



**Joint Efforts for Innovation:
Working Together
to Improve
Foreign Language
Teaching in the
21st Century**

**Dolors Masats, Maria Mont
& Nathaly González-Acevedo (Editors)**

A book for the curious and passionate 21st century language teachers and teacher trainers.

Tired of reading about the wonders of technology enhanced project-based learning but not knowing where to seek inspiration to start to adopt this teaching approach? A team of in-service teachers, teacher trainers, pre-service teachers and researchers have worked together to present a simple, engaging and practical book to offer fellow education professionals stimulating ideas for their teaching practice.

Joint efforts for innovation: Working together to improve foreign language teaching in the 21st century offers:

- Inspiring classroom projects and innovative teaching experiences.
- A compilation of digital tools and resources for the foreign language classroom.
- Pioneering proposals to open up the classroom doors.
- Problem-solving and inquiry-based tasks that promote team work.
- Honest reflections from practitioners on their classroom practices.

This book includes

- accessible examples of teacher-led classroom research small-scale studies.
- calls for teachers to do research in their classrooms.
- personal accounts on the importance of school internships for pre-service teachers.

This book is an invitation for practicing teachers and teacher trainers to be creative and to develop learning skills, literacy skills and life skills.

Are you ready to become an innovative 21st century educator?



**JOINT EFFORTS FOR INNOVATION:
WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN
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Taking a trip down memory lane

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Introduction

This chapter is aimed to promote reflection towards practicum experiences, and launches several suggestions about how to make student-teacher training proposals a bit more useful and real. Although the opinion and arguments I will provide are solely based on personal experience and, therefore, subjective, it is my belief that they relate to experiences lived by other teachers and can serve to help teacher-educators to design more tailored training programmes for pre-service teachers.

During my Primary Education degree, within the framework of Erasmus student mobility grants, I could study in Finland. The proposals I will make here regarding the training of pre-service teachers are inspired by what I could observe there. I will critically reflect upon how school internships are organised in my home university with the hope of making a small contribution towards change.

My practicum experiences

Gaining practical experience during our training is fundamental for us, teachers. Research proves we all learn by doing. It is through engaging in practical and meaningful actions that we can learn what to be a teacher is like. If a hands-on approach to learning is useful and relevant for both, pupils and university students alike, why isn't this methodology implemented from day one at universities?

The Primary Education programme offered at *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* has one compulsory internship period in years two and three, and two periods in year four. Students have the chance to get to know a total of three or four schools. I conducted my last two practicums at *Escola Bellaterra*, a brilliant, innovative and reflective school in which I spent two trimesters. During that time, I became familiar with the methodology used at the school, with the kind of actions teachers planned for school festivities, with the training initiatives teachers had at hand and basically, on how to manage a classroom and plan learning on a daily basis. Moreover, both my school mentor and my university tutor were amazing and motivated educators able to get my teaching skills to flourish. They were demanding but supportive and encouraged me to take challenges. For example, I spent my practicum V with a 4th grade group that was reading Oscar Wilde in Catalan. I suggested that children could know the author better if we

established links between what children were learning in Catalan and what they were learning in English. With this objective in mind, I prepared a teaching unit based on Wilde's novel *The Canterville Ghost* (see annex 1). It was a challenge for the children and for me, but I could create a good learning proposal thanks to the support and guidance I received from my mentor. As a pre-task, children watched the cartoon movie, then they read the book, and finally, they retold the story using Scratch (a coding language that allows children to programme a story). At the end of the project, children had read a graphic gothic comic, had learnt to construct sentences in the past tense, and had practised how to use Scratch. As the story is set in the countryside, they also got a glimpse on that typical English landscape. All this was possible because my mentor was flexible with her syllabi and eager to include in it the proposals I made. With her, I also learnt that the teacher's role is to guide students more than to instruct them, that we should listen to their voices and take their interests into account, and that they look on us as models to follow and therefore we need to help them look at the world from a positive but also socially active perspective if we want them to become committed citizens, not only in the future but also in the present.

All teachers-to-be deserve to have positive training experiences during their internships. This means that universities should guarantee that teacher trainees attend innovative schools and are mentored by caring teachers. During our training, we need to learn how to observe students, how to listen to pupils and colleagues, how to choose ideas that promote relevant knowledge, how to relate knowledge to practice and how to provoke rich learning experiences. These "how to" actions can only be achieved if you are supported by committed in-service teachers and mentors. Thus, if we cannot attend innovative schools whose teachers can offer quality mentorships, our internships will not be worthwhile.

Apart from that, tuition at universities should also be different. If our methodology teachers tell us that certain teaching methods are outdated and should not be used in class, they should not employ them either. Similarly, our teachers told us about the importance of encouraging learners to develop their ideas and of being flexible enough to acknowledge that all learners are unique and have different abilities. However, in general, our university tutors gave us so many instructions on what to do during our internships that it was very difficult for us to fit their demands into our regular practices and still accomplish the expectations set by our school mentors on how to organise learning. University tutors and school mentors should work together and reach agreements with regards to the tasks student-teachers must perform at schools. This would undoubtedly reduce the stress and the pressure trainees suffer when they are asked to do different tasks for the two educators.

Lessons learnt thanks to my practicum experiences

During my internships I got the chance to experiment, to reflect and to discuss upon what learning English should be like in primary schools. How did I manage to do that? I had excellent school mentors who provided me with a lot of examples of good practices, who showed me they believed in me and who were flexible with their lesson plans to include my proposals in them. As I said earlier, they were very flexible but also highly demanding. When we discussed my lesson plans, they used to make me reflect on my proposals, on what I wanted to do and why. That allowed me to understand the needs and interests of the students better and to modify my initial plans to meet those needs. After implementing the activities I had designed, I could also reflect with them about what had worked and what had not. For me, those were powerful opportunities for learning and growing as a teacher.

At schools I also discovered that language learning can occur across the curriculum, you just need to see learning as a network of knowledge. I learnt to value games as learning tools. Games are repetitive as they trigger the use of certain language structures again and again. Through repetition children get to notice those structures, reflect about language usage and internalise new linguistic knowledge. But above all, I developed team work skills and learnt how to work collaboratively with my mentors. Co-teaching was a secure step into learning to be a teacher. I felt self-confident and relaxed as I knew my mentors were giving me their support and guidance. On those occasions I was taking the lead, they would only intervene if it was necessary; and even then, I felt my work was appreciated. Learning from my mistakes on the spur of the moment was priceless. Co-teaching allowed me to gain first-hand experience on how to manage the classroom dynamics, on how to adapt the lesson plans to unforeseen events, on how to observe students' interest and needs and act accordingly, on how to address learners, etc. I think co-teaching was also profitable for my mentors as my presence in the classroom made it possible to organise learning differently.

Proposals for improvement

Today I work as an English primary teacher in one of the schools in which I did my internships. Having my own classrooms help me reflect upon what I would have liked to learn while I was still a pre-service teacher. I would like to share my thoughts with the hope to contribute to improving teacher training programmes, at least at the university from which I graduated.

Learning must be meaningful, functional and real. This idea was repeated as a mantra in most of the courses I took as part of the requirements to obtain my

Primary Education degree. I used to reproduce it in my exams, but it was not until I took my internship at *Escola Bellaterra* that I was able to understand what it really meant. What I learnt in a year by being engaged in co-teaching tasks with my school mentor was 10 times more motivating and important for me as a teacher than what I had learnt during four years at university. Therefore, I think that the amount of time pre-teachers spend at schools working with in-service teachers should increase. School mentors and university teachers should establish solid bonds, not only to plan together what pre-service teacher education should be like, but also to conduct research on innovation and learning. This way research could be more practically based and school methodologies more updated.

Ideally, school internships should be carried out in innovative, reflective and updated schools, whose teachers work hand in hand with university teachers to bridge theory and practice. If what you observe in the classroom as a pre-service teacher does not differ significantly from what you lived as a primary student, you are not going to learn much and you would not be prepared for being an agent for change. This also implies that not all teachers could be mentors. Whereas there are schools whose school board is still debating where it is necessary to plan changes in their methodology, there are other schools whose teachers are implementing innovative educational approaches and reflecting on the effect they have on learners. Teacher trainees should learn at the best schools with the best teachers to guarantee a new supply of good teachers.

Finally, student placements should last for 10 months instead of two. Trainee teachers would then be able to observe students' progress through a whole academic year. During that time, pre-service teachers would be progressively asked to focus on particular issues (observe, for example, how to plan a lesson, how to develop students' literacy skills, how to handle discipline, how to cater for students with special needs, how to make teaching proposals to integrate language learning and disciplinary contents, etc.) and university courses should relate to them. Student teachers at the university would have to read articles and research papers to participate in discussion around the observation tasks conducted at schools. This way, they could also relate the theory to the practice and learning for teacher trainees would be meaningful, functional and real.

Concluding remarks

Teachers tend to reproduce the teaching models they have been exposed to. In order to guarantee that they promote innovation at schools, during their pre-service training programmes, teachers should observe and take part in the development of innovative proposals. There are two requirements for this to be possible. On the one hand, school placements should take a more prominent role in education degrees: there should be more and they should take longer. On the other hand, university teachers and school mentors should team up to bring innovation to schools and universities, and to design more hands-on proposals for pre-service teachers.

Acknowledgements

I want to send my best wishes to all the children who shared time with me at school, because thanks to being with them I have learnt to become the teacher I wanted to be. I want to thank all the teachers from *Escola Bellaterra* for teaching me that everybody has positive and valuable qualities we need to learn to observe and promote. My special thanks to all the readers who might get inspired by my words, or at least will reflect on my proposals.

Annex 1. Rationale of a teaching unit based on Oscar Wilde's novel *Canterville Ghost*

Curriculum core competences		Activities	
Cultural competences		Introducing a British writer; Observing the English countryside	
Audio-visual, linguistic & communicative competences		Watching a movie, reading a gothic comic, recording voice messages, retelling a story	
ICT competences		Retelling a story using Scratch, playing online educational games	
Learning to learn competences		Reflecting and assessing own work and the work of peers	
Sessions	Objectives	Contents	Assessment Indicators
Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To present the project and the final product • To create a routine for all the sessions • To reflect upon what happened in the movie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive listening: the <i>Canterville ghost</i> movie • Specific vocabulary related to the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be able to create a mental sequence of the tasks required to complete the project • To be able to understand the plot of the movie • To share their knowledge on the story in the movie
Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the plot of the story • To read accurately focusing on the pronunciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary on chapter one • Subjects and verbs in phrases and sentences • Simple present and past tenses • Intensive reading: the <i>Canterville Ghost</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read a text with good pronunciation and intonation • To be able to summarise the plot of the <i>Canterville Ghost</i> • To identify verbs on the book and establish a chronological line (past or present)

Session 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read accurately • To understand instructions • To reflect upon language use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive reading: the Canterville Ghost • Vocabulary from the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read a text with good pronunciation and intonation • To be able to understand and follow the instructions to play a game • To be able to identify subjects and verbs in a text
Session 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read accurately • To feel comfortable when reading in English • To reflect upon language use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules to create sentences using the present and the past simple tenses • Rules to formulate instructions 	
Session 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read accurately • To feel comfortable when reading in English • To understand the plot and important details in the story • To reflect upon language use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive Reading: the Canterville ghost • Vocabulary from the story • Rules to create sentences using the present and the past simple tenses • Following instructions • Retelling the book cooperatively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To construct simple sentences in past and present using previously learnt appropriate vocabulary • To classify verbs separating present simple from past simple forms • To be able to communicate verbally and non-verbally
Session 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To read accurately • To reflect upon language use • To create oral texts using good pronunciation and intonation patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive Reading: the Canterville ghost • Vocabulary from the story • Rules to create sentences using the present and the past simple tenses • Following instructions • Recording oral texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be able to retell the story orally, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures and accurate pronunciation and intonation.
Session 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reflect and assess the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying assessment criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be able to fairly self-assess and peer assess the activities done • To assess language learning throughout the various games played