

Received: January 5, 2018
Revision received: February 7, 2018
Accepted: March 19, 2018
OnlineFirst: March 28, 2018

e-ISSN: 2602-3733
Copyright © 2018
<http://journalrep.com>
June 2018 ♦ 2(1) ♦ 15-36

Research Article

The Critical Role of Play in Teaching a Foreign Language: Considerations in a Catalan School, Barcelona Spain

Inma Piquer Vives¹

University Of Barcelona

Georgianna Duarte²

Indiana State University

Abstract

For many children in first language and second language settings, monolingual teachers carry out all the educational activities. There is a lack of public school support for bilingual programs, often parents who lack the dominant language are often misunderstood, judged, or excluded in the formal school or early childhood setting. Given the global migration across Europe, this article presents a play-based approach to foster the acquisition of English for young children in a state school in a village near Barcelona, Spain. The current study revealed that play based approaches provide young children context, opportunities for practice, safe emotional spaces to practice language, and exposure to positive feedback in the mode of play.

Key Words

Foreign language • Public schools • Play based approaches

¹ Inma Piquer Vives (PhD), Department of Language Teaching, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain. Email: mpiquer3@xtec.cat

² **Correspondence to:** Georgianna Duarte (PhD), Department of Teaching and Learning, Bayh College of Education, Indiana State University, Indiana, USA. Email: duartefree@aol.com

Citation: Duarte, G., & Piquer, I. (2018). The critical role of play in teaching a foreign language: Considerations in a Catalan school, Barcelona Spain. *Research on Education and Psychology (REP)*, 2(1), 15-36.

One of the primary goals in all schools in Barcelona (Spain) is to promote the learning of both official languages, Spanish and Catalan. In southern Spain, it is critical to respect students' native language, but also rigorously promote the acquisition of, at least, one foreign language. The emphasis has gradually been put on English, as it is in many early childhood programs around the world. The goal of English language teaching for young learner education in Spanish schools is to sensitize students towards a progressive learning of the language. This methodology has an impact on students. For this reason, it is common to find schools that put projects into practice, and by doing so, improve English as a foreign language instruction for young learners.

In spite of the optimism and enthusiasm that many schools have for change, it is often not always feasible to develop projects in which both languages are equitably included and fostered. Different factors hinder the introduction of English in Primary schools. Some of these factors include social pressures, financial limitations, and shortage in human resources, physical settings, and insufficient resources for teacher training. The final challenge is the limited number of functional and rigorous project proposals.

English as Foreign Language in Barcelona Schools

English is valued in many countries and it is systematically integrated as an educational requirement. Similarly, in many regions of Europe, English is required in public and private educational settings. While this article focuses on the region of Catalonia, there are many common elements in various global regions. Catalonia is the capital of Barcelona and has strived to preserve its own language and culture. Catalan as well as Spanish is both used extensively in the region. All democratic governments in Catalonia have put massive effort to guarantee the co-official status of both languages. From past decades to recent days, the importance of learning, at least a foreign language, has been strongly supported and promoted in all primary schools in Barcelona. However, English has been identified as a crucial foreign language due to its high, marketability in Europe. As a consequence, there is an increasing number of programs and educational initiations that promote English.

Linguistic Complexity of the Catalan Society

The linguistic complexity of the Catalan society considers that multilingual inclusive Catalan schools are meant to integrate immigrants from all over the world and guarantee students' language mastery in both official languages and include other European languages of instruction, which is mainly English. The objectives are to provide access to the official languages, add an international dimension to schools through the mastery of other languages, but also to preserve immigrants' mastery of their native tongues. This diversity of language and respect for the culture is valued in the Catalan society (Lorenzo & Piquer, 2014).

Catalan schools introduce the first foreign language when students are in their first year of Primary education, at the age of 6-7. Since late eighties, the most popular foreign language taught at schools has been English. Before that period, French used to be the foreign language that students had to learn at school at sixth grade of primary education, at the age of 12-13. The massive popularity reached by the English language in all school contexts all over Spain made French teachers aware of the need to preserve the presence of their language in school contexts. Some actions were held which helped to preserve French, German or Italian, as curricular foreign languages taught at school started at late nineties. It was introducing a second language at the end of Primary education in some schools) and in Secondary education. French became the most popular second foreign language taught in Catalan schools, particularly in the districts close to the border with France.

When early 2000 immigration rates increased in Catalonia, new languages occupied their space in the multilingual context. The variety of languages that new Catalan citizens brought to cities such as Barcelona was integrated within the school context, mainly to immigrant students, as extracurricular activities. Some of the new languages at that time have become popular and due to strong social demands Chinese classes were offered as second and third foreign language to children in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools as an extracurricular activity. English has always maintained a privileged position among the other foreign languages (curricular and non curricular) taught in school contexts. Teachers, parents and educational authorities have become aware of the language diversity being a powerful resource for future citizens in Europe. This is particularly true of English being offered in many early childhood and primary programs throughout Spain (Lorenzo & Piquer, 2014).

Learning a Second Language & Developmental Concerns

There is extensive research in how young children learn language and develop in their early years. Typically, children are born eager to explore their world, experiment with language and master their development. From the child's first day at kindergarten, language development proceeds at a pace exceeding that of any stage of life. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers rapidly develop capabilities in emotional regulation, relationships, cognition, motor development and language. These capabilities form the foundation from which all future development builds. The foundation of positive development depends mostly on the quality of the young child's early environment and relationships. Human relationships are the building blocks for healthy development and these environments must not be stressful environments. Positive early relationships include extensive language opportunities and greatly influence a child's ability to achieve later success in school and life. Relationships enable young children to care about people by establishing the human connection between self and others.

As a consequence of early relationships, young children seek to understand the feelings, thoughts and expectations of others, as well as the importance of cooperation and sharing. The young child's identity is shaped by the interactions that they have with others who are significant in their lives parents, childcare providers, and other family members. (Day & Parlakian, 2004) The quality of these early relationships has a far more significant influence on early learning than has previously been understood, and this is the key to learning language and taking cognitive risks. This article is about pedagogical practices of English in a non-stressful classroom where making decisions, creativity, and drama activities are emphasized/valued. (Van Hoorn, Monighan-Nourot, Scales, & Rodriguez-Alward, 2011)

Conceptual Background of the Study

Play is an integral part of a child's life and central to the development of intellectual, social, linguistic and emotional skills (Duarte & Cortez-Castro, 2015). There is extensive research on the topic of play (Vygotsky, 1933). All people play and all people have the ability to play, and children engage in tremendous learning through self-selected play activities. It varies among activities, social contexts, and age groups and involves imagination and reality. Vygotsky (1933) claimed that play creates a zone of proximal development (ZDP) in children. The ZDP is the distance between one's actual developmental level and one's potential developmental level when interacting with someone and/or something in the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

Value of Play and Language Learning

During play, children explore behaviors above their average age, daily behavior, and actual development level. It is as if children are trying to jump ahead of themselves when playing in order to explore their learning potential. A number of researchers adds to Vygotsky's theory of play and the ZPD (Lantolf, 2001). As Lantolf (2001) explains, when children pretend to be a mother, a shop assistant, a hair-dresser, and a doctor, etc., they engage in activities that are not only about enjoyment, but allow them to start future projects. This is particularly important as it relates to play in the classroom.

The contributions of play toward effective learning, though organization and problem solving, show that children learn from mistakes during play to construct internal models that assist them in solving future problems. If play creates a ZPD, it seems to promote development because children are able to project themselves into the future and learn by developing future problem solving strategies. Play is also highly influential in language learning. In addition to songs, games, activities, verbal play can be utilized in the classroom. According to Cook (2000), play in language learning is composed of two opposite spectrums: patterned sound at one end and pragmatic contextualized meaning at the other. The patterned end contains verse, speech, and semantic meaning. The pragmatic end resembles the interaction, which takes place between interlocutors (touch, eye contact, affection, emotion, etc.). Verbal play also provides children with the training phases necessary for developing new verbal skills. Types of language play vary widely, from vocabulary games to talking to one self.

Language Play

Language play incorporates word play, unregulated rules, and enjoyment. Language play at the elementary school level needs to be responsive to the cultural and socio-emotional needs of the learner. Playing in the classroom provides diverse opportunities for physical development, language, creativity, imagination, social connections, and learned behaviors. Children's direct social and individual experiences in early to middle childhood during the "developmental window of opportunity" between the ages of three and twelve years help shape their environmental identity and choices (Van Hoorn et al., 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how young children learn language through thematic play in a classroom, where they have opportunities for socio-dramatic play, conversations with peers and teacher. The purpose of this is to show the different stages of language that can be effectively fostered through diverse guidance of play. This proposed methodology of play is both economical but viable in the classroom setting.

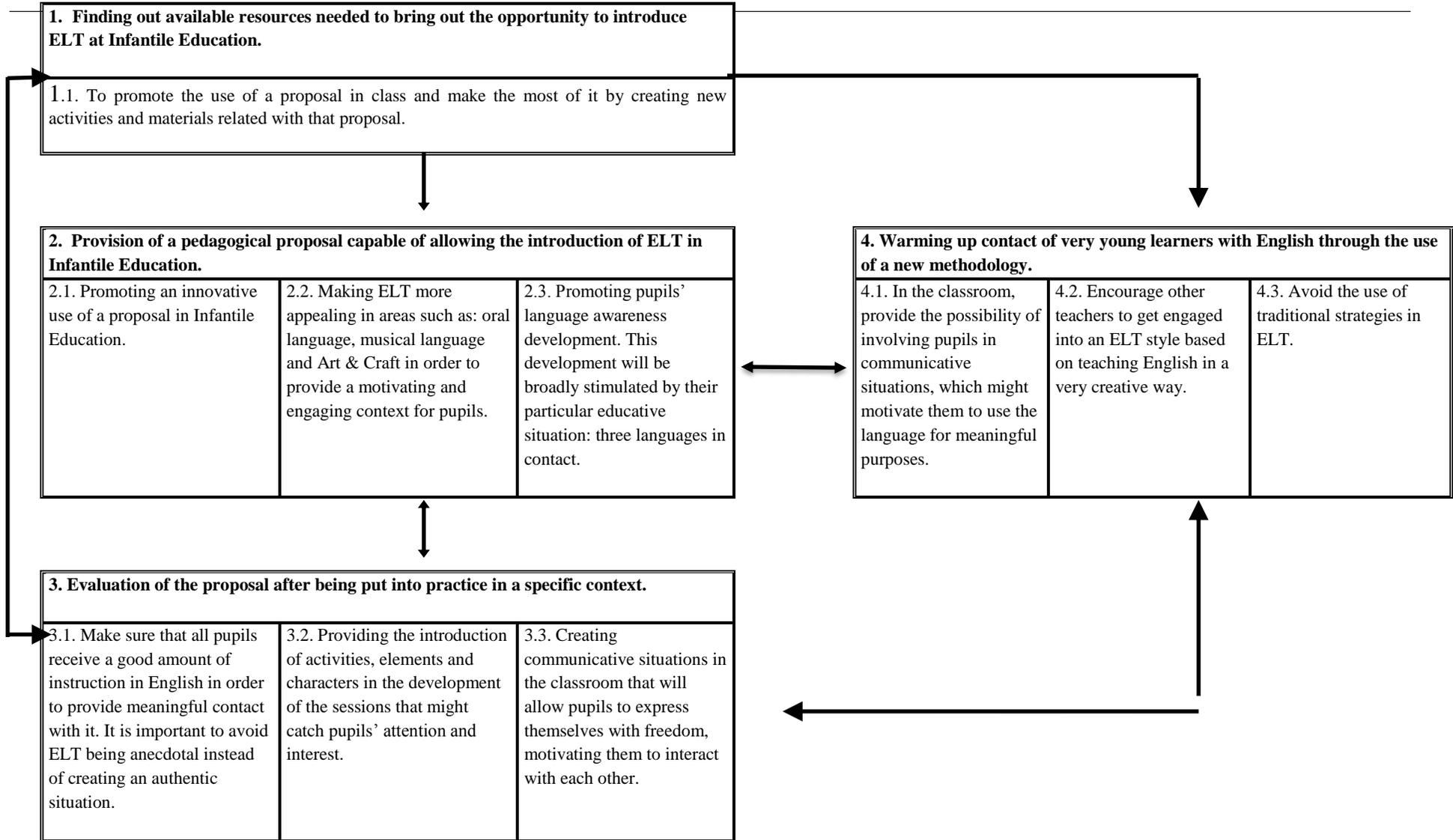
Population & Demographics

In Barcelona, there is a variety of languages spoken. These include: Castilian Spanish (official) 74%, Catalan 17%, Galician 7%, and Basque 2%. Catalan is the official language in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and the Valencian Community (where it is known as Valencian); in the northwest of Catalonia (Vall d'Aran). Aranese is official along with Catalan; Galician is official in Galicia; Basque is official in the Basque Country and in the Basque-speaking area of Navarre; Aragonese, Aranese Austrian, Basque, Calo, Catalan, Galician, and Valencian are recognized as regional languages under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Method

Model of the Research

To guarantee the achievement of the objectives shown in the previous flowchart imply to leave some clear and well-defined methodological bases that will serve as a guide during the whole process of design, application and evaluation of the didactic proposal. The nature of the initiation that we expect to carry out; to advance the introduction of English in the Infant Education, demands a diversified methodology. We can discover new perspectives and effective methodology through this action research.



The two methodological angles of the research are: theoretical investigation, which has been carried out starting from the meticulous and intense revision of the literature related to the topic of the study, curricular investigation which has been developed from a double angle. On the one hand, it consists of making an intense and careful revision of the legal dispositions in the course with the purpose of defining a new curricular proposal. This laborious activity involved the elaboration and the design of a curricular proposal, which is non-existent at the moment. Similarly, it highlighted the meticulous revision of official course documents and their widespread use, as well as those of institutional course and internal use: the Curricular Project of the Centre, the Linguistic Project and the Classroom Programming. On the other hand, it was critical that the didactic proposal seriously consider the importance of creativity and constructed language. Finally, the action-research included the process of planning, action, observation, reflection and evaluation.

Process of Action Research

Cohen and Manion (1990) propose a process of action-research integrated by eight well-differentiated stages. First is to understand, to identify, to formulate and to evaluate a problem that is perceived as critical in the teaching-learning process. Secondly, it would be to agree the design of the action to be carried out in the school. Thirdly, it would be to guarantee a meticulous revision of the literature related with English Language teaching to very young learners. In the fourth place, comes the redefinition of the initial problem and formulation of the general and specific objectives of the proposal. In the fifth place, selecting the procedures so that they concord in the application takes place. In the sixth place, choosing the data collection sources takes place (combine the 5th, 6th and the 7th in one sentence). In seventh place, once the didactic proposal is elaborated, it is time to proceed to its application. Finally, it would be time for interpretation of the data and discussion of the results.

The first stages of the process have been classified as the documentation and the design of the didactic proposal. It is time to think of the procedures that will be followed by its application and the sources of data collection that will be used in the process of evaluation. The use of sources for data collection allows teachers to count on an amount of information that, once triangulated, will facilitate the process of evaluation and the later revision of the sketch proposal.

Data Collection

The process of data collection on the process of foreign language acquisition with young children is complex due to the overtures, dramatization of play, and the interaction of young children. Data collection involved a qualitative means such as, which included the journal or diary, as well as two objective methods, which involved questionnaires. The teacher's diary is a subjective method of data collection. It is the punctual testimony that reflects the experiences during the action. This document has to reflect the pursuit of the action, the incidences that have taken place and the personal evaluation that reflects the thoughts and concerns of the teacher.

The Questionnaires

This source allows for capturing information from families concerning the practical application of the proposal. The answers selected from the questionnaires are based on the practical experience of the families about the learning of English that their kids make at school. During the study, the researchers employed video filming because it enabled the data collectors to obtain objective information on the results of the action

Context of the Study

Overview

The learning of a second or third language when the student is still very young is part of an educational process of socialization that can be considered as fundamental inside a modern program of cross-cultural Education at present. This includes some difficulties because in communities like Catalonia where two languages are official, the introduction of foreign languages faces difficulties.

This is the prejudice that a large number of people share the idea of considering the introduction of a third language when students are still very young. They believe that it will harm the acquisition and the consolidation of both first languages.

Experiences and research demonstrate that multilingual schools don't hinder the learning of the two official languages of the community but rather they favor it (Baetens-Beardsmores & Anselmi, 1991; Tosi, 1991). Multilingual learners benefit greatly when the resources, materials, and support are present to support diversity of language and culture.

To guarantee some good results in the process of teaching-learning one or more foreign languages inside the European educational board, the European Commission has elaborated all type of documents, which promote multilingual practices in all types of educational settings. Moreover, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council Cultural for Co-operation Education, 2001) is the guide who promotes the learning of foreign languages to all ages emphasizing new ideas as well as more appropriate teaching practices.

To avoid negative experiences in the school context, it is necessary to introduce the new language taking some requirements that a qualitative program to the learning of a foreign language should fulfill into account. First of those requirements is the need to outline the learning process of the language from communication differentiating two levels: the development of speaking skills and the acquisition of his/her own linguistic skills of the foreign language in question. Another requirement is to involve the entire staff as well as students' families. Finally, the design of a good program aligned with the already established curriculum will be paramount to guarantee successful results (Guillén & Alario, 2002).

Infant Education curricula prioritizes all kinds of literature materials as they have a multi-tasking value as long as they promote the learning of the language, amongst others, in the following ways: they provide the introduction of aspects related with the learning of the spoken language (pronunciation, intonation, etc.), they promote the development of the comprehension competencies as well as the following ones: linguistic or grammatical; textual and discursive; referential; situational and relational; and strategic. They also provide the folk aspects in the program.

Literature is not the only prominent factor of the curricula of Infant Education. The physical space in which the English sessions are developed is also important. The English class is a social context of reference where all the elements that configure it have the chance to interact: visual relating, spaces of communication, verbal and non-verbal watchwords, rights and duties of the teacher and pupils, etc. That is to say, it is the context in which the denominated "formats of attention and combined action" take place (Bruner, 1984). These formats have the external appearance of games and they promote the creation of routines and outlines of understanding and structuring of the activity that allow pupils to make forecasts on what will happen. As a consequence, these

formats allow pupils to adapt and restructure their reaction. This progressive practice on formats of attention and combined action among the participants

In the process of teaching learning allows students to get a certain degree of speaking competency in English during the process of language learning (Pérez & Roig, 2009).

The sketch proposal to promote the advancement in the introduction of English in the kindergartens of Primary Schools was applied and evaluated in the CEIP Sant Cristófor of Begues during the academic course 2002-2003 and continued and improved up to 2012. It is the only state school in the village, which, from being one line, has grown for the past twelve courses. In the last years, there has been a significant increase in the number of students who don't communicate in Catalan or Spanish, often due to being part of a migrant family.

Parents have shown a great interest in the introduction of English as they consider it fundamental for of their children's education. Results showed a very positive evaluation of the advancement of the English language at 2^o level of Primary during the courses 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. This was a decisive factor when voting in favor of the introduction of English in the Infant Education. The pioneering initiative to introduce English in the 2nd course of C.I. was developed at the school in the frame of the modality of Orator's Project that promoted the advancement of English language in C.I. of Primary. The success of the program revealed that the initiative has been maintained and the school staff has taken parents' demands into consideration. Teachers and families have positively valued the possibility of teaching in English in Infant Education (Català, 2001).

In fact, the participation of families and municipalities is supposing in many schools a clear bet for the support to foreign languages and many human and material resources are being capitalised that would be impossible to mobilized only from the effort of teachers and much less hardware from the effort of specialists of FL (Pérez & Roig, 2004, p. 96).

Previous considerations

There are several important considerations. First, it is recommended that the quality of the process be maintained to insure and maintain equity of languages. Second, a respectful timetable of methodology and instruction was critical to respect the developmental needs of the children. Finally, collaboration of inclusion, respect, and developmental understanding is monitored to ensure that the framework of the curricular project is of high quality.

The fact that the learning of a second language involves a longer period of time (Infant and Primary Education) and this allows better distribution and dosage of the diverse stages of the learning process. However, so that this qualitative improvement along the different educational stages can be manifested in the linguistic knowledge of the students, there has to be a guarantee of continuity. Any initiative to proceed with the introduction of a foreign language has to have the support of the whole staff, the approval of the School Council and everybody's commitment to guarantee its follow through (Duarte & Cortez-Castro, 2015)

Unfortunately, due to the lack of teacher training, lack of continuity in proposed programs, and the constant change of staff impact the quality and success of any proposed pedagogy or language project in the school. Also, there has been a decrease of resources when there is other pressing curriculum needs. Unanimous agreement exists regarding the belief that the effectiveness of the learning achieved by the students increases when they are subjected to a considerable number of hours of exposure to the target language (Muñoz & Nussbaum, 1997;

Nussbaum, 1999). This situation takes place when learners receive a quantitatively important amount of input in English (Murado Bouso, 2012).

In spite of the importance of factors like the guaranteed continuity of the proposal and the attention to some principles of coherent timetables, we don't have to leave aside others that, if considered when beginning a directed action to advance the introduction of the English in the Infant Education, can guarantee the success of any proposal. These factors would be: the combined treatment of the languages according to the Linguistic Project and the internal evaluation of English language, the development of the area in the frame of the Curricular Project and the competence of the teacher in charge in terms of both, the English language and teaching very young learners skills.

The dominance of two foreign languages besides their own one becomes a right, or rather an obligation, for the citizens of the new Europe. To guarantee an integrated language teaching style that, besides favoring a combined treatment of the languages, promotes communication in different languages in class has to be the main objective of the Linguistic Project of the school.



Photograph 1: Playful Exploration of Identity

In a center such as CEIP Saint Cristòfor it is relatively easy to guarantee a combined treatment of the two languages of daily use: Catalan and Spanish. The challenge appeared when it was necessary to introduce a third one that the students ignore and that with difficulty will be able to be used outside of the school context. Faced with this situation, the teacher is forced to look for opportunities to interact with the students starting from a methodology based on the teaching of oral language framework; this means to assist the intentions and productions made by the students, to welcome and value their productions, to check that the meaning of their utterances has been understood, to include each utterance made by the student in the following production made by the teacher, to encourage students to expand the meaning of their own productions and to continue these interactions in a progressive way during a continuous process of construction and combined negotiation about the use of the language (Navalón, 1996).

An FL program of activities designed through its use as a vehicular language of another area of the curricula offers good guarantees of success (Caballero & Masats, 1999). However, a program of these characteristics cannot be carried out blindly, it is necessary to pick up the basic prescriptions set down by the law and to contemplate them in the design of the proposal. That means to make sure that the contents of the foreign language

have a context in the experience of the students, to promote the principle of individual attention and to assure the relationship with other areas of the curricula. Once the legal prescriptions have been contemplated it is time to choose a program to follow. The offer of programs to teach foreign languages to very young learners is wide (Caballero & Masats, 1999). Some are based on didactic units whose objective is to promote the use of the FL to introduce, to reinforce or to expand contents of other areas of the curriculum, with a global view of the learning process. Some others would include a whole part of one or more areas of the curriculum. The program of FL teaching based on the format responds to an example of the first modality and the design of project program to the second one.

Social dyads affirming home language, but engaging in second language

The *format* is a well-known structure of action shared by the adult and the student in which the premeditation is recognized by both speakers and in which the intentions of the adult are always recognized by the student, and where, thanks to the already established routines, students have the possibility to maintain meaningful and effective interactions with their speakers (Bruner, 1984). There are two types of *format*: *formats* with narrative contents and those that don't. Invented stories based on fairy tales or experiences of the students respond to the first type of *format*, routines or repetitive stock respond to the second type of *format*.

Psycholinguistic principles of the *format* claim that the learning process of a language is based, fundamentally in its use. Naturally, this phenomenon takes place as long as shared experiences between speakers exist (Taeschner, Nias, Plooi, Etxeberria, & Arzamendi, 1992). Speakers' intentions are personal and have to generate the use of the new language by sharing motivating and meaningful experiences (Arzamendi, Etxeberria, Lindsay, Garagorri, & Azpillaga, 1996). Some of the demands of this program are that it requires from teachers certain abilities in the use of strategies, non-verbal communication included. It also supposes that he/she has the capacity to develop a nice atmosphere in the classroom; this implies the creation of motivational situations through out the learning process. On the other hand, the *format* guarantees to force students to speak in the FL from the beginning because contextual and enjoyable repetitions of linguistic structures take place in the classroom.

On the other hand, a *project program* allows working on different topic areas using English as the main vehicle. A project is a work unit that implies all students in the understanding, manipulation, production and interaction in the foreign language, while their attention is centered, mainly, in the meaning more than in the form. These programs conceive communication as a series of activities that facilitate the learning of talkative conventions (Candlin, 1990; Zanon, 1990; Pérez & Roig, 2009). The stages of a *project program* design are: choice of reasons for which a project should be carried out, selection of the topic to work on, concretion of goals and contents of learning, demands of students' direct implication, determination of the project or final projects, forecast of activities that provide the execution of the final project and evaluation of the learning process carried out by the students as well as the quality of the implied instruction design.



Photograph 2: Project Work of Children

The activities that integrate a *project program* will be effective in the measure that they are familiar as well as relatively complex regarding the previous knowledge of the students. The goal of this type of program is to develop in the students the capability to interpret, to produce and to negotiate meanings. Besides a specialized formation on infant teaching, to be a proficient FL speaker, to have a global vision of the fundamental characteristics of the organization and structure of the speech and the language itself, to know the methodology for the teaching of languages, to be conscious of the effort and work that supposes to provide continuity to a project of advancement in the introduction of a FL, etc., the specialist of English in this educational period has to be able to observe, to register and to analyze verbal and non-verbal interactions that take place in the classroom, that is to say, his/her own behavior and the one of his/her students.

Human communication, in general, is a social and permanent process that integrates multiple ways to behave: the word, the expression, the look, the contact, etc. (Cantero & de Arriba, 1997). It's expected that the Infant FL teacher who, above being a competent English speaker, is also a dynamic and confident person at communicating, as well as capable of entering into the children's world with comfort while taking them wherever suitable in order to fulfill teacher's main target: make sure that students are capable of communicating in English with ease and naturalness inside both in, and outside of the classroom. First sine qua non condition to communicate efficiently with other people is to establish good contact with them, to agree with the speaker, to establish a negotiated shared vision of the world that, although this being, it allows us to talk about same realities and to use the same words in a meaningful way (Cantero & de Arriba, 1997).

From here, any good quality proposal to advance the English language teaching in Infant Education has many possibilities to be successful in any educational context. However, it is necessary to add that it is always recommended to make a revision, adaptation and amplification (if it is considered necessary) of the activities offered depending on the needs and characteristics of the center, the teacher and pupils. Following the prescriptions of the action-research, once the design of the proposal is concluded and before proceeding to its application, it is time to select the data collection's resources that will allow making the later analysis. In the case

that occupies us, the chosen ones have been the diary, the questionnaire and video filming as the most suitable resources in the data collection process.

Data collection

The teacher's diary has been the data collection resource used by the teacher with the purpose of being able to take anecdotal records of the data related with the day-to-day actions in the classrooms.

Pupils, in general, have been very enthusiastic with the proposal of introducing English in a fun and very interactive way. Songs, stories, video fragments, puppets, making of murals, etc., have been fundamental elements in the development of the sessions that, as was expected, have resulted in the success of the proposal. The most resolved students demonstrated ease in being able to repeat and reproduce songs and expressions that the teacher used with them. However, some students, mainly those from P-4, manifested some difficulties when communicating in English in the classroom. It seems to be that the position of the sessions in workshops has not been the most favorable with the students of these groups.

Factors like: the frequency of instruction in English, the idea of teaching English for fun, the use of attractive and very motivational resources for the students when memorizing and reproducing vocabulary and expressions in English, the possibility to recreate talkative situations in English in a natural form thanks to the participation of parents in the development of some sessions, etc., they have made the English sessions with the students of P-3 and the workshops with P-5 a success. In spite of the fact that the results obtained in the workshops with P-4 have not been so good, we have to speak about the clear satisfaction in regards to the acquisition of English communicative skills demonstrated by these students throughout the course.



Photograph 3: Role Playing Through Play Infused into the Curriculum

The use of questionnaires has been motivated by the interest in knowing the opinion of the families regarding the progress in the introduction of English in the Infant Education. According to the participation index, the P-3

parents were the most interested in sharing their opinion about their child's experiences, an 80% of participation, and 61.40% of P-4 parents only 28.5% of P-5 parents. In summary, 57.89% of parents across the entire school population voiced an opinion through the questionnaires. Among the given answers there are some that give information about the linguistic profile of the students and there are some that give information about the value of the experience made by the families. It is in fact the latter that results in being the most valuable when making the triangulation of the data. This is because they reflect in a faithful form families' opinion about the proposal and the knowledge that they have about the linguistic level of the students starting from the transfers made at home.

The use of the scales of attitude helps the researcher to determine the strength of the attitude or opinion made by the person who answers to some asseverations of attitudes. Assigning a numeric code to each element in the scale, you can determine a compound or a scale that represents the variety of attitudes inside the studied group. The purpose is to put people that respond to the need to study their attitudes and feelings about several questions (Cook, 1996, p. 143).

It is necessary to highlight the great approval of the experience manifested by the parents of the students of P-3 whom with a 20% of very positive answers towards the introduction of English in the Infant Education, are the group of families that have welcomed this proposal with the most enthusiasm. In second place it highlights the 12% of very satisfactory answers towards the experience given by the families from P-5 group and lastly are the P-4 families with only 6% of satisfactory answers. The grading regarding the opinion of the families picked up through the questionnaires is very closely related with the appreciation picked up by the teacher in the class diary.

From this document it is easy to pick up some very positive comments about the improvements shown by P-3 students throughout the whole course, the spontaneity and ease of the students of P-5 when communicating in English during the development workshops sessions and the limitations and reservations that the P-4 students demonstrate.



Photograph 4: Diverse Opportunities to Use English in Context of Role Play

The filming of some sessions towards the end of the course show how the obtained results with the students of P-3 have been the most successful and the most unexpected of all. This is because the three data collection

resources used in this research tells us so. If we compare the data collected from the P-4 filmed session with that collected from the teacher's diary and the questionnaires, it can be said that all sources take us to the same conclusion. Something didn't come out as expected because results show lower knowledge and use of English by these students compared to their partners.

From our point of view it is fundamental to develop previous linguistic competence to the systematic introduction of CLIL (Contents and Language Integrated Learning), otherwise this option is of difficult application. It is necessary to have a minimal initial competence that allows the enough fluency and that doesn't transform the work into something so far away from children's skills that could generate low rates of motivation and interest (Pérez & Roig, 2004, p. 113).

That is to say, in spite of the value of any proposal based on CLIL, it can never be forgotten that this implies that the pupil has to have minimal initial competence that if lacking, could lead us to similar results to those obtained with the P-4 students.

Regarding the group of P-5 students, it is necessary to say that the filming of the workshop session with this group confirms that these students know the dynamics of the session very well, they share it, they participate, they enjoy it and they end up becoming the main characters of all and each situation of communication and dialogue that takes place in the classroom. No doubt, the results obtained with the group of P-5 students in the introduction of English through workshops overcome all initial expectations.

Results

The elaboration of a curricular proposal to introduce English in Infant Education requires a meticulous investigation in the field of the curricular dispositions. It is also a very creative exercise based on the professional experiences of the researchers. It is, after all, to design a non-existent document having to take into account the demands set down in the Curricular Base Design regarding the achievement of certain objectives and learning capacities and competences when concluding an educational stage. To do so, attention needs to be paid to the curricular prescriptions exposed in the "Curricula of Infant Education", in the "Curricula of Primary Education" and in the "The foreign language in first cycle of Primary Education". The introduction of the foreign language in Infant Education has to take place under a talkative and meaningful perspective for the students and, being in the case that concerns us, the areas of art & craft and music will also be considered when selecting the objectives and contents of the areas of verbal language and foreign languages. To end up, we must say that School's Curricular Project designed by the staff of CEIP Saint Cristòfor will guide the final document.

The most valuable tools to provide communication in English in the Infant Education are all those formulas that are part of the didactic baggage of Infant Education: songs, stories, folk games, puppet shows, checking the number of students who came today, etc.

The combined use in the classroom of all these resources, add to the natural talkative spontaneity of students aged between 3 and 6, making the development of the teaching-learning process in English in Infant Education possible. The result obtained is natural and productive speech full of spontaneity and meaning. This discipline guarantees the transmission of cultural knowledge and the development of this artistic sensibility. On the other hand, it is also necessary to highlight its communicative and pleasant function that helps to activate the student's memory. It's such a functional and pleasant form of expression that allows the student to know and to familiarize

themselves with their surrounding environment. The use of this or other areas of the curricula, to introduce a foreign language in the Infant Education is a very interesting strategy. Typical routines of school life, storytelling, drama performances, songs, puppet' shows, etc., are good examples of activities that will provide the learning of the foreign language in Infant Education. The instruction of a new phonological system different to the own one/s, the modulation of the voice, facial gestures, body language, etc., will help the student in the process of translating and producing messages.

The fact that the curriculum of Infant Education is characterized for being flexible and appropriate for these students' needs, makes it ideal when introducing a new innovative element as is the introduction of the foreign language. Temporary distribution and timetables are the factors that have to be settled in a meticulous way from the beginning, this is because it will be the established schedule that will allow us to elaborate the third level of concretion realistically and coherently. The making of this schedule has to be carried out paying attention to the school's needs, the teacher's timetable, but overall, considering the need to provide students frequent instruction in English (Piquer, 2009).

Experience and common sense tell us that the two groups of P-3 have to be the most focused on when making the schedule of the course. To reserve a daily space; of short length; of repetitive routine dynamic; and of great interest for the students because it will be a time for stories, songs, puppets, etc., is considered appropriate for the instruction in English in the classrooms of P-3.

Regarding the groups of P-4 and P-5 it has been thought to provide a temporary distribution by workshops. This distribution of pupils in workshops allows us to work with reduced groups without spending a big amount of time on designing activities because the same weekly programming is good for both groups. The amount of time of exposure to the foreign language is very important. However, it is not the only aspect that has to be considered. In this first stage it is necessary to count with a good classroom programming for all the learning languages, only one type of methodology, as well as a certain link between all the subjects which are being taught in the other areas (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2004).

These daily sessions will be thirty minutes long. This has been decided for two main reasons. On one hand, locating English sessions after morning break time we assure that children will be receptive to memorize activities as they are coming from the relaxed atmosphere of the playground. On the other hand, we respect P-3 high-priority activities that students have to carry out with their own tutor. We are talking about routine activities that have to be carried out at first and last hour of the morning or the afternoon (morning greetings, to sit down on the carpet, to check who is in class today, to say the day of the week, to look at the weather, to talk about the weekend, to comment about the menu of the day, to say goodbye, etc.).

The programming of these sessions is made taking into consideration the week's thematic nucleus; this programming is carried out weekly without caring about monthly distribution. The content of the sessions is very flexible. A model session could be one where the English teacher arrives to the classroom with a bag or a full trolley with that the students are already familiar with. It is optional for the teacher to provide some music when arriving, but it shouldn't be forgotten that music would always give more meaning to the arrival and the farewell.

With the arrival, there is no doubt that the teacher will catch the children's attention, as they will show their interest to find out the contents of the trolley. It suits that, at any time, the adult is receptive to the demands made

by the students. It is appropriate, for example, if they request the puppet, the teacher has to show it in order to avoid disappointing them, and thus not hindering.

Some of the fixed activities in any session should be the puppet's introduction, learning or reviewing some songs, looking at some vocabulary flashcards, storytelling and farewells by means of the puppet. Starting from this point, we can go adding or substituting some of these activities for others such as: watching videos, dancing, puppet's show, etc.

Three year old students manifest great interest towards learning activities related with infant literature, songs, dances and children's folk in general, puppet's world, etc., so these elements will be of great interest in the programming. Occasionally, it will be suitable to repeat sessions and even weekly programming throughout the course.

These periodic repetitions will provide the element of routine that will allow the students to know the activities, to be early to the pretenses of the teacher and to participate actively in the classroom development.

The vision that the individual has of what reality is, his/her model of the world, his/her patterns of behavior, they don't just "arise" from the inside neither they are "implanted" directly from the outside, but rather they are built along a complex process of exchange with the others: for that reason communication and conception of reality are the same thing (Cantero & de Arriba 1997, p. 29).

Thematic blocks are distributed establishing some series of sessions. The first of them is the introduction: presentation of the topic, suitable vocabulary introduction, and explanation of the consistency of the whole thematic block and some art & craftwork. Remaining sessions are meant to provide consolidation of acquired knowledge through the first session as well as previous ones and to be dedicated to the making of a mural.

A conception of the art & craft that goes beyond the mere manipulative activity, more centered in the recognition, the identification and the creation of forms of expression that take in consideration the color, the forms, the textures, the composition...would be more enriching for learning English than for aesthetic learning (Pérez & Roig, 2004, p. 117).

The preparation of the first session of the thematic block demands the teacher's effort of decorating the class with visual stimuli that allows them to present the topic to the students without having to rely on the use of the L1. This presentation will be beneficial for contextualizing students in the context in which they will have to work during the next sessions of the thematic block. Once the prolegomena are concluded, it suits to take advantage of the first session to encourage the students to do some artistic work that they will have to continue making during the later sessions. These sessions will begin with a fleeting review of the vocabulary presented during the first session of the block, hereinafter; it will be continued with the art and craftwork.

A thematic child's store was designed in a corner of the class in order to foster and support the language of the children. The props, visuals, and language cards promoted the conversation of selling and buying materials. Students spoke in English in their interactions, solitary play, and cooperative play overtures.

The use of environmental music is recommended (English songs already learned or not yet learned in class) while the art and craft activities are developed in the classroom. Regarding storytelling, one may also regard it is

a valuable source and whenever time allows is good to begin, to supplement or to conclude some of these sessions.

The teacher, on the other hand, will be the responsible for guaranteeing a working environment full of visual stimuli related with the worked topic that will facilitate English communication in the classroom (representative images of the new vocabulary, 3D elements equally related with the work topic, a mural that inspires children's art & craft work, posters that help to remember frequently used vocabulary in the classroom, occasional participation in the classroom of other adults that speak also in English, etc.). The use of relaxing resources (environmental music of English songs) and stimulants (the English language as a tool of communication in the class) that guarantees, insofar as possible, a situation of linguistic immersion in the classroom.

Conclusion

The advancement of English in early childhood programs involves examining the context, educational focus, and supporting the other developmental areas of the young child. Given the results in this study, it is clear that with social and emotional support provided through a context of play, consistent programming, and systemic support of families, acquisition of English is successful.

Based on this observational data, it is crucial that children are exposed to positive linguistic experiences that are interesting, challenging and positive so that children have opportunities to play, practice, and redefine their linguistic abilities. Similarly, it is vital that the students' first contact with the language is meaningful and that it will motivate them to produce small spontaneous and meaningful dialogues. It is worthy to avoid activities related with formal teaching of the language and to leave aside traditional methodologies, strategies and techniques in order to support new foreign language teaching and learning styles.

This developmental work has been carried out considering three well-differentiated factors: the agreements taken by the administrations in regards to the teaching of foreign languages in Infant Education, the specific needs of the school and the people implied in the design, application and evaluation of the proposal's own needs. The application and evaluation of the proposal has been carried out in a school that, in spite of being a state school, enjoys some privileges that makes it extraordinary. Certainly, the application of this proposal in other state schools might require some revision and suitable adaptation.

It is important to note, that students are uniquely different from adults because the latter, under similar circumstances, would feel ridiculous and perhaps, ever embarrassment. As a result, a program advancing the English language introduction for young children needs to be developmentally appropriate, meaningful and relevant to the interests and needs of young children. Young children are individuals and these needs require individual planning, observation, and documentation to best address their linguistic needs. This way, human beings don't act in fact, directly on the world but through the representation that we have of it, of the map that allows to decrease reality to governable dimensions and to guide ourselves in that sea of stimuli without losing our identity: reality, itself, could not be represented, because human capability is limited. Without the map, we would be adrift as a ship (Cantero & de Arriba, 1997).

Children and adults are guided with a different map of the world. English teachers have important opportunities to provide appropriate programming for their students. In considering other regions, the challenges of dominant language, politics, and resistant ministries do in fact exist. Quality language education Primary

Education must consider important language opportunities and strategies. First, it is vital to create communicative situations in English in the classroom through playful opportunities, dramatic corners, and to consistently to promote English in materials, resources, formal and informal educational conversations. Second, English must be visible in the print rich physical environment in instructional posters, photos of the children, as well as materials. Third, the teacher must promote a respect for home language, second language acquisition, and be committed to the respecting and honoring the individual developmental levels and differences amongst children. Fourth, these play strategies must not only honor the choices of children, but also promote music, arts, and joy so that language is approached in a positive manner. Finally, language is intricately related to listening, reading and writing, so educators should approach the integration of English in all of these areas in the classroom.

References

- Arzamendi, J., Etxeberria, F., Lindsay, D., Garagorri, X., & Azpillaga, B. (1996). Proyecto europeo para enseñar lenguas segundas o extranjeras a niños y niñas [European Project for teaching second languages to children]. In A. Moyano, A. Muñoz, & P. Pérez (Eds.), *Enseñar y aprender una lengua extranjera en el segundo ciclo de la Educación Infantil* [Teaching and learning a foreign language in the second cycle of Infant Education]. Barcelona: Dossiers de Rosa Sensat.
- Baetens-Beardsmore, H., & Anselmi, G. (1991). Code-Switching in a heterogenous unstable, multilingual speech community. In *Papers for the symposium on code-switching in bilingual studies: Theory, significance and perspectives*. Strasbourg. European Science Foundation.
- Bruner, J. (1984). *Los formatos de adquisición del lenguaje. Acción, pensamiento y lenguaje* [The language acquisition formats. Action, thought and language]. Madrid: Alianza.
- Caballero de Rodas, B., & Masats, D. (1999). Les llengües estrangeres com a vehicle d'aprenentatges escolars [Foreign languages as a vehicle for school learning]. *Perspectiva Escolar* [School Perspective], 232, 19-25.
- Candlin, Ch. (1990). Hacia una enseñanza de lenguas basada en tareas [Towards a task-based language teaching]. *Comunicación lenguaje y educación* [Communication, language and education], 7(9), 33-54.
- Cantero, F.J., & de Arriba, J. (1997). *Psicolingüística del discurso* [Psycholinguistics of speech]. Barcelona, Spain: Ediciones Octaedro.
- Català, M. (2001). *Tractament de les llengües i les TIC a l'escola* [Treatment of languages and ICT at school. Unpublished material developed to obtain a Strategic Plan of the Department of Education].
- Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1990). *Métodos de investigación educativa* [Methods of educational research]. Madrid: La Muralla.
- Cook, G. (2000). *Language play, language learning*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cook, V. (1996). Teaching English as a foreign language in Europe. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research on second language teaching and learning*. New York & London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Crookes, G., & Schmidt, R. (1991). Motivation: Reopening the research agenda. *Language Learning*, 41(4), 469-512.
- Council for Cultural Co-operation (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, M. & Parlakian, R. (2004) *How culture shapes social-emotional development: Implications for practice in infant-family programs*. Washington DC: Zero To Three Publishing Company.
- Duarte, G., & Cortez-Castro, D. H. (2015). Play cannot wait: The child's right to play. In G. Duarte & D. Cortez-Castro (Eds.), *Children's play: Research, reflections and possibilities* (p. 7). New York: Linus Publishing Company, NYC.

- Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament d'Ensenyament (2004). *La llengua estrangera al cicle inicial. Aspectes organitzatius i didàctic* [The foreign language at the First Cycle. Organizational and didactic aspects]. Barcelona: Servei de difusió i Publicacions.
- Guillén, C., & Alario, C. (2002). La introducción de las LEs en la Educación Infantil [The introduction of foreign languages in infant education]. In J. M. Vez (Ed.), *Didáctica de la lengua extranjera en educación infantil y primaria* [Foreign language didactics in infant and primary education]. Madrid: Síntesis Educación.
- Lantolf, J. P. (2001). Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition. In R. Kaplan (Ed.), *Handbook of applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lorenzo, N., & Piquer, I. (2013). Report and evaluation of the development of programmes in Catalonia. *Temps d'Educació* [Education time], 5, 143-180. Retrieved from <http://www.publicacions.ub.edu/revistes/tempsDEducacio45/default.asp?articulo=941&modo=resumen>
- Muñoz, C., & Nussbaum, L. (1997). Les enjeux linguistiques dans l'éducation en Espagne [Linguistic aspects in Education in Spain]. In Muñoz, C., Nussbaum, L. & Pujol, M. (Eds.), *Appropriation de langues dans une situation de contact* [Incorporating languages in contact]. *Aile*, 10, 5-20.
- Murado Bouso, J. L. (2012). *Didáctica de inglés en educación infantil*. [English didactics in infant education]. Vigo: Ideaspropias Editorial.
- Navalón, J.D. (1996). Aprender a usar el lenguaje en la escuela infantil [Learning how to use the language in Infant Education]. *Aula*, 46, 9-13.
- Nussbaum, L. (1999). Perspectives actuals per a l'ensenyament i l'aprenentatge de llengües estrangeres a l'educació obligatòria [Nowadays perspectives on teaching and learning foreign languages in compulsory education]. *Perspectiva Escolar* [School Perspective], 232, 2-8.
- Pérez, P., & Roig, V. (2009). Enseñar inglés o enseñar en inglés? Factores que inciden en la eficacia de la enseñanza y aprendizaje del inglés en Educación Infantil [Teaching English or teaching in English? Impact factor on teaching and learning English in infant education]. *Tribuna Abierta*, 87-99.
- Pérez, P., & Roig, V. (2004). *Enseñar y aprender inglés en educación infantil y primaria (Vol. I)* [Teaching and learning English in infant and primary education Vol. I]. Barcelona: ICE-Horsori.
- Piquer, I. (2009). *Timetabling pre-school classes*. Macmagonline. Retrieved from <http://macmagonline.macmillan.es/editions/archive/issue-18-summer-2009/infants/timetabling-pre-school-classes/>
- Taeschner, T., Nias, J., Plooi, F., Etxeberria, F. & Arzamendi, J. (1992). *European project for teaching a second language to children between 3 and 7 years*. Unpublished.
- Tosi, A. (1991). First, second or foreign language learning? In *Papers for the symposium on code-switching in bilingual studies: Theory, significance and perspectives*. Strasbourg. European Science Foundation.
- Van Hoorn, P.J., Monaghan-Nourto, P., Scales, B., & Rodriguez-Alward, K. (2011). *Play at the center of the curriculum*. Pearson Publishing Company. Boston: MA
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1933). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. In J. Bruner, A. Jolly, & K. Sylva (Eds.), *Play: Its role in development and evolution* (pp. 461-463). New York: Penguin Books.

Zanon, J. (1990). Los enfoques por tareas para la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras [Task teaching approaches in foreign language teaching]. *Cable*, 5, 19-27.