

Developing Oral Skill through Collaborative Learning and Teacher Monitoring for English Language Learners

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Abstract: This article is a proposal for English language teachers to focus slightly more on developing students' oral production in the English language. This is a concern that came up with the student teacher's observation and bibliography which support the idea that Chilean students cannot communicate in the second language, despite the years spent in learning the language at school. There is a natural development of the receptive skills, listening and reading; but writing and speaking are far from being easy to learn and to teach. Two strategies are proposed for this objective being accomplished. First strategy relates to collaborative learning and the way students support each other's learning; second strategy relates to teacher monitoring the class permanently, so the teacher can be aware of the students' weaknesses and progress, observing the individuals, peers or teams. Collaborative learning and teacher monitoring go together, and it is a natural way to design oral activities, making it easier for the teacher to observe the students' performance.

Key words: teacher monitoring, collaborative learning, oral skill.

Introduction

Results for English SIMCE, 2014² shows that, although students have English language subject from Primary School or before, they still cannot communicate in the language, not even in the receptive skills, which are the ones assessed in that standardized test. Hence, it could be stated they are even less prepared to communicate orally, what it is expected for learners nearly ending High School. There is a gap between productive and receptive skills, and the need for developing the oral production is imperative.

This weakness was also observed in the class where the implementation was carried out. Students expressed interest for speaking, but fear for it, at the same time, and that is just because they are not used to a speaking English lesson.

The learning challenge so, was to prepare and create the conditions for oral production. The planning was elaborated this way, and every lesson was intended to generate these conditions for students to speak. However, there were two strategies developed in order to accomplish this goal. The first one consisted on organizing the class to work individually, in pairs, and in teams, so they could support each other in self-confidence, discipline and learning; setting aside the fear of making mistakes in front of the whole class, but in small groups where confidence was somehow granted. The second strategy consisted on the teacher's permanent monitoring, so that students who usually did not work, could become aware that in any moment the teacher would ask and/or supervise their work, and they would have had done or in progress, and eventually do the task because they want to; and the strategy is not useful only for students but for the teacher who can notice if students are on task, or she/he can listen to correct errors, and correct privately; or even re-teaching what is not clear.

Both of these strategies are used to develop oral skill, which is a part of the English language teaching usually disregarded, because of lack of time, convenience or just because students are too many. The way to respond to this challenge is materialized in the planning for the intervention.

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² SIMCE, 2014 Unidad de Currículum y Evaluación, Ministerio de Educación, Santiago de Chile.

Theoretical Framework

Developing Oral Skills through Collaborative Learning and Teacher Monitoring for English Language Learners

The aim of speaking in a language context is to promote communication efficiently; teachers work hard for their students can use the language correctly and with a purpose. Students, and people in general, value the speaking skill over reading, writing and listening (Ur, P. 1999) and people who know a foreign language are referred as “speakers”.

In spite of the fact that Chilean students spend a lot of years studying English, from school to University, it has been always said that English is not well spoken in Chile, and some of the learners can assure that they are not capable of speaking and expressing fluently in English. In a recent study it was found that *“results (for English SIMCE) are more than discouraging and in line with the low learning results that are observed in the other tests”*. From 186.000 evaluated students in eleventh grade, just an 18 % got a certification; that is to say, an 82 % of the students cannot communicate in English, no reaching the expectations of the national curriculum” (Educación 2020, 2013).³

Besides, there is a natural development of receptive skills in English Students learners, when they are confronted to language. Students develop reading skills, and they can understand when listening, because, progressively, teachers expose them to more and more input, and because of the external input students are exposed to, such as music, videos, movies and the like.

Thus, it is supposed they develop the productive skills, as natural as receptive ones, but they do not. Formulating their own ideas orally in the second language or having enough vocabulary to express them in writing is not naturally developed as listening or reading.

There seems to be no emphasis on that. It seems that integrated skills are just an aim to reach, which, in the path, teachers leave aside because of lack of time or strategies and, even, because of the Ministry of Education through SIMCE does not assess. As it is stated by the Ministry through SIMCE: *“other relevant learnings of the current curriculum, such as the oral expression and written texts production in the English language are not directly evaluated in this test...”* (SIMCE, 2010).⁴

On one side, the Chilean English language curriculum promotes a communicative approach, integrating the four skills for using language as a tool to solve oral or written communicative situations (Programa de Estudios, MINEDUC, 2012); on the other side, teachers intend to cover the four-skills teaching. However, there is still a strong weakness in the development of productive skills.

This situation leads to a lack of confidence when students are confronted to speak; hence, a lack of participation inside the classroom, resulting in a poor development of this skill. It is also a concern that many teachers would probably think that they, in a sense, have a “communicative approach”, because their planning are full of activities where students communicate, when they actually do not. As

³ Los resultados de este año (del SIMCE inglés) son más que desalentadores y se condicen con los bajos resultados de aprendizaje que es posible observar en las otras pruebas. De los 186.000 estudiantes de 3º medio evaluados, sólo un 18% obtuvo certificación, es decir, un 82% de los estudiantes no puede comunicarse en inglés, no cumpliendo con las expectativas del currículum nacional.” (Educación 2020, 2013).

⁴ “Otros aprendizajes relevantes del currículum vigente, como por ejemplo la expresión oral y producción de textos en el idioma inglés, no son evaluados directamente en esta prueba...” (SIMCE, 2010).

it was stated by Cotton *“Research has established a link between integrating monitoring methods into periodic classroom reviews and the later achievement of students involved in the review sessions.”* (Cotton, 1988); therefore, it could be said, for opposition, that we also have a lack of monitoring. Consequently, developing oral skills through collaborative learning and teacher monitoring appears to be a good choice for improving students’ competence in this skill.

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is an approach centered in the interaction and contribution of all the members of a group, in the consecution of building knowledge; in other words, it is a learning achieved with the participation of the parts forming a whole. In Johnson and Johnson words it is a *“designed system of interactions which organizes and induces the reciprocal influence among the participants of a group, where each of them and everybody feels mutually engaged with each other learning, generating a positive interdependency that by no means implies a competition”* (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). This strategy is a master piece to use in the pursuing of oral skill development.

Monitoring task

The step, after giving the task, when the teacher makes sure students are doing the activity, solving doubts, or checking their performance into the team quietly is the monitoring task. *“The teacher acts as a facilitator in setting up communicative activities and as an advisor during the activities. The teacher moves from group to group offering advice and answering questions.”*(Freeman, 2013). Collaborative learning and monitoring task are the two most basic strategies to follow in order to reach the oral skill development in English student learners.

Why is it so important to work on this particular skill? Let’s put this on Harmer’s words: *“There are three main reasons for getting students to speak in the classroom. Firstly, speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities - chances to practice real-life speaking in the safety of the classroom. Secondly, speaking tasks in which students try to use any or all of the language they know provide feedback for both teacher and students. And finally, the more students have opportunities to activate the various elements of language they have stored in their brains, the more automatic their use of these elements become.”* (Harmer, 2008). In this sense, speaking activities are designed with a purpose, being the previous strategies at its service.

Diagnosis

The school where the student teacher is doing the training is a vocational institution that has 2.100 students from pre - school to secondary school. It is located in Pedro Aguirre Cerda. Students who attend this school come from Pedro Aguirre Cerda, Lo Espejo, Cerrillos, Maipu and El Bosque, mainly.

This is a subsidized school which belongs to a Roman Catholic foundation, having schools in different areas of Santiago. Parents or tutors do not have to pay for their children education in this school.

This institution has PIE (educative integration program which supports students with special needs) and SEP (preferential scholar grant by which the Ministry of Education gives financial support to the school for every student ranked low socioeconomic level); they are also supported by JUNAEB with school materials, breakfast and lunch, due to the students’ family low socioeconomic level.

As a vocational school, it has Business Administration career with two specialties, intended for eleventh and twelfth levels.

The Institutional-Educative Project (PEI) is based on the Gospel values, pursuing the students' integral development in both their human and academic potentials. The institution intends to train creative, innovative men and women for society. All classes have to start the day with a pray, and both students and teachers respectively, have a day off in a refuge, where they have spiritual and personal development activities, all based on the Christian principles.

This school is quite well-equipped. There are more than 50 classrooms; they all have a projector and speakers, some furniture to keep books and school materials. Most classrooms have fans, a computer, wall watch, a board for posting news and tests dates. As a catholic school, all classrooms have pictures or figures of Christ and saints. There is even a chapel for praying. When the students go to the theater or MIM, etc. they hire modern and comfortable buses to transport them.

This educational center is big, and space is well organized. It has yards, a playground, a gym, 2 cafeterias for primary and secondary students respectively, and other for teachers in an isolated place; a library (CRA), a multi-use room. The teachers' room is also big and clean, equipped with computers, lockers, bathrooms, a refrigerator, fans, a heater, a TV set, a water dispenser, and even a living room.

The School Handbook is well-observed. Teachers do not let students to wear hats or caps, make-up or cell phones in the classroom; although, there are moments when teachers look the other way. The students' behavior and clothing is very neat. In general, they have good manners. When situations occur, the teacher in charge of Mediation calls the students involved during the same day, and disciplinary measures are taken with no delay.

In particular, tenth grade B is quiet, they don't usually use bad language during the lessons; they don't stand up for any reason, neither shout nor laugh out loud. Anyhow, they have their moments when they are quite talkative, and some of them don't work on the activities unless the teacher is watching. But if the teacher asks for silence or tells them to work, they have a positive reply.

Tenth grade B is a 43 student-class. There are not students in PIE. They have had English lessons from pre kinder; since 7th grade they have had the same head teacher, previous that there were two different teachers. Nevertheless, there are about 12 students coming together from pre - school and primary, the rest has come in the way; even this semester three new students came in May and July.

The school follows the MINEDUC English Program, and they use the books given by the Ministry of Education; but, it is clear that the teacher does not find it much useful, because she uses it just from time to time, and she usually gives students worksheets prepared by the British Council. What calls the student teacher's attention is that the English teachers follow the program and prepare their students using different styles each, and clearly there are differences in their students' learnings. The student teacher can notice that, by observing a worksheet prepared by another teacher to all the three tenth level, all grammar-based activities; and the planning of the other teacher, prepared for fourth level, which was very tight to the English text. Tenth grade B, in this case, are ahead, because the teacher has a different approach. There is an agreement with the British Council for 11th and 12th levels; they have a special program with teachers coming from the British Council. Students in each level are divided into groups, according to their proficiency in the language. This program started this year, so there is no results to share yet. Results from SIMCE 2012 are poor, but they double the 2010's results from 45 to 96. Certification obtained was 0,074 %, similar to schools with the same characteristics (SIMCE 2012).

During the English lessons, students are quite motivated; based on the survey, most of them like the subject and the teacher very much. The English Language Teacher and Head Teacher of the class, usually follows a routine, explains the objective, and proposes the activity which is something that students are able to do and challenged to, at the same time. When the teacher prepares a listening, she follows the pre, while and post moments, but the student teacher has not seen her to present a reading. The student teacher observed worksheets lessons, mostly, because of the global test. But she often leaves the students on their own at the moment of developing the activity; if they have a doubt they can ask, and the teacher solve their doubts with no delay, but she neither monitors nor recaps. It seems that this class is used to solve their situations by their own, because when the student teacher arrived, the teacher told them to ask both the teacher and the student teacher, and it took time for them to ask the student teacher; and the students who ask for doubts are usually a few and the same ones. The teacher does not subscribe to any approach in particular, as J. Scrivener says, she has her own personal methodology: *“Many teachers nowadays would say that they do not follow a single method. Teachers work out for themselves what is effective in their own classrooms.”*(Scrivener, 1994).

According to the results of the survey⁵ applied to students, it is possible to say that most of them are comfortable with the subject, although there are some who do not learn at the same speed than the rest of the class, they do not have big difficulties in general. There are several students who have become resentful because the English lesson is developed mostly in English language, and they would prefer Spanish, which is commonly known. The major problem or fear they have is the productive skills, mainly speaking, which is also a regular issue. In words of Scrivener: *“There seem to be some difficulty in moving language from “up-there” knowledge to actively usable language...without experience in using language, learners may tend to be nervous about trying to say things.”* (Scrivener, 1994).

Therefore, three basic situations could be identified, which stand out as limitations for students to get better results in learning the English language: English-spoken lessons, lack of monitoring during lessons, which make possible to copy the activity; and lack of confidence when confronted to write or speak in the target language. Based on this information the student teacher would suggest a collaborative and systematic work, permanently monitored by the teacher, supporting the students' doubts, and students supporting each other on their tasks; thus they can reach a better development of the productive skills and oral skill in particular.

Description of the Unit

Tenth grade B is a class that enjoys the English subject, which does not mean they have such a good command, though there are a few students with some proficiency.

According to the applied survey and my observations, there is a weakness in the productive skills, particularly in speaking. Besides, they are neither used to work in team work nor to be monitored all the time. Therefore, the didactic unit is intended to develop these strategies in order to achieve productive skills.

It is a 2 hour- 9 lessons' plan, with two interventions a week, from August 29th to September 28th.

The class planning is based on the School Learning Timetable Distribution, which is also based on Program by MINEDUC, unit 3. This unit is called *“The world that surrounds me; personal relationships and social networks”*; the learning outcomes integrate the four skills, considering topics closely related

⁵ This survey is part of the appendix.

to students' reality, and moves forward to an autonomous productive development, where activities are worked in teams, in pairs, and individually. It is also part of the purposes that students can be permanently monitored by the teacher; that way they can develop the corresponding task, support each other in their learning and get a better development of the productive skills, speaking in particular. The learning outcomes for each lesson are related to the ones on the Program, emphasizing one of them in each lesson. Each learning outcome is intended to work a specific skill. In general, students have to express oral or written opinions and/or summaries after being exposed to readings or listening developed during the lesson. The activities are designed for students to work alone, in pairs and teams, and they are assessed for each task by answering direct questions, checking a worksheet or by presenting a product, all of them formative assessments.

Each lesson was planned according to the following steps:

- Creating the conditions: greet, keep quiet, put cell phones away.
- Routine: date, learning outcome, "stairways to learning", which is a sheet of paper all students have in order to mark his or her disposal to start the learning process and how they finish at the end of the lesson. It looks like this:



- Warming-up activities, usually with colored chocolates or candies, or popsicle sticks used to make questions or revision about the previous lesson, which have also the colors of the delivered sticks or candies. They look like this, but in colors:

Tell us

GREEN: What was the last lesson about?
RED: Have you ever played the game?
Yellow: Do you think it is a dangerous game? Why/why not
Brown: What's Pokemon Go?
Orange: what do you think about social network?

- Developing of the three main parts of the planned lesson:
Start: presentation of the topic, tightly related to their interests, and aligned with the grammar purpose.
Developing the lesson: the activities and tasks that students are requested to do; examples and instructions which are presented on a power point presentation and/or orally.
Time is given for each task, some of them are made individually, in pairs or in teams.
The teacher is constantly monitoring the students' work, solving doubts or encouraging the good work.
Closure: check of the given activities, formative assessments. Go back to the learning outcome and check if it was achieved by the class.
- Metacognition time: usually a five minutes time for students write or tell what and how they learnt. This was usually used as an exit ticket.

The following is part of the Planning

DESCRIPCIÓN DE LA UNIDAD

NOMBRE UNIDAD	El mundo que me rodea; relaciones personales y redes sociales
Número de horas semanales	4 horas. Lunes de 15:30 a 17:00 hrs. / Miércoles de 11:30 a 13:00 hrs.
Número de clases	8 clases. Inicio: 31 de Agosto / Término 28 de Septiembre
Número de Semanas	4 semanas
Descripción: El colegio donde haré la intervención es un particular subvencionado que pertenece a una congregación religiosa y está ubicado en Pedro Aguirre Cerda. Según la información del colegio, en términos socioeconómicos, es altamente vulnerable; pero según la información de SIMCE es medio y medio bajo. Este establecimiento está muy bien equipado y se evidencia una buena organización. Los alumnos respetan su reglamento de convivencia y siendo 2.100 alumnos y alumnas, no se presentan mayores problemáticas de convivencia. Se imparte enseñanza desde pre básica a	

enseñanza media y hay 3 cursos por nivel.

El curso asignado para mi intervención es el 2° medio B. Es un curso de 43 niñas y niños a quienes en general les agrada la asignatura de inglés y, además, les va bien. Lo que no quiere decir que sepan bastante, aunque hay algunos alumnos que tienen bastante dominio.

De acuerdo a lo observado y la encuesta aplicada, su debilidad se encuentra en las habilidades productivas, en particular, ellos reconocen la necesidad de hablar y aplicar verbalmente lo que aprenden; sin embargo, también manifiestan el temor de hacerlo.

Por otra parte, cuando la profesora les da el tiempo para desarrollar sus guías y actividades, ya sea solos o en grupo, suelen trabajar y terminar, pero varios se dedican a conversar o manipular su celular y luego copian lo de sus compañeros.

La intervención que he diseñado, se basa en la Distribución Temporal de Aprendizajes (DTA) del colegio, la cual, a su vez, se basa en el programa del Mineduc, unidad 3. Integra las cuatro habilidades, considerando temáticas cercanas a la realidad de los alumnos y avanzando progresivamente hacia un desarrollo productivo autónomo, donde las actividades se trabajan de manera independiente, en parejas y en equipos. También hay un énfasis especial por parte de la profesora de monitorear el trabajo y no dar mayor espacio a tiempo ocioso o subutilizado. Las evaluaciones son formativas, clase a clase, y, si es posible, se evaluará algunos productos de manera, a lo menos, acumulativa. Para terminar con una evaluación final sumativa, que integre las habilidades y contenidos más relevantes de la unidad.

Adecuación del desafío de aprendizaje

Una vez iniciada la intervención, se observan elementos que evidencian que el grupo curso tiene como fortaleza una alta motivación para la asignatura, algunos alumnos que comprenden muy bien lo que leen y lo que escuchan; no obstante, el resto se ha acostumbrado a tomar sus respuestas y descansar en ellos; lo cual hace muy lento el desarrollo de cada lección, pues en el desafío de realizar la tarea, se dan cuenta que no saben cómo, y que, al trabajar en pareja o en grupo, vuelven a descansar en el que sabe. En consecuencia, creo necesario re direccionar el diseño hacia un trabajo colaborativo, sistemático, monitoreado permanentemente por la profesora, en el sentido de corroborar que cada alumno y alumna desarrolle la tarea que le corresponde, y que éste/a, a su vez, apoye la tarea del otro/a y, de este modo lograr la incorporación y mejor desarrollo de las habilidades productivas, en particular, la oral; de manera que esta intervención pueda ser un pequeño aporte al desarrollo del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje guiado por la profesora titular.

LESSON ONE

Profesora: Laura Villarroel Beltrán	Asignatura: Inglés	Curso: II B
UNIDAD: El mundo que me rodea; relaciones personales y redes sociales	Mes: Agosto	AÑO: 2016

OBJETIVO DE APRENDIZAJE		Contenido		
OA N° 02 (Comprensión lectora) Leer y demostrar comprensión de ideas principales e información explícita en textos descriptivos y narrativos simples relacionados con redes sociales y relaciones personales		Uso de have to, have got to, need to para expresar necesidades y uso de want to, like to para expresar deseos › Frases que introducen una opinión: I think...; I believe...; In my opinion...; To my mind... › Conectores although, besides, either... or		
OBJETIVO DE LA CLASE: Expresar opiniones fundamentadas en relación a la lectura realizada durante la clase. <i>"By the end of the lesson, we will be able to express one consistent opinion, orally, about the reading."</i>				
Fecha: 29 de Agosto	Horas: 2	Habilidades: Reading, Speaking, Relacionar e Interpretar información		
Desarrollo		Tiempo	Recursos	Indicadores de Evaluación
Inicio		20'		
Saludo. Rutina. OA. Marcan Escala de Aprendizaje La prof. Selecciona al azar alumnos para que saquen un m&m (chocolate) y según su color responderán preguntas en ppt, en relación a los conocimientos previos sobre las redes sociales, qué son, cuáles conocen, en cuántas participan.			Pastillas de chocolate Data Computador Ppts	
Desarrollo		50'		
Pre: PPT con imagen de Pokémon Go, el juego. Comentan generalidades. Responden "What's Pokémon Go?" PPT con key words matching / predicen contenido con preguntas de selección múltiple. Reading: se dividen en grupos, 3 o 4, y leen el texto, centrándose en un párrafo en particular, el cual tendrán que scanear y compartir, además de confirmar predicciones. Pasado el tiempo asignado, 10', cada grupo comparte el párrafo que le tocó hasta que todos tienen una idea clara de su contenido. Post: True or false activity para revisar comprensión .			Documento de lectura	Deducen ideas principales del texto, basándose en su conocimiento del tema y del vocabulario temático de la unidad. › Deducen el significado de palabras desconocidas con ayuda del contexto y de su comprensión general del texto.
Cierre		20'		
Talking point: en los mismos grupos del principio, comentar What do you think of Pokemon Go game? May it be dangerous? Must authorities ban some particular places here in Chile? Deben usar "I think", "in my opinion..." Voluntarios por grupo, comentan al curso.				Expresan su opinión acerca del texto en forma oral, usando expresiones y frases hechas.

Exit ticket: responder “lo que ya sabía”, “lo que aprendí” y “lo que me gustó”.			
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Lesson Two

APRENDIZAJE ESPERADO/OBJETIVO DE APRENDIZAJE	CONTENIDO
OA N°1 (Comprensión auditiva) *Demostrar comprensión de ideas principales e información explícita en textos simples relacionados con relaciones personales que contemplan las funciones de expresar posibilidades. OA 04 (Expresión escrita) Escribir textos descriptivos y narrativos breves y simples relacionados con relaciones personales.	*Expresiones relacionadas con relaciones interpersonales: get on with someone, go out with someone, meet someone, break up, make up, ask someone out, hit on someone.
OBJETIVO DE LA CLASE: Usar expresiones de relaciones interpersonales en una redacción coherente con base en el audio escuchado. <u>“</u> <i>“By the end of the lesson, we will be able to write 3 sentences using phrasal verbs”</i>	

Fecha: 31 de agosto	N° horas: 2	Habilidades: listening, writing, relacionar, interpretar
Inicio: Saludo. Socializar OA. La prof. Selecciona al azar alumnos para que saquen un palito de helado y según su color responderán preguntas en relación a los conocimientos previos sobre las relaciones interpersonales y algunos phrasal verbs. PPT con imágenes y phrasal verbs.		
Desarrollo Pre: predicen contenido del audio Key words sobre distintos tipos de verbos que implican relaciones Listening http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/grammar-vocabulary/phrasal-verb-videos/best-mates Escuchan audio para confirmar predicciones Check understanding: reordenan oraciones Post: Practice phrasal verbs, filling in the gaps Write the words in the correct order to make sentences Should you tell your friend if you think their boyfriend or girlfriend is cheating on them?		
Exit ticket: Entregan relato escrito		

Lesson three

APRENDIZAJE ESPERADO/OBJETIVO DE APRENDIZAJE	CONTENIDO
<p>OA N°1 (Comprensión auditiva) *Demostrar comprensión de ideas principales e información explícita en textos simples relacionados con relaciones personales que contemplan las funciones de expresar posibilidades.</p> <p>OA N° 3 (Expresión oral) Expresarse oralmente a través de monólogos y diálogos (de 12 intercambios) breves y simples, incorporando las funciones comunicativas de expresar necesidades, deseos, posibilidades y obligaciones.</p>	<p>Vocabulario relacionado con Amistad y redes sociales, comment on, share information, identity, tolerance, respect, ...</p> <p>-Expresiones para dar opiniones personales</p>
<p>OBJETIVO DE LA CLASE: Expresar opiniones en relación a la amistad y las redes sociales, a partir de la canción escuchada.</p> <p><i>“By the end of the lesson, I will be able to express an opinion about friendship and social networks”</i></p>	

Fecha: 5 de septiembre	N° horas: 2	Habilidades: listening, speaking, evaluate
<p>Inicio: . Saludo. Rutina. Socializar OA. Stairways to learning. Responden preguntas en relación a las lecciones anteriores sobre relaciones interpersonales y las redes sociales PPT con imágenes de amistad, comentan.</p>		
<p>Desarrollo Pre : comentan sobre relaciones de amistad Key words Predicen contenido del audio Listening : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MihBI3ffWBA&list=RDMihBI3ffWBA Escuchan y confirman predicciones Escuchan por partes para unir mitades Con el script vuelven a escuchar para completar las missing words Post: Identifican y subrayan significados implícitos, parafraseándolos. Relacionan concepto y definición. En parejas, comentan sobre sus relaciones sociales y amistades</p>		
<p>Cierre: Comparten voluntariamente algunas de sus opiniones con el curso.</p>		

When students are requested to work in teams, they have to follow some rules, like having a representative, a person who takes notes, another who can prepare the task, and the like; the purpose is that every member has a function and can feel part and participant in his/her team in order to achieve

the objectives proposed. They also have to be aware that the teacher monitors the class, and they can ask questions, clear doubts and show their progress.

In order to check understanding, students have to develop some products like worksheets which are solved and checked during the lesson; and posters which should express the collective opinion of the team; they are about friendship and social networks. Finally, they are expected to express opinions about the activity, coming to a sort of conclusion. Throughout this, they are permanently monitored by the teacher, who also promotes the English speaking while giving their opinions. The way they can try to produce oral English is given by stems and examples presented with the instructions.

The summative evaluation is written. It was not possible to assess listening or speaking skills, because the guiding teacher suggested the student teacher not to. Consequently, the assessments for speaking skill were made during the lessons and, they were formative. The learning outcomes for this evaluation are:

- Apply vocabulary related to personal relationships and social networking
- Identify Vocabulary used during the lesson about social networking
- Relate concepts and meaning of phrasal verbs
- Discriminate the use of modal verbs
- Apply writing strategies for expressing coherent ideas about a topic
- Interpret information of a reading

All the contents and the reading are just part of the lessons; and the writing item is somehow prepared during the lessons too. In fact, the test is intended to show just what students worked all through the unit.

Learning Results

The first thing to be said about the implementation is that the planning was ambitious. It was from the very beginning that the teacher became aware that students took too many time in solving some tasks, and it would be necessary to shorten or eliminate some of the planned activities. Thus, the following lessons were modified, trying to keep the most relevant activities, and the time given to develop them was extended.

Students were engaged with the lessons from the beginning, most of them showed their will for participating. However, their participation kept in the mother language, and there were some students who did not pay attention, though they showed to be listening. In order to motivate these students to participate with the rest of the class, the teacher took more time with them while the monitoring process, so they could notice they were observed and felt considered by the teacher. This strategy was successful, because eventually the students got involved, working on the given tasks, and worried about understanding what they had to do. There was one of them who, by his own, sat in front of the board in order to pay better attention.

As lessons went by, the class slightly started to say some sentences and words in the target language. They did it particularly when the teacher monitored the teams. One of the purposes of the activities and tasks intended to get students involved in the English language, so they gave their opinions and conclusions about the topics to the whole class, but this would not happen in this short period. Instead,

students were very successful in understanding the readings about social networks, or listening songs about friendship; they developed the activities proposed with enthusiasm, made mistakes but rapidly corrected them; and most remarkable, some of them helped others to understand. However, when the process reached the time to produce writing ideas on cards, or expressing opinions on posters, students got anxious, felt as if they knew nothing and asked many times how to do the task, or they just failed in doing it. At this point, the teacher was advised by the methodologist to take more time during the instructions and modelling. Once followed this advice, the teacher could observe that students were more likely to do activities properly. Nevertheless, all through the unit, it was hard for students to write or speak in the target language; anyhow they tried and sometimes succeeded.

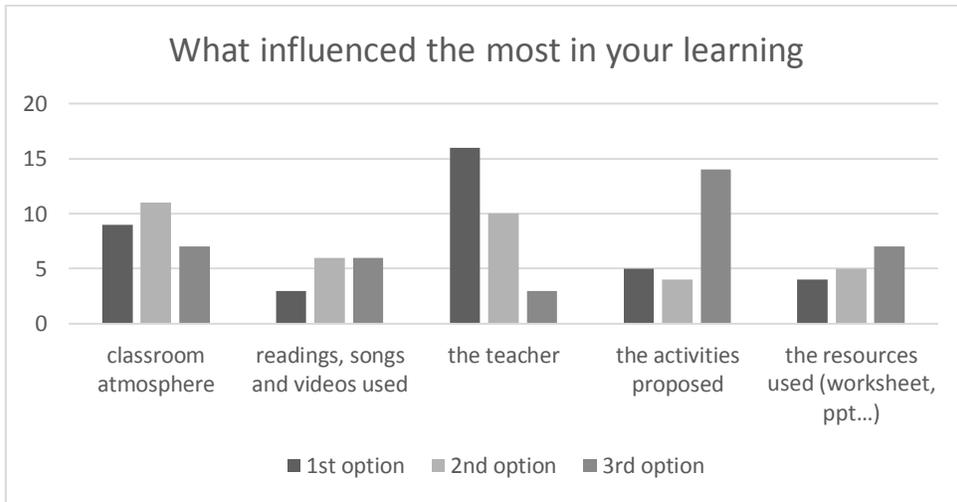
There is another aspect which was remarkable, and it has to do with the team work process. In this class there were two girls who sat and worked always alone. They did not like to sit or talk with their classmates. Due to the kind of activities proposed by the teacher, they were compelled to work together, and, at the beginning, they agreed reluctantly; somehow, progressively, they just sat together during the whole class, and one of them help the other to understand. For the final lesson before the assessment, they were asked to be part of a bigger team, and they agreed without reticence.

As the teacher was failing to make students speak, another decision was taken; besides the instructions and modelling, there were more sentence stems and examples that students had to repeat many times in order to understand and get confidence. This part took several minutes, but it was worthy considering the results. In the process, the teacher was assessing the students in a formative way, and that was the only assessment to count on, since it was not possible to assess students orally in the test.

The students who usually manipulated their cell phones during the lessons and copied the answers at the end of the activity, finally tried to do the tasks, mainly because they were asked for results in the process.

There was a lesson devoted to learn the use of some modal verbs, and the teacher used some social network reading for that purpose. The students were very enthusiastic about the topics, but the way the modal verbs were introduced did not work. It was very hard for students to follow the model and it was necessary to readapt the activity. The learning outcome for that lesson was hardly accomplished, and the teacher decided to devote the next lesson only to teach modal verbs with another strategy. This time the students felt more confident about their understanding and developed a worksheet and solved their doubts.

After the evaluation, a second and final survey was taken. It had to do with the unit previously developed, and the observations students could have related to it. The questions were related to the elements that facilitate their learning process; students had to number them in order of the importance that each of them gave to each of the elements. In a universe of 33 students, the results were as follows:



Graphic 1: what influenced most in students learning

The results of the “stairways to learning” are as follows:



Graphic 2: Stairways to learning

Analysis of the Results

Collaborative learning was an easy task for some of the students in this class, because they are used to work in the activities proposed. However, there was a group of students who usually did not work and wait for the others to copy their results. These students in particular learnt to work as a team. One way or another, they knew there was no other possibility, because of the way the lesson was developed.

Collaborative work and monitoring go together when teaching a foreign language, in particular. In this case, from the beginning, there were some students reluctant to work in groups; even belonging to a team they did not work, as it was observed from the diagnosis. As these students became aware that the teacher would come to their team in some point of the lesson, they progressively started to develop the activities. It was not easy to get to this point, but it is just a matter of being persistent in monitoring, and tell the students they can do it and show them how.

Some of the students also learnt to share their skills and knowledge with the others; and some others discovered that it was not that hard to work with a classmate. As it was stated in the theoretical framework, students engage in a common task and a reciprocal influence (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

There were some occasions that it was very difficult for most of them to understand what they had to do, and they got anxious. Those were occasions for the teacher to show calm and, following the advices previously given, the teacher took time to explain and give examples.

It was also difficult for the teacher to accomplish the whole lesson every time; sometimes this was due to the guiding teacher who gave some information in her role of head teacher; but most of the time it was because the planning had activities that students took too long to finish. The teacher solved this by reformulating the planning to a more realistic set of activities through which the learning outcome could be accomplished anyway.

The main purpose of the intervention, that means the development of speaking skill, it was hardly accomplished. Even though, graphic 2 shows that students felt they could success; the teacher thinks this has to do with the unit as a whole, more than with a better performance in speaking. Some of the students who had good command in the language could elaborate suitable sentences and well organized answers; for most of the class this was hard to do. The teacher could explain that, based on the short time invested. The possibility of challenging students every time to express themselves orally in English from the beginning of the year is a good strategy to get better results.

Regarding graphic 1, it is remarkable the importance students give to the teacher, the activities proposed and the classroom atmosphere, in that order. They clearly value and consider the relationship among these aspects and their learnings.

When they were asked about how these elements affected their learnings, one of the answers that called most the teacher's attention was regarding the resources used, because some students stated the possibility to learn the same, though they would not count on technology, as long as they had the teacher. This is remarkable, considering that the vital importance of using as many resources as possible in the classroom, in order to get better results in teaching and learning, is widely sustained in the area of education.

Regarding graphic 2, it shows a strong disposition to learn, in the starting point; the ending point shows how the entire class feels they succeed. The results of the test confirm that. It is possible to state a

relationship between the teacher's attitude and disposition to the class, and the positive reception by the students. It is worth mentioning that there was one student, showed in graphic 2, who said she did not do it; however, her final step was "I did it!."

Regarding the test, 95% of the students approved and a 53% got a 6.0 and over. These results reflect how the learning outcomes were accomplished. Students faced the test calmly, there was nothing they did not work through the lessons, and the only item they found hard to answer was the writing item where they have to read a short paragraph about friendship, then give their opinion with foundation. Again, the productive skills appear to be a handicap which teachers can solve giving more time to them on their planning.

Self – Evaluation and Improvement Plan

I spent much time observing the class, getting aware of the particularities of almost each and every student. I could observe the way my guiding teacher developed her lessons and I saw how students responded to her. Time and observation were essential to elaborate my planning and to interact with students. So I think one of the strengths I had to succeed was I knew how to get students engaged, and that I was already familiar with their particularities and behaviour.

Another strength has to do with my previous experience. There was nothing new about developing a didactic unit, but including the methodology and strategies I learnt through the Program.

However, this experience worked against as I could never felt the class was my class. Somehow, there were moments when I could not go beyond about discipline or assessing, just because I thought there are some things a teacher does from the beginning of the year in order to have a certain way of behaving during the lessons, a criteria used for particular situations, which I could hardly implement in a month. Anyhow, it seemed students did not notice this, but I did.

I was always strongly supported by my guiding teacher and our methodologist. This made things much easier. As it was stated in the diagnosis, the educational institution has all the resources and equipment a teacher could need, so I had no problem on preparing presentations in Power Point, videos and on -line sources. It is a strength knowing what kind of material to choose, but if the school does not have the implementation to set a planning in motion, it could be hard to proceed.

Those aspects I need to work on are related with the planning and timing. I had to reformulate my planning, so the students could accomplish the learning outcome for each lesson. I consider activities that were too extensive and sometimes, because of the extension, these became boring.

The way I introduce a new content it was usually appealing, but I failed a few times when giving the instructions and examples. I had to ask for advice on this point, and reformulate the way of giving them; I had to take more time modelling, adding more examples, and make some students to model too. When solving this aspect, timing was also solved; then, if I give five minutes for something, students would do it in five minutes because they already know well how to.

The development of productive skills was poorly achieved, probably due to a lack of persistence. When students could not say something in English I always let them to try it in Spanish. This did not happen when writing, because I compelled them to try harder; that is why the writing item in the test was well accomplished.

Consequently, if I had to do this didactic unit again, I would elaborate a plan with the same learning outcomes, but the activities should be one or two for each lesson. I would try to have more speaking time, modelling over and over again and giving more sentence stems to complete. I would try to start with simpler things and gradually getting on more complex structures or extended sentences.

Implement different ways for students show their oral production would be a good improvement; for example, let them prepare videos from themselves in a particular situation, or make them use their cell phones to record themselves and notice how they speak. Maybe those kinds of activities encourage students' appealing for the language and motivate them to learning differently.

Conclusions

It has been a constant through all this process that when teacher groups students together, it impacts their learning. This learning can occur between two students or more, and it is focused on the students more than the content. Students consider themselves active participants, responsible for their own building of knowledge, and for the other's, in the pursuing of a goal. It increases social abilities and improves the relationship among classmates. It is easier for students to make mistakes in small groups, and it becomes less discouraging too. In numerous classes it becomes hard for the teacher to make each student speak one at a time. Micro-teaching is possible when working in teams.

That last statement leads us to another constant in the process; that is teacher monitoring. Monitoring students creates the possibility of assessing them individually, solving doubts they may not want to express in front of the class, and give the teacher the chance to make sure all students are doing the activity. There are some occasions when the teacher may notice the necessity of re-teach some aspects that are still weak.

As it was previously said, collaborative learning and teacher monitoring go together, and it is a natural way to design oral activities, making easier for the teacher to observe the students' performance in small teams.

However, the fact that it is so hard to promote oral communication in English language students has to do with a whole system which somehow forces the teacher to meet the national curriculum in a way it is comfortable for him or herself and for the students, setting aside the productive skills development only because it takes too much time, there are too many students in the class, and time is always running.

Therefore, it is possible to say that the approach should be changed. The national curriculum promotes a communicative approach, then teachers are the ones to fulfil this call. Maybe teachers are used to a kind of lessons which let little or no time for speaking skill. This change might start on our minds, getting convinced that English language students will be able to speak, speaking.

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