

## TEACHERS' ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

The teachers' annual conference 2016 "teaching for success" has taken place in Santa Maria school, located in Portugalete, on September 24<sup>th</sup>.

The welcome ceremony has been in Salon de Actos with an opening plenary where Robin Walker (Trinity College) has contributed with his speech "**they don't do Scottish accents**". In the first part he has made reference to attitudes to accents and one of the main ideas has been that every accent will have - somewhere- a social group which has a prejudice about it. That is why is very difficult to "establish" an accent as the standard one, however, there are many accents (as the british ones) that are commonly accepted by the vast majority of population. Variation, when she speak about languages, is inevitable. Another idea is that sometimes we have the tendency to associate accent with intelligibility but as we know, a speaker can have a very strong accent yet perfectly understood.

In this conference I came to a conclusion that can be practical for my job: "perfecting an accent is not possible for most". I remember perfectly those days when I was learning English. I used to spend hours each week working on my own accent listening to the BBC, using pronunciation CDs, practising aloud and recording myself, etc; in order to get a more native-like pronunciation.

Robin talked also about "accommodating accents" (productive accommodation and receptive accommodation), that means that you change your accent to accommodate to/ distance from the interlocutor, the place you are in...

The ideas were interesting and easy understandable in general and well exposed too. I feel that many of them had to be taken into account specially when we travel abroad.

Another point worth mentioning is that he gave us a wide range of books linked to the presented topic: "(phonology for children) teaching the stream of speech", "communication in the language classroom" (John Field), "teaching the pronunciation of English as a lingua franca" (Robin Walker).

The second part of the conference is composed by the different workshops. Each teacher has to choose one of the proposed ones, according to his-her preparation, expectations and interests. As I work as a Infant and Primary school teacher I selected "10 easy ways to use poems with 8-12 year olds" presented by Julie Mills (British Council Bilbao). The session has been practical and I enjoyed it absolutely. The objective has been showing us different ways of working on "the poem" as a tool: recite in groups, perform, play with pronunciation, practice learning by heart, review useful words before writing, use only part of a poem, give students a reason to listen (or read), use the same poem for different levels, be ambitious with your questions, use models

as a basis for students' writing, outline resources (on the handout). The poem could be as well an easy way to develop children imagination (make questions) and to focus on poetic features (for example rhythm, syllables...). In the same way, they can express their personal opinions.

From my point of view, it is absolutely feasible to put in practice the presented "techniques". I admit that by attending this particular workshop I have "reaffirmed" the work I am doing with my pupils, in other words, I have realised that I am working in the same direction as the speaker has told us. And as we know, self-security is one of the features that a teacher must have (and sometimes we lack of it).

In conclusion, "10 easy ways to use poems with 8-12 year olds" has answered to all my expectations as it has provided me different ways that children can have fun with words, rhyme and rhythm, while at the same time they are practising + consolidating aspects of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

The second workshop has been "**maximising language learning in the early years classroom**" by Jo Marriott (British Council Somosaguas). I have found it interesting because we have revised the psychological stages of the child and the consequent necessities that the child has in each stage. The importance of it resides in the fact that the teaching process has to take into account (and as a consequence is influenced by) many conditions (resources: material, personal...) but specially, general psychological features, and usually we are not aware of it. For example: sometimes we propose very long, intensive activities with young learners, instead of more dynamic, active ones, with rapid changes of focus. Consequently, children get bored and de-motivated. I have to highlight the essential importance of playing in early years; as a result, the activities that we usually do in these early years (routines) have to be playful and enable the process of language learning (helper presentation and functions, C-box...).

Jo has given us some recommendable tips to apply when we are with young learners: demonstrate with actions, what you want them to do, use positive reinforcement when they do it! (interact with them), make them do it again if they don't get it right the first time (actively reach routines).

As you can see, it has been a useful help for those who work with pupils principally aged 2-5 years old.

The next one has been the workshop named as "**3 simple strategies for promoting thinking in Primary**" (Amanda Mcloughlin, British Council Bilbao).

To be honest, I strongly believe that we don't usually make our students think. Because of that, when Amanda asked us about the methods we use to make our students think we didn't have answers to it. I had the impression that we were completely lost.

Undoubtedly, a quality linked with the capability of thinking is the creativity. So, we need our students to create something new; for example, inventions (we can create a new English teacher, a student that go to school and does our exams...).

Plasticine could be a good resource to represent some abstract ideas or new places... Besides, it is possible to practice oral skills and vocabulary by using plasticine: one member of the group describes for example a monster (4 legs, 5 eyes)... and the other does it. We can develop the imagination of our kids' group by making them to find a new way to use a certain object, for example, a blanket (answers like we can use it as a poncho, it can be used as a pillow...). The most original idea can be prized.

Another technique is SCAMPER (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate and Reverse): the teacher provides to the children with some paper and they have to "construct" something with it (they can cut, eliminate, adapt it...). Then they have to tell the others what they have done and how.

It is inevitable to make reference to the fact that students have to think about the things they know, what they want to know... In this line, KWL (Know and Learn) is a useful technique, as well as the traffic lights, where children must colour the traffic light according to the way they have understood (red-nothing, yellow-regular, green-good), decision making charts (on the Internet) and so on.

The last point has been the visible thinking routines: we show them a picture and they have to describe and think deeper about it by the technique SEE-THINK-WONDER (I see..., I think it's..., I wonder if...); ZOOM IN: we show them a part of a picture and they have to guess what is the picture of and what would happen if...?

Briefly, I am glad to say that I have acquired knowledge about how to do my students think and taking into account the importance of the competences in the curriculum, I feel that is something crucial.

Now, I am going to make reference to another workshop "**activities for very young learners**" (Karen Elliot, Cambridge University Press). This conference is tightly associated with the second one (maximising language learning in the early years classroom) as it explores children psychological development and needs constantly by remembering the role of routines in these ages. Karen also told us the importance of the stories to support children feelings in the classroom.

The last workshop "**getting to grips with assessing Primary pupils**" (Anita Demitroff, Macmillan) and the longest one (1h 30 min), in the afternoon.

The evaluation is a part of the teaching process, not a goal by itself. We have made a reflection about the way we normally evaluate (not in a negative way), the objective has been to make a simple comparison between the different ways of evaluation.

The workshop has not been strictly theoretical so we have exchanged our points of view (there have been teachers of Infant, Primary, Secondary School and academies so it has been more rewarding). We don't have to forget that the pupils are part of the process so they have to know how will they be evaluated.

We have overviewed the most common useful instruments: grades on a grid, comments, rubrics, quizzes/tests, homework feedback, classwork, oral exams... We have recognised that we usually try to be accurate but the evaluation process is subjective in a certain way and sometimes we have doubts about how can we evaluate abilities (writing, speaking...). Besides, we have to stick to the laws of education and in this way, we don't have "freedom" because we have to give a program in a certain time.

To finish I would say that the evaluation is an element of teaching process that needs more reflection.

Finally, Nayr Ibrahim (British Council Paris) made the closing plenary in Salon de Actos with her conference about **"growing up with multiple languages: a journey through different words"**. She has spoken us about how in historical times we were monolingual, but we became bilingual little by little. To explain all these factors he has made reference continually to historical attitudes concerning the monolingualism-bilingualism (against and for). For example Ellen Blalystok compared bilingualism with having Alzheimer. The main point has been how being monolingual, bilingual-polilingual affects the children (attitudes, maximising languages...). She has "revised" with us the language acquisition process since we are a child (mother language) and the acquisition of the second language... The ideas have been very interesting as it has made reference to historical facts that we didn't now and have had influence on our current situation (linguistically speaking)

To make a summary, I believe that attending this conference has provided me with some interesting ideas that can be easily put in practice in the classroom. Undoubtedly, teachers have new challenges and one of them is the professional training (new theories, ICT, available material...) and this conference has responded to all my expectations regarding it. Consequently, I am firmly convinced that teachers should attend this training session that takes place in September.

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