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“Looking inwards”

Trabajo Fin de Máster: Modalidad A

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I. ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this End-of-Master Project (later, ‘project’) is to collect a complete overview of the impact that the experiences I had recently lived both in class at University and in my three placements have had on me, with the purpose of being able to reflect on all these feelings and insights and to make consistent and reasoned judgments on my teaching-learning process. However, not only is this a mere enumeration of facts, but also a reflection on how these facts have affected me and have made me the person that I am today.

Firstly, in the Introduction I shall establish a general theoretical framework of the teaching profession, by relating the knowledge acquired at University and the working conditions at my placement, but also about how both this knowledge and my practice teaching have highly influenced me to become a highly adaptable person; I would say that even more passionate in my desire to be a future English teacher.

Secondly, in the section of ‘Justification of Projects’ I shall explain the main reasons why I have decided to choose the assignments to work with. On the one hand, my Learning Unit placed me in the frame of mind of creating something I have never done before but also of not being sure what the outcome will be in the end. On the other hand, the innovation assignment made me develop an interesting proposal about peer correction, but the fact that it was impossible to implement it in my lessons made me reflect about how I would improve this assessment to my course plan if I were already an English teacher.

Next, I shall delineate my personal thoughts about these two assignments, advantages and disadvantages and its relation, where applicable.

Lastly, there will be a sort of closure of the whole learning-teaching cycle.

Thus, this project does not pretend to compile ideas but to meditate, not to list them but to mull over them; all in all how this master has made me a future teacher.

II. INTRODUCTION

Honestly speaking, I started to write this project with a different feeling from that I had while writing previous assignments this year. Furthermore, I think I have learned how to internalize many of the contents from different subjects of this master; others are still getting under way since the process of becoming a good teacher never ends up. Now, even when my teaching practice was relatively short at High School, I may assert that my own overview of the teacher profession has been greatly modified throughout this academic year.

First and foremost, one of the general ideas that surround the spirit of this master is that the pattern teacher (as the active element) vs. pupil (as the passive one) should be totally discarded. These clichés may have been taken for granted by the profession lately and there is often a commitment by teachers to internalize the disposition of reflective teaching and skills to study their teaching and become better at teaching over time, that is, a commitment to take responsibility for their own professional development.

However, we might find traditionally-minded employed teachers who only follow a **structure-based instruction** (knowing a language in the past was maybe limited only to read aloud; the language as a system of structurally related elements for the coding and transmission of meaning), without reminding themselves about the fact that students do need to be constantly stimulated by introducing them to other views such as the functional and the interactional: the first as the way to understand language as a vehicle for the expressions (to apologize, to communicate, etc) and the second one, related to the interpersonal relations and for social transactions between individuals (context as the key). In this way, students’ learning processes become an active method through which they can work, think and study by themselves, in order for them to be able to detect a problem and to find out how to resolve it.

Let us take as our point of reference **Hymes** (1972): “There are rules without which the rules of grammar would be useless”. This author was the first sociolinguistic to coin the term communicative competence to counteract

Chomsky’s (1965) distinction between competence and performance. Hymes’s communicative competence definition not only covers the ability to use grammatical rules in grammatical correct sentences but also to be able to know when and how to use those sentences and to whom. By means of this relevance of communicative language teaching, communicative competence has become the current goal of language education.

Later, the development from a communicative language teaching (**CLT**) towards a task-based language teaching (**TBLT**) was illustrated in part by the replacement of the label “communicative” by “task”: from emphasizing interaction as the means and also the goal of study to the focus on the use of authentic language to do meaningful tasks using the target language. Then, a **task** should be always understood as the primary unit for the teacher (both in planning and in class), with clear focus on meaning and it may entail from the use of one skill only to all four.

In this direction in which the terms **meaning** and **context** become essential elements for the teacher of today to work with in class, we also have to pay attention to what Pragmatics focuses on, as one of the fields of Linguistics that studies the way in which contexts contribute to meaning. Both the Common European Framework of Reference (**CEFR**) and the Aragonese Curriculum (**AC**) show relevance to the communicative competence of the learner as the way to perform successfully in real communicative context, that is to say, *“la competencia comunicativa, entendida como el dominio intuitivo que el hablante posee de usar e interpretar la lengua apropiadamente en el proceso de interacción y en relación con el context social...”* (AC, p. 200)

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (2006) worked in depth on the idea that a good language learner should learn how to practice L2 as often as possible, as the best predictor of success in second language acquisition is **motivation**. There is nothing truer than that statement, as I saw myself during my placements: every time I gave frequent, positive feedback to support and motivate my students, there was clear evidence that they did believe they could do the task well, so they mostly did it. It is absolutely right that knowing lots of grammar is not always necessary but only in those cases where the student is

focused on form on purpose (e.g. in an job interview where register, formal structures and grammar construction is essential)

All in all, I would go as far as to say that the atmosphere in class should be as much comfortable as possible for students to promote learning. It should be also noted one of the hypotheses of the monitor model stated by the linguistic **Krashen** in the 1970s and 1980s, **the Affective Filter hypo** which reinforces the view that students learn better when they are happier in a relaxing situation; in other words, if you are relaxed in class, you are open to input, so your affective filter is highly receptive. If this does not take place in class, then they face up to a barrier which finally blocks learning. Thus, I have learned that teachers should be always eliciting students to use L2 in class by creating their own individual grammar between L1 and L2, what **Selinker** (1972) called **Interlanguage**, the creative process in interaction with environment, our desire to communicate with others in interaction.

In this regard we should point out what the result would be if we as teachers do not expose students to constant input (written and spoken language) which faces them up to situations that create an internal conflict. It can be assumed that the answer should be that they will not be challenged enough in class and consequently, not forced to think. In other words, if we do not try our best to work with their knowledge in order to make them build new knowledge, are we really helping them learning? Again, negative answer is suggested.

Without a doubt, all the arguments set out here lead to the same conclusion: CLT emphasizes competence in terms of social interaction, which is directly concerned with sharing information and negotiation. If teachers promote the so called **information gaps** in class, students are missing information necessary to complete a task and consequently, they need to communicate by sharing information between them.

The theory supported by **Kumaravadivelu** (2006) stated that CLT has a clear communicative orientation, with innovative classrooms to create motivation. In addition to this, we must also have to take into account one of the offshoots of communicative approaches to English teaching, that is, the Task-

Based Language Teaching (**TBLT**) with the core concept of a task. I shall be talking about tasks later in my critical reflection about my Learning Unit.

So far, I am of the opinion that learning in our students will only be promoted by activating their acquisition processes, with an approach to the target language learning and teaching inside a context that activates that process. It is clear that this is the role I have to learn how to play as a teacher, with a focus on the language use and where my students will have to be able to take responsibility for their own learning. And only through the process of reflection I will be able to contribute to my own understanding of the responsibilities that a future teacher needs.

III. ASSIGNMENTS: SELECTION AND JUSTIFICATION

- **Learning Unit “*Getting into the Labour Market*”**

It cannot be denied that as far as I am concerned there is a before and an after in this master, that is, my traineeship, specially the II and III periods. One might be tempted to think that the II and II practicing periods are the most comfortable time during the master, as you do not have to attend lessons at the University and you have to attend many lessons as a guest student, doing a little bit more than listening to and noting down ideas for your assignments. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, I found this part of the master quite exhausting and highly time consuming. Not only do you have to create a Learning Unit, but also to be able to implement it in class with relative success with a group of students rather unfamiliar to you.

My desire when designing the Learning Unit was to get the best successful result ever, a fact that stressed me a lot when looking for achieving a consensus from my teacher at University, my mentor at the High School and from myself. I desired that they had a good impression of my job. In addition, everything in my Learning Unit was designed thinking of my students’ needs. First and foremost, it should be also pointed out that student’s interests became my priority.

It is my belief that, as soon as this unit was created, I did know that it was going to be one of the selected pieces of my final project. There are few assignments like this in this master in which I have left a deep, personal mark.

This Learning Unit represents all what I internalized about the theoretical framework in an attempt to achieve the best students’ learning outcome ever; it compiles my rights and wrongs and even I planted some seeds on it without being conscious of my act until I reflected on it once everything was finished.

Going into greater detail, one of the most notable aspects of my Learning Unit is that it is **English for Specific Purposes (later, ESP)**. I did my placement periods at Miralbueno High School, with a Higher Grade of Vocational Training in Cooking; it was about English for cooks. Thus, teaching ESP as a branch within **ELT** encouraged me and it was, in a sense, like a big challenge I had to deal with.

I also believe that working with a Learning Unit in this specific context forced me to realize that I had to pay attention to the real needs of my students to prepare and facilitate them to communicate themselves effectively within a specific work situation. This need required me a special endeavor and in order to see the result of my teaching, that is why I shall explain further in more detail what has and has not worked, that is, my ups and downs with this Learning Unit.

- **Innovation Proposal “Peer correction to improve learners’ outcome”**

This assignment was written by three classmates and me during May. It is about **Peer Correction** and the possible outcomes after its launch. We were determined to test the validity of this study during our placements and check if students improved their learning outcome through this technique. We assumed that most students only pay attention to the final mark of an exam, and not analyze their errors in detail. We focused our proposal on the writing skill only, creating **our own evaluation tools** (an indirect marking code, a rubric and a checklist). After some exams, we wanted to prove if learners could improve their learning outcomes.

From the beginning, we designed a proposal that, although it was very challenging we were aware that it was going to be rather difficult to implement during our placement. Reasons such as lack of time, diversity of the placement schools and age of our students (from 1st ESO to Vocational Studies) made us work with two students who took individual lessons at home (instead of testing our proposal in class).

After implementation with these two students, we were satisfied with the results of our proposal: on the one hand, we saw some positive improvements on exams' results and on the other hand, we corroborated students' willingness to cooperate with this way of correction.

Our **goal** was partially achieved because once we arrived at our placements and started implementing our units; we realized we did not have the time to put our proposal into practice. Most students have not worked with this kind of assessment and it is rather difficult to implement it in 6 lessons and have real outcomes.

By working in group, the team has more knowledge than the one that each person has in isolation as well as the level of motivation and participation may enrich the proposal. Personally, I believe that this assignment was an excellent idea but I also realized that if I were already an English teacher, I would modify this proposal a little bit within my Year Plan in order to adapt it more efficiently to my students. I will comment on this point later in the “Critical reflection” section.

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❖ Since these two assignments are the chosen ones for my project, one has to weigh up the pros and cons of each one, but also I shall look in further depth at the relations between the Learning Unit and the Innovation Proposal.

❖ As there was no option to implement the proposal into my Learning Unit, at first glance one might think there is no connection between them. Moreover, this proposal was not on my mind to be included as one of the assignments of this project.

❖ Sometimes one needs to budge and what made me change my mind was the connections I found after reflecting about the proposal and the changes I would have implemented for myself. These modifications

became useful if I were an English teacher who had to prepare a Year Plan. As the study needs time to be implemented in order to see real learning outcome, I shall explain the validity of this proposal and possible aspects which could have been done differently in order to obtain more accurate results.

IV. CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THESE WORKS

- **Learning Unit: “GETTING INTO THE LABOUR MARKET”**

- **General questions**

“A man never knows what he is capable until he tries”
(Charles Dickens)

Clearly, the perspective of being a teacher is rather different from the one of being a student and definitely, one can only be aware of this only if you place yourself at the unknown side. In other words, and as it is commonly said: Nothing is what it seems to be and my preconceptions about teaching soon turned into better after the placement periods.

The most difficult part when someone starts to do something completely unknown is precisely to be able to know how to face it up bravely. Seen from outside, the idea of being a practice teacher for 6 sessions might not appear that challenging, even more so when all your work is being supervised by an experienced mentor and you have been trained during the master period for that task. My reflection of this idea is that nothing could be more untrue. Rather, the importance of knowing how to work and to prepare materials increases significantly and it only leads to more fears and insecurities.

I taught 2nd course of **Higher Studies of Vocational Training in Cooking**, one of my mentor’s group. It was a very **heterogeneous class**, with students from around 20 to 55 years old, which created an atmosphere completely different from the typical lessons of ESO with teenagers. From the first day at High School, I knew that I had to do a thorough job, but I was more conscious of this when I knew the average age of my class.

By the way, I also have to mention the importance of **my mentor** at High School. She is a Professor and has been teaching English language at this High School for a long time. She helped me a lot manage the new situation and gave me some important tips in terms of guidance but also freedom in designing my Learning Unit. Apart from this, it was me who finally chose the topic of my Unit, as she gave me total freedom in this sense. I have to say that my choice was based on taking into account the Year Plan of the course. I had access to this plan and my decision about the topic of my Learning Unit was based and justified by the Year Plan. This position of choice and furthermore the selected topic perfectly fixed with the previous topics of the Year Plan.

Teaching requires the best planning ever because the more you plan in advance, the smoother the class operation works. However, this work should be even acute with adults. I later checked that this group generally demanded on a high capacity's teacher of knowledge: questions constantly arose during the lesson, therefore the teacher is often asked to provide specific information at once. In this way, the teacher must be always ready to set aside the planning for a while. This idea was even more reinforced with the passing of my lessons.

I also believe that things work better if one thing comes after the other, so after choosing the practice centre at the beginning of the master, after knowing the group in which I had to teach and the topic I had to teach, the hardest task has finally arisen: How should I teach?

The **topic of my Learning Unit** is *“Getting into the labour market”*. The open-minded position of my mentor allowed me to take an active role in choosing the topic of my Learning Unit as I explained before. I thought that a topic which helped students find jobs would be interesting and appealing for them. In fact, they are supposed to finish their studies this term and consequently to look for a job in a not too distant future. Thus, I decided to prepare a Unit about job searching.

My mentor warned me that I had to prepare my lessons thoroughly because they had not studied this topic before in class and there were grounds to think that for the majority of the class this topic was absolutely new. I felt then that I had a great responsibility to teach them something as important as

how to write a CV, a covering letter and to handle a future interview in the best possible way.

At this point I would very quickly like to thank my mentor for her crucial role. She was not under any obligation to give me freedom about the topic of my Learning Unit but she did. This fact, which maybe seems to be totally irrelevant, became essential for me: Can anyone think about how you would feel if your boss asks you for opinion on your first working day? This fact made me feel like a real English teacher from the very beginning. So far I can say that that was the first time I have been an English teacher with an audience. She even introduced me to the class in the first day as the English teacher (no comments about the practice period) and as the person from whom they were going to learn a lot.

Coming back to the idea about how the structure of my LEARNING UNIT was, and thanks to the **well-defined blocks**, I worked with **different genres** in detail: jobs advertisements, CVs, covering letters and interviews. I was convinced of the validity of my unit as long as I achieved to develop the communicative competence of my students. I knew that I had to put much effort on promoting academic but also social knowledge. For instance, how CVs are driven by social standards, why job advertisements are written in a variety of ways depending on the job title or even how to behave during a job interview.

All these aspects are not only related to the learning of a second language in itself but also their acquisition allowed students to learn **cross-cutting themes** equally important. More specifically, it was a pedagogical requirement that they tried to understand how the world around them works by thinking and exploring different situations through a variety of tasks.

Again, another question came to my mind: how should I perform this role in class? Certainly, I did not only have to limit myself to explain things but to be able to give instructions to students, to be a kind of guide for them so that they can produce the **expected learning outcome**. In my Learning Unit, these outcomes were three: to create a CV, a covering letter and to rehearse a job interview. Therefore, my assessment will be based in terms of this outcome.

I have to admit that their curiosity was a plus point for me. They wanted to be able to write their own CV, a fact that most of them had never done before. Paraphrasing one of the ten ways that **Ken Wilson** stated during his seminar “*Motivating the unmotivated*”, a teacher must be able to challenge students and make them curious.

It is interesting to consider again the question of tasks in my Learning Unit because my lessons were all based around the completion of the three above-mentioned tasks. However, I also have to admit that it was difficult for me to establish which activities would work out following my goal towards students. During this Master, we have been taught about the importance of using authentic materials all the time. According to **Tamo** (2009), there are several benefits of using these kinds of resources in the EFL classroom. First, one of the main advantages of using **authentic materials** is that students are exposed to **real language**. The language present in textbooks is adapted and in many cases does not reflect the language used in real life situations. Second, these materials can have a positive effect on students’ motivations because they are dealing with real texts that are not specifically designed for the EFL class and that any native speaker could be exposed to. Finally, the use of authentic materials can make the learners more interested in practicing English outside the classroom, especially if the topic is appealing to them.

However, when you are the teacher and you are selecting the materials, you always have the doubt if the text can be named as authentic and sometimes the confidence about yourself tempers. There are a lot about my topic in textbooks and on the Internet, but it is difficult to present them within a context. If by ‘authentic’ we understand materials used by native speakers in native environments, then I had to make use of these materials in class. In addition to this, I noticed that integrating different skills when you are working with specific genres is a bit difficult because the teacher should work with each genre by paying specific attention to the specific vocabulary, structures and social conventions.

Nevertheless, my Learning Unit tries to work on the **different skills** proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (**CEFR**) which “describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have

to learn in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act affectively” (Council of Europe, 2001:1). The skills proposed by the CEFR are listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. Every lesson tries to incorporate several of them in order to make the learning process more effective and integrated.

Indeed, I later realized that I was teaching English to my students for a specific purpose: to be able to manage in the job search. In this way, teaching the language did not have to become my main aim, but the content. The concept of **English for Specific Purposes** (ESP) has not been included within the Master guideline so I have to admit a kind of uncertainty about this teaching, because the methodology is completely different from that of general English. Now that I have been a kind of self-educated on this matter, ESP is mainly based on the completion of tasks with a predetermined outcome and consequently, I understood that my work had to be also focused on specific vocabulary, different genres and socially accepted registers in order to get the above-mentioned learning outcome. My students were finishing their studies in Cooking this term and they are supposed to look for a job (maybe abroad) as cooks.

One of the first works which dealt with the field of ESP was **Hutchinson and Waters, 1987**, although it was **Strevens**’ ESP definition which soon became one of the most widely accepted, as he stated that ESP is referring to the teaching of English which meet learners’ needs, but also to the content of some occupations. Therefore, I shall state that ESP is mainly for designed to meet a specific need, so that is why I previously talked about the need of learning in my Unit different registers, different situations, different discourses and specific terminology used in a specific situation. In sum, by emphasizing the importance of students in this process, here comes the guiding principle of ESP in the 1970s *“Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you what English you need”*

At the same decade, we commented before **Hymes**’ development of the **communicative competence** term. What he called communicative competence as the goal of teaching soon became my goal as well. I did not want

to limit my lessons to teach grammar or a set of rules without a context. Grammar would be only taught to complete meaning, if necessary. **Willis and Willis** (2001) pointed out, tasks differ from grammatical exercises in that learners are free to use a range of language structures to achieve task outcome. Hereof, I was determined to show my learners how important getting knowledge about “*Getting into the labour market*” was in order to use that language within social context.

From all this, it follows that even if you are clear enough about what you want to include in your lessons, it is always difficult to assert if you are doing well or wrong. The final answer will be always given both by students and the results in class and also by your own lesson analysis to draw relevant conclusions.

○ **My evaluation**

“If you can both listen to children and accept their answers not as things to just be judged right or wrong but as pieces of information which may reveal what the child is thinking, you will have taken a giant step toward becoming a master teacher, rather than merely a disseminator of information.”

(Easley and Zwoyer 1975: p 25)

It is often said that being a teacher is a good, highly regarded profession to the plain eye. However, there is also much background behind this statement. I learned how much work a teacher has to plan before entering the classroom. One of the teachers of this Master Degree in Education told us that a good teacher is that one who is exhausted while planning and relaxed while teaching. This maxim is totally true. I am sure that my lack of experience made me doubt constantly during the lessons planning, but honestly speaking, the process was hard. I knew what my students needed to know to master the topic, and that is, for sure, very important, but also to be able to set up a series of communicative situations valid for them in order to learn to perform different functions. This is precisely what exhausted me. Sincerely, I hope this feeling gets better in a near future and I am getting used to preparing lessons faster.

From the beginning, I was clear about the **structure of the Unit** I wanted to implement. I focused on four specific blocks: advertisements, CVs, covering letters and interviews. The truth is that, by cutting into smaller units the great topic facilitated me a lot my job. From then on, everything was easier. Moreover, looking back on time, this was the best way to start working: to have any idea, to put it into words and then to cut into smaller pieces that big idea into smaller pieces so that one can easier work on it. This definitely gave me the confidence of controlling every single part of my Learning Unit.

Despite the fact that the structure of the Unit was plain to see, the task of creating the lessons was the most strenuous part of the work. At first sight, once you have settled the topic of your lesson, everything might seem to go smooth, but again, nothing is what it seems.

One of the things that stressed me most was the fact that I had to implement my unit only in three days; each session consisted of a two-hour time. The first day we worked on advertisements and CVs, the second one on covering letters and the last one, on interviews. In this way, this setting did not allow me to extend one session work to the next session as this change would clearly disrupt my planning. Therefore, this **schedule** became a must in my planning. I feel that this was a good decision and gave me the pattern to follow henceforth. Now, looking back, I should say that the idea was good but difficult to carry out.

Not only was **time** difficult in terms of schedule but also the time dedicated to each activity. I have realized that I really need to improve this within a class. I had to fit something very specific into three days and it really became a challenge for me. When designing the lesson, I roughly calculated how long each activity should take depending on the point of difficulty and also the possible length of the activity itself taking into account linguistic difficulties.

There is nothing bad if a text presents some difficulties because we can lecture students to get easier knowledge. I think that it is important that students have access to both the context and the content of the text (what it is called **top-down process**). In the end, many activities lasted longer than expected. I realized that this problem with time happened because of two

reasons mainly: one, students arose with questions direct or indirectly related to the exercise and I answered all of them (the important ones and the irrelevant ones). This is not totally correct on my behalf. Obviously, I must address doubts but without losing sight of the objective of the exercise.

As said before, I know I have to improve this problem, as if you are not able to plan time well, there can be activities left out of the planning and students may not be able to get all your desired learning outcomes. But, I am also aware of the reasons I diverted in many occasions. Due to the fact that most students did not know almost anything about how to get a job, they were, in a sense, too much devoted to learn about this and therefore, forced me to get into some aspects in more detail. **Cross-cutting issues** often arose when reading covering letter examples or different job advertisements. Students wanted to know reasons such as why it is important to have a recommendation letter, the justification of using “Yours Sincerely” or “Yours Faithfully”, the relevance of being punctual in a job interview, and so on. Once you have realized what the reasons for the problem are, you have a major willingness to face up to that drawback and to get it better.

In respect of **students’ level** of the language, the group was a bit heterogeneous and in general terms, B1 low: a group of five students with a clearly lower level and three out of twenty students stressed over the rest of classmates. This made me think all the time how to face up to both extremes and so far, this seems to me one of the most difficult things to carry on by a teacher.

As a teacher, I may presuppose problems during my lessons; I must expect some problems during lessons and therefore I have to be prepared to answer properly. I think that a teacher has always to be able to know if the lesson is on the right level to be interesting for students. For instance, by paying attention to the reaction of the group: a motivated group is likely willing to participate in class and this definitely enriches the atmosphere for learning.

An added element in every lesson should be **motivation**, which works on a dual sense in the teaching-learning process. I stressed out before that only when students feel motivated, they may achieve better learning

outcomes. But the motivation level that I felt when teaching was even more remarkable. When one has the control over the class, you easily get into an English teacher so you are likely to perform this character better. If there is no interest on the topic, then the class would be bored and turn off. So I know that I replied many questions with the desire that none of them got lost and could follow well.

The **evaluation of my job** in these terms would be that you always have to give answer to students' doubts, but also one must keep in mind the planning of the lesson and take into account that, slight diversions are allowed as long as you do not lose sight to the objective of each activity.

Following the analysis of my teaching, the more or less success in carrying out my activities in class, I noticed that students might be more involved when the activity requires more personal work, that is to say, the more they have to think by themselves, the more successful the activity likely is. This clearly happened with activity 11 (activity 11, *Discover 10 mistakes in the covering letter*). They were challenged to work in teams and they had to compete against other groups to be the one who had discovered more mistakes. All they worked lively and the environment was really pleasant in class. In order to go on with the next activity in class, I decided to collect one paper from each group and to name the winner in next session, which really became appealing for them.

This activity showed me that they had learnt about covering letters what I expected as the results of discoveries was almost complete. There were five groups with the following results: group 1 (8 successes out of 10), group 2 (7 successes out of 10), group 3 (10 successes out of 10), group 4 (9 successes out of 10) and group 5 (10 successes out of 10).

In my opinion, the success of the Learning Unit may be supported by the usefulness of the planned activities. My Learning Unit is based on the acquisition of three main tasks: students will be able to write its CV, a covering letter and be able to face up to a future job interview in a better condition. Therefore, my goal soon became students' goal: they showed me its interest in

learning how to perform these tasks, as only a few students had experience in the labour market.

Hereafter and in order to show clearly how well or bad I taught; I am listing some of the positive and negative aspects of my performance as an English teacher during the placement period.

Most effective parts:

- **Relaxing atmosphere** in class contributed to a cooperative environment.
- Working with **real-world texts**.
- Combination of **different types of tasks** during my lessons: comparing tasks, problem-solving tasks, creative tasks, sharing experiences tasks and so on.
- Providing lists of **vocabulary** (activities 1 and 7).
- Success of the **interview rehearsals** in class (activity 16).
- **Mastering** the topic of my Learning Unit made me feel confident, self-assured in front of my students.
- An **attitude** of firmness when performing my role as their English teacher increased their respect towards me.
- Working with **adults** allowed me not to adopt the “babysitter role” in class, so I could be more concentrated on the teaching-learning process rather than on maintaining discipline and order.
- Different **teacher roles** depending on the activity: organizer, observer, prompter...
- Constant emphasis on **pair/group work**.
- Use of **blackboard** as an extra support during my teaching, allowing students to take time to think about my explanations quietly.
- By reading job advertisements, CVs and covering letters in class, **constant incoming input** to obtain real knowledge was exposed all the time.
- **Widely use of L2** over the lessons (welcomes, explanations, instructions, oral corrections, management class and so on).
- **Limited use of L1** in class: English language was my main tool when talking to

them, which facilitated a good fluency of the language in both directions.

- **Corrective feedback and recasts** were done all the lessons to help students in those cases that errors affected meaning.
- **Variety of activities** carried out during lessons to promote communicative competence by learners.
- **Information gathering survey** in the first half of the lessons as a useful tool to let me know what students thought about my lessons.

Least effective parts:

- My desire to manage the order in class made me be **strict** when students start talking.
- I needed time to distinguish a productive **murmur** and a breakdown one.
- **Timing** is a difficult task to calculate. Most of my activities required more time than the one expected. This could have been avoided by focusing more on fewer activities.
- Some activities (especially those related to interviewing) would had required an extra support with a video on the **Internet** (unfortunately, Wi-Fi net did not work properly at High School).
- **Giving instructions** to do homework were hurriedly given (both creating a CV and a covering letter) which affected me in the development of the next class.
- **Diversity in class** should be always managed and lower students would have requested more attention from my side.
- **Set of photocopies** could have been reduced if the Internet at High School would have been available all the time (I may understand that an image is better than a paper).
- Unfortunately, **ICTs** is not a plus point of the placement centre (i.e. poor Wi-Fi which does not allow teachers to make use on the Internet).
- **Follow up activities** should have been more present in lessons in order to provide more opportunities for creativity.

○ **Conclusions and Solutions**

From all this, it follows that it is essential to be able to learn from your acts so as to improve your teaching performance in future, but also I take into account that measuring my own behavior is not a simple task. I previously commented that generally speaking I am satisfied with my practice teaching period, as I found it full of experiences (positive but also negative) which will help me find out new ways of improving my way of working with students.

First, I learned that a positive mental attitude towards a new challenge is half of a battle won in the quest for a productive lesson. By developing a topic which creates interest among students encourages a good atmosphere of work and therefore, it can only lead learners to interact more actively.

Thus, every student of this Master should have learned from the experience lived at placements but each case will be always different depending on the circumstances. For my particular case, **teaching adults** was a very rewarding experience because, although they were a very demanding group, they showed me a teaching perspective different from the one I may have with students of ESO (more motivated pupils, responsible people, closer to the lesson itself and a very inquisitive group).

Second, I always noticed their **willingness to cooperate** in all activities and that made me feel that I was in the right way. Even during the interview rehearsals when it is supposed that students may feel embarrassed when acting in front of an audience, I was able to secure the commitment of the group to have a good performance by putting in words all the knowledge recently learned.

Third, I always had in mind that, although the mother tongue plays an important play in foreign language instruction, the overuse of L1 might be prejudicial for students' learning process. In this way, I was able to force them to interact in class by using **L2** as much as possible with the purpose of prompting production. On the one hand, this was possible thanks to a variety of activities which provided opportunities for participation and oral explanations and on the other hand, by promoting fluency rather than accuracy. In other

words, I realized that I would motivate more my students if I increased the amount of English I used in class.

Finally, I was able to remind them the importance of having a good command of the English language and in detail the benefits of mastering the subtopics of the Learning Unit to their own future.

However, I believe that you never stop learning from your students and the older you are, the more experienced you become so I would keep for future the following aspects of my planning and teaching processes in order to overcome the possible drawbacks of teaching.

One of the conclusions I drew after implementing my Learning Unit was that the way you give instructions will determine the later action of students. It is essential to emphasize the importance of our actions to your students so that they can pay attention to them. If the teacher gives instructions about doing homework in a vague way, then students are likely not to do that homework and consequently, it may affect the planning of your next lesson. That happened to me. Now, I know that I did not help students understand the purpose of the activity and therefore, that homework became not effective because it was done only by some students.

As said before, another difficulty I faced up to was timing. Thanks to **reflection in action**, not all the things that happen in class can be anticipated and I think it is because the process of teaching and learning is always interactive. **Woods** (1996) claimed that the process of reflective teaching is essential for a teacher; in detail, reflection in action refers to the act of reflection during the teaching and usually happens very quickly as we are teaching. That continuously happened to me. The interest for mastering the topic of my Learning Unit made them ask me questions continuously, and consequently, I had to be able to respond to many unexpected questions all the time. They were a **very demanding group** in this respect. Due to this reason, the timing of activities was affected as well as my plan for the lesson but because I thought that all the learning opportunities could not be overlooked and therefore I took my time to answer all of them.

Nevertheless, for my future I should also be able not to step off the path for too long and keep in mind the contents of the Year Plan and also I suppose that experience give you time and opportunities to try new ways of doing things in class in order to improve your teaching capabilities at the same time you create the necessary conditions under which English might be learned.

- **Innovation Proposal: “*Peer Correction to improve learners’ outcome*”**
 - **State of affairs**

My innovation proposal is an assignment written in group about *Peer Correction* and the hypothesis if this correction may improve learners’ outcome. The four members of this group soon reached an agreement about the topic, because we all wanted to do a fact-finding work that allowed us to get some valuable conclusions, either positive or negative about this topic. For this purpose, we focused only on the writing skill with a view to obtaining both information and data to test if there was an improvement in students’ learning outcome in writings after implementing **peer correction**.

Among the four skills in EFL, we shall state that correcting a composition is one of the hardest tasks to do by a teacher. What makes a text good or bad? It is well known that putting one’s ideas into words is hard and it is even harder to have the ability to create meaning. Then, what elements do teachers have to grade writings? We all wondered about these questions for a long time and we thought about the pedagogical benefit of implementing the peer correction technique to improve students’ academic-style.

We can start by saying that peer correction is mainly a class technique through which students correct each other. **Coit** (2004) asserted that “Based on theories in collaborative learning and social cognitive development, peer review has assumed an important role in both L1 and L2 writing classrooms” (p. 902). We thought that by empowering students with the role of correcting other writings, they would be more confident and therefore, they would be more willing to work on this technique.

From the beginning, we faced up to the problem of implementing our proposal at our placements: each member of the group was going to teach a different course (from 1st ESO to Vocational Studies), a fact that disables us to create standard templates for all courses as the data collection as well as the data analysis would be disparate. Then, we chose to develop this study with two students with similar level of English who belong to 1st ESO to whom we provide home tuition. We thought that if our students read similar texts and are able to detect similar problems, then they would be more confident and independent with themselves and may improve their learning outcome.

On balance, peer correction has been widely applied in writing skill in EFL. **Rollinson (2005)** is one of researchers who have investigated about peer correction and his studies reveal that peer readers can provide a positive feedback as they hold a positive attitude towards this learning interaction. We should not forget that this technique is much about collaborative work and negotiation of meaning between two sides.

We must also say that our purpose was to go beyond grading a text or giving a number or a letter, but finding out what would happen if we involved students in the process of assessing writings. So far, tests are usually seen by students as an end and not as a means for learning. **Carroll (1968: 46)**, an American psychologist stated that *“...a test is a procedure designed to elicit certain behavior from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual”*

I am convinced that by working with this technique, we may encourage students not only to develop their critical thinking of writing but also to help them realize about their real learning level. In this way, this is closed connected to the well-known term **assessment for learning (AFL)**, which implies that the teacher needs to check progression in the student’s knowledge. Students with peer correction are always guided by the teacher who provides the final desired expectations in terms of learning outcome.

In conclusion, because of the goal of our proposal was to provide an adequate and guided peer correction; the teacher becomes a guider at the same time that the student becomes a coacher.

Above all, I shall make an important note here: when implementing peer correction in class at any school, the teacher always has to take into account carefully that neither the whole class has the same level of English nor all students have the same personal good relationship between them, a fact that may affect the process of correcting.

○ **Target and further comments**

Our assignment tries to predict that the use of peer correction in writings will lead our students to a better management when writing. I must say that with our proposal, we were only able to obtain very little empirical evidence on the impact of this alternative instructional model. Due to **team work**, it was not possible to implement this proposal at schools, so the sample was only taken with two pupils with home tuition and not with a whole class. Personally speaking, I feel a kind of lack in the amount of practical results (only two students may be not that significant) in order to state a final conclusion. Nevertheless, it is also remarkable that some progression on both students was highly noticed.

In order to test if our hypothesis became true (the fact that students do not reflect on their mistakes and only pay attention to the final mark), we created some tools for assessment: a **marking code** for indirect correction, a **rubric** and a **checklist**. It is necessary to say that neither student was used to work with these kinds of assessments, so the low level of use made them almost unable to use the provided tools.

The methodology to implement the process of peer correction was established in the following steps:

- We present our students the assessing tools (already done by ourselves).
- Students were asked to write about a past holiday and later they received the composition corrected in an indirect way by us (the teachers). We observe and interact with students in case of doubts.

- Similar activity was carried out some days later with a different topic (a past birthday) with the purpose to see if there has been any learning improvement their learning outcome. Now, it is the student who has to use the three assessing procedures (the teacher monitors the process) with the other student’s exam.
- A final activity was carried out some days after the second activity. In this case, we correct both exams to check progression in learning outcomes and correction of former errors. (Here, we saw the improvement on their writings).

By providing the sample of the first exam with indirect correction, we noticed that training to be able to understand this kind of correction is highly needed. Students were a kind of lost as they were surprised of not receiving a final number. We noticed that students do need a special and continuous training in order to perform the task of correcting properly. Again, the teacher must provide students with support in order to check student’s progression. Taking up **Krashen’s** Monitor Hypothesis, if we tried to reduce the stress in students (caused by the peer correction), then they would become more receptive to other students’ errors.

Finally, in the third stage, students had to write another composition and now, we could state that both students showed a clear progression after correcting this third exam. We knew the sample of results was limited but it showed a kind of effectiveness.

Thanks to this proposal, our team was right to point out that students may be willing to learn new methods of assessing for their own benefit. Once you explain the **purpose and the criteria** for marking, then they are ready to start reflecting on peer errors. Nevertheless, the process of getting used to this kind of correction needs time and practice on behalf of students.

I think that a teacher should not provide students with these assessment tools at the same time because this change of correcting writings would only cause more stress on students. In accordance to this idea, students

will be more engaged when they feel motivated enough to do this kind of assessment because we cannot forget that we should promote their learning autonomy so that they can be able to detect errors easily and to know how to cope with them.

More specifically, due to the fact that the team could not implement this proposal at our assigned schools, we may not assure the degree of success at schools with many students. It is undeniable that peer correction helps students improve EFL writing because they can provide their own reasons for those mistakes by exchanging ideas about similar topics.

○ **Final reflections and proposal for the future**

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that I felt both challenged and privileged to work at Miralbueno High School during my teaching practice periods (I, II and III). In my experiences during the Master Degree in Education this has been one of the most enjoyable and meaningful periods. This is mainly because I was able to know at first hand day-to-day matters in a teacher's life and how feasible all the contents learned in my lessons at University could be implemented with students.

More specifically, one of the contents that I have been reflecting on most is about peer correction and its grade of practicability. Once my Learning Unit was fully implemented at High School and the innovation proposal about the study of *Peer Correction* was completed, then I started thinking about possible linking points which could connect both assignments; I believe that we simply cannot confine ourselves to writing assignments and not to reflect on further evidences or at least to muse about them.

From all this, it comes to mind how I would use the *Peer Correction* technique with my students if I already were teacher of English language at any School. Thanks to teamwork, I was able to grasp advantages of this type of correction but it also allowed me to consider how it could be applied to my own

Learning Unit in order to get a noticeable improvement in students’ learning outcome.

I would maintain that the benefits of the peer correction technique will almost certainly outweigh the disadvantages. Once the pros and cons are stated, it will be easier for me to establish the possible connections of both assignments. As important advantages of this kind of correction we may find:

- Students are really involved in the process of correction, a fact that continuously renews their confidence.
- This correction encourages an atmosphere of cooperation.
- Valid assessment tool for the teacher about students’ awareness.
- Motivation is promoted as the process encourages independence.
- Discussion of errors to negotiate meaning in class.
- Involvement of each single student.
- They learn from each other and consequently they get to know each other better.

Among the possible problems of its practice:

- It may be difficult to get an agreement between teachers from the English Department to establish a correction standard level: i.e. what errors should be corrected and how.
- Student may be wrong when correcting.
- Some students may also feel disappointed with the teacher, as they may think that correction is one of the teacher’s duties.

Following her words, **Ur (1999)** claimed that “Correcting written work is **time-consuming**”. I would also like to add that peer correction requires a **training period** as well so that students get used to working with this method. In this way, I think that these two inconveniences may impair the efficiency of the method itself. In other words, if I were a teacher of English, I would be determined to try to implement this kind of assessment with my students.

However, I am also aware that I should take into account some essential questions in order to carry it out:

- How long would the application of this process last?
- What level of efficiency am I pretending to obtain from students?
- What kind of assessment tools should I use? How many?

These are some of the questions that I should try to remind myself in order to be able to implement peer correction in writing skill in class in a not distant future. My experience lived at High School leads me now to learn about coming up with hypothesis concerning my future as an English teacher.

Although I would be determined to use this method in my future, it may also seem that the process itself may be hard to accomplish, at least, short-term. I believe that if I had had the possibility to introduce this approach to teaching writing for a long period of time, I would have helped them realize their learning level and foster their writing skills (only when timing is not a barrier but the vehicle to get our objective).

It is also interesting to point out that too many assessment tools may block students learning and they may be intimidated by the large amount of work. My Learning Unit focuses much on writing skills (creating a CV and a covering letter), so these writings would have been perfect to work with peer correction in class). Not only should I get a personal code for peer correction but also through agreement with other colleagues. In this way, we would share information and would work collaborative by editing the code all together.

In our innovation proposal, we created our own assessment tools with satisfactory results in our two students (an indirect marking code, a rubric and a checklist), tools that constituted a solid base for students' involvement.

Nevertheless I think that, it would not be necessary to use all of them at the same time at once. If I were a teacher, I would work the marking code with my students along a year so that they learn slowly but firmly how to correct writings (I would even hang the code on the wall in a visible place so that the whole class becomes familiar to the codes). I would start by correcting not long compositions but short sentences, first in pairs, then in groups and later, short texts and long texts in order to facilitate the understanding of the process itself.

Thus, valued terms such as **efficiency** and **verification** become essential in the sense that the application of this correction method should be along an academic year. If efficiency stands for the quality of being effective, that efficiency should not be impaired by the fact that verification is compulsory delayed in time: a project with a more progressive perspective.

To round off this section, I believe that it is important to learn how to be adaptive when teaching. This should be a must for my future; the quicker you are able to adapt yourself to the circumstances, the better chance you have to prevent some fearsome collateral damage.

V. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

It would be naïve to suppose that in a radically changing world this Master only provides academic knowledge for future teachers of English. Here it comes into play many other factors which should provide a solid foundation for my future.

After completing this Master and reflecting on both the learning unit and the innovation proposal I have reached several conclusions. First, it is highly rewarded to be able to face up to the difficulties of creating this kind of assignments: the whole process from the planning up to the real implementation became exhausting for me. Even when you are really determined to fulfill your objectives, many drawbacks constantly arise. This is the reason why I said before that appearances may be deceptive about the teaching profession. I have learned to value this job much more than I did before. I now understand how difficult is to carry on your teaching, to satisfy different students' needs in class and how the step of being a teacher becomes a never ending process.

Particularly, the periods I stayed at High School place me directly in the battlefield. Then, I learned a lot just by being a witness of the day-to-day activities that surrounds the teaching profession. I could also observe different courses (PCPI and ESO) which helped me reflect on how I would face up to these students. Now that I had the opportunity to see students with problems of attention in class, with a very **low motivation** attitude, or even very active

groups, I would like to learn more about this aspect of teaching, about how to help these kinds of students with a **high school failure**, to work with students who are not willing to learn. I can imagine that the position of the teacher at this point must be very stressful and I also consider that specific training on this matter would help professionals to cope with this current problem in our schools.

I also learned that it is important to have a **positive attitude** towards your students but also towards your colleagues. You can always learn from them and see how they **interact with students** in class in order to create a good atmosphere at the workplace: good relationships among the staff contribute to the well running at any School.

In addition, I learned that I should have an **adaptive teaching** procedure when teaching in my future: all students learn and grow at their own pace and struggling students need extra attention and time on task.

I should always keep in mind that, though I always try to do our best plan for our students, I will not always be correct. It is especially important that I, as an inexperienced teacher, am ready to adapt to my students' learning. I am sure that as I gain more experience, I will be able to plan, to teach and to proceed correctly more often, but I will never be perfect.

Only by using some elements such as reflection in action and on action, my practice will be more rewarded with the passing of time. I have learned that I should check my daily notes, my class work, and my procedures towards students every single day in order to make future adjustments.

All in all, I am determined to be a reflective teacher in the future as an essential part of my job to become an effective teacher of English.

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