

*EL CONOCIMIENTO (PRÁCTICO), DE UNA MAESTRA
DE INGLÉS, COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA DE PRIMARIA:
ESTUDIO PILOTO SOBRE LA HABILIDAD ORAL
DE SUS ALUMNOS*

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Resumen: *La actual tendencia internacional de que los niños aprendan lenguas extranjeras a más temprana edad que antes conlleva a cuestionar las formas de aprendizaje y enseñanza tanto de alumnos como de profesores. Este artículo da cuenta de los resultados de un estudio piloto de doctorado, cuya finalidad es explorar el conocimiento y creencias de una profesora de inglés como lengua extranjera en una escuela primaria respecto al desarrollo de la habilidad de habla en inglés de sus alumnos. Los resultados destacan que las prácticas docentes de esta profesora son holísticas y orientadas tanto al alumno como a la enseñanza lingüística.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: EDUCACIÓN; NIÑOS; APRENDIZAJE; CONOCIMIENTO PARA LA ENSEÑANZA;
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TEACHER COGNITION IN AN EFL PRIMARY CLASSROOM: A PILOT STUDY ON SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: The current international tendency of having children start learning foreign languages earlier than before, poses many questions about the teaching and learning methods of both learners and teachers. This article accounts for the results of a pilot Ph.D. study carried out to explore the knowledge and beliefs of a primary teacher of English as a foreign language regarding the development of her students' speaking skills in English. The results highlight the fact that this teacher's practices are holistic, learner-oriented, as well as language-teaching oriented.

KEYWORDS: EDUCATION; CHILDREN; LEARNING; TEACHING KNOWLEDGE; PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT-

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INTRODUCTION

Since foreign languages started to be taught to children earlier at school, the fact that there is a shortage of EFL teachers prepared specifically for teaching young learners has been unveiled, among other things. There is an urgent need for teacher education programs and teacher's continual professional development (CPD) courses tailored specifically for kindergarten and primary instruction. Current trends on teacher education consider that research on teacher cognition can be one of the sources in which the design of CPD courses can be based on (Johnson, 2009). This pilot study aims to contribute to this area by giving voice to an experienced EFL primary teacher. The main theoretical framework is based on the work carried out by Simon Borg (2003, 2006, 2009, 2012) and Devon Woods (1996) on teacher cognition, as well as that of Simon Phipps and Simon Borg (2009) on the relationship between beliefs and teaching practices.

TEACHER COGNITION AND TEACHER BELIEFS

Teacher cognition (TC) is a subfield of applied linguistics that studies the “unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching” (Borg, 2003: 81). More specifically, it is an inclusive psychological construct that refers to the complex, practically-oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs language teachers draw in their work (Borg, 2006).

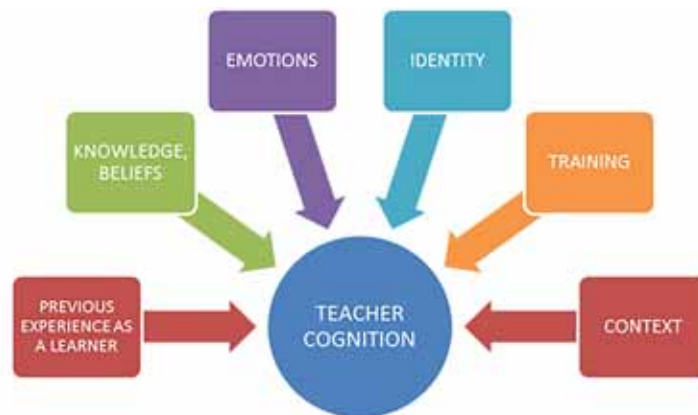
This field emerged about forty years ago and, in contrast to the previous behaviorist approach in which teachers were trained to perform methodological teaching models considered effective in terms of learners' learning, the TC approach views teachers as genuine knowledge creators who, alongside other sources, also learn from their teaching practice (Verloop, van Dreil and Meijer, 2001). They are currently seen as developers of unique ways of teaching that are the result of the interplay of the elements presented in figure 1 and the particular contexts where they practice their profession.

Simon Borg has been considered the researcher who contributed the most to the emergence of TC as a quite independent field in applied linguistics. He openly stated that understanding TC is central to the process of understanding teaching and highlighted its “potential for deepening our understanding of what it means to become and to be a teacher” (2006: 1-2). Alongside the development of his own empirical research, he wrote several reviews on TC in 2003, 2006 and 2011. All of them were

very helpful because they gave a framework to the study of teacher cognition, which consisted of the following pillars (Borg, 2006: 271):

- The nature of language teacher cognition
- The scope of language teacher cognition research
- The relationship between language teachers' cognition and classroom practices
- The impact of context on language teachers' cognition and practices
- The processes of pre-service language teacher learning
- The relationship between cognitive change and behavioral change in language teachers
- The nature of expertise in language teaching
- Methodological issues in the study of language teacher cognition

FIGURE 1: THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE CONSTRUCT OF TEACHER COGNITION



SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM BORG, 2003: 82.

For this pilot study, I considered several issues presented by Borg. First of all, I contemplated his definitions of TC and the rationale of this construct. Secondly, I chose the third bullet above, as the topic of the pilot study. Third, I based the methodological design of this article on his analysis of the methodological issues in the study of language teacher cognition (eighth bullet).

Regarding Devon Woods (1996), there are several aspects of his work on TC that I took into account for this project. The first one has to do with his focus on teachers' interpretations and understanding of classroom events. These unfold a framework for studying TC made up of teachers' knowledge, assumptions and underlying beliefs, as well as their perceptions about classroom events. In this same line of thought, he points out the fact that there is an "implicit neglect and disregard for what the individual teacher brings to the learning experience of the students in the field of second and foreign language teaching" (Woods, 1996: 2).

Although Woods draws the rationale of his book *Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching* (1996) from three specific areas of research (method debates, focus on the learner and classroom-centered research), the gaps he mentioned about our understanding of language teaching remain as rich research fields as when he wrote his book twenty years ago:

1. Research has not described the structure of classroom language teaching in pedagogical terms, *i.e.*, in the context of larger units of course structure and its underlying objectives.
2. It has not examined the processes by which language teachers plan and make decisions about their teaching (both for and in the classroom).
3. It has not examined the language teaching/learning process as it is perceived and interpreted by the participants themselves—in particular the teacher. (1996: 11)

In this pilot study, I considered the third gap. More specifically, I wanted to contribute to the field of TC by investigating one of the aforementioned participants: a young learner teacher. I tried to document her knowledge and beliefs about her teaching practices regarding her students' speaking skills. As stated above, although twenty years have passed since Devon Woods stated those existing research gaps, the specific area of primary EFL teacher cognition is still under-researched (Borg, 2006). A review done by Mexican university researchers on the existing published research in Mexico about teaching and learning foreign languages—theses and articles—from 2000 to 2011 showed a great scarcity of investigations in the fields of TC and in young EFL learners (Ramírez, 2010, 2013).

Teacher's beliefs

I acknowledge that there are many different definitions of Teacher's beliefs, as well as the fact that different terms have been used to describe similar concepts (Borg, 2006). For the purpose of this study, I opted for Phipps and Borg's brief definition: "propositions about all aspects of their work which teachers hold to be true" (2009: 381). I also considered their view on some of the main features of teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning (Borg, 2006; Phipps and Borg, 2009):

- They have a powerful effect on teacher's pedagogical decisions.
- May be powerfully influenced (positively and negatively) by teachers' own experiences as learners.
- Act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experiences.
- Can exert a persistent long-term influence on teachers' instructional practices.

As it could be observed in figure 1, teacher's beliefs are a part of TC. I present this as a separate topic because it is a construct that helps explain much of the implicit knowledge teachers apply in their classrooms.

THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF EFL MEXICAN YOUNG LEARNER TEACHERS

The purpose of describing these teachers' professional profile is both to show the typicality (in terms of professional credentials) of the teacher, subject of this study, and to show the importance of giving voice to experienced teachers regarding the rationale of their teaching practices. As often as not, the main focus has been on the relationship between teachers' pedagogy and students' achievement, whereas the teachers' knowledge about teaching in specific contexts has not been considered as frequently. This kind of studies can inform the field of teacher education in a most necessary way.

Recent research from different geographical backgrounds shows that the professional profile of EFL young learner teachers can be quite heterogeneous. The reasons for this are diverse: on the one hand, teacher national and international education programs do not usually offer subjects related to teaching children; on the other hand,

although several undergraduate programs and private institutions are starting to offer training on teaching EFL to young learners, the fact is that many educational policy makers have launched national programs which offer English as a school subject at primary school and kindergarten, before there were enough English teachers or generalist teachers well-trained for this task (Rixon, 2013).

In Mexico, when the National English Program was launched in 2009, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) stated that 99 500 young-learner-EFL teachers would be needed to reach national coverage in 2020 (Sayer, Mercau and Blanco López, 2013). Internationally, to face the lack of EFL teachers educated to teach English to children, English coordinators and other educational stakeholders decided to hire people with a less specific professional profile. Three main categories of EFL teachers were detected: a specialist of English, the homeroom or the generalist who teaches the children most of the subjects, and teachers who lack a professional qualification as teachers, but speak English (Enever, 2014; Garton, Copland and Burns, 2011; Rixon, 2013).

Shelagh Rixon's survey (2013), conducted in 64 countries around the world (including Mexico), showed that different regions can have different percentages of each of those teachers' professional profiles. In Mexico, a survey carried out to study the professional profiles of primary EFL teachers who belonged to the National English Program in Basic Education (NEPBE) and their training needs, showed a slightly different set of teachers' professional profiles (Sayer, Mercau and Blanco López, 2013).

The survey was completed by a sample of 370 teachers from 24 states. Half of the individuals (52.4 %) held a B.A. in teaching English as a foreign language. The second group (18.6 %) were teachers who held a secondary English teacher diploma (called "normalista" in Mexico). The remaining 30.5 per cent of the sample were teachers that had been hired because they knew English and held certificates to prove it (Sayer, Mercau and Blanco López, 2013: 10-13). In the next paragraph a brief description of each profile will be presented.

Mexican undergraduate programs on teaching EFL usually have a strong methodological and linguistic approach to teaching. Many students of these programs learn the foreign language and reach different levels of English proficiency depending on their entrance level and the quality of their English classes. The main drawbacks of these teacher education programs are that there is usually a lack of subjects about teaching young learners, and that students do not have access to a practicum.

The second profile consists of teachers whose training was targeted specifically for teaching English to secondary students. This group of teachers has the advantage of getting experience through a practicum in public schools, which allows them to learn many of the practicalities of teaching in that sector, as well as learning classroom management techniques. Unfortunately, as in the first profile described above, this one also lacks specific training on teaching English to young learners or to very young learners (kindergarten level).

The third profile is represented by a group of teachers that have studied a B.A. in a different field from EFL teaching, but, as mentioned above, are nonetheless hired because of their proficiency in English.

This survey also showed that the three groups of teachers opted to take several CPD courses and to obtain English certificates. For example, 37.4 per cent had taken the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) and 72.7 per cent the institutional TOEFL exam. Besides, many in-service teachers held a teacher's certificate which is usually obtained after a sixth-month or a one-year course on EFL teaching methodology. To sum up, it is worth mentioning that 50 per cent of the sample of teachers surveyed stated that one of their main priorities was their need and interest in getting specific training for teaching young learners. The subject of this pilot study belongs to this third group which could also be described as teachers who learn their trade mainly by teaching.

THE STUDY

The objective of this project was to analyze a primary EFL teacher's knowledge and beliefs about the development of her students' speaking skills in English. It was also designed and developed with the intention of trying out the data collection methods before starting the Ph.D. main study.

The research setting was a small private school in Mexico City. Internationally, the procedure to be allowed to do research in primary schools is quite strict. In this case, I was informed that I needed to get a permission from the SEP main offices to observe classes at government schools. I tried to obtain it, but this process took too long; however, since I was also interested in carrying out the study in any of the sectors (public or private schools), I started visiting private schools.

The selection criteria I had designed for the private sector was that the school had EFL classes every day with small groups of students, which could facilitate the data

collection process. I also considered the *convenience* criteria and looked for schools which were not far from my usual routes and where I knew some members of the staff. The director of one of the private schools I visited was interested in getting CPD for his staff in exchange for my permission to do my research project there, as long as the teachers were also interested in my project. What is more, he hired me as a secondary teacher.

The ethical issue was taken into account before starting the study. It implied having the university where I am studying the Ph.D. review the project design and approve it. Once this process was over I asked the subject of this study if she wanted to participate in it and explained to her what it would be like in terms of her participation. When she accepted, the school director reviewed the consent letters for the teacher and her students' parents so that they could sign them. It is worth specifying that anonymity matters were also dealt with and that they had already been given the university approval according to their regulations.

The study subject is a 39-year-old person who has been teaching English to children for about 12 years and has been a member of the school's staff for almost three years. As mentioned above, her professional profile belongs to the third type described in the previous section.

She has a B.A. in a field different from EFL, but later decided to become an English teacher. Her English level was fairly good because she had attended a bilingual primary and secondary school, and had spent some summer vacations at camps in an English-speaking country. Her teacher training was at a private language institute where she took English courses for about a year. When she completed the advanced English level, she was invited (by that same language institute) to teach some English courses addressed to children, teenagers and adults. She was also given a certificate, usually known as "Teacher's," which is a yearly methodology course on general teaching.

When I told her about this pilot study, we agreed on having her third and fourth grade students perform a "show and tell" (ST) presentation about their pets. We selected this activity for several reasons. On the one hand, because the children had already done an ST on different topics so this activity was not something completely new for them. On the other hand, I considered the fact that this kind of activity is usually proposed in many school contexts to give the children the opportunity to share something meaningful to them, either in their mother tongue or in a foreign language. Lastly, I thought that this activity was a good example of a classroom oral activity.

The research questions were:

- What are the teacher's aims in having the children perform the ST activity?
- According to the teacher, are any of these aims related to the children's development of oral skills in English?
- What is the teacher cognition (knowledge, beliefs) about the development of her students' oral ability?
- Does the teacher apply techniques of corrective feedback? If she does, what is the teacher cognition (knowledge and beliefs) about them, in relation to the children's development of speaking skills in English?

Methodology

It was a qualitative case study about a quite experienced in-service EFL primary teacher. The research design consisted of two semi-structured interviews, the observation of the activity, field notes, and a stimulated recall session on the audio-recorded ST (Duff, 2008, 2012).

Stimulated recall (SR) is an introspective method in which the research subject is asked to watch a part or all the audio —or video— of the recorded session, so that they try to recall the thoughts he or she had while having the session. According to some researchers' theoretical descriptions of this research method, the proper and more reliable application needs to occur within 48 hours after the recorded event, since it is believed that if it is done afterwards memory decay will not allow the participant to re-live the thoughts he or she had during that event (Gass and Mackey, 2000). Other researchers are not so specific about the exact time span in which the SR session must take place (Calderhead, 1981).

I became a member of the school staff a few months before this pilot study. Therefore, my relationship with the participant was that of a colleague —we were both teaching EFL— and I was also the leader of the monthly CPD sessions.

Data collection

There was a period in which I got acquainted with the research setting before this pilot project began. I visited the participant's classes to have the students get used to my presence, and sometimes, I would also play games in English with them. The interviews were carried out in the participant's mother tongue (Spanish), because although she is fluent in English, I believed that she would feel more comfortable explaining her ideas and beliefs in her native language.

The first interview was about the participant's professional profile as an EFL teacher, the second one was about the participant's objectives and expectations for the session. It is worth mentioning that the latter was done right before the ST session.

Each group of students performed the ST in their classroom while I took notes and observed. Regarding the performance, most of the students had prepared a cardboard with a picture of their pets to show to their classmates. They also had notes at hand to check them in case they forgot something. During the ST performance, third graders did not "tell" their classmates about their pets; instead, they read their notes. In contrast, most fourth graders were able to talk about their pets without the need of reading their notes.

Notwithstanding that I had planned to have the SR as soon as possible after the students' performance, I could do it six days after the ST session, due to the participant teacher's agenda at school.

The SR session took place at the school library a day when the children were not taking classes. First, the participant and I agreed on the way we would use the SR procedure. Then, I invited the participant to start giving her general impression on each group's performance and to talk about the students' individual performances. To do the latter, I played the recording of the first student's performance and invited the participant to make comments on it. This was the procedure of the whole session; however, in certain occasions, the participant preferred to talk about different students' performances without having previously listened to the recording. In addition to her comments on the students' performance, in her narrative she described in great detail her personal view about each child. She referred to several aspects: the EFL learning process, their personality, their physical development, and the family support—or the lack of it—regarding homework.

As for the theoretical feature about SR already mentioned, although the session was carried out a week after the children's performance, the teacher seemed to be able to recall quite vividly each student's performance.

Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed, categorized, and coded, considering the emergent topics. These were then related to the research questions to find out if they could be answered.

The answer to the first research question (the participant's objectives in the ST session) was to assess her students' speaking skills. Mainly, she wanted to observe how they use certain grammatical structures to identify if they were able to do it

properly. Below, I quote her words from the interview, previous to the children's ST performance:

Researcher: Ah! A "show and tell" about their favorite pet. Er... tell me, please, what the "show and tell" is like. It is not the first time they do it, is it?

Participant: My idea is that they get to know how to express themselves, how to use structures and complete sentences, and that they can talk about any topic. This time they have to talk about their pet.¹

Additionally, she considered that this kind of activities can help the children to overcome the fear of speaking in front of their peers:

Participant: I want to see how they express themselves; to see if I'm failing, if I am explaining the structures well; if they overcome the fear of speaking in public and if they are using the things correctly [she meant the things they have seen in the course].²

The link between these objectives and her beliefs about the development of her students' speaking skills (second and third research questions) was that this kind of activities are an opportunity for the students to use the grammatical structures and to produce complete sentences, which in her opinion, favors the development of their oral ability. Furthermore, when she explained this process of development she acknowledged the next language acquisition path shown in Figure 2.

The following quote taken from the SR session shows some of her beliefs about the process of language development from the mother tongue to the target language:

1 Original transcriptions in Spanish will be provided as footnotes henceforward: "Investigadora: ¡Ah! Un 'show and tell' de su mascota favorita. Este... cuéntame cómo es el 'show and tell'. ¿Porque no es la primera vez, no?"

Participante: El chiste, mi idea es que ellos sepan expresarse, sepan usar estructuras y oraciones completas y puedan hablar de cualquier cosa. En este caso, ahora les tocó de su mascota".

2 "Participante: Es ver cómo se expresan. Ver si estoy fallando, si voy con las estructuras bien. Si ellos ya pierden el miedo de hablar en público y si me están ocupando las cosas correctamente".

Participant: What I expected; what I always expect from the “show and tell” is that they know how to talk. Always, always, each time, better. Yeah, better and better. Well, because there are some kids who find talking in English more difficult. Others have a very fluent English. What I expect is that they teach themselves to express their ideas better, that they use the structures correctly, because sometimes they use Spanglish which I don’t like, but I have to deal with it. With that we are making progress. That’s what I want with each ST, to see their progress, their [oral] expression. And that’s the aim of the ST.³

FIGURE 2: SPEAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT



Another issue that emerged prominently in the data analysis was the way she adjusts her teaching practices to the children’s different learning styles and needs. I will illustrate this by quoting her narrative about two students. The first case refers to a girl who, according to her, finds learning EFL difficult and does not engage in the activities with ease:

Participant: I think it is a language she doesn’t like, so it’s hard for her. For example, if I give a vocabulary task with illustrations, [she imitates the girl] “Oh yeah, that’s nice!

3 “Participante: Lo que yo esperaba; lo que yo siempre espero del ‘show and tell’ es que ellos sepan expresarse. Siempre, siempre, pues cada vez mejor. Ahora sí, cada vez mejor. Pues porque hay algunos a los que les cuesta más expresarse. Otros que lo traen así muy fluido su inglés. Es lo que yo espero que ellos se enseñen a expresarse mejor, a utilizar las estructuras bien porque luego utilizan su *spanglish*, que no me agrada, pero bueno. Que con eso vamos mejorando. Eso es lo que yo trato de ver con cada ST cómo va siendo su avance, su expresión. Y para eso es el objetivo del ST”.

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I like to do that.” So I usually try to put the formulae with a nice little face so she gets interested in it and pays attention and remembers it. Because it is actually hard for her.⁴

The quotation above describes how she prepares nice illustrations and formulae to attract them student’s attention, in order to help them to get engaged in the activities and remember the topic of the lesson.

The second case is a very bright child who did not try to speak English in class and did not get involved in the activities properly.

Researcher: He was your student last year. How was his speaking skills development? I mean, did he used to talk less when he was in third grade or what was it like?

Participant: He used to talk less.

Researcher: How do you think he improved?

Participant: Well, I believe that it was because I stayed close to him. Because I realized he did understand. It was just that he didn’t want to do the tasks. It was easy for him to say everything in Spanish. Besides, last year he was much more restless. He’d rather be lying on the floor than speaking English with me or paying attention. It was like: “Sit down. I’ve explained it already. Now you explain it to me. Do this exercise.” And usually, since I saw he knew a lot I have him work with D and E because last year they were a bit slow, so he could help them. Yeah, I had to check on him all the time: “You can speak English to me. You can remain seated.” I believe that I was such a pain for him [laughs]. Let’s see, but I did notice his changing, changing [for good].⁵

4 “Participante: Se me hace que es un idioma que no le gusta, entonces le va costando trabajo. Por ejemplo, si le pongo *vocabulary* y le pongo dibujos, [imita a la niña] ‘Ah eso sí es bien padre. Eso me gusta hacerlo’. Entonces normalmente procuro ponerle pues así que las formulitas, que la carita bonita para que muestre interés y entonces se le grabe. Porque sí le cuesta mucho trabajo”.

5 “Investigadora: [refiriéndose al alumno] Lo tuviste el año pasado. ¿Cómo fue su evolución en la expresión oral? Quiero decir, ¿hablaba menos en tercero o cómo era?

Participante: Hablaba menos.

Investigadora: ¿Cómo crees que logró avanzar?

Participante: Pues yo creo que como estuve encima de él. Porque yo veía que sí sabía. Nomás que no

The participant refers to—at least—three characteristics of her student (he knew English, he could work and behave better, he evolved from what he was like in the previous school year) so she paid close attention to help him work better and make him aware of his own knowledge. She also assigned him the task of tutoring two slow-working students. In the last part of her quote, she refers to the student's development both in his use of English and his behavior. As for the latter, she describes how difficult it was for the child to remain seated in third grade and how he used to like lying down on the classroom floor.

Corrective feedback

In the following pages, I will describe her techniques of corrective feedback (CF) (fourth research question), which were performed both before and after the students' ST session. During the week previous to the students' ST performance, she checked and corrected their written texts about their pets. Then, she had them read these texts aloud to give them individual feedback on grammar and pronunciation issues. Immediately after the data collection session, she gave them—once again—individual feedback on the grammar and pronunciation mistakes detected during the performance.

The theoretical framework of corrective feedback is related to the different language acquisition theories researchers align to. There are many categories of corrective feedback that are applied depending on the way and the circumstance in which the correction is provided (Russell and Spada, 2006). They are described as a *continuum* that extends from explicit correction on one end, to implicit correction on the other: explicit correction, clarification requests, metalinguistic information, elicitation, repetition, and translation (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Panova and Lyster, 2002 in Rezaei, Mozaffari and Hatef, 2011). The theory of CF also describes several kinds of recasts.

quería hacer las cosas. Se le hacía muy fácil hablarlo en español o decirlo en español. Además de que el año pasado era mucho más inquieto. Él prefería estar tirado en el piso a lo mejor, que hablándome en inglés o poniéndome atención. No, sí era de: 'Siéntate. Ya lo expliqué. Ahora tú explícame. Haz un ejercicio'. Y normalmente como yo veía que sabía mucho lo ponía con D y E porque el año pasado eran más lentitos para que les ayudara. Era de estar encima de él: 'Puedes hablarme en inglés. Sí puedes estarte sentado'. Yo creo que de tanta lata que le di, ya [ríe]. A ver. Pero sí he visto una evolución, una evolución”.

In this pilot study, the participant's narrative provided information about her explicit corrective feedback and recasts. In the preparatory sessions in which the children showed her the texts about their pets, she overtly corrected the children's pronunciation mistakes (explicit CF) and helped them choose which structure sounded better when she gave them the correct forms (recast). Then, following the prescriptions of the communicative approach, she did not interrupt the students' ST performance to correct them. Her rationale for this is that, in reading tests or oral presentations, she does not correct them right away, she just takes notes because she wants to assess their oral ability to find out which topics she needs to teach again. Below there is a quote with her explanation:

Participant: Because in that moment, for example, I do the same when we are reading in class, I do correct them but when it's the reading test I tell them: "I won't say anything." They read and although they make mistakes I write them down but I don't correct them. Because I want to see how much they have improved and how well I'm doing things. Otherwise I have to retake it [to cover or teach that again]. So then [she's again describing the ST performance] I had my notes and so I call them one by one with their notebooks: "Tell me, why did you pronounce this and that way? You should have pronounced it this way." So I corrected them, but after their oral presentation, because when they are reading or presenting, as I tell them: "I forget everything."⁶

Findings

From the participant's narration in the SR session, I conclude that her teaching practices had the following aims:

- Motivating students
- Attending to individual differences and learning styles

⁶ "Participante: Porque en ese momento, haz de cuenta, hago lo mismo cuando estamos leyendo en clase, sí los voy corrigiendo, pero cuando es examen de lectura yo les digo: 'Yo no digo nada'. Leen aunque tengan errores, voy apuntando todo, pero los dejo. Los dejo para ver qué tanto me han avanzado, qué tanto estoy haciendo bien las cosas. Si no, me regreso. Entonces, según yo tenía aquí mi hojita y después los hice pasar con su cuaderno: 'A ver, ¿por qué pronunciaste así y no pronunciaste así? Se decía así'. Entonces ya los fui corrigiendo, pero ya después de la exposición, ya a la hora de que hablan ellos o exponen, yo no, como les digo, 'se me olvida todo'".

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- Understanding developmental changes
- Building a relationship with each student
- Expecting a good performance from each of them
- Setting challenges for the group but, at the same time, considering their different aptitude and attitude

Her corrective techniques seem to show that she believes one way of helping students to improve their speaking skills in English is by explicitly showing them their pronunciation mistakes and helping them recognize the correct use of grammatical structures.

It was observed that her objectives in that particular ST session were multiple. Although she explicitly pointed out her intention of assessing the students' pronunciation and their use of grammatical structures as her main objective, she was also very concerned about the individual challenge her students were facing as they spoke in public in front of an outsider (the researcher) and their peers, and as they had to find the information they wanted to share in the foreign language.

The way she chose to perform the SR session showed that her view about her students' EFL development is more holistic and student-centered, than language-oriented. In other words, she spent more time narrating the students' ST performance, their actual behavior, personality and development, rather than assessing their pronunciation and use of grammatical structures.

Regarding their language performance, she just mentioned—in general terms—that she was proud of each of her students and that some of them had surpassed her expectations, while others could have had an even better performance.

In terms of time, it is worth mentioning that, during the interviews, she spent most of it narrating children's distinctive features and the way she tried to accompany their personal development and learning. One can perceive in her narrative that she is able to develop a special relationship with each child and that this helps her to adjust her teaching practices to the group, as well as to each student.

CONCLUSIONS

The main categories that emerged from the participant's narrative showed that, according to her practical knowledge, cognition and beliefs, young learners' EFL

learning and the development of their speaking skills are immersed in a complex framework containing several elements: children's motivation, development, learning styles, attitude, and aptitude towards learning the foreign language, the teacher's relationship with the group and with individual students, as well as the support from children's parents. It also showed the centrality of the learner in the process, which is a distinctive feature of young learner teachers who identify themselves with a "humanist" approach to teaching, characterized by looking at children holistically and by building relationships of trust with them (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). From the start, the participant's rationale of the "show and tell" comprised both language objectives, such as assessing their linguistic performance (mainly grammar and pronunciation), and objectives of a different kind, such as observing how students lived the challenge of speaking in front of the group.

More often than not, in courses and event presentations at congresses about teaching EFL to young learners, researchers and experts emphasize the importance of both teaching techniques that promote EFL learning, and children's characteristics as learners and language learners.

This pilot study on teacher cognition, teachers' beliefs and practical knowledge provides a valuable insight from an in-service teacher that can contribute to inform the fields of teacher education and CPD. Through the lens of the teachers' views about their students, and about the teaching and learning process, researchers could also collect current information from actual contexts regarding students' profiles which could be useful to update the field of pedagogy.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the limitations of this study. On the one hand, it was a pilot study meant to try out a methodological design and, at the same time, document the participant cognition and beliefs. On the other hand, it focused on just one participant who gave the rationale of only one activity. Although limited, the contribution of this pilot study is that it shows that EFL primary teacher cognition and practices may not be language-oriented only. Young learner teachers may have children's general well-being and individual development as one of their main concerns. In this case, children's holistic well-being is pursued persistently and, at the same time, she teaches EFL in creative ways.

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