ASL2. SERVICE-LEARNING THROUGH INTERACTIVE GROUPS TO TEACH EFL AND CLIL SUBJECTS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

ASL2. APRENDIZAJE Y SERVICIO MEDIANTE GRUPOS INTERACTIVOS PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DE ASIGNATURAS DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA Y AICLE EN EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA

ASL2. APPRENTISSAGE-SERVICE PAR LE BIAIS DE GROUPES INTERACTIFS POUR ENSEIGNER L'ANGLAIS LANGUE ÉTRANGÈRE ET DES DISCIPLINES EMILE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT PRIMAIRE

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Abstract

Interactive groups belong to a strategy of Learning Communities which promotes pupils' full participation, divided into smaller groups, under an adult's guidance. Although research has proven the importance of this method for different aspects of education, little attention has been paid to this strategy in the context of foreign languages and bilingual education. Considering this, the present paper has two main aims: first, to show the origin, evolution and results of a service-learning project carried out at a Faculty of Education; and second, to delve into the contribution of this strategy to the teaching of language and CLIL areas and the acquisition of key competences as well as the convenience of including it in future teachers' training. For that, both classroom action research and the qualitative or interpretative method have been employed. The results will show that these experiences are motivating and fruitful for initial teachers' training. The reflection on the project's success will also suggest other improvement measures to be taken in future editions regarding the professor, the students and the school and pupils. Finally, the relevant role interactive groups play for a diverse pluricultural and plurilingual society will be also reflected.

Palabras clave: Interactive groups, ELT, CLIL, bilingual education, education in values, service-learning.

Resumen

Los grupos interactivos forman parte de una estrategia de Comunidades de Aprendizaje que promociona la participación plena del estudiante en grupos reducidos bajo la supervisión de un adulto. A pesar de la importancia probada científicamente de este método para distintos aspectos de la educación, se ha prestado poca atención a esta estrategia en el contexto de las lenguas extranjeras y la educación bilingüe. En este sentido, este trabajo tiene dos objetivos: primero, mostrar el origen, la evolución y los resultados de un proyecto de aprendizaje servicio llevado a cabo en una Facultad de Educación; y segundo, ahondar en la contribución de esta estrategia a la enseñanza de lenguas y asignaturas AICLE y a la adquisición de competencias clave, así como la conveniencia de incluirlo en la formación de los futuros maestros. Para ello se emplean la investigación en acción y métodos cualitativos o interpretativos. Los resultados demuestran que estas experiencias son tan motivadoras como fructíferas para la formación inicial docente. La reflexión sobre el éxito del proyecto también sugiere otras medidas de mejora a considerar en las futuras ediciones tanto respecto al docente universitario, como a los estudiantes y el colegio. Por último, también se describe el papel que desempeñan los grupos interactivos para la construcción de una sociedad pluricultural y plurilingüe.

Keywords: Grupos interactivos, enseñanza de inglés (ELT), AICLE, educación bilingüe, educación en valores, aprendizaje y servicio.

Résumé

Les groupes interactifs font partie d'une stratégie de Communautés d'Apprentissage qui promeut la participation pleine de l'étudiant dans des groupes réduits sous la supervision d'un adulte. Bien que l'importance de cette méthode ait été scientifiquement prouvée pour divers aspects de l'éducation, peu d'attention a été accordée à cette stratégie dans le contexte des langues étrangères et de l'éducation bilingue. Dans ce sens, ce travail a deux objectifs : d'abord, montrer l'origine, l'évolution et les résultats d'un projet d'apprentissage-service mené dans une Faculté de l'Éducation ; et ensuite, approfondir la contribution de cette stratégie à l'enseignement des langues et des matières EMILE ainsi qu'à l'acquisition de compétences clés, ainsi que la pertinence de l'inclure dans la formation des futurs enseignants. Pour ce faire, on utilise la recherche-action et des méthodes qualitatives ou interprétatives. Les résultats montrent que ces expériences sont aussi motivantes que fructueuses pour la formation initiale des enseignants. La réflexion sur le succès

du projet suggère également d'autres mesures d'amélioration à considérer pour les futures éditions, tant en ce qui concerne l'enseignant universitaire que les étudiants et l'école. Enfin, le rôle des groupes interactifs dans la construction d'une société pluriculturelle et plurilingue est également décrit.

Mots-clés : Groupes interactifs, enseignement de la langue anglaise (ELA), EMILE, éducation bilingue, éducation aux valeurs, apprentissage-service.

1. Introduction

Interactive groups are one of the four Successful Educational Actions of Learning Communities (Garrido, 2012, 81), whose aim is to promote successful school performance and social inclusion along the different stages of compulsory education (Grañeras, Díaz-Caneja & Gil, 2011, 17). The other three are: dialogic literary gatherings, dialogic models of conflict resolution and tutored libraries. At the same time, the main aim of Learning Communities is to overcome school failure and conflicts by creating opportunities (dialogic learning), involving the whole educational community, maintaining high expectations of all learners, and sequencing learning in communities and phases (Flecha & Puigvert, 2002, 1, 7).

Interactive groups may be defined as small and heterogeneous groups of pupils who have to work collaboratively on activities or tasks under the supervision of an adult −usually volunteers− who promotes supportive interactions and dialogue so that everyone participates and learns (Racionero & Padrós, 2010, 155). The teacher prepares the activities and is a guide both for learners and participating adults. Groups are normally made of 4 or 5 pupils and the activities usually last for 15-20 minutes, after which adults rotate to the next group. However, teachers must be flexible and involved in the project just in case postponing the beginning of one subject may be necessary not to break the flow of the groups. In every activity, communication and participation "are transformed into dialogic communicative acts in groups based on egalitarian dialogue, which involves the conditions of sincerity and consensus" (Oliver and Gatt, 2010, 279). Thus, interactive groups reduce competitiveness and generate solidarity at the same time they improve academic performance and learners' participation, as they are conceived for students to receive the highest quality education (Elboj & de Gràcia, 2005, 105).

Research shows the importance of this methodology for an inclusive education (Muntaner, Pinya & de la Iglesia, 2015)−especially for children of vulnerable and/or minority ethnic populations (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013)−, education in values and students' motivation (Álvarez Álvarez & Puigdellívol Aguadé, 2014), attention to diversity (Peirats Chacón & López Marí, 2013) or educational success (Flecha, 2015; Melgar Alcantud, 2015), among others. However, despite the importance of interactive groups for the bilingual or foreign language classroom−since they provide learners with plenty of opportunities to communicate in a real and meaningful way, improve their oral communication skills and, eventually, develop a positive and motivating attitude towards the learning of a second or foreign language (Garrido,

2012, 81)– little attention has been paid to this strategy in the context of foreign languages. Moreover, as Aguilera, Mendoza et al. (2010, 45, 55) claim, it is necessary to link universities and learning communities, so as to obtain benefits from such collaboration, and continue research and the dissemination of good practices to implement learning communities, including interactive groups, in schools and the training of teachers-to-be. One way to create such bonds is through service-learning, which is an innovative methodology connecting the local community and education institutions to collaborate in finding answers and addressing the challenges that education poses at present (Martínez-Odría, 2007, 627). In it, academic learning is combined with providing a voluntary service within a real classroom to cater to the local community's needs in a way that they mutually enrich both their learning processes, at university and at school, and form an inseparable binomial (Martínez-Odría, 2007, 630). Service-learning has been demonstrated not only to have a strong impact on learners' personal development, especially in their "self-esteem, confidence in political and social skills, and building relationships with others", but also in building "an increased sense of social responsibility, expressed as feeling connected to their community" among participants (Howard, 2003).

Under these premises, this paper has two main aims. On the one hand, to show the origin, evolution and results of a project carried out in the course unit of *English Language Teaching* (*ELT*) *Methodology* at a Faculty of Education through classroom action research consisting in the creation of materials to be used in interactive groups in a real school both in the area of the foreign language (English) and in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) areas, namely Sciences and Arts. And on the other hand, to analyse the contribution of interactive groups to the teaching of language and CLIL areas and the acquisition of key competences (the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2006) as well as the convenience to teach it at university before students become actual professionals.

As for the methods employed, both classroom research and the qualitative or interpretative method have been used. First, "classroom research may be simply defined as ongoing and cumulative intellectual inquiry by classroom teachers into the nature of teaching and learning in their own classrooms" (Cross and Steadman, 1996, 2); that is, when "teachers look critically at their own classrooms and use research primarily for the purpose of improving their teaching and the quality of education in their schools" (Hopkins, 2014, 8). And second, the qualitative or interpretative method focuses on producing descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour; in other words, it is the study of reality

in its natural context, where phenomena are studied according to the meaning they have for the people involved (Peirats Chacón & López Marí, 2013, 204).

2. Interactive groups: a service-learning project

The project started when a professor of *ELT Methodology* at a Faculty of Education, and author of this article, first participated in the interactive groups of a Pre-Primary and Primary Education school of a city in Spain. Once the benefits of this methodology were observed, the project was implemented in the course unit with real student teachers in the following academic year. Due to its success, it has also been applied with yearly improvement measures since then. The origin, evolution and specific results at each stage are explained as follows.

2.1. Phase 1: Initiation

As mentioned before, the project was carried out in the course unit of *ELT Methodology* of the Degree in Primary Education, within the English minor, at a Faculty of Education in Spain. This minor includes students from all the groups belonging to such degree taught in Spanish and the group studying all the courses in English, except for the three of the area of Spanish Language. First, the professor of this course unit, and author of the current article, collaborated as a volunteer in the interactive groups of a Pre-Primary and Primary Education school of the Spanish city; thus, in this pilot experience the professor learnt and participated in this strategy, at the stage of Pre-Primary Education though.

This experience was short as it only lasted for a day. However, the professor had the opportunity to see how the methodology was implemented in a real school as well as the benefits of this methodology in the three grades of Pre-Primary Education in Spain (3-4 years old, 4-5 years old and 5-6 years old). She was also able to observe *in situ* how this working method motivated and was effective for both the native Spanish and American children enrolled in that school; and how these American children can energise their classmates, share their communication skills and be a model for Spanish speakers, especially regarding pronunciation.

Therefore, after having observed the benefits within the classroom, both the professor and the school principal and the teachers agreed to carry out the project in the following academic year involving real student teachers of the Faculty acting in the capacity of volunteers. However, a formal document or report was not written, so this was one of the improvement measures taken in the following academic year. Partly because of that, logistics was not considered as it should have, especially

regarding the difficulties of coordinating two different institutions and 31 students, including 2 Erasmus students. Besides, two other insurmountable difficulties arose. On the one hand, the fact that the timetable of the school is in the morning (9:00-14:00) and the classes in the Faculty are in the evening (18:15-20:15). And on the other hand, the evaluation part, as the evaluation criteria for the course unit at university must comply with the curriculum passed by the corresponding National Agency. The permitted evaluation tools and percentages were: eTwinning project (10%); Progress tests, including practices, tests in Moodle and presentations in class (30%); Unit of work (now learning scenario) and task (30%); and final exam (30%), this latter comprising 50% of theory and 50% of practice. Thus, interactive groups were simply included as one out of a total of 15 practices.

2.2. Phase 2: Development

Since the pilot experience of the previous academic year was a success, in the following one, the professor along with the principal and the English teachers of the same school decided to continue the project. However, this time, the students of the faculty would be the adults preparing and guiding the activities done in interactive groups in different Primary Education grades and groups. The main goals of the project were that the student teachers were able to have a first approach to the reality of the centres in a practical and participative way; that the student teachers were able to implement the activities designed by themselves for *ELT Methodology* in a real class; and that the student teachers were able to observe, analyse, evaluate and reflect the benefits of this methodology on the design of activities, units of work (now learning scenarios) and/or a year planning or syllabi.

To start the project, the principal and the school teachers of English and non-language-related subjects taught in English presented their project, including videos of previous sessions, in a seminar at the Faculty. After this seminar the professor and the school coordinated to start the visits. The teachers were proposed to create a timetable—including the groups, subject, day and hour—where university students could register weekly and voluntarily. They were also told to include the topic students would work in class so as to prepare the material in advance and even consider if they could use it for their projects and practices in the course unit at university.

In this academic year, a total of 31 students, 11 males and 20 females—including 2 Erasmus students from Türkiye—participated in interactive groups. So as to design their materials, the student teachers contacted the Primary Education teachers by

email; and they even had a meeting at the school before applying the methodology to ask their doubts. They were also encouraged to solve doubts both in class and through office hours or virtual tutorials.

After their participation, students had to write their practice and upload it in the section for the university course on the Virtual Campus (Moodle) before a deadline. Of course, both interactive groups and the projects in class had to be done in English. The instructions for interactive groups and their practice were the following. First, students had to agree on a date to go to the school. Second, briefing on the types of activities and the characteristics of the pupils were provided by the school teachers and staff—by email or in an appointment at the school—before preparing their own material for the activities. Then, after having done the activities, they had to write a report covering all these points: grade, class and number of pupils; activities done, including photos, if possible, comments, drawings, etc. to illustrate what they had done; methodology, space distribution and timing; evaluation, improvement measures for the practice and self-evaluation; and conclusion and personal comments. Students were encouraged to attach photos and videos, but they were warned to ask for due permission to take pictures and/or record videos; as children's protection and safety was highly important and so as to avoid committing any crime. However, that graphic material was simply to check what they have done and would just be seen by the professor; it would never be published. Students were also reminded that they would be guests in someone's classroom, who kindly invited them to stay there; therefore, they had to behave as a guest by not interrupting, asking for permissions when necessary and being polite at all times.

Student teachers' participation in this activity was evaluated in three different ways within the mentioned course unit: first, considering their progress and comments to improve the project in future editions; second, as a compulsory practice, which was part of the 30% out of the final mark along with other 14 practices; and third, as a part of the final project of the course, which was part of the 30% out of the final mark along with a task.

At the beginning of the academic year, the professor published a rubric which would be considered in every project or practice. In this rubric, five criteria are evaluated: appropriateness, didactics, format, language, and originality and creativity. *Appropriateness* comprises both quality and quantity. The former considers if the answers are accurate and clear and adjust to the questions given, if the answers focus on the main points, if students show they have understood, synthesised and summarised the contents seen in class; if students research and use proper documents, authors and sources; if ideas are organised and explained in a

logical and clear way; and if ideas are elaborated and concepts clarified. The latter implies that answers are neither too short nor too long; there is no extra, unnecessary or repeated information and answers are well structured. *Didactics* means that students apply what they have seen in class (different frameworks, methods, approaches, evaluation strategies and techniques, aspects regarding the teaching-learning process, etc.) and that they know the legal framework and regulations in force. It also means that they justify the election of methods and approaches employed in the methodology and that education research and innovation are shown. Finally, it also focuses on how students use educational ICT and software, such as Pixton, HotPotatoes, JClic, ToonDoo or any other suitable one and contribute to digital literacy; and in the most recent years if they use generative AI ethically and report it.

In the *format* section, the following points are considered: font size and type are clear, legible and appropriate; a style sheet is followed; the layout and binding are suitable for an academic paper, as well as the design and colours; margins appear and have the proper width; students comply with the typical structure of a lesson, unit of work (now learning scenario), task, year syllabus, eTwinning project, and so on based on legal regulations, teaching principles, or educational sources and institutions, among others; and, finally, information is clear and organised by using charts, tables, illustrations and/or drawings to clarify, explain or exemplify. Regarding *language*, first there is a published list of mistakes which are highly penalised in the final mark of a project, by subtracting 0.25 marks per mistake up to a maximum of 3 marks out of 10. Other aspects are considered as well, such as a suitable register and style for an academic paper, project, essay or exam. Students also have to check spelling, employ correct grammar and properly use connectors and linkers to organise their ideas. They also have to utilise specific vocabulary and correct terms according to the law in force and the field of education. Finally, in the section of *originality and creativity*, these are evaluated, especially if the latter is connected to critical and divergent thinking, if it is shown when explaining ideas and concepts; if the format is original, if activities are dynamic, original, creative and motivating; and if students are able to innovate, foster motivation and engage the reader or listener.

When the project finished, student teachers were asked about their experience. They all agreed that going to a school, putting into practice activities designed by them and actively participating in a real classroom was very motivating for them. Nevertheless, some reported difficulties, such as establishing the appropriate level, which was somehow solved as the project developed and improved their performance, which was reflected in the quality of their productions and the

assigned tasks at university. Likewise, in a survey completed at the end of the course unit, all the participants concluded that those visits were both positive and fruitful for their training.

After the development of the project and once it was evaluated, some improvement measures had to be taken in the following academic year. The most important problems concerned planning and organisation. At the Faculty, syllabi and the year planning are done in June of the previous academic year, whereas at schools this is done in September of that present academic year. This mismatch caused that interactive groups were not included as an independent project, but only as a practice out of a total of 15. However, after seeing the involvement of Primary Education teachers and the school, the student teachers' effort and how much coordination and correction it implied, it was soon evident that a higher percentage of the final mark had to be assigned to this project. There was another problem, school classes were in the morning and, at the Faculty, student teachers had classes in the evening. This caused two inconveniences: on the one hand, students could not be obliged to do an activity outside their class hours; and, on the other hand, students could not be obliged to miss other university classes to do a compulsory activity, which already had arisen problems in past similar projects. The best, thus, was to create a flexible schedule where students would sign to voluntarily participate in the project. This was especially confusing at the beginning, since the school proposed their schedule, but their system was not explained; and, sometimes, after the gaps had been filled, it was claimed interactive groups could not be done due to incompatibility.

Another drawback is that some students enrol at university in September, and the course starts in that month. Therefore, I am not able to have an accurate list of students until mid-September and, as the course used to finish in October, there was not much time for planning or readjustments. However, the Faculty decided to combine practicum-related courses with the core course and the practicum–school placement or internship– itself during the first term; so, in later editions of the project, this could be improved by simply leaving September to organise the groups, October and November for the core service-learning project development, and December for retaking due to readjustments and evaluation. It would have also been a good idea to have the topics in advance, so that students could use them to prepare at least the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) practice about this topic.

Evaluation was a weak point as well. First, the Primary Education teachers were shown the abovementioned rubric maybe too late, so they were not able to apply so

many items and indicators. Furthermore, the evaluation was done after the student teachers had been there, so teachers did not have enough records or memory to evaluate their performance after such a long time. Thus, the rubric was not applied, and students did not have a mark according to their individual work. On the other hand, Primary Education teachers did not want to fail or assign lower marks to their future colleagues, due to their emotional bond with their Degree and the empathy evoked by their own experience. Moreover, effort is usually taken more into account than merit, so school teachers tended to simply evaluate students' progress and found it difficult to assign an objective mark based just on their performance or activities, which in the end was unfair for those students who usually stand out, as everyone obtained a very good mark.

Another major problem was students' lack of commitment, since they signed to attend interactive groups and some of them did not go. Therefore, they did not appreciate that teachers were giving them an opportunity for which they had changed their planning on purpose. This would have to be reinforced in the seminar student teachers would have at the beginning of the year in the following academic *idem*. In this line, the seminar was only held at the beginning, but not during the project, when problems and doubts arose. At first, they do not usually ask since they do not know the methodology or what they would find in the class. Even though they could go to office hours or school meetings, they may have felt afraid. It would be a good idea to have regular contact with the whole class to clarify doubts and express their concerns, which now usually happens, since the professor worries and asks in class regularly about how interactive groups are progressing.

2.3. Phase 3: Consolidation

Despite all minor trifles, both parties−the Faculty and the School− decided to continue the project in subsequent academic years, so as to consolidate it by adding the previous improvement measures; as their collaboration had proved to be fruitful for students' future career and a motivating practice for trainee teachers, which has now become an essential assessable part of the course. In fact, service-learning is acknowledged by the university and the regional council of education, who signed in 2021 a Collaboration Agreement between the Regional Council of Education, Culture and Sports of Castilla-La Mancha and the University of Castilla-La Mancha for the development of service-learning and education innovation and research in non-university centres financed with public funds from the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha.

At this stage, the aforementioned problem regarding the percentage assigned to this project was considered. Therefore, it was decided that the project would be considered twice in the evaluation from this year onwards: first, the mark assigned by the Primary Education teachers considering student teachers' material and performance at school would be 5% out of the final mark; and second, this would be part as one out of the current 14 practices of the course, which must show how they had applied the theory seen in class in the school, as well as their originality and knowledge of teaching concepts and terms and are 30% out of the final mark.

As in the previous stage, both the principal of the school and English and non-language-related-subject teachers had a seminar at the Faculty where they explained the trainee teachers what interactive groups are, how they are implemented in their school and showed examples of them at different stages (Pre-Primary and Primary Education) and in different subjects, grades and groups. They insisted on the idea that what children learn depends less and less on what happens in the class and more and more on the relationship between what happens in the class and their homes and the street (Castells et al., 1994); since learning activates a series of internal processes that occur just when the child interacts with people from their environment and cooperates with their peers (Vygotsky, 1979, 89). They also expounded that interactive groups are based on the following principles: heterogeneous groups, volunteers and tutors from different areas and fields, inclusive education; dialogic learning, which propounds that the whole community—including parents, relatives, students, educational bodies, NGOs, etc.—has an impact on pupils and so must be included when planning their learning (see Gallin, 2010); high expectations, peer-peer learning, the acquisition of personal and social values, curricular development, and the acquisition of key competences. Furthermore, in this school, other successful educational actions, apart from interactive groups are implemented too, such as assemblies, dialogic literary gatherings, two-teacher classes and projects. They also answered my students' questions; however, since students were not familiar with this methodology yet, they did not ask much.

Regarding shifts, the same problem existed as in the previous academic year, since my classes were in the evening and interactive groups were in the morning. However, this time we planned to start the project in October so as to be able to organise them in September. Therefore, at the end of September, we already had the schedules where students could sign for October and November, and we usually leave the first week—even fortnight— of December for retaking in case readjustments are needed for unforeseen reasons and for the final evaluation. The school also offered us instructions to avoid communication problems. The coordination between

the school and the professor improved, thus, since then. The school also appointed a spokesperson to channel the sharing of information between both parties and so avoid misunderstandings and cross-posting.

As in the previous year, students were free to choose when to go because, on the one hand, they had to do this aside from their class times, so the professor had to guarantee interactive groups did not overlap other classes; and on the other hand, as they went to the school several times, the professor wanted the student teachers to benefit from the experience in different groups and subjects, especially considering that the school offered this project both in English as a foreign language and CLIL subjects. Even though the system was rather successful due to its flexibility and because it was based on students' voluntary participation, it was not enough and caused inequality among student teachers in the first academic year of this stage; because every student obtained a good mark regardless of their effort or the times they participated. Considering that, in subsequent academic years, it was decided to command students to go there at least once. Moreover, if they wanted to have a 10 (excellent), they had to go there at least 4 times (2.5 each visit). If they went there more than 4 times, the extra visits would compensate for those weaker points either in the practice or in the project, for the best 4 marks of all visits would be chosen for the final evaluation. This also improved students' commitment and involvement in the project as their effort and time was rewarded.

Apart from this, since the rubric was not applied before, in the first year of this stage, the evaluation problems in the school were somehow solved, as the professor sent the teachers the abovementioned rubric from the beginning. They were also offered the opportunity to change it at their convenience and adapt it to their interests and needs, which they did. On a scale of 1 to 3 (never, sometimes and always), teachers evaluated if students researched and used proper documents, materials and sources in classroom activities; if they knew the legal framework, methods, approaches and techniques to be applied; if they complied with the typical structure of a lesson, unit of work (now learning scenario), task, year syllabus, and so on; if the register employed was suitable; and if the activities were dynamic, original, creative and motivating. Despite this, teachers were reluctant to give students low marks and so they did not differentiate excellent students from average students or even unsatisfactory performances. Therefore, a final decision was made: school teachers would write a qualitative description of each student teacher's performance and the professor would translate it into a quantitative mark, also considering the number of times participating in interactive groups.

3. Concluding remarks and prospective improvement measures

After each visit to the school, student teachers were inquired about their experience; they all agreed that going to the school was very motivating, as they implemented their own activities and actively participated. Although some reported difficulties in adjusting the level of the activities, the quality of their productions and performances improved along the project, which was reflected in their tasks for the university course. Moreover, in a final survey, every participant stated that those visits were both positive and useful for their training. The reflections drawn from that survey and their practices help to improve not only the project, but also the professor's performance every year.

After the evolution of these three stages, it could be claimed that what started somehow in an informal way—as the former school principal came to the Faculty to open their centre to projects and collaborations—has little by little consolidated and improved year by year even with the change of the school's management positions and teachers; in fact, this type of experiences have been officially channelled not only by the Faculty, but through an official agreement between the University and the Regional Council of Education, Culture and Sports. However, despite the relative success of the project and after reflecting on the evaluation, the following improvement measures should be taken in further editions. In addition, these measures could be classified in three groups, regarding the professor, the student teachers and the school.

First, it must be noted that the school opened their doors and welcomed both professors and students from the beginning. They have shared their knowledge, teaching and good practices very kindly. Without them, this project would be impossible, and the Faculty is undoubtedly grateful for that. They are also and always willing to participate in any project together and to provide ideas to improve. In fact, we believe our cooperation works perfectly, since our students volunteer there so that they can carry out different projects, at the same time they are trained from and for real school practice. Moreover, the Faculty can apply the theory seen in class there and research and innovate to obtain results from reality, which is especially convenient in a course like *ELT Methodology*, as by law is a practicum-related course. This model precisely confirms some points of the curriculum not usually considered—especially by novel teachers—in the design of activities, for example, the integration of families as part of the teaching-learning process. In interactive groups, any member of society (the retired, workers from different sectors, parents, teachers, students, foreigners, professors, and so on) enriches pupils' learning by offering their own experience and conveying their wisdom; therefore, pupils learn that each person

has a valuable role in society and appreciate diversity naturally. Resources are also optimised, since voluntary collaboration is employed at no cost.

Regarding planning and considering that the course only lasts one term, organising interactive groups rapidly is necessary, also taking into account that bureaucracy is needed to have this action approved of under the mentioned agreement, something which must be done every year. For that, schedules should be provided as soon as possible, and it would be interesting to include the topic which would be worked on in the school, so that students know in advance what they should prepare and even integrate it or them in the projects and tasks they have to hand in at university.

Our coordination sessions will continue, since both parties—the Faculty and the School—can freely express our opinions in those meetings and our relationship has been tighter every year, which positively redounds to the project. Nevertheless, and even though the seminar helps students understand what this method is about, teachers should insist on each participant's role. That is, although the Primary Education teacher will always be in the classroom and is responsible for interactive groups, volunteers—in this case, student teachers—have to create the activities—following the teacher's instructions and advice—promoting pupils' interaction, encouraging them to speak in English, and appealing to their cultural intelligence. They should also trust pupils' capacities and reflect that during, and also with, the activity. Students are quite inexperienced and novice, so teachers should give more precise instructions and even insist on the most 'obvious' aspects; for example, the importance of student teachers' commitment, since teachers change their lessons for them to visit and if they do not go to the school, they cannot do what they had planned in that lesson. It would also be a good idea to create a resource bank where they could obtain models, and good practices could be disseminated. This way they could see what it is expected from them, and they would adjust the level and sequence the learning scenario better.

Finally in relation to the school, a more effective—just an individual—evaluation would be necessary, really distinguishing between average, good and excellent students. For that, the school might need more logistic support in the classroom. The possibility of peer evaluation will be studied; maybe including a person simply to observe and evaluate each individual during the whole process would result in a better one. Doing it on the spot or through new technology, such as by using SurveyMonkey, or even assisted by generative AI would be another possibility. The third option would be to record their performance to examine it afterwards. However, in this last case, apart from the possible problems arisen by parents'

permission to record underage pupils and concerns about data protection in general, this could also have a negative effect, since students could feel observed during the activities and that would alter their spontaneity and naturalness.

Regarding the measures concerning student teachers, it is important to insist on high expectations. For many of them, their activities were not enough, and they had to improvise. They realised that dividing their activities into blocks—or chunks as described by scaffolding—and doing them as they completed the previous one was extremely useful. They also understood by themselves that it was better not to do some blocks they had already prepared than not having enough material and, thus, not knowing what to do.

Another major problem for university students was adjusting the activities to the pupils' level. It must be noted that, at this stage, students are combining their school practicum at the same time they do the practicum-related course, so they do not have much time to take in information but simply must apply it just in time. Moreover, for the students who study this Degree in Spanish, this is the first course they do on ELT teaching, although some theoretical materials are seen in their first and second grades and only have studied these two courses (*English Language and English Language Teaching I* and *II*) in English. In fact, they themselves see a huge difference between them and their mates who are studying the full Degree in English. Therefore, apart from including more practical activities in previous courses from the English Department, it would also be proposed, on the one hand, that the students investigate more on pupils' level by analysing different textbooks and comparing them to the current Spanish legislation to see how to design learning scenarios stemming from specific competences and which of them must be evaluated and then selecting key knowledge to apply task-based approach with a communicative purpose. In this line, the class could also be divided into groups (one per each of the six levels in Primary Education) and they could summarise the bases of different books in a chart comparing which specific competences are usually worked on and evaluated as well as which key knowledge (through a selection of topics) is repeated and, obviously, considering the minimum levels that the curriculum states, as they are much too flexible to be interpreted by an inexperienced student. On the other hand, job-shadowing visits could be planned so that students became familiar with pupils' level at each grade, and they could also observe how their—socioeconomic, personal, etc.—characteristics must be considered in lesson planning and how they affect pupils' pace of learning and the general classroom level.

This kind of practice helps them adjust the level and prepares them for their future teaching practice and classroom reality. In fact, comparing this school to the

one in which they are doing their practicum also allows them to make comparisons and generalisations about the teaching practice in different local contexts. Moreover, these projects are very motivating for student teachers, since they like observing reality by themselves, which appeals to their vocation, opens their mind and makes them understand that classes are not made of ideal pupils, as when they plan activities, because of multiple pupils' conditions and diversity. This also appeals to their sense of social responsibility and encourages them to volunteer in other children's organisations. Furthermore, coordinating all their (working, personal, family, academic, and so on) lives makes them distribute their time more efficiently and prioritise certain activities. And once they are aware of the abovementioned, their curiosity has been aroused and they devote some time to volunteering, their willingness to participate in similar future projects increases, thus, contributing to creating a culture of social responsibility and volunteering and thus tapping to their citizenship and [European] values. Academically, these projects introduce future teachers to new trends in education, allowing them to see the short-term and long-term benefits and effects. Moreover, sharing good practices will make them copy positive models in their future careers and this would make them more critical and proactive teachers at the same time, appealing to their entrepreneurship and initiative and awakening their sense of innovation and investigation through lifelong learning.

The improvement measures concerning the professor are the following. First, reducing the key contents−since there are 7 units for 15 weeks, which cannot actually be changed since both units and academic calendar are decided by other official bodies−in favour of practice should be studied. Second, and in relation to students as well, Practice 3 stated that groups had to include only one activity done in interactive groups. In class, they asked if they could include all of them and that was permitted at first, but the result was 100-page papers, instead of 5-7 pages, which is the average of the rest of the practices. This made them unnecessarily repeat a lot of information to avoid incomplete activities or sessions. Therefore, the result was counterproductive, since the main aim was for student teachers to select−by applying this course's evaluation rubric−their best activities and show their ability to summarise information, which is key in mediation as well. Due to the flexibility of the schedule, this practice was submitted individually at first, but this was not sustainable, as the number of students in this course usually surpasses 50. Thus, the decision was that they could do interactive groups with the people they found more convenient with, even if they were not from the same home groups, but they finally

had to select the two best activities they deemed fit for submitting their practice with their home groups.

Another problem which has been partially solved along the project is the topics to be worked on. The obstacles are, in a principle, insurmountable. On the one hand, students start interactive groups in October, but they need a topic in September to do the practices and tasks for the university course (regardless of what they will work on in the school). On the other hand, the university course is *ELT Methodology*; therefore, it focuses on the creation of materials to teach English, although CLIL is one of the parts of the curriculum. Interactive groups are usually done in CLIL subjects (Sciences and Arts), so complying with the curricula of both institutions is incompatible in a principle. Nevertheless, a breakthrough for the project would be having a list of the topics which would be dealt with in the school from the beginning. In this way, they will be used in the university course as much as possible so that students would optimise their resources and materials, and vain effort would be avoided. As this is practically impossible, since schools cannot predict which topic they would be working on for a particular date, the agreement is to write to the school teacher at least one week in advance to know the focus of interest for their activities; and the professor would let them use their productions as much as possible, not only in the practice related to interactive groups, but in others, such as the one related to CLIL.

As already mentioned, it is important that the theory taught at the Faculty relates to school reality and, at the same time, professional researchers reflect on this relationship to obtain new theories of learning and disseminate good practices. Furthermore, this type of projects contributes to eliminating a widely extended cliché within Degrees in Education in Spain; that is, that the theory seen in the studies is seldom linked to practice. Precisely from Faculties of Education, in general, and from our Faculty, particularly, these projects have become official—and so acknowledged by both worlds, including stakeholders and education administrations—so as to create a unique coordination and dissemination body to channel the numerous projects almost all the Departments in our centre have been carrying out in the recent years. This demonstrates the interest by students and also professors, as well as school principals and teachers, because despite the extra work—not paid and usually underrated— the benefits of service-learning for both institutions on both docents and learners can be proven.

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