

Title

MY EXPERIENCE AS ENGLISH TEACHER IN MY PRACTICUM: LOOKING FOR
AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHOD

Author

Carolina Vélez Montoya

Program

Licenciatura en Inglés

E-mail

Carolina.velezon@amigo.edu.co

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English teaching in our Colombian context is a challenge, because of the different issues present in it. Problems as the lack of interest towards a foreign language, the stereotypes English country natives have in this country learners' and citizens', the perception that some students have of the English class as the time to rest for really demanding classes, among others.

To start this writing, I will include some important information about the writer of this essay to the fact that are important elements that will guide this narrative. It refers to a passionate teacher who fulfilled her life with her profession combining her main interests: One is what is Humanities and the other one is what is related to the English Language teaching.

That person is me. I had the practicum experience at the school where I currently work, I have had the opportunity to use my interests and expand what I have learned a long in my career and to question what theories in Education say in the practice. As we know, Humanism is complex, there are too many variables so it is just impossible to make a mold for human beings and to pretend it will always be successful, especially in education. Therefore, I believe sometimes we as teachers, must submit our method to trial-error, being responsible, documented, critic of our job and always keeping in mind a clear intention of improvement and wellbeing of our students. So this is what I have made in this wonderful opportunity of being a teacher, researching, combining and creating, those combinations are based on studied theories I consider the best for my student's necessities. Thus, I have come up with my resolutions looking for an answer to the question for effectiveness in English teaching, which has ended up in certain results I consider have been satisfactory until now and that allow me to point some important aspects while teaching English in a regular classroom.

In English there are several sustained teaching tools to address this practice from different perspectives since students in our classrooms have different sensitivities and this way, we can give them more opportunities to understand a topic adjusted to diverse style of understanding.1.

So far, I have found three edges to support my post method practices, the first one is English for real purposes, the second one (and the most controversial) is the classic method by repetition and the third one is to bring literature into the classroom. So, the reader could wonder how I combined all those three teaching strategies in each of my classes.

When I took the job at this institution, the academic structure of English was different. It used to have a traditional model, the one taken from Comenius that we all know, memoristic and that was all, it is really common to find. Therefore, it was the necessity to redesign the curriculum in English in order to attend to the demands of the Colombian National Plan for English named “Guía 22”. 2.

Inside this syllabus It was necessary to make students develop several competences simultaneously, such as Linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic. In addition, It is aimed to address the student to be an interlocutor with human values, to be respectful, to act properly according to the situation. It is fundamental when you are focus in **English for real purposes**. This sounds great, but there was a concern I wrote in my class diary, “Should I see English learning as an accumulative process in which, at the end, the student can recognize expressions and words, and then this would be the moment to include thinking and logic? But if that is so, how about the ages with who I am working with in which they are just developing consciousness? 3.

Talking about consciousness, the pedagogical model of the Educational Center where I work in, which is developmentalist with a constructivist approach, where English and all subjects are taught in order to develop consciousness in the students; this means, there should be coherence between knowledge and its functions in real life (**English for real purposes**). So, from this perspective the approach that better fits to develop the objective of the institution is the “Communicative Approach.” The one that is looking for the development of the competences mentioned above including consciousness.

I would like to point out the Communicative Approach has an interesting light in which we need a good and solid starting point, ***“It is thought that learners need to have knowledge of the rules of use in order to generate language appropriately for certain situations, and to have strategies to communicate effectively”***⁴. In other words, it is required to get in used to certain basic rules in the new language and then to move forward. This fits perfectly in the children's situation, the ones who are first strengthening the memory, and consciousness is little by little being reinforced. Thus, some scholars argue that in learning a foreign language we behave similar to our vernacular language. While babies, we learn a quantity of words and over time we conjugate them and give them sense. This does not fully explain what happens with the development of logic. About that, Matthew Lipman⁵ has demonstrated in his studies about philosophy for kids that they develop a logic thinking mixing creatively the notions they have in their memory as a natural fact, but Education is an artificial process in which children face new challenges in the learning of abstract ideas. So, it seems they need the opportunity to acquire both, new concepts and also to develop thinking and logic but it seems It doesn't happen simultaneously⁶.

Subsequently, I have developed some strategies in order to help children acquire basic tools as basic vocabulary, writing, reading and the relation between words and letters (linguistic competences) in some classes, and on the other hand I defend the usage of English literature in the class for giving the chance to develop Pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences in other classes, in which I look for the opportunity to include literature which contains the studied vocabulary, all oriented to the purpose of communication for real life. How is this?

For the Linguistic competences, I have designed an activity of spelling and I want to stress the importance of this aspect because it has brought me a lot of surprises and questions. It seems spelling could be mechanical and it has been really used from old times in the traditional teaching models, and it has been part of the method by repetition which has been highly criticized. Moreover, this is a crucial point: Should we demonize traditional methods in foreign language teaching or just redirect them? In this mentioned experience, I have proved that traditional methods could be effective if we can redesign them. Therefore, spelling is an important base in English, which conjugates acquisition of vocabulary, and the understanding of a difference between reading of words and alphabet, especially complicated in the case of native Spanish speaking people.

This is how I have created the complementary activity called “The Spelling Bee”. It consists of a scholarly contest of spelling made at the end of the academic period. For such contest I decorate the stand with colors yellow and red and pictures related to bees in order to generate curiosity and motivation. To achieve this goal, students learn vocabulary in the English classes, its proper spelling and reading. Then three Volunteers from each grade participate and ten words are given to the participants in the contest in front of all grades at the school. All the participants get the maximum score in English, and the winner gets certification and an Ice cream. It could sound simple but it had a significant and inspected reception among students who prepare themselves motivated to participate in the

contest. Students have demonstrated this activity has had an impact in their motivation to learn English and I have noticed academic good results too 7.

As for Literature, it is a great opportunity for kids to use the vocabulary learned in class and the interaction, to connect their subjectivity with English and to develop productive skills 8, but as said above these kind of classes are made in some sessions separately in order to focus in the aimed competence because it needs enormous amount of energy and concentration. For this, pictures books, videos, audiobooks, are used all in English and subtitled. After this, the youngest ones express themselves through art and the bigger kids have conversations in class sharing their own points of view. Nevertheless, discussions can be in Spanish, they have to understand the previous reading in English.

As a conclusion, it remains to say that taking into account all discussions against method by repetition pointing to memory, my activity with spelling has demonstrated and allowed me to approach to a kind of measurements of student's progress in English, because I can observe they have memorized words, spelling and pronunciation. But It does not mean I do not care about more complex mental processes, contrary to this I also wonder about other important elements implicit in the communicative process such as logic and thinking, because the dynamics of language is not only a mechanical repetition, but at the same time the acquisition of vocabulary which makes possible the combination to express ideas, is an important material on what more complex processes continue and repetition is important for memory being aware that it is not 100% effective itself. It needs a purpose. As teachers, we have some requirements; sometimes it seems impossible to conjugate for the development of all competences in English at the same time, but this is not an excuse for doing the same mistakes. Children really need chances to develop their competences, and it is our responsibility to help them. Therefore, I believe teachers have to develop the capability to play wisely with variables which compose the educative fact: we have to play with materials,

necessities, capabilities, time (moments in the class), theories, etc, strategically as if they were a special puzzle but the chance to combine knowledge and subjectivity has to be given.

I agree with Frank Smith when he said:

“Consciousness allows our perceptual system access to the past (memory) into to possible futures (prediction); it allows the imagination to become a working part of perception.

Students whose imaginations are not locked into whatever they are expected to learn cannot be expected to succeed. They will literally lack consciousness of whatever the teacher is trying to impart - and unconscious people do not learn” 9.

References

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- *Krashen, Stephen. (1.982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition, Oxford: PERGAMON PRESS.*
 - *“Studies in developmental psychology have contributed a great deal to the understanding of how children acquire language. Early studies attempted to link cognitive stages and stages of linguistic development. However, subsequent studies suggest that cognition and language develop along related but independent paths”.*

- *Reflection 13. October 28-2016 as I wrote in my diary:*
 - *It seems the first “Spelling Bee” was exciting for kids and impacted their lives and their learning. So I consider it was a significant experience for we all. The first “Spelling Bee” was an event with a lot of challenge to design and to make it real. It was interesting to observe how kids engaged and prepared themselves for the event. The activity woke up a lot of emotions ending up into learning. Emotions such as anxiety, nervousness, joy and also frustration. Now I am preparing the second “Spelling Bee” with a lot of expectations.*
- *Bringing literature into your classroom. Short, k (1.997) Literature as a way of knowing. Heinemann. Portsmouth. NH.*
 - *“Literature is both a mirror and a window on life. As readers discover other experiences through literature, they find themselves reflected in books. Literature has the potential to transform children's lives. Literature connects the heart and mind. In schools, we often focus on knowledge and the mind, and fail to connect with the whole of your student's lives. Literature helps to reconnect feelings and thinking”.*
- *Our selves. Frank Smith (2006) Our selves. Mahwah, New Jersey. LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS. London.*Chapter 9, page 99 Our consciousness.*