



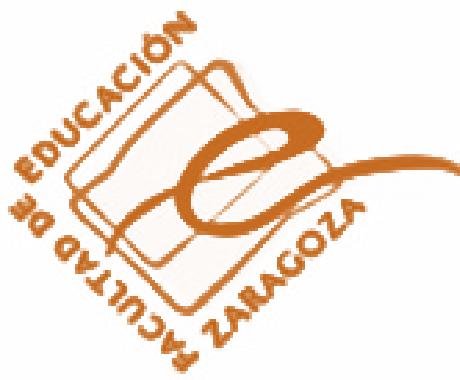
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Trabajo de Fin de Máster

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Máster Universitario en Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanzas de Idiomas, Artísticas y Deportivas

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Index

Index	2
I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II: JUSTIFICATION	6
JUSTIFICATION: LEARNING UNITS	6
JUSTIFICATION: RESEARCH PROJECT	7
III. CRITICAL REFLECTION.....	8
III.I.ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNING UNITS	8
III.I.I. Analysis of the learning unit “Let’s go to New York”	9
III.I.II. Analysis of the learning unit “Save the Planet”	9
III.I.III. Competences acquired after their execution	12
III.II.ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT	13
III.II.I. Acquired competences with the research project	17
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS	18
IV.I.CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS ON THE LEARNING UNIT “LET’S GO TO NEW YORK”	18
IV.II. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS ON THE LEARNING UNIT “SAVE THE PLANET”	19
IV.III.CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS ON THE RESEARCH PROJECT.....	19
V. REFERENCES	21
Appendixes	22

I. INTRODUCTION

The education received through different educational stages plays an important role in the development of any teacher and consequently it is an essential part to their training. Education contributes to create the academic, personal and social training of the teacher. Teachers guide the learning process and transmit values to students, prepare them for further education and for working life and are one of the main contributors to good education. This important profession does not get the recognition it deserves. Teachers are one of the main pillars of a progressive society. We can consider this profession the resource by excellence. The materials used are important but if there is no motivated teacher in front of our students, the goal will never be achieved. It has always been a great concern for the training and the results obtained by both the teachers and the students. In the last decade, low motivation and high dropout rates have led to different educational reforms. One of those reforms involve the introduction of the *Máster Universitario en Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanzas de Idiomas, Artísticas y Deportivas* as part of teachers training with the aim of provide its students with more academic training and with teaching and motivating tools.

We live in a period of crisis in which there are more and more trained and skilled young people and where the professional future is deeply uncertain. This together with my interest in teaching led me to study Master. I have always felt identified with the figures of the student and of the teacher; with the student because it is what I have always been, and with teachers, because they represent a figure what I would like to be, a learning guarantee. I have always liked languages, especially English, whose role in globalization and in children's education is crucial. I have always rejected the idea that languages are something you are good or bad at. In my opinion, everyone can learn if both students and teachers work together, and the way of doing it is what I wanted to learn in this Master.

This Master of the University of Zaragoza- has a total length of nine months- distributed in two terms, the first term from October to January and the second one from February to July. The first term is devoted to general modules and practicum for all specialties and works as a first contact with the educational reality from a teacher's perspective. Motivation, classroom management or the administrative system are some of the issues discussed in the following first-term modules: *Contexto de la actividad docente, Interacción y convivencia en el aula, Procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje, Diseño curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras, Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de Lenguas Extranjera, Atención a los alumnos con necesidad específica de apoyo educativo* and *Prácticum I: Integración y participación en el centro y fundamentos del trabajo en el aula*.

The second term, in turn, includes specific modules, practicums and a Master's Final Project for each speciality, in my case English language. This term develop and implement some of the key aspects of teaching English as a foreign language such as teaching skills, pronunciation, activities, research projects, etc. The specific contents of the second term are: *La comunicación oral en lengua inglesa; Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de Inglés; Evaluación e innovación docente e investigación educativa en Inglés; Tecnologías de información y comunicación para el aprendizaje; Prácticum II: Diseño curricular y actividades de aprendizaje en Lenguas Extranjeras – Inglés; Prácticum III: Evaluación e innovación*

de la docencia e investigación educativa en Lenguas Extranjeras - Inglés and Trabajo Fin de Máster- TFM.

Module 1	Contexto de la actividad docente
Module 2	Interacción y convivencia en el aula Atención a los alumnos con necesidad específica de apoyo educativo
Module 3	Procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje Practicum I Practicum I: Integración y participación en el Centro y fundamentos del trabajo en el aula
Module 4	Diseño curricular de las asignaturas de las especialidades de Lenguas Extranjeras La comunicación oral en Lengua Inglesa
Module 5	Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de Lenguas Extranjeras Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje del Inglés Tecnologías de la información y la comunicación para el aprendizaje
Practicum II	Practicum II: Diseño curricular y actividades de aprendizaje en Lenguas Extranjeras - Inglés
Module 6	Evaluación e innovación docente e investigación educativa en Inglés
Practicum III	Practicum III: Evaluación e innovación de la docencia e investigación educativa en Lenguas Extranjeras - Inglés
TFM	

Key	First term
	Second term

The dissertation (TFM) aims to present a Master's Final Project including the development of a critical learning on some of the documents carried out for academic purposes during the course. It consists of five chapters:

- Section I that presents the Introduction of this dissertation where there is an introduction of my motivation for doing this Master and the structure of the Master.
- Section II intends to be a justification of two lessons plan of the documents prepared for our future teaching that have been considered useful to our learning. The first document corresponds to the first learning unit developed in the first term (see Appendix I) dealing with the tourism topic. This document will be compared with the learning unit (see Appendix II) developed in the subject *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de Inglés* which focuses on the theme of the environment. This second unit collects more knowledge, is more complete and approaches closer to the perfect teaching unit under Aragonese Curriculum, at the same time it also tries to be more practical and most of its activities have been put into practice at the María Auxiliadora School where I conducted my school placement. Finally for this chapter, I have selected a third document on overcoming the problem most Spaniards have when learning English, oral communication, so this chapter will also include an evaluation and innovation project (see Appendix II) focused on improving the students' oral skills and meet the communicative approach established in the Aragonese Curriculum.

- Section III includes a critical reflection on the projects introduced in chapter II. It shows the main aspects we have worked on, their feasibility and the pitfalls that we can find when teaching.
- Section IV draws the main conclusions and formulates future proposals to improve the English teaching and consequently the learning of English as a foreign language.
- Finally, Section V presents the bibliography included in this dissertation.

II: JUSTIFICATION

Throughout this chapter I will justify the choice the learning units of work and of the research project for being analysed in depth in this Master's dissertation. Firstly, I will justify the selection of the two learning units and latter of the research project. Subsequently, their study will be presented throughout Chapter III.

JUSTIFICATION: LEARNING UNITS

With regard to the two learning units and in reply to the psychodidactic globalization principle, these two learning units of work have been selected due to their importance in the school placement. Learning units are used as a method to plan and organize the different tasks a teacher does with a specific group of students. In general, learning units are not just contents and concepts to be developed in class that students can acquire; in addition they are a way of grouping experiences and activities, based on the needs and interests of students and which contribute to the overall development of the students' full potential. They are essential in the teaching-learning process and represent the last level of the curricular realization. Learning units imply establishing: what is to go to be taught, how, when and the procedures applied to the learning assessment. Learning units are not only an organizational tool, but they also contemplate the development of certain skills which allow the formation of the students' personality and educational values.

I decided to select two different learning units that will be compared in the next chapter and to analyse to what point they follow the pattern of structure and content of the ideal learning unit. The first unit was developed in the first term of the Master, it was written in Spanish and it was one of the first learning units I have created. For its creation, I took into consideration what I learnt in *Procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje*, *Diseño curricular de Lenguas Extrajeras*, *Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de Lenguas Extrajera* and *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de Inglés*. The subjects from the first term concentrated on the development of the curriculum as well as on the teaching and learning processes introducing us to objectives, contents, key competences, methodology and evaluation, key concepts in the design of a learning unit. The activities included in this first unit were developed without knowing their feasibility and therefore, they were not designed taking into account that we as teachers must deal with: the four skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening) as well as the grammar and vocabulary to accomplish with the established curriculum.

The second selected learning unit is written in English and becomes closer to what is required in the *oposiciones* to English Language Secondary or Official Language School teacher. This second unit was developed taking into consideration the knowledge acquired in the subject: *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de inglés*. This subject was devoted to create activities for learning a foreign language. It focused on the feasibility and acceptability of each of the activities especially designed or selected for learning foreign language. Finally, I would like to mention that this learning unit was selected as part of this dissertation due to the positive results obtained when it was put into practice at María Auxiliadora School.

JUSTIFICATION: RESEARCH PROJECT

Regarding the research project, it has been selected since its topic is closely related to oral communication. Oral skills are not properly worked nowadays and most of the Spanish students are not very confident when speaking a foreign language. Although the curriculum establishes a communicative approach in teaching, the reality of the Spanish centres is very different, lessons are traditional or based on written exams in most cases. The features which are particularly worked in schools are grammar and vocabulary and there is no emphasis on the communicative skills. The ratio of students per class does not facilitate the implementation of this skill and as a result, the level of English among the Spanish students is lower and lower, which is demonstrated when they cannot apply for jobs in which one of the requirements is fluency in English or they go abroad and they have problems of communication.

The importance of English as a second language cannot be denied. Not only is it an indispensable tool in business, but also a medium to obtain information and knowledge in the globalized world we live. Consequently, the concern for the knowledge of English in our future students is well founded and so the choice of this project based on learning and developing communicative skills.

This project tries to prove that role-plays are a useful tool to improve communication since both students and teachers agree with their advantages. Despite this agreement, it has to be pointed out that secondary school teachers do not implement them frequently as they should. Moreover, role-plays seem to be motivating and help them to improve their speaking in a different and less conscious manner. Finally, the most powerful argument that leads me to select this project is that students highlight their willingness to participate in future role-plays. We felt gratified at the positive results of the experience that demonstrated that communication can be improved in a funny way. In addition, the results encourage to use a communicative methodology with our future students since what they need is practice and although innovation is difficult at first, the achievements are worthy.

III. CRITICAL REFLECTION

The present chapter includes a critical reflection on the two learning units and the research project aimed to improve the students' English competence. I will start commenting on the learning units and I will continue with the research project trying to show the relationship between the learning units and the research project.

III.I. ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNING UNITS

Learning Units are a key document to the teaching-learning process. They represent the last level of the curricular realization and therefore they can be defined as an essential document for the teacher.

This official Master had devoted four subjects (*Procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje, Diseño curricular de Lenguas Extrajeras, Fundamentos de diseño instruccional y metodologías de aprendizaje en la especialidad de Lenguas Extrajera* and *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de Inglés*) to contributing to the development and expansion of our knowledge with regard to learning units and their implementation in different secondary schools and Official Language Schools. The knowledge we have acquired goes beyond the basic requirements of the *oposiciones* in as far as learning units is concerned:

The learning unit must specify:

- learning objectives to be attained
- contents
- teaching and learning activities
- assessment procedures
- attention to specific needs

In addition, when the learning unit is addressed to secondary school, objectives and evaluation criteria will be related to the degree of acquisition of the Key Competences.

BOA nº 68 08-04-2010

Moreover we have extended these requirements of the Curriculum for compulsory secondary education in Aragon (art -. 26.3) to suit our students' needs, including contents that are closer to an individual lesson planning (*Programación Anual*). We incorporated the following sections to the previously mentioned requirements: contextualization, justification, organization and methodology in order to adjust it to the pattern of structure and content of the ideal learning unit.

In this Part of the dissertation I will describe the main characteristics of the learning units "Let's go to New York" and "Save the Planet" developed through this Master, focusing on the latter since it has been carried out during my school placement and its viability has been proved. Furthermore I will try to point out the competences acquired after their execution.

III.I.I. Analysis of the learning unit “Let’s go to New York”

The first learning unit was devoted to travels and tourism, a topic that provides students with information especially useful in a tourist country like Spain and in a world where young people make more and more trips. It intended to motivate students and involve them in their own learning process by giving them the chance of acquiring valuable knowledge and vocabulary for their possible visits to a foreign country, since they will work aspects linked with tourism in order to exchange information.

This learning unit has not been put into practice since it was addressed to a fictional context. It was elaborated in the first term for the subject *Procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje* and our main interest was to develop the structure of this teaching instrument. It provided the basis for the objectives, contents, key competences and evaluation of the second learning unit included in this dissertation.

III.I.II. Analysis of the learning unit “Save the Planet”

This learning unit was designed to make our students aware of the importance of having good habits in order to avoid the destruction of our planet. The entire unit deals with this topic which forms part of the Cross-Curricular topics (Art. 5.4 of D. 231/2007): Environmental Education, Health Education and Civic and Moral Education. It was carried out in seven sessions, and it reviewed, as well as introduced, a number of basic communicative functions and grammar and vocabulary contents related to linguistic domains which are very close to the students' lives.

It is addressed to two different classes I had the opportunity to teach during my school placement: two heterogeneous groups of 2nd year ESO, with approximately 25- 27 students whose general level is medium-low. Many of the students came from an immigrant background and although they dominate Spanish well enough, they did not show much interest in the English subject, a widespread tendency among the students from the two classes. The former learning unit was designed to fulfil the students needs, objectives, basic skills, content, teaching methods and evaluation criteria set forth in the Aragonese Curriculum.

Throughout the development of the unit, I managed to develop the four skills and at the same time the vocabulary, grammar and the communicative interaction related to the topic. The sessions were organized in a balanced way using a spiral organization criterion that allowed me to explain new contents, constantly recycling and expanding them. Each lesson focused on an average of one-two particular skills from beginner and easy activities to more complex ones in order to have a smooth transition between the connected activities.

The contents and objectives were based on the textbook “English Alive!” since our mentor suggested we should follow it in order to fulfill the Curriculum. In relation to the objectives I decided not to complete all those included in the textbook since I noticed that some of them were not closely related to the topic and they did not match the level and needs of the students. Contents were grouped in blocks in relation to four key skills in terms of the teaching and learning process: oral language; written language; the constituents of the linguistic system, their function and relationships, and the social and cultural dimension of the foreign language.

Regarding the methodological perspective, the development of this learning unit devoted to the environment, was mainly based on a communicative approach widely applied when teaching a foreign language. It makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. Students seemed to enjoy and learn at the same time with language games, quizzes and role-plays, of which the ones students seemed to enjoy most, are those where the students have to interact with their peers. Unlike the audiolingual method of language teaching, which relies on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can leave students in suspense as to the outcome of a class exercise, which will vary according to their reactions and responses. According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011:122-129), real-life simulations motivate the students, especially teenagers, who in most cases desire to communicate in meaningful ways about “meaningful topics”. We as future teachers should monitor this process and not forget to address those different learning styles combining this method with different ones since not all the students may feel comfortable at first. It is very difficult for adolescents to communicate within a group using a foreign language without distraction if you have not worked on it in advance, but once they are involved, these activities become more and more productive.

Furthermore, I tried to follow an active methodology where the student became the active subject of the class, a subject who actively takes part in their own learning process, while I acted as guide to the class' learning. Since the students were not used to this learning style I had to use Spanish in order to check for understanding; however the results obtained when grammar was developed through reading and inference were not completely efficient and I finally had to reinforce these aspects using more traditional methods like grammar charts for the students to complete.

Concluding with the methodological aspect of the unit I included a final guided task-based activity carried out in small groups to create an environmental poster, since most of the students of 2nd year ESO are not very familiar with the writing skill. However, their problems with writing especially those related to the lack of coherence, cohesion and the poverty of their vocabulary and grammar made my help and a visual support necessary. Bearing in mind Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011: 157-160), task based activities develop the autonomy of the student and contribute to cooperative learning by working in small groups. I found this methodology very useful and instructive when combined with other approaches and activities. We can get the students involved by doing travel brochures, posters, advertisements, etc. while they learn a language. The opportunity I had to implement a task-based activity provided me with the awareness of the importance of giving clear, straightforward and simple instructions. When integrated within a unit and well monitored by the teacher (including academic explanations when necessary), this method avoids teaching language bit by bit by encouraging the students' autonomy and their “natural language learning”. This method facilitates an equal relationship among the students and between the teacher and students.

Attention to the students' needs was carried out by means of the heterogeneous activities selected for this unit. These activities made it possible to help different kinds of students in their learning process. In this way, low level learners can succeed at the same time as the high level ones can stretch themselves to the limits of their abilities. Working with partners or small groups made the integration of students who need support possible since fast-learners can help slower ones in the learning process; rotation of students' seats would also be convenient for that reason. During my school

placement, I realized that a teacher must know the activity and the students perfectly in order to create effective groups made up of friends and therefore avoiding students interrupting the rest of the class.

In order to assess this unit, the evaluation measured linguistic knowledge and the progress shown by the students. Evaluation and assessment has been one of the most difficult tasks I experimented during my school placement due to the fact that it was the first time I had performed this task and I was quite uncertain of being fair and accurate. Most of the students prove their knowledge and progress when a formative and continuous assessment is applied. In order to be assessed, students included all the activities of the unit in their notebooks for them to review the contents and for the teacher to assess them and to consider the students' main difficulties. I used a rubric or a checklist to assess their writing exercises, their participation and engagement in the daily routine and their speaking activities. Rubrics and checklists, as Kuhs et al. (2001: 61) state, ensure that every student will be judged using the same criteria. This continuous feedback allowed me to check the students' progress, and to celebrate success rewarding the students' effort and dedication. Celebrating success and the positive comments I personally provided the students with at the end of the unit surprised both my mentor and students who felt gratified and proud of their work. Additionally the internship experience concerning assessment made me assess how efficient I was as a teacher and my main strengths and weaknesses.

The different lesson plans presented identified the priorities and implications which involved the use of additional resources: photocopies, game boards, digital whiteboard, etc. They constituted a guide for teachers who must always decide which activities keep better to their objectives. The objective of this unit was to obtain a positive response towards language learning and the way to learn it. When preparing a lesson and in order to satisfy both the academic and personal development of the students and us as teachers, we must remember that we are addressing different types of learners and levels. Besides, we must also remember that students have to interact with new and existing knowledge in a cyclical way.

As far as the activities were concerned, I tried to follow Marzano's assumptions (2007) and use different types of input and chunk information to avoid saturations. Both objectives and contents were developed in 3-4 learning activities per day: preparatory or introductory activities, activities to work and develop the different skills, and follow-up activities (pre, while and post-activities) focusing on the development of the English language and the previously mentioned European competences. This previously mentioned structure characteristic of the communicative approach, followed and studied in *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de Inglés*, proved to be very efficient when I put it into practice during my school placement. Generally, the main activity is focused on a specific skill, while pre and post- activities integrate other skills; these skills are usually interaction (group work) and speaking, since they are two of the main difficulties these students presented.

Taking into consideration the organization of the activities, based on Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011:156), students must firstly be introduced to the topic finding out what they already know about it by means of brainstorming and some discussion questions related to the topic, and then, provided with the necessary background information and new vocabulary they will need for the subsequent activities. In the

second stage students need to perform a related activity to work the previously introduced aspects (comprehension questions, quizz-quizz trades, taking notes, etc). Finally there is a need to finish with an activity to extend the topic and help students to remember new vocabulary (discussion group, craft project, writing task, game, etc.). Nevertheless, during my school placement, I could not follow this structure literally in all the sessions due to the lack of time. Possibly this structure adjusted better to the video session since no extensive explanations were needed. Teenagers may have good and bad days, but you as a teacher should anticipate and adapt to their needs using varied and attractive materials that enable us to work all the skills in a different way (videos, photocopies, interactive activities, posters). Students enjoyed this type of activity in which they interacted with their peers and learned at the same time.

One of the main conclusions reached after the implementation of this learning unit was the importance of the learning unit of work as essential for educational planning. It allows us to observe every aspect of the subject we teach. Moreover, these documents help the teacher to facilitate, improve and refine the techniques throughout the evaluation process and feedback. By means of this planning, lessons and methods, respectively, will be easily prepared and decided. Learning units allow the teacher to combine content activities with more recreational ones as well as to prevent possible difficulties concerning classroom management and the development of contents although we must adapt the time to the different types of learners and their levels. The use of alternative exercises involving cooperative work became very appropriate in order to make English classes more entertaining and interesting. The implementation of this learning unit not only trained the students in the cognitive aspect but also in the social and civic aspects.

III.I.III. Competences acquired after their execution

Learning units apart from being an academic tool, are a way of grouping experiences and activities, based on the needs and interests of students, they contribute to the overall development of their full potential.

Thanks to the development of the previously described learning units and to the implementation of one of them during my school placement, I am able to create different didactic units based on the requirements of the Aragonese Curriculum in any of the secondary education years. This acquired knowledge can also be applied to the teaching of adults in the Official School of Languages.

In addition, these two projects as well as the different subjects that contributed to their contents, made me develop my personal autonomy. Personal investigation provided me with enough competences and tools to adapt, create and select appropriate and varied activities tailored to different types of learners using various resources.

I am now able to recognize the importance and usefulness of the communicative and task-based approach in connection with cooperative learning when learning a second language since the students become more participative. However, the implementation of the learning unit devoted to the environment during my school placement had made me aware of the importance of the traditional approach to address all the learning styles. Using fill in the blank exercises, matching activities or vocabulary lists help most of the students to fix grammatical structures, concepts, etc. In my opinion the key of the

teaching-learning process lies in a combination of multiple approaches and effective classroom management and teaching.

The experience of teaching a second language implementing my own learning unit in a secondary school has been very positive, instructive and illustrative. It helped me to practice all the theory we have been learning and to confirm first-hand the main difficulties that may arise when teaching adolescents. The main difficulties or weaknesses of my role as a teacher as far as a learning unit is concerned were possibly the control of the time of the task in those less guided activities especially in the oral skill and the assessment process. Thanks to this experience I am able to settle a group of learners into a room and gain their attention at the beginning of a lesson and maintain it until the end in spite of the “mini vacations” in most of the circumstances.

When we talk about education, experience is a plus; every day is a new beginning. From the point of view of someone who is training to teach, every positive advance is a victory but in reality there is no ideal classroom. The teacher's training continues every day throughout their working life. Being a teacher as well as being a professional is a vocation that requires motivation, effort and self-confidence but also demands respect and the ability to place ourselves in the position of the other. The essence of myself as a teacher would be a mixture of this positive experience and the different learning I got from it.

III.II.ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Role-play, as defined by Livingstone (1983:20), is a classroom activity which gives students the opportunity to practise the language they may need outside the classroom; in our opinion they are speaking activities which improve communicative competence and provides practice in contexts which simulate real-life experience.

The main advantage of this technique, according to Al-Mutawa & Kailani (1989), is that it affords the opportunity to practise a new structure in the context of natural communicative usage. Ments (1999) and Livingstone (1983) add that role-play increases learners' motivation and involvement in the learning process. Role-play also enhances learners' imagination and their communication skills. That is why it is an enjoyable and formative activity for learners. Furthermore, it gives learners the opportunity to identify themselves with different social roles promoting the acquisition and development of social and civic competence.

In this Part of the dissertation I will comment on the aim and significance of the research project; its main obstacles and difficulties, the methodology applied and the procedure followed; the main conclusions reached after the investigation and finally the competence I acquired after its execution.

Our research project attempted to look into the effectiveness of role-plays in improving oral communication in English among secondary school and Official Language school students. It arises from the urgent necessity of Spanish students to develop their oral skills. In general, our future students are characterized by their command of the grammatical rules and by their lack of oral abilities. As a result, when they come to talk in English in a different environment to that of the education centre, their competence in the language is deemed poor, if we bear in mind the years of exposure to this same

language. Since it is indeed quite difficult for teachers to give students the opportunity of experiencing a different environment to the education centre, they should work to provide their students with real-life situations in the classroom. We considered that not only can teachers achieve this purpose by means of the use of authentic materials, but also with the implementation of a well-known technique: the role-play. There are numerous benefits and surprisingly positive results associated with this technique, which we tried to demonstrate throughout the research with a theoretical basis.

Considering our experience as English learners and the time spent on our Practicum observing certain lessons we noticed that oral skills are not properly worked nowadays especially in secondary schools. Although the curriculum states that they are fundamental the fulfilment of the minimum goals of each stage, the reality is that, from our point of view, oral skills are not given enough importance. The prominent features worked in schools are grammar and vocabulary, with little emphasis on the rest of communicative skills. As a result, the English level of Spanish students is not advanced enough as demonstrated when they cannot apply for jobs in which one of the requirements is fluency in English or they go abroad and they have problems of communication.

There has been a lot of criticism and comments about the low level of English among Spanish-speaking students and most of them are addressed to the figure of the teacher. The reputation of English teachers is not as positive as in Northern European countries. It is widely considered that teachers in Spain are not motivated or proficient in teaching English. However, with a big class of between 25 to 30 students and several classes to teach, the academic load for teachers is very dense. We, as future teachers, focused on the analysis of the current ways of teaching oral skills and on the implementation of role-plays as a tool to develop these communicative (oral) skills and change these facts and popular beliefs as other researchers such as Mohamed Ishak (2005) did among Malay students.

We placed role-plays as an alternative to improve communication and therefore we had to consider that it also had disadvantages like any other activity. Ments (1999) points out that discipline may be hard to maintain during role-play and the teacher could lose control of the class. He also notes that it is a time-consuming activity. Moreover, the pacing of the role-play can be altered by the embarrassment of some students, who do not feel comfortable acting out in front of their peers. In the course of our search for information on the use of role-plays, we have noticed that there are more advantages than disadvantages, when role-plays are used in an appropriate way. We considered that these disadvantages can be solved easily. On the one hand, the loss of control could be avoided by assigning the students, who are not taking part in the role-play, a task such as assessing their partners or a follow-up activity and at the same time it can be solved by means of practice allowing the students to get used to them. On the other hand, embarrassment could be solved by giving them advice or support or celebrating success when acting out the role-play in front of the class. With regards to the fact of being a time-consuming activity, we do not agree with Ments' point of view concerning this aspect, since any time spent on practising English is very useful for the student's language acquisition, projecting their voices, gaining self-esteem and improving their spontaneity.

Parallel to any learning activity, role-plays require a very detailed organization and according to Cameron (2001:30), they should be “appropriate for the children’s age and social-cultural experience”. When designing the activity, teachers have to choose an interesting and motivating topic related to the lesson he/she is teaching. We need to introduce key vocabulary and expressions the students may use. Additionally, flash cards should be provided to learners to guide the whole process and they should be given enough time to understand the context and develop their own ideas. During the performance, teachers ought to take into account fluency rather than accuracy and reassure their students that they should not be influenced by their possible hesitations or mistakes. Finally, the whole class must do the task at some time and it is also essential to reinforce students’ effort.

The major obstacle we encountered in this research project was related to its duration. Two weeks are not enough to implement a variety of activities and role-plays that allow us to assemble the reliable evidence desired. As a result, the data collected during this period, although from different contexts and levels, would not suffice to demonstrate the feasibility of such research. Furthermore, not all the components of the research were able to develop the tasks required for each step of the research owing to mentors’ restrictions.

When we first thought about the viability of the project, we had to base our suppositions on theory and previous research that will sustain the investigation before deciding its application in the Aragonese education centres. Considering the assumptions of authors like Livingston, Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989) and Ments (1999), about the effectiveness of this technique was guaranteed. However every country has a different behavioural pattern and the application of role-plays may be different when taking into account different ages and countries. The school placement was the best imaginable way to put a research project regarding the effectiveness of role-play to improve oral communication into practice due to the difficulties of finding volunteers when you are not connected. In addition, when a project is carried out by four student teachers visiting different education centres in various contexts and dealing with a great variety of students, its dimension increases substantially. We used as many tools as possible in order to gather relevant information that adjusted the objective of the project.

The objects of this study were selected because we had implemented our learning unit of work in these classes and they already knew us and the way we worked. The teachers we selected for our research were our mentors and although they had more than 20 years of experience two of them had never applied this tool before. The total number of students polled was 102; they had different ages and levels since they were from secondary school and Official Language Schools (3rd and 4th year of ESO, 1st year Bachillerato and Advanced level Official Language School students).

In order to obtain the results we handed two surveys to the students (to complete before and after the implementation of the project) and one to the teachers. With the aim of proving the effectiveness of role-plays, we also selected different role-plays according to the topic they were working on at that moment in order to integrate them to what they were actually doing providing them with an average of two different situations related to the following topics: “Law and Order”, “Crime and Punishment”, “Travel and Holidays” and “Television and Advertisement”. We created our role-plays in order to adjust them to a more real situation among the fictional elements the units devoted to

crime and law tend to have, situations in which students prepare for a future event that will take place. Most of the role-plays included in textbooks do not contribute to the development of communicative skills since they are usually prepared dialogues for students to read aloud. This type of dialogue can be implemented to improve pronunciation but not the fluency.

When carrying out this project the first thing we did was to review related literature to create the different questionnaires adjusting them to the results we wanted to obtain, Subsequently and during the first week of the Practicum III, we gave a survey before implementing the role-plays to the abovementioned groups. After acting the role-plays in the second week, we handed out the second survey. While the students were preparing their roles and during their performance, we observed them and took notes about relevant aspects: vocabulary according to the topic, use of English/Spanish, use of notes, asking for help, engagement and enjoyment. As far as the teachers' surveys were concerned, we gave them to one teacher of the English Department in each centre.

The main conclusions reached after the study were that the students had the opportunity to use their knowledge of vocabulary and suprasegmental features (speech acts, discourse fillers, turn taking, pauses, etc.) although it can be a very difficult or unnatural task if the students do not have sufficient language or information about the participant or the situation, it becomes better to carry out the role-play at the end of the unit.

Given the nature of this study we found some differences between the students and the teacher's opinions from the secondary schools who tried in a way to hide the lack of practice concerning oral communication. We also found differences between the Official Language School and Secondary Schools. Official Language Schools are based on the principles of the communicative approach; therefore, speaking activities are a fundamental issue there. In secondary schools, although the curriculum fosters the implementation of this type of activities, factors such as the high ratio of students, the small amount of time or the difference between levels condition teachers when developing these activities. However, as the teachers establish in their surveys, their willingness to work speaking skill is crucial. As a consequence, teachers who want their students talking would not make excuses and provide the learners with the necessary resources in order to work communication. We strongly believe that practice is what will make the development of unproblematic communicative activities and enable secondary school students to carry out this communicative exchange as positively as the adult students of the Official Language School.

The results obtained throughout the surveys indicate that role-plays are a useful tool to improve communication since both the students and the teachers coincide with their advantages even though secondary school teachers should implement them more often. Moreover, learners have found that role-plays are motivating and help them to improve their speaking in a different, recreational and less conscious manner. Finally, the most powerful argument for us is that almost every student highlights his or her readiness to participate in future role-plays and therefore, we will continue carrying out these activities in future classes.

III.II.I. Acquired competences with the research project

The implementation of this research project apart from reflecting the situation of the Spanish educational system concerning communicative oral skill, and the effectiveness of role-plays to improve it, it has also provided me with the necessary tools to prepare and manage this kind of activity that seemed to be motivating and recreational for the students.

In order to succeed with role-plays exhaustive preparation must be done. We have to introduce the activity by describing the situation and making sure that all of the students understand it. It is also necessary to make sure that the students understand what the result of the role-play should be. When using role cards that describe the person or role to be played considering the needs of lower-level students, they got more involved in the activity and had better results. Before starting the role-play, have students brainstorm to predict what vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions they might use (language-oriented input). We should also consider each student has individual language skills, an individual approach to working in groups, and a specific role to play in the activity. We should not expect all students to contribute equally to the discussion, or to use every grammar point or all the vocabulary taught.

The most important thing is that the student manage to communicate with the language they have at the same time they increment their oral skills in a less conscious way. Role-plays offer good listening practice and, at the same time, they provide an opportunity to practise the rules of social behaviour, engage the learner physically, aid in language retention, and finally provide a context for understanding attitudes, expectations, and behaviours related to the target culture.

Role-plays as learned through *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de inglés* are activities that need a continuation in order to have a complete sense, we as teachers have to do linguistic follow-up and feedback has to be given on the grammar or pronunciation problems you have heard. It is difficult to control the time on the task and manage this type of activity especially when acting out in front of the class; however, we can solve this problem by assigning a task to the rest of the students such as assessing their peers or identifying the situation represented.

Despite of these difficulties I am now more self-confident in carrying out these types of communicative activities. The positive results led me to encourage my mentor to perform role-plays and more communicative and recreational activities. I hope that the fact of my mentor having the two models applied in my school placement, the role-plays included in the learning unit and the ones of the research project, and the fact that she is a fan of the Internet where numerous resources can be easily adapted to the students needs may contribute to continue practicing communication.

The school placement has encouraged my idea that a combination of different approaches such as the communicative one may contribute to the development of a language. If we consider the natural tendency on how we learned our L1, we as teachers will consider the efficiency and importance of talking and role-plays.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS

Section IV of this dissertation pretends to establish the main conclusions and future proposals on the project and learning units previously analysed.

IV.I.CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS ON THE LEARNING UNIT “LET’S GO TO NEW YORK”

After executing both learning units of work, one can conclude by saying that there are many differences between them.

The first of the learning units included in this dissertation was developed in the first term of the Master and it focused on the structure rather than on the contents and their appropriateness. It has therefore forged the basis for the last learning unit, a leaning unit that is closer to the ideal one.

Its objectives, contents and adjustment to the Spanish educational reality is not complete since it has not been based or guided by a text book. It does not introduce many new contents and it would fit best as a revision unit rather than as a widening one. However, it includes great socio-cultural contents that cannot be developed in topics related to the environment.

The organization of the different sessions comprises the activities to execute rather than the explanation and usefulness of any of them. Furthermore, it does not comment either the role of the teacher or the one of the students. The organization of the different sessions is more similar to an organization of different materials. We cannot say that this learning unit includes suitable lesson plans that enable any teacher to perform the activities selected. In the future, and in order to implement this unit in a real classroom, lesson plans must provide the teacher with indications or additional notes on the possible problems that may arise; lesson plans must be schematic and visual, as we learned in the second term.

Considering the activities of this learning unit and in connection with the ones included in this second term, it would be convenient to include them into a different section rather than on the organization on the session, as learned in *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de inglés*. This new section will facilitate the development of a students’ handout since the activities do not belong to a textbook. For future implementations it would be useful to add introductory activities since we must contextualize the topic to the activities and explain to the students the purpose of the activities in order to achieve meaningful and functional learning. At the same time, I will consider the possibility of providing the students with more guides and exemplifications, especially when doing writing activities.

Regarding the activities included in this unit, I will probably combine the these activities with videos or oral exercises like small talks about travelling experiences that may promote student-student and teacher-student relationships.

As far as the use of ICT is concerned, this learning unit included a webquest, a useful tool to develop knowledge in an interactive and cooperative manner. Bearing in mind my experience with 1st year ESO students, this activity does not fulfill the requirements

of the unit and the students will not be prepared enough to execute it properly. In future implementations it would be advisable the use of mind-maps and PowerPoint presentations to support contents and develop task-based activities similar to the ones included in appendixes IV and V.

Regarding evaluation, I found it appropriate in accordance with the provisions of the Aragonese Curriculum since, apart from being formative and continuous, the evaluation process applies different methods to assess the teaching-learning process. As a future proposal I would include a rubric for the students to assess their peers (see Appendix VI) and another rubric and checklist, similar to the ones in appendixes I and II, for the teacher to assess the students and provide them with feedback. The teaching-learning process is a dual process, both the teacher and the students take part of it and they must be equally involved. Therefore teachers must also check their progress using different tools such as the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Language or teachers self-assessment charts similar to the one included in the unit “Save the planet” (Appendix III).

IV.II. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS ON THE LEARNING UNIT “SAVE THE PLANET”

This second learning unit is close to the ideal one. It is the result of all the knowledge acquired throughout this Master. The academic and personal results obtained both in the subject *Diseño, organización y desarrollo de actividades para el aprendizaje de inglés*, and in the implementation of the unit during the school placement were very positive. Notwithstanding, it can be improved that the addition of different communicative activities such as debates and talks in order to contribute to the improvement of the students’ fluency and accuracy as well as working on the social and civic competence.

In relation to the process of evaluation, it will also be very useful to include peer assessment tools such as rubrics, or checklist (see Appendix VI), which would involve the students in this process.

IV.III. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROPOSALS ON THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The research project allowed us to learn at first hand the real situation of oral skills among the Spanish students and their differences and it contributed to analyse the effectiveness of role-plays to improve communication among our students.

In future researches on the same topic I would dedicate more time to the observation of the role-plays and to giving feedback to the students so that they would appreciate the usefulness of role-plays to improve fluency and communicative accuracy rather than considering them a mere part of a study carried out by a university student.

I would use this technique more often and I would consider the possibility of creating workshops to provide more real communication practice to the students. Furthermore, I realised that the role-plays about crime and law could be related to real cases taken from newspaper articles of crimes and court cases such as prosecution of a shoplifter, burglar, computer crime, or racial discrimination. The role-play carried out in the Official Language School can be considered more realistic since it includes less guiding element

and authentic materials to comment on. In future practices I will highly recommend the use of authentic materials to support the students and to make role-plays more significant for them even when their level is low.

Finally, it would also be highly recommended to show the results obtained to our school mentors since they would be able to see how communication has been worked in different centres.

This Master provided me with the opportunity of becoming more aware of the real situation of the Spanish education system, its problems, its advantages, the conflicts that may arise in a classroom and the huge differences among students. This experience has been completely enriching, as it allowed me to learn from professionals with broad experience in teaching, in managing student's behaviour, in student-teacher interaction and in choosing the appropriate activities or the right words to motivate them and to overcome their possible lacks. Owing to the contribution of education to society, educational institutions should demand a lifelong learning to the teachers as a way of guaranteeing updated teachers and high quality education.

When we talk about being an educator, experience is a plus; every day is a new beginning. Being an effective teacher implies being open to change; teaching is a vocation that requires motivation, effort, personal autonomy and self-confidence but it also demands respect. During this master we also had the opportunity for learn from our peers and we acquired lots of knowledge and future ideas to be developed in our future classes.

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Appendices

- **Appendix I: Unidad Didáctica “Let’s go to New York”**
- **Appendix II: Learning Unit “Save the Planet”.**
- **Appendix III: Research Project on the effectiveness of role-play to improve oral communication among secondary school and official language school students.**
- **Appendix IV: Mind-map**
- **Appendix V: PowerPoint presentation**
- **Appendix VI: Rubric for peer-assessment**