Programmes and Upper-grade Training Programmes. According to the students' educational needs, there are different programs that can be applied; non

significant academic adaptations (ANS), significant academic adaptations (PAB), diversification, etc. The center has a staff of 84 teachers and is provided with all types of facilities. The function of the center is to provide students with academic, cultural and social training.

## **2.2. Participants**

The class I chose to put my learning unit into practice was a third grade of ESO where there were 29 students: 13 boys and 16 girls who had known each other for at least three years. There were 8 students who participated a lot since either they liked English or they had a good level of English and there were some others who participated although they had a poorer level of English. In general, it was a very hard-working group. However, there were two aspects that worried me before starting to apply the learning unit: on the one hand, it was the fact that there were some competitive students and on the other hand, there were three students who were not very well integrated in class. I thought these two facts could affect the process when working in groups and it was something that I had in mind in order to look for possible solutions.

## **2.3. Procedure**

At the beginning of my Practicum and before starting to apply my learning unit, I had the chance of knowing all the groups that my mentor was in charge of. Once I chose the class I was going to work with, my mentor proposed an activity to the group which involved group work in order to see whether they operated correctly and to start being in contact with them.

The title of my unit plan was *Finding Your Way* and it dealt with gender issues. It was organized in eight lessons of fifty minutes each. Students were randomly divided into five groups of five people and a group of four so that they were heterogeneous groups. Each member in the group was given a role so that everybody was involved. The main task in the unit was to create a project in groups. There were three topics for the projects: advertisements, fairy tales and toys. In order to be able to elaborate a good project, students were given some previous lessons to work on the topics. In those lessons, students had the chance to discuss both in small groups and with the whole

classroom about the different topics they would be working on in the project. Once they knew something about the topic, they started designing their project by looking for information, organizing their group work and discussing different questions with their group mates. Then, once they got all the information and material they needed, some lessons were spent in the elaboration of the project itself. Finally, three lessons were reserved for their oral presentations.

Although it was an open project, students were handed some guidelines so that they could know what I expected from them. Apart from that, I was always moving around the groups, monitoring and instructing them. I also gave them different materials to complete the project such as images, videos, articles, etc. In short, it was an open but a guided project.

#### **2.4. Principles of the Learning Unit**

Among my personal aims in the implementation of this learning unit was the fact that I was able teach English in a way that was different from the way I was taught. In that sense, it was very important for me to choose an adequate methodology that adapted to my personal objectives, which were the following ones:

***Critical Thinking.*** Becoming a critical thinker is a very hard work and the fact of reflecting about a social issue is only the first step. One of my concerns is that gender prejudices should be eradicated, and school is the place where this change should start to take place.

***Learn to unlearn.*** I wanted my students to break free from old habits of negative thinking and learn how to express their own viewpoints by assuming their own position about reality and gender issues.

***Cooperative Learning.*** Most descriptions of Communicative Language Teaching encourage teachers to use pair or group work in the classroom because, among other advantages that it may imply, interaction is involved. As for Cooperative Learning, it is a way of working together to accomplish a goal. In this case, I wanted to foster cooperative work in my English lessons in order to create a common project or task. The task required reflection; therefore, students could elaborate their ideas and state their position on a topic by agreeing and disagreeing with their group mates. As Dillendourg

states in *The teacher's Role*; adolescents learn from each other in a vast range of formal and informal settings (1).

**Peer-assessment.** Peer assessment is part of the process of cooperative learning since it is a way of assessing each other's contribution to the group work. I wanted to implement this type of assessment as it encourages students' responsibility, involvement in the work, reflection on their own contribution and development of critical faculties. It also provides more relevant feedback to students as it is generated by their peers.

**Lower affective filter.** According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, affective variables have an impact the second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Therefore, as a high affective filter prevents input from being assimilated by the learner, my concern was to lower it by showing myself close to my students, listening to them and taking in consideration their opinions, ideas and needs.

## 2.5. Materials used

The followings are some of the most relevant materials I used in the learning unit. Each material is chosen because of specific purpose that I will explain in the next section.

**Find the fiction** (see Appendix I) This game consists in telling four statements about oneself from which three of them are true and one false. Students need to guess which statement is the false one by asking questions to the teacher. It is commonly used at the beginning of the course because through this game, students are able to get closer to their teacher as she/he shows herself/himself to them. Consequently, the affective filter lowers and students feel comfortable to participate in the following lessons.

**Mafalda** (see Appendix II) Quino's *Mafalda* is a good way of introducing students into critical thinking as it is a cartoon made in order to transmit a message. Each student is given a part of the comic and they have to look for the rest of it. They will have to make the effort of understanding the message of the comic so that it makes sense and they will also have to move around the classroom and get involved in the game. Once they have put the comic together, the students that form it will create a group for the next lessons.

**Corner value** (see Appendix III) Students are told different statements on a topic and they have to see whether they agree with them or not. There are three possible answers: agree, do not agree or unsure. As the statements deal with gender stereotypes

or roles, students will be able to reflect on what they think since they have to give an opinion, discuss it as well as listen to their mates' arguments. In conclusion, it is a game that fosters critical thinking and learning to unlearn.

***“Effects of sexist advertisements on women”*** (see Appendixes IV-V) It is an essay taken from [www.ukessay.com](http://www.ukessay.com) which has been adapted to the students' level by the teacher. The text explains how women are portrayed in advertisements with the support of different examples from real life. The article is considered as an introduction to the topic of sexism in advertisements since, later, students will have to analyze some real life advertisements taking into account what the article explained and their opinion about the topic.

***Examples of real life advertisements*** (see Appendix V) Students are given five sexist advertisements. The ads try to sell cars, a gel, a high protein drink and a jewel using stereotyped images of men and women. Students have to analyze them in groups and share their ideas with the rest of the class.

***“Children do not want sexist pink and blue toys”*** (see Appendixes VI-VII) It is an article taken from *The Guardian* which, though being quite long, is adapted to the students' level by the teacher. It explains two different cases of two girls who complained to toys companies about the products they create. The first girl complained because boys' toys were more active, adventurous and funny while the second girl argued that there was almost no presence of women in the game *Guess Who?* Through this article, students may reflect on their opinion in terms of sexism in toys since they will have to complete a comprehension worksheet where, apart from answering some questions about the article, they will have to discuss whether they agree with the arguments given in the text or not.

***Video Riley (Appendix VII)*** It is a video about a 4-year-old girl who complains to her father about the companies that create children's toys. She argues that girls may want to play with superheroes and boys may want to play with princesses. Although her arguments are not elaborated enough, it is an authentic material that may help students to start thinking about sexism in toys and bring them back to their own childhood.

***“How growing up Disney shapes gender role”*** (Appendixes VIII-IX) It is an article written by Leah Picket who writes about popular culture in WEBZ, the web page of a public radio in Chicago. The text is adapted to the level of the students by the teacher and it analyzes two Disney female characters in order to explain the way women

are portrayed in Disney stories. After the reading, students have to answer several questions in terms of content comprehension and linguistic knowledge. They also have to choose a fairy tale and analyze how women and men are portrayed. It is a collaborative work because on the one hand, they must answer the questions together and, on the other hand, they have to reach an agreement in the discussion so that they can share it later with the rest of the students.

### **3. Contribution to the Key Competences**

The list that follows includes some of the key competences established by the *Aragonese Curriculum* that I intended students to develop in the implementation of my learning unit:

- ***Competence in linguistic communication.*** Students will develop their linguistic skills in communication by making use of English in order to solve problems, reach agreements, look for information, express ideas, etc.
- ***Learning to learn.*** Students will find the way to express themselves while discussing in small groups and then bring their ideas together. Students will learn how to use both an online and a real dictionary in order to look for the words they need so as to express their ideas.
- ***Autonomy and personal initiative.*** Students will find the way to get information for the unit project as well as to organize and work in small groups.
- ***Information processing and digital competence.*** Students will have to select and interpret the information they read, and organize their ideas in order to create a project and present it to the class.
- ***Social and civic competence.*** Students will discuss gender issues with the group
- ***Artistic and cultural competence.*** Students will show their creativity and artistic skills by creating the project, as they will be free to choose their own project model and mode of presentation.

#### **4. Implementation of the learning unit**

In this section, I will explain one by one the different lessons that students were given. In each lesson the learning outcomes set for the lesson are described as well as the sequence of activities that were carried out.

##### **4.1. Lesson one**

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 24th March 2014

**Lesson 1**

##### **Learning outcomes**

- To make use of questions in the past tense to guess a false statement
- To identify and feel comfortable with their work group
- To orally interact within their work group in order to reach an agreement
- To infer a complete text from a concrete piece of text

##### **Sequence of activities**

- The teacher asks students whether they know the game *Find the Fiction* and a boy explains it to rest of the group. The teacher makes a brief presentation about herself through that game. Students have to guess which is the false statement within the four statements she says about herself by making questions. They look engaged because they pay attention but there is only a boy who makes different questions to the teacher.
- Each student is given a vignette of a comic of Mafalda. The teacher asks them to stand up and to look for the rest of the comic so that it makes sense. When they find the other pieces they need, the teacher tells them that this is going to be their group for the rest of their classes. The teacher forgets to bring all the comics and there are five students who cannot participate in the game. Thus, a group is formed with them. There is not enough time for working on the meaning of each comic.
- The teacher asks students to sit down in the assigned groups. She tells them to take a sheet of paper, to divide it into three parts and to write a headline in each: “all”, “none” and “someone”. The teacher explains they need to find three things for each part in five minutes by using a Round Robin: they have to take turns

responding orally in order to let everybody participate. When they got it, the teacher gives students five minutes to think of a name and a gesture that define their group. The teacher notices that students are not using a Round Robin and that few of them are participating.

- The teacher comments on some rules that she considers important for the management of the group and the time:
  1. *Every time I say Class, you say Yes.* The teacher informs that every time she is not listened to she will say *Class* and students have to answer *Yes* remaining in complete silence.
  2. The teacher requires bringing an English dictionary every time there is an English class. There should be at least one per group.
  3. The teacher demands students to sit in their seats before starting the lesson. There is no need to waste time doing that.
- As there is some time left, the teacher suggests playing a Find the Fiction about them. There are three volunteers in the classroom and students participate more than at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher notices lack of attention to their classmates in the group and she worries about that.

## 4.2. Lesson two

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 25th March 2014

**Lesson 2**

### Learning outcomes

- To make use of a dictionary to find out the words they need.
- To critically think about socially accepted ideas.
- To understand the main concepts of the unit: role, stereotype, sex and gender.
- To understand general ideas of a video about gender equality
- To express agreement or disagreement with different statements

### Sequence of activities

- The teacher needs to remind the students that they have to sit in their seats before starting the lesson not to waste time. She also has to reiterate the need to bring dictionaries because there are only two groups which have one.
- The teacher introduces the topic by writing down on the blackboard “Women” and “Men” and asking students to brainstorm in their groups what the difference is between both of them. Students have to attribute different adjectives to each one in three minutes making use of a Round Robin. When the time is finished, all the adjectives are shared with the rest of the class and they are written down on the blackboard. There are some new words that have been looked up in the dictionary. When the teacher asks for the students' opinion, everybody wants to comment on the adjectives and they make the effort of explaining their ideas in English. There is a general disagreement. The teacher uses that moment to describe what she is seeing: nobody agrees on what is on the blackboard but everybody has participated in the elaboration of it.
- The teacher explains to the students that they are going to play the game called the *Value Corner*. As there is not much time to play it standing, she decides to play it from their seats and by raising their hand. It is a game in which students have to say whether they AGREE, they DO NOT AGREE or they feel UNSURE about the value statements the teacher says. Those statements are related to gender stereotypes or roles. Every time there are relevant differences in the opinions, the teacher makes questions to some students in particular. She never

gives an absolute truth because one of the objectives in the activity is to make them think.

- The teacher gives a brief explanation of three basic concepts related to the topic: stereotype, role and gender role. The explanation is supported by a power point presentation which supplies different examples and images that help comprehension (*see Appendix X*). Students pay attention and seem to understand the concepts because every time they are asked they know how to answer correctly. Further time is required to conclude.

### 4.3. Lesson three

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 27th March 2014

**Lesson 3**

#### Learning Outcomes

- To listen to and comprehend general and specific information of an oral text related to the topic of each group.
- To read and comprehend specific ideas and vocabulary of a written text related to the topic.
- To orally interact with their work group in order to reach an agreement and answer the questions.

#### Sequence of activities

- There is a students' strike and not all the students are in the classroom. The teacher asks students to remember what they learned the previous day. She uses these ideas to provide a conclusion and to discuss it. The conclusion deals with "creating your own gender and being yourself".
- The teacher takes some minutes to explain students a planning for the following two weeks and the activity they are going to work on as well as the objectives of the project they will have to carry out. She makes use of a power point presentation (*see Appendix XI*). Then, students are asked to organize themselves and, in order to do that, they are given different roles to adopt in the group:

- 1. Presenter:** he/she presents the group's finished work to the class.
- 2. Secretary:** he/she takes notes whenever the group meets.
- 3. Time keeper:** he/she monitors time and moves the group along so that they complete the task in the available time.
- 4. Checker:** he/she checks if everybody in the group collaborates and if the work is properly done.
- 5. Data collector:** he/she collects data for the work and brings it to the class.

- Each group is given a text and a video together with some comprehension questions to work on. There are three different topics for six groups and the choice of the topic-group is done by the teacher taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the groups.

- The teacher asks students to start working in their group. She realizes that most of the groups do not bring a dictionary with them and she decides to use an online dictionary. The role of the teacher has special importance in this step because she goes around the groups monitoring them. She notices there are some groups which are not doing group work and she tries to clarify what they have to do. The teacher tries to generate interest on the students by discussing their texts; not everybody is motivated. Students are told that they will have to hand in the worksheets and that there will be a discussion about the topic on Monday.

#### 4.4. Lesson four

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 31st March 2014

**Lesson 4**

#### Learning Outcomes

- To develop learning autonomy through active participation in the planning of their own learning process.
- To listen respectfully to different ideas arisen in class related to the topic.
- To be aware and take notes of the new ideas or vocabulary expressed by their classmates.
- To appreciate the value of English as an instrument to access information and to learn diverse contents.

#### Sequence of activities

- Some of the most active students are missing today because they are with the English exchange students. The teacher's mentor is also absent.
- Students start commenting on their topic but, as the teacher notices some difficulty in listening, she asks students to take a sheet of paper and to draw a table with two rows: *What I already knew* and *What I have learned* or *I want to learn*. She explains to them that while their classmates are talking they will have to take their own notes and hand it to the teacher later. They do not seem to take it seriously. Moreover, the teacher forgets to ask them to hand it in at the end of the lesson.
- The teacher makes questions to the group presenters about their topics. She asks them one by one what the text and video are about and whether they agree or not. She makes questions to the rest of the class to generate a debate. There is no time to emphasize possible new vocabulary or grammatical structures.
- The teacher gives each group a project (*see Appendixes XII-XIV*). At the beginning, students seem to be at a loss and that is why the teacher spends some minutes with each group. She tries to monitor them regarding what they can do by making questions, seeing what their interests and their experiences on the topic are. Most of the groups have a clear idea at the end of the lesson about what they are going to create. Spanish is used in their discussion and almost

every time they speak to the teacher. The teacher gives importance to the fact that they have to know what material is necessary for their project to bring it for the next lesson.

## 4.5. Lesson five

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 1st April 2014

**Lesson 5**

### Learning Outcomes

- To develop learning autonomy through an active participation in the planning of their own learning process.
- To appreciate the value of English as an instrument to access information and to learn diverse contents.

### Sequence of activities

- At the beginning of the lesson the teacher briefly explains to the students how they are going to be evaluated so that they can know what are they expected to do. The assessment will be participative because all the students' opinions will be taken into account.
- Students continue working on the project. The teacher goes around the groups and takes note of the different roles students have been assigned in their groups. Some of the students do not understand the function of their role and the teacher realizes there has not been time to assimilate and to put them into practice. She also asks for the previous day's worksheet.
- The teacher goes around the groups to solve possible doubts or problems. There is diversity in the groups because each one has its own process:
  1. **Greedy Pigs.** They have the idea of changing the story of *Rapunzel* but they advance slowly. The teacher realizes that the traditional story's project is the most laborious one.
  2. **Power Rangers.** At the beginning of the lesson they were quite lost but after talking to the teacher for some minutes and having thought about the project, they have come up with an idea for their toy project. It is something new because it is invented.
  3. **The Pianist.** They want to create a video game but they need to be more concrete in their project. There is a student who knows programming video games. They promise they will be ready to present it the following day. The

teacher emphasizes the idea that they need to think how they are going to explain it to the rest of the group.

**4. *Pasta Lovers*.** They have the idea of making a car advertisement. It is not sexist but it is not very original either. The teacher thinks they will be able to finish it by the end of the lesson and asks them to prepare a presentation for the next day. The teacher calls their attention to the fact that they need to think how they are going to explain it to the rest of the group.

**5. *Listening to Music in Parties*.** This group has the necessary material to elaborate their project: a mask, a wig and a deodorant. They want to record an advertisement and the teacher lets them do it in the corridor. Their advertisement is not sexist but it contains some nasty values. The instructions are respected, so the teacher does not say anything. They will also be presenting the following day. The teacher highlights the fact that they need to think how they are going to explain it to the rest of the group.

**6. *Video Parties with Chips*.** They also have the idea of changing the story of *Rapuncel*. However, the teacher notices there are some problems between two students in the group. They are constantly fighting and, although the teacher tries to moderate them, one of the students does not stop being angry. The rest of the group is demotivated and there is only a student who is working on the project. The teacher lets students see if they are able to solve the problem.

#### 4.6. Lesson six

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 3rd April 2014

**Lesson 6**

#### Learning Outcomes

- To orally express in order to communicate different ideas in an intelligible and appropriate way.
- To show self-confidence in the ability of using English.
- To present information in an appropriate sequence to clarify understanding.

#### Sequence of activities

- From the three groups committed to presenting today, only one group has prepared the presentation. The teacher shows her disappointment and asks them to bring it for the next lesson.
- The teacher gives an evaluation sheet to each student and explains to the whole class the meaning of the criteria they must take into account to assess the group that is going to present their project (*see Appendix XII*). The teacher asks them to be honest and fair with the marks.
- **Pasta Lovers** present their project in ten minutes (*see Appendix XIII*). All the members of the group speak but there are some that do read from the power point presentation. At the end of the presentation the teacher makes some questions to the group and there is only a student who answers the questions. In order to generate debate, she also makes some questions to the rest of the class and some students participate. Finally, the teacher comments on the presentation mentioning its strong and weak points. The group hands in a written form of their project.
- The groups continue working on their project:
  1. **Greedy Pigs.** They have changed their traditional story and they are going to work on *King Lion*. The teacher sees that, in this group, all the members are working equally and that they do not waste time. However, they will have to meet outside the classroom to finish their project.
  2. **Power Rangers.** This group has already developed all the ideas but they need a computer to create the power point presentation and to look for images. The

teacher lends them her computer so that they can work in the classroom. They promise to present the next day.

**3. *The Pianist.*** As they already have the idea of the video game and they can not do it in the classroom, the teacher advises them to prepare their oral presentation. They also promise to present the next day.

**4. *Listening to Music in Parties.*** As they could not finish recording the previous day and today's clothes are different, this group asks the teacher to record again in the corridor. They promise to be ready to present the next day.

**5. *Video Parties with Chips.*** One of the problematic students is missing and there is no fighting today. They work on the project very well and they advance a lot. However, they will need to meet outside the classroom to finish their project.

- All the members of ***Pasta Lovers*** are given another evaluation sheet to assess themselves and their group mates (*see Appendix XIV*). When they finish, some students help other groups and some others do their homework for other subjects.

#### 4.7. Lesson seven

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 7th April 2014

**Lesson 7**

#### Learning Outcomes

- To orally express in order to communicate different ideas in an intelligible and appropriate way.
- To show self-confidence in the ability of using English.
- To present information in an appropriate sequence to clarify understanding.

#### Sequence of activities

- All the groups bring their project with them. The teacher reminds the students that they have to evaluate each group presentation and project.
- **Power Rangers** present their project in less than ten minutes (*see Appendix XV*). A student draws a design of their toy on the blackboard and, then, they start explaining it with the support of a power point presentation.
- **Listening to Music in Parties** are the next ones to present. After explaining the reason why their project is not sexist, they play on the advertisement they have been working on (*see Appendix XVI*). It is a very elaborated video in terms of editing, music, subtitles, etc.
- **The Pianist** are the last ones to present their project. Before starting the presentation, they ask for two volunteers who stand next to the computer. There is a previous explanation of their video game: reasons for doing it that way, how to play it, etc (*see Appendix XVII*). There is a general misunderstanding in the class and everybody starts asking questions. The group is so excited to show the video game that they do not pay attention to the questions. The teacher needs to monitor the situation. Finally, the video game is shown and the two volunteers start playing. Everybody seems to understand the project now.
- The teacher realizes there is a member in each group who always answers her questions. Similarly, the same students participate every time the teacher makes a questions to the whole classroom. It is a problem that she does not know how to manage.
- There are some minutes left and while the groups that have presented today start

completing their evaluation sheet, the other two groups continue working on their project:

1. ***Greedy Pigs***. They have already finished their project and they do not need to work on it. They will be presenting the next day.
2. ***Video Parties with Chips***. One of the problematic student is angry with the rest of the group because they did not meet at the weekend. The teacher listens to the students and talks to her. Finally, she joins the group and they start preparing the presentation for the following day in the teacher's computer. They will be presenting the next day.

- The teacher moves around the desks asking the students whether they liked the unit plan, their work groups, etc. She notices how difficult it is to prompt them to speak in English.

#### 4.8. Lesson eight

**UNIT:** Finding Your Way

**Date:** 8th April 2014

**Lesson 8**

#### Learning Outcomes

- To orally express in order to communicate different ideas in an intelligible and appropriate way.
- To show self-confidence in the ability of using English.
- To present information in an appropriate sequence to clarify understanding.

#### Sequence of activities

- The teacher reminds the students that they have to assess each group presentation and project following the criteria on the evaluation sheets.
- **Greedy Pigs** start presenting their project. They have changed the King Lion's story and they explain it with the support of a power point presentation with music, images and text (*see Appendix XVIII*). When the teacher makes some questions to the group, there is only a student who answers them.
- **Video Parties with Chips** are worried because the person who had the power point presentation has not come and they do not know what to do. Only three out of the five members of the groups are in the classroom. As they are not able to come up with a solution, the teacher ends up giving them one. They draw different pictures on the blackboard that are used as a reference for their story. One of the problematic students does not want to read and the teacher has to talk to her again until she is convinced. The presentation is difficult to follow because they read from a sheet of paper and they do not explain in which point of the story they are. The teacher needs to stop them and clarify the different doubts of the story for the rest of the class. The group promises to send their power point presentation to the teacher by email (*see Appendix XIX*).
- The groups that have presented today complete the evaluation sheets and hand them in to the teacher. All the students finish completing the evaluation sheet for the projects and they hand them in to the teacher as well.
- The teacher asks the whole classroom whether they have enjoyed the lessons, what they have learned, etc. She takes notes of the students' feedback.

## **5. Results analysis**

In the following section I will analyze one by one all the group's projects in terms of gender in order to see whether they show an understanding on the topic they were given. I would like to point out that, although it is not possible to see the student's critical thinking on gender in all the projects, when they were asked in their oral presentation about the reason why their projects were not sexist, most of them were able to correctly argue the ideas that led them to their final work.

### ***Listening to music in parties***

This group elaborated an advertisement about a boy who is ugly (he is represented with a monster mask) and is alone in the school. After buying a *Rexona* deodorant in a shop, he becomes beautiful and people invite him to parties. When the group showed the teacher their script, she let them continue with it because she found that, after all, they were respecting the instruction she had given to them: not to be sexist and be creative, attractive, in English, etc. However, the teacher noticed some nasty values which were exposed with the rest of the class when the group presented their project. Nonetheless, the teacher did not realize at that moment that, casually, the protagonist of the advert is a boy and the shop assistant a girl. They may have distributed the characters randomly, but it would have been interesting to point it out in their presentation. This fact may reflect that, although they did not sell the deodorant with a sexist use of women and men's image, they still reproduced the so-differentiated gender roles.

### ***The Pianist***

Although the members of this group were quite lost at the beginning of the project, they finally got an idea that motivated them: to program a video game. In the video game there are four levels where the symbols of males and females have to shoot and destroy their stereotypes and get points catching the other gender's stereotypes. For example, in the first level males have to destroy superheroes and catch microphones (referring to singers) while females need to destroy dolls and catch cars to get points. The next levels have the same purpose but with different items. Through this video game, the group clearly show their understanding on the topic in a very original way.

### ***Power Rangers***

This group created a new toy called *Little Grasshopper* which is a toy to play alone. It has a seat with a belt, airbag and it jumps and lands. Although the group managed to create a new and original toy, the project was focused on selling it. In their oral presentation, the group argued that it was not sexist because both boys and girls could play with it.

### ***Video parties with chips***

As I have already explained, this group was not very united from the beginning of the project but they finally could finish it. They just changed the main character of the story of Rapuncel and, instead of being a pretty woman in a tower, it was a boy with blue long hair and big hands and feet. In their presentation, the group argued that they believed that story was very sexist in the sense that there was a defenseless woman who need to be rescued by a brave boy.

### ***Greedy Pigs***

This group did the same as the previous work; they changed the main character of the story from being a King to being a Queen. Thus, it was not a very original story because they did not make up anything. Nonetheless, in their oral presentation the group argued that in the original story male characters are important while female characters are only shown as companions.

### ***Pasta Lovers***

This group created an advert of a BMW car. They described the engines, the design, the comfort, the safety and the dynamism under the slogan “You can drive a car or a BMW, you choose”. The advert is not very original since it is quite similar to the ones we can see on TV trying to sell a car make. However, in terms of gender, the advert does not focus its attention on selling the car to any gender nor does it make use of women's bodies to be more attractive. These were the reasons that the group gave when they presented their project, what showed me they had understood why an advert may be sexist.

## **6. Areas for Improvement**

Considering this learning unit as an attempt to create a different approach to language teaching and a very new way of both learning and teaching, it was expected to have some errors in its realization. As is the case of all new projects, its implementation has both weaknesses and strengths that I will explain in the present section.

First of all, the fact of **working in groups** during the whole learning unit was different from what students are used to. As their English teacher told me and as far as I am concerned because of my whole schooling, nowadays students work in pairs on rare occasions and write an assignment once a year, but cooperative work is not something that predominates over individual work in Spanish education. Thus, it was a handicap that was noticed in the project work process. I saw cases of students either fighting for defending their ideas or becoming passive and letting the rest do instead of taking the group work as a space for debate, tolerance, discussion and reflection. I also observed difficulties in the organization of the group work at the beginning of the project and I realized that there were some students who worked more than others. As a positive point, my concern about students that were not very well integrated in the class disappeared successfully since they were perfectly adapted in their groups. According to P., Kutnick and A., Kington “effective group work involves an effective classroom context. If group work is to be effective, pupils must be able to work in a socially inclusive manner with all other members of their class and not be dominated by same-gender and friendship preference groups”(61).

Second, I tried to give my students as much **autonomy** as I could by facilitating them what I thought would be necessary for them: a dictionary, some information and a guideline or script for each project. In the case of giving students a guideline or script, “studies show that cooperative learning with a script is more effective than individual learning with and without such a script” (O'Donnell 117). Apart from that, they were constantly monitored because I was moving around the desks analysing their working process. I expected the beginning to be a difficult step since, as I said, it is a way of working to which they are not used but, surprisingly, it was rather easy. Some groups were lost at the beginning but there were some others that from the first moment knew what they had to do along with how to do it. In fact, there was a group that every time I

got close to them updated me and they told me they did not need my help. Thus, I think it was due to different factors: individual factors of the members of the group such as shyness or arrogance, the relationship among the members of the group, motivation for the topic, etc.

Third, as I mentioned in the introduction, the **role of the teacher** changes in PBLT to become less active. As I am used to working as a teacher that runs what has to be done in class and in which way, the fact of just being there without having “the right” to control what is happening has generated frustrations in several occasions. In other words, it was difficult for me to respect the process of the group work since I am used to controlling the work of my students. This is why I constantly had the necessity of helping in order to make them advance in their work but I was also aware I should let them overcome the obstacles by their own. By contrast, some students required my help to solve their problems. It was the case of the last group presenting when they forgot to bring the power point presentation. I tried to ask them some questions so that they could get a solution but they were confused and they could not think. Despite the difficulty of controlling everything in the classroom, I have also become aware of some strengths in my role as a teacher; for example, being able to monitor all the groups during the lesson time. It is true that sometimes I was required by more than one group at the same time but I had the ability to keep calm and go step by step. Apart from that, my opinion is that I was able to lower the affective filter with most of my students because my attitude towards them was that of being respectful, listening to them and showing interest in them. This can be evidenced by the students' high level of participation in the activities.

Fourth, as the learning unit was carried out in eight lessons, **lack of time** became a handicap. On the one hand, although students worked on their topics in several lessons, some more time would have been needed in order to reflect deeply on the topic. In the projects, it can be appreciated that although the design of some of them is very creative and original, there is not much reflection on the topic. For example, the group *Listening to Music in Parties* recorded an advertisement in the class time, edited it and added some subtitles at home. Nevertheless, the advertisement was about a person who was not popular among his classmates and after buying a deodorant and using it, he became more attractive and had more friends. This was not sexist as in the sense they

had been looking at in the previous lessons but it was still sexist. On the other hand, the roles that each member of the group had to adopt were not totally understood because there was almost no chance for playing them. As it is said in the *The Teacher's Role*, “one of the conditions for the role to be effective is that it needs to be meaningful” (233). The presenter's role, for instance, was required only once in the whole unit, when the group finished answering the comprehension worksheet and had to share their ideas with the rest of the class. The students who were assigned this role could only act once or never as in the case of a girl who did not come that day and then asked me what she should do. However, they did not understand each member role not only because of lack of time but because they did not have to make the effort of playing it since they were not going to be assessed. At the beginning that was my idea but I did not tell them they were going to be assessed in their performance of the role. As a consequence, I did not use it as a criterion at the end. In short, I think it was a very ambitious project that would have required some more time in order to do it better.

Finally, as previously mentioned, it was a learning unit based on a communicative approach and, consequently, **English use** was important in all the activities. The activities were designed to foster communication both in small groups and with the whole class in order to make the students aware of the use of English as a vehicle for communication. Thus, focus on meaning was predominant in all the activities. However, some more focus on form should have been needed in some exercises, for example in the comprehension worksheet. After filling it in groups, the teacher handed it but, later, there was not a recall to the text and the video and a focus on form. Some correction and feedback was obtained though in the oral discourses such as the presentations or spontaneous participation.

## **7. Conclusions**

When I decided to elaborate this learning unit on gender issues, I started thinking about all the possible aspects that I could work on with my students. Soon, I realized that I pretended to cover so many aspects that, as the Spanish proverb says: “You should not bite off more than you can chew”. Once I started steering towards some specific ideas, fear pressed me. My students were not used to the teaching methodology I was going to employ, nor was I since, as I have been able to observe in my previous experience as a teacher, it is very easy to repeat the patterns of teaching that we have received during our schooling and the difficult thing is to reflect on and change them. People have always wanted to change education. Some tried, some did not. The fact of wanting to change education implies hard work and not everybody is willing to do it.

The effort starts from the attitude teachers have in the school. The material that most of the teachers use in the classroom is the textbook since it is supposed to be in accordance with what the law prescribes. According to a survey elaborated by the University of Santiago de Compostela in 2008, 83,9% of the teachers in Aragón use the textbook as a resource to support teaching. However, my question is: what happens with the personal touch? How can a person teach something that probably does not interest her/him? Can we be certain of students being interested in what appears in the textbook? I believe there are teachers who adapt the activities of the textbooks to what their students need in the same way as there are teachers who have been creating their own material for years. Nonetheless, I am also aware, because I saw it when I was studying and again in my Practicum experience, that being supported by the textbook and going through is more comfortable than creating your own material. In my opinion, the effort involved in the creation of the material is very closely linked to the motivation to improve the quality of teaching. This means that the teacher is aware and takes into account the necessities that the context requires.

Another tedious work and, from my point of view, essential is the one dealing with the figure of the teacher. Education needs to adapt to a changing world and, although I would not like to fall into generalizations since I believe there are teachers who fight for changing their own behaviour, I am convinced that there are still teachers whose behaviour is not appropriate enough. It is time to break with the image of the

teacher who knows everything and is grieved because students do not pay attention to him/her. Similarly, it is time to stop believing that a student has to listen to the teacher and never complain after being sitting for seven hours. Students are always classified into good or bad students depending on their attitude and marks in class. Has anybody ever wondered what students need? In an education system where everything is imposed upon students, it is normal for them to rebel. But what would happen if we started communicating with our students? My intention is to wake those minds up and show my students they can decide or be heard. In order to do that, it is necessary to leave the traditional image of the teacher and get close to them. If our teacher acts are natural and good, it is assumed that our students will feel comfortable in a relaxed atmosphere which will positively affect their participation in the classroom. Conversely, if we talk a lot about learner-centred methodologies but our attitude is the opposite, our students will probably notice it. Someone once told me that children need authentic people. Similarly, students need authentic teachers who believe and act the way they think. This, of course, implies a lot of effort for a teacher.

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