

# Teaching Abroad

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**Bilić, Dina**

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*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

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Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek

Faculty of Philosophy

Department of English Language  
and Literature

Teaching Abroad:  
Self-reflective Study of Teaching English as a Foreign Language to  
Very Young Learners in Spain

Poučavanje u inozemstvu:  
Introspektivno istraživanje poučavanja  
engleskog kao stranog jezika

Diploma paper

Mentor: Višnja Pavičić Takač, PhD, Associate Professor

Student: Dina Bilić

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As the title itself explains, the main focus of the paper is teaching English as a foreign language to young learners in Spain. The paper is based on the self-reflective study which was conducted in a period of six weeks, while I was teaching English language in a kindergarten.

The research report itself will be preceded by a theoretical part referring to these aspects of language teaching I found most relevant for my own practical experience. Since the study focuses on teaching beliefs, teaching traits and teacher development, it will be elaborated in the theoretical part of the study. The chapter about the characteristics of young language learners will follow. Considering the fact that teaching young learners took place in Spain, the Spanish curriculum aim will be briefly described as well. Interaction in the classroom, planning decisions and the language use will be mentioned as part of the exploration of the teaching. In the final chapter of the theoretical part, the reflection on teaching will be elaborated through the description of journal writing, as it was the main research tool in this self-reflective study.

The research of the study will be presented through a series of ten self-reflective research questions. Through these questions, I will elaborate on my teaching experience prior to this research, as well as the personal experience, beliefs, and practices. The research tool that this study is based on is the teaching journal, i.e. personal record of my teaching experience. The teaching journal served as a foundation for my reflection on my teaching, as well as my motivation to raise questions about further teaching development. It also enabled me to observe the changes in my teaching methods and in my attitudes toward language teaching and learning. In the end, a short conclusion will follow.

## 1. Language Teaching Awareness

Richards (1998, as cited in Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999) discusses six content domains of second language education that teachers should develop. These include 1) theories of teaching, 2) teaching skills, 3) communication skills and language proficiency, 4) subject matter knowledge, 5) pedagogical reasoning skills, and 6) decision making and contextual knowledge. Teacher educators who follow such a developmental approach provide a variety of activities for teachers to construct a knowledge based on six domains. These include:

- experiencing teaching (practice teaching, internships)
- observing (peer observation)
- reflecting of teaching and learning (teaching journals and other written activities)
- investigating teaching and learning, doing project work (action research, curriculum and materials development)
- information-oriented approaches (lectures and large-group teaching)
- communication activities (student oral presentation, skill training), and proficiency-focused activities (practice of classroom functional language).

A general strategy to use in order to achieve your goals, either in language skills or techniques related, is to develop your self-awareness, in other words, to learn to judge your own language skills and teaching critically. This can be done through regular self-assessment and introspection. This involves planning what you are going to do, carrying out your plans, evaluating, and reviewing your performance. According to Carl Rogers, genuineness or realness was considered to be the most basic of attitudes that facilitate learning:

If the facilitator is a real person, being what she is, entering the relationship with the learner without presenting a front or a façade, she is much more likely to be effective. ... It means that she comes into a direct personal encounter with the learner, meeting her on a person-to-person basis. It means that she is *being* herself, not denying herself (Rogers 1983, as cited in Oprandy 1999:139).

Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) state that teachers and teacher educators often use vague words to talk about teaching. Words such as ‘encouragement,’ ‘clear,’ ‘atmosphere,’ ‘enthusiasm,’ and ‘interested’ are high-inference words, because they have different meanings for different people. For example, when one teacher hears the word ‘involved’, he or she might think of a class learners actively listening to a teacher, whereas another teacher might

think that ‘involved’ means learners talking loudly in a group work. The same adjective might have different connotations to the teachers, so there is a need to have a common language (metalanguage). This is the main purpose of observation. The goal is to evaluate teaching, to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching behavior, and to improve as a teacher.

As Gaies and Bowers (1990, as cited in Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999) conclude, one problem supervisors face while observing is defining improvement. This is because the relationship between teaching and learning is complex and it is not completely known how teachers’ behavior results in student’s learning to specify improvement. Moreover, the teachers are often given the global advice (i.e. teach the whole child, give individualized instructions) without linking it to specific behavior (Good and Brophy, 1997 in Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999). Chris Adlerd (cited in Head and Taylor, 1997) who trains teachers in the UK, found that all kinds of issues and problems arise when teachers begin to talk about the anxieties and difficulties in their teaching. She uses the metaphor ‘*opening a can of worms*’ as a way of exploring teachers’ worries and helping them to deal with it<sup>1</sup>.

Underhill (1994, cited in Head and Taylor, 1997) believes that self-awareness is an essential complement to understanding what is happening inside the learner, and that developing awareness lies at the heart of our development as teachers. Similarly, Head and Taylor (1997:48) conclude that “developing awareness is a process of reducing the disparity between what you do, and what you think you do; reducing the discrepancy between the psychological effect that you imagine your attitudes and behavior have on your learners, and effect that your atmosphere really has on them.” Furthermore, Gaies and Bowers (1990, cited in Gebhard, 1999:27) suggests that “...rather than basing the concept of improvement on the relationship between teaching behavior and learning activities, improvement can be based on what teachers are expected to be doing in a specific teaching context ... as compared to what they actually do”.

Moskowitz (1978, as cited in Head and Taylor, 1999:44) believes that affective education is effective education. Humanistic education is a way of relating that emphasizes self-discovery, introspection, self-esteem, and getting in touch with strengths and positive qualities of ourselves and others, because “as students find that their thoughts, feelings, and experiences are regarded as important in school, school becomes important to them.”

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<sup>1</sup> “the can is obviously ambiguous, meaning both building confidence, encouraging the realization of potential or empowerment of teachers so that they feel they can, and bringing into the public domain aspects of professional and sometimes personal lives from the hidden or known-to-self domains in the can.” (Adlerd, unpublished paper, cited in Head and Taylor, 1997:32)

## **1.1 Teacher Development**

Development means change and growth. As Underhill (1986, cited in Head and Taylor, 1997) states, teacher development (TD) is the process of becoming the best kind of teacher that someone can be. According to Head and Taylor (1997), TD draws on the teacher's own inner resource for change, and it is centered on personal awareness of the possibilities to change. Furthermore, it builds on the past, because while recognizing how past experiences have or have not been developed, we can identify opportunities for change in the present or future. It is a self-reflective process, because throughout questioning old habits, alternative ways of doing something differently are able to emerge.

As Brewster and Ellis (2002) point out, teachers are very much on their own. Teachers are busy people with tight schedules and responsibilities for many pupils, and often find it difficult to find the time and methods to develop personally and professionally, so sometimes teachers settle into a routine. As Jackson (1986, cited in Oprandy et.al., 1999:150) observed, the loneliness of a teacher is legendary. “Given the tight structure of teacher’s school day and the limited time set aside for professional development activities, teachers are generally left alone with their inner speech regarding the hundreds of decisions they need to make daily.” Gebhard and Oprandy (1999:28) believe that “teachers gain much from doing individual teacher-development activities, such as observing other teachers, keeping a journal, working on an action research project, talking with a supervisor, or working on a personal development project. Each activity alone certainly offers an opportunity for teachers to explore their teaching.” Therefore, as we gain more experience, it follows that we understand our pupils’ needs better, we are better able to control our pupils, we become more self-confident and we become more effective teachers (Brewster and Ellis, 2002).

## **1.2. Teacher’s Beliefs**

According to Richards and Lockhart (1996:29), teaching is a complex process that can be conceptualized in a number of different ways. Traditionally, language teaching has been described in terms of what teachers do; in terms of the actions and behaviors that teachers carry out in the classroom and the effects on learners. No matter what kind of class a teacher teaches, he or she is confronted with the following tasks: selecting learning activities, preparing learners for new learning, presenting learning activities, checking learners’

understanding, providing opportunities for practice of new items, monitoring learners' learning, giving feedback on student learning, reviewing and reteaching when necessary. In trying to understand how teachers deal with these dimensions of teaching, it is necessary to examine the beliefs and thinking processes that underlie teachers' classroom actions.

According to Richards and Lockhart (1996:30) teachers' belief systems are "founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work as well as their roles within it." These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision-making and action, and hence constitute what has been termed the '*culture of teaching*'. Teachers' belief systems are built up gradually over time and consist of both subjective and objective dimensions. Research on teacher's belief systems suggest that they are derived from a number of different sources (Kindsvatter et al., 1988, cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1996:30). Some of them are as followed:

1. Their own experience as language learners: all teachers were once students, and their beliefs about teaching are often a reflection of how they themselves were taught.

2. Experience of what works best: for many teachers experience is the primary source of beliefs about teaching. A teacher may have found that some teaching strategies work well and some do not.

3. Established practice: within a school, an institution, or a school district, certain teaching styles and practices may be preferred.

4. Personality factors: some teachers have a personal preference for a particular teaching pattern, arrangement, or activity because it matches their personality.

5. Educationally based or research-based principles: teachers may draw on their understanding of a learning principle in psychology, second language acquisition, or education and try to apply it in the classroom.

Brindley's observation (cited in Rivers and Temperley, 1978) draws to the fact that both teachers and learners bring experience to the classroom that influences their perception. Rivers and Temperley (1978) acknowledge that learning to use a language fully is an effortful process, because the teachers cannot learn the language for their learners, they can only set the language learners on the road, helping them to develop confidence in their own learning process. Not all techniques are applicable for every situation, therefore the teacher of English as a foreign language (TEFL) is a professional who must diagnose and select according to the particular situation of a specific class of students and adapt materials and techniques accordingly.

According to Willis and Wesley (1996), practice of language forms does not necessarily make perfect. People cannot learn a language without plenty of opportunities for real language use. Therefore, it is important that the language they are exposed to reflects the kind of language they want to learn. Spontaneous spoken language is what they need to hear and study. We can say that some people learn a language naturally, without classroom instructions. On the other hand, many people do not learn in spite of being taught. Formal instruction is rarely a sufficient condition for learning languages. Head and Taylor (1997) claim that not all the knowledge that one brings to your teaching has been learned in formal training. Therefore, much of it accumulates from experience.

According to Rivers and Temperley (1978), teachers should not get discouraged because they rarely see the fully developed product of their labors, the autonomous confident speaker of English. However, as teachers, we will often be rewarded by the enthusiasm of those we have started along that path, and they may pleasantly surprise us when we meet them in later years.

### **1.3. The Role of the teacher**

According to Willis and Wesley (1996), the teacher is generally a facilitator, always keeping the key conditions for learning in mind. The teacher is involved in setting tasks up, ensuring that the learners understand and complete them. Although learners carry out the tasks independently, the teacher still has an overall control and the power to stop everything if necessary. In a broader sense, the teacher is also a '*course guide*' explaining to learners the overall objectives of the course and how the components of the task framework can achieve these objectives. A summing up of what they achieved during a lesson, or after a lesson can help learner's motivation.

Brewster and Ellis (2002) notice that all teachers have their own preferred teaching styles which will affect their classroom management skills and their personal and professional development. Teaching style is a very individual measure, which is based on a range of factors such as the teaching/learning context, the teacher's personality, attitudes, and beliefs about language learning and learning more generally and finally, the teacher's classroom experience. Different teaching styles lead to variations in matters like discipline and classroom control, the amount of noise you tolerate in your classroom or the degree of learner independence you consider acceptable.



All teachers should have language awareness, but should also be knowledgeable of subject matter, methodology, and people. When it comes to the types of teacher, the main types are explainer, involver, and enabler. The *explainer* is knowledgeable in the subject matter; *Involver* is also knowledgeable with subject matter but also understands and has knowledge in teaching methodology, whereas *enabler* is knowledgeable with subject matter, has knowledge in teaching methodology, and also has an understanding of people. As an enabler, the teacher guides and helps the class to make decisions about the direction of class. All teachers develop their style and they fall in a category or combination of the categories, because these types of teacher often interconnect<sup>2</sup>.

In *The Tao of Leadership*, John Heider claims that too much conscious concentration on getting things right can block out the inner inspiration. Therefore, the teacher needs to learn to unclutter the mind, because “as you rely less and less on knowing just what to do, your work will become more direct and more powerful. You will discover that the quality of your consciousness is more potent than any technique or theory or interpretation” (Heider, 1985, as cited in Head and Taylor, 1997: 66).

Gebhard and Oprandy agree that exploration cannot be done in a vacuum. As Fanselow (1997, cited in Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999:5) suggests, seeking to explore by ourselves alone, is “like trying to use a pair of scissors with only one blade”. Likewise, Edge (1992, cited in Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999) explains that by cooperating with others, we can come to understand our own experience and opinions and we can enrich them with the understanding and experiences of others.

Gebhard and Oprandy (1999:15) encourage teachers to *explore to gain emotional clarity*. “By exploring our feelings we can gain awareness about the feelings we care deeply about or do not care about, or are ambivalent about”. Although this affective side of teaching is often neglected, we still need to explore the emotional side of ourselves, because our feelings about things can highly affect our behavior.

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<sup>2</sup> source: <http://eslenglishteacher.wordpress.com/category/teach>

## **2. Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Young learners**

There are a number of cases where a teacher, often unguided, is confronted with a group of learners who are heterogeneous in nearly every aspect (native language and culture, ability and experience in English, educational level, classroom expectations, personal goals...) and who are united only by the fact that they meet regularly for their English class. “Learners may not even share the motivation, wanting to learn more English because it is not uncommon for the learners to be in a language class under duress, at the order of some higher authority or seeking only a formal prerequisite for some other course of study” (Rivers and Temperley, 1978:34).

As Brewster and Ellis (2002) argue, young learners are expected to develop a global and specific understanding of simple oral texts related to well known objects, situations and events. They are also expected to use the foreign language orally to communicate with their partners in routine classroom activities and in communicative situations created by the teacher for that specific purpose. Of course, the kinds of language learning points focused on by the teacher or materials will vary enormously according to the learners’ age and language levels. In line with primary methodology, learners will probably have the opportunity to learn the English alphabet, memorize simple dialogues, play language games, sing songs and chants and so on in ways that keep the child interested, motivated and challenged. The freedom from rigidly specified aims is intended to “leave room for personal interpretation and application by the individual schools and teachers in accordance with local needs” (Housen, 1997, as cited in Brewster and Ellis, 2002:9).

### **2.1. Teaching English in Spain**

In many countries, the main language aim for primary English language teachers is to be able to communicate or to develop communicative competence. Similarly, Brewster and Ellis (2002) state that in Spain the language aim is recognizing and appraising the communicative value of a foreign language and the capacity to learn how to use it. Teachers will be aware of how much parental expectations can be a positive or negative force in second language learning. Fortunately in the case of learning English many parents are highly motivated, a feeling which tends to be passed on to their children. However, teachers will have to work hard to nurture feelings of enthusiasm in their learners.

An umbrella term covers four different kinds of awareness which are as following: language awareness, cognitive awareness, social awareness, and cultural awareness (in Brewster and Ellis, 2002). Developing learning awareness is essentially a way of helping learners to understand why and how they are learning another language. Another common aim of language learning in many countries, including Spain, is to develop intercultural awareness. Therefore, Coyle and Valcarcel state that the aim is “not to teach a foreign language but to teach how to use it in communication” (Coyle and Valcarcel, 1997, cited in Brewster and Ellis, 2002).

## **2.2. Characteristics of Young Learners**

The input of a foreign language that children receive when they are listening or reading in the second language is dependent on many factors: the goals of language learning, the syllabus in use, the teacher’s beliefs about learning and language learning, the teacher’s language level and teaching style, the size of classes and the type of resources available.

Young children are not yet in control of their lives and still have a great deal to learn in their own language, as well as learn another one. At four, eight or twelve, children do not have specific foreign language needs, although some may be under pressure, usually from their parents or the school system, to pass English language examination (Brewster and Ellis, 2002). Young children are different from older learners because children have a lot of physical energy and often need to be physically active. Moreover, they have a wide range of emotional needs, they are developing conceptually and are at an early stage of their schooling, they are still developing literacy in their first language, learn more slowly and forget things quickly. They also tend to be self-oriented and preoccupied with their own world, get bored easily but can concentrate for a surprisingly long time if they are interested, therefore, they can be easily distracted but also very enthusiastic.

One reason for starting to learn a language as a young learner is to increase the total number of years spent learning the language. Generally, the younger the learner, the more physical activity they tend to need and the more they need to make use of all their senses (Brewster and Ellis, 2002:36). For children, it was determined that regular short slots during the week were likely to be more effective than a longer more concentrated slot only once in a week. Secondly, young children seem to have a greater facility for understanding and imitating what they hear than secondary school learners. Therefore, “general aims of early

foreign language learning should appear attractive to parents, teachers and be workable for children, while avoiding to be over-ambitious and unrealistic.’’ (Brewster and Ellis, 2002:5).

With regard to grammar, Willis and Wesley (1996) believe that many teachers feel that real beginners need to be taught some grammar before they can start to do tasks. In task-based learning, learners learn by doing, the learning is part of the task itself. If we are visiting a country where we do not speak the language, we take a dictionary or a phrase book, rather than grammar. Children learn their first language by listening and finally producing some words and phrases. We do not expect them to start with perfectly formed grammatical sentences. For example, six to seven year-olds tend to be confused by certain irrelevant information, complex constructions, and the implied meaning of certain words. Chomsky (1969, cited in Brewster and Ellis, 2002) presented five year-olds with a blindfold doll and asked if the doll was ‘easy to see’ or ‘hard to see’. Most of the younger children were misled by the blindfold and responded with ‘hard to see’. By nine and ten none of the children were confused by the blindfold. Therefore, young children may not know that they do not understand or that directions they are given are incomplete or unclear. They may simply continue without showing incomprehension or asking questions. Older children are more likely to realize that something is unclear and may try to identify the problem and suggest an alternative. Furthermore, beginners may feel more vulnerable and shy when attempting to use the new language in front of other learners. Exposure and use are two of the optimum conditions for language learning, establishing a relaxed, anxiety-free atmosphere, building on what they know, but without expecting perfection, reassuring them of their progress, boosting their confidence.

All language learners at primary school have emotional needs, such as developing self-esteem and confidence in learning. Very young language learners still operate in a very egocentric way where they find it difficult to consider other’s needs, tend not to cooperate with others as effectively as older children and can become very frustrated if their needs are not met. The behavioristic view was shaped by the thought where children were seen as ‘blank slates’ or ‘*tabula rasae*’, who learned by reacting passively to different kinds of stimuli and the positive and negative feedback they received. This view holds that teaching equals learning. This is known as a transmission model of learning (Brewster and Ellis, 2002).

By contrast, Piaget presented the child as actively constructing his or her own thinking by acting upon the physical and social environment (Cameron, 2001). For example, most children between four and eight are at the concrete operational stage, where the language is contextualized in concrete situation. By 11, some learners may move into the stage of formal

operation, where they are capable of more abstract (decontextualized) thought. This means that it is not possible to teach young children some things until they are ready. However, the important part of children's lives that Piaget neglects is the social, as "it is the child on his or her own in the world that concerns him, rather than the child in communication with adults and other children" (Cameron, 2001:4).

The work of Vigotsky (1978, cited in Cameron, 2001) is therefore very important since he emphasized the role of the adult in the children's learning of language. He saw the child as first doing things in social context, with other people and the language helping in various ways, and gradually shifting away from reliance on others to independent action and thinking. This shifting, from thinking aloud to thinking inside the head is called 'internalization'. He saw the process of mental development as working on two levels: the present actual level and the future, potential level of development. Vigotsky held the view that speech precedes the thinking. In addition, Wertsch (1985, as cited in Cameron, 2001:7) emphasized that this internalization was not just a transfer but transformation, because being able to talk about something is qualitatively different from being able to do it.

Since language is intimately bound with human behavior and personality, it is considered that extroverts make better language learners. Therefore, extroverts often appear to be learners that are more active and more willing to take risks with language. However, some introverts who are silent in class are often listening well, thinking hard and learning as much if not more (Richards and Lockhart, 1996). Other personality factors also come into play. People who are tolerant of ambiguities tend to do well, while shy or anxiety-prone learners may do less well and will benefit from small group and pair work, which is less threatening. Learner's cognitive styles may vary as well, i.e. for analytic learners who prefer a deductive approach, give them a rule and let them deduce another example from it; for holistic learners, who prefer an inductive approach, give them an example and let them induce the rule (Brewster and Ellis, 2002).

Willis and Wesley (1996) conclude that lack of motivation is the main problem that prevents learners from learning. In the gap between skill acquiring and skill using, many learners will remain undecided rather than face the unprotected autonomy of real communication. They will prefer the safety of structured exercise and develop a nervous attitude toward the unstructured, which will be very hard to change. Children have better memories and rely less on cognitive strategies. With children, teachers often use more active methods, reflecting their ability to imitate and rote-learn and speaking without being self-conscious.

### 3. Exploring our Teaching

Looking from a teacher-thinking perspective at teaching and learning, one is not so much striving for the disclosure of the effective teacher, but for the explanation and understanding of teaching processes as they are. “After all, it is the teacher’s subjective school-related knowledge which determines what happens in the classroom, whether the teacher can articulate his or her knowledge or not. Instead of reducing the complexities of teacher-learning situations to a few manageable research variables, one tries to find out how teachers cope with these complexities.” (Halkes and Olson, 1984, as cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1996:36).

In order to understand the teaching processes, the teacher should have in mind the importance of lesson planning, individual differences in learners’ personalities and their different interaction types, and in case of young learners, the importance of the balance between the target language and the native language.

#### 3.1. Interaction in the Classroom

There are various classroom interaction patterns; beside the group work, pair work and the individual work, some other ways of classroom interaction are: close-ended teacher questioning, choral responses, collaboration, full-class interaction, or an open-ended questioning tasks. Birkmaier (as cited in Rivers and Temperley, 1978) points out the importance of using language in a natural, useful way in a significant social setting, because without the ability to comprehend the speech of another, ‘communication’ becomes an uninteresting and frustrating one-way street. However, there can always be different patterns of interaction observed in the same classroom due to the individual differences in learners’ personality and their cognitive styles. Good and Power (1976) describe six different interactional patterns:

- *Task-oriented learners*: those learners have high level of competence and success in completing academic task with great accuracy. They seldom need a teacher’s help and they are very cooperative with others.
- *Phantom learners*: even though they are very good learners who work hard on classroom tasks, these learners are often not noticed or heard in the classroom. Because of the fact that they rarely initiate the conversation and ask for help, teachers and other learners do not know them very well.

- *Social learners*: they tend to place a high value on personal interaction. Although they may be competent in completing classroom tasks, they tend to value socializing with their classmates more than completing class assignments. For that reason, they tend to be popular among their classmates, but less popular among their teachers.
- *Dependent learners*: these learners need the teacher's support to complete class tasks; they tend not to work well in large groups, because very often they need guidance and encouragement in order to complete the task.
- *Isolated learners*: these learners isolate themselves from others and withdraw from classroom interactions. They may avoid activity tasks such as peer or group work, because they show reluctance to sharing their work with others in the classroom.
- *Alienated learners*: these learners react against teaching and learning and are often aggressive. They create discipline problems and make it difficult for those around them to work.

Classroom interaction is typically made-up of a three-part exchange in which the teacher initiates, a learner responds and a teacher gives some feedback (Willis and Wesley, 1996). If the teacher gives no feedback, the learners may take this as a negative sign and go on trying to answer until some feedback occurs. The teacher initiates most exchanges, which may involve informing the class about something, directing the learner to do or say something, eliciting a response, checking that something has been done, and evaluating the response. Therefore, it is the teacher who controls the openings and closings of every classroom topic or activity, who controls the turn-taking and who initiates almost every exchange.

Carl Rogers (1983, as cited in Head and Taylor, 1997:55) believes that the best learning happens when the learners are fully involved so that they can fully reach their potentials, and that “the primary task of the teacher is to *permit* the learner to learn, to feed his or her curiosity. ... Learning *how* to learn is the element that is always of value, now and in the future”.

### **3.2. Teacher Decision making**

Richard and Lockhart (1996) conclude that before a lesson can be taught, it must be planned. Decisions at this stage are called *planning decisions*. During the lesson itself, another level of decision-making is involved, when the teacher has to make snap decisions called *interactive decisions*, concerning different aspects of the lesson, many of which may not have been planned. After the lesson, the teacher must make decisions about its effectiveness and what would be the follow-up to the lesson. These are known as *evaluative decisions*.

The different teaching or learning situations that we experienced from childhood onwards will leave a mark on the kind of teacher we are today. Donald Schon, an American sociologist who has studied the habits of thinking and acting that professional people use, calls the experience of actually doing the job, *knowing-in-action*. It helps teachers to make the necessary on-the-spot practical decisions to cope with problems as they arise while the lesson is in progress. “Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate” (Schon, 1983, as cited in Head and Taylor, 1997:22).

According to Johnson (1999), the majority of curriculum development seems to proceed on the rather simplistic assumption that there is a direct equation between planning, teaching, and learning. In other words, it is assumed that what is planned will be taught, and that what is taught will be learned. Recent studies of what actually goes on at the stage of programmed interpretation, demonstrate that the equation is much more complex. Teachers do not always teach what has been planned, and learners very often learn things other than that which has been taught.

### **3.3. Target language and mother language use**

Even in our native language we often ‘hear’ what has never been said. The two terms *perception* and *reception*, represent the two levels of practice required to improve systematically the learner’s skill in interpreting messages intended by speaker. (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999:68). Even in the native language, many people are poor listeners, whether by weak powers of concentration, egocentrism or short auditory memory. According to Rivers and Temperley (1978), the ability to understand what others are saying is essential for the interaction.



According to Richards (1996), one distinguishing feature of language classrooms is that language is usually both the goal of the lesson and the means by which this goal is achieved, i.e. repetition is one of the strategies teachers use to make their directions and instructions understandable to the learners. Apart from communicative interaction, much of the enjoyment in second language or foreign language use comes from listening activities: watching films and plays or listening to songs or talks by native speakers. Even in a class, learners learn a great deal from listening to their teacher, tapes or records, or each other.

The English we use in the classroom with young learners will be very different from the English we use for general purposes and for our own personal needs. We need to think carefully about the language relevant to the needs of young learners. The major problem is how to encourage learners to speak a foreign language if they know little or nothing. Willis and Wesley (1996) encourage balancing the target language and mother language: in some countries, language learners are very obedient and will stick to the target language if they are told why. In other countries, other forms of persuasion may be needed. However, banning mother tongue use altogether may not be advisable. In circumstances when the mother tongue was totally banned in group talk, the resulting interaction tended to be shorter and less natural.

#### 4. Journal Writing as a Reflection on Language Teaching

In contrast to a lesson plan, which is prospective, reflection can be retrospective, in the sense that it recalls action as it has been recorded in observation. It “seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints” (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982:9 as cited in Gebhard, 1999).

There are varieties of ways that nonparticipant observers can collect and analyze descriptions of teaching. We can use checklists, tally sheets, jot down notes with short dialogues, record, and make short transcripts, code transcripts with a metalanguage, and finally, we can use a teaching journal.

As it is defined in the literature<sup>3</sup>, the usual teaching journal is a first person account of a series of teaching experiences. The idea is to write about teaching experiences as regularly as possible over a period of time, then to analyze these entries for patterns and conspicuous events. We can use the journal not only to plan and analyze our lessons, but also to plan and carry out our own exploration projects.

We see journal writing as contributing to exploration in two unique ways:

1) First, journals can provide a way for us to work through the emotional part of our teaching. By writing in a teaching journal, we can criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions (Bailey 1990, cited in Gephard and Oprandy, 1999:79). A teaching journal can also function as a place to celebrate discoveries, successes, and golden moments (Fanselow, 1987, cited in Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999:79).

2) Second, journals can provide a place to articulate and explore such beliefs and practices. They can be used to keep a record of such things as our self-observations and observations in other classrooms, our conversations with other teachers, our teaching ideas, our teaching questions and answers, and the personal connections we make between who we are as teachers and who we are as people. In addition, it can create an opportunity to confront the affective aspects of being a teacher, including what annoys, disconcerts, frustrates, encourages, influences, motivates and inspires us (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999).

According to Richards and Lockhart (1996:7), a journal is a teacher’s or a student teacher’s written response to teaching events. Keeping a journal serves in two purposes:

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<sup>3</sup> There are a number of publications by those who write about the use of second language teaching journals. Gebhard and Oprandy (1999:79) list the following: Bailey (1990), Brinton and Holten (1989), Brinton, Holten and Goodwin (1993), Brock, Yu, and Wong (1992), Farrell (1996), Fattah (1993), Gebhard and Duncan (1992), Holten and Brinton (1995), Jarvis (1992), and McDonough (1994).

1. Events and ideas are recorded for the purpose of later reflection.
2. The process of writing itself helps trigger insights about teaching. Writing in this sense serves as a discovery process.

As Richards (1996) explains, many different topics from classroom experiences can be explored through journal writing, for example:

- Personal reactions to things that happen in the classroom or in the school,
- Questions or observations about problems that occur in teaching,
- Descriptions of significant aspects of lessons or school events,
- Ideas for future analysis or reminders of things to take action on.

A teaching diary can be both a factual record of one's teaching, and a means of reminding yourself of the highs and lows of the job. This too can be a useful source of personal support. Sylvia Welyczko, a TEFL teacher, encourages teachers to keep a teaching diary because: a) it provides a record of teaching ideas and problems experienced. Although it may be a haphazard record because ideas are not easily 'retrieved' for the future, still it provides a safe and non-judgmental 'site' for the ideas themselves, b) when it is re-read after the passing of time, it acts as a reminder of progress made, either in professional or personal terms, and c) it acts as a record of one's career (Welyczko, 1989, in Head and Taylor, 1997).

It is argued that "as intrapersonal journalists, we are both the writers and the audience of our own journals" (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1990:80). Teacher educators generally encourage us to focus our journal entries on what we perceive to have gone on in our classrooms. Some also see value, however, in writing about our beliefs about teaching and learning, the learners in our class or own language learning experiences and how that relates to teaching. One way teachers write in journals is through a kind of *stream-of-consciousness* writing. The intrapersonal journalists see no particular need to worry about grammar, style, organization, because the emphasis is on obtaining a record of teaching, feelings, and thoughts about it. It is encouraged because writing freely about whatever comes into our minds is a form of exploration that can generate lots of ideas and awareness about our teaching and ourselves as teachers. Unlike a dialogue journal, in which the purpose is to gain awareness through interaction with others, in intrapersonal journal, the emphasis is on introspection through communication with oneself.

## **5. RESEARCH REPORT**

### **5.1. RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of this paper is to explore my own teaching beliefs, attitudes, and teaching styles. The general aim is to exemplify how both the theoretical formal knowledge and the personal, subjective classroom decisions affected my teaching.

Formal teacher training is essential for future teaching, while only through the practical experience one can employ the theory acquired and make use of it. Through a series of ten research questions, I will reflect on the kind of teacher I am and how not only the theoretical knowledge I have gained during my formal education so far, but also how my attitudes, beliefs and my personal life influenced my teaching and manifested in the classroom.

The research questions, based on Richards (1996) are the following:

1. How does my former education influence my teaching?
2. What kind of a teacher am I?
3. What are my beliefs about teaching and learning?
4. What organizational methods do I use in my teaching? What kind of planning decisions and on-the-spot decisions do I make use of?
5. How do I cope with teaching problems?
6. How do I cope with discipline control?
7. How do I communicate with my learners and what kind of interaction occurs in my classroom?
8. How do I modify my language while teaching young learners? How and when do I switch to L1 while teaching?
9. How does my emotional and personal life affect my teaching?
10. Which activities do I use in my classes?

## 5.2. PROCEDURE

The research method used in the study is keeping a teaching journal, i.e. the written accounts based on my six-week teaching experience in Spain. During my stay in Spain in June and July 2010, I was keeping a teaching journal, i.e. taking short notes on daily basis, on-the-spot, either during the classes or at home. I was taking notes regarding my personal feelings and beliefs when teaching and my personal reactions to things that happened in the classroom during some specific situation. The notes from my teaching journal were a part of my portfolio, which contained all the materials collected for the research: lesson reports (personal accounts of what has happened in the classroom), lesson plan (weekly plan written in advance), self-assessment sheet (European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages, EPOSTL), course books used in the classes, and the internet worksheets and handouts.

Along with the teaching journal (appendix 1), which was a more private and personal insight in my teaching, I was writing additional lesson plans where I presented main features of the lessons (appendix 2). Lesson plans were written on weekly basis and were presented to learners and their parents in advance. Finally, the handouts prepared for learners were based on the copies from the activity books and from the internet worksheet pages. By the end of the course, I had collected approximately 75 pages course book copies and over a hundred of internet source worksheets. Finally, I was comparing my notes every week with the self-assessment sheet, EPOSTL (appendix 3), in order to reflect on the competences I have as a teacher, as well as those I lack, and to self-assess my own personal, educational, and professional development.

### 5.3. CONTEXT

During my second year of graduate studies, I applied for IAESTE<sup>4</sup> student traineeship to teach English in a foreign country during the summer period. I was accepted to work in a kindergarten in Main English Centre (Centre D'estudis Main), in Meliana, Spain. Besides having regular groups of preschool children, they provided six-week summer English courses for children who wanted to attend English lessons. I was given a list of 29 children enrolled in the summer English course and was told I would work with another teacher. The list was divided into two groups and I was supposed to take over the younger class, children aged between 3 and 5, while the other teacher was responsible for the older group of learners aged 5 to 9. However, I was informed later that I would teach the whole class on my own. I was advised to prepare different activities and handouts for different age groups and different levels of English language knowledge. My job was to be a teacher and a facilitator, to teach English but also to engage learners in different activities and to be their full-time supervisor. Every day there was a timetable I had to follow, but except for the regular daily plan, I was not given any additional help or hints concerning the course plan and the activities.

My day started at 9 a.m. when I would play some board games with the learners who arrived earlier. The class would gather by 10 when we would start with the presentation of target vocabulary (appendix 4, fig. 1) and with the task-based activities, consisting of various handouts (appendix 4, fig. 2 and 3). Around 11 o'clock, they would have a morning snack and afterwards we would revise the lesson by playing games, singing songs, or doing some other topic-related activity. At noon, we would tidy up the classroom and get ready for the playground, where the learners would first play freely for a while and then I would introduce some activity to keep them occupied and to revise the lesson. Later on, they would go to the gym to take some rest and relax before lunchtime. At 1 p.m. six learners would go home, while the remaining learners would have lunch in the classroom. After lunch, we would tidy up the classroom together and they would watch a video or play board games while I was having my lunch break. At 3 p.m. we would go to the playground again, where they would usually have free activities, or if they were tired they would take a rest. In the meantime, I would be waiting for their parents to arrive according to the timetable given. The learners would leave between 3 and 5.30 p.m. After all the learners left, I would leave the classroom and go to the office to prepare new handouts and organize a lesson plan for the next day.

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<sup>4</sup> The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience

## **5.4. REFLECTION**

### **5.4.1. How does my Former Education Influence my Teaching?**

*‘While we teach, we learn.’*  
Seneca

Throughout their education, people remember some teachers specifically, either with positive or negative connotations. Some teachers have this ability to leave a trace in pupils’ lives and have a big impact on them for the future. Young teacher’s believes are shaped not only by the experience they acquire in the teaching, but also by the formal education they had as a learner and a student. In addition, when one enters the classroom as a teacher, he or she should reflect on the prior knowledge, which was acquired in either formal or informal way, because it is always helpful to relate the past experience with the present situation in the classroom in order to become more skilled and develop professionally.

#### **5.4.1.1. How does my elementary school teacher affect the way I teach?**

I will reflect on my primary school teacher and will mention some teaching and educational methods that I disliked in her teaching, and why I did many things differently from what I had been taught throughout my education. Later I realized that some of my teaching and educational methods were wrong, and as a result, I dealt with many problems in my teaching.

In my class, there were some learners who were very clever, and able to understand the instructions and solve the tasks, as well as very well behaved. They were perfect; they could stand as role models and could serve as an example to everyone else. I realized I was neglecting those learners and did not pay enough attention to them. However, I thought they were not the ones who needed my help, since they could cope with almost every situation on their own. I realized this mistake because I had to treat them all equally with no prejudice. Later, I was praising them because I considered them to be mature enough to be my helpers and to co-operate with the others, average learners.

Throughout my school education, I was faced with injustice every time I would see some professor putting emphasis on the best learners, the ‘perfect’ ones, the ones that knew the answer to every question and the ones who participated actively in every lesson. My primary school teacher would mostly cooperate with the minority of the class, only with the

best learners, ignoring the rest of us and not paying enough attention to everyone equally. Likewise, she rarely encouraged us to play the active part in both learning and thinking and to cooperate with each other. It was very difficult to get positive feedback from our teacher and to earn a nice encouraging word. It was very stressful to be left out either by peers or by a teacher, especially at that age when one acquires basic attributes for one's character formation.

In contrast, while teaching English to young learners, I realized I was encouraging learners in almost every situation, giving them positive feedback whenever possible. It became a problem after a while, when I realized they did not take it seriously any more because they did not feel special when they heard me saying a reinforcing expression to everyone else. One Friday while making the handout book for the parents, rearranging, and checking their weekly handouts again, I realized I wrote '*Excellent! Good job! Well done!*' on over a hundred handouts, even on those that were not eligible for such positive statement. Even if there were some mistakes in a crossword puzzle, fill in the gaps or matching exercises, I would put a tick and write something stimulating down. With the youngest ones, I would check their coloring pages or connect-the-dot tasks and write '*very nice!*' or '*great!*' (Appendix 4, fig. 4). Therefore, I realized they were all equally awarded even though there were differences in their knowledge of English as well as in their behavior. Nevertheless, the most important thing for me was to see them trying, even though they eventually failed in some task; I would give them positive reinforcement. In addition, their parents, who were satisfied to see that I proofread the tasks and paid extra attention to every handout, expected rating their handouts with positive remarks.

When I was in primary school, I missed doing some experiments, going for a walk, playing in the classroom, in other words, putting the theory into practice and learning from real-life experience. Furthermore, my former teacher rarely encouraged creativity in the classroom. For example, although I enjoyed participating in free contextualized writing, I mostly remember doing fixed classroom tasks that did not leave space for imagination. I was thinking, how come she never made us wonder or ask questions in order to raise new questions.

That is the reason why I included a lot of artwork, creative activities, used total physical response (TPR), and encouraged learners to be creative and to express themselves in a different, individual, or even non-traditional way. Then I realized not everyone liked to be creative and do the artwork, because there were some learners who were bored with coloring



and drawing and who wanted to do some closed task-based activities and to do handbook exercise, which I did not use in my lessons.

In addition, my former teacher rarely formed groups or included pair work in the classroom, there was a lack of interaction because most of the time we were on our own. She did not even allow us to do our homework assignments together with our peer(s), as we would be scolded or even punished for it most of the time. On the other hand, in my teaching I encouraged group work and promoted whole class and peer cooperation, so it seemed that I put more emphasis on human relationships than on my formal language teaching.

Lastly, I came to the conclusion that I was scared of by my teacher's strict attitude. I felt frightened all the time, had difficulties accepting her way of teaching in the educational and pedagogical way and her as an authority. I wanted to have a better, more friendly relationship with our teacher.

When it comes to this, I realized I could not be as strict as I wanted. I was trying to make the learners feel at ease as well as to make myself stress free and calm, to have a friendly approach and to achieve everyday positive atmosphere with a healthy human-to-human relationship and open communication. But, I felt I was losing control as it seemed that the Ls were the ones pulling the strings and deciding on the outcome of the class activities. I thought I would meet my learners' needs by letting them do what they wanted, walking freely in the classroom and talking to each other. As a result, I was faced with a lack of classroom discipline and fewer handouts completed by the end of each day.

I did not have the best relationship with my former teacher. She was the first and only teacher I had at that time, and I did not know about any other teaching or learning approach until I was ten. At that time, I realized how different teachers could be, with varieties of teaching techniques stemming from their different personality, education, age, lifestyle etc. Even then, I liked some teachers more although I did not know the reason why. Now I see that the teaching methods that were suitable for me are not necessarily good for someone else, and vice versa. Therefore, the things I might consider as being false or wrong and the teachers I might think of as being a bad influence for my character-formation, can play the most important role in somebody else's life and might be considered to be very good role models for another learner.

I came to the conclusion that I cannot put the blame on my former teachers for being incompetent in my own teaching; I should rather base my assumptions on my own teaching traits and try to find a way to improve them in order to become a better teacher in the future.

#### 5.4.1.2. How often do I reflect on my prior knowledge?

It is good to use the skills and knowledge you acquire from other fields to help promote your personal and professional development. What motivated and helped me in my teaching experience were many past situations, skills and techniques important for my further development goals:

- *School practice*: it was helpful to *practice* teaching in several elementary and secondary schools in order to gain teaching awareness and not to feel new in the role of a teacher. However, school practice was very different from a typical everyday classroom environment, because it is very formal and fixed, as it serves for academic, grading purpose, and it cannot provide a neutral environment.
- *Peer observation and teacher observation*: while observing the others, I was more objective and more precise in my observation; it was helpful in my self-reflection to know better which things to consider important in my teaching.
- *Books and articles*: reading literature for teachers' development can be very helpful while teaching, because the teacher can use the advice and collect the important information, which can be used in practice when teaching.
- *Talking with friends*: it is always helpful to have someone to share your ideas with, or to talk to. For me it was important to talk about my teaching with my friends or my family, in case I could not exchange the ideas with another teacher.
- *Yoga practice*: I had to learn how to balance my body and mind, as well as to balance the professional development with my personal growth.
- *Singing or playing an instrument*: these talents are excellent for making songs and rhymes an integral and enjoyable part of your lessons. When the learners were learning about music, I introduced them to different instruments. I played the piano in elementary school, so I used my skills to play some lullabies on the xylophone to my learners.
- *Drawing/creativity*: drawings are very effective in conveying the meaning of a new word or when presenting a new language items, and creativity is very helpful as new ideas can improve the activities and raise interest (Appendix 4, fig. 3).
- *Acting*: being willing to experiment and have a go at drama acting is especially encouraging if you want your pupils to take part. I like miming and other interactional activities which enable socialization, and I believe that enthusiasm counts for more than acting ability.

#### 5.4.2. What Kind of Teacher Am I?

“*We teach what we are.*”  
Postman and Weingartner

I have an inner motivation to make progress and to try harder. I used to get worried and stressed every time I encountered a new problem, because I felt incompetent or lacked experience needed to solve the problem. I had lots of routines and they became habits. I had a fear of failure and fear of making a mistake. Therefore, I needed to believe in my abilities and myself and worry less about how others judge me as a person. I had to accept all the ups and downs in my lessons and not to have too high or unreal expectations.

I believe that my effectiveness as a teacher depended on the feelings and attitudes I had in the classroom, my effect on others and my willingness to change as a teacher and as a person, as well as my ability to make progress every day and never to stop learning. Furthermore, I benefited from taking yoga classes; the physical confidence and emotional stability helped me to cope with unexpected problems in the classroom and to meet my learners’ needs more efficiently. Since I did not have an opportunity to explore my teaching fully from the position of a teacher, the more emphasis was put on analyzing my learners. However, while getting the insight of my learners’ behavior and their learning patterns, I was able to draw conclusions about my own teaching.

I will reflect on some personal traits that influence the way I teach<sup>5</sup>:

1) *Introversion* versus *extroversion*: I think I am more of an extroverted person. I am very social and prefer interaction while teaching (and learning). I need positive reinforcement and affirmation from the others to acknowledge my effectiveness (from my learners, not necessarily from the other teachers and experts). On the other hand, I think I was also sometimes introverted as a teacher, because I had ups and downs in my teaching: moods and emotions would range from being scared, to interested and stimulated, from being keen and enthusiastic at one point to being tired, bored and frustrated at the next point. Finally, I became relaxed and satisfied as my internship was coming to an end.

It was sometimes very hard to keep my level of enthusiasm and motivation high. I sometimes experienced a lack of concentration or even lack of interest, which I needed to search for excitement, and I became distracted by external events and like to observe what is going on in and outside the classroom.

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<sup>5</sup> Based on personality traits, Myers-Briggs character types (1962, cited in Brown, 1987:111).

2) *Sensing* versus *intuition*: in my case, these two personality types interconnect and mix in my teaching depending on the situation. In *sensing*, I rely on my experience and I reflect on my teaching and learning in the past, like being practical and down-to earth in teaching, but I sometimes have too high expectations. At the same time, I consider myself intuitive, because I am caught up in the moment and I can accept different outcomes of a situation. I am very imaginative, and consider life to be fun and teaching to be a game, meaning that I am oriented to the future at the same time.

3) *Thinking* versus *feeling*: as a teacher, I rely on feelings rather than ratio, therefore I am rather subjective, taking things personally and relating teaching situations to my personal life. I place high values on other people and social interaction. I am committed and devoted to what I do. However, I need to balance my life because I need to feel the harmony in many fields in order to be more effective in my teaching. I was controlled by emotions and instant feelings rather than rational reasoning. I was having difficulties accepting the authority and the rules, which were imposed from other persons, but my learners were required to follow my rules and to stick to my teaching methods.

However, I was trying to be as fair as possible, which would imply that I was being judgmental from time to time as well. For example, it happened often that one learner tore somebody else's handout up, and a problem arose immediately. If I had just shared the handouts and it was still blank, I had an extra copy so I asked them to apologize and simply replaced it with a new one. However, in one situation, the torn handout was colored and the tasks were already half-done, so I told the learner to do the same thing with the other learner's handout. Of course, my decision made a lot of mess and disorder, but at least they were even. As in *quid pro quo*, I encouraged them to be fair and honest, and wanted to treat them all equally as much as possible. It was not always the best approach, but it usually worked out for them. If they got the same punishment as they had deserved, they would keep that in mind for the next time in the future.

4) *Judging* versus *perceiving*: on the one hand, when it comes to preparation, I am a more of an organized person. I like to plan and make decisions in advance, and I prefer deadlines because otherwise I might feel lost. On the other hand, in the process of teaching, I consider myself to be more perceiving; because I am a flexible person: open to new things and discoveries, I can adapt to new situations and people, and I am open to change under both internal influence or external influence, I like to go with the flow. I often relate teaching to learning, and consider learning as a lifelong process.

My motivation is mostly *intrinsic* (within me rather than influenced by others), and is both instrumental (I wanted to make progress in carrier, gain formal experience and professional development) and integrative (I had the desire to interact with foreigners and felt the need for communication in order to be part of a (multicultural) group).

I included the learners actively in the classroom, because they needed to be motivated in order to participate and cooperate with the teacher and with their peers. I tried to raise their awareness with a variety of games, role-plays, songs etc. Most of the tasks were co-operational, because I believe that the learners were more active while working in small groups or in pairs. However, the individual work was not neglected, because the learners seemed to be more focused while doing the task on their own, and in this way, they were less distracted and they had to think for themselves. They were also provided with a competitive task from time to time because it was essential for each learner to make an effort and to try harder in order to be better than or at least equal to his or her peer.

In my personal opinion, out of the three teacher types (see 1.3), I resemble the involver the most, although I may be a combination of them. Firstly, I believe that when it comes to teaching, I have had sufficient knowledge of a subject matter, and was able to understand the teaching methodology as well. I did not only lecture and use frontal teaching all the time, I rather used different approaches and a variety of teaching techniques. Of course, I was trying to be the enabler the most, because that trait is the most valuable one and this kind of teacher is a complete person with positive personal and professional traits. Therefore, I wanted to encourage the learners to take over the control but remain the teaching authority; however, I did not manage to achieve it every day.

In my opinion, I was using different learning styles, which is actually inevitable, because every person uses a combination of language strategies and it also affects language style, and it is affected by our personal traits. For example, as a learner, when I have to memorize a word given, I have to write it down and simultaneously repeat it aloud. I have to take notes in order to remember something, because I rarely remember what I have heard only once. It means that I am more a visual than auditory learner, because I have to 'see' a word or a phrase in order to memorize it. However, I realized that in my teaching, I was encouraging sounds and pronunciation rather than orthography, because I was teaching young learners, some of which could not write and read in their first language, who gained advantage from rote-learning and oral repetition more. Likewise, I was aware that, when it comes to language skills, listening precedes speaking and reading precedes writing, where the first two skills are more suitable for young learners.

I knew I was making progress because I felt the improvement every day in a professional and personal sense and I had reasons to be proud of myself every day for many things. The most important thing was that I felt fulfilled because I was given the opportunity to analyze and observe my own teaching. I knew I was a hard-working and a responsible person, and that I could manage to cope with many problems. I have a passion for teaching, and I think I will make improvement in my future teaching, because I am learning from my own experience. I had the great opportunity to reflect on my teaching and to learn from my own personal experience in order to gain more self-esteem, control, and knowledge.

### 5.4.3. What are My Beliefs about Teaching and Learning?

*‘I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.’*  
Socrates

Some students learn the language easily, and for those who find the task more difficult, the teacher should make every effort to ensure that their language learning is an enjoyable and educational experience. I believe that teaching should be learner-centered<sup>6</sup>. Thus, an educator’s job is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose or modify old ones. However, although being taught differently, my teaching was mostly teacher-centered.

Learners need to express personal intentions through all kinds of familiar and unfamiliar recombination of the language elements at their disposal. The more daring they are in linguistic innovation, the more rapidly they progress. Teacher must create the opportunities for students to use a foreign language for the normal purposes in relation with others (Rivers and Temperley, 1978). Although being inexperienced as a teacher, I got used to being in the classroom most of the time as a student and learner. For years, I was observing classes from the position of a student. When I finished high school I started to observe classroom life from a different perspective, as a future teacher, and I had the opportunity to “become aware of new things in a very familiar place” (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999:3).

In the beginning, I thought that as a teacher I needed to be different from who I was as a person. I was trying to put all my personal feelings, anxieties, hopes, thoughts, and emotions aside and tried to focus on my learning style, teaching competence, theory, and psychological and pedagogical side of teaching. It was very difficult to struggle with my multiple personality, so I realized that I needed to accept myself as a whole with all the positive and negative personality traits, in order to progress as a teacher.

I will reflect on some beliefs I have regard to teaching and learning. These beliefs were written in my homework assignment *What Type of Teacher Do I Feel I Most Resemble* (2009), therefore I held those beliefs as a student, and they can still apply to my (future) teaching:

I think that sometimes I will not be able to draw the line when it comes to someone’s bad behavior or inappropriate response, and I actually still do not know what my reactions will be. Furthermore, I would like to work in a positive and calm atmosphere, so I should be able to create one. Therefore, I hope I will not be nervous or distracted by anything, because students will easily notice it and will not take me seriously. If they think I have low self-

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of learner-centered learning is over two thousand years old and derives from Socrates, who considered that his role of a teacher was to guide the learners to answer their own questions.

esteem or if they feel my anxiety, they will easily become anxious or nervous themselves, and it will do no good for the atmosphere in the classroom.

When it comes to the social relations among people, I believe I have some awareness of other people's feelings and emotions and I think I will be able to tell whether someone needs my help or advice. However, it will be very demanding to have insight into every student's feeling, because it is very hard to approach every learner individually, and it takes much time as well. It is very complex to distinguish whether a learner needs your help or not. Lastly, I will have to pay more attention to those learners who are ahead of their peers (who may easily find the lectures and classes boring because they do not learn anything new), or those learners who pick up the subject matter more slowly than the others (in this case, the learners will need more time to solve the task or understand something, and it requires much effort to work harder with those students). From my point of view, teaching a language is the most interesting school subject to teach. Since the language is both the means and the goal of communication, there is a wide choice of tasks, topics, activities, and assignments that can be done in a fun and interesting way.

In my school practice, when I was required to answer questions about personality traits for effective teaching, my conclusion was:

It is not so hard to name all of the personal traits one good teacher should have, but when it comes to practice, it is usually not so easy to adjust and teach according to those 'rules'. Therefore, I cannot be sure which are the personal traits that I have and those that I lack of, until I step in front of language learners and try to create an environment that will enhance learning, a positive atmosphere, and interesting class period, and beside that, manage to teach them something new and useful. Once I accomplish this in practice, I would be able to call myself a good and a complete teacher.

And really, after experiencing teaching in practice, I gained a deeper insight in my own words.



#### **5.4.4. What Organizational Methods do I use in my Teaching? What Kind of Planning Decisions and On-the-spot Decisions do I Make Use of?**

*“Good teaching is one-fourth preparation and three-fourths pure theatre.”*  
Gail Godwin

I do not think I am experienced enough to teach without a plan. I needed to be organized and fully prepared and to know at least one day in advance what I should teach and which activities to present. However, I did not strictly follow the plan. I think that a teacher can sometimes ‘*go with the flow*’ and make some slight changes on the spot. It is important if not recommended for the teacher to consider learners’ wishes, and to come up with new ideas and to change some steps of the course when necessary. Therefore, the teacher needs to be creative enough to cope with these changes in everyday organization. Usually in the morning hours, during the task-based activities, I would be more organized, while during the day it would get somewhat chaotic and unpredictable. I needed to be flexible in the classroom, but I had to spend a considerable amount of time planning the lessons, since there were no fixed teaching materials. It took me more time to look for proper tasks, suitable worksheets, interesting games and activities and to integrate them into the lesson. One should take time to write a lesson plan because it will help to reflect on the goals, the different stages of a lesson, the timing, the materials etc.

There were times when I was not organized at all. For the first two Fridays, I was running out of time because I had to sort out, proofread, and attach the handouts together for the parents. I even left my learners unsupervised at the playground because I was rushing to the classroom to prepare it. I mixed their handouts and some of them did not even have names on. The week after I decided to prepare it on Thursday, because I would rather stay an extra hour at work than get anxious and worried about my time management. Furthermore, I put nametags on document holders where the handouts were separated and organized.

There were many on the spot decisions when I was able to use my prior knowledge in another field, renewing my skills that were useful for classroom teaching. It is beneficial to be skilled in many fields because it gives you a variety of choices in activities used in teaching. It is important to use your creativity efficiently and to be able to (re)act in on-the-spot situations.

### 5.4.5. How Do I Cope With Teaching Problems?

*“Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime.”*  
Chinese proverb

In my teaching, pacing was a problem. Sometimes I was running out of time because many activities were planned, and sometimes I had plenty of time left after the activities. Then I would propose some game or revise the lesson with flashcards. I did not know how much time an activity would take. On Fridays, we did arts and crafts, and I would prepare regular amount of handouts. Since I considered handouts more important because they had to do the written tasks every day, I did not have enough time for the handicrafts. As the learners were looking forward doing arts and crafts at the end of the week, I needed to consider their wishes, so I excluded handouts from the program on Fridays although I was told not to.

I have seen some learners, who were quiet in the classroom, who seemed disinterested, but they showed good knowledge and proficiency, and they would even complete the tasks earlier. Then there were the silent ones with no discipline problem, who were daydreaming all the time and they were never focused. The extroverted learners also differ in knowledge. Some would wander around, talk a lot and socialize, but would be as efficient as the silent ones. On the other hand, some Ls were less successful in the tasks, both introverts and extroverts, either because of insufficient language knowledge or because of lack of motivation.

Maybe some of my learners kept silent because they had the anxiety and fear of negative evaluation<sup>7</sup> concerning their own predictions of how the others will react to them. So I had to encourage learners to express their opinion (even in Spanish), to use the vocabulary as much as possible and to be free to make mistakes and correct them whenever needed. Many teachers disagree with actually trying to correct every error, including those of stress and pronunciation. In my opinion, if the teacher corrects every error during the lesson, the lesson would not be successful because the learners would become discouraged. Learners need to regard errors in a positive way and to treat them as a normal part of learning. I was trying to correct the mistakes regularly in their handouts, but in spoken language, I would sometimes miss the mistakes and errors. It is better for them to risk getting something wrong than not to say anything. If their message is understood, then they have been reasonably successful. If they remain silent, they are less likely to learn. In the privacy of a small group

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<sup>7</sup> Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986 as cited in Richards and Lochart, 1996) claim that the fear of negative evaluation is likely to manifest itself in learners' insecurity, passiveness, and performance deficits.

with a teacher monitoring from a distance learners are more likely to experiment and take risks with new language if the atmosphere is supportive.

Learners needed more chances to use the foreign language with each other, not just to practice forms, but also to achieve results. According to three P, *presentation, practice, production*, the aim is to teach a specific language form (Willis and Wesley, 1996). The problem is that sometimes learners manage to do the task at the production stage without using the target form at all, and sometimes they tend to overuse the target form. For example, my learners were asked to say "*Water, please!*" when they were thirsty. By the time they were acquiring food vocabulary, every time I pointed to water flashcard, they would reply with: "*Water, please!*".

My learners did not talk very much. I was doing most of the talking, especially during the TBA tasks, but they would have plenty opportunities to practice speaking in games, songs, choral responses etc. Furthermore, they seemed bored while doing the same type of activities, but it depended on their feelings and attitude. Sometimes the learners were eager to participate, they were focused, hard-working, even competitive; but there were times when the same learners were exhausted or lazy to do similar tasks. It was interesting to see their enthusiasm fading and rising throughout the week or day, and I concluded that their instant boredom was not related to the choice of activities but rather to their changeable mood, motivation, and feelings.

In my English classes, most learners would get angry if I did not give them enough attention or if I seemed to be preoccupied with another learner. They may show their discontent or even jealousy by either ignoring the further task completely or by making noise and disturbing the rest of the class. Controlling large classes may be a problem. Therefore, there had to be time limit for the activities to keep it under control. When I would feel I was losing control, I would stop the task or adjust it if possible, and I would go round and monitor. On July 1, I wrote in my teaching journal that my learners were following my instructions and listened to me carefully. It was probably the first time I managed to gain control over the entire class.

When unable to manage the transition between the activities very effectively, a lot of time was wasted, and I would get disoriented. I used my teacher's desk to place all the handouts needed for the lesson so that my learners can have better access to teaching materials while I could monitor the class better. When it comes to the task based activities, I was very sad to realize some of them had only a few handouts per week, while some of them

would complete up to 30 pages in five days. I did not want them to feel lazy or bored and I enjoyed in their eagerness to participate in any way.

In the beginning, I had a wrong approach toward learners' feelings. I was eager to teach them justice and morals. I did not realize that they were too young to have developed this way of abstract thinking and feeling. I realized I needed to keep it as simple as possible, so I would point out their value and quality through socializing activities (*hugging game, hand alphabet*) instead of giving those lectures.

### **Teaching Problems: An Example of an Individual Learner**

There was one four-year-old boy in my class, Nacho, who was very difficult to cope with. From the beginning of the course, I had been warned about him. He had both learning and discipline issues. Due to my former experience with my primary school teacher, who always praised only smart and well-behaved learners, I put emphasis on those 'difficult', rebellious learners. He used to get very noisy and attention seeking but I did not accept the fact that he was 'badly behaved'; he was rather 'playful'. He would always break something, lose something, and make a mess. He would distract the class and I would hear myself shouting 'Nacho!' most of the time.

In addition, he would not complete the tasks given, he would always hand in a blank paper, and he would not color, draw, read, write, or talk. However, I did not want to think that he is 'slow' or 'challenged'; he was just a bit lazy. Then I realized I had to change my approach if I wanted him to change his behavior and attitude. I did not blame him anymore; I rather kept him occupied all the time. While doing task based activities I would find time for him and tell him what to do. He was completing the tasks successfully, however, at a slower pace. He would receive instructions to color something, and I would help him choose the appropriate color and then I would drop by to check on him occasionally to give him further instructions. It seemed that he needed someone to keep an eye on him and to help him with some things. Sometimes I would ask him for his help to tidy up the classroom or to clean the tables or wipe the floor. First, he considered it a punishment, because the other teachers would make him clean the floor every time it got dirty (because the pencils would fall on the floor and all the learners would step on them and leave a trace around the classroom). In situations like that, I told him I needed his help because I thought he was good and strong enough to help me. Then he became happy to be helpful and we both seemed satisfied with our

interaction. Throughout the time, I received fewer complaints about him. Overall, he needed somebody to guide him and to spend some time with him. Soon we started to get along well and I was saying nice things about him and to him. Some of the teachers have seen this slight change in his behavior and they were satisfied even though they advised me to pay attention to him and to leave him alone because he seemed to be 'irreparable'.

During the third week of the course, my mentor scolded me because Nacho had not been doing his 'summer course book' that he was supposed to fill in because he was expected to do some extra work every day. I had never been told that, because that course book was kept on the top shelf in the classroom and remained intact. From that day on I spent one extra hour per day with him, giving him individual tutoring. While the other learners were taking a rest in the afternoon, silently playing or watching a video, I was helping him with the exercises and tasks, with several more learners who also had 'summer course book' to fill in. Until his last day of the course, we successfully completed the whole, fifty-three page book. I was proud of him and of myself as well. We were happy to hand it in to his parents, who were taken by surprise as if they themselves did not expect him to complete it. I consider him one of my greatest achievements I had during my stay in Spain. He really got under my skin, no wonder I was crying while saying goodbye.

#### 5.4.6. How Do I Cope With Discipline Control?

*“To teach is to learn twice.”*  
Joseph Joubert

Out of the personal traits I did not have, the most important one is that I was not sure if I was going to be able to hold control of the classroom all the time. It depended on the students’ age and on their attitude and behavior. Likewise, I was aware of the fact that my personal attitude and my way of teaching affected them as well, so I had to learn how to approach them with a certain formal authoritative way while at the same time remaining nice, with an easy-going, warm attitude. This is actually my biggest fear when it comes to teaching in the classroom: I am afraid I will try so hard to be approachable and friendly and that I will eventually lose control of the classroom, and I know that learners will eventually take advantage of it. They will probably take me as too lenient and ‘fragile’, and once they conclude this, they can have the control over the class and over the teacher as well.

However, I tried to change my attitude and my approach. I needed to understand that my learners were all equally important during the lessons, and they had to see it, too. However, they needed to know when to speak up and when to stay still, but it was very difficult to explain such things to young learners. At that age, they long for everybody’s attention in order to feel successful and proud especially in front of their peers. Most of them had an urge to raise their hand when they needed attention. Since I wanted to pay attention to every learner, equally I would react every time someone would raise a hand and yell ‘*Teacher! Teacher!*’. However, after some time I realized that some specific Ls did not have any questions to ask, but wanted attention by raising their hands and saying ‘*Finished!*’. I started ignoring those who would continuously call my name without having to ask anything. However, I knew they would not give up until I looked at their handout and said something nice as an approval. I realized I should not ignore them because it would have a counter effect, so I had to come with some better idea because I was back to square one. I asked myself how I could be able to focus and help those learners who really needed my help and attention without leaving the other ones out. Therefore, instead of running through the classroom all the time going from one learner to another while there were a dozen of hands raised, I realized they could come over to my table instead so I would be less busy while they would get a chance to move all the time. For that reason, I would take a seat next to my desk, observe the whole class and be able to keep an eye on every individual. They would come up to me asking for help or just handing in the sheet. I would check their handouts at the same moment and place them in a box with their nametag. I also had to keep all of them occupied

so I would advise Ls to compare the answers among each other or to go around the class to help the other classmates who were not done with the task. Most of the time they would want me to check the answers for them, but usually I would write the answers on the board and ask them to compare them, and I would ask the better learners to help me with those learners who were still working or who had some difficulties with the task. They would feel very proud if I asked them to be my ‘helper’, the ‘assistant teacher’. They felt special and different that way, they felt like they could pull the strings and have the authority over the rest of the class. Some of them were proud to be ‘the substitute teacher’ but the others would rather go and play or talk to their classmates when done with the tasks.

If they fought with each other verbally or physically sometimes, it was not enough to separate them completely, because they would continue to tease each other from the distance and would bring chaos in the classroom. The better option was to make them relaxed or at ease by explaining to them that they should not fight and they should be friends instead. (*Nosotros estamos amigos!/We are all friends! Dame un beso/le dio un beso/give me/him a kiss, embrazos/hug*). In that way they would relax and remain calm at least for a while. Then I had to find out the reason why this happened. I would ask an unbiased child to confirm the story because it would help me to understand the overall situation better. Then I would ask one of them or usually both of them to apologize. But, if there was a situation where one learner physically hurt another child seriously, they needed to get a punishment to understand that it was more serious. They were usually sent to sit in the kitchen for a while or simply left out while playing some games and activities with the rest of the group. Sometimes they were grounded in a way that they were not allowed to play with the ball or drive a car for the whole day. I would also ignore them to make them aware they did not deserve my attention. In some rare occasions, the intervention of another teacher was required, so I would tell them off to my mentor or to a more experienced teacher. In some situations, it was very difficult for me to know what they were talking about and to understand the story completely. It happened out of two reasons; there were either two different stories from two different points of view, so I didn’t know what part was true in this mismatch; or because I would not understand them explaining it in Spanish language so I would not know how to react and how to punish them. It was difficult in these situations to be left alone, and that was the main reason why I would ask for help; I needed someone who would not solve the problem instead of me but who would simply understand them better because of the language.

On one occasion, I took the learners to the room with a big pool filled with balls and learners were allowed to jump in and to look for ball(s) of a specific color. Incidentally, when

we came to this room, another teacher asked us to leave saying that only the young ones were allowed to play there, and my group was considered to be 'restless'. Most likely, the real problem was not the age but the behavior of my learners, because they did not follow instructions easily. They were throwing balls around the class, which they then refused to pick up, they made a big mess, and they were quite loud and noisy. I told them to leave this room and never to go there again. Although they asked me to take them there again several more times, I never did. Perhaps I did not trust them enough, and I had to obey other teacher's decisions.

Furthermore, one day the learners broke a big mirror in the classroom because they were playing with a ball. I was not present because it occurred before 9 a.m. but there was no other supervisor in the classroom. I had to consult my mentor who scolded me for their bad behavior. I was sorry but did not feel completely guilty because I was not responsible for them before my work time. Of course, it was my responsibility that the balls were in the classroom in the first place, visible to learners' eye. The balls were not out of reach because I did not want to hide things from learners; I explained to them I would keep the balls on the top shelf in a box, but they were not allowed to use them in the classroom, only at the playground or in the gym. There was one sponge ball, which was very light and therefore convenient for classroom activities and games, but they took a harder ball and smashed the mirror. Honestly, I did not care much that my mentor was mad at me. I was rather sad because I trusted my learners and I felt like they were disrespectful to me, because they were not fair. From that day on they were not allowed to touch the ball without my permission, not even on the playground. Soon I got the idea how to take advantage of this situation. I used the ball as bait, telling them they could play football only if they were well-behaved. This method turned out to be successful because they had something to look forward to every day and they knew they needed to gain my respect in order to get what they wanted. However, I would always stick to my words. I did not like false promises, and I followed this rule when it came to the teacher-learner relationship. If they were told they could have the ball in 15 minutes, they would get it in time given. If I promised them they could listen to some Spanish songs after one in English, I will play it in as told. In every situation, I was trying to stick to my words.



### **5.4.7. How Do I Communicate With My Learners and What Kind of Interaction Occurs in My Classroom?**

*“Kids used to sit back and listen to lectures. Now they’re leaning in. Body language has changed.”*

Mike Harvey

#### **5.4.7.1. Learner to Learner Interaction**

The learners should be collaborative and cooperative and be ready to support each other and give help when needed. However, not all learners are the same; some of them like to do the tasks on their own, because they may be passive or unsociable. Therefore, the teacher should encourage every learner in particular to work on their individual trait development, while adopting different tasks and activities, and in this way, develop different learning strategies.

The learners would interact with one another according to the same pattern. They formed different groups according to age, gender, family relationship, and even knowledge level. Younger ones were separated from older ones, because I organized the classroom so that it would be easier to do the activities. They would mostly stick to the sitting order, even during lunchtime or during their free time. In some situations, some learners would be left out by their peers, and they would feel sad, hurt and they would mostly come to stand next to me or even cried. I would talk to the other learners to identify the problem, they would usually ignore the accusations saying they did not do anything and shrugging their shoulders. I would ask them to hug each other and to play with everybody, because everyone is treated equally. Those were usually groups of girls, who made fun of someone else, whereas sometimes the boys would play football and exclude one learner while playing because he or she was not good enough. I realized that the older boys were playing against the younger and weaker ones, so I told them to form two equally strong teams and to allow everyone to participate.

Interactional activities lead to various patterns of individualization.<sup>8</sup> These are reflected in complex interrelationships within a group. Learners form their own small natural interactional groups that select or generate activities as the group becomes a compatible unit. An imaginative teacher and involved learners will think of many absorbing and exciting interactional activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Maslow: each individual has a hierarchy of needs to be satisfied, rising from psychological needs through the needs of felling security, belongingness, esteem (to others and to oneself) and self-realization (Brewster and Ellis, 2002).

### 5.4.7.2. Learner to Teacher Interaction

In my classroom, the interaction was easy going because I did not establish many rules for appropriate classroom behavior. For example, my learners were not required to stand up and greet when entering the room, I would say ‘*hi*’ to each of them and start to chat. They were not required to raise hands, to sit still without talking or to wait for my approval for everything. This type of interaction was less traditional, the Ls were engaged in classroom activities on their own, even choosing which handouts they would like to do first. They would call my name or approach my desk to ask a question. They were allowed to consult with their peers and freely walk around the classroom without asking my permission. They were only instructed to wait for my dismissal to stop with the tasks or approval to go to the playground or restroom. Concerning the fact there was no bell, I had to follow the timetable so I had to set a particular amount of time for a specific activity. I would show them the watch, saying that we need to do the tasks by 11 when they could have a snack. I was strict with the time because it was important for learners to get into a habit when to do as they wish, and when to follow my instructions in order to end the lesson successfully.

When I was under stress, I would get absent-minded; I realized I was giving answers to my learners without fully listening to them, I used close-ended questions and provided short yes-no answers, and did not understand that I was blocking what they were trying to say rather than encouraging them to say what they wanted.<sup>9</sup> When I realized that, I proposed some activity where I could interact with them or would give them some reinforcement to show them that I was still there with them. I regretted having negative evaluations of some individuals, criticizing, and name-calling when something went wrong, bossing around, moralizing, and telling them what to do. However, I was trying to avoid being rude and unfair, especially to young learners who would find my statements puzzling.

Sometimes learners did not interact simply because they were not familiar with the subject matter and they were not able to participate. Therefore, personalization plays an important part of the teaching and learning process, as people tend to get an insight to the things from their own perspective, so it should be applicable for the classroom interaction as well. In this way, the teacher will get the student’s feedback and create a good atmosphere for fluent classroom interaction. Very often, the learners were not interested in each other or in me as a teacher, but at the same time, my learners were too dependent on me. They were too young to realize the subject matter, so they could make a fuss about the trivial things.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Bolton calls these ‘communication’ spoilers’ (Richards and Lochart, 1996)

Furthermore, the individuals in the group were attention seeking and very dominant, whereas some individuals did not fit in the group and they were left aside.

When it comes to nonverbal communication, I used to believe that in teacher to learner interaction it was inappropriate to use touch as a means of communication and that you must keep your distance as a teacher. However, when starting to teach, I changed my opinion. I was using the touch as a means of communication, to break down the barriers and I encouraged my learners to use it in order to build up the trust within the group. I think there was no harm in using physical contact in the classroom as long as there were boundaries. The genuine warm hug can be more comforting than words, and there was nothing better than entering the classroom every day and receiving hugs from all those happy faces. I would also use hugs in order to comfort, encourage, or even reward when necessary.

When it comes to encouragement, I praised learners even if they did not make any progress, so they did not react to my words much. I started rewarding them instead of praising them, I pasted colorful smileys on their handouts (Appendix 4, fig. 7 and 8), but they would get particularly happy when I put a sticker on their clothes, hands or face. I would reward them with an English trophy, (cutouts with different cartoon pictures). They were collecting trophies and they seemed more motivated to work or to behave well in order to be rewarded in that way. For example, during lunchtime, we played '*The silent game*', and those learners who showed good manners and who did not talk during lunch were rewarded. Furthermore, when I asked them to be my helpers to tidy up the classroom, they would get a trophy. One boy pointed out that I always choose three to four girls to clean, and never give boys a chance to help. I realized my mistake and from that moment on, I made sure that learners from both sexes participate equally because they had equal abilities. Furthermore, if I heard them talking in English during the free activities, they would get a trophy. They would use the flashcards to ask each other words in English, but I have been told to take it away from them, because they were not allowed to tamper with teaching supplies as they might ruin them. However, I allowed them to use it whenever they wanted. Since they were playing with table games, toys and many books, I thought they could play with the flashcards as well because it encouraged them to practice English in an amusing and informal way, with no pressure.

Cooperating is very important, because if the teacher and learners do not cooperate, the lesson will not be as successful and the class may lose interest soon. If the teacher cannot take learners' feelings and thoughts into consideration, they may not give any feedback, or may not feel the need to respect the teacher or have the reason to give positive remarks and achievements in return. Cooperation with one another is also very important because the

learners need to know how to work as a coherent group of people and not behave as an isolated learner all the time.

Since there was not an observer in the classroom to point out to some mistakes, I had to find an observation pattern myself. I was rarely aware of the interaction at that moment, I would realize it after giving it some thought and when reflecting on my lesson. I was interacting to those learners who played an active role in the lesson, who were willing to participate in an activity or in acquiring new vocabulary. There were some learners who were satisfied to be out of my action zone, and I rarely forced them to participate if they did not feel like it. In my opinion, not all learners should be forced to be equally active participants in the lesson, because it was simply impossible. There were always some learners who were interacting more, although I was trying to encourage all of them equally. I usually could not influence them much. However, the interaction with learners was changing throughout the day. Some of them participated more during the task-based activities, while some other would interact with me more during some other activities or during their free time. I had a more professional interaction with some learners, who would talk to me when they needed to ask for something related to an activity or task. On the other hand, some of them would talk to me with no particular reason, just to retell their day, talk about their family, friends, holiday, and weekend or just show me a new bag, swimsuit, toy etc. Since I did not want to seem disinterested, and I would even ask questions in order to raise the interest and prolong our interaction. I asked questions in English but they would respond in Spanish. Maybe this informal friendly approach was not professional, but I found it important to have a good relationship with them and to make them feel relaxed enough to talk to me. However, I do not think I will have the same interaction with every group of learners in the future, because it will always depend on the situation.

The most common model used in the classroom was whole-class teaching. I would present the new topic, revising the previous lesson if possible. I would describe, explain, direct, ask questions and finally, provide answers if necessary. The advantage of this method is that it enabled me to teach a large number of learners while at the same time to focus on all learners equally. There are some disadvantages because this method is teacher-oriented which does not leave space for learners to participate actively. The topic is guided and mostly presented deductively to learners instead of asking them to draw their own conclusions. It is difficult to use this method in mixed classes, because it is expected for all learners to progress at the same pace. Therefore, some learners might feel lost, while the other ones can be held back. During the task-based activities, the learners were doing the tasks individually. It

enabled them to progress at their own speed and to reflect on their knowledge; they did not feel competitive with their peers. However, there was not enough time to check all the tasks individually so there was a lack of interaction again. Furthermore, it was difficult to monitor what the learners were actually doing during the written tasks. Some of them would just remain sitting without proceeding to other tasks.

Usually individual work would interfere with group work, because learners would often exchange information with their peers or ask for feedback, and I encouraged collaboration among them because I believe that socialization among learners could promote learning and they could complete the tasks more efficiently. Sometimes I would share a crossword puzzle and ask them to find as many words as possible in a limited time. They would turn to tasks rapidly because they would feel competitive and wanted to test their abilities and knowledge.

#### **5.4.7.3. Teacher to Teacher Cooperation**

In team teaching, my cooperative skills have improved. I became open to new ideas because I did not feel intimidated in any way, because we were not inferior to each other. I was not possessive about my ideas and I was willing to share them with another teacher, mostly because I was happy to get the feedback as well as to adopt new mutual ideas.

Sometimes I would get additional help from another teacher, usually from 10 a.m. to 12 a.m. I enjoyed cooperating with one teacher (Teacher A), while I did not feel comfortable working with the other one (Teacher B). With the teacher A, I was able to share experience and exchange ideas, as she was very creative and energetic, she was warm-hearted and nice to everyone, and learners liked her very much. Teacher B would usually come to the class and ask: 'What are you doing today with your learners?' where I would reply: 'today *we* are doing...'. She was not cooperative and she rarely made any suggestions or offered help. She seemed as if she did not want to be there and as if she was bored with the learners and with my teaching. Besides, I did not trust her, as she let me and the learners down. During the fifth week, she was supposed to teach the dances instead of task-based activities. She was supposed to prepare various dances (meringue, belly dancing, and salsa) and choose the appropriate music. In the end, she did not show up for three days, and I was not fully prepared. I did not prepare handouts, I did not plan extra activities, and did not have a laptop to play popular songs, not to mention how disappointed my learners were. I had to cope with many issues only because I relied on somebody else too much.

#### **5.4.8. How do I Modify My Language While Teaching Young Learners? How and When do I Switch to L1 While Teaching?**

*“Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own.”*  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

With nine year-olds, it was easier to explain some things or to tell them what to do in a task. They also understood some metaphorical meanings and were able to coin new expressions with the old, already acquired words easily. The younger ones were not able to decipher some new expressions, to tell the difference between some pictures, to use the new vocabulary and to understand some basic sentences or follow instructions. As a student, I was encouraged to use mostly English in the classroom, although I considered the use of the native language (L1), in this case Spanish, to be encouraging and helpful.

Therefore, it was good to use the mother tongue to translate in order to find out how to say words the learners did not know. I was using a limited amount of L1 because of my limited knowledge of Spanish. I would use L1 in translation, conversation and even in some tasks (Appendix 4, fig. 5). Therefore, the English-Spanish communication was ongoing and successful.

When in the classroom, I was using mostly convergent questions (Richards, 1996), where the responses are often short yes or no answers because my learners could not provide diverse responses which required high-level thinking. They would be able to recall previously presented information instead of providing their own answers, because they were beginners. The target language was usually followed by nonverbal, over exaggerated explanations, so that my learners would understand the meaning better.

For several days, I had a sore throat and could not speak at all. The learners were told that I was sick and they were asked to follow my non-verbal instructions. Surprisingly, we had a very good interaction, concerning the situation explained. They were given handouts with written instructions, and they were playing games and activities that did not require my verbal instructions. For example, they were reading some word cards or flashcards or reading from the board. I would just nod my head in approval or disapproval and I would write the answers on the board. At the playground, they were given free time because I could not boss them around. However, they were still playing the flashcard activity (i.e. if they said the word correctly they were allowed to pass with the car or go down the slide). I started to like my new role, because although being sick, I felt relaxed and calm because I saved a lot of energy with my silence, and it seemed that the learners understood me even better when not speaking.

At that time, I was surprised to see that they were voluntarily using English in games and free time activities.

Sometimes, while talking to them, they would seem disinterested; either they would pretend not to understand or were not able to follow my instructions. I would sometimes find my own words pointless but I also knew I had to make them communicate with me if I wanted them to learn something. Most of the time I had to repeat my instructions several times or even say them in Spanish, I would work very hard while describing, translating, explaining, entertaining etc.

I was telling some simple stories using the pages from the book as a hint (*Four little flowers, It's lunch time, Animals at the zoo, Shapes and colors* etc.) and the learners were not equally interested. They were required to sit in front of me and to pay attention but most of them were playing with something else. Most of them could not understand the story so they could not interact or reply and they were confused. I eventually gave up on story telling and I allowed them to use the books on their own, but I encouraged them to read those in English. However, they would usually read books in Spanish, so I was dealing with a new problem. So I decided to use some books in Spanish which dealt with a particular topic, such as *animals, colors, food*, I would sometimes use the book instead of flashcards and word cards, and ask the learners to provide an English equivalent for the items they see in the book.

I was surprised to see that the learners used more English vocabulary when playing some free activity than when doing guided tasks, and I concluded that the learners were motivated to speak English but not all of them participated during the revision activities. It was difficult to revise some lessons because the learners did not participate actively when they needed to answer individually. The learners were also instructed to say '*Hi*' instead of Spanish '*Hola*' or '*I'm sorry*' instead of Spanish equivalent '*lo siento/ perdona me*' or '*How are you*' instead of '*com estas?*' and so on. The instructional actions were introduced in the beginning of the course, and they were useful for the future understanding of English language activities or tasks (*sit down, stand up, point, cut, copy, say, read, draw, color, jump, talk, stay silent, move*, etc.). It was very helpful to sing or hum the instructions in order to raise their interest (i.e. *everybody sit down, sit down, sit down; everybody sit down, sit, sit down!*)

## **The use of English in Spain**

During my stay in Spain, I got a chance to meet an English professor, a native Spaniard who teaches English and Greek at the Technical University in Valencia. She is fluent in both foreign languages since she had spent twelve years living abroad. She expressed her inconvenience and dissatisfaction with the level of knowledge of the English language in Spain. She was not only discontent with the scholars, pupils and foreign language learners, but with the teachers' competence as well. The biggest problem about teaching English as a foreign language is that the native Spanish speakers do not get enough input of English during their education; the majority of English teachers have never lived in an English-speaking area and never practiced their foreign language enough. They do not necessarily lack the knowledge, but are not good at pronunciation or fluency. The other biggest problem is that English classes are very often held in Spanish, and even the activity books and other resources contain a lot of explanation and theory in Spanish.

At my work place I had the opportunity to meet two philology students (aged 24 and 27 years), who study English at University, and two more students who already hold a degree in another field (both 25, one holding a degree in electrical engineering and the other one in sociology/pedagogy) and they chose to study English at the university to gain the competence for becoming English teachers as well.

Most of them used plain language. The use of simple English is welcomed and even required when teaching young learners, or while talking to another foreigner whose mother tongue is not English. However, most of them make slight changes in pronunciation and are often difficult to understand. They regularly make some grammar mistakes. They have different, if not wrong pronunciation.

They attribute their problem to the lack of input in English language, especially throughout the media and TV, biggest companies, since all the movies or TV shows are dubbed in Spanish national and local television channels.



#### **5.4.9. How Does My Emotional and Personal Life Affect My Teaching?**

*‘Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t, you’re right.’*  
Henry Ford

There were some times during my experience in Spain when I had the feeling of guilt because it was difficult to cope with all the different approaches and to accept the variety of instructions I needed to follow. Even among the other professional teachers, there were some discrepancies and they would not follow the advice themselves. Therefore, I would get into a catch-22 situation because while obeying the rule of one teacher I would at the same time break the rules of the other. Then I came to the conclusion that I should listen to everyone’s good piece of advice, but not strictly follow; I should rather make my own set of rules concerning teaching methodology.

I used to have a fear of speaking in public, and every time I had to deliver a presentation, I would get nervous. I would get stressed even when thinking about the possible outcome of the situation, I could feel the anxiety and stress in advance. Throughout the years, I managed to reduce the stress, to face the fear, and not to run away from it. Luckily, I had many opportunities to speak up publicly or to share my opinion, i.e. in my language classes, to give presentation or homework assignment, or to deal with some other activities and tasks in front of my class. The stress was still there, but it was reduced and it decreased in time. Paradoxically, the more I participated actively in the class, the more frightened I would get, but at the same time I felt good about myself every time I would speak up, because I was strong enough to give it a try. Because you are not a failure if you never try, you are a failure if you did not try but you wanted to. Therefore, when I confronted my new class in the role of a teacher, I still had some anxiety, but I was confident enough not to feel intimidated or inferior to them. I accepted new challenges every day with this positive fear I had. People are usually afraid of the unknown, that they usually do not see how much they could benefit from these situations; they usually give up on themselves even before they try to deal with the changes.

When I was going through a very difficult period (journal entry July 6), I did not feel well physically, and this behavior reflected on my teaching and on my relationship with other people and the learners. I felt I was under a lot of stress and felt very sensitive to other people’s complaints. During lunchtime, while serving the plates and bringing the food, the learners were noisy, shouting and even throwing food. The teacher who prepared their meals was holding their plates and she saw how they misbehaved. At one moment, she winged the plate and hit the table while shouting at them. The learners immediately stopped and there

was a complete silence in the classroom. I was looking at them doing nothing, because I felt so weak and fragile in front of them, thinking that I could not influence their behavior no matter what I did. She asked me how I could let such thing happen, while the situation got out of control, and how I could possibly be so indifferent. At that point, I started crying. I burst into tears and had to leave the classroom. I went to see Clara because she was the only one there who spoke English besides my mentor, and I confided in her, telling her I was losing control and I explained to her what had happened. I told her I did not want people shouting all the time because it made me nervous and tense, even afraid. She spoke to the ‘angry’ teacher, who was also her mother, and she apologized to me for shouting and yelling. From that day on, she was getting angry less and less, maybe because the Ls were getting better. From that day onwards, she would give me a hug every morning, and it was a nice way to start a new day.

I probably took everything too personally and I got offended easily in any situation, which reflected in my teaching as well. In my opinion, it is a big disadvantage in teaching because the teacher is considered to be a strong, strict, down-to earth and dominant person. If the teacher shows his or her feelings, emotions and fears, he or she might easily be considered as soft and weak. In some similar situations, the learners would come to me and give me a hug as if they knew something was wrong, but they were too young to understand what.

It is important to know the reason why someone loses his or her temper. On some occasions, tears might be considered as a good thing, for example if they are the outcome of stress. This reaction is a reminder that a person needs some time off, a sort of permission to act differently. Maybe it can help teachers to see the situation from a different perspective and to face the problem instead avoiding it any longer. It is better to cry alone, but if the situation arises when you are interacting with a group of people who are the source of your bad feelings, it is better to show your emotions instead of hiding it and avoiding it, because avoiding them may cause the counter effect.

After several days of disorder and chaos in the class, I was given a friendly advice from other employees in the kindergarten. They told me I did not have a ‘developed character’, which would be a rough translation from Spanish. I knew they were trying to say that I needed to take control over them and show my authority as a teacher. The major issue was that I did not have a good approach or attitude and it had to be changed.

Many times I wrote in my journal entry: “I am very exhausted, but fulfilled.” This is how I felt during the course. I was very tired almost every day, and I was experiencing inconvenience or was faced with some difficult or demanding problem, but I would always

find a solution and was able to correct some mistakes and improve myself as a person each day. The state of burnout can happen “when our development is blocked for too long (stagnation) or pushed to its limits for too long (overextension)” (Olsen 1989, as cited in Head and Taylor, 1997:126). You learn from experience; the harder way is to learn from your own. I had to identify the negative feelings, accept them, and understand that they come and go and face the changes. I was trying to draw my inspiration from everything around me and I realized that even the songs could make me think positively and influence my mood.

During the third week, I felt lack of physical and mental energy. On Friday morning, my temperature rose and I could not stand on my feet, so the teachers gave me some pills and told me to take some rest and lie down for a while. They put three toddler beds together for me and left me alone in the classroom. The learners were watching movies and playing table games while the other teachers were supervising them together with their groups of children. I had been sleeping for two hours and when I woke up, I felt much better. The teachers advised me to leave earlier, but since it was Friday, I still had to prepare the weekly handouts for the parents and write a new lesson plan for the following week. I did not want to lag behind and leave the work unfinished. I rather did my job in best possible way, and used the weekend to take a rest and boost my energy.

In the past, there were the times when I overcame the fear and the pain. Back in high school, I underwent the spine operation due to the spine scoliosis/fusion. I have been struggling with physical pain for years. Before I came to Spain to teach, I was afraid that I would not make it through the whole day because I would feel too exhausted. And really, in the beginning I was feeling very tired, exhausted and the pain seemed to increase. Then I convinced myself I was fine and the following time I felt physical pain I would boost up my mind with positive reinforcement and nice happy thoughts. It was very helpful and I realized I could still dance, sing, act, jump, and do all sorts of activities because I had enough energy and was eager to succeed in being a complete and competent teacher. After all, when feeling exhausted, I would find some time to sit down and take a rest. Breathing techniques also helped me feel relaxed. I never wanted to think of myself as a victim with so many problems with no solution, because self-pity and mourning over the ‘unfair’ life will never do any good.

Regardless of all the inconvenience and problems I was facing, I felt good while teaching English in Spain. Maybe it was simply because I was in Spain. It would probably be different in my everyday, neutral hometown surrounding. I cannot say that I would be less professional and less motivated otherwise, but surely this intercultural aspect played a significant role in my teaching. I took many things into account as better, therefore I felt like a

different person, like someone who has got such an opportunity to make progress and make the best out of it. For example, when my bag got stolen on the street, I remained surprisingly rational. I was thinking to myself: “Well, you are in Spain now, think about all the good things that happened and that are yet to come, there is not time to waste, relax and stop wining!”. This positive thinking reflected in my teaching as well, as I had to be flexible and able to adjust. I realized I could not cope with everything and solve every problem, so I knew I should not take the blame personally, without noticing that some of the demands were unreasonable, as teachers sometimes find themselves responsible for the outcome of a situation, but without the power to influence it (Head and Taylor, 1997). I had to take things less personally, and not feel responsible every time it seemed that the learners were not making progress.

The last days were extremely emotional for me in general, because it was difficult to say goodbye to all of them. I really became fond of my learners and I felt very comfortable working there. Most of the time spent there I considered to be one amazing adventure, and although I had a big responsibility for the learners and there were moments when I fell short of my own expectations, I proved myself that teaching can always be fun if the teacher makes the necessary effort.

#### 5.4.10. Which Activities Were Used in My Classes?

‘‘Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.’’  
Benjamin Franklin

Since there was no fixed curriculum to follow in the course, there was a fear of over exaggerating within the program, or that my learners will not prosper because I might choose the wrong tasks and activities,<sup>10</sup> either too challenging or too simple. Tasks that are more receptive were used rather than productive. Although the learning is best achieved when the learners play an active role in the process, being active means that learners cannot just be given information, rather they must have opportunities to internalize information in ways that are meaningful to them. In my teaching, vocabulary presentation was mostly non-verbal, with the use of flashcards, realia, drawing, miming and pointing. In verbal presentation, usually the direct translation to L1 was given if possible. Target vocabulary was based on several topics: greetings, actions, body parts, clothes, sports, music, in the classroom, pets, wild animals, farm animals, fruits, vegetables, shopping, senses, transport, weather, at the picnic.

A common way to maintain the interest in foreign language learning is to introduce information about the target culture. The learners were more interested in new vocabulary if it was somehow related to the famous character or any other topic, which is popular nowadays. The topics, which were introduced to raise cultural awareness and to raise learners’ interest, were the following: football (World Championship theme, *Waka Waka* song<sup>11</sup>), Sponge Bob (*Bob Esponja*), Las Divinas, Spiderman, Peter Pan, Alladin, Winnie the Pooh, Pokemon, Sezame Street, Mickey Mouse, etc., as well as the movies and cartoons: Calimero, Peter Pan, Pocahontas, Sponge Bob, Garfield, Harry Potter, Tom&Jerry, Spiderman and Disney English (various topics: family, my friends, my school).

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<sup>10</sup> Language activities: in this paper, the term *activity* refers to all types of work that enhanced language learning, i.e. presentations, games, worksheets, oral revision, and written practice; the term *task*, in a more narrow sense, is used when the focus is mostly on written assignment consisting of worksheets and handouts. Therefore, the *task* is considered to be one sub-type of *activity*. The main difference is that the TBA (Task Based Activities) were fixed in the classroom and were limited to one hour per day (10 to 11 a.m.), whereas the activities took place in the classroom and outside the classroom throughout the whole day (9 a.m. to 5. p.m.)

<sup>11</sup> The official song for the 2010 FIFA World Cup was Waka-Waka (Shakira, 2010); in addition, Spain national football team won the championship.

#### **5.4.10.1. Task-Based Activities (TBA):**

Some teachers make significant use of textbooks and let the textbook make many of their instructional decisions. However, since I did not have any book to follow, I had to organize the curriculum myself. The advantage of the free choice is that it encouraged my creativity to opt for the topics and activities on my own. I preferred to make the use of teacher-generated materials (Appendix 4, fig. 9), and it forced me to be more engaged in lesson planning and to avoid overdependence on materials. A teacher should know how to encourage learners to express themselves, not only to teach, but to learn with my learners, to help them acquire English language, and to bring out the creativity in the learners.

Nearly everyone is likely to need a basic command of the most frequent words, phrases, structures, and text patterns. Most learners also have their favorite topics and specialist areas. Selection criteria for material: topic variety is very important; but it is impossible to please every member of the class every time.

The TBA activities used in my teaching were filling in the gaps, sorting words alphabetically, finding the difference, classifying, pairing, word worm, odd one out, grouping, eliciting, memory games, matching, identifying (comparing), puzzles, guessing games (problem solving), brainstorming (names, words from songs, animals, food) to name but a few. Activities such as drawing, coloring, copying, connecting the dots, and tracing were chosen for those learners who could not read or write yet. Such simple tasks were more appropriate for the youngest children, although it was optional for learners to choose the handouts according to their wishes and interest (appendix 4, fig. 10).

In animal word search, the learners were required to write the words below the pictures and then find them in the puzzle. To make it easier, I wrote down the vocabulary in advance. Two learners pointed out that they could not possibly find the word horse. It turned out that I confused the sheep over goat and the goat over horse, which was not in the crossword at all. I apologized and corrected the mistake in each handout. I had not realized my mistake, because I was in a hurry and made it fussy. Later on I would pay more attention to every task I present and would complete the whole task myself before I hand it in to the learners, especially those with no answer key.

#### 5.4.10.2. Revision Activities

A good way of providing healthy contextualized activities can be seen in the use of TPR activities<sup>12</sup> where children perform physical actions in response to spoken statements. The activities used, including TPR, were: Day&Night, Hockey Pockey, Head and Shoulders, Simon Says, Hide and Seek, dance moves, point to the animal, find an animal, point to the color, point to the clothing, find an item in the classroom, miming sports, Bingo cutouts (food, fruits&vegetables, animals), Domino (sport, clothes, food, animal) etc.

At the playground, learners were involved in slide activities and pool activities with flashcards. If the learners answered the word correctly, they were allowed to go down the slide or jump in the pool. Later on, the learners were asking for more demanding tasks. For example, they got bored with 1-10 number flashcards, so I included addition and subtraction in their activities, and they had a command of two-digit numbers as well.

In the classroom, communication was better when the group would sit in a circle, we could make eye contact and see each other, and all the members were equal. We would usually play the ball game in order to revise the lesson (for example *everyone wearing blue, stand up*), games build-up trust and sensitivity, boost up self-esteem, provide opportunities for everyone to participate, and increase concentration.

#### 5.4.10.3. Games

The use of games was welcomed in the classroom and outside the classroom, because in this way the learners would use and practice the foreign language in an interesting way and in various situations, through a method of *learning through doing*. Some of the games used during the course are:

*Horse game*: there were eight horses on a stick that the learners could ride, and each learner was given one number. They were asked to follow instructions according to numbers, i.e. *number 3 switch places with number 5, number 7 go to the slide* etc. The game was not successful because there were only eight learners who could participate, and they did not follow instructions, they were chasing each other running around and speaking Spanish. Next time they were allowed to use toy horses as a free activity.

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<sup>12</sup> Total Physical Response (TPR) is developed by James Asher (1965,1966), is a part of modern teaching classrooms, because physically enacting the information in a sentence results in better recall than simple repetition (cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1996)

*Parachute game:* I found the parachute in three colors, and the learners were given instructions, for example to put their left/right foot/arm on blue/red/yellow field. This game was a version of the Twister game, which they were already familiar with, so we used the additional equipment to combine the two games together so that more learners could play.

*Ring game:* I was using the colorful rings for TPR activity, giving instructions similar to “Simon says” activity. The learners had to follow instructions according to the color of the ring they had chosen. There were always some learners who did not want to participate and the same problem arose like in Simon says, learners would not follow instructions unless I showed it to them first.

*Jump the ring game:* in this version of ‘missing chair’ game, there was always one ring missing on the floor. The learners were instructed to dance around the rings without touching them while the song is playing. When the song is paused, they had to jump in the ring as soon as possible. This activity was interesting for learners and it was very convenient for me, as I did not need to instruct them or explain the rules repeatedly. As soon as they saw me putting the rings on the floor and playing the song, they would join the game. Although this activity was not very helpful for English language acquisition, the songs were in English, so the learners would listen to the pronunciation practice auditory comprehension. They would sometimes ask for particular song (i.e. *Waka-Waka*) so that they could sing it while dancing.

#### **5.4.10.4. Creativity/ Arts and Crafts**

In creativity tasks, the learners were listening for specific information and following instructions, observing, expressing themselves creatively, socializing, relaxing, and having fun. We were to organize a Tea party for the learners, making crowns that they would wear and bring home. I made cutouts from folded paper in advance and the learners were requested to draw different pictures and color them. Some of the learners felt lost and did not know what to do because they were not instructed clearly and could not understand me. Therefore I drew some simple pictures on the board (Appendix 4, fig. 6) giving them a choice. We also made classroom decorations and blew up some balloons. Since I wanted to prepare a welcome tea party, I asked my mentor whether we could prepare actual tea in the kitchen to pour in plastic cups or to share the tea bags to every learner to take home to prepare. I was surprised to hear that children were not allowed to drink tea because it is considered as a light drug due to the theanine and caffeine. Therefore, we were having welcome party with candies, biscuits,



and water. At the end of the day and week each learner was given a balloon to bring home, they were supposed to choose the color and say it correctly in English.

Although there were lot of memory cards and bingo games, I found it more interesting to prepare animals and food bingo on my own. However, I think that the learners did not care much whether the bingo cards were hand made or bought. In addition, they even complained that the paper cutouts were not in color. I did not like their attitude because they did not appreciate the fact that I made an effort to prepare those cards for all of them. I came to conclusion that it was not their fault, because they were not included in the preparation of bingo cards at all. If they had participated actively in this creative activity, they would have felt more involved and it would have probably raised their interest for Bingo game. The following time the learners prepared memory cards on their own, and I realized they were playing with the memory cards more often than with the bingo cards.

I prepared the lesson plan on Sponge Bob week, and one of the topics was clothes. That day, while coming back home from the store, my roommate took the free advertisements in order to check for a mobile phone. When I saw him, it dawned on me that I could use those leaflets to make the clothes cutouts. I made several cutouts, which fit the size of the sponge Bob doll we had in the classroom (Appendix 4, fig. 12). The next day the learners were putting the clothes on and taking it off the doll as a revision game. In addition, I brought a bag consisting of different clothing items, and my learners were interested to see what was in the bag, they would guess the vocabulary and compare the clothes to something they were wearing. Oprandy suggests that the teachers can extend the reflection beyond the boundaries of school, connecting our work with what we observe in a ‘nonschool’ setting.<sup>13</sup>

In cooperation with another teacher, we made Sponge Bob hand puppets with the learners. We bought several sets of colored kitchen sponges and drew eyes, teeth, and pants to make cutouts, which were stapled to the sponge later on. Plastic wires were used for hands and feet.

There were some difficulties since the majority of learners wanted a yellow sponge, to be more realistic. Unfortunately, there were only eight yellow sponges and it was difficult to choose who deserves to get them. Therefore, since all of them were impatient waiting for their puppets, we started with pink, green, and blue, leaving yellow ones aside. Most of the learners were impatient to wait for the right color so they did not care anymore. However, those who

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<sup>13</sup> Oprandy refuses to use the term ‘nonteaching settings’, because teaching and learning take place everywhere, and every communicator plays the role either of the teacher or of the learner. (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999: 129)

were determined to get what they wanted were waiting patiently for their turn and got a yellow sponge puppet. It was interesting to notice that the most patient learners were usually the ones who were patient in every activity, they did not seek attention and did not brag around; but they were very stubborn so sometimes they had difficulties to fit in and to follow instructions.

Some other handicrafts were: maracas made of the toilet paper rolls and rice; means of transport made of milk and juice containers; fruit baskets made of clay, animal masks made of plastic plates and paper (Appendix 4, fig. 11), tiger origami, paper cutouts, masks, to name but a few.

## 5.5 FINAL REMARKS

From the practical part of the study it is obvious that, besides reflecting on my teaching competences, beliefs and expectations, I was often reflecting on the personal and emotional side in my teaching, and I concluded that who we are as people plays an important role in our teaching, and who we are as teachers reflects on our personal life. It takes time and practice to improve, it has its ups and downs, and the motivation changes throughout the period, but all of this makes a good teacher and encourages us to break the boundaries of our exploration.

Although it may be very difficult, I still support an individual approach, the ability to have the insight into learners' educational competence and emotional needs, and to see the interaction and behavioral pattern in the classroom; because it is very helpful to get an insight into your own teaching. The observation in the classroom sometimes precedes self-reflection, because it is within a relationship to others that we can truly see who we are as a teacher and as a person. I have also realized that dealing with problems can be an advantage for me, as I would consider it as a challenge and not as a threat. Finally, I felt confident enough to cope with different problems and to accept every situation as a new riddle to solve. Even in those situations that I had no control over, I did not consider to be a failure, because I realized I could learn something from every situation, even when I would find myself helpless.

As a teacher, I had to adjust to my teaching environment and my learners' needs, but to keep down-to-earth and be genuine. I know I should never alter completely, to lose my *it-ivness*, but I should always be able to adapt, integrate, and be willing to be affected in either intrinsic or extrinsic way. While teaching one learns, it is a never-ending process, because you learn as you live. Keeping a journal was very beneficial for my future teaching, and it was a helpful insight in the process of teaching as it happens, i.e. the personal reactions to the things that occurred in the classroom, which I might not have noticed otherwise.

In conclusion, throughout my teaching self-reflection, there was a proper learning/teaching cycle: my assumptions and beliefs stemmed from my previous personal teacher/learner experience in the past; my self-observation was conducted in present reflection of my teaching competence; and my desires and hopes for teacher's development were directed toward future events.

*“The most effective kind of education is that a child should play amongst lovely things.”*  
Plato

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study was based on self-observation and self-reflection of teaching English to young learners in Spain. It was mostly based on a six-week journal, with the reflection on my former education, past experience and future expectations. The teaching journal was extremely helpful in serving as a record of my insights and beliefs about my teaching, but it also encouraged me to see the change in my development and discover some teaching and educational patterns of which I was not aware.

This study did not provide exact (empirical) results; the results were liable to change, as it was rather one-sided, personal insight into one's teaching expectations, choices, successes and mistakes, feelings, attitudes and discoveries. Therefore, the research questions examined in the study could be interpreted and answered in different ways, and for sure new questions would arise immediately.

It is important to see the difference between the things we cannot change and those that we can change, although it might be very difficult. Sometimes we convince ourselves there is nothing we can change, which can be only an excuse for laziness and for making the others responsible for our lack of development.

All in all, it is very difficult to observe, exemplify and (re)live the personal experience, and to present it in an objective unbiased way. Therefore, no matter how hard one tries to put his or her personal experience into words in order to describe it as genuinely as possible, this experience is always going to remain only a blurry reflection on somebody else's reality.

The study showed that without the proper formal education one cannot become a competent teacher, however, only by the direct teaching experience can one put the theory into practice and (re)use it in a best possible way.

*“The end of all our exploration  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.”*  
T.S. Eliot

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## PORTFOLIO (Extracts)

### Internet resource for the handouts

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## Appendix 1: *Six Weeks Journal Entry*

Here are some of the notes taken from the teaching journal in Spain:

Note: this is a *rough view* of the teaching journal and does not represent the entire observation and reflection conducted while teaching.

**Week 1:** fear of the unknown: will I make it? Am I competent enough? Getting to know Ls: will they like me? How will I communicate with them? Dealing with a large group of Ls, What to expect? Too enthusiastic, high expectations- false, A lot of paperwork, Using prior knowledge: hockey pokey, Simon says, day&night, head and shoulders, Do not have enough handouts prepared, Ls are drawing and coloring most of the time, I am afraid of my mentor, have a too short break

**Week 2:** discipline problems, my Ls don't pay enough attention,, Sponge Bob week- full of ideas, every day different topic, Making clothes cutouts, found great board games to play, suitable flashcards, Running out of time, too many activities, too many copies, the tasks are too demanding, High expectations from my Ls-too difficult, bad timing, Can't follow the lesson plan correctly (they are not allowed to drink tea?!), cultural differences, Ls don't understand my English, I can't check in the dictionary for the unknown words, don't have time to learn, my Ls speak Valenciano, I don't understand their language!

**Week 3:** the worst week, very frustrating, getting sick, physically weak, mentally unprepared, Can I hold it? Burst into tears in front of my Ls, loosing my patience, don't feel like talking a lot (cant talk because I have a sore throat), loosing my enthusiasm, Ls are ungrateful and selfish, they don't appreciate my time and effort, I am very tired of everything, easily distracted, can't stay focused, I fell asleep at work, tensions between Ls and co-workers

**Week 4:** recovering physically, getting new ideas, lagging behind with work and activities, have to stay extra hours, starting to communicate better with my Ls, I use more Spanish, they use more English, relaxing and feeling calmer, preparing a lot of handouts, preparing extra handouts in advance, writing a lesson plan with another teacher, finally accepting the responsibility as an advantage, not as burden, Interesting topics and activities

**Week 5:** another teacher didn't show up! What to do? I have nothing prepared, feeling lost, Ls want me to teach them dance, they don't like the songs I'm playing, they want Waka-Waka, I relied on others too much, cant get any help, I am on my own again, luckily I had some unused handouts from the previous week and new handouts for the final week, I decided to revise all the lessons, to build up confidence, I am better on my own, feeling good, I printed

*Waka-Waka* lyrics and *I got a feeling* lyrics, singing with my Ls but don't have laptop to play the songs, the teacher shows up at the end of the week, she wants to move dancing topic for a final week, I feel like we lost too much time, deal- she will teach them dancing during the free time at the gym or playground so I will still have my TBA time, Ly have very few handouts at the end of the week

**Week 6:** all topics chosen, lesson plan prepared for the final week, I'm not worried about the tasks and activities, very relaxed, having a lot of fun but feeling sad at the same time, became very fond of my Ls, feeling comfortable teaching, feeling good about myself, feeling proud of my accomplishments, time had passed so quickly, very emotional period, don't want to leave,

I have not fully realized my potentials; I have to continue to learn on everyday basis and to acquire new experiences by myself and throughout the interaction with my Ls

No regrets!

*“We teach people how to remember, we never teach them how to grow”*

Oscar Wild

# ENGLISH SUMMER COURSE



NAME OF THE STUDENT: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF THE PROJECT: July 26, 2010

HEAD TEACHER OF THE PROJECT: Teacher Carmen, Dina and Carmela.

NAME OF THE PROJECT: SUMMER HOLIDAYS!

Plaça Major 11 i Sarieta s/n  
Meliana · 46.133 València  
Tel. 96 149 52 29

In the final week the students will do various activities and learn about different things. They will learn about transport (car, boat, truck...), about weather and seasons (summer, winter...), about human senses (touch, sight, smell, hearing, speaking) etc. and revise some things that they have learned so far.

Note! Either on Thursday or Friday the students will go at the local playground (Patronato de Meliana, al lado de la Academia) to change the environment and to have more physical activity.

A lo largo de esta última semana, vuestros hijos realizarán actividades variadas sobre diferentes temas. Aprenderán diferentes tipos de transportes, el tiempo y las estaciones, así como nuestros sentidos. También se revisarán aquellos aspectos más importantes trabajados en las semanas anteriores.

IMPORTANTE: Tanto el jueves como el viernes haremos una pequeña excursión al Patronato de Meliana (al lado de la Academia), donde los niños se divertirán y se lo pasarán pipa. ☺

NOTE: Please, bring a snack and a water bottle. Swimming time is on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, so please bring a swim suit and a towel.

IMPORTANTE: Por favor, TRAE CADA DIA EL ALMUERZO Y UNA BOTELLITA DE AGUA.

Los martes, miércoles y jueves tenemos piscina, así que traed bañador, muda de cambio, toalla y crema

## LESSONS TIMETABLE

## SUMMER HOLIDAYS!

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
10.00 TO 10.45	WRITTEN ENGLISH TASKS My senses	WRITTEN ENGLISH TASKS- transport	WRITTEN ENGLISH TASKS- Summer Weather	Going at the playground	Revision Of the final week, and of the entire course
10.45 TO 11.30	CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES handouts	CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES handouts	CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES Handouts and vocabulary	CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES handouts	CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES or PLAYGROUND
11.30 TO 12.00	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
12.00 TO 12.30	SPORTS	SWIMMING AND SPORTS	SWIMMING AND SPORTS	SWIMMING AND SPORTS	ARTS AND CRAFTS OR
12.30 TO 13.00	TV/relaxing	games	Table games	relaxing	playground
13.30 TO 15.00	<b>LUNCH</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>
15.00 TO 15.45	ENGLISH GAMES	ENGLISH GAMES	ENGLISH GAMES	ENGLISH GAMES	ENGLISH GAMES
15.45- 16.30	PLAYGROUND and/or VIDEO	PLAYGROUND and/or VIDEO	PLAYGROUND and/or VIDEO	PLAYGROUND and/or VIDEO	REST and PLAY

Appendix 3: EPOSTL personal statement sheet; changes of teaching expectations and beliefs throughout three months

EPOSTL

PERSONAL STATEMENT

✓ ≈ June, 2010  
✓ ≈ September, 2010 (Teaching English to Young Learners)

3. Expectations of your teacher education course

a) What do you expect most from your teacher education?  
 To be happy and fulfilled every time I succeed in my goal - to help LS in achieving their language goals. To receive good piece of advice but not to strictly follow everybody else's rules, but to create mine as well!

b) What do you want most from your teacher education?  
 To build up my teaching abilities and to become a good, fair and open-minded teacher to gain theoretical knowledge which I will be able to use in my everyday practice, and never to stop

c) What do you think that your teacher educators expect from you? Learning  
 To be a good student, which usually implies that this is the way to become a successful teacher one.

4. How important do you consider the following for a language teacher? Add your own ideas. Discuss with a partner and give reasons for your choices.

	How important? not → very important					
1. Cooperating with others	1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Good organisational skills	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Being able to explain grammar	?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. being able to teach vocabulary	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. teaching how to communicate	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. encourage LS to speak up & express their	5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. pre-knowledge and general knowledge	7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. work on learners writing skills (how to write an essay, add, write application...)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Respect every person equally and never make judgements before the options are given, to treat LS as a group equally but at the same time to get to know each learner individually		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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Appendix 4: Examples of activities and handouts used

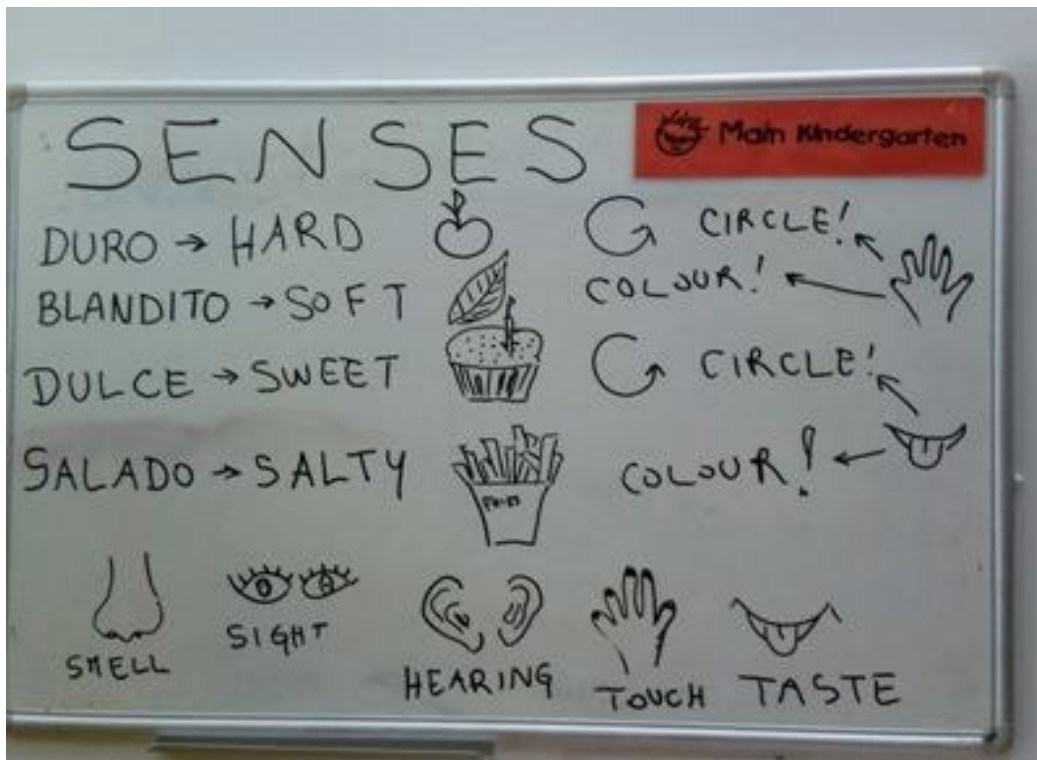


Figure 1: Giving instructions on the white board; direct translation to the L1

size \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Your Sense of Taste

You use your tongue to taste things. This is your sense of taste.  
Look at each picture. Color the pictures that would taste sweet if you tasted them.  
Circle the pictures that would taste salty if you tasted them.

Beginning science unit: Sense of taste. Worksheet provided by www.funfonix.com

size \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Your Sense of Sight

You use your eyes to see things. This is your sense of sight.  
Look at each picture. Circle the pictures that you can see but you cannot touch.

Beginning science unit: Sense of sight. Worksheet provided by www.funfonix.com

Figure 2: An example of Internet source handout



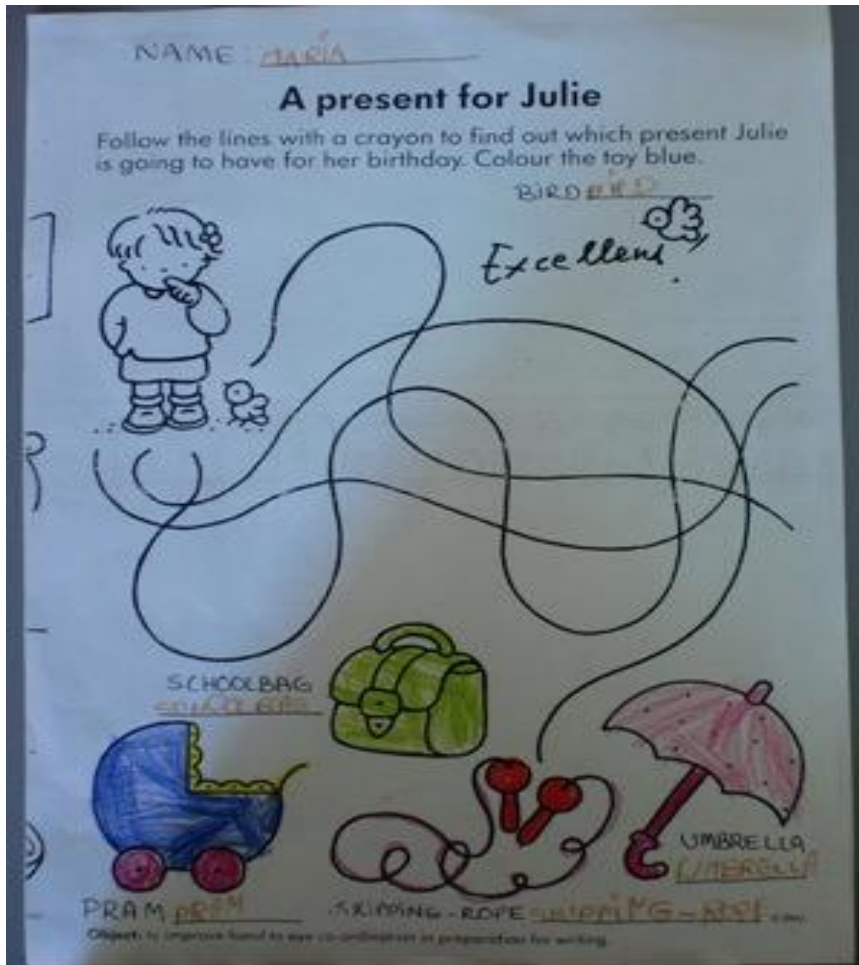


Figure 3: An example of a TBA where the written instructions were changed and the emphasis was on copying words rather than coloring the items












Figure 4: The example of receptive coloring task where the Ls were encouraged and rewarded with a positive reinforcement

Match the English and Spanish clothing to the picture. Name \_\_\_\_\_

### English and Spanish Clothing


Draw a line from each article of clothing to the correct English and Spanish words.

hat		las botas
skirt		los guantes
pants		la camisa
shirt		el sombrero
boots		la falda
sneakers		los calcetines
gloves		el vestido
socks		zapatillas de deporte
dress		los pantalones

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### ¡¡¡AYE I want some food

Tengo que comer comida. ¿Qué grande comer? Observa los alimentos que hay en la nevera y etiquétalos ayudándote de la lista siguiente.



There is a sandwich. There are two SPINACHES. There's some WATER. There are APPLES. There are six EGGS.

¡¡¡AYE I want some food

Tengo que comer comida. ¿Qué grande comer? Observa los alimentos que hay en la nevera y etiquétalos ayudándote de la lista siguiente.

There is a sandwich. There are two SPINACHES. There's some WATER. There are APPLES. There are six EGGS.

¡¡¡AYE I want some food

Tengo que comer comida. ¿Qué grande comer? Observa los alimentos que hay en la nevera y etiquétalos ayudándote de la lista siguiente.

There is a sandwich. There are two SPINACHES. There's some WATER. There are APPLES. There are six EGGS.

Figure 5: Bilingual handouts; task with English vocabulary and Spanish equivalents, and the task with the instructions written in Spanish.



Figure 6: Ideas for creative activities, guided drawing and writing



Figure 7: Language certificates and awards for the English Summer Course

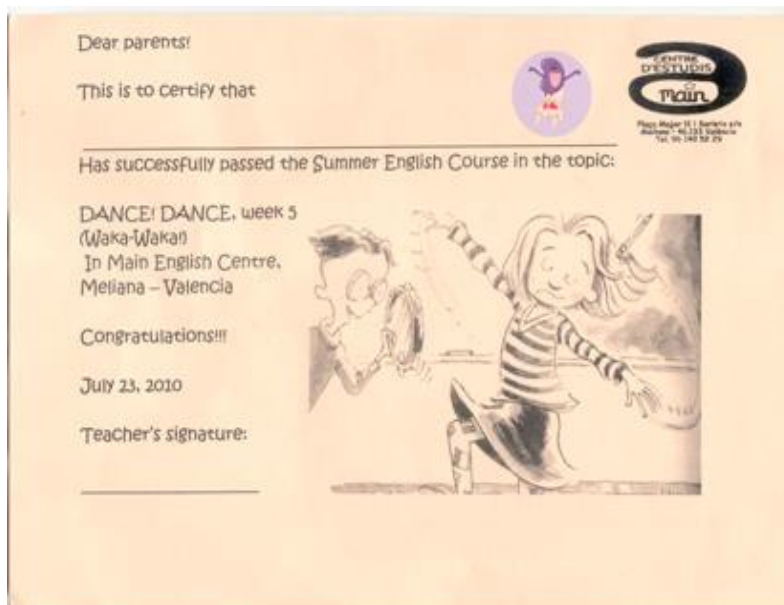


Figure 8: Weekly English language certificate, the cover page for the handouts Portfolio



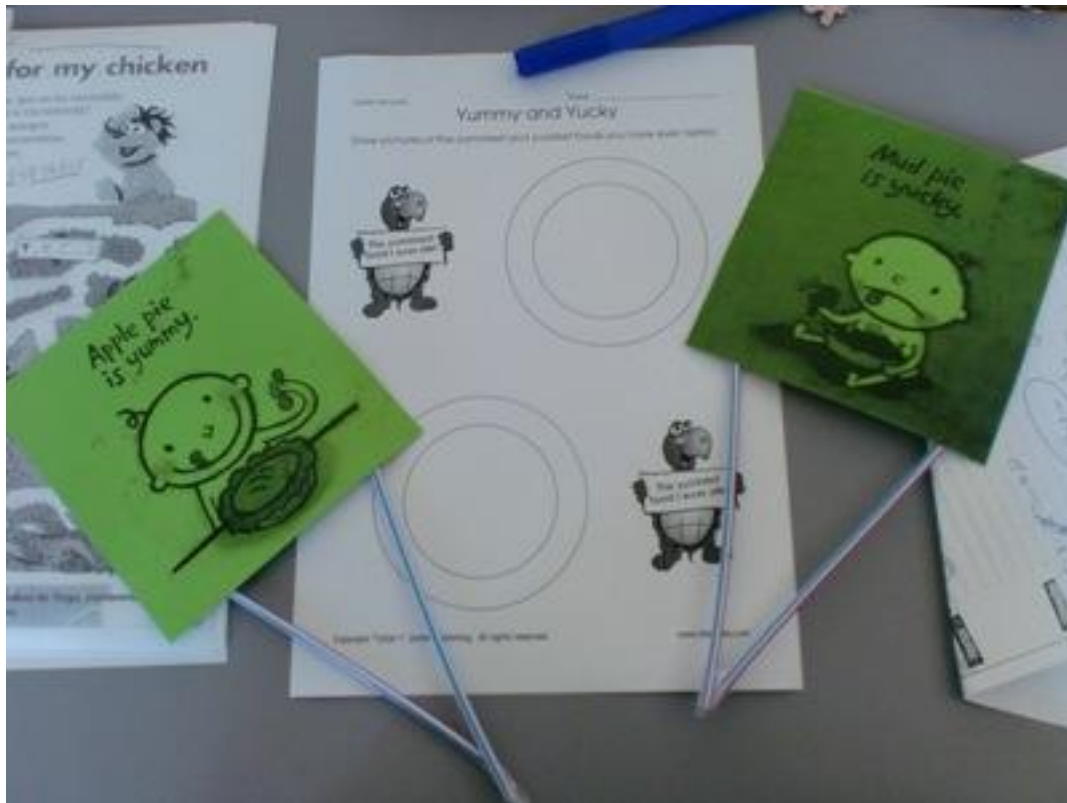


Figure 9: Creative teaching supplies enhanced new language activities

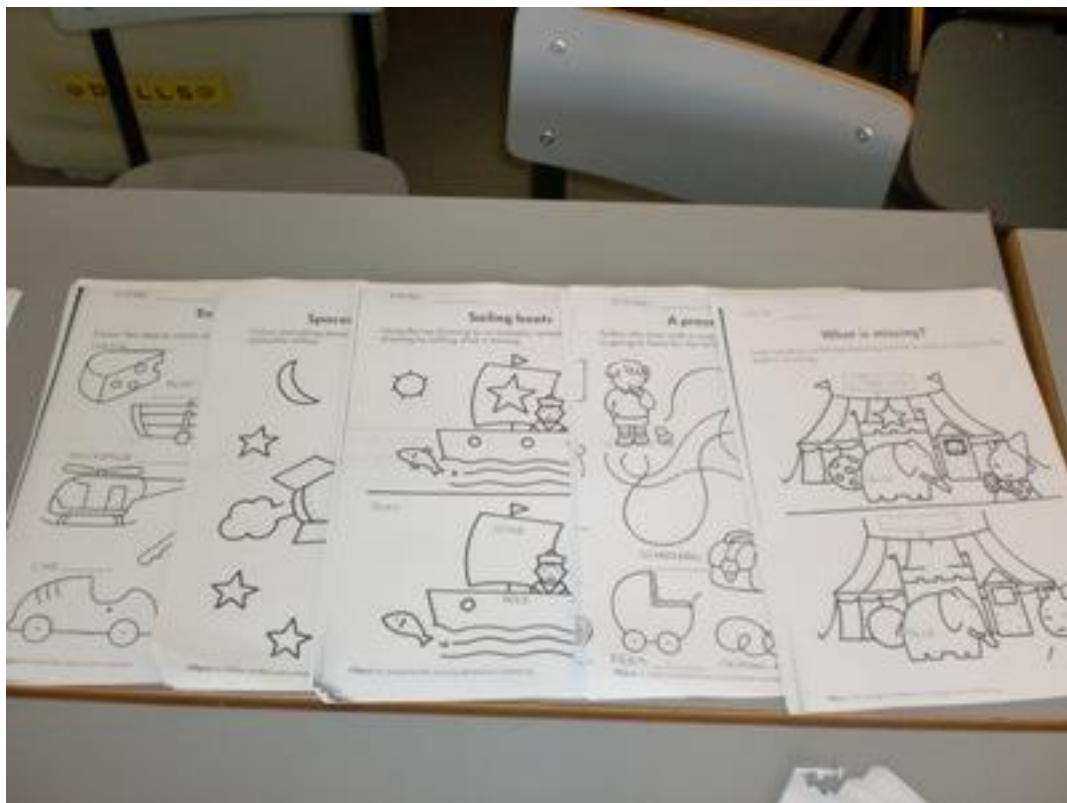


Figure 10: The TBA adjusted to different language levels, the coloring and drawing tasks for younger learners, the copying tasks for older learners

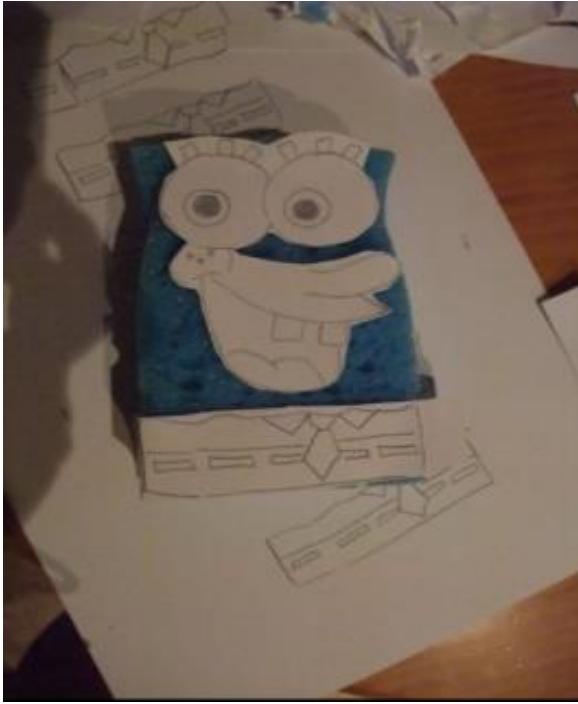


Figure 11: *Handicrafts for weekly creative activities, Sponge Bob hand puppet and plastic plate animal face*



Figure12: *Paper cutouts as a substitute for flashcards and realia*

## SUMMARY

This paper is based on the self-reflective study of teaching English as a foreign language to very young learners in Spain. It consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part of the paper, relevant theoretical knowledge related to the topic is presented. In the practical part of the paper the results of the research were presented. The research was based on the analysis of the kept teaching journal during a period of six weeks, while teaching English language to young learners in the kindergarten *Centre D'Estudies Main* in Meliana, Spain.

Key words: self-reflection, teaching, learning, foreign language, (very) young learners, teacher, activities, tasks, discipline, teaching journals, observation

## SAŽETAK

Rad se temelji na introspekciji i samoevaluaciji poučavanja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika učenicima predškolske dobi u Španjolskoj. Rad se sastoji od dva dijela: teorijskog i praktičnog. U teorijskom dijelu rada predstavljene su bitne teorijske spoznaje vezane uz temu rada. U praktičnom dijelu rada objašnjeni su rezultati tj. predstavljeni su odgovori na istraživačka pitanja. Osnova istraživanja je analiza dnevnika poučavanja koji je vođen u razdoblju od šest tjedana, tijekom poučavanja engleskoga jezika djeci u vrtiću *Centre D'Estudies Main* u Meliani u Španjolskoj.

Ključne riječi: introspekcija, samoevaluacija, poučavanje, učenje, strani jezik, rani uzrast djece, nastavnik, aktivnosti, zadatci, disciplina, dnevnik poučavanja, opažanje

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