

First step towards the creation of our instructional materials*

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* Este artículo pretende describir el diseño de un módulo de aprendizaje del Inglés. Se adscribe a la línea de Investigación Pedagogía de las Ciencias del Lenguaje, de la Maestría en Lingüística, UPTC.

ABSTRACT

This article aims at describing the design of a module for English language learning entitled "Enjoying English". This module states the learning objectives, underpin the four communicative language skills, let the reflection on the importance of taking care of the environment and compare the local and foreign culture. This module is based on language and teaching theories, culture and curriculum and syllabus. The design and instruction of materials focused on students' context allow not only the development of their communicative skills in English language, but also the reflection on students' reality and the knowledge of their culture and the other ones.

Key words: language, teaching, learning, culture, curriculum, materials design.

RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende describir el diseño de un módulo de aprendizaje del Inglés titulado "Enjoying English". Este módulo plantea los objetivos de aprendizaje, promueve las cuatro habilidades comunicativas, permite la reflexión sobre la importancia de cuidar el medio ambiente y compara la cultura local y la foránea. Este módulo está basado en las teorías de lenguaje, teorías de enseñanza, cultura y currículo. El diseño e implementación de materiales basado en el contexto de los estudiantes permite no sólo el desarrollo de sus habilidades comunicativas en la lengua extranjera sino también la reflexión sobre la realidad en que viven y el conocimiento de su cultura y la de otros.

Palabras clave: lenguaje, enseñanza, aprendizaje, cultura, currículo, diseño de materiales.

INTRODUCTION

Designing material is a challenging opportunity to explore and strengthen our teaching potential, learning process and at the same time our creativity. There are many advantages to create our own materials since we can be aware of students' immediate realities and their needs and expectations in order to achieve particular and specific language objectives and in the same way, allow students to increase their motivation and be successful in second language learning. According to Kessler (as cited by Menezes, 2001), "the need for materials developed by teachers in our field is essential because these individuals are the most immediate experts on the needs of ESOL learners, the cognitive abilities of different age groups and the learning process of their specific learners". Teachers are close related to their students during their learning process and for this reason teachers can design suitable materials to engage students in their second language learning.

Elaborating materials is not an easy process. It implies not only a lot of effort, patience, dedication, some expertise and time, but also being skillful in relation to language learning theories, teaching approaches, syllabus and curriculum organization, specific learning objectives and learning styles. Likewise, designing materials implies to be careful in the purpose of different meaningful tasks and activities since these ones need to be communicative and enjoyable for learners. These activities must be focused on students' reality to make sense of their learning in a way that they can challenge their own views of the world.

The process of creating material involves also the goals established in the syllabus which have to be related directly to materials' goals and must be clearly defined so that learners can understand those goals. The type of tasks and activities must be elaborated based on learning aims proposed. The tasks must include students' prior knowledge and target language which allow learners to interact actively and to achieve their learning goals. Moreover, materials must be assessed and evaluated constantly to realize if these are effective or not in students learning process.

Bearing the previous ideas in mind we, as Secondary English Teachers from the High Schools Jorge Eliecer Gaitán and Institución Educativa Suse, decided to design a module for ninth graders taking into account their needs, interests, and the context where they are immersed daily. This module was designed for both high schools because these institutions share in their curriculum principles the notion of including and developing projects about environmental topics in order to be aware students about ecological problems and to foster them to provide possible solutions in the care of the environment and especially of the region. Consequently, we propose in our module activities related to environmental issues which promote consciousness about their reality and reality of other country. In this way, second language learning is being enhanced meaningfully.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The design of the module was focused on language from different perspectives, language as a system of rules and language as a means of communication; the natural approach from second language theory; the communicative approach from teaching theory; culture; and curriculum and syllabus.

The first theory is language. Language has been seen from different perspectives, according to Nunan (1999:8) "up to, including the 60's, language was generally seen as a system of rules, and the task for language learners was to internalize these rules by whatever means were at their disposal" from this perspective it is possible thinking of that materials used were closed related to grammar, grammar books, drills, filling blanks.

After 1970, language was considered as a system for the expression of meaning rather than as a system of abstract syntactic rules. So, if English teachers consider language is the expression of human communication through which knowledge, belief and behavior can be experienced, explained, and shared; the materials used for English language teaching will probably look for using language for meaningful proposes. It means, language for expressing what learners think, feel and believe.

The second theoretical consideration is second language theory. Our module bears in mind the natural approach. It was developed by Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen, in 1977. Terrel and Krashen (1983) state "language acquisition is an unconscious process developed through using language meaningfully while language learning is consciously learning or discovering rules about a language, and language acquisition is the only way competence in a second language occurs. Grammatical structures are acquired in a predictable order and it does little good to try to learn them in another order. People acquire language best from messages that are just slightly beyond their current competence". Therefore, we, as English teachers, consider that it is relevant that students learn a second language in a meaningful

way. It means students can express in a foreign language what they think, feel, and believe. Learners are able of expressing their ideas taking into account the grammatical structures in a natural and spontaneous way. That is, students learn from their own reality and reality of others, thus they are able to communicate with others effectively.

Likewise the Natural approach is characterized by proposing communicative activities which include games, roleplays, dialogs, group work and discussions. There are three general stages identified in the approach: (1) Preproduction - developing listening skills; (2) Early Production - students struggle with the language and make many errors which are corrected based on content and not structure; (3) Extending Production - promoting fluency through a variety of more challenging activities. The activities of our module were addressed into the principles of the natural approach since learners are engaged in diverse tasks which help them to develop successfully their four communicative skills.

The third theory is the teaching approach. The communicative approach was considered in the design of the content of our module. Communicative approach focuses on language as a means of communication. This approach recognizes that all communication has a social purpose. That is, learner has something to say or find out. Communication involves diverse activities, such as: seeking information, apologizing, expressing likes and dislikes, etc. and notions such as apologizing for being late, asking where the police station is, etc.

Communicative approach is focused on expressing not merely grammar structures, but messages with real purposes in different contexts. Classroom should provide opportunities for rehearsal of real-life situations and provide opportunity for real communication. Emphasis on creative roleplays, simulations, surveys and projects, all produce spontaneity and improvisation - not just repetition and drills. It means that communicative approach takes into account learners needs and interests. In the same way, communicative approach includes pair work and group-work which help to promote the development of students' communicative skills.

In this way, the natural approach and communicative approach share the principle that errors are a natural part of learning language. "Learners trying their best to use the language creatively and spontaneously are bound to make errors. Constant correction is unnecessary and even counter-productive"¹. Thus, correction should be tactful and discreet in order to let students talk and express themselves.

Moreover, Communicative approach involves the four communicative skills. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills need to be developed to promote pupils' confidence in their second language learning process. As well, grammar can be taught, but less

¹ Communicative Approach. Available from: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/~mflwww/seclangacq/langteach9.html>

systematically, because the main objective is not emphasized learning on grammar rules, but on communicative real purposes. Besides, communicative approach use materials related to students' reality and interests. Resources and materials must be updated, interesting and appealing for students. It is also important consider authentic materials which can substitute a native speaker; resources such as: newspaper and magazine articles, poems, manuals, recipes, telephone directories, songs, videos, news bulletins, discussion programs. All of them can be exploited in variety of ways in order to focus efficiently second language learning.

The fourth theory is culture. Culture implies many different definitions provided by diverse researchers and ethnographers, however all of them agree on the importance to bear in mind the culture's conception in foreign language learning. Culture's conception is developed by each person in interaction with different aspects of his/her community; such as: behavior's patterns, ways of dressing, eating, thinking and manners of establishing relations with others. A general definition of what is frequently understood by culture is given by Richards et al (1999) cited by Cruz (2007) "culture is the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society". Thus, specific people of a community define, build and shared the conception of culture in interaction with others.

As classrooms are diverse cultural contexts, language teachers should develop in students' cultural understanding. This means, help learners to be aware about their culture and appreciate it, and besides comprehend other cultures from their own culture. Mehan (1981:48) cited by Lee McKay (1992:47) states: "to be competent members of the classroom community, students must not only know what to do, but when and where to do it. Inasmuch as the classroom is a socially organized community, participants must be able to act appropriately within its normative constraints". Hence, teachers must determine what is going to be learnt and how it is going to be learnt in order to understand each other, teacher and students in terms of learning.

We, as language teachers, should include both cultures, foreign and local in the selection of our materials; and besides, we should develop our students a sense of cross-cultural understanding. It allows our learners to become receptive to cultural differences in the classroom and in materials too. Seelye (1984, p. 96) cited by Castro (2007:204) states: "we could prepare ourselves (our students, in this case) to become sensitive to cross-cultural differences. When a command of the language, personal attributes or willingness to interact with members of the other culture may not be enough... we could provide our students with the chance to foresee some of the difficulties they might have, thus allowing them to think of possible solutions or ways of understanding the situation". Thus, our students could understand people from other cultures and their classmates too; likewise, they could comprehend cultural differences in foreign and local materials.

The fifth theory is curriculum and syllabus. According to Longman dictionary "syllabus, also curriculum: a description of the contents of a course of instruction and the order in which they are to be taught. Language teaching syllabuses may be based on (a) grammatical items and vocabulary, (b) the language needed for different types of situations, (c) the meanings and communicative functions which the learner needs to express in the target language", however, according to our criteria the curriculum includes not only contents, objectives of each educative level, methodology, resources, evaluation, but also the mission, the vision of the school and the learner's profile after finishing the whole educative level and therefore continue the process of life-long learning. The Curriculum as an educational program bears in mind the next aspects:

- u The educational purpose of the program (the ends)
- u The content, teaching procedures and learning experiences which will be necessary to achieve this purpose (the means)
- u Some means for assessing whether or not the educational ends have been achieved.

ENJOYING ENGLISH: A MODULE FOR FOSTERING STUDENTS' ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS

"Enjoying English" is a module designed for ninth level students of high school. We have called "Enjoying English" to our module because we pretend that students learn vocabulary and grammar in an interesting and enjoyable way. The tasks presented in this unit promote the development of the communicative skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The different activities will be challenging and fascinating for learners. Those activities allow students to achieve their learning goals in second language learning. "Enjoying English" module is characterized for:

- ? A clear communicative approach for developing the four skills, including cross-cultural and curricular topics.
- ? A project methodology to promote meaningful tasks and cooperative learning.
- ? Funny activities which imply enjoying while learning.

In this module, students can find the learning goals that they have to achieve, grammar aspects that they will work during this unit, vocabulary required to familiarize with the topics proposed and the contents that they will develop based on cross cultural and curricular topics.

In the first lesson "Exploring our region"; students will express their pre-knowledge about the lake of Tota in the warming up activity. Then, students will listen to a conversation between Helen, an American student, and María a Colombian student, speaking about the lake of Tota. In this activity students will practice this dialog orally. The next activity is

based on working with this dialog; students will answer questions about what they comprehended. Then, students can find a grammatical short explanation about simple present tense. The explanation will allow them to comprehend the grammatical structure worked during this lesson.

After that, speaking and writing skills are presented in a contextualized way. Richard an American student is visiting "Playa Blanca" on his vacations. He is speaking to his friend Emiro about this place. Here, students can expand their grammatical knowledge about simple present tense. Then, they will have the opportunity to share their ideas orally.

The next communicative activity is speaking. Students will look at five pictures about environmental problems, they will have to choose one of those pictures and they will speak about what they think supporting their ideas and finally they will share them with the rest of the class. This activity not only allows students to strengthen their grammar, but also their critical thinking about those ecological problems.

After that, a listening activity is proposed. Students will have to listen to the "Earth Song" and complete it with the missing words which are showed before the song. While learners are sharpening their listening skill filling in the blanks with the correct words, they are trying to interpret the message of the song. Then, students will identify and underline the expressions in simple present tense, as a way of expanding their grammar understanding. Finally, students will have to express what they comprehended about the message of the song. We pretend that students continue thinking critically about environmental aspects, reflecting on those issues and can express themselves using the target language learnt through the lessons in this module.

As a way to expand their writing skill, students will have to create a poster expressing a message for taking care of the Lake of Tota. This activity allows learners to reflect on the environmental issues in their local context and propose possible solutions. Finally, the lesson finishes with an ecological project. Students will have to create a bulletin board about an environmental problem in their region, they will write concrete solutions and then, share with their class. Students will be aware of taking care of the environment of their region involving their classmates while they increase their knowledge in a second language.

In the second lesson "A trip to the Great Lakes", students will have to answer three questions about the topic proposed for this lesson, the Great lakes. This is a warming up activity to explore students' prior-knowledge of this theme. Then, students will listen to and read short texts about the background and geology of the Great Lakes. Students will work with this reading answering questions related to this topic. This activity is an introduction to the knowledge of other realities about foreign culture related to the Great Lakes and students' local context related to the Lake of Tota.

A grammatical chart about comparatives and superlatives is presented to students. They will observe in a specific way target language to work on this lesson. This chart will help them to interpret grammatical structures of the comparatives and superlatives. A reading about each one of the Great lakes is presented. This reading gives information about specific geographical aspects and besides Great lakes' similarities and differences of how they are constituted. In the next activity, students have to read eight statements presented through comparatives and superlatives and they have to tick true or false according to what they understood in the short texts. Herewith activity students will have to expand the information about the five Great lakes and reinforce grammatical aspects of this unit (comparatives and superlatives).

In the next activity students will have to write statements using comparatives and superlatives keeping in mind the specific information about the Great Lakes presented in a chart. A word bank with adjectives is showed to students as a helpful tool for developing the activity. After that, students will share orally their task with the rest of the class.

Then, a listening activity is presented. Students will listen to "Heal the world song". They will focus their attention to identify and underline the comparative statements in the song. Students will write the message about the content of the song. Finally, they will sing the song. Through this activity, students will continue reflecting on environmental topics and at the same time, they will reinforce the target language proposed in this lesson. Besides, this activity will allow them to enjoy singing the song with their classmates.

In the writing activity, students will write a short text using comparatives and superlatives bearing in mind information acquired about the Lake of Tota and the Great Lakes. Through this activity, students will recognize the differences and similarities between two important hydrographic sources from different cultures, and at the same time, this activity will promote intercultural knowledge and understanding.

The lesson finishes with an ecological project where students will browse information about ecological problems in the Lake of Tota and in the Great Lakes. Then, learners will design a brochure with the information found and they will make comparisons. They will write an ecological message and finally they will share the brochure with their class. Through this entire lesson, students will develop their critical thinking about ecological issues and their second language performance during the diverse communicative activities presented in this lesson.

Students will have access to a Cd which contains the tracks of the conversation about "Playa Blanca" in the lesson one and the reading about the Great Lakes in the lesson two; the song of the lesson one "Earth Song" and the song of the lesson two "Heal the World". Besides, two videos which will help students to develop the extra activities proposed at the end of each one of the lessons.

We hope that students be able to communicate in English naturally, in different areas that are actually interesting for every one of them. For that reason, we have included intercultural environmental topics in the module "Enjoying English" in order to promote communicative language skills and the consciousness of taking care of the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Designing our own material, in this case a module is a challenging task because it demands much effort, time, knowledge of different language educational principles, teaching experience and exploring students' needs and interests in order to be updated, adopted, applied and developed the material to reality of students. This module is focused on the development of the communicative skills in a spontaneous and meaningful way because students have the opportunity to construct and expand their knowledge from the local reality towards foreign reality.

This module is only a step in the process of elaborating materials. We, as teachers, can take advantages from every teaching context because every one of it offers much cultural richness which must be explored to enhance students' communicative skills in a balanced way. Likewise, it is important students relate their own knowledge about the local culture with the knowledge of a foreign culture in order to be aware of intercultural aspects and thus, they can comprehend to others, value their own reality and the foreign reality, and strengthen their identity.

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APPENDIX 1

LISTENING

A. Read this song and fill in the blanks with these words while you listen to the song.

rain fields Earth world stars seas
nature's worth animals elephants whales forests man

'EARTHSONG'

What about sunrise
What about _____
What about all the things
That you said we were to gain...
What about killing _____
Is there a time
What about all the things
That you said was yours and mine...
Did you ever stop to notice
All the blood we've shed before
Did you ever stop to notice
The crying _____ the weeping shores?

Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah
Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah

What have we done to the _____
Look what we've done
What about all the peace

That you pledge your only song...
What about flowering fields
Is there a time
What about all the dreams
That you said was yours and mine...
Did you ever stop to notice
All the children dead from war
Did you ever stop to notice
The crying _____ the weeping shores

Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah
Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah

(What about us)
Have we lost their trust
(What about us)
What about crying _____

I used to dream
I used to glance beyond the _____
Now I don't know where we are
Although I know we've drifted far

Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah
Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah
Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah
Aaaaaaaaaah Aaaaaaaaaah

Hey, what about yesterday
(What about us)
What about the _____
(What about us)
The heavens are falling down
(What about us)
I can't even breathe
(What about us)
What about apathy

(What about us)
I need you
(What about us)
What about _____
(ooo,ooo)
It's our planet's womb
(What about us)
What about _____
(What about it)
We've turned kingdoms to dust
(What about us)
What about _____

Someone tell me why
(What about us)
What about babies
(What about it)

(What about us)
 We're ravaging the seas
 (What about us)
 What about _____ trails
 (ooo,ooo)
 Burnt despite our please
 (What about us)
 What about the holy land
 (What about it)
 Torn apart by creed
 (What about us)
 What about the common man
 (What about us)
 Can't we set him free

What about the days
 (What about us)
 What about all their joy
 (What about us)
 What about the _____
 (What about us)
 What about the crying man
 (What about us)
 What about Abraham
 (What was us)
 What about death again
 (ooo,ooo)
 Do we give a damn

(What about us)
 What about children dying
 (What about us)
 Can't you hear them cry
 (What about us)
 Where did we go wrong
 (ooo,ooo)

Aaaaaaaaah, Aaaaaaaaah

- B. Listen to the song and check the words in the blanks.
- C. Identify and underline the expressions in simple present tense.
- D. What is the message of the song?

WRITING

Make a poster expressing an ecological message for taking care of the Lake of Tota.

APPENDIX 2

COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE ADJECTIVES					
ADJECTIVES WITH -ER AND -EST			ADJECTIVES WITH MORE AND MOST		
Adjective	Comparative	Superlative	Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
fast	faster	the fastest	dangerous	dangerous	dangerous
long	longer	the longest	careful	careful	careful
big	than	the biggest	natural	more than	the most
small	smaller	the smallest	expensive	expensive	natural
heavy	heavier	the heaviest	boring	boring	expensive
	bigger			natural	boring
COMPARISONS OF EQUALITY WITH ADJECTIVES			COMPARISONS OF EQUALITY WITH NOUNS		
? Why do people prefer a fur coat instead of a synthetic one? Because a synthetic coat is not as attractive as a fur one ? Is a snail as slow as a turtle?			? What are you doing about it? ...some other green groups that are as concerned about preservation as we are		

APPENDIX 3

READ THE NEXT INFORMATION ABOUT THE GREAT LAKES

Lake Superior



Lake Superior is the largest of the Great Lakes. This Lake is about 600 feet above, making it the highest of the Great Lakes. Lake Superior is the deepest of the Great Lakes too. Inland cities like Hibbing mine taconite and send it by rail to the port of Duluth where ore boats carry it to various places around the world.

Lake Huron



Lake Huron is the second largest of the Great Lakes and has the longest shoreline. Large ships pass from Lake Superior into Lake Huron through the Sault St. Marie Locks. It is in this area at Whitefish Bay that one of the most interesting maritime museums is located. Three bays extend out from Lake Huron. Georgian Bay is the largest and was considered a separate lake by early explorers.

Lake Michigan



Lake Michigan is located east of Lake Superior and is the third largest of the Great Lakes. It touches the borders of four states-Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Many people live in the city of Chicago which is an industrial and commercial center. Small boats can travel down the Illinois Waterway from the Chicago River into the Mississippi River.

Lake Ontario



This lake is the smallest of the Great Lakes. It is from here that ships will pass through the Saint Lawrence River and out into the Atlantic Ocean. Ontario is the smallest in elevation (feet above sea level), length, and size of all the Great Lakes. While small in all of these, it goes down 802 feet.

Lake Erie



Lake Erie is the shallowest and warmest of the Great Lakes. It receives water from lakes Superior, Huron, and Michigan. Lake Erie's water levels are constantly changing. Lake Erie is bordered by the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.

APPENDIX 4

Tick true or false, based on the previous information about the Great lakes. Correct the false ones.

- a. Lake Superior is larger than Lake Ontario
- b. Lake Huron is smallest than Lake Ontario
- c. Lake Michigan is the largest of the Great Lakes
- d. Lake Erie is the shallowest and warmest of the Great Lakes at Whitefish Bay in Lake Huron
- f. Lake Michigan is higher than Lake Superior
- g. Lake Erie is deeper than Lake Superior
- h. Lake Huron has larger shoreline than Lake Michigan

T	F

SPEAK AND WRITE

Look at the chart. Read the information carefully and write sentences, using comparatives and superlatives. Use the word bank. Share your information with the class.

Lake	Lake Erie	Lake Huron	Lake Michigan	Lake Ontario	Lake Superior
Surface area	25,700 km ²	59,600 km ²	58,000 km ²	9,500 km ²	82,400 km ²
Elevation	571 feet (174 m)	577 feet (176 m)	577 feet (176 m)	246 feet (75 m)	609 feet (186 m)
Maximum depth	210 feet (64 m)	770 feet (230 m)	923 feet (281 m)	808 feet (246 m)	1,332 feet (406 m)

WORD BANK		
Adjective	comparative	superlative
Large	larger	the largest
High	higher	the highest
Deep	deeper	the deepest
Shallow	shallower	the shallowest

Example: Lake Huron is larger than Lake Erie.