

## Chapter 3

# Instructional Design

In this chapter we present the objectives and the activities planned in order to design the workshops to enhance eleventh graders speaking skill in English. We tried to explore how through contextualized learning opportunities presented in the workshops, students developed their speaking skill.

### **3.1 Main Objective**

The main objective of this proposal was to improve students speaking skill through workshops that aim at addressing their needs.

### **3.2 Specific Objectives**

- To provide students with contextualized opportunities to work on their speaking skill.
- To understand issues related to students' cultures and values.
- To make the learning of English a more meaningful experience through the creation of contextualized workshops.

### 3.3 The Theory of Education

The theory of education that we followed for the development of the workshops was social constructivism, which promotes individual as well as social growth. According to Vygotsky (1979), social constructivism emphasizes the critical importance of culture and the importance of the social context for cognitive development. The theorist further posits that the next four principles apply to a social constructivism philosophy:

- Learning and development are social collaborative activities.
- The zone of proximal development can serve as a guide for curricular and lesson planning.
- Learning should occur in a meaningful context and not be separated from learning and knowledge children develop in the “real world”.
- Out-of-school experiences should be related to the child’s school experiences.

### 3.4 The Approach

The communicative approach guided the design of the workshops. According to Nunan (1999), in the communicative approach language is a system for the expression of meaning. He argued that the primary function of language is interaction and communication. Celce-Murcia (2001) pointed out that, according to the communicative approach, it is assumed that the goal of language teaching is to develop the learner’s ability to communicate in the target language. It is also suggested that the content of a language course includes semantic notions and social functions, not just linguistic structures. Students regularly work in groups or pairs to transfer (and if necessary negotiate) meaning in situations where one person has information that the other(s) lack.

In addition, Celce-Murcia (2001) asserted that students often engage in role plays or dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to different social context. Also, she suggests that skills need to be integrated from the beginning; a given activity might involve reading,

speaking, listening, and writing; which was taken into account to design the workshops.

### 3.5 Theory of Learning and Language

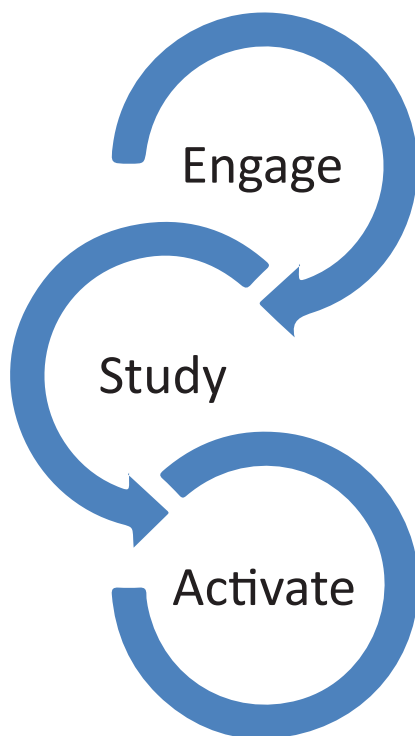
According to Nunan (1999), activities involving real communication, carrying out meaningful tasks, and using language that is meaningful to the learner promote learning. This is further explained by Stern (1981) when the author proposed that “language is learned when the learner becomes involved in real communication so that he or she is a user of the language rather than a detached observer who analyses and rehearses the language for later use” (p.139).

In the same way, Littlewood (2002) clarifies that “foreign language teaching must be concerned with reality: with the reality of communication as it takes place outside the classroom and with the reality of learners as they exist outside and inside the classroom” (p. 94). In this sense, the tasks in each workshop accounted for students’ surroundings and prior experiences such as agricultural practices in their region, celebrated festivals, famous music, and sports of the department of Boyacá.

In line with the previous statements, the interactional view of language which claims that “Language is the vehicle for the realisation of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social interaction among the individuals” (Richard & Rodgers, 2001, p.21), was the framework for this research. From this perspective, language is a tool with which speakers can build up and maintain social relationships.

### 3.6 Methodology

The methodology for the instructional design was based on the principles stated by Harmer. Thus, the workshops followed the next steps: Engage, Study and Activate (Harmer, 1998), as illustrated in the following diagram.



**Figure 1.** Principles of a language classroom used in the workshops.

**Source:** based on Harmer (1998)

In the first stage, Engage, the workshops presented students with activities that were motivating for them. Also, we included easy exercises so that students could develop them easily. Thus, this first part was usually composed by games and imageries. The main aim at this point was to engage students with the topic of the workshop (see Appendix A). The second stage: Study, focused on the language to be used in the workshops. In this part, we selected activities such as paragraph organisation, guessing vocabulary from context, filling gaps with appropriate language, etc. (see Appendix B). Finally, for the Activate stage, we proposed activities that guided students towards communicative purposes. These activities were usually carried out in groups (see Appendix C).

Along the workshops, students had the opportunity to work on individual bases, in couples or in groups. They were also asked to develop activities

in which they expressed their personal points of view, relate to others and use the language imaginatively. These elements helped them to feel more confident when trying to use the language.

Besides the aforementioned principles, we tried to account for what Nieto (2013) mentions when she refers to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. She says that this kind of pedagogy aims at respecting students' cultures, experiences and histories. Thus, we incorporated topics students were familiarized with: agriculture, music, sports and festivals. These topics were particularly meaningful because all of them were based on these eleventh graders' lives in rural zones in Boyacá. For instance, when addressing agriculture, there was emphasis on the way potatoes are grown. In the case of music, diverse genres were addressed but there was a special place for Jorge Veloza and his "carranguera" music. When the opportunity came to talk about sports, Nairo Quintana, the famous "Boyacense" cyclist, was the main character, and finally, in festivals, the outstanding festival La Tomatina that takes place in Sutamarchán was analyzed.

The following table presents the main topics of the workshops, the communicative function of each one as well as the general objectives. Aspects such as the skills developed and the grammatical topics are also shown.

**Table 1.** Content of the workshops

| WORKSHOP | TOPIC       | FUNCTION                                                                       | OBJECTIVE                                                    | SKILL                                       | GRAMMAR                              |
|----------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1        | Agriculture | Students will talk about the daily agricultural practices people do in Boyacá. | To describe and talk about the cultural endeavors in Boyacá. | Speaking<br>Writing<br>Reading<br>Listening | Simple present tense                 |
| 2        | Music       | Students will be able to talk about music using the present perfect tense.     | To talk about experiences regarding music.                   | Speaking<br>Writing<br>Reading<br>Listening | Present Perfect Tense                |
| 3        | Sports      | Students will be able to express opinions and likes about sports.              | To express likes and opinions about different sports.        | Speaking<br>Writing<br>Reading<br>Listening | Frequency adverbs and “wh” questions |
| 4        | Festivals   | Students will be able to describe different festivals around Colombia.         | To describe the most famous festivals around Colombia.       | Speaking<br>Writing<br>Reading<br>Listening | Simple Present Tense                 |

The selection of these topics and their inclusion of our students’ culture in the workshops helped us to start becoming responsive teachers. According to Nieto (2013), a responsive teacher views their students’ voices as a rich source for curriculum.

### 3.7 The Role of the Teacher

According to Brooks and Brooks (1993), the teacher is the person who will encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative; inquire about students’ understandings of concepts before sharing his/her own understanding of those concepts; encourage students to engage in dialogue with the teacher and with one another; engage students

in experiences that show contradictions to initial understandings and then encourage discussion; assess students' understanding through application and performance of open-structured tasks. Furthermore, the teacher has two main roles apart of the ones stated above. On the one hand, she/he is concerned with facilitating the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between the participants and the variety of activities. On the other hand, the teacher is an individual who acts independently within the learning-teaching group (Breen & Candlin, 1980; as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001). To account for what the previous authors mentioned, our role was to design the workshops to be developed. We also directed the activities that took place during the sessions.

Besides that, our role was also to engage ourselves in critical reflection. In other words, we also tried to understand who we were and how we fit into our students classrooms. While developing the workshops we were constantly examining our own assumptions about this particular rural context. We were also learning and unlearning new things about rurality in Boyacá. In this sense, we found it useful to have as part of our team a teacher-researcher who has shared the same culture of the students. This teacher was born and she grew up in a rural area, as all the students we were working with. Then, the activities presented in the workshops were constantly evaluated under the bases of our own cultural bias.

### **3.8 The Role of Students**

Students were active and constructed their own knowledge. Students had three main activities to fulfil. First, they had to develop the workshops, second, they had to present orally what they had achieved as part of the Activate stage and third, they were asked to share their learning experiences with the class. In this sense and because of the nature of this study, learners were central in the learning process.

### **3.9 The Role of Material**

The role of the material (workshops) was also relevant in this study. The workshops provided meaningful, realistic and contextualized learning opportunities for students in order for them to use the prior knowledge and to construct and assimilate new one. The material also had the primary role of promoting communicative language use.

### **3.10 Instructional Phases**

Having described the role of the teachers, the participants and the material, we will explain the three phases that we carried out to help our students to develop speaking skills in EFL through workshops, designed based on their needs.

### **3.11 Student's Profile on their Experience in EFL**

In order to account for students profile and experiences in regards to the language and the speaking skill, we applied a needs analysis. This first phase belongs to what Graves (2007) calls needs assessment. This stage encompasses the weaknesses or deficiencies students let the researchers know through the application of some research instruments. At this stage, we applied two instruments to know what the situation was and what they lacked regarding the English learning process. The field notes and surveys revealed that students needed to improve their speaking skill. We will deeply refer to these instruments in the chapter entitled Research Design.

### **3.12 Exploration of English Language Teaching through Students' Cultural Background**

In this phase we aimed at considering the way that our students reacted through topics that involved their own cultural experiences. Its purpose was to identify weaknesses and strengthens before tackling the workshops to avoid stereotypes and prejudices. For this purpose,

we informally asked them about their perceptions regarding the materials used to teach the language and if they considered it important and interesting to address their own realities in the materials for the English class.

### **3.13 Topic Selection**

Afterwards, we started to develop four workshops. At this point we reviewed and examined the content or topics students were supposed to study regarding their syllabus for the scholastic year. For instance, the syllabus for eleventh grade reads that they needed to study the present perfect tense, frequency adverbs, likes and dislikes, and so forth. Here it is important to highlight that the topics, as presented in the syllabus of the schools, were based on grammatical structures. As this proposal was carried out during the second term of the year, we were asked by the teachers in the English department to review the topics they had already studied. They also advised us to review the topics in a non-linear way. That is why, the topics in the workshops moved from present perfect to adverbs of frequency. When the content was utterly revised, we set up the goals and objectives we desired students to meet by using the workshops, as the main material for the English class.

### **3.14 Activities Selection**

The next procedure was to select and develop activities. This aspect was the beginning of scaffolding the body of the workshops. We began to design the activities taking into account the data portrayed in Survey 2, which aim to document students' perceptions, likes, preferences, and favorite topics they would like to talk about in their English classes. In the following lines, we will explain in detail how we developed this entire process.

The content of the workshops was related to students' interests, preferences, likes, needs, and empathy in terms of learning English as a foreign language. In this case, and based on the answers provided by students in a survey and an interview, we selected the following

general topics: agriculture, music, sports, and festivals. Likewise, the activities in the workshops favored the rehearsal of the speaking skill as well as the content related to the rural area. Among the variety of activities, the workshops included interviews, asking each other through games, finding someone who, acting from a script, role play and oral presentations, among others.

We also adapted the grammatical topics recommended in the syllabus to the content of the workshops, as suggested by students. Furthermore, when approaching the content itself, we included students' life experiences at the countryside, agricultural practices carried out by their parents and family, festivals or fairs celebrated in their region and what they meant to them. This process included items that were well-known in their surrounding context, which is the rural area. Hence, the content encompassed topics in regards to agricultural activities such as growing potatoes, corn, beans; items related to cattle, local music, and festivals. These topics were addressed because the nature of the workshops was to integrate prior knowledge and students experiences as much as possible in a contextualized way, which means to include information that surrounds students' lives and experiences to promote meaningful learning (Ausubel, 1968; Nieto, 2013).

### **3.15 Organization of Content and Activities**

This stage basically consisted of shaping the workshops, which appealed for the order in which the activities probably looked more coherent and appropriate to approach the teaching and learning process. As previously mentioned, we followed the Engage, Study and Activate sequence as proposed by Harmer (1998).

Finally, evaluation was conceived as a process and not as a result. It was systematic and everything students produced was valid and appreciated. Thereby, it was focused on communication, construction, and interaction among learners. Each workshop was assessed by the teacher and the students (see Appendix D).

In sum, the steps we followed to develop the workshops were the following: setting up students profile in terms of their needs, exploration of students' abilities and difficulties in terms of speaking, and the topic selection and development. Hence, in the following lines we present the research design adopted in this research study, which includes the approach, type of study, setting, population, and data collection procedures.

