

# Developing Speaking Skills through Project-Based Learning<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This is a public school in the urban area of Santiago. The subject of this case study is project based learning with a communicative language teaching approach. The students are in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The learning objective was to develop speaking skills in students through project work. The project was centered on a driving question (What is a Hero?) that allowed them to work autonomously and with creativity. The duration of the project was three weeks. Working in pairs, students had to create a 2 -4 minute dialogue in which they interviewed a hero of their own choice. By the end of the project students were able to practice their speaking skills while doing different activities that were connected to the final outcome. The students are able to produce the language but they still need to work on their accuracy, fluency and pronunciation.

**Key Words:** Speaking skills – Project Based Learning – Communicative Language Teaching

## Introduction

What does it mean to teach English in Chile? A lot of things come into play when teaching English as a second language. Before we go into the intricacies of teaching English in Chile, we must also mention the importance of English as a language of international communication. It is helpful to know English in case you need to communicate in the language for social interaction and when you travel to other countries. It is also a good and positive to know English because it can be useful when pursuing higher education or going into the world of business.

First of all, it is important to remember the sociocultural and educational aspects of teaching English in Chile. Keeping in mind the context of the Chilean classroom is a must. In 1998 the Ministry of Education worked on a national curriculum reform, in which the emphasis was on receptive skills (reading and listening), giving less time to work on productive skills (speaking and writing). This was heavily criticized by experts and teachers. In 2014, the Ministry of Education published a document in which they stated that they wanted to work on integrating Chilean culture and context in the language acquisition of English, and they came up with a new student book, called *Go for Chile*.

In 2003 the Ministry of Education launched the English Open Doors Program. This program aims to work on “improving national economic competitiveness and promoting equity by extending English language learning to all students in publicly funded schools” (British Council, 2015, pag. 20) This program also covers higher education in Chile.

We must talk about English teaching in public education because this case study deals with public school students. The British Council (2015) mentions that there is no real difference between public and private schools when it comes to language learning. The same study mentions that large classes, teacher training and long hours of work usually affect English language learning in public schools. This is not the case for the present study. This school may be considered an “exception to the rule” given that its students have had good results in the English SIMCE evaluation. The majority of the students in the class can communicate in the language with different levels of accuracy and fluency. It is very important to

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develop all four skills in language acquisition (reading – listening – writing – speaking) but in this particular project we will focus on developing speaking skills through Project Based Learning.

### **School Diagnosis**

The school in question is a public school, founded on June 8th 1993. It is known as being one of the “good” public schools in the city of Santiago. The fact that it depends on one of the capital’s richest districts helps the school management in terms of how money and resources are used to make it better. It has been part of the shared funding program since 1994. The school subscribed gradually into the full school day system (JECN). The enrollment fee is between 1,000 and 10,000 pesos and monthly payment per student is between 10,000 and 25,000 pesos. The school gives out 85 scholarships to students.

### School Information

The school currently has 1389 students, with an average of 32 students per class. It teaches primary and secondary scientific humanistic education. There was no way of knowing the average income of the school’s families, but the assistant of the school director mentioned that they were mostly middle and upper middle class. The total number of hours dedicated to English teaching per week is between 5 and 7 hours and the English department has 8 teachers. When we asked about the school’s plans and programs for English class nobody knew for sure what to answer, including the head of the pedagogical technical unit. The school used to have their own plans and programs, but they don’t anymore. Still, when we asked about the old documents nobody was able to give correct information about them. It seems like they don’t exist anymore. When asked about it, teachers answered that they don’t use their own plans and programs anymore (since 2015) and that the English department uses the Ministry’s documents to develop their work.

The following numbers show the percentage (%) of students who received their certification in the English language after the SIMCE test.

2010	48%
2012	74%
2014	96,4%

It is important to mention that this school in particular ranked in 3rd place amongst public schools in 2010 at a national level and that the number of certified students between the first and the last year the SIMCE test was taken has increased significantly.

The school has a lot of institutional projects as part of its educational project. Some of them include class training for the national selection test (PSU), affectivity and sexuality program, an environmental program and an integration program. The assistant of the school principal said that “one of our school’s characteristics is the different sociocultural level in the families of our students (27 May 2016) and that “our students are highly compromised with their education and their school...our integration program has been a success because it leads to accepting diversity between our students” (27 May 2016)

## School Culture

The educational project mentions in their vision that “the school will achieve academic excellence by giving an advanced education in a changing and globalized world, paying attention to diversity and encouraging individual capacities, creating awareness and respect for the environment and advocating for a healthy life” (Educational Project, 2014, pag.5) and their mission states that “public school X will favour respect, responsibility and love of truth in interactive work amongst the community’s actors. In the same way, it will tend to the integral development of the student, enabling the use of all their capacities and potentialities with the purpose of forming students that are committed to their learning process and their surroundings so that they can act in a globalized world” (Educational Project, 2014, pag. 5)

The school has a comprehensive set of rules and stipulations when it comes to student’s behavior. There is also a list of sanctions if these rules are not accomplished. The school’s Community Handbook states that “the school community has the right to co-live in a respectful environment, with the students’ family and the school itself to resolve any conflict. The goal of the school’s Community Handbook rules is to be of help and a guide in the formation of students and it aims to achieve responsible liberty in the students, to help harmonic living in the community and thus help to facilitate the teaching process” (School Community Handbook, 2014, pag.1) The school’s educational project promotes respect, responsibility and truth as their core values.

The assistant of the school principal mentions that the school’s teachers “have a high level of commitment to the school and to their students, they are aligned to the school’s educational project and they are willing to participate in school activities” (27 May 2016). She also mentions that one of their goals is to give integral formation to their students and that is why they have a variety of extracurricular activities like clubs, sports, arts, etc.

## The 8th grade A

The 8th grade A has 35 students. They have 6 hours of English during the week. They have been having English lessons since they were in 1st grade. There is one student who repeated this grade and 5 students have ADHD (attention deficit disorder). Students live in the surrounding areas of the school, like Las Condes, Vitacura and Lo Barnechea (with the exception of 3 of them, who live in Puente Alto, Huechuraba and Santiago) which could possibly mean there is a high chance their families are well educated and have good social and cultural capital. For most of the class, the teacher leads the work by using the project data and the book *English in Mind*, doing fill in the gap exercises and other activities included there. Students work well during the class. The teacher speaks English during 85% of the class. Students seem to understand the language, and the teacher says their good level of understanding English is a reflection of the SIMCE results. Some students are less shy than others and speak in English when it is needed, while other choose to reply in Spanish to questions made in English by the teacher. Most of them seem engaged in class and are eager to participate. The teacher says neither she nor the English department has a particular method when teaching English and that she uses the English in Mind book for planning. She also mentioned that all the teachers in the school plan their lessons in the same manner, using the same planning template given to them by the head of the pedagogical technical unit. This includes all other disciplines that are taught in school (history, maths, science, etc)

A student survey was conducted asking them what they liked the most about the English class. Most of them answered that the teacher and her way of teaching were what they liked the most, saying that her use of English and her pronunciation helped in their own learning. They also said that they liked the “didactics” used by the teacher. Most of them acknowledged English as something useful in their lives. A second survey showed that the skill they like the most is speaking and the one they like the least is writing.

The results from the second survey also revealed that when the teacher asks a question, students like to prove that they know the answers. Results also revealed that students get easily distracted during class. Other interesting results from the 2nd survey showed that 63, 3% of the students agree that they like English as a second language, while 57, 6% like to speak it. It is interesting to know that 68, 8% of the students of English as a useful skill for their future.

While English lessons are taught without much inconvenience, it is also noticed that all of the classes have been the same in their conducting. The teacher arrives, calls to order and asks students to open their books. There is little time to do anything else, this is because their lessons from Monday – Wednesday are only 45 minutes long. The only day they have a longer class is on Friday. During April, students worked on a public speaking, in which they had to do a 3 minute presentation about a topic they liked. Students seemed eager to show the class the things they liked, and the work they prepared in images to support their speaking. These results indicated that it would be a good idea to prepare something for them in which they developed their speaking skills, seeing that they understand the language and like to practice it but barely have opportunities to do so. They mostly work on grammar in context. Knowing and learning grammar is an important part of the language, but the previous investigative work shows that this class in particular needs to practice their speaking skills and work on pronunciation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

English has become an international language of communication in our globalized and modern world. We are constantly exposed to English on mass communications and marketing. English has also become an important tool to know and master, and it is taught and learned in Chilean schools. This can be an asset for the students’ futures, something they can put into good use when they go on to higher education, apply for a professional job or when they travel and meet new people. This is why being able to communicate in English is key. Developing speaking skills is relevant because you communicate and interact with people on a daily basis. If you are able to do this in English, then a whole world of opportunities becomes available. The main goal of this intervention is that students develop speaking skills, and that they realize they can express themselves freely if they practice it regularly. Harmer (2007) mentions three reasons to teach speaking: On the one hand, it gives an opportunity to practice, on the other hand you can give feedback to students, and moreover students can work with different elements of language they know. He also states that “good speaking activities can and should be extremely engaging for students. If they are all participating fully – and if the teacher has set up the activity properly and can then give sympathetic and useful feedback – they will get tremendous satisfaction from it” (Harmer, 2007, pag.123) However, it is also important to pay attention to the fact that speaking is just one aspect of oral communication. Goh (2007) says that just producing the language isn’t enough for language acquisition and that “feedback must be present to indicate to the learner that what was said

has not been clearly understood, leading to the need for negotiation of meaning between speakers and listeners” (Goh, 2007, pag.2 )

8<sup>th</sup> graders in this class in particular are unique students and have their own unique demands in terms of learning English as a second language. The results of the diagnosis made in this class revealed that these students, as a group, understand English and instructions given in the target language. The results also showed that they are willing to participate and evidence their knowledge; they want to practice their speaking skills. Students work with the book *English in Mind* on a daily basis. They like it and work well with it, but it is focused on grammar. Keeping in mind the characteristics of this particular group of students, we have chosen to work with a project- based methodology in this intervention, within a communicative language approach to develop speaking skills. This article will give an insight into the work done with students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade A during the course of three weeks.

Brown (2005) mentions that “The communicative language approach seeks to explore “pedagogical means for “real life” communication in the classroom...we are trying to get our learners to develop linguistic fluency” (Brown, 2005, pag 42). On the other hand, we also have Richards (2006) who mentions that with communicative language teaching “learners learn a language through the process of communicating in it, and that communication that is meaningful to the learner provides a better opportunity for learning than through a grammar based approach”. While the theoretical aspects of Communicative Language Teaching are much more contrived and would need more in-depth analysis, we will just stick to the characteristics of this approach. Brown (2015) mentions that fluency and accuracy are complementary principles when it comes to a communicative approach, but that sometimes fluency can seem more important to learners. He also says that “the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator and guide, not an all knowing bestower of knowledge. Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others” (Brown, 2015, pag. 43). Achieving fluency in communicative language teaching is one of the driving principles of the method, but we must not forget accuracy. Fluency and accuracy often come hand in hand. Richards (2006) mentions that when working on fluency, the focus is on getting the message across to a potential listener, relying on different communicative strategies and the use of vocabulary. This leaves little room to practice pronunciation and grammar. Richards indicates that “fluency work thus requires extra attention on the part of the teacher in terms of preparing students for a fluency task, or follow up activities that provide feedback on language use” (Richards, 2006, pag. 9) This shows that even if achieving fluency is crucial in language acquisition, we must not forget accuracy. These are aspects that we want to incorporate into our daily practices in order to make students actually use what they are learning and get them to communicate.

A second relevant concept to consider is Project-Based Learning<sup>2</sup>. So, why decide to work with project-based learning with these students in particular? The answer is because they are highly motivated and can manage work with a challenging question. Jones, Rasmussen and Moffit (1997) define project-based learning as “complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, which involve students in design, problem solving, decision making, or investigative activities; give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations.” The purpose of the project was to engage students with a challenging, interesting question to think about and to guide their work, and to that effect, the subject of thinking and talking

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<sup>2</sup> From now referred to as PBL

about heroes is timeless. All this work is encased in the intervention's goal. By the end of three weeks students were expected to conduct an oral presentation in which they – in pairs - present and interview a hero of their own choice.

While working with PBL is a good way to challenge students, it also has restrictions. Haines (1989) mentions that it is important that teachers keep in mind both the problems and benefits of working with projects. The author mentions that students should be mature enough to work on their own. Haines also mentions that the approach the teacher takes when giving instructions and explaining activities is very important, as it should be non-directive and support participation and motivation. He also says that the teacher should be able to assess students' limitations when necessary. Svobodova (2010) names some of the mistakes teachers working with PBL often make. These include choosing demanding themes that the students are not familiar with and giving them goals that are hard to reach in the given time; underestimating students' ability to work in groups and projects that are too long or too short.

It is important to note that PBL proposes five guidelines to conduct the project; these are centrality, a driving question, constructive investigation, autonomy and realism. One of the most valuable aspects considered in the intervention is the part where students work with autonomy; this means that the project is "student driven to some significant degree. PBL projects are not, in the main, teacher-led, scripted, or packaged. PBL projects do not end up at a predetermined outcome or take predetermined paths. PBL projects incorporate a good deal more student autonomy, choice, unsupervised work time, and responsibility than traditional instruction and traditional projects (Thomas, 2000, pag. 4). This meant that students were able to pick their own heroes from real life, comic books, TV shows and anti-heroes.

Aside from the expected final outcome of the intervention, it was expected that, according to project-based learning, students worked in decision making and problem solving regarding what their investigation work was about, being able to coordinate their teammate's opinions and ideas into one that worked for the final project and interview.

### **Description of the Unit**

Before sitting down to plan the intervention, we had to think about the necessities and demands of the 8th grade A. This is why it was necessary to ask students what they thought about their English class and the different activities they usually did, in order to identify what they needed to work on. Direct observation and daily interaction with the students during their lesson was another way to get an idea of what learning necessity or challenge this class needed. It was suggested that the intervention planning was done in similar fashion to the official teacher of the class. However, the planning did include a learning objective taken from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade National Study Programme, linked to the class objective and the overall aim of the project.

As previously mentioned in the school diagnosis, students answered two different surveys. One of the questions in the first survey was "what do you like most about the English class?" while the second survey asked students to agree or disagree with statements like "I feel comfortable talking in English", "I like working with the book English in Mind", "I understand instructions in English", etc. The second survey also asked students which of the 4 skills they would like to practice more and which of the skills they didn't like working on. The results of the survey showed that the majority of the students wanted to work on and develop their speaking skills. Results also showed that reading was the skill they liked the

least. Keeping the necessities of the students and the survey answers in mind, the decision was made to work on the students' speaking skills, and to do so through PBL. This also presented a challenge for the students, as it took them out of the routine of how their everyday class was conducted.

The name of the unit was Heroes. The central question of the project was "What is a Hero?" The name was decided because of a unit of the book *English in Mind*, which was the unit the students would have worked on if they have followed their teacher's planning. This unit presented a story of a man who had saved a woman from falling on the subway tracks in New York City. The teacher didn't use the national curriculum to plan her lessons, and on her suggestion, we decided to plan our unit following the book as well. In it, students had to work in pairs and choose someone they considered a hero, who could be from real life or fictional. They could also choose an antihero if they wanted to do so. By the end of the intervention, they had to conduct a 2 -4 minute interview of the hero they chose. This was also their evaluation. It is important to note that each lesson had a distinct class objective to work with. This was done in order to help students work on their project. The official teacher did not usually write down a class objective.

Before students started working on the unit, they were told what was expected from them and how the work was going to be done. This included telling them that they were expected to be seated with their work partner when the teacher arrived and to talk in English when working in pairs. They were also told that one of the project lessons would be in the computer laboratory so they could look up information on their hero, using a guideline given by the teacher. Students were informed that they were going to do a self-evaluation by the end of the project that would be part of their final grade. All specific dates were shown and explained before starting the project work. The unit included a grammar point: the first conditional. We also worked on adjectives to describe a person and adjectives to describe feelings.

The intervention was planned accordingly, and each class had a comprehensible and direct objective, which was linked to the overall goal of the intervention itself. This meant that each class had a different activity that would help students work on their final project. Students listened to hero's stories, and they also read, wrote and talked about heroes, sharing opinions about what made someone worthy of admiration. The unit consisted of 21 pedagogical hours (divided into three 45 minutes lessons and one 135 minutes lesson a week) According to the unit planning, each lesson had 3 stages:

**Stage 1 (pre):** Class routine. The teacher greeted students, and wrote down date and class objective. A motivation video related to the subject was shown on certain days. After the video, the teacher asked students what they thought about it and to share their experiences or opinions about what they saw. Then, the teacher worked on engaging the students in the subject and "activating" their knowledge. Finally, the teacher proceeded to tell students what they would work on that day.

**Stage 2 (during):** The teacher showed a PowerPoint presentation that was connected to the work students had to do for their oral interview. For example, the teacher showed adjectives to describe a hero (usually someone well known, like Nelson Mandela or Malala) and asked students to think about their own hero and write sentences describing them. Students proceeded to work on this with their work partner while the teacher monitored their work and answered work related questions.

**Stage 3 (post):** The teacher asked students to share their answers. The teacher also asked students what they had done that day and to give examples. Finally, the teacher told students what they would do the next class and said goodbye.

There is an example of a lesson plan presented below this paragraph. This shows the duration of the class, both the teacher’s and the students’ resources, the learning objective and the class objective, a description of the general activities done by the teacher, the evaluation format for that class and the three stages described previously.

Class/Week	Learning Objective	Resources	Activities	Evaluation
1/1 45 min 1 pedagogical hour	<p><b>OA15</b></p> <p>Writing to inform, express opinions and narrate, using: learned words, phrases and structures of common use. Learned connectors. Correct spelling of majority of learned words of common use. Correct punctuation.</p>	<p><b>Teacher</b></p> <p>PPT What is A Hero (examples, images, definitions) Computer Projector Sound speaker</p> <p><b>Students</b></p> <p>Notebook Mini biographies worksheet</p>	<p>Teacher gives information about unit theme, how the work will be conducted (activities) and what it aims to achieve. Students’ are encouraged to work on something interesting, with inquisitive questions. The driving question of the project is “What is a Hero” which includes descriptions, etc.</p> <p><b>r</b> Class Routine: Greeting, date, class objective, theme. Method of working is explained and the outcome expected. Video “What is a Hero?” Teacher tells students they can choose between real life heroes, fictional heroes or antiheroes. 5 minutes to form teams of two.</p> <p><b>W</b> PPT presentation (What is a Hero?) <b>h</b> Teacher hands out mini biographies worksheet. <b>i</b> Work in pairs: Discussion. Who do you think is a hero? Why? <b>e</b> Teacher assesses students’ work, answers questions about vocabulary and other expressions. Students’ write 3 names of people they think are heroes and give reasons why they like them.</p> <p><b>P</b> Students’ share information and opinions about what they have discussed. Examples. <b>o</b> Teacher gives feedback and tells students what they will be doing the next day. <b>s</b> Closing routine: Teacher asks about the work of the day and if the class objective was met. <b>t</b></p>	Assessment by direct observation
	<p><b>Class Objective</b></p> <p>By the end of this class I will write down 3 names of people I think are heroes and 3 reasons why I like them</p>			

## **Teaching Resources**

The resources used in this intervention were in direct link with the planning of the unit and the theme the project was focused on. It was important to engage students in the project and to promote motivation and to encourage students to share their opinion, given the theme of the intervention (Heroes). For this reason, a motivational video was shown at the beginning of some lessons. The videos were presented as a form of introduction to that particular class and were linked to the class objective. They were all related to the theme of the unit, but in different ways. One of them told the story of Rosa Parks with cartoons, while another video told the story of a man going on his everyday life while helping people, sort of a real life hero. Students also watched a video that showed the different stages in a hero's journey according to literature and pop culture. On the first day of the intervention, the teacher handed out a worksheet that included 4 mini biographies of well-known world heroes –including a Chilean woman - in hopes that one of the teams picked one of them. This didn't happen.

Students worked on 2 different listening activities. On the first one, students had to listen to the real life story of a fisherman boat caught in a storm, where one of the fishermen saved another man in the crew. Then they had to complete a paragraph from the story with words from a word bank. The second listening activity was listening to the song "Holding out for a hero" by singer Bonnie Tyler, and fill in the blanks with the missing words. They enjoyed this activity a lot because they knew the song. Another activity they responded very well to was one where they had to think about heroes in different categories (sports hero, literary hero, family hero, national hero, etc) and shared their opinions with their project partner.

## **Evaluation**

The project finished with the unit evaluation. Two weeks before the date, students were given a guideline that mentioned what the teacher was going to look for at the moment of the oral presentation. Some of these stipulations were that the oral interview had to be between 2 -4 minutes long, that students needed to know their hero's history and facts, that they had to include a description of their hero using personality adjectives, the dialogue had to include at least two lines of dialogue using the first conditional, etc. Students were also encouraged to work on their creativity and were told they would receive extra points if they dressed up as their hero or presented their information in a creative way. This could be anything from wearing a costume or bringing a microphone. Likewise, they had to present a poster with images and information about their hero. The teacher told them that the poster was only a visual support for their presentation and that they would not be evaluated on this aspect.

Students were also asked to do a self-evaluation, in which they had to agree or disagree on statements about the work they did during the three weeks of intervention. They were asked to approach this with the level of seriousness and maturity needed.

## **Learning Results**

The students of the 8th grade A are used to work in one way during their English lessons. This project work presented them with a new way of learning and developing their language skills. While the final evaluation of the unit – the interview – had good results for most of the class (just one team had a bad grade, this because they didn't work and complete the stages of the project) it was clear that the

students were not used to this kind of work. In any case, students seemed a little bit confused when presented with the instructions of what they were expected to do and they had a lot of questions.

Given that the intervention's learning objective was to develop speaking skills, students were actively encouraged to speak English when working with their partner. This was not always done, but monitoring from the teacher helped them to do so. By the end of the first week, students understood that what they were doing was connected to the final part of the intervention, which was the oral interview. If they answered in Spanish, they were told to do it in English. They also understood this was the reason we worked with a different objective each class.

Thomas (2000) mentions that when working with PBL the project becomes the central teaching strategy and that students learn the discipline and its concepts via working in the project. This relates to the centrality aspect in PBL. It also relates to the final goal of the intervention.

The intervention had a grammar point that was taught in context. The grammar point was the first conditional. Students learned the first conditional while talking about their heroes and what they would do if they met them. They had to include 2 phrases using the first conditional in their final interview. Descriptive adjectives were also taught in context and used to describe their hero. Adjectives of feeling were taught so students could talk about how they felt when they met this person. This helped students to expand their vocabulary knowledge.

Overall, students worked with a purpose once they knew who they were going to interview. There were a couple of teams who didn't complete their daily tasks but quickly caught up with the work and there were other teams who didn't work very much. Coincidentally or not, these were students who have an unsatisfactory performance in the language and who don't participate in class actively and only do so when asked by the teacher. This could also be because they are shy and afraid to speak in public. This shows that while one way of learning is good for a particular student, it may not be the same for another.

As mentioned in our theoretical framework – and following the ideas of Richards and Brown - fluency and accuracy in communicative language teaching are very important and they go hand in hand. There can't be one without the other. Students in this class have good speaking skills and can communicate in the language, but they still need to work on their accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. The teacher monitored these aspects and gave them feedback on it. Pronunciation of words was one of the students' concerns according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> survey.

After the intervention was finished, the teacher did one last survey. The aim of the survey was to ask students if they felt that they had worked on developing their speaking skills while working on their Heroes project. More than half of the class answered this question positively. Some of the written answers to this question referred to the opportunity to improve their pronunciation, while some said that they were able to overcome their shyness when speaking in public. Students also appreciated the fact that they got to learn new words.

Another question gave students the option of voicing their opinion in relation to which aspect of the intervention they had liked the best. They could pick more than one choice. The answers to the question "what I liked most about the intervention was" included the following: the theme of the project; the

motivational videos; working in pairs; working with lesson objectives; putting my speaking skills to practice; the different activities and the evaluation format.

The results showed that what students liked the most was working in pairs, followed closely by the intervention subject and the evaluation format. Next in line were the motivational videos, the different activities we did in class, and practicing speaking skills. The fact that practicing speaking skills is so down on the list of preferences is surprising, given that more than half the class answered “yes” when asked if they felt they had put those skills to use. The option with less preference was working with class objectives. We could say that this is not a surprise. Their official teacher does not work with class objectives and students are not used to it.

### **Analysis of the intervention**

As we have mentioned before, the goal of the intervention was that students develop speaking skills through project based work. The intervention and unit were planned accordingly, thinking of their needs and how to find the best way to engage them in the process. We have also mentioned that the lessons had three stages (pre – while – post) and a lesson objective connected to the final presentation of the project.

In general, the lessons went well, but a few adjustments had to be done along the way. This mainly related to having to adjust to students’ timing and the amount of time each lesson had. Between waiting for the students to settle down, find their partner and sit down, 15 minutes had already passed. With 45 minutes lessons, the teacher had to adapt and modify activities in order to do all of them. In more than one occasion the “closing” part of the lesson had to be done very quickly, asking students for examples and what we did during that day.

Perhaps the biggest unsuspected outcome of the intervention was how students behaved when they had to pick the hero for their interview. It was expected that students choose international heroes like Malala or Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King. One of the guidelines of PBL is that students are allowed to have a voice in how they want to work or the subject they work on and that they work autonomously. Projects are student lead and students make their own decisions in regards to how they develop their project. This also allows them to explore their creativity. In this particular project, they had the option to choose whatever hero they wanted and, perhaps not surprisingly, all of them were fictional superheroes. Think of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman. It was either fictional superheroes or athletes like Alexis Sanchez and Tomás Gonzalez. Only three teams worked with other options: their heroes were Nelson Mandela, a Brazilian man who rescued stray dogs from the street and Aquiles, respectively.

Another problem faced during the intervention was the official teacher’s opinion and instructions. She was in the classroom during lessons, and she mostly kept to herself, but sometimes students would ask her questions about what they were going to be evaluated on, and she answered. Students would then be confused about what they had to do because the original instructions had been different. This created a sort of “she said this, you said that” that had to be resolved quickly and in a successful manner. The official teacher also helped the students a lot when they had to write down their questions and dialogue, sometimes even writing the dialogue and questions herself. This was done with students that are usually left behind in class because they don’t understand the language.

Svobodova (2010) mentions that one of the problems teachers are faced with when working with PBL is the extension of projects. We could say that the intervention was perhaps a little bit too long and that it would have worked better if it was shorter. This way, the activities done with students wouldn't have been so repetitive. Students wondered why they had to write 3 or 4 phrases per class (connected to the class objective) when they could do all that was asked of them in one week and a half instead of three. Keeping students active and engaged in their activities is a must.

Some students were not achieving daily goals. It was clear that not all of the students were writing the class objective and not all of them were doing what they were supposed to. Irresponsibility was also a problem. The teacher told the group that by the last class in the first week of the intervention they had to have an idea about what questions they were going to ask their hero. Not all students worked on this when it was the time to do so and a few days before the final oral presentation some students were still debating with their partner about what they were going to ask.

The original amount of pedagogical hours was 18, but the intervention ended up with a total of 21 pedagogical hours because it was interrupted by the September 18<sup>th</sup> holidays. The official teacher suggested that students needed time to practice and ask questions, so a whole 45 minute lesson was dedicated to that when they came back from their week off. When it was time to do the evaluation and listen to the students they were ready for it and eager to show the rest of the class what they had been working on.

Our last survey helped us know the students' opinion about the intervention. When asked about the methodology used by the teacher, they said that they liked working with class objectives because it helped understand what they were doing and what for. Some answers also said that it helped to organize their work. Some negative answers mentioned that working with class objectives was repetitive and boring. Nonetheless, students' perception of the unit was more positive than negative.

### **Self-Evaluation**

When the evaluation was over, I took some time to reflect on my performance. Throughout the three weeks I kept a record diary in which I wrote down what had happened in each class, once it was over. Overall, I would say I did well and that it was a good, positive experience. That being said, there are things that could have been better.

First, I should have used more time to explain how the project would work and what was expected from the students and be sure everyone was listening. It was clear that not all of the class was paying attention when I introduced the topic. I answered questions on the first day but I was still getting the same questions more than one week later. I would say that during each lesson I had the attention of more than 85% of students but it is very difficult to have all the class engaged in what it is happening in front of them, especially if the teacher is new. This is related to self-confidence. It is important that the teacher believes that what he or she is teaching is correct for that group of learners.

Second, sometimes I get confused about words in English that I already know or forget how to say them in English. It usually takes me a moment to reconsider myself and in that moment students can tell that I'm struggling to remember, and sometimes they laugh. In the last survey, a couple of students commented that I looked nervous, which I would say is true, but not all the time. I usually get nervous

when I feel pressured to answer quickly and when everyone is talking at the same time. With practice, I can manage this more effectively.

Third, I need to find a way for students to respect me. It's not that I had a problem with students being disrespectful, but when I arrived at the classroom in the morning they would take a lot of time to sit down and be quiet, and they would always ask if their official teacher was coming. I took this as them thinking that if their official teacher was there they would be on their best behavior and not acting in the same way with me. It could also mean that English class with their official teacher was more serious and meaningful. This could also be because they were not used to project work and this new way of developing their abilities. Sometimes I had to raise my voice and shout and I didn't want to be "the mean shouting teacher".

On a positive note, I would say that I'm good at monitoring students' work and answering questions and doubts they might have. This was also commented by students on the last survey. I also received good feedback from the official English teacher, who said that I was very enthusiastic and had a positive attitude in class and connected well with students.

As for professional learning, I would say that becoming this group's teacher for 3 weeks helped me realize that in order to be a teacher you have to become one and believe in that. Also that it is possible to conduct a group of learners if you have the initiative and patience for it. Having experiences as a learning teacher in two very different schools, it is important to say that the location and resources of a school can determine your experience as a teacher in either a positive or a negative way.

### **Improvement Plan**

For the intervention to be successful and an engaging activity for all students in the classroom it is important that all of them are clear in what the teacher expects them to do, and to be sure that all students are clear on this. When there is a group of students that is always participating and collaborating, the teacher should be aware of those students who do not participate or are very hesitant when answering questions and taking an active role during the class. This also relates to keeping in mind that not all students have the same way of learning: what works for one person, could not work for another. Different styles of learning should always be considered. Some students learn in a visual way – watching short videos, looking at images – and some learn in other ways – by listening to short recordings, songs – while others need to move and get up from their seats and be active. All of this needs to be taken into account to improve and better an English lesson.

Another aspect to improve would be the activities done during the lessons. English lessons could benefit from a more different variety of activities that helped students to work on the 4 different skills. During the intervention, the class objectives always asked that students write down something. It would be better if the activities connected to the class objective were more diverse and interesting for students to work on.

Lastly, students should always be reminded to talk in English during class, and this should be encouraged by the teacher at all times. Speaking is a productive skill and it is important that students produce what they are learning and that they practice whenever it is possible. They should talk not only about the work they are doing but also about everyday things, about their lives and the things they like, all of this in

order to learn how to communicate in the target language, and to be comfortable with it too. This could also help them to improve and expand their vocabulary and to feel more confident in what they are saying and sharing with the rest of the class.

## **Conclusions**

Working with students as a teacher with little experience is always a challenge. More of a challenge is working with students' that are used to a routine and a certain way of learning a language. Taking them out of their routine and introducing them to a new way of learning was a good way of proving one's worth as a new teacher who is just immersing in the world of education.

The decision to work with this class on a project presentation was in part decided because of the students' motivation and understanding of English. The intervention goal was that the students develop speaking skills and that they practice them. English teaching in Chile has changed and the focus is put on developing the four skills. All of them are important, but as we have said before, communication in the target language is a basic necessity. After three weeks of working on a project that helped students to focus on what the final outcome of the project was – doing an interview with their chosen hero - we can effectively say that the goal was met. Students were receptive to instructions given by the teacher and able to work with their partner in a creative way. Just as Goh (2007) mentions, speaking the language does not mean language acquisition, so these students still have a long way to go in terms of feeling comfortable enough with the language to have full conversations with another person and feel confident doing it. Overall, the intervention was successful, though not without problems. This was explained in previous segments of this analysis. Students in this class still have a lot of work to do in relation to achieving fluency and accuracy but they have good participation and motivation in English as a school subject. To achieve fluency and accuracy students need to practice and to talk in English whenever they can. As we also said before, fluency and accuracy cannot be achieved without the teacher's feedback so the teacher should always be available for students when they need it. Most of them are enthusiastic about the language and could reach their full potentiality as they grow older.

There are factors – both external and internal – that intervene when teaching something and affect how students learn. These are important things to keep in mind when it's time to move on to another school. Now that the intervention is over, the professional challenge as an educator is how to bring new ways of teaching into other schools. Working with Project-Based Learning is just one way of introducing students' to new ways of learning the language, even if they are not used to it. It is important that even though they go back to their usual way of learning, they know there are other ways too. Bringing a new method of teaching can be disruptive to students and teachers alike, but it is also incredibly rewarding, especially when students are welcoming and receptive to a teacher in training. Bringing in new ways of learning English to students that are often frustrated and who lack motivation can possibly put their expectations about the language in a new positive light.

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## **Appendix**

Encuesta N°2

Objetivo: Identificar percepción de clase de inglés por parte de alumnos

- I. Esta encuesta busca identificar cómo te sientes en clases de inglés y conocer tu opinión sobre diversos aspectos de ella. Por favor marca la opción que más te represente respecto de las afirmaciones que se hacen.

	<b>Muy de acuerdo</b>	<b>De acuerdo</b>	<b>Ni acuerdo ni desacuerdo</b>	<b>En desacuerdo</b>	<b>Muy en desacuerdo</b>
<b>Me gusta la clase de ingles</b>					
<b>Me interesa el inglés como 2do idioma</b>					
<b>Entiendo instrucciones con facilidad</b>					
<b>Me gustan las actividades realizadas en clases</b>					
<b>Me gusta trabajar con el libro</b>					
<b>Me es fácil hablar el idioma</b>					
<b>Me gusta hablar el idioma</b>					
<b>Quiero mejorar mi pronunciación</b>					
<b>Me gusta participar en clases</b>					
<b>El ritmo de la clase es adecuado</b>					
<b>Me gusta estudiar para el ramo</b>					
<b>Me gusta trabajar en grupo</b>					
<b>El inglés es una herramienta positiva para mi futuro</b>					
<b>Estoy conforme con mi desempeño en el ramo</b>					

**De las 4 habilidades que se desarrollan en la clase de inglés, la que más me gusta es**

- a) Hablar      b) Escuchar      c) Escribir      d) Leer

**De las 4 habilidades que se desarrollan en inglés, la que menos me gusta es**

- a) Hablar      b) Escuchar      c) Escribir      d) Leer

### **Cuando la profesora me hace una pregunta**

- a) Siento que es una oportunidad para aprender
- b) Me da miedo no saber la respuesta
- c) Me pongo nervioso
- d) Me gusta demostrar que se lo que se está preguntando

### **En el transcurso de la clase de inglés**

- a) Me da vergüenza que mis compañeros me escuchen hablar en inglés
- b) Siento que no estoy al nivel de mis compañeros
- c) Me cuesta entender instrucciones
- d) Me distraigo fácilmente

### **Encuesta Final**

**Por favor responde las siguientes preguntas. El objetivo de esta encuesta es conocer tu opinión acerca de la unidad de trabajo Heroes. Esta encuesta es anónima y solo será utilizada para los fines antes mencionados.**

1. Durante el mes que duró la intervención, ¿Sentiste que pudiste poner en práctica y mejorar tu comunicación oral en inglés? Fundamenta tu respuesta.
2. Respecto de la metodología utilizada (objetivo clase a clase y proyecto final) da tu opinión al respecto y fundaméntala. Menciona aspectos positivos y negativos.
3. ¿Crees que el trabajo realizado fue un desafío para ti? ¿En qué sentido? Fundamenta tu respuesta.
4. ¿Qué le dirías a la profesora sobre la intervención realizada? ¿Qué mencionarías como aspecto negativo y como aspecto positivo de la unidad revisada? Fundamenta tu respuesta.
5. Respecto de la unidad, marca la opción que más represente tu opinión.
6. Lo que más me gusta de la intervención realizada por la profesora fue
  - a) La temática del proyecto
  - b) Los videos motivacionales
  - c) Trabajar en duplas y sentarme con mi compañero de trabajo
  - d) Poner en práctica mi expresión oral
  - e) Trabajar con objetivo clase a clase
  - f) Las distintas actividades realizadas
  - g) El formato de evaluación (entrevista – presentación oral)