PCS ANALYSIS

First and foremost, we have to remember that even though there may be some connections and even interesting ideas between a topic and the PCS, in this case topic 9; it would be a wrong approach to think that we can solve this PCS in a "topic style". That would leave the essence of a well written PCS (i.e. contextualisation, curricular connection or creative practical proposal) out of our exam. A different matter is the fact that we can take advantage of certain ideas in a topic on the grounds of methodological updated trends as for teaching pronunciation in a FL, as we shall see in the model.

According to the steps established as method, let us start with the first one to detect **key words** and important meaning, since it shall be highly clarifying to design our QWCI (remember this acronym refers to the elaboration of our mind map to gather the essential resolution guidelines).

In this case, we have not started with a difficult question, at least for this stage. The key words should be:

"Explain the way in which you intend to develop your learners´ phonological competence in an integrated didactic unit."

Apparently, the question is simple, but it entails plenty of difficulties since it is quite general and we shall have to "create a context". However, to start organising ideas from general to specific, it seems clear that we have to present the concept of phonological competence as essential component to develop the learners´ communicative competence (CEFRL).

On the other hand, there is also an interesting concept in topic 9 which can be taken to practice: the main aim as for teaching pronunciation is not to attain a native-like accent, but to develop in our students the abilities to understand different accents and to produce English above the "threshold level" of what can be understood (intelligibility).

The previous underlined words in the title explicitly demand candidates to think of an original educational response to this question in the context of a didactic unit. This brings about the need to design a teaching proposal which integrates pronunciation and communicative competence.

In this model we have born in mind **essential principles**: music and songs have the advantage of providing motivation and present the sounds in meaningful contexts; and at the same time music is always a powerful and motivating resource. Similarly, through the use of songs and rhymes students can be aware of connected speech (real English), so that they develop "ear training skills" to understand and produce.

We have already come up with the main guidelines for the resolution of the PCS: principal aim in the development of phonological competence and the use of songs to develop this ability in a "hidden way". The next step goes through the organisation of these main ideas (apart from some principles in topic 9, it may be useful to remember songs treatment in our didactic units and specific activities for example).

Once having seen that music is the principal framework to improve their phonological competence, we are going to **create a context** in line with recent trends in education (project based learning, PBL), claiming that students are more likely to be motivated and involved if they work actively towards the production of a common group project outcome. In these terms it may seem rather abstract; nevertheless, if we think of a **TV contest** where children collaborate in groups to "create a new Beatles song", which shall be recorded and uploaded to the FL blog, then it sounds more like a different thing: good teaching practice and integration of modern trends in relation to the FL area main aim.

As opposed to this, we can reflect on **what is not** a good option in this PCS. As we know, traditional approaches to pronunciation in a FL were based on decontextualised and isolated drills. This old-fashioned perspective may perhaps help distinguish some inconvenient sounds to be confused in English; but certainly it does not directly improve children's ability to communicate in English… Thus, it should not be an option.

The connection with the **legal framework** shall vary depending on the question. In this case, due to the fact that it refers to a **didactic unit**, it seems appropriate to spell out the most important **curricular components** in a unit, from objectives to evaluation; and without forgetting the opportunity to include an interesting **bibliographic reference** through the methodology. In this sense, it is preferable to consider updated bibliography (i.e. Libow and Stager, 2013) better than other important authors whose works seem quite far in time (i.e. Hymes, 1972. Littlewood, 1981). Of course, we can combine both to state that the PBL approach in FLT is not opposed to communicative language teaching, but rather a modern perspective under unchangeable principles (i.e. child active involvement, motivation, group dynamics, and the like).

In the presentation of the **practical proposal**, we have chosen a **structure** in which we first introduce the **final product** (distinctive and main feature in PBL methodology). Why is that so? Simply because in this methodology (PBL) children start by getting familiar with the kind of product they are expected to achieve at the end of the unit. The fact that the product is a TV contest implies the possibility to introduce technologies in several tasks; group children in heterogeneous and supportive teams; and not less important, create a sense of community and mutual help and respect.

Paradoxical as it may seem, starting with the explanation of the final product may be more illustrative to understand the sequence of possible activities which shall lead children successfully towards their active participation in the contest. Moreover, it is interesting to note how this sequence ranges from simple to more complex and demanding; and how the titles in the activities are a "knowing wink" for the TBE, who shall recognise original or "adapted titles" from The Beatles songs.

On the other hand, involving families in school life through regular collaboration contributes to strengthen the bonds amongst the members of the school community, and it favours a sense of relevance in the task. In any case, parental involvement always entails a series of benefits for an ideal teaching and learning environment.

And finally we must deal with the conclusion of the PCS. Remember that this part of the PCS should not be too long. In fact, a short but powerful idea tends to be more effective than a long explanation (summarising) about what has already been read. In this example, we have taken the strong relation between music, the teaching of phonological competence and motivation as cornerstones to try a strong closing, including a nice quotation about music and words.

Outline:

1. Introduction

2. Contextualisation

3. Curricular connection

4. Practical proposal

5. Conclusion

6. Bibliography

1. INTRODUCTION

As stated in the methodological orientations for the teaching of English in our **legal framework RD 126/2014** 28th February, the ultimate aim in foreign language teaching (FLT onwards) is the progressive development of the students´ communicative competence (in relation to competence-based learning). This perspective implies prioritising oral skills, especially at early ages; considering that the FL has to be linked to social practice and useful linguistic interactions.

On the other hand, an updated perspective on this issue requires analysing the concept of **phonological competence** in the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL, 2001)** as part of the students´ communicative competence and the complexity of the English phonological system. Similarly, in this practical case I shall deal with some motivating **learning strategies and techniques**, considering that the main objective in Primary Education is not to achieve a native-like accent, but to develop in students the abilities to understand different accents and to produce English above the "threshold level" of what can be understood. Indeed, this concept of **"intelligibility" (Harmer**, 2001) is indispensable to consider **phonetic correction**, since a communicative task should not be constantly stopped on the grounds of phonetic accuracy.

Given this, in order to solve this practical case, I shall first **set the context** in which my practical proposal shall be implemented; next I shall establish the **curricular relation** with the official curriculum; to finally present an original **practical proposal** and some **concluding remarks.**

2. CONTEXTUALISATION

Starting from the very beginning, the unit selected to illustrate this paper is entitled **"Meet the Fantastic Four from Liverpool"**. It is aimed at a group of 24 students in the **fourth level,** in which I shall bear in mind the natural heterogeneity, different abilities, learning styles and students´ preferences. In this final unit in the second term, the learners shall discover who The Beatles were and some cuts of their most famous hits; and considering the project-based learning (PBL) approach, they shall come up with a **final product. Libow and Stager** (2013) define the term project as kind of work which is substantial, shareable, and personally meaningful. In other words, when a teacher creates a well-designed prompt that capitalises the learners´ curiosity, they can embark on complex, long-term learning adventures. In this case, it is widely acknowledged that **songs are ideal and motivating learning scenarios** to get students familiar with the sounds of the English language, providing them with the opportunity of extra-exposure to the language out of the school setting through the **FL blog.**

3. CURRICULAR CONNECTION

It is commonly acknowledged that, planning the practical proposals in a unit should first go through the necessary **connection with the curricular elements.** Therefore, I shall now proceed to spell out the most important curricular relations as for phonological competence.

First and foremost, the **FL objectives (FLO)** established by the **regional curriculum** this unit specially contributes to are: FLO 1, related to listening comprehension; FLO 2, concerned with oral expression and interaction; FLO 5, dealing with the use of information and communication technologies (ICT); and finally FLO 9, directly aimed at the identification and practice of phonetic aspects, like stress, rhythm an intonation.

Although the four **content blocks** must be worked in an integrated way, the development of phonological competence is mainly covered in blocks 1 and 2, comprehension of oral texts and production of oral texts respectively. In more practical terms, in block one students shall be challenged to understand lyrics in a song; participate in the songs´ related work; as well as sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects. Additionally, blocks 3 and 4 are also involved, since learners must read and complete gapped lyrics; and hence write some new lyrics for the song "Yellow Submarine".

The **evaluation** of what students are expected to do along the unit implies considering the **evaluation criteria** and their specifications in the **learning standards**. In this sense, in this unit my students shall identify essential information in songs; learn some sociocultural aspects (where Liverpool is); and recognise basic sounds and rhythmic patterns in intonation; make a brief presentation and description of The Beatles members; sing some of the songs (different song for each group), as well as their final product (previously written according to models and the teacher´s support. Thus, the **main competences** involved are: linguistic communication competence, learning to learn, socio cultural and sociolinguistic competence and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

From a **methodological viewpoint,** the learners should be given **opportunities to practise** and express their own ideas in the FL along the communicative situations created by the teacher. In line with the **PBL model,** as previously pointed out, students must create a new version of a song and perform in guise of a **final product.** This process may start with a challenging guessing game to know some facts about The Beatles and the presentation of a similar final product. Being children songs lovers, this proposal intends to be a **motivating** contextualising framework to enhance the learners' capacity to understand and pronounce in the FL; and what is more, we can state that this is an ideal strategy to develop their linguistic knowledge through an enjoyable learning experience. Moreover, the active involvement of students in creating something "real" in a FL to be shared, presented, personalised and uploaded to a digital platform, shall foster not only real use of the foreign language, but also a high level of motivation and involvement on the part of the students.

Some final considerations in relation to the formal aspects of the unit have to do with:

The treatment of **attention to diversity** for those learners who find it more difficult to understand and produce in the FL; the **resources** for the different activities (Apps, smart board, Beatles **Youtube** videos, laptops and recording camera; and the cross-curricular links with other subjects like music.

4. PRACTICAL PROPOSAL

Once established the methodological framework in which we intend to develop the learners´ phonological competence; and the curricular connection according to the legal framework, I shall now proceed to define the **didactic product** I intend learners to create. The main intention through this contextualised proposal is to improve their phonetic abilities by guiding them towards active listening. In order to do so, the **motivating factor** shall be the participation in a **karaoke group contest** (KGC), which eventually shall be recorded and uploaded to the FL blog. However, considering the need to **challenge** my students and obtain a relevant **linguistic benefit**, the recorded versions shall have

to include a brief presentation of the song, based on prior investigation. Similarly, the **KGC rules** demand that children create their own lyrics, following some patterns.

The **phonetic benefit** in this product is obvious, since the creation of their own lyrics entails following some intonation patterns, so that the lyrics fix the music. On the other hand, the fact that the product involves a group competition in which all groups shall somehow be rewarded (i.e. teacher´s notes on the FL blog to remark the positive qualities of each singer), shall for sure motivate learners in this **"TV contest".** As FL teachers know, there is nothing like young students´ willingness to participate in a fun activity to obtain a didactic benefit. In this case, they shall have to **imitate the sounds** of the words to **produce a real-like Beatles performance**, which shall eventually be voted as in a TV program, counting with some FL teachers who shall perform the role of jurors. These "professionals" shall decide the group whose performance outstands due to **pronunciation accuracy**, **similarity in intonation patterns** between the original lyrics and their creative proposals, clothing imitation, and so on. However, experienced teachers also know that these time-consuming tasks (i.e. design and elaboration of Beatles costumes, recording videos, editing process, amongst others) require plenty of coordination amongst teachers and some support on the part of families. In this sense, I shall arrange a **meeting with parents** to present the project and ask for their collaboration to **elaborate the children's costumes and characterisation.** Undoubtedly, the families' involvement in the project shall turn into an additional motivating factor for my students, who shall perceive the relevance in their work.

The **role of the FL teacher** as organiser of the project is of prime importance, and includes tasks such as providing families with the ideas and suggestions for the elaboration of costumes; or suggesting them the **benefit in the activity** of **listening** to the selected Beatles song **with their children,** so as to encourage them to improve their pronunciation together. Similarly, this rewarding home activity shall create a **sense of achievement in students**, as they shall be helping their parents on English pronunciation, which in some cases may not be a smooth sailing. Although at home this work implies an individual performance for every student, the whole project is organised according to **heterogeneous groups**, stressing the prominent role of PBL and cooperative work to offer an educational response which considers the **natural diversity** in students.

The KGC is a **motivating learning scenario** for the development of the learners´ **phonological competence;** nevertheless, a successful product shall emerge out of an appropriate previous preparation. In this regard, I would like to spell out some of the activities that constitute the backbone of my project:

- **Song presentation**. Enjoy The Beatles . Listen for fun and pleasure.

- **Introducing the Beatles.** Glogster or smartboard presentation, images, videos, etc.

- **"Strawberry fields forever."** Through this joyful activity, children in small groups shall compete to be the first to choose the song, which shall be the starting point in their project. After being presented some songs; in groups they have to play a game, in which they have to collect as many **strawberry stickers** as possible. Basically, the groups have to match description sentences with photographs of John, Paul, George and Ringo. Every right sentence shall be awarded with two strawberries.

- **"Help! I need somebody."** Once each group is aware of the final product and the song has been chosen, students must complete a gapped text. In the procedure, students collaborate and assume different roles. They will be provided with a **tablet** and some **headphones**; weaker students shall be the listeners whilst advanced ones may be the writers. However, the intention is to exchange roles, so that all of them practise the different skills. I shall monitor the activity, checking progress and taking notes on the learners' attainment of comprehension and production learning standards. Similarly, I will indicate students the need to carefully listen to reproduce the sounds, so that their classmates can properly write the missing words.

- **"I feel fine!"** This activity is a **treasure hunt** in which students must find the answers to some questions in pre-selected websites. These questions shall lead to relevant information related to

The Beatles: i.e. where they were born; what music they imitated before being famous; "iconic" names such as Penny Lane, The Cavern; essential hits, and the like. Besides, they shall also find specific information in adapted texts in relation to their song. **This preparation is essential for the first part of the final product**, since before singing, students in turns shall make a presentation according to a previous script. In this manner, they will highlight some general information about the group; and also a concise introduction to the song they shall perform. Finally, it is worth noting that this activity brings about plenty of motivating sociocultural content.

- **"All you need is music."** In this group activity, I shall make use of the Kahoot app to design a contest in which students must answer questions about The Beatles. In turns, they shall read aloud the question and sort it out orally. From a methodological perspective, we cannot forget the weight of sociocultural factors for the development of the students´ communicative competence. Moreover, there is little doubt that music represents one of the most stunning cultural manifestations in any society, and The Beatles in particular are an icon of the British culture.

- **"Don't let me down."** It is time for students to be challenged and creative. In this activity they must gather their wits and collaborate to turn into **songwriters**. Being provided with a Karaoke version of their song, they must write new lyrics. In this complex task, they will be supported with patterns and clues to start building their song. Once written, checked by the teacher and rehearsed, we are ready to participate in the KGC. As it seems obvious, previous rehearsal is indispensable for learners to feel confident, especially those students who find it difficult to take the risk to use the FL on a daily basis.

- **"Here comes the KGC."** The day has come and everything is ready. The class has been turned into a TV studio. The students shall make a short oral presentation and will sing their song. The jurors will take notes and the audience shall remain respectfully silent until each performance has finished. I shall record the show and upload it to the FL blog.

5. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the development of phonological competence should be integrated in motivating proposals within the scope of communicative learning teaching. In this task, FL teachers should design appealing learning situations contributing to memorable learning. In this sense, we may assert without a shadow of a doubt, that music is one invaluable resource to develop the students´ accuracy in pronunciation and fluency in their speech. After all, as Christian Andersen said, "where words fail, music speaks".

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Libow, S and Stager, G "Invent to learn: making, tinkering and engineering in the classroom". Torrance, CA: Constructing Modern Knowledge Press, 2013.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- RD 126/14, 28th February, which establishes the basic curriculum at state level for Primary Education.

REFLECTION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Perhaps the first interesting conclusion is that there is not just one single way to approach a PCS, since different teachers may certainly come up with different answers. Despite this, we should try to bring the question to the own terrain in which we feel comfortable (modern FLT trends,

ICT…); considering what is commonly accepted nowadays as excellence in teaching practice in FLT (communicative competence in the times of competence-based learning).

Given this, although the PBL model has its origins in the task based approach born in the seventies, it is very likely that the PBL model would not have gained momentum if new technologies and the internet had not burst into the educational field. This implies an immediate consequence: it is of prime importance to consider in PCS resolution the weighty role of ICT and its multiple uses in the FL classroom.

Less effective in our opinion but also possible in the answer to this PCS would have been the presentation of the sequence of activities as previous preparation for the elaboration of children´ final product.

One of the prospective dangers when writing a PCS is that the result sounds too "theoretical". For instance, in this model we could have spelt out the plenty of benefits in the implementation of the PBL approach; and even the psychological foundations on why this approach is highly beneficial for children´s active involvement. But remember what has been said about pressure and time as two "enemies" that should be kept under control. In other words, if we spend too much time reflecting on those aforementioned aspects in the PBL approach, we shall not have enough time to develop a practical educational proposal illustrating the question. That would be very negative for us, since the most valuable part in the PCS (the one in which we show our abilities as FL teachers to design creative and attractive learning situations) may result poorly explained, without enough examples or not enough concretion.

On the other hand, creativity is something usually appreciated and well valued by the TBE. In this regard, we would like to remark that creativity can be found in the PCS as an inner feature in the whole proposal; and also in details like the names of the activities and its nature (what children do to attain the goals).

Before bringing this example to an end, let us reflect on some other contextualisation resolution guidelines for this same question:

- Instead of music, we could have used the context of stories and **storytelling** to be at the heart of a similar proposal based on projects development. In this sense, children may create their own story by following previous patterns and record it (roleplaying); or even act it out for younger children in a different grade.

- As for the use of **games** for children to practise the sounds of English in a "hidden way", we would concentrate ideas short and widely. It is acknowledged that children love games and get involved easily. Thus, gaming is one way of the most powerful tool in FLT to increase student`s motivation and improve teaching effectiveness.

- The use of ICT software for effective teaching and learning through the use of different activities, such as a camera to record children´s performances to promote autonomous learning strategies, foster an interest for English outside the FL class, amongst others. For instance, children would enjoy showing their performances in the FL blog to their parents; and may even develop a taste for listening simple oral texts, stories or songs in **Youtube**.

In any case, whatever the question, we have seen through the PCS Key Model that we can create a teaching learning context out of an apparently simple question. And even more, the necessity to design our teaching proposal under unchangeable principles in the teaching of a FL: motivation and active involvement, creation of a positive learning environment in which the child feels cared about and attractive learning proposals to create a desire to communicate in English.