How can I make my sixth grades students from San Gregorio de la Salle School speak English in the classroom?

This research was carried out to obtain the university degree as an English teacher.

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Abstract

This research proposal was performed in sixth grade A and B students at San Gregorio de la Salle School, in La Granja. This proposal deals with the lack of effective communicative situations inside the English classes. Also, this research aims to find the causes of this reluctant attitude to speaking activities and suggests some strategies that can be used in order to address and solve this problem.

This investigation was carried out under an Action research method. This method was chosen because it allows the teacher to act as an investigator of his or her own practices to later change and improve them. Consequently the methodology used in this research was an ethnographic observation of the reality of the students to later establish a number of conclusions and answers to explain the phenomenon previously stated. The teacher observed and recorded in journals the main features of the classes for two weeks. As a result of this investigation and the conclusions that are stated here, it has been possible to create an action plan that could allow these students from this specific context to acquire more oral production strategies and gain more confidence in their speaking classes.

Key words: Teaching speaking, CLT, CBI, GTM, rote learning, mixed abilities class.
Resumen

Esta investigación fue realizada en base a la observación de los estudiantes de los niveles sexto a y b del colegio san Gregorio de la Salle en la comuna de la granja.

La investigación trata de entender y resolver la reticencia de los estudiantes hacia las actividades que implican comunicarse de forma oral, en este caso, usando el idioma inglés como lengua extranjera. Asimismo este seminario tiene como principal objetivo encontrar las posibles causas que explican esta falta de comunicación efectiva dentro de la sala de clases además de proponer estrategias para resolver el problema anteriormente descrito.

La presente investigación está creada siguiendo los parámetros de la investigación acción. Este método fue escogido dado que permite al investigador analizar su propia practica para luego poder entenderla y transformarla. Por ende, la metodología usada se enmarca como una observación etnográfica por medio de bitácoras en donde fue posible analizar la realidad de los estudiantes y de sus clases de inglés. Como resultado de la observación y el posterior análisis de esta misma en el presente documento fue posible trazar un plan de acción que debería permitir a los estudiantes de los niveles anteriormente descritos adquirir más confianza y estrategias para enfrentar las instancias de comunicación oral de una mejor manera.

Palabras claves: producción oral, CLT, CBI, GTM, rote learning, mixed abilities class.
Introduction

Even though more and more schools are recognizing the importance of having a second language, in this case English, many of the schools cannot make students interact and express their ideas and thoughts in a communicative way. Therefore, that speaking skills are very important elements that must be considered when teaching a language in the classroom. However, many experienced and newly qualified teachers cannot find the appropriate strategies to teach and encourage students to talk in English and actually try to communicate in the language. Many reasons have been given to explain this phenomenon: from old fashioned methodologies to unprepared teachers have been used as arguments to justify the lack of communicative interaction inside the classroom. This research is intended to analyze my students’ reality and understand why their English classes lack of this important element and also give some solutions in order to fix this problem in a gradual, non-invasive, non-threatening and friendly way for them.
Chapter I

General and school context

San Gregorio de la Salle School is a public subsidized school. In general terms, classes are planned and taught based on the minimum requirements of the Ministry of Education and the material that the school uses is provided by this entity as well. Regarding the social context, the students are immersed in one of the most troubled places in Santiago. However, the teachers and the coordination of the school make great efforts to provide a good instruction to the students by the continuous improvement of the systems of evaluation and the equipment of every classroom among other aspects.

Also, it is important to mention that the school belongs to a Catholic association that has a great influence in most of the behavioral situations and in the discipline that they try to develop in students. Therefore, some of the rules, especially in terms of physical appearance, are quite harsh.

Related to the infrastructure, the school is well equipped for the number of students that the school has. Almost all the classrooms are equipped with the basic ICT components and every level has its own classroom. Also, there are computer labs, a library, special classrooms for extracurricular activities, and a big yard for all the students to spend their recess. Also, there are special rooms for the activities that some students do with the counselors, the psychologists and the specialist teachers. The teachers also have their physical spaces where they can eat, work and rest properly.

Specifically in the English class the situation seems to be problematic. Recently the school faced the problem that all their English teachers left or are
leaving the school right now. Consequently, they have decided to hire education students who are finishing their degree. According to current educational, the schools can hire students in their final years. In order to do so, they have to “habilitate” the new teachers in the Ministry of Education. In order to do so, the school has 15 legal days to correct the situation. Regarding behavioral issues the school has decided to integrate students with attention deficit, dyslexia, learning disorders, hyperactivity, etc. so teacher are not allowed to expel the students from the class and are asked to cope with the needs of these students, even though most of them have no or very little instruction on skills to deal with these problems.

**English Class specific context.**

The number of students in 6th grade is around the 35 to 45 students approximately. This fact has a major impact on the activities that teachers prepare for their classes. In the English class the large number of the students forces the teacher prepare activities to allow students to work independently after the pre and while steps of the class. This is because they seem to learn more when they are working on their own or in groups. Or at least they seem to be more concentrated.

The teacher tries to follow the steps of the pre, while and post lesson plan format integrating the four skills in class. During the development of the activities, students show a good level of knowledge of the grammatical aspects of the language but they have not internalized a wide variety of vocabulary (for example, they hesitate when they have to act when the teacher uses classroom
commands). However, it can be said that most of the 6th grade students have a good level of reading and listening comprehension but they are not confident enough to talk or write by their own. Maybe this is because they recognize the grammatical structures but they are not able to produce their own since they lack of appropriate vocabulary to express what they want to say.

Regarding the materials all the students have an English book given by the Ministry of Education. They also have speakers and projectors integrated in the classroom so the teacher has the possibility to teach English to visual and auditory learners. The listening tracks and the reading texts are mostly taken from the Ministry English text book even though some of them are written and prepared by the teacher.

Regarding evaluation and assessment the students have two in each month. The first one is related to a portfolio in which all the students must keep all their class work and projects in a portfolio. The second one is a test at the end of the month in which teacher evaluates the skills and the knowledge that students must have by the end of two or more units.

To sum up they have few opportunities to talk in class, all the opinions that they give in the class are in Spanish. They have a good comprehension level and they do not have problems with the input that teacher gives them but when it comes to talking (especially in pairs) they start to speak about anything except the topic of the class.

At the light of all the things that have been said my objective this semester is to increase the number of opportunities that the students have to
talk in English and to boost confidence and motivation in students so they can feel competent to talk in English.
Research questions:

The following research questions are answered by me in order to understand and specify what I want to achieve with my 6th grade students and also understand my attitudes and my preconceptions towards the class and my work better. This analysis is based on my ethnographic observation of the class and my own reflection about my actions. They are intended to reflect about my own practice since this is the first step to change reality in my classes.

Research questions number 1: does the teacher give meaningful topics?

When I arrived at the school all the classes were disorganized since my students did not have a teacher. When I assumed the responsibility of their English classes I based my lessons in the minimum mandatory requirement of the plans and programs from the Chilean Ministry of Education. Therefore, I started to work with the activities suggested in the students and teachers text book delivered by this entity since most of the contents that I wanted and needed to review were covered in activities already planned in the book.

The important question that I want to answer is if the topics that the teacher gives (in this case me) are meaningful enough to make them speak up.

In all the lessons there are moments in which students can talk. There are some instances in which they can talk among them and in other classes they talk with the whole group and the teacher. From my personal experience I can say that they tend to talk more in activities in which they share their ideas with the whole class and with the help of visual aid or written phrases that they can repeat and use. When I encourage them to talk in pairs or in groups they start to speak in Spanish since the teacher cannot monitor the class without
losing the contact of the rest of the students. However, they demonstrate enthusiasm for talking when there is an activity in which their tastes or family and daily life is involved. Nevertheless, the big problem with this is that they do not have the expressions or words that they want to use to talk and finally they go back to the Spanish. This situation is probably produced for the following reasons:

- The topics presented are interesting and meaningful for them but the teacher does not give them the keywords before the speaking task. So, they just talk based on what they know which is their mother tongue.

- The teacher is not able to lower the levels of anxiety in the class. A sign of this is the constant need of the students to look for words in the dictionary not only in speaking but also in writing activities. This is probably produced because they do not have acquired the words that they want to use or because they do not feel sure of what they know.

- The teacher is not able to motivate students enough to make the whole class talk in English if there is not an extrinsic motivation attached to the speaking activity.

It can be concluded that even though the topics are meaningful the activities are not the most appropriate for this group.

**Research questions number 2: does the teacher give meaningful tasks?**

In the previous point it could be conclude that even though the topic are meaningful or motivating the task are not challenging enough to make them speak in class. From the observation and analysis of the class it could be said
that there is appropriate help or support for students to feel confident enough to talk. The teacher encourages the students to speak and work in groups but there is no effective help for them to apply the language. There are no keywords or phrases that they can use because the teacher only writes the questions on the whiteboard and explains them expecting that students understand. This kind of mistakes can explain why the levels of anxiety in the classroom are high. It is possible that these tasks are not promoting a feeling of self sufficiency producing frustration in the whole group.

**Research questions number 3: What kind of previous knowledge should the teacher expect from her students?**

When I arrived at the school I never had the chance to look at the previous lesson plans since the last teacher took them with her when she left the school. Therefore, I ask my student what was the last thing that they did on the book until the last semester and I realized that my students did not know important things such as classroom commands to enable an effective communication with my students especially when I give them instructions. In the same way, my students did not manage the concept of cognates and false cognates very well. For that reason, it was always hard for me to explain words such as “activity” since they were always asking for words that were similar in Spanish and in English.

For all the above before my main expectations about the previous knowledge of my students were the following:

- Classroom commands

- Cognate and false cognates.
- Vocabulary associated to the previous units of the book that students were working on.

- Vocabulary and chunks associated to greetings.

- Vocabulary associated to objects present in their daily students' life such as: school supplies

- Vocabulary associated to the four skills: read, speak, listen and write.

**Research question number 5: Do all students have that previous knowledge?**

There are specific cases of students in the classroom that can understand all the vocabulary and expressions that I was expecting as a teacher that they know. However, most of the students do not manage the vocabulary that I consider important to establish real communicative situations in the classroom. Most of the students in the classroom have trouble when they hear a complete lesson entirely in English since they feel that they do not understand anything the teacher is saying and they are constantly asking for Spanish explanations.

**Research question number 6: What strategies have the students practiced in order to boost oral expression?**

According to what students express: They are used to practicing their speaking skills when they are repeating words (like in drills) and when they memorize a piece of text (for example a dialogue) and they practice it in front of
the class. Hence it can be concluded that they do not have troubles with the receptive skills but when it comes to producing something they are not confident on what they know and show themselves insecure with a constant hesitating behavior.

**Research question number 7: What is the current method the teacher uses to organize her lesson plans?**

I always try to follow pre, while and post stages. Nevertheless, it always happens that pre and while stages take more time since students do not seem to have enough vocabulary or expressions that they can use to say what they want to say.

At the very beginning of the semester I made some mistakes regarding lesson planning that may have confused my students’ work, but as time goes by I have applied the corrections that my tutor wanted me to do and the class seems to go better. They can understand most of what I say in English and sometimes my students ask the most advantaged students to help them with the activities of the lesson.

Also, I always try to follow a routine in which students can look at the objective of the class and see if they have accomplished that goal by doing a process of meta cognition at the end of the lesson.
Objectives and reasons

According to the above I consider that the lack of oral communication is damaging the development of the language to a great extent. This lack of effective communication can be appreciated in situations in which they want to communicate something important or request and give information to someone else because they are not able to do it in a comprehensible way. Consequently, based on the research questions and the ethnographic analysis of these months my main aim is to convince my 6th grade students that speaking is absolutely necessary for the development of a second language for the three following reasons:

- Only by practice speaking you can start learning how to speak so I want to make them understand the importance of effective communication in foreign language acquisition.

- Oral production can foster the development of the rest of the three skills.

- Only by speaking you can gain more confidence when interacting
Chapter II

Methodology

This research is based on the method taken from the book “Research in English Language Teaching” by Anne Burns (chapter one). It allows the teacher to investigate and make conclusions about their own personal performance.

In any action proposal the data collection and the data collection instruments are very important parts since they allow the researcher get a whole idea of the phenomena that the investigator wants to research. In this case I decided to use my ethnographic observation of the classroom dynamics and the behavior and attitudes of my students in the speaking activities.

In order to take a sample of my students’ attitudes I decided to restrict my observation until the second week of classes since the objective of this investigation is to analyze the problems caused by the methodology that my students were used to having in their English class. If I had taken into account more class observation the results would have been influenced or affected by my own methodology and the outcomes of this research would have been biased.

Regarding the instruments all my observation is recorded in written journals that have been attached in the appendix.
Chapter III

Theoretical Framework

Teaching Speaking

With this part of my research I want to understand if my ideas or goals expressed in the research questions and my objective and reasons are sustained by theory and are achievable. thus considering that the topic that I want to research about is related to speaking in the classroom, I consider extremely relevant to understand why teaching speaking is so important to later convince my students (and also their parents) with solid arguments about how crucial it is to practice oral expression in the classroom.

First of all it is important to understand that communication is about receiving and deliver messages. On that account, it is important to have input and output well trained in order to express myself in a coherent and comprehensible way. According to Spada a successful language class should have “access to both comprehensible input and conversational interaction” (Lightbown and Spada, 2011)

Once students have the opportunity to have both elements they can have the opportunity to “negotiate for meaning” and “arrive at a mutual understanding” (Lightbown and Spada, 2011) Speaking activities give to the students the possibility to make connections between form and meaning. And this connection is nothing but negotiation of meaning between two or more interlocutors which is the basis of communication.
This negotiation of meaning is always a concrete and real experience and also extremely relevant if we, language teachers, have as a main aim to help our students to communicate and interact with other people. In foreign language acquisition this is really important since oral production develops the ability in our students to build a bridge between form and meaning.

But students not only can gain this ability but also have the opportunity to “become more fluent and confident” (Scrivener, 2005) On the same topic the author says that “there is no point knowing a lot if you can’t use it”. Here the importance between the negotiations of meaning appears as something really necessary. We can teach thousands of words to our students but if they do not have the possibility to use them, then the words will be forgotten and real learning never will happen.

Now that the importance of the oral production in class is completely clear I want to analyze and describe some strategies, approaches and ideas that can help me when tracing the possible action plan. The concepts that I want to address are the following: Content based instruction, Lexical approach, Communicative language teaching, Grammar translation method, Rote learning, mixed ability classes.

The first three concepts are important for this research because I consider them as the central strategies or approaches that can improve my classes according to what I want to achieve. The following three are in the list because they are what my students are used to experience. My intention is to understand the roots of these three concepts to better explain behavior,
attitudes and expectations of my students towards the class and from that learn how I can address their needs.

**Concepts and Approaches: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

After the decline of situational language teaching, applied linguists started to consider that to teach a foreign language it was necessary to take into consideration “the functional and communicative potential of language” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986) rather than just learn isolated structures to put them into practice. With these ideas the communicative language teaching approach started to gain more strength among linguists and teachers. Mainly the aims that this method has are the following:

a) Make communicative competence the goal of language teaching

b) Develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)

With this it can be said that for the communicative language teaching approach the relationship between form and meaning is also an important interaction in foreign language acquisition. They are relevant because they are always related when practicing the development of the productive and receptive skills. Only by communication we can negotiate the meaning of words and concepts. Accordingly to all that has been said it can be stated that “language learning is learning to communicate” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)

Some of the most remarkable features of CLT are the following:
- Contextualize learning.
- Anything that can help the learner is acceptable.
- Communication with others must be constantly encouraged.
- Fluency is more important than accuracy.

In my reality I consider the Communicative language teaching approach a very important aspect of my classes since it is what I want to ideally achieve with my students. However before describing the strategies that can be applied in CLT it is important to know which the main objectives in a CLT class are. According to Richards four of the most important objectives are the following:

- The language is a mean of expression
- Language is the objective of learning
- Learning is based on error analysis
- Language learning has to be in the school curriculum also.

Now classroom strategies must always be based on the objectives and always “involve negotiation of information and information sharing” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986) based on that, the strategies that I want to use in my classroom are the following

- Real and authentic material as much as possible.
- Offer a variety of role-play and simulations.
- Group my students.
- Assume a monitor teacher role.
- Contextualized topics and activities.
- Always motivate them before they talk.
- Their personal experience and reality.
Content Based Instruction

Another approach that I think will really benefit my class is content based instruction. This approach gives lessons a sense of purpose since “language becomes the medium to convey informational content of interest and relevance to the learner” (Brown, 2004) I consider this approach as an important contribution to my class. I cannot conceive my lessons without introducing a topic to my students to engage them. Sometimes, content based instruction can be a great way to encourage oral production since students feel that they are talking about topics that they can really address and talk about. This approach promotes in them self sufficiency and increases the language ego of students since they feel able to talk about every topic because the class is about things that happen in their lives. Also content based instruction develops intrinsic motivation in them because they talk not because they have to but because they want to share their ideas and thoughts about topics related to their daily life and experiences. To sum up, Content Based Instruction can make my tasks and topics more meaningful and boost oral expression as well.

Lexical Approach

When I started teaching my lessons I realized that most of my students did not understand common expressions and chunks such as classroom commands or language related to greet people and start and finish a conversation (language that I consider essential in a communicative lesson) in order to boost oral expression in my student I came up with the idea of lexical approach. This strategy is explained by his creator, Michel Lewis, with the
following idea: “the Lexical Approach argues that language consists of chunks which, when combined, produce continuous coherent text” (Lewis, 2008)

In order to teach a class based on lexical approach students focus on learning pre-fabricated chunks and expressions instead of memorizing grammar rules or structures. These objectives can only be reached if students learn not just the noun but also some adjectives associated to that noun and also the pronunciation of the whole expression and not word by word.

I believe this method can be a good strategy to teach new vocabulary and expressions for my students to communicate effectively in the classroom. Regarding the sense of purpose when using the expressions, students can make associations by the use of the expressions and the reactions or actions that these chunks produce in their peers and the teacher. The Lexical approach can be useful when teaching the vocabulary that I consider relevant for my students to communicate in the classroom. This approach can also lower the levels of anxiety in my students since whenever they want to talk they will have a pre-learnt data base of useful expressions.

The following three concepts are considered as important aspect to take in consideration when teaching my students. They have been trained in a grammar translation method and rote learning. This fact clearly affected the way in which they received my classes. The three concepts that I want to understand are: grammar translation method, rote learning and mixed ability class in order to see if something of the previous learning experiences that they had can be rescued in my tentative action plan.
Grammar Translation Method

Grammar translation method or classical method aims at the acquisition of grammatical rules and vocabulary by memorization and translation of words or sentences from the target language into the student’s mother tongue and vice versa. In a detailed way, this method can be defined according to what Prator and Celce – Murcia (Prator and Celce – Murcia in brow, 2004) have defined as the major characteristics of this method. The most remarkable ones are the following:

- Vocabulary is taught as isolated words
- Students are provided with grammatical instructions so they can put those isolated words together.
- Reading is only aimed to study grammatical structures.
- Pronunciation is not important since oral/aural production is not the objective of the class (Prator and Celce – Murcia in Brown, 2004)

This method is currently ruling our English classes mainly because it does not require a skillful teacher to teach a class under this method. Teachers do not talk in English because oral input does not contribute to the acquisition of grammatical rules and also has no sense since the class has as main aim to learn how to translate and not how to produce. Maybe this method is popular in our country since there is a huge lack of well-prepared English teachers and also because the number of them is not enough. In some cases teachers have been forced to teach English even though they have another specialty. In my specific context, my students were affected by this method since the previous teacher did not take care of the productive skills and put more emphasis on the
grammatical rules and memorization of words and dialogues than developing a class where the four skills are integrated. As a conclusion, it can be said that many of my students are possibly frustrated to see that now they have entire classes in English and they cannot understand most of it. Also it can be problem for “good students” to face a change in methodology since the previous classes only required the ability to memorize and not develop complex cognitive skills such as: categorize, comprehend or describe.

**Rote Learning:**

Rote learning is always presented as an opposite concept to meaningful learning. So, in order to understand what rote learning is we have to define what meaningful learning is. According to Douglas Brown meaningful learning “subsumes new information into existing structures and memory system and the resulting associative links create stronger retention” (Brown, 2004) In other words, meaningful learning is always meaningful because it uses the previous and background knowledge of the students to engage them with the class or class topic. On the other hand, rote learning is “taking in isolation bits and pieces of information that are not connected with one’s existing cognitive structures” (Brown, 2004)

As brown said rote learning is not useful because it makes students memorize isolated words or chunks just for the sake of memorizing them: there is no meaningful use for those words either in the class or in life. Some examples of rote learning problem explained by Brown are the following

- High amount of grammar explanation.

- Too much explanation on abstract concepts.
- Too much drilling and memorization.

- Activities whose purposes are not clear.

- Activities that do not match the objective of the class, unit or course.

- Activities that push students to learn the mechanics of the language instead on the language itself or its meaning.

It is important to be aware conscious about the effects of rote learning in order to avoid it. And the most important effect is that rote learning does not allow students to think by themselves and use the language to express themselves because they and their teacher are only worried about learning the grammar or the mechanics of the language in order to learn more about the language but not the language itself. In rote learning classes, language is not a means but the end and purpose of the lesson. The result is that students in a few months or years after graduating will discover that they have not learned anything because the classes never had a clear and meaningful purpose.

**Mixed ability classes:**

Chilean reality suggests that in our classrooms teachers have around 37 to 45 students in a normal class. Some of the students in the classroom are good in the subject, others deal with it in a acceptable way and another portion of the students have a low performance on the tests and the class dynamics. On that account, it is important to know what a mixed ability class is and how it works. According to Richard (1986) some of the best strategies to teach mixed ability classes are the following:

- Introduce more cooperative learning activities
- Reduce the amount of teacher interventions

- Increase the amount of students’ talk

- More negotiation of meaning

- More comprehensible input

- Increase the motivation in students

A good strategy also prepares different versions of the same activity for weaker, intermediate and stronger students so each group will work at their pace and level.
Chapter IV

Action plan and possible solutions.

Unit one: classroom commands and greetings

Accordingly to all the things that have been said in this research, I would like to create a tentative action plan that uses lesson plans as the main resource to boost oral expression. The idea is to continue using the pre, while and post stages since they give an order and structure to the class. Then it is important to acknowledge that the teacher always must adopt a monitor role inside the classroom. Students must feel self-sufficient in order to feel that they can talk and overcome their shyness easily. If the teacher is always assuming all the responsibilities and doing the entire job inside the classroom students will get used to the easiest way to memorize English grammatical rules and they will finally continue asking for Spanish.

To begin with (and recognizing that my students do not have enough previous knowledge of speaking strategies) the first classes must start by teaching classroom commands and greetings as the first general unit of the first semester that ideally has 8 classes. (Approximately the semester will have 5 months. Each month will have 8 classes of 90 minutes each)

At the beginning of the semester students can use one month (8 classes previously mentioned) to train the use of greetings and expressions using them as chunks (putting lexical approach into practice). Ideally they will start by learning 5 expressions and words per class and continue using them in the following lessons using the previous knowledge of the students. The idea here is to increase the oral expressions without letting aside of the rest of the skills.
Ergo, during the first month all the listening and reading comprehension materials, as well as the exercises used in the while stages will be prepared by the teacher since many course books do not start with a unit of greeting and commands. Ideally they will practice more with speaking activities rather than writing it the productive part of the class since this tentative action plan follows an ideal Communicative language approach model.

At the end of the first month they will approximately have around 30 to 40 daily expressions to communicate inside the classroom and start or finish a conversation with another person. I also consider important to mention that this plan is intended to be applied at the beginning of the first semester and consists in one thematic unit that will probably give the students the basic vocabulary to communicate in the classroom; they will gain more confidence and overcome their hesitating behavior in an easier way.

**Materials, strategies and suggestions: unit one pre plan**

Since in the first month of the semester my students will not work with the course book given by the Ministry of Education, the teacher must prepare all the materials. Consequently, the teacher will probably spend a lot of time planning the lessons and preparing the materials of the classes. Consequently it will be really helpful to have a pre plan of Unit One to have more guidance on what the expressions, contents and strategies, among others, should be. My idea is that as this action plan is using the pre, while and post stages the teacher must alternate reading and listening activities on the while part of the class and giving more emphasis to speaking activities in the pre and post part of the class. Also all the lessons will use a topic to contextualize the words and to facilitate the
negotiation of meaning in students. In the following chart some activities and materials are suggested for the first unit. It is important to mention that the thematic unit described above was created by me in order to fit my future work on the targeted level and my students’ reality.

Unit one (thematic unit): “let’s say hello to a new year”

Purpose of the unit: at the end of the unit students will be able to request and ask for information using the target vocabulary of the unit in contextualized activities and in all the dynamics of the class.

Learning outcomes:

- Students will analyze in listening and reading activities the target vocabulary of every lesson (comprehensible input).
- Students will read and listen in a comprehensible way adapted texts in order to acquire useful vocabulary and expressions related to the thematic unit.
- Students will practice the use of the target vocabulary learnt in the pre and while stages in practical and communicative situations in order to boost self-sufficiency in oral expression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class topic</th>
<th>Target vocabulary</th>
<th>Pre stage suggested activities</th>
<th>While stage suggested skill and activities</th>
<th>Post stages suggested activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My classroom is...</td>
<td>Vocabulary associated to classroom object and spaces. (no more than 10 single)</td>
<td>Discussion about if students like their classroom. If not how they can make it more friendly and presentation</td>
<td>Adapted reading short story about a group of students who are labeling the parts of the classrooms and changing</td>
<td>In pairs students label 5 objects of the classroom and propose to the class at least two ideas of new seating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **The language of my classroom** | Integration of the vocabulary from the last class plus 5 more expressions aimed to ask for permission or request information | Prediction of the possible expressions that the class will address. Students can see the pictures and then confirm their predictions about what they are going to learn.  
Presentation of focus questions | Adapted listening text in which students can analyze how the expressions are used in a familiar and daily context. Students do matching and true and false exercises  
Students are encouraged to create a little sketch in no more than 2 minutes using some of the expressions and words studied before.  
Then students present some of the sketches and teachers and students can give feedback to the groups. |  |
| **Conflicts?** | Integration of the vocabulary learnt before plus 5 expressions aimed to express feelings and thoughts about the classroom. | Students discuss in pairs which are their feelings emotions and actions towards school. What do they do when they have a problem and what people can I talk to in the school if something is happening to me. Introduction of focus questions | Adapted reading story in which a problem in the school is faced in many ways using the expressions of the target vocabulary. Students must analyze it and complete exercises of fill in the gaps and questions according to the reading.  
Students discuss a particular problem that they have had in school. Using the expressions learned before they will create a brochure with useful expressions that can be used in the situation chosen. They the poster will be presented and posted on the school bulletin boards. |  |
| **My classmates and friends** | Past expressions previously learned and 5 more expressions to greet and start conversation in the classroom | Students discuss in pairs if the previous years they have learned some useful expression to greet people. How would they say hello or goodbye to a classmate or a friend in English? | Adapted listening text in which students can listen to a short dialogue the 5 expressions used in a classroom context. Students take notes of what they can hear and make tick exercises checking the expressions that  
Students will receive a piece of paper with the expressions used to greet and start a conversation. They will around the classroom and see if they can greet at least 10 people and see if they understand what they are talking to each other. |  |
Check point of the expressions learned. A practical activity is suggested. In this case, this thematic unit proposes the preparation of posters and brochures that will be glued all over the classroom. In this class students will work on their own creating the materials and the posters for the class. At the end all the posters will be evaluated with a rubric in which the communicative aspects should be more relevant than the grammatical ones.

<p>| Formal and informal expressions | In this class students will analyze different expressions and discriminate if they are formal or informal. | Students will see some of the posters that they did for the class and the expressions used on them. Which of them can you use with the principal of the school and your friends? Introduction of focus questions | Adapted reading story in which the vocabulary is used in context. Students complete exercises of matching, categorizing and labeling with the expression from the text. | In groups Students will create a dictionary with at least 10 of the words that they have seen in class. In order to do that, they must discuss which of the expression are formal and which of them are not, defining them with their own words and explaining them, |
| Troubles with the words | Students will learn new expressions to ask questions related to the subject itself and how to solve doubts regarding English | Teacher will show to the students a video in which a student has troubles while learning English and how the student can solve those situations by the use of certain expressions. Students then will discuss in pairs about which of these situations have happened to them before and when. | Adapted listening text in which students will spot the new words in familiar situations and contexts Students do exercises of matching and true and false according to the listening activity. | In pairs students must discuss how many expression they can use to solve their doubts and problems in the classroom. They will make a list of the most common doubts and problems exist in their English classes and how can they solve them by the use of the expressions learned. Then, they will share their expression with at least three couples and record their |</p>
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<th>Introduction of focus questions</th>
<th>answers.</th>
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Final check of the unit: students will check the progress of their knowledge and abilities by answering a questionnaire and a self-evaluation about how she or he felt during the classes and how they can improve it for the future. This class has the intention to act as a metacognitive process in which students can analyze their cognitive processes and their work in the unit.
Chapter V

Conclusion

Taking in consideration all the things that have been said it can be concluded that oral production inside the classroom is an element that language teachers cannot ignore. The benefits of effective communication are widely recognized by a large amount of authors and teachers. However the most important outcome that language teachers can appreciate in their classes is how communication goes from an unfruitful attempt to request for data and information to the expression of ideas and feelings. In this research the importance of oral communication lies in the negotiation of meaning and in the communication itself. Is it possible for our students to communicate just in written form? Voice is the most immediate form of communicating and in most occasions the most effective one. It is for that reason that oral expression not only can improve the acquisition of a foreigner language but also can empower our students and give them the tools not only to express themselves in their mother tongue but also to speak up their ideas in another language. With such a great power they have access to different cultures, meanings and ideas. Teaching a foreigner language in all its versions (speaking, reading, writing and listening) can prepare our students to communicate and be subjects with voice.


References


Appendix

Journals

August 26th, 2012

I have just finished my first class on 6th grade and I could notice some things about them: they have a lot of resources in the classroom: they have projectors and speakers to do a lot of visual and auditory activities. Also in this particular classroom they have access to dictionaries that they tend to overuse: every time they don’t know a word they look for it on the dictionary.

The class is quite large and the students have mixed abilities: I would like to highlight the case of Constanza Lucero: she is a really good student who is able to communicate and understand a simple conversation in English. However, her grades are not as good as I could expect. (She has a 6, 1 in the subject versus the highest score student in the subject, Constanza Cañete, who has a 6, 8) when I started to compare the performance of this two students during the class I realized that Cañete, as well as the majority of my students, were really used to memorize and recite the structures instead of communicate: Lucero is the only student in 6th grade A who can communicate a message without being the best students in terms of grade.

Regarding the rest of my students they seemed nervous and anxious to have the third teacher of English in just one month. After the class ended, they have said that they didn’t understand my class because of the constant use of English during the lesson. They are not used to speak in class and they use Spanish all the time. When I was explaining something they started to ask for
Spanish and when they didn’t get what they want they show themselves reluctant to continue participating in the activities that were prepared for the class.

To sum up, most of the students immediately showed a friendly attitude towards me. However, the girls seemed more open to accept this change instead of boys. Also the whole group seems to work better in pairs instead of working alone. As a general rule, they tolerate very well the rules of the class and can be concentrated listening or reading during a long period of time (more than 10 minutes)
August 28th, 2012

6th grade B seemed to have more willingness to work in this class compared to the previous group. This behavior can be explained by the larger number of students in this group that seems to have more skills that facilitates the work with the language. However, when looking at the grades at the end of class I noticed that these are not better compared to 6th grade A. however, they show more willingness to work. I say this because this group appeared to have a more positive attitude towards to the constant exposure to the language: they didn’t ask for Spanish and they were always making efforts to grasp the meaning of the words without looking at the dictionary.

They have the same visual aids and materials as 6th grade A: the classroom is equipped with a data show and speakers as well as dictionaries and books to work on. In general terms this group can be focus less time than 6th grade A in listening and reading skills but they react better when a speaking activity is proposed: they make more questions and more efforts to express their tastes in english than the other group. However, is more difficult to maintain a positive classroom environment here than in 6th grade a since they bully each other and have a lot of coexistence problems among them. This was particularly problematic when I asked them to work in pairs or in group since there were two people who were left working alone. (Diego Uribe and joseph Gallardo)
August 29th, 2012

The second class with 6th grade A was better in terms of discipline. I started using images and visual resources to engage them and they seemed to work. However, when I proposed them to talk about the things that they usually do they didn’t show interest at all. Maybe, it is because they don’t see me as someone who they can trust. Also, I realize that they had troubles with cognates and false cognate: as an example they confuse “can” with “dog” and they do not make any effort to understand word such as “activity” or “family”. It seems that they are used to be “spoon feed” when it comes to learn new vocabulary. They do not understand basic words such as: read, listen or speak. I realized about this when I asked them to read a small paragraph and they didn’t react to the instruction until I made a mimic to illustrate the meaning of “read”. The same happens with classroom commands: they didn’t seem to understand chunks such as “be quiet” or “turn around” which makes more difficult to maintain a proper working environment in the classroom.
August 29th, 2012

This was the second class with 6th grade B and the results were similar. The students continued showing enthusiasm for the activities even though they did not have enough vocabulary to properly do them. However, this group seemed more willing to collaborate with the development of the class by providing ideas and discussing their daily activities.

I could notice that this group has problems with classroom commands as well as 6th grade A. nevertheless, they made more efforts to understand cognate and false cognates without looking at the dictionary. It seems that the language ego in this class is higher than in 6th grade A. however, they continue carrying out the reading and listening activities with troubles. it seems that they are not really interested in receiving input since they are always demanding for speaking activities.
September 3rd, 2012

I can see some progress in sixth grade A; they have started participating in classes and stop asking for Spanish in the classroom. However, they continue depending on the dictionary and they seem so anxious when they make a mistake.

Since now the classes are in the afternoon because of the re schedule of the classes the students seem to have more troubles to concentrate at this time (2:00 pm) than in the morning. The listening and reading activities that were so easy for them started to be less productive since they do not give real evidence that they are understanding what they listen and read. Nevertheless, I encourage them to work in groups and the concentration came back. In this group is really easy to form groups since they all get along and work in a cooperative way.

It is important to mention that at the beginning of the class they asked for “a reward” in order to perform the speaking activities. I accepted to give them credit for the test if I catch someone talking in English: they all were participating and even showed more interest in show evidence of what they have done. Despite this fact, they didn’t show a real ability to talk in English since they were not really trained for that before.
September 5th

In this class 6th grade students seemed more comfortable with the activities prepared. They participated in the speaking activities with enthusiasm without asking for any rewards. As for listening and reading activities the group showed an improvement in the attention spam: they can be concentrated during a longer period of time listening to a track or reading a short story. However, the results are the same: they continue getting confused with cognates and they tend to look for wrong information in the listening activities.

Regarding the speaking activities they have started using Spanglish during the classes and sometimes they dare to ask for chunks in english in order to use them (the last class they asked me to teach them how they can ask for permission to go to the toilet) this last observation shows that even though they are in the same level as 6th grade A (both groups don’t know how to communicate with classroom commands or discriminate between cognate and false cognates) they seem to be more interested in the classes than the other group.