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## **TRABAJO DE FIN DE MÁSTER**

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Modalidad A

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The competences and knowledge acquired during this master have reinforced my deep teaching vocation. I cannot say that the master has been a turning point in my life because all through it I have never hesitated that I wanted to be a teacher. The motivation I had when I enrolled in the master slightly diminished in the first semester as there were times I could not clearly see the usefulness of some of our studies. However, from the current perspective, I can state that the outcome is positive and that I have been able to develop new competences and become acquainted with the foundations of teaching. I am aware that this is only the beginning of a life-long learning.

In general terms, as it can be read in the teaching guides, this Master degree aims at acquiring three broad competences: knowledge of *what* to do as teachers (from the legislative framework), knowledge of *how* to do it (integration of theory and practice) and knowledge of *how to handle oneself* when doing it (socio-affective and psychological values). As a result, these three competences have been developed as the transversal crux along the different modules and broken down into more specific competences.

First, the module *Contexto de la actividad docente* in the first semester allowed me to know the educational law and the legislative rules that regulate the organization and running of secondary schools. Since my English Studies degree was mainly intended to the analysis and study of the English language and I did not do anything related to teaching, that was my first approach to education and everything it involves. Apart from becoming familiar with the educational legislation I also learnt to analyse the relationships between families and the school institution and its deep impact on children's education. In fact, during Practicum I had the opportunity to see how a school works from inside, very far away from the perspective I had until then as student. I could realize that unfortunately, the ideal situation that the law proposes is sometimes impossible to carry out, especially when families do not want to get involved in their children's education. Besides, in the optional subject *Atención a los alumnos con necesidades específicas de apoyo educativo*, I was taught to face up to the multiple intelligences making use of the psycho-pedagogical resources that schools offer.

Second, as regards “knowledge on how to teach”, two modules have been in charge of showing us how to integrate the theoretical contents with the actual practice: *Procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje* and *Diseño curricular e instruccional y organización y desarrollo de las actividades de aprendizaje*. On the one hand, in the former I learnt to teach how to think and develop the creative thinking, which is my ultimate aim as a teacher-to-be: to make my students think about the world outside the classroom. Moreover, I was also asked to design a learning unit of work based on the acquisition of knowledge, skills, as well as intellectual and emotional abilities.

On the other hand, the module *Diseño curricular e instruccional y organización y desarrollo de las actividades de aprendizaje* has been the broadest one and it has been divided into different subjects attending to three main aspects: curricular, instructional and organizational design. The subjects in the first semester were more general and devoted to the planning of activities according to the different key competences and following the most appropriate methodology (curricular design). We did not pay too much attention to the activities themselves but to their degree of adaptation to the legislative and educational context. Nevertheless, the second semester has been more related to the planning, design and implementation of the activities (instructional design). Consequently, the learning unit of work that is going to be dealt with in this dissertation clearly shows this distinction and focus on different aspects.

After having taken this module, I feel able to design not only good learning activities but also the necessary assessment tools and procedures that help students progressing and lead to success and motivation. In this sense, I have also become aware of the importance of assessing the teaching process in order to improve it and finally achieve a high quality way of teaching and learning. However, I would have liked to go into the topic of organization, development and especially, timing of the activities in greater depth, since it has been the most difficult part to expand in my learning unit and barely dealt with in class. Also within this extensive module it is included the subject *La comunicación oral en lengua inglesa*, which has meant a change of perspective on the teaching of phonetics and has provided me with the clues for a different and enjoyable approach to the teaching and learning of pronunciation. Besides, from my point of view as student it has lead to my better understanding of the English language, especially as regards pragmatic and discursive features. On the other hand, the subject *Recursos didácticos para la enseñanza de una materia en lengua extranjera (inglés)* has been really useful to discover another way of teaching and to bring to practice all the knowledge acquired during the course as well as the application of the Communicative Approach. Once the knowledge has been internalized and carried out, it is necessary to evaluate it so as to identify and analyse the problems to sort them out. This has been the main aim of the module *Evaluación, Innovación e Investigación en Lengua Inglesa*, where I have learnt how to critically concentrate on the educational system and carry out a research project to investigate which aspects do not work appropriately and then propose any kind of innovative measure to repair them.

To conclude, the last –though not least important– of the three main competences to be achieved at the end of this master degree, is the one regarding the “knowledge on how to behave when teaching and learning”. Accordingly, the module *Interacción y convivencia en el aula* has contributed to the acquisition of some socio-affective and psychological values, needed to deal with teenagers. Hence I have understood students’ characteristics and how their social environment affects their motivation or behavior; to think about the benefits of establishing a good class atmosphere based on mutual respect and attending to everyone’s rights and duties; to develop strategies for preventing and solving conflicts; and to promote (as much as possible) the development of the intellectual, academic and personal capacities of students. Furthermore, I have increased my capacity for observation and listening to other people, not only within a school context but in my daily life.

Apart from that, I cannot forget the experiences I have lived during my teaching placement, since I have had the opportunity to establish links between theory and practice. It is a shame though, and very frustrating indeed, to check that these new methodologies and new approaches to teaching are not being applied and that the English language classrooms are still being –in general terms– mainly grammar based. This fact contradicts the principles stated in the *Currículum Aragonés* for the teaching of foreign languages:

*“methodology is the main tool for the development of the curriculum and so, it has to be in accordance with the previously established learning goals: the development of students’ competence in linguistic communication as well as the intrapersonal and interpersonal competences, which allow them to grow as autonomous individuals, able to learn from different contexts and to successfully cope in a multicultural society”.*<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the methodology to be used in the classrooms should be the one established by the Communicative Approach and then “make communicative competence the goal of language teaching” (Larsen-Freeman, D. and Anderson, M 2011:115). That would imply the use of authentic language in real contexts, the focus on fluency rather than on accuracy, the emphasis on cooperative learning and negotiation of meaning, the choice about what to say and how to say it and what is more important, the use of grammar as a means for communication not as an end on itself.

From the experience I have had so far and from what I have learnt from my classmates, I am not sure that most students are able to use the English language as a vehicle for communication since they do not feel like being successful when using it. That is why I consider that a change is needed so as to provide students with the necessary tools to progress in learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the *Currículum Aragonés* for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (page 225)

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## 2. JUSTIFICATION

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There is evidence of the inefficiency of the approach on foreign languages teaching in our country, which has not yet reached the goal of providing learners with the skills to perform successfully in context. The constant changes on educational policies are a clear indication of this inadequacy of the traditional language classroom methodology. The traditional Spanish attitude towards the teaching of foreign languages is artificial and disconnected from authentic and meaningful material. For many teachers nowadays, the formal teaching of grammar and vocabulary is still the central point of the English classrooms and although opportunities for communication are provided, students do not aim at developing communicative competence but simply at practicing that specific vocabulary and grammar. As a result, the main problem that I have found in the secondary school during my teaching placement has been the learners' difficulty to express themselves in English and to convey meaning regardless of making mistakes.

The two projects that are going to be analysed and reflected on in this dissertation are the learning unit and the research project that I have had to design during Practicum II and III. On the one hand, the learning unit brings together all the knowledge I have acquired and internalized throughout the Master degree; on the other hand, the research project relates to the learning unit in the sense that even though they have been implemented with different groups of students, I can extract the same conclusions from both pieces of work: students' oral production is generally poor and it shows that a change in the teaching and learning process is needed. After having considered other options I have finally decided to focus on these two activities because both of them will allow me to highlight the benefits derived from the implementation of a methodology founded on the principles of the Communicative Approach.

According to my own experience in the secondary education (first as student and later on as teacher) I think that this justification might be applied and related to what happens in the classrooms, more specifically in the English classrooms: students are sometimes demotivated because they feel they cannot speak English or because what they are learning is useless. For this reason, I think that it is so important to make them think of what they feel, think or know so as to make them aware of their actual knowledge and their learning improvements and therefore awake their curiosity and wish for learning more (metacognitive strategies).

Anderson (2002:1) states that

*“metacognition can be defined simply as “thinking about thinking” [...]. The use of metacognitive strategies ignites one’s thinking and can lead to more profound learning and improved performance”.*

Thus, although it has been a difficult course and at first the general feeling of the group was of discouragement, I finally found the energy and motivation enough to carry on with the learning process so as to become a good teacher of English.

Some years ago, in order to be a teacher it was required to pass a three-month course, which people agreed to provide an inadequate teaching education due to its brevity and distance from the classrooms’ everyday reality. Since the 1980s, politicians from several parties and with different ideologies have been conscious of these weaknesses and have promoted different means, until the official master degree has been established to put an end to that situation and give opportunities for good and effective teaching practices (Gemma Tribó, 2008). In spite of this fact, it seems paradoxical that even though the current educational law demands an innovative way of teaching and learning, education is still held by traditional attitudes and teachers who come from the “old school” and who are not willing to change their methodology. That is precisely the reason why I think that every teacher should stop and think of the important role they play as the driving force behind change: they are the responsible of bringing up people which are going to be citizens of the world.

Bearing all these things in mind, the following section will show the knowledge I have acquired during this master degree by means of comparing and analysing two pieces of work that I have made on my own.

### 3. CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE TWO PROJECTS

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Although the learning unit and the research project were implemented with different groups of students, both pieces of work ultimately aimed at checking whether the teaching of English is being successful and effective or not. My research was about the teaching and learning of a subject matter through English and how the use of a foreign language influences the understanding and internalization of contents. Consequently, its results will allow me to establish relationships between the way of teaching English and the ability for applying it in real context.

On the one hand, a unit of learning is

*“an organized series of learning activities and materials that key in on a specific topic related to the curriculum as a whole. The use of many and varied activities is believed to provide a more in-depth look at the subject area and an enhancement of learning through high-interest activities”<sup>2</sup>*

Designing a learning unit of work requires much more than planning a series of learning activities related to the curriculum: it must contain the learning objectives to be fulfilled, the contents that are going to be dealt with, the methodology to be used, the strategies on how to pay attention to the possible multiple intelligences within a classroom, and a way of positive assessment that leads to individual learning and self-improvement. Besides, activities must be appropriate to the students' different levels, needs and interests. Therefore, it is not so easy to think of activities that cover all these characteristics and are, moreover, interesting enough to engage every student in the class. Bearing all these things in mind, my main objective was to integrate the four macro-skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) as well as to promote spoken interaction and communication exchanges. I tried to be original and creative –though realistic, of course– and show that a shift on the traditional way of teaching is possible, necessary and effective indeed.

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<sup>2</sup> From Dictionary of Education ([hanneby.com/category/education](http://hanneby.com/category/education))

On the other hand, action research is considered to be:

*“a constructive enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her won knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the experience”.* (Koshy, V. 2005:9).

According to Fraenkel, J and Wallen, N.E. (2008), there are many types of research and different ways of doing it; but what is especial about action research is that it does not aim at finding general results but at obtaining specific information that will help the researcher to “change conditions” in a particular situation. Besides, the participants in action research take an important role since they are actively involved in the process. Taking all these things into account, doing a research project meant a big challenge for me because I had never heard about it before and I had no idea of how to start or what to do. I think, nevertheless, that it is necessary to investigate which are the best ways of teaching and learning, the students’ needs and interests, their learning problems or difficulties and so on, in order to improve the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, if it is considered that each student is different from another and that not all students learn in the same way, research is the basis to find out which is the best way to attend to every single student’s demands.

### **3.1. Social Context**

The secondary school in which I did my teaching placement is located between three different districts and accordingly, students come from very different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, which affect their educational needs. Generally speaking, these needs are related to learning difficulties and lack of motivation, mainly due to the familiar indifference towards their children’s education.

On the one hand, from the economic point of view –and according to the *Instituto Aragonés de Estadística*– this secondary school is highly characterized by the working class; even more, if it is taken into account that during the last years there has been an important increase of immigrant population, which has contributed –and still does– to modify the traditional student profile. Thus, the activities to be carried out and the methodology to be applied should be as varied as possible, and try to attend to everyone’s particular situations.

On the other hand, from the socio-cultural point of view, two essential aspects must be born in mind: the relationships with families and students’ lack of motivation. First, there are several families who do not care about their children’s education and delegate this responsibility to the teachers. This lack of commitment negatively affects students’ behavior, which is indifferent and defiant towards study. In the group I chose for implementing my learning unit of work, there were two boys who refused to do anything and so I tried to apply the psychology I learnt in the first semester, talking with them and listening to their reasons for that kind of behavior.

I was really surprised when they openly explained me that they were just waiting to be sixteen years old so as to leave school and start working anywhere. I attempted to make them realize that finding a job without having any kind of qualification is very difficult nowadays but they did not pay much attention to me. However, I did not try to convince or impose them anything but just give them a different point of view. Since that very moment, these two students changed their attitude with me and even though they still did not participate in the class activities they did not decline to do the especial exercises I prepared for them and they even smiled me in the corridors. It was very enriching for me and I felt I was achieving my challenge. Second, as regards motivation, it was quite difficult for me to find the appropriate activities to engage my students because I had to cover the contents established in the textbook. The lack of motivation was also evident among the learners with whom I carried out the research project, because despite expectations, many of them did not find comfortable being taught in English. With all these things going on, I could, in any case, be aware of how difficult is to teach when there is no willing for learning.

### ***3.2. Learning unit of work***

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When I started working on my learning unit I was free to design the activities I wanted to carry out in class, but I had to cover the contents established in the textbook. I have to say that I am not a very creative person and my main aim was to make my students use the English language as something natural and to go beyond the topics dealt with in class so that they could think and develop a critical attitude towards the world outside the classroom.

In order to design and organise my learning unit I tried to integrate the four macro-skills, i.e. reading, listening, speaking and writing, and to introduce some pronunciation items as well. I followed the indications we had studied in the module *Diseño, Organización y Desarrollo de Actividades para la Enseñanza del Inglés*, so as to make my teaching as effective as possible. As we were taught from the very beginning of this module, it has to be taken into account that “teaching” and “learning” are not equivalent terms and that what we teach is not necessarily what students learn. Therefore, I tried to design simple activities, with clear aims and easy to follow.

Robert J. Marzano (2007: 9) points out the three elements needed for teaching to be effective: “(1) setting and communicating learning goals; (2) tracking students’ progress, and (3) celebrating success”. Consequently, I tried to keep in mind these three principles all the time: I always started the lessons with a warm-up activity to revise what had been previously studied (tracking progress); then, I explained them what we were going to focus on that lesson (communicating learning goals); I encouraged them to participate and engage in the development of the activities and finally congratulated them for their achieving (celebrating success).

As regards classroom management, it has already been said that one of my main aims was to promote interaction between students. For doing it in an organized way, I explained to them that it was very important to raise their hands whenever they wanted to say something because otherwise the exercise would not work and we had to finish it. At the beginning, they respected the turns but without forgetting that they are at second year of ESO and that they are adolescents, it was normal that they ended up speaking all at the same time. I consider that one of the main features to be taken into account is that classroom atmosphere must be based on mutual respect and tolerance; so although I looked for everyone's involvement I never forced anyone to speak aloud if he or she did not want to do so.

### ***3.3. Communicative Approach***

As it has already been said, I tried to apply the Communicative Approach and use the English language as the vehicle for classroom communication, not just as the object of the study (Communicative Language Teaching). As such, almost every activity in my learning unit gives opportunities for speaking and oral discussions, either in pairs, groups or as whole class activities. I tried to promote students' communication as much as possible providing opportunities for them to talk about their thoughts and experiences and simulating everyday situations in which they had to solve some kind of problems. My idea was to make them realize that learning a language is very important in life, not just a matter of having a grade at school. For this reason, I always tried to introduce some cultural aspects for them to be more motivated or to relate contents with other subjects of everyday life and then awake their wish for knowing and learning something else. Besides, I asked them some challenging questions for them to discuss and then achieve my second great objective, which was to develop their critical sense about the world – as it can be seen in Appendix 1, in the lesson plan 1 with the post-reading activity.

Coming back to the *Currículum Aragonés* to support this idea, it states that:

*“The development of the communicative competence will need the greatest participation in real communication situations. These ones will provide students with the necessary discursive, sociolinguistic, cultural tools to allow them to interpret and express meaning appropriately, as well as to give them the opportunity to transfer and develop the required strategies.”*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Own translation from the *Currículum Aragonés* for the teaching of Foreign Languages (226)

### **3.3.1. Fluency and accuracy (learning unit and research project)**

At the beginning, it was quite strange for my students to be taught in English all the time because they were not very used to that methodology and sometimes did not follow me or refused to answer my questions if they had to do it in English. But I tried to simplify my input so as to make it comprehensible –Krashen’s input hypothesis– and encourage them to use it without caring about making errors until they finally gained in confidence and whatever they had to say they said it in English. Therefore, fluency was focused on rather than accuracy since the emphasis was put on “the process of communication rather than just mastery on language forms” (Larsen-Freeman, D. and Anderson, M 2011:120). During these activities, errors were allowed and instead of interrupting students whereas they were speaking, I noted down their errors and communicated them later on with an accuracy-based activity for the whole class.

For instance, one concrete aspect that called my attention was that almost every student in my class pronounced the word “since” as /sams/ instead of /sins/ and they did not understand or notice that they were pronouncing it in the wrong way. After having explained them several times that it was pronounced /sins/, I asked them to nod whenever they said “since” (as a remembering for the Spanish word “sí”). They laughed at the beginning because they found it quite odd; but from then on, if they said /sams/ I nodded once and again until they said it correctly. I learnt that technique in the module *Diseño, Organización y Desarrollo de Actividades para el Aprendizaje del Inglés* and after having brought it to practice I can prove the usefulness of using gestures and relating concepts with everyday situations to achieve a better level of understanding.

In relation to the research project, it has to be noted that as we were dealing with a kind of *Content and Language Integrated Learning* program (although it was not officially established), the English language was used as a tool for learning but not as the object of study itself. Therefore, the teacher had to give more prominence to the acquisition of contents than to the correct use of language. As a consequence, she also focuses on fluency rather than accuracy and tries to promote students’ interaction by encouraging them to use the English language without the fear of making mistakes.

### **3.3.2. Grammar (learning unit and research project)**

As regards the grammatical points of the unit, i.e. the comparative and superlative adjectives and the modals *should* and *must*, I could realize how difficult is to teach grammar without following the traditional methods. I did not know how to do it at the beginning, but I found a power point presentation on the Internet that explained how to form and use the comparative and superlative adjectives in English with a game and a quiz at the end. I decided to use it because it was about a detective trying to find some thieves and it totally fitted the topic of the unit.

Although it was a kind of formal teaching of grammar and it did not correspond with the Communicative Approach's principle of not direct instruction on language forms, I think that it was a bit different from what they were used to do; it was more enjoyable than completing the rules in a table; and they liked it very much – see Appendix 1 (page 9). There are sometimes in which it is not so easy to strictly follow the Communicative Language Teaching and forget about focusing on form. In this sense, Kumaravadivelu (2006), who analyzed some lessons taught by teachers following CLT, finally confirmed that

*“Even teachers who are committed to CLT can fail to create opportunities for genuine interaction in their classroom” (p. 62).*

Second, in order to deal with the other grammatical item of my learning unit (the differences between *should* and *must*), I showed them some traffic signs and related them with some instructions for the next game using the corresponding modals, so that they could see their meaning and use. Afterwards, they were asked to think of other behaviour rules following the examples to finally guess the rule for the use of those modals (see Appendix 1, page 13). This activity was a bit confusing at first because students were not used to that kind of methodology and they did not understand what they had to do exactly. Nevertheless, it was quite interesting to check that during the speaking activity in lesson plan 5, most of them used the modal verbs correctly but very few provided any examples of comparatives or superlatives. Therefore, modals were better internalized because they were learnt in context instead of being formally taught; whereas in order to use the comparatives and superlatives appropriately, they had to remember every single detail, the general rule and the exceptions (they could not use them naturally).

From my point of view, the teaching and learning of grammar is the big obstacle that students have to face and which prevents them from being competent in the use of language. As the results of my research project indicate, students do not feel motivated for learning a subject through English because they are unable to express themselves in the target language. I could observe two different groups, which had different teachers of English with different methodologies and ways of working: whereas one focused mainly on grammar, the other gave more emphasis to productive skills (speaking and writing). As a result, students' performance in English was also very different from one group to the other. Specifically, most of the participants in our research project find it difficult to orally explain the contents when the speech was unplanned and spontaneous. Even though they were asked to convey meaning without paying attention to the actual use of language, they did not feel confident when performing in English. This shows that although the content teacher bases her methodology on the Communicative Approach, both content and language teacher should work hand-to-hand so as to provide students with the necessary tools for being successful in real communication activities. From the research, it is concluded that although most students agree that this kind of teaching is positive and beneficial for them, they do not feel comfortable with it because they are not used to exert the English language as a means for communication.

### 3.3.3. The role of the teacher (learning unit and research project)

One of the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching is that “the teacher acts as a facilitator in setting up communication activities and as an advisor during the activities” (Larsen-Freeman, D. and Anderson, M 2011:121). In this sense, whenever a discussion or a problem to be solved was proposed in class, I asked students to work cooperatively in groups, being them the responsible for building their own knowledge though I helped them when it was required. I gave them the context and they had to decide on what to say but also on how to say it, depending on the particular situation – that has to do with the development of the communicative subcompetences as proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), which are the linguistic, pragmatic, strategic and discursive. That way of approaching the language classrooms also allowed students to be aware of their current situation and monitor their own process of learning since they were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and therefore be capable of improving or recovering them. For doing that, I always started my lessons with a warm-up activity so as to remember what we had done in the previous lessons and then check whether they had internalized the contents or if, by contrast, they had to be dealt with again for better understanding. It was done through games (lesson plan 2), oral discussions (lesson plans 4 and 5) or by written exercises, such as the one-minute-paper in lesson plan 3; and I always gave them feedback so as to know which aspects needed to be developed in greater depth.

For carrying out our research project, my classmate and I had the opportunity to attend to several Biology lessons taught in English. It was quite interesting to check that all the strategies and theory that I had learnt in the module *Recursos Didácticos para la Enseñanza de una Materia en Lengua Extranjera (Inglés)*, were being brought to practice in such an easy way. First of all, the teacher’s language was very easy to understand because she adapted it to the students’ current level and so they had few problems to follow her. Second, as they were studying the digestive system and students already knew some of the vocabulary in Spanish, the teacher did not tell them the vocabulary but she prepared matching activities in which learners had to identify the different parts and steps of the digestive process in a picture. She also used mind maps and very schematic summaries for students to understand the main ideas and then, develop them through language. These lessons were mainly based on the applying of the so called IRF-pattern, according to which the teacher displays a question (Initiation move) that is followed by the response (R) of a student and then followed again by the teacher’s feedback (F). This is the typical pattern of interaction within a class. However, there are sometimes in which contents are totally new or too difficult to understand and interaction with students is not enough to ensure acquisition of knowledge. In those cases, explicit instruction is needed to avoid students getting lost and feeling demotivated. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that sometimes it is not enough to let students interact and construct knowledge but explicit instruction is necessary to offer the correct values, though without ignoring interaction. In conclusion, it is the teacher’s role to establish interaction with the whole group but also to secure the whole group’s understanding of contents. (Dalton-Puffer, 2007).

I learnt a lot from these lessons, since I find this way of teaching very useful and as an alternative to the current situation of the educational system, especially as regards foreign languages. It is a way of learning in context and, what is more important, to construct knowledge *through* language instead of *about* language. For my learning unit I used some of these strategies learnt in the module *Recursos Didácticos para la Enseñanza de una Materia en Lengua Extranjera (Inglés)*, such as the use of mind maps, of elastic sentences (to give students the sentence beginnings for them to write the corresponding endings), or to make questions for them to discuss and guess the answers.

Another important aspect that I observed whereas I was doing the research and that I applied in the implementation of my learning unit as well, was the management of L1 and L2. Although we are supposed to use the target language and to ensure communication in that target language, it has also been pointed out that it is the teacher's role to ensure the whole group's understanding and internalization of contents. Thus, it is sometimes necessary to use the L1 to clarify ideas; as it was explained during a talk given by an AICLE teacher in our module about CLIL, the best alternative to this problem is to communicate "*as much as possible in the target language, and as much as necessary in the mother tongue*".

#### **3.3.4. Role plays**

Role plays are very useful techniques for Communicative Language Teaching, since they allow students to use the language in different social contexts and for specific purposes. According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011: 128),

*"role plays can be set up so that they are very structured (the teacher tells the students who they are and what they should say) or in a less structured way (the teacher tells the students who they are, what the situation is, and what they are talking about, but the students determine what they will say)".*

I consider that they are essential to develop students' communicative competence, since apart from being enjoyable activities they can lead to develop students' conversational skills and discursive strategies and to bring to practice their knowledge of vocabulary. However, they can be difficult or unnatural tasks if students lack the required language or any background information. That is why the teacher should be aware of each student's actual knowledge so as to help them by giving key words or structures when it is necessary.

On the one hand, for my learning unit I prepared different role play cards in which students were told who they were, what the situation was and what they had to talk about, but they had to create the dialogues according to their knowledge as well as the vocabulary and the structures we had dealt with in the previous lessons. Thus, it was their choice to choose what they were going to say and what kind of language should they use, according to the given situation.

On the other hand, for the module *La comunicación oral en lengua inglesa* we were asked to plan a series of activities for the teaching of any suprasegmental feature. Thus, we had to design an oral activity for practicing it, following the steps proposed by Celce and Murcia (1996) and therefore including an example of *guided practice* –which focused on meaning, grammar, and communication though in a controlled way; and another example of *communicative practice* –focusing on meaning but not controlled anymore. Accordingly, my lesson plan contained two different role plays: one in which students were given the role, the context and the structures to be used (guided practice) and the second one, in which they were just given their role and the situation, and they had to apply their knowledge and adjust the language to the corresponding social context. (See Appendix 3) This kind of activities allow students to practice a concrete item at the same time they gain confidence in using the target language, since they learn to communicate in a gradual and progressive way.

### 3.3.5 Feedback and assessment

The methodology that I established in my learning unit aimed at *providing immediate and constructive feedback as well as individual attention*. It has been noted at the beginning of this section that two principles for effective teaching are to track students' progress and to celebrate success. In this sense, feedback constitutes a turning point in making students aware of their current situation as well as to encourage them to learn more. It could be defined as “the information given to the students about how good or bad they are doing so as to help them during the learning process”.

There are a lot of strategies that can be used to correct students' errors (Thornbury, 1999), and we should choose the most appropriate ones for each kind of activity and always keeping in mind that the aim is to help the student and encourage him or her to learn. Thus, when I was implementing my learning unit I always tried to avoid negative feedback such as *no, this is not correct* or directly repair students' answers by interrupting them. By contrast, once they had finished their speech I asked them for clarification, replayed their utterance up to the point where the error occurred for them to notice it and repair it, or simply I used the error to explain an spontaneous structure. On the other hand, if I had to correct the errors from a written exercise I gave them the results with the corresponding explanations and I wrote the most common errors in the blackboard to be corrected and reflected on as a whole class activity.

As regards evaluation and assessment, different teachers have taught us throughout the master that it has to be formative and that it has to pay attention not only to the students' results but also to the process of both teaching and learning. Therefore, assessment for my learning unit was designed to check that the learning objectives were being achieved along the process and which aspects had to be modified or changed so as to improve the teaching and learning process. For doing this, I considered different procedures (warm-up activities, one-minute-paper...) and I gave more prominence to the everyday work and effort than to the results on the final exam. Finally, I passed a survey for the students to give their opinions about the activities that had been implemented and the teaching process in general.

### 3.4. Cooperative Learning

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*“When working cooperatively, students of all grades and content areas achieve more academically, acquire social skills, improve social relations including cross-race relations, feel better about themselves, and like school more”. (Spencer Kagan, 1998)*

When talking about cooperative learning it is very important to differentiate it from team work. On the one hand, group work does not pay attention to social skills and it generally focus on individual performance only, without taking into account if the other members of the group learn or not. However, cooperative learning involves working in small teams with students from different levels of ability, in which everyone in the group is responsible for the group's success or failure. It is not only a matter of learning, but also of helping others to learn. That is why its main principles are: Positive Interdependence, Individual Responsibility, Equal Participation and Simultaneous Interaction. (Kagan, 2001).

Once the difference between group work and cooperative learning has been established, it can be seen that the use of cooperative learning in the classrooms is a good alternative, especially in learner-centered approaches, which ultimately aim at promoting students' success and achievement. During the second semester, we have learnt different techniques to create groups as well as examples of activities to promote cooperative learning, and therefore, I have tried to apply some of them in my learning unit. For instance, I designed a cooperative reading in which each group had a paragraph from a text and had to do an exercise on it. Then, each member of the group would meet a person from the other groups so as to organise the different paragraphs and complete the whole text. Once they had explained each other their own piece of information, they had to come back to the original groups and check that everyone had reached the same conclusions or, if not, discuss the different possibilities and finally come to an agreement. At the end, I gave them the whole text with some questions they should have discussed before and then, check that everyone had achieved the goals of the exercise –See Appendix 1 (lesson plan 1).

I think that it was a very good exercise because it required the involvement of every student, since each of them had to collaborate and understand what they were talking about, to be able to communicate it to other classmates. Besides, those students who felt unconfident to speak in front of the class were engaged in the activity because they were working in small groups and felt less embarrassed. I am very shy and I usually feel reluctant to share my ideas in class or to speak in front of everyone, but with this kind of activities I have realized that there is no reason for being shy because you can learn from the others at the same time that they can learn something from you.

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#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

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Throughout this dissertation I have tried to show the benefits of applying the Communicative Approach as opposed to the traditional methods and how it was brought to practice during my teaching placement. I think that I have acquired a lot of competences all through this master degree and one of them has been to realize the precarious situation that the educational system in our country is experiencing nowadays.

It may seem a bit paradoxical –however– the fact that in spite of my reluctant position towards the formal teaching of grammar I do like it in fact, and I find it very entertaining. But I like it because I have always been very fond of analysing language forms since my years in the secondary school, when I was taught to analyse and decline Latin and Greek. I started studying English when I was nine years old and since the very first day of my experience with the English language all I have been taught has been the grammatical rules and the possible uses of one tense or another. However, I was never asked to communicate anything or doing an oral exercise until the second year of my English Studies degree, which was quite disappointing for me since I could realize that I was unable to speak a language that I had been learning for almost ten years. Therefore, I started considering the possibility of abandon my English studies and apply for the Hispanic ones instead, where I would have had no problems regarding the language. But I finally decided to stay there and improve myself by studying and practicing on my own. Now that I have had the possibility to reflect about that and to see the benefits of another way of teaching, I do not want to reproduce the traditional methods and I only wish I would have been taught English like I pretend to do in the future.

Another negative aspect of the educational system nowadays is that it seems to have experienced a shift as regards families and teachers' implications and roles. Parents are supposed to educate children at home and to inculcate them a series of social values and behaviour rules whereas teachers will pass on knowledge and help them thinking and develop their cognitive abilities. Nevertheless, it is a shame that in many occasions nowadays it is the other way round: teachers have to establish behaviour rules at school and parents pay for private or personal education for their children because they do not pay attention in class.

In this sense, I cannot avoid feeling disgusted at this situation and reinforce my will of being a good and effective teacher. But unfortunately, as I have said at the very beginning of this dissertation, I still have too much to learn and a long way to go.

As regards the implementation of my learning unit, I tried to apply all the knowledge I had acquired during the master degree and I tried to do my best to achieve it. However, I know that there are a lot of aspects to be improved that I will have to consider for a future. For instance, I have to learn to control timing and manage time-on-task, since in many occasions I gave my students too much time for doing the activities and therefore they started bothering, or my lessons became too monotonous other times.

On the other hand, maybe I should have paid more attention to multiple intelligences in my classroom. I have already stated that in my class there were two boys who refused to do anything and so I prepared them different activities for them to be entertained and avoid they spend the English hours sleeping in class. As they told me that they liked painting and drawing I asked them to draw a picture of someone famous so that any of their classmates could describe the picture later on – since we were dealing with adjectives for describing people. At the end of my teaching placement I gave them a survey to evaluate me and they told me that they had felt integrated in the classroom and that I had been very respectful with them. However, there was also a girl who did not follow the instructions very well and although I explained her everything in detail and I encouraged her to participate in the activities, she did not succeed and progress as I would have liked. Therefore, for future experiences I will try to pay more attention to these details.

As a final conclusion to the implementation of my learning unit, I would like to state that I am very happy with the results of my teaching practice because even though my activities were not anything special, they could have been much more creative and innovative, my students liked them very much and felt very motivated just because they were doing something different from the textbook and they did not feel like being taught since they were asked to speak and play games all the time. Besides, I tried to make them realize that learning is not only a matter of memorizing anything and having a grade but –as I learnt from a teacher when I was in the secondary school– *“life is not only what is on exam”*.

## 5. REFERENCES

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