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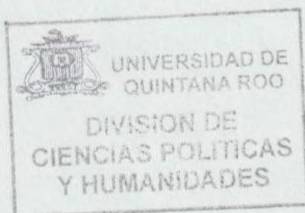
Teaching Strategies to Achieve NEPBE Standards in  
Primary School

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**Monografía en la modalidad de memoria por experiencia  
profesional**

Para obtener el grado de  
**Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa**

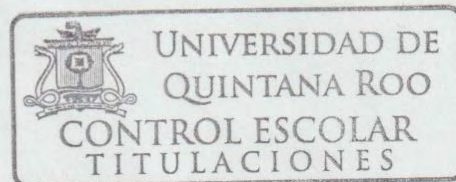
PRESENTA  
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Chetumal, Quintana Roo, México, enero de 2020





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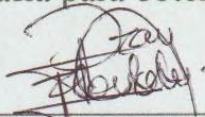
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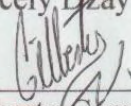
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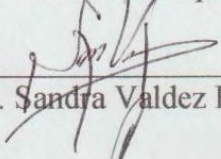
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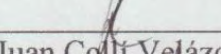
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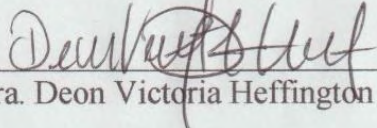
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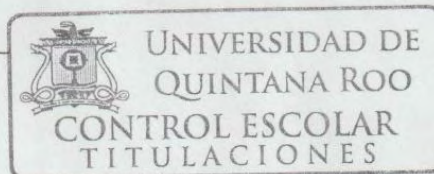
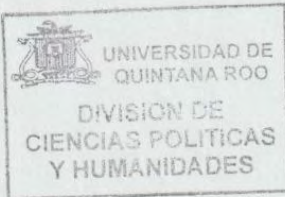
  
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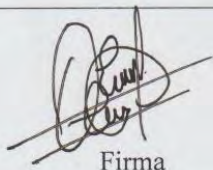
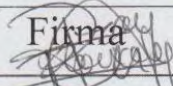
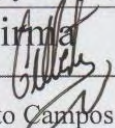
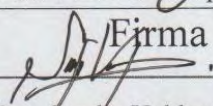
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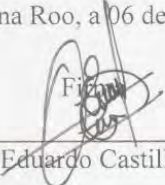
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César Eduardo Castillo Ojeda

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning is a process in which knowledge or any skill is internalized in a person's brain and becomes commonplace for him/her (Caroll, 2001). This new knowledge or skill may have been learned empirically or it may have been taught by someone else that works as an instructor that guides the learner to the target object (Lantolf, 2012). This learning process also applies to the language learning.

Nowadays, due to globalization, English language started to be conventional and even compulsory. Mexico was not an exception from this. Learning another language apart from the mother language has become little by little part of the schools' curriculum. In Mexico, although English has become a widely spoken language (Nordquist, 2019), it was until 2009 that the Mexican government established a new national program of English which was called National English Program in Basic Education (NEPBE henceforth). This program aimed at standardizing the teaching of English in Mexican primary and secondary schools.

This program works under a communicative and constructivist approach in which the student builds their own learning by developing three sort of competencies, which they called *knowing about the language*, *doing with the language* and *being through the language* in order to get a holistic view of the language in classroom settings. To understand the way this program works, teachers are given teachers' guides, manuals and other material for teachers to understand and improve our work for goal achievement. However, in the manuals, there is no information about the sort of problems that teachers may find while teaching children or even about the kind of strategies we can use during a class.

As a result of this lack of information, when I encountered problems, I had to look for strategies that help teachers accomplish their goals in the classroom. The teaching strategies varied according to the purpose of the teaching task (Díaz-Barriga and Hernández, 1999). There are strategies ranging from teachers' discursive speech to our visual aids to help students' organize knowledge. These strategies help promote significant learning based on the previous knowledge students have about certain topic. These strategies have an objective that is reached when applying them in the class and working with activities. These are necessary to achieve academic standards.

As the curriculum of the NEPBE is used, when I was hired to teach in basic education, I was required to work under this program. The first time I worked in a school using this program I realized that the teacher had an important role in the classroom. Being a teacher, from my standpoint, was not just a matter of studying English, so the person is ready to teach what was learned at college. While I was a student, I learned about some problems when teaching, such as controlling the students' discipline, teaching methods, teaching techniques, material design for every level. However, it was only when problems arose that I found myself in the need for finding teaching strategies and activities appropriate for children. In my teaching training I was just given notions about teaching children, but it was not the main goal of the major. Therefore, I had to change my discursive skills to persuade and convince my students about the topic we were learning and help them understand the language by using a diverse range of teaching strategies based not only on my purpose but responding to the problems identified.

In this monograph, hence, I will provide effective teaching strategies that helped me to achieve students' learning according to NEPBE's goals. I believe this will help other educators who encounter similar problems while teaching children from different ages.

## **1.2 Justification**

Having in mind my own experience and thinking about what other teachers face, I decided to write my experiences so that a novice teacher can use, during his/her first classes, diverse two-fold teaching techniques as they address not only the NEPBE's goals, but any of the problems I had when teaching children from public primary schools. The teachers can use them to improve the learning environment. Considering the results obtained and the situations that I had with children and families, I can assure that these techniques are effective in reaching significant learning gains. It is expected that, with the help of this monograph, many pre-service teachers can have access to effective instructional strategies for teaching in primary schools. I also would like to share the experience I had with the different "cycles" considering the NEPBE's paradigm.



The strategies proposed in this monograph could be helpful within a context with the same characteristics as these cases. I also infer that better results may be obtained if these strategies are used in smaller groups. My intention is that by reading this monograph and learning from my experience, future teachers can avoid the common mistakes that a beginner teacher usually makes. They can also develop suitable and motivating classes. In this way, the suggestions and strategies offered in this paper could be useful for future teachers to improve their teaching skills and to obtain the desired effect of teaching: students' learning.

### **1.3 General Objective**

The present monograph aims at providing the teaching strategies used in two completely different primary schools that helped to reach the NEPBE's objectives according to the curricular foundations as well as to solve problems encountered with children from diverse age range. These strategies are based on my personal experience as an English teacher in a public primary school.

## **2. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, the NEPBE approach and the general settings of my teaching experience are explained. In order to understand NEPBES approach and the problems encountered when I worked during this period of time, I provide the settings and contextual information about the NEPBE. Also I describe its methodology and its standards as well as the public primary schools I worked in as an English teacher.

### **2.1 NEPBE**

When I finished my English Language Teaching major, I began working for the NEPBE. The NEPBE has a local coordination in the Educational Services of Quintana Roo (SEQ as the Spanish acronym). The latter is an institution which regulates educational programs in the state of Quintana Roo, in the southeastern region of Mexico. I began working in two schools, Cetina Salazar Elementary School and Carlos Marx Elementary School. The first one is in the center of the capital of Quintana Roo, a small city called Chetumal. The second school is located in a small village, named Allende, located 45 minutes away from Chetumal. The number of students in classrooms ranged from 30 to 35 students in the Cetina Salazar School and from 20 to 22 in the Carlos Marx School.

NEPBE's syllabus is focused on the social practices of the language. According to NEPBE's curricular foundations, "It is for students to get the necessary knowledge to engage in social practices with spoken and oral language to interact with native and non-native English speakers by means of specific competencies with the language" (Curricular Foundations, 2011, p. 67). Therefore, in the syllabus, the concept of a social practice of the language is explained, in which the skills working together allow students to develop and promote communication, it is to say, students are going to have oral or written dialogues among peers. In the past ten years, the NEPBE has expanded to include most the Mexican public primary schools. Students in the program can learn a foreign language as part of the curriculum. The purpose of acquiring a foreign language, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is to "prepare students so that

they can face the new challenges of a globalized world, in which the contact among multiple languages and cultures becomes more and more common every day” (Delors et al, 1996, p.31).

Since the Secretary of Public Education in Mexico started to expand the NEPBE across the country, the SEQ created the English Coordination for Basic Education in Chetumal. This coordination is responsible for promoting and establishing the curriculum of English language teaching (ELT) in some public schools. At the beginning, the NEPBE was implemented as a social service in the English Coordination, which was a great opportunity to acquire the basic experience of teaching the foreign language. However, the implementation of English as an official foreign language to teach in basic education required that students cover 2.5 hours of English per week, according to the regulations of NEPBE.

### 2.1.1 NEPBE Approach

First of all, NEPBE works under a cycle model. The first cycle comprises 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades of primary school. Cycle 2 includes students from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades. Cycle 3 involves 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. Finally, cycle number 4 comprises all grades in secondary school. Due to the fact that the program is designed to provide young students from kinder garden to secondary school with the level of language competency B1 according to the Common European Framework of Languages.

Therefore, these cycles help organize the content across the different grades of basic education as shown in the following figure. In the blue area, the cycles I worked with and which I am talking about in this monograph are shown.

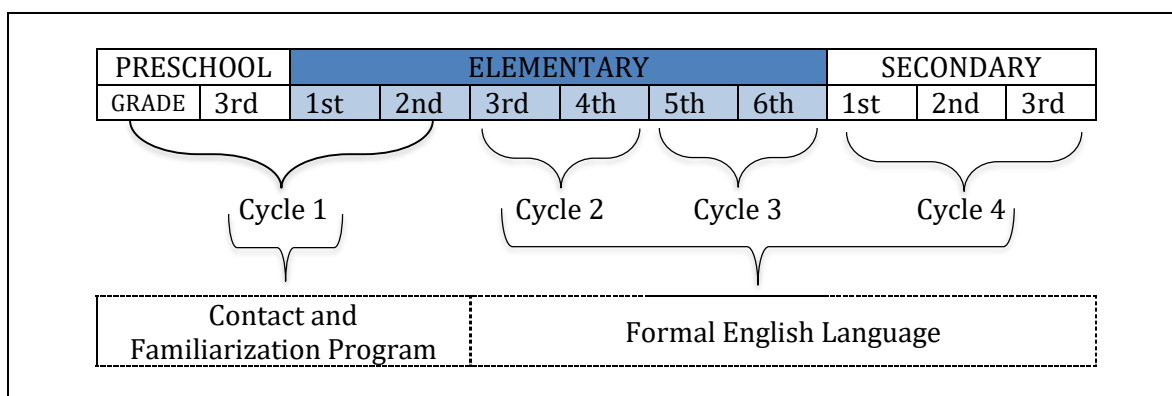


Figure 1. Organization in Cycles (adopted from NEPBE, 2010)

NEPBE also works under an adapted approach, based on the interactionist and communicative approaches' foundations with three-competency development, which are described in detail in the following paragraphs. According to National English Program in Basic Education (2010) the communicative approach fails to emphasize the importance of grammatical learning which is considered essential. However, due to the importance of communication, the principles of this approach were adopted in NEPBE underpinnings. Additionally, due to the role of the teacher to successfully teach the contents and address students learning, it also adopts some key constructs from the interactionist approach in the methodology underpinnings.

Therefore, the NEPBE's (2010) approach is based on what they called "social practices of the language" and aims for students not only to communicate, but learn about culture and language structures, the latter are constructs from the interactionist approach. This social practice of the language is the language teaching approach that teachers have to establish in their classrooms. A social practice of the language makes reference to an activity which promotes communication; it can be written or oral. This social practice comprises a set of competencies which involve three different types of knowledge: doing with, knowing about and being through the language. Moreover, programmatic contents are outlined in the official curricular foundations and the teachers' guides.

The first competency, doing with the language, refers to learning by doing. Students are expected to learn how to speak by speaking, how to write by writing, how to read by reading and how to listen by listening. This competency does not stand isolated, but works in a cyclic way with the other two competencies.

The second competency, knowing about the language, implies that students will reflect on their own knowledge about language, to raise awareness about language for them to be creative with it, so they progressively improve the four skills of language competency. This second competency comprises the knowledge about the language itself. In order for students to be creative with the language, they have to understand the language by learning about the structure of language.

Finally, the third competency, being through the language, focuses on the values of the use of the language. This targets the intercultural-education contents as well as the values and attitudes involved while interacting in oral settings. In this one, the students are taught

the cultural differences between Mexican culture and English-speaking countries' cultures. This helps students understand what is beyond language, that is the people who speaks the target language.

Besides, due to the fact that English is taught as a foreign language rather than a second language, NEPBE considers then, the social learning environments as a matter of great importance in order to promote students' acquisition of language and to compensate the lack of immersion because of the state of the language in the country. This notion of learning with the aid of the environmental factors are the constructs from the interactionist approach which are explained in the next chapter, in the theoretical framework of this monograph.

These social learning environments are divided into three facets: familiar and community environment, academic and educational environment, and literacy and ludic environment. The former is related to the students' approach of the language in real situations regarding their close range of interaction in order to get familiar with the language and acquire more confidence. The second refers to the classroom. In this one, the teacher is in charge of encouraging students to use formal academic language inside the classroom and emphasizing which learning strategies which will help students to better comprehend the features taught. The last facet is literacy and ludic environment which refers to literature, reading, writing, and speaking in order to broaden students' notion of culture and to understand diverse views of life beyond their own.

### *2.1.1 Objectives*

The National English Program in Basic Education generally aims to provide students the knowledge to produce language in diverse social practices by means of "specific competencies with the language" (Curricular Foundations, 2011, p.19). Furthermore, every cycle provides specifically a set of purposes in order to achieve them in the time established. These are represented in the competencies and the standards. The latter are displayed in the next sections.

### *2.1.2 NEPBE Standards*

In this section, I will present the standards of the program in order to know what standards I worked with when applying the teaching techniques and the activities implemented in my teaching practice. The NEPBE standards are divided into cycles, as I mentioned before. Due to the fact that I worked in part of the cycle 1 and in cycles 2 and 3, I limited myself to presenting the standards for those cycles. For the cycles 1, 2 and 3 - belonging to the primary school grades - the standards are arranged ascendingly in order to understand the curriculum and purposes described previously.

#### *2.1.2.1 Cycle 1*

As mentioned in the previous sections, cycle one comprises the last year of the kindergarten and the first and second grades of primary school. This implies that the students in this cycle are usually five to seven years old. In this first cycle, the NEPBE aims to raise awareness among young students and provide them a curiosity to learn the language. Based on curricular foundations (2011, p. 20), the standards are displayed below:

Students are expected to:

1. Acknowledge the existence of other cultures and languages.
2. Acquire motivation and a positive attitude towards the English language.
3. Begin developing basic communication skills, especially the receptive ones.
4. Reflect on how the writing system works.
5. Get acquainted with different types of texts.
6. Start exploring children's literature.
7. Use some linguistic and non-linguistic resources to give information about themselves and their surroundings.

These standards will help to achieve the goal of this first cycle that is to create a curiosity to learn English among young learners in early stages of basic education. When students have been familiarized with the language, they are pushed to reach higher levels of language proficiency. So, the second cycle applies its own standards, which are displayed in the following section.

### 2.1.2.2 Cycle 2

Cycle 2 involves teaching English to children from third and fourth grades of primary school, whose ages range approximately from eight to ten years old. In this second cycle, students are provided with higher cognitive competencies. Due to the fact that this cycle aims to provide students with the linguistic tools to understand and to use English in diverse situations, such as in the academic, familiar and community scopes by developing specific competencies in these domains.

To achieve this main objective, the curricular foundations (NEPBE, 2011, p. 21) provides with standards which are displayed below, in which students are required to use more complex cognitive skills.

At the end of the cycle, students are expected to:

8. Express simple opinions and requests in familiar contexts.
9. Recognize basic instructions, information, and advertisements.
10. Identify basic aspects of pronunciation and vocabulary used in everyday life contexts.
11. Use expressions to refer to personal aspects and needs.
12. Respond to spoken and written language in different linguistic and non-linguistic ways.
13. Use different strategies to solve everyday problems, as well as to look for information about concrete topics.
14. Identify similarities and differences between their own cultural expressions and those of the English language.
15. Establish basic social contract by means of their linguistic repertoire.

As seen, in the third and fourth grades, students are expected to comprehend and use English in order to understand, recognize, and employ basic skills taught to communicate during their everyday activities incorporating the environments mentioned before.

### 2.1.2.3 Cycle 3 Standards

In the last cycle involving primary school, Cycle 3, students' age ranges from 10 to 12 years old. They should have mastered previous content and skills. So in this cycle three, they are supposed to reach higher cognitive skills which will help them succeed in the development of the following standards.

Students are expected to:

16. Understand and produce everyday or routine information and its general meaning.
17. Begin or participate in some conversations or transactions using verbal and non-verbal strategies.
18. Recognize similarities and differences in the form and social use between their mother tongue and English.
19. Use strategies to present information, understand academic texts, and solve simple problems.
20. Express opinions and provide short descriptions.
21. Produce comprehensible messages, adapting their linguistic forms and pronunciation.
22. Use strategies to recognize forms and understand content in a variety of simple literary texts.
23. Interact with oral and written texts for specific purposes, and use them as a basis for further interaction.
24. Socialize by means of common expressions. (NEPBE, 2011, p.21)

In this cycle students are able to develop specific competencies so they can interact in everyday simple and familiar communicative oral and written tasks according to the 3 environments. In this cycle students are more prepared to communicate according to their abilities developed during the previous cycles.

### *2.1.3 Materials for teachers*

As part of the curricular foundations of NEPBE, the educational materials play an important role in order to achieve the goals and standards of the program. It is important to use materials that align with real-life situations. As NEPBE is a Mexican federal program which is



established nationwide, it provides children with the books to work with in the various public schools in the Mexican Republic.

There are five publishers that provide books and materials for the program. Every editorial has to align the book contents according to the syllabus of the NEPBE, which means that the topics from the books (from first to sixth grades) develop, then, corresponding competencies that are going to promote social practice of the language. The books have a complement which is the CD in order to practice listening skills in the classroom.

On the other hand, the common materials that helped me in the classroom were flashcards, paintings, sheets of paper with images, scissors, tape and didactic materials that the English coordinator gave me at the beginning of the course. Didactic materials allowed me to modify the classroom according to the needs of the children and also of the teachers.

Experience showed me the importance of the creation and elaboration of our own material, in order to adapt the material to our lesson, especially, when working with children. It was really difficult to explain a topic without the help of any visual materials or a device that can facilitate the activities. Materials were also a matter of importance to develop and carry out the activities and learning strategies I used during my classes in the primary schools.

### *2.1.3.1 Working Guides: NEPBE's teachers' manuals*

In order to achieve the goals, NEPBE understands the important role of teachers, so they provided us with teachers' manuals to help us to have a clearer panorama about the approach and goals of the program. It also helped me adapt the activities, materials and teaching strategies to the cycles, to the standards, and to the three competencies of the language expected in the program.

The teachers' manuals provided me with the knowledge to support my activities to the achievement of expected outcomes. The most influential part of these guides in my teaching practice is the integration of the social practices of the language in a curricular proposal that helped me to adapt activities and also gave me ideas to carry out a class. These teachers' manuals also helped me plan my classes more easily. Finally, the guides raised awareness on the teacher's role in the classroom and on the accomplishment of the goals, so

I reflected on our role as a factor of students' learning and motivation. Therefore, when I started teaching I was prepared to teach under this ambitious approach.

## **2.2 Institutions I worked in**

When I started working with the local Coordination of the Educational Services of Quintana Roo, which regulates educational programs in Chetumal city, they provided me the information about the NEPBE and assigned me to work in two different schools to work in. Both of them were primary schools.

### *2.2.1 Primary School: Cetina Salazar*

The school holds twelve groups comprising both A and B groups from first to sixth grade. The staff of the school was constituted by twelve teachers and two educational leaders, the principal and assistant principal and two janitors. The social status of the school included mainly working-class parents. In a period of three years, I was given 8 groups with 35 to 37 students each in the Cetina Salazar School, both A and B from third to sixth degree. I started working from seven to twelve hours.

The school is located in the center of Chetumal, next to the local government building. The classrooms, on the one hand, had essential infrastructure and all basic services such as lighting as well as technological tools were installed, including a computer and a projector per classroom. Likewise, this school had free access to the network enabling students to do classwork online and/or use online platforms and webpages. The school was composed by 12 classrooms from first to sixth grade. This school also had a dome in which students had possibilities to practice ludic activities and sports.

This school had the optimal conditions of infrastructure and the necessary technological devices to work with the children, such as computers, projectors, CD players and a technological system installed in a special classroom called Encyclomedia, where children could learn and work with internet. The academic concerns of this school were to

offer a good environment of learning based on a good teaching quality; children can learn and develop the necessary knowledge in order to be successful in the daily life.

#### *2.2.1.1 Mission*

This schools aims to guarantee that the learners acquire the basic and useful knowledge for their daily life, which are established in the programs and curricula in vigor in order to develop their abilities, and intellectual skills as well as the communicative competencies. Learners will be able to detect and analyze information about the circumstances, historical and social processes in order to understand and explain the society's characteristics in order for them to get the values to have a better society.

#### *2.2.1.2 Vision*

Its vision is to be an institution of basic education where holistic education is taught, which fulfills and sets the foundations for the students' interest in order to achieve a holistic formation to harmonize and completely develop as human beings. Likewise, we want to be an institution which possesses such a worthy infrastructure to help to achieve the educational goals.

#### *2.2.2 Primary School: Carlos Marx*

This school is located in a small rural area, called Allende, on the way to the Rio Hondo Rivera. To arrive, I had to commute approximately 40 minutes. I was given six groups with 20 to 22 children each approximately. I started working from 13:00 and finished at 15:30 hours.

The prominent social status of the students and families was low-income. Most of the students' families received financial and educational assistance from the government. The latter was mostly stationary basics such as backpacks, notebooks, pencils, among others. Students frequently attended school with flip-flops.

The school had basic infrastructure, such as lighting. The boundaries of the school were marked with wire mesh fencing materials. However, it had neither internet connection nor technological tools to work online as the other school in the city did. It was a traditional rural school: it had basic services such as lighting, water, toilets, and so forth, but they had no opportunity to explore the internet.

The school staff consisted of six teachers, one principal and assistant principal and one janitor. This school did not have a dome for the students to develop outdoors activities in the shade, without exposing students directly to the sunlight, but there was a small field in the civic field to do activities and practice sports.

#### *2.2.2.1 Mission*

The school's mission is to develop abilities, skills, attitudes, and values for the holistic formation, as well as fundamental competencies for their incorporation to the society and for students' life-long learning.

#### *2.2.2.2 Vision*

To be an educational institution which provides high quality education to the students, which helps them to fully develop not only in academic goals, but to develop values to face daily-life situations, such as responsibility, efficacy, liberty, justice, and discipline with the help of trained teachers who are committed to the education of the Mexican childhood.

#### *2.2.3 School Differences*

There were some differences between the schools not only geographically, but in other aspects as well. Students from the primary school of the city started my course with previous English knowledge due to the fact that the NEPBE is applied in some kinder gardens, mostly in the cities. This was an advantage as children who had previous knowledge were easier to teach as they just continued their process of learning the English language. However, children

from Carlos Marx School, the rural primary school, did not have the same characteristics because the conditions and the programs established in the school did not cover the content according to the NEPBE. Therefore, teaching children in the rural school was more difficult to some extent.

Carlos Marx primary school was different from Cetina Salazar regarding the group number. There were only six groups in Carlos Marx, so there were only six classrooms: one per group. There was one classroom for computer classes and one room for the Encyclomedia device. The infrastructure was almost similar in both schools, there were not differences according to the services and objectives that offered both schools yet. However, there was a huge difference between them concerning the socio-cultural aspect that played an important role in the teaching techniques to use. There were many low-income children that were sent to the school without the basic school supplies. Moreover, they did not have appropriate clothing to be at school, and most of the children used to go with flip flops among other issues.

It was common that Carlos Marx school received students not only at the beginning of the academic year but any time during the year. This was due to the fact that some children came from migrant families, such as from other towns or cities in order to work with their families in the crops. At least 10% of kids worked and they lacked attention of their parents because of their work. It is a low-income community with basic public services. There was no internet even though they had a computer classroom.

In Carlos Marx, lack of motivation was a general problem because the students did not have the necessary support and help at home. According to some teachers at school, the majority of the work had to be done inside the classroom because it was a problem to give homework. Hence, it was really important to analyze, consider and plan a way to develop all the work of the lesson during the English class. The objective of the school was to provide the basic elements of knowledge to students because the majority of them, according to the social context where they lived, had to begin working once they finished primary or secondary school. Just a few of the families and their children had the possibility to continue studying to finish high school.

Another difference between these two schools was that in the Cetina Salazar (in the city) almost all the classrooms had an average of 30 to 35 students in the different groups;

whereas, in Carlos Marx, there were around 20 to 25 students per classroom. This fact, in my view, facilitated the control and the process of teaching –learning in the groups in the latter.

Another substantial difference among schools' contexts was regarding students' basic needs. There were learners in both schools feeling hungry during the class, but the number was larger in the rural school. The time of the class affected students' hunger as they were eager to get out of the classroom as soon as the class finished. I was not able to help in resolving this problem, but I used interesting and hands-on strategies for them to increase their motivation and engagement in the class.

Although the schools I worked for were different, both were situated within the NEPBE curriculum which I was prepared to use. Therefore, I found some activities and teaching strategies more effective in both contexts which I will address in the subsequent chapters.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, I present theoretical underpinnings that helped me not only to deeply understand NEPBE's approach but to determine the importance of my role, as teacher, in carefully choosing the teaching techniques in order to help students develop learning. First of all, the communicative approach is described to understand the NEPBE's approach. Next, the role of the teacher in the L2 learning is presented to understand the importance of the teacher in achieving the NEPBE's main goal that is students' learning the foreign language. Then, the teaching techniques and ludic activities are presented to provide the foundations for why I chose the techniques I did.

#### **3.1 The Communicative Approach**

As described in the previous chapter, NEPBE works with the communicative approach. Then, in order to understand what this approach is and its relation to the NEPBE approach, an explanation is provided. First of all, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Communicative Approach seeks communicative proficiency rather than merely knowledge about linguistic features (Rushton, 2018).

This approach is based on the foundation that the primary function of language learning is communication. Therefore, the key construct of the communicative approach is to allow students to engage in real-life-like situations that require communication to reach fluency in oral skills and accuracy in linguistic aspects. So its primary goal is that learners develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). Renukadevi (2016) a current researcher on the communicative approach highlights that because the main focus of the communicative approach is on communication, in which students develop their ability to effectively express their ideas, the target language should be used in a variety of situations in the classroom. This helps students produce meaningful communication "rather than forcing them to imbibe the syntax of the foreign language" (p.76).

Hence, this approach aims to provide as much exposure to the target language as possible in order to help students to communicate. In order to achieve this, Piepho (1981)

describes five levels of the characteristics that the approach objectives should have. First, the “integrative and content level.” In this level, language is considered a means of expression. For example, this includes when the teacher uses English to provide explanations and to talk during the lesson. The second level is the linguistic and instrumental level, in which language is considered the object of learning. In this level, the language is seen as what the students will learn during the lesson. The third level is the affective level of interpersonal relationships and behavior. In this level, language is considered as a means of expressing values and judgements about oneself and others. In this level, the interaction with others is necessary in order to express ideas and achieve communication to some extent. The fourth level is the level of individual learning needs, in which there is a remedial learning based on error analysis. This level allows teachers and students to build the knowledge by drawing attention to erroneous utterances with the aid of teaching techniques such as corrective feedback techniques that are presented in the section 3.3.2.3 in more detail. The last level of the objectives of this approach is the general educational level of extra-linguistic goals, in which language learning is within the school curriculum, that is the case of NEPBE.

Additionally, Nunan (1996) adds five characteristics of the approach that are the following. First, a focus should be put on communication through interaction. Second, an introduction of authentic materials should be done in learning settings. Third, an opportunity to think in the learning process not only in the language as the object of study is given to students. Forth, the students’ own experiences and knowledge about their own culture are important elements to facilitate learning in the classroom. Finally, the fifth is that there is a connection between the target language learned in the classroom with activities outside the classroom. These characteristics also agree with NEPBE’s approach.

As mentioned at the beginning of the present section, the focus of this approach is real communication to promote learning and also provide meaningful tasks to promote complete learning. As a result, explicit grammar is set aside because it does not match the notions of communication (Hymes, 1971; Wright, 2000). Other authors (Halliday, 1970; Hymes, 1967; 1971) have versions of this approach in which they claim that students learn by doing (which agrees with Vygotskian notions described in section 3.2) and consider grammar should be presented, to some extent and in some specific way, in order to reach the linguistic competence that the approach seeks.



Joven (2014) explains that grammar presented in this approach should be done through inductive methods. She explains that the use of inductive methods to teach grammar in the communicative approach should address functional criteria, so “it is not teaching grammatical concepts, but the form and its use in order for students to use it and communicate effectively in English” (p.14). This practice is based on the General Theory of Learning (Bruner, 1961; Hammerly, 1975). The latter establishes that everything that someone learns on his or her own is internalized in our minds rather than what is explicitly provided.

This also agrees with the NEPBE approach, in which grammar is not taught explicitly but implicitly. In conclusion, the communicative approach as its name says, focuses on communication. Furthermore, as Nunan (1996) stated, it has to be done through interaction. In the next section, this interaction, which is mainly between the student and his or her teacher is explained in detail with Vygotskian and interactionist terms.

### **3.2 The role of the teacher in NEPBE approach**

Learning a second language (henceforth L2) is what is expected in NEPBE’s English classes, but how learning a foreign language can be developed is explained with the interactionist approach. The interactionist approach is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural Theory (henceforth SCT), which main construct to L2 learning is on the Zone of Proximal Development (hereafter ZPD).

Vygotsky (1978) proposed the Sociocultural Theory which suggests that humans and the world are related indirectly, so this relation was mediated by tools that can be physical and symbolic, in the latter language is included. These tools provide humans their human nature: to have the power of controlling and changing the world they live in, but the symbolic tools permit humans to control the neuropsychological aspects of their brains (Lantolf, 2012).

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory explained two mechanisms for the incidence of psychological procedures derived from social activity. The first is imitation, which is creating something new from an observed pattern. The second is the Zone of Proximal Development, which explains L2 acquisition, as it is the unconscious process of language internalization; the conscious process is learning (Krashen and Terrel, 1983).

To understand ZPD, Vygotsky describes that development is a process in collaboration in which learners change from what they are incapable to do to what they are capable to do by imitation. He provides three levels of development. The first level is called “the actual developmental level” in which a child’s mental functions are established as a result of certain already completed cycles (Vygotsky, 1978). The second level is the “level of potential development”, in which the teacher supports the learner during the task: the ZPD is at this level. The last level occurs at the point in which the learner cannot perform the task even with help.

Therefore, in the ZPD, teachers help the learners to do activities they cannot do alone. In this process, learners store the new ability or knowledge, this process of internalization of the new skill or information may permit them to perform without teacher’s help later on. However, for teaching to foster L2 development, it should be sensitive to what learners are able to reproduce under other type of support. This indicates their future development (Lantolf, 2012).

The preceding description of Vygotsky’s views helps understand the interactionist approach, which is Vygotsky’s views adapted to the L2 learning. Interactionists (Mackey, Abbuhl and Gass, 2012) state that interaction “occurs when a learner and his/her teacher encounter some kind of communication breakdown [which] is beneficial for L2 development” (p.9). Consequently, after interaction, a learner may get new knowledge which was adapted in an attempt to make the message intelligible. During interaction, the teacher applies varied teaching techniques for the student to raise awareness of the new linguistic knowledge. This process is what Vygotsky calls ZPD. Therefore, after the help of the teacher, the student pays attention to the target language considering his/her interlanguage, which contributes to L2 acquisition (Mackey, Abbuhl and Gass, 2012).

### **3.3 Teaching techniques**

In order to help our students to learn a language, the way in which we approach contents is important. Therefore, teaching techniques play an important role in the classroom and in

teachers-students' interaction. It is convenient to discern between teaching and learning techniques as this is the matter of the present monograph, so definitions are presented in the first subsection of the chapter: the teaching techniques are defined and the learning strategies as well. Subsequently, a set of teaching strategies will be provided and justified.

### *3.3.1 Definitions*

Due to the fact that learning is a two-face process involving not only teacher but students, the strategies involved in the process may be of two types: one related to the student and one related to the teacher, which are explained in the next paragraphs to draw a more accurate panorama of the implications of the present paper. Therefore, the former is called learning strategies and the latter are teaching strategies. On the one hand, learning strategies can be "induced" (Levin, 1971) and serve the students' own self-generated learning. Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, and Willingham (2013) described them as techniques which students use regardless instructor assistance and without specialized technological devices. Hence, this is out of the stratum of my teaching application, so in the present monograph learning strategies are not the matter of work.

On the other hand, according to the role of the teacher that was explained in the previous part, "teaching is a process of help, which is adjusted in function with how the progress in the constructive activity occurs" (Díaz-Barriga, and Hernández, 2002, p.116). Teachers' techniques are those adaptations in order to obtain the desired effect: students' learning. Mayer (1984), Shuell (1988) and West, Farmer, and Wolff (1991) define teaching strategies as procedures that the teaching agent uses in a reflective and flexible manner in order to promote the achievement of significant learning in the students. Díaz-Barriga and Hernández (1999) state that these strategies are means or resources to provide pedagogic assistance adjusted to the needs of the progress of the students' constructive activity (p.118). Therefore, as they mentioned these strategies nature is flexible, so we as teachers, adapt them according to the circumstances in order to achieve students significant learning. These are the means, in order to easily carry out the teaching strategies with children, it is absolutely necessary to provide students with didactic materials which also play an important role in NEPBE's curriculum. The latter authors agree with this view as they highlight that it is a

matter of importance for teachers to have a toolbox with teaching strategies in order to teach learners not only the class content but how to learn and promote a significant learning.

To understand the teaching strategies, Díaz-Barriga and Hernández's definition is adapted with the views of the ZPD of Vygotsky. Teaching strategies are then resources we as teachers use as we are the element in their ZPD which assist students to achieve a significant learning so progressively they can perform on their own.

### *3.3.2 Teaching Techniques*

Díaz-Barriga and Hernández (2002) provided a classification of teaching techniques in order to get a significant learning. These categories varied according to the needs of the class. The first category is strategies to activate and use prior knowledge to generate proper expectative in students. The second is strategies to improve constructive integration between previous knowledge and the new information about to learn. The third is discursive and teaching strategies. The fourth is strategies to help organize the new information about to learn. The fifth is strategies to promote a situated learning. The last one is strategies and design of academic texts. These are described in more detail below.

#### *3.3.2.1 Strategies to activate and use prior knowledge to generate proper expectative in students*

The first kind of strategies aim at activating and using prior knowledge in order to generate expectative among students. They understand prior knowledge as an important factor to construct new knowledge due to the fact that without this previous knowledge, the students would not be able to understand, assimilate and interpret the new information to use it as a means to gain new knowledge (Ausubel, 2002). Therefore, activating prior knowledge helps to construct new knowledge.

This kind of strategy requires to consider three main aspects in order to promote the use of the prior knowledge. The first aspect is that, as teachers, we need to identify beforehand the core concepts to be taught. The second is to keep in mind the objectives or what we expect students to learn. Finally, the third aspect is to explore students' prior

knowledge in order for teacher to decide whether to activate them or to generate them. (Díaz-Barriga and Hernández, 2002)

An example of this kind of strategy is the guided discussions, as it is “an interactive procedure in which students and the teacher discuss about a specific topic” (Cooper, 1990, p.114). There are some parameters considered by Wray and Lewis (2000) that are needed to consider to plan a discussion. Some of them are a) to create open questions and give students time to reflect, b) to manage the discussion as an informal talk but in a respectful and harmonious environment, c) to encourage students to elaborate their answer and support their classmates’ comments, and d) to close the discussion summarizing the main ideas.

### *3.3.2.2 Strategies to improve constructive integration between previous knowledge and the new information about to learn*

These kind of strategies are helpful to create proper links between what students know and what they are about to learn. In this process, the teacher assures that there is a higher significance in the achievements and better scaffolding according to the ZPD, as the teacher helps the students integrate the prior knowledge with the new one. In order to do this, the teacher needs two sort of strategies: analogies and previous organizers. The former is a kind of strategy in which the teacher compares intentionally two situations: an unknown one with a well-known one, in which both are similar to some extent. The latter is an introductory resource comprising a set of concepts and propositions of the new information to be learned, which aims at proposing a conceptual setting to help students assimilate meanings. Mayer (1984) called the process as “construction of external connections”.

These two strategies use parameters to reach their goals which is integration of knowledge. On the one hand, the analogy needs the teacher to introduce the topic, to evoke the vehicle considering its familiarity with the current students’ state of knowledge: a sort of known situation, to establish a comparison between the new topic and the known situation by identifying joints or similarities, to use visual aids, to provide conclusions about the new topic and set boundaries of the analogy and differentiate it from the actual topic in order to guide the students to the new topic (Dagher, 1998).

On the other hand, there are two types of Previous Organizers: expositive and comparative. The former is used when students do not possess enough prior knowledge or possess no knowledge to integrate the new information, so the teacher exposes ideas for students to get familiarized. The latter is used when students have a panorama or some notions about related ideas to the topic to teach. Depending of which type of previous organizer is, its function is whether to “propose previous knowledge or to use existent knowledge respectively, but both aim at providing supportive ideas for the students to constructively assimilate the new learning information” (Díaz-Barriga and Hernández, 1999, p.126).

### *3.3.2.3 Discursive and teaching strategies*

As part of the interaction which is needed to learn a language, according to Vygotsky’s ZPD, the teacher should be able not only to explain but to convince students. According to Castelló (1995), there are two types of discursive strategies applied by teachers. The first is the one that helps to organize the discourse itself in order to guide and provide a logic sense, and the second is the one clarifying the contents, which intertwines with the use of proper definitions, exemplifications and reformulations of what was exposed previously.

Another dichotomy was proposed by Cros (2002) in which the teaching intention is twofold: to explain and to argument. In the former, the teacher uses a set of diverse range of techniques to achieve the explicative intention. These are divided into three categories: a) to get relevant knowledge from the students, b) to answer to what students say, and c) to describe the class experiences that are shared with the students.

Firstly, as teachers, we need to know what students know. To do that, teachers make questions to get clues. These questions help to draw students’ attention to the topic, so they are able to analyze and conclude if they know what the teacher asks. For this, some elicitation questions are provided for the students to answer.

Second, we need to get to know the state of the students’ understanding of what we have explained by answering to what students said. Their utterances may be of two types: correct or incorrect. In order for teachers to continue the guidance, teachers use varied range of techniques such as feedback. It can be either positive feedback or corrective feedback,

which differ in their intention. Positive feedback techniques provide students a confirmation of the correctness of their responses, if they are positive (Ur, 2006). On the other hand, corrective feedback is corrective in intent (Astolfi, 1999), which signals the students that his or her utterance is incorrect to some extent, mostly linguistic aspects, and he/she needs to repair it. (Jiang and Ellis, 2009, Corder, 1976; Lightbown and Spada, 1990; Lee, 2004, Ellis, 2017). Lyster and Ranta (1997) provided corrective feedback strategies for students to correct their errors: explicit and implicit techniques. The former are techniques that give the students the correct answer and the latter elicit the correct answer from students.

The explicit strategies are explicit correction, which is giving the correct answer, and metalinguistic explanation that is a metalinguistic comment, question or explanation about an erroneously used linguistic feature. The implicit strategies are repetition, recast, clarification request and elicitation. The repetition is when the teachers repeats the erroneous part of the students' utterance. The recast is when the teacher partially corrects students' errors in order for the student to complete the sentence correctly. Clarification request is when the teacher signals the student that the teacher did not understand the utterance and asks for the students to clarify teachers' doubt and the student reformulates his/her original erroneous utterance or to correct the error. Finally, elicitation is when the teacher repeats the students' utterance except for the erroneous part, it can be a reformulation of the whole sentence or of an extract, and the teacher asks the student to provide the correct answer. (Lyster and Ranta, 1997)

Third, other type of strategies are the ones involving students and teachers as a whole in the process of learning. These are seen from a holistic view of the teaching-learning process. These help students to perceive the continuity of what they have been learning since the course started, and help the teacher to know where the student are and check students' knowledge and understanding of the subjects. An evocation is a type of strategy of this kind, in which the teacher asks the student for some part of the content taught in previous lessons. Exhortations are some kind of eliciting prompts that the teacher uses to stimulate students' and make them reflect on what they have learned (Mercer, 2001). Another strategy of this kind is recapitulation which is worth as it provides students with summarizations of contents which give continuity to the subjects. These previously mentioned strategies come along the basic structure of the conversation in class. (Coll, Colomina, Onrubia, and Rochera, 1992).

#### *3.3.2.4 Strategies to help organize the new information about to learn*

These strategies are didactic resources which communicate a logic structure of the content to be taught. (Díaz-Barriga and Hernández, 1999). These are useful in language teaching as they help students to recall vocabulary by contexts. For example, the class topic may be about family members and the teachers draws a tree diagram or a two-column chart to work with meaning and visual aids at the same time.

Some examples of this kind of strategy is the tree diagram, the timetable and the two-column chart. The Tree Diagram is a kind of diagram that it is used to establish hierarchical relations from top to bottom or vice versa. Timelines are graphic representations that allows to organize and visualize events in a temporal continuum (Díaz-Barriga and Hernández, 1999). These may help English teachers to organize the teaching of English tenses.

Two-Column Charts are a kind of chart that follows a certain type of organizing format based on the relations they represent (Harrison, 1994). These relations may be of different types according to the lesson objectives. Díaz-Barriga and Hernández (1999) propose a set of modalities regarding what these relations express: cause and effect, theory and evidence, problem and solution, before and after and actions and results. However, I also used them in classes to write a word in English and its meaning.

#### *3.3.2.5 Strategies to promote a situated learning*

Another type of strategies is the strategy promoting a situated learning, which aims at promoting experimental or authentic learning in students. This will allow students to develop skills and similar competencies as they find in real settings (Díaz and Martínez, 2014). There are four pedagogic proposals which fit this kind of strategies due to its characteristics: learning based on problem solving, learning based on analysis and case studies, and learning through projects. These are applicable to all sort of topics as the idea is that teachers situate students under one of these proposals by promoting interactive and social activity in natural-like settings.

Learning based on problem solving is when teachers organize the teaching and learning contents through diverse relevant and holistic problems. It implies that the students are the stars of the stated problematic situations. Also, it constitutes a pedagogic environment



in which students do so much cognitive and collaborative-heuristic activity in which the teacher is seen as the instructor who helps them to do the task to help them in the process of inquiry/research. It can be, for example, when a teacher asks the students what would they do, if they were in the place of a person who had a car accident, in order for them to use the second conditional and they not only think about the real-life-like problem but also about the linguistic features to say what would they do. On the other hand, learning based on analysis and case studies is when teachers propose students a case in which they are required to analyze it and discussed in groups, so the didactic process consists on promoting the in-depth study based on the discursive and argumentative learning (Boehrer, 2002). Students work with other students, so they share their ideas and also speak in the target language as the teacher monitors they do the task.

These activities work with sort of strategies that help young learners to maintain focused on the learning activities. There are specific approaches to teach children, which helps to determine what kind of strategy works better with them.

### *3.3.3 Ludic activities*

Ludic activities are an important part of teaching children. They allowed students to develop their skills. The fact of using ludic activities helps us to develop the different skills because students can get engaged with the game and enjoy the relation between having fun and learning. The word ludic makes reference of something that is full of fun and activity in the different environments where things are done. According to Díaz and Martínez (2014), ludic activities are “dynamic strategies that promote active learning involving students in doing things out of the routine and thinking about what they are doing. The same author mentions that “the objective of implementing ludic activities in the classroom is to promote student’s interests and participation.”

Ludic activities are necessary for children learning under the NEPBES curriculum, as the learners are required to know about the language, to do with the language, and to be through it. So, with these activities the purpose of the curriculum is achieved at least in the general achievement of these competencies as the interaction and children’s involvement in

these activities are the way to achieved NEPBE's goals. As discussed in the previous chapter, teaching materials are necessary to carry out these kind of activities.

In the next chapter, a description of the problems encountered in my early stage of teaching as well as the solutions applied are described.

## **4. MEMORY**

In my experience, when somebody starts a job as a teacher, he or she does it in order to acquire experience. One of the most challenging situations for an unexperienced young teacher is to teach children. In the following sections I present the problems I encountered when I was teaching. Firstly, I present the early problems I encountered although it is not directly related to the NEPBE's goals, these problems affected, to some extent, my successful achievement of the goals. Secondly, I present the problems I found when I was trying to achieve the goals and the solutions I found based on the teaching techniques and the NEPBE approach.

### **4.1 Early problems**

I started teaching in two different primary schools. The first one was Jesus Cetina Salazar, which was in Chetumal city. The other one was Carlos Marx School in a small town called Allende, 45 minutes from Chetumal. Both schools had different needs and problems because of their locations. The first working time started in the school in Chetumal, Carlos Marx, from 08:00am to 12:00 pm; after that, I had to travel to Allende to continue teaching in the second school from 01:00 to 03:00 pm.

My teaching experience began in 2010. When I arrived to the first school Cetina Salazar, I could realize that children were familiarized with the use of technological devices for the learning process; it was absolutely different from the second school (Carlos Marx). The latter did not have the elemental infrastructure in order to use electronic devices which enhance the learning process; besides, the other English teachers were people from the same

community who did not have the pedagogical ability to teach the language. However, it seemed that it was going to be a monotonous class.

In the following sections, I present the initial problems I encountered when I started teaching, which were not directly related to the NEPBE objectives, but affected, to some extent, my teaching and my use of teaching strategies and activities. Those problems were rural school students' overenthusiasm, infrastructure, lack of attention, discipline control and lack of planning skills.

#### *4.1.1 Rural School Students' Overenthusiasm*

The first group which I worked with was the third grade in the Cetina Salazar School. It was a group formed by 35 students from 8 to 9 years old. This group had an exceptional characteristic; every student was motivated to participate in the class. In the same way, they wanted to do everything, so they were very active. I was really surprised because I did not know how to canalize that enthusiasm for their process of learning; even the number of activities planned were not enough for the class because they used to finish faster every task or activity I assigned to them.

Consequently, what I did was to create more activities related to the topic that they were working with. In the same way, we changed roles. For example, they had to work in teams with a certain activity that they previously chose, so the next class they had to develop and explain the activities, what they did to achieve the goals of the activity, how they did their task. Once that they finished presenting their explanations, I used to give feedback in order to solve doubts that may be arisen in children during the progress of their classmates or their own presentations.

#### *4.1.2 Different Infrastructure*

In my experience, one of the main problems in basic education is the infrastructure. As a result of this, many teachers do not have the possibility to adapt their classrooms according to the student's needs. For example, the fact that schools do not have multimedia classrooms

where teachers and students can use computers, a projector, internet, a radio recorder, etc. precludes that the teacher uses activities involving these techniques which may facilitate learning to some students. As a consequence of this, the strategies used in the classroom are more limited.

As a result, what I did to solve this problem was the use of flashcards and games for students to be actively involved in the lesson and in the activities. There were situations involving a lot of materials, which I got from the teaching materials provided by NEPBE at the very beginning of the courses.

#### *4.1.3 Students' Lack of attention*

When I started my first class, the first problem I had, was that I did not know how to get student's attention. Students' lack of attention was linked to their motivation. These factors interfere in the process of teaching- learning a second language. McLeod (2014) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs but, he questioned about the real need of young children in order for them to learn a second language. This question is the main question that a teacher needs to establish in his or her notes in order to have students' motivation in mind. Consequently, what I had to do was to looking for strategies in the internet in order to capture student's attention.

There were some strategies that helped me to solve this. A simple strategy such as changing the seat arrangement helped me enormously. I arranged the students' chairs into subgroups which helped me to better control them and keep focus on activities. Also, I had a sort of hook which helped me to keep students focused when they started screaming or doing so much noise, such as a song. I used a ludic song to draw children's attention, which is called "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands" and I acted the song. Immediately, students' attention was on me and the song, so they also sang and participated in the acting the song.

#### *4.1.4 Discipline Control*

Working in a public school with a group with 30 to 35 students was a real challenge because I needed to implement efficient strategies and techniques. The discipline and the classroom environment had to be managed with effective strategies, so did I implement some into the classroom. It is important to mention at this point that every student had particular needs and their backgrounds were so different, so I had to look for activities that not only helped me motivate my students but helped me with the control of the discipline in the classroom.

Lack of discipline was a matter of regulation in my every day, so control group techniques were necessary for me to maintain discipline. I stuck to one technique which helped me to all groups of all ages. This was “class class”, which is taught to students at the very beginning of the course. I explained to them that when I say class, they must respond yes in order for them to be quiet and sit down in their places. At the early weeks, I had to do it to some frequency for them to get acquainted with the phrase and the way they must behave after that.

#### *4.1.5 Lack of effective planning skills*

Next, at the beginning, it was difficult to develop a topic in the class due to the fact that children needed to be active during the entire class, so that the activities had to create interest in them. The lack of knowledge on ludic activities and the not execution of the same created a boring teaching environment; hence, I had to investigate about ludic strategies and activities that I could apply in the classes.

Moreover, I did not know how to develop an-hour-and-15-minute’ class with the suitable strategies that I had to apply in order to teach a lesson. I had to remember what I did in my teaching practices at the university. First, I used a lesson plan format that I had as an example. Considering that as a starting point, I started to divide my class by sections. I counted and estimated the number of minutes I needed for each activity including the warm up where I had to introduce the topic. Eventually, I understood that the warm up is an

important activity that teachers have to implement at the beginning of every class because as a consequence of this preparation activity, teachers capture student's attention and draw their interest on the topic.

Furthermore, I used a 5-stage lesson plan frame to start. It has a warm-up, presentation of the topic, practice, production and closing. The problem I had with the warm-up is that I thought it was an activity such as hot potato, fruit cocktail, spider net, fruit and vegetables among others, but they were merely ludic activities which may have two-fold purposes practicing or producing. So, what I did is to use a strategy that activated prior knowledge from previous classes, in order to introduce the class content in some way. The warm-up lasted from 5 to 10 minutes. For example, when we were about to learn on birthday parties, I showed them pictures with vocabulary learned on previous classes about parties. Also, the students already know that the flashcard, so they know the word party. I asked them if they had been to one of those parties and if they got any present. After that, I presented the topic.

For the presentation, I used to use new flashcards, songs or other visual resources with the aid of the encyclomedia equipment that was in the classroom. However, there were moments in which students hardly understand the explanation, especially, students from cycle two and three. So I used some basic grammatical explanations (explained in the section 4.7.2). After the presentation, they practiced the new content. The presentation lasted about 10 minutes.

The practice consisted on diverse activities. For this stage, I give 15 to 25 minutes because it was students' time to practice with my help. The activities varied according to the age of the students. We could read a text or listen to a conversation, or sing along songs, or repeated the sentence frames that the song had or they repeated after me. The idea was that they practice controlling the grammar, vocabulary or whatsoever linguistic item I taught during the presentation.

In the production stage, which lasted about 20 or 30 minutes. When producing, they were required to write short texts or speak with classmates. The activities varied with the age of the students, but they usually worked with writing and speaking in this stage. We sometimes played games such as hot potato and the students with the "potato" were required to used sentence frames already written on the board, in which there were gaps in which students should say a word of the vocabulary learn during the class. The sentence was usually

short, but to some students it used to take longer to write or say than I expected. So, I had to say “finish” when the time was over.

Apart from this, this kind of games produced a lack of attention as they were complaining, screaming, talking to the classmates, and so on. For this, I was given by some more experienced colleagues, a technique to draw students’ attention when it was a problem. I applied this technique which they called “claps”. This technique involves the teacher clapping twice. I had to indicate students that every time when they hear two claps and when I said “class class”, students were supposed to answer with other two claps and to say louder “yes yes”. In order for the students to be accustomed to it, I had to do this in a repetitive manner because of its function as a discipline strategy. So that, I could do it every time that I wanted to draw student’s attention.

Finally, the closing was a time to share experiences of the class. It usually took 5 minutes or the rest of the class, which was less than 5 minutes. I asked them what they learned and if they found it fun or boring. This had also a dual objective. First, it let me know if students were able to produce the new linguistic items outside the class exercises and, second, it let me know if they enjoyed the class. There were sometimes in which they said they got bored or they were not able to discern what they learned.

#### *4.1.6 Struggling with NEPBE’s approach*

When I started teaching, I did not really understand what the communicative approach was, but I knew it was the method that NEPBE bases its foundations on, as the main aim is that students can communicate. However, during the time of my work experience, I found myself mixing other methods such as Suggestopedia and audiolingual methods due to my lack of insight into the methodology of NEPBE. So before I started a class I prepared the classroom with certain images, posters or some material that can help students to familiarize with the language (as part of the Suggestopedia method).

According to Bower and Kawaguchi (2011) this approach is based on suggestion in learning. Hence, a positive suggestion can make a learner more receptive and, in turn, stimulate learning. On the other hand, according to Rhalmi (2009), the audiolingual method is based on pronunciation and grammar, which means that learners are more exposed to the

ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations according to the vocabulary and grammar patterns learnt.

However, NEPBE has its own methodology which I did not understand the very first days of my teaching. So I had to adapt certain features from other methodologies to try to help myself to achieve the program's goals. In subsequent days, I realized I was not using the correct methodology, so I reread the curricular foundations and the working guides and I got a deeper insight into NEPBE methodologies. I researched more about the principles of the communicative approach. Then I read again the curricular foundations and I understood that I was not working appropriately with the program. So I adapted my activities and strategies to NEPBE's communicative-interactionist approach. As a result, other problems arose.

Next, I display in the following subsections the problems I found when trying to achieve NEPBE's goals and how I achieved them based on the diverse range of teaching strategies, which matched with the communicative and interactionist features of the NEPBE approach.

## **4.2 Interaction as a target in the EFL children**

One purpose of NEPBE is for students to get the necessary knowledge to engage in social practices with spoken and oral language to interact with native and non-native English speakers by means of specific competencies with the language. It means that, through competencies that involve production and interpretation of oral and written texts of familiar, academic and literary nature, students will be able to satisfy basic communication needs in different every day, familiar, and known situations.

However, in the classes in the public schools there are no native speakers for children to talk with. Thus, I had to adapt other methodologies in which materials and other features lead the classroom to be an English-spoken –environment.



#### *4.6.1.1 Solution: Adapt diverse teaching methods*

The methods that I used in order to reach this objective of NEPBE were the Suggestopedia method and the Total Physical Response (TPR). The former is based on the way human brain works and how we learn most effectively according to the activities that students develop during the classes. For example, the use of dramatized texts allows students to practice expressions, the songs help them to improve their listening skill and the games were very efficient because they interact with their partners according to the topics that they learnt in the class. Also, there were posters stuck on the wall for them to get used to the vocabulary and expressions needed in all situations in class. I applied this method because I could see that the majority of the students enjoyed activities that were active where they could interact with their partners.

Moreover, I also used some features from TPR because with this method it was easier that students learn verbs and comprehend indications of the activities that I want them to do. Due to the fact that students were said to do something and they repeated the command and also acted the command. This worked in the early stages of the class, as students were able to recognize and create connections between words and action verbs. It also helped to create an English speaking environment and interaction among students in a fun and relaxed way, as they followed orders and commands.

### **4.7 Problems encountered throughout the different cycles**

Diverse problems arose depending on the cycle I was teaching to. Therefore, I opened a whole section to describe the problems encountered as a result of teaching children from different ages. In the first cycle, children from 6 to 7 years old were targeted. In the second one, children from 8 to 10 were targeted. Finally, in the third cycle, children from 11 to 12 years were targeted. In the following subsections, the problems found are described in detail and their respective solution which was effective for me.

### *4.7.1 Cycle-one Illiterate Students*

Regarding the cycle one, starting teaching a foreign language was very complicated as they were illiterate children who were not familiar with reading-writing systems. In fact, the curriculum of the first and second grades of primary school aims at teaching children how to read and write, so they pass these grades as the head teacher evaluates students' process in these skills. Therefore, not only was an isolated task, but a collaborative work between me, the English teacher, and the head teacher as the students were learning the abecedary and its sounds, so I worked the same way with them.

#### *4.7.1.1 Solutions: Flashcards and games*

With children of cycle 1 (first and second grades), I created a lot of supporting material, such as flashcards with letters and pictures. In this way, I started to teach the alphabet. So I used some strategies which improve constructive integration between previous knowledge and the knowledge about to learn. Hence, based on this kind of strategies, I started associating the sound of the vowels with pictures whose concepts began with such vowels. For example, I used a flashcard with letter A with a picture of an apple and so on and so forth, until they recognized them all, I started with the consonants using the same technique. They were doing similar activities in Spanish, so students were familiarized with this activity.

For children of this age (six to seven), I did not use much information to avoid confusion. I used to teach them from three to five words a day as part of their vocabulary. In order for them to master the words, we used to play "hangman". Hangman is a game that consists on drawing on the board a tank with sharks and a sort of branch in which a man is going to be beheaded if children do not guess the word chosen by the teacher or any other player. The number of letters of the chosen word were the number of short lines that are written beneath the place in which the hangman is about to be drawn. We played this game for them to identify the letters until they can name or say the word they spell.

On the other hand, in order for me to provide them with feedback we played "Scrabble", in which they are required to organize the words of the vocabulary, so with this game, we worked one per one the words taught. Also, they worked with an activity book in

which they could cut flashcards containing words related with the vocabulary I taught to them.

I used to work with NEPBE's contents of the first cycle, so in that order I developed the classes with the respective topic and the vocabulary related to the topic for them to understand what was the topic about and could associate the information they had with the new information. I used the strategies to elicit previous knowledge for them to be able to do the tasks. For example, vocabulary to work with was related to greetings, so that I implemented flashcards for every word or phrase, such as "Good morning" and I drew a sun moving its hand, "Good afternoon" and I drew a sun tired moving its hand, and "Good night" in which I drew a moon moving its hand.

#### *4.7.2 Cycle two: Complexity of the content in the post-illiterate stage*

After the first cycle, students are filled with contents according to the curriculum of first and second grades, English was not the exception. In third grade, students were gathering and learning new information from diverse subjects which they did not have in the previous grades. In my class, topics were little harder than in the previous cycle. However, I stuck to the use of flashcards to teach vocabulary, but this was different from the previous cycle, as for third and four grades I worked not only with complex words but with more words. At every moment I needed to teach vocabulary, I used flashcards, as this worked to get students' attention. We used to work from 10 to 15 words per class. We also played some games for them to recall the recently introduced words, such as crosswords or scrabble.

One of the difficulties of this level was that students were accustomed to translate into English what they were thinking in Spanish. I believe that the reason of their thinking in Spanish was that they were in the process of transiting from learning how to write and read to content classes. Therefore, I tried not to use dense grammatical explanations for them not to get confused. However, their thinking in Spanish made children write and speak ungrammatical utterances. They used to write the sentences in the same order it was written in Spanish. They also struggled with the meaning of certain words in English, especially the

false cognates, which are words that are similar in form to the first language but in the target language have a completely different meaning.

#### *4.7.2.1 Solutions: Basic grammar as taught in Spanish classes*

There was a problem during my classes: students spoke English as if they were trying to speak Spanish. They used the same grammar in both languages, although the English grammar is different to Spanish. So, in order for them to stop using Spanish grammar, I used a simple formula to teach grammar as they did in their Spanish classes. I made them think of Spanish to understand English grammar. As in third and fourth grades, children were familiarized with words such as subject, verb, predicate, adjective and nouns. So I was able to introduce basic grammar based on children's knowledge of such concepts. This kind of strategy helps to improve constructive integration between previous knowledge and the new information about to learn according to Díaz-Barriga and Hernández (2002). Besides, Joven (2014) and Newby (2015) agree that mastering grammar plays an important role in the acquisition of communicative competency, but its teaching should be explicit when necessary in order to achieve the communicative competency.

Then, I started to teach the English names of the Spanish grammatical terms they learned in their classes. Next, I showed them the basic structure using the article as a starter point when necessary and subject, verb and complement. Hence, this formula helped students to understand extracts, ideas or whole texts, when we were reading short stories or short texts. Likewise, when they needed to write simple sentences they used this formula for them to arrange the sentences in a grammatically correct manner and even to understand the topic that we would work with during the class. In NEPBE curriculum and standards, students were required not only to write and read in English but to use the language to interact with other students as previously stated in the section 2.1.1 about NEPBE Approach.

Four standards: “to respond to spoken and written language in different linguistic and non-linguistic ways”, “to use different strategies to solve everyday problems, as well as to look for information about concrete topics”, “to identify similarities and differences between their own cultural expressions and those of the English language”, and “to establish basic social contract by means of their linguistic repertoire” (NEPBE, 2010, p.21) were fulfilled

with this strategy as the students are aware of the linguistic items to use as well as the non-linguistic ones. The latter was the kind of competency called Doing with the language which were used to speak with other classmates in order to establish basic social contract with the aid of the vocabulary and grammar learned during classes.

Furthermore, this formula helped students not only to understand the positive utterances but also the grammar inversion used in questions. Obviously, the formula varied in form. This helped me to explain the changes of the position of the grammatical items to introduce the wh-question words whenever they are affirmative sentences or question words.

To assess the effectiveness, I evaluated the performance of the students using a rubric given by NEPBE, based on the learning outcomes. Fortunately, my students showed ability to fulfill the requirements of the rubric.

#### *4.7.3 Cycle three's students' anxiety about producing oral utterances*

During the cycle three, I had the most problematic situations: lack of oral participations due to anxiety. Students felt seriously embarrassed at participating at the moment of speaking or any other oral activity. The written productions did not produce such anxiety, though. Although the students were able to perform well in both skills: speaking and writing as they had the foundations to produce language, they were uneasy to participate in speaking activities. They did not want to exchange ideas or practice with their classmates.

##### *4.7.3.1 Solutions: Intermittent conversation social groups*

As a result of such problem, I had to find the solutions for students to speak in order for them to produce oral language. So, I found a solution which I called sporadic conversation social groups. I gave them a topic such as trendy cartoons, TV series or games: the ones they used to talk about. Then I provided them with key words of the topic which we would work with in the class. These topics should have been related to the class topic and objectives because the students should speak about the topic using the class's grammatical new features or

vocabulary. In order to do the activity, there was a moderator and I just monitored the activity and the proper development of this. I also encouraged them to make questions and provide their opinions. Some of them preferred writing the question or the utterance as they felt more comfortable and that prevented them from feeling anxious or embarrassed at the moment of producing orally.

There were situations in which the questions contained errors, but I rarely used corrective feedback techniques for them to feel comfortable. So, I preferred using implicit techniques, such as elicitation request or repetition (Ellis, 2017). If the other children noticed the error, they corrected their classmates using another type of feedback involving a peer, which is called “peer correction” (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994; Gómez, Hernández and Perales, 2019) which also helped them to feel less exposed when speaking as this activity was in small groups (Lasagabaster and Sierra., 2005). In this way, the students’ errors were not exposed to the whole class but in their circle. Other common errors were pronunciation errors. Therefore, the way I used to address pronunciation errors was the use of catchy songs. I sang the song with the word they mispronounced, then they sang after me, so they were able to practice the pronunciation of those words.

On the other hand, in order to promote their speaking, I used to add some extra points to the students who participated during the classes. Also, I provided the on-time students with an extra point for being on time every day and to attend to all classes of the period.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Having worked in these primary schools under NEPBE's curriculum helped me to understand that being a teacher was not an easy task because I needed to adapt materials, strategies and methodologies in order to achieve NEPBE's goals according to the different cycles in this level of basic education. I also understood that being a teacher not only is beneficial for me in diverse areas, but also for the students. When I studied the major in English Language at UQRoo, I considered myself to be prepared to teach English. However, in the degree curriculum, there was not any subject or even any module in a content class which referred to teaching children. So, I encountered several problems when I started teaching.

Although I had some notions about the difficulty of this task, as in the teaching practice subjects, we were required to practice with real young students to practice our teaching skills, I did not really know how hard it would be until I had my first groups in Cetina Salazar and Carlos Marx. Teaching here helped me notice that problems such as discipline and teaching materials creation and adaptation would be my every day. Despite I had previous knowledge in disciplines, teaching materials preparation, I was not prepared to what it was coming those days. I found myself struggling with students' discipline and classwork. As a result, I found myself using diverse teaching strategies not only to teach English but to teach values and to help students learn and internalize the language.

After reading to write the theory of this monograph, I found a sense of the whole process of teaching and the role of the teacher in this process, and now I have a holistic view of the things I have been doing and what I did those days of my newly teaching career. I understand that I did the things well, I tried to find solutions for every problem I had. My role in the process is vital, as I am a support in the students' knowledge building. My main responsibility was to achieve students' learning objectives, so I did my best to achieve that.

As a teacher, I consider myself to be a good facilitator of knowledge achieving the NEPBE's goals and children's attention. I feel rewarded with my learning and the mark I left behind in those kids in my early teaching days.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS

I suggest to novice teachers working with NEPBE to read carefully the dynamic of the curriculum and to carefully read the standards and the methodology used to achieve the goals as we are given everything we need to carry out the teaching tasks, as a way to avoid what I did those days, in which I had to struggle with looking for new techniques.

The pedagogical implications of this work relies on that, although teachers are provided with teaching material by the Secretary of Public Education, other resources and materials adaptations are needed according to the group's and the students' needs in order to achieve the goals of the NEPBE and to fulfill the goals of the teacher's role in the classroom according to the interactionist approach.

In rural schools, teachers may have struggle with visual aids, so we should not overload the visual aids on technological devices but to develop diverse range of activities for the young learners get involve in order to master the language by the three-competency program. In this kind of schools, motivation is not a problem as children look forward to learning everything they can when they are in classes. This is also a factor for them not to have a lack of discipline, as they have high motivation to learn the target language.

In order to avoid badly planned classes, you can plan diverse stages and activities as children may finish or not finish the tasks because of the very particular contexts and needs. I suggest that teachers plan as I did with an introductory hook such as a warm-up. Then in the first cycle of the NEPBE's curriculum, repetitive vocabulary classes with games are needed for the young children to get familiarized with pronunciation and the target language. In the post-literate stage, teachers can work with the warm-up and, after that, in order to introduce the topic, the teacher can use some basic grammatical formulas and terms as the students learn those in their Spanish classes. By doing this, we promote their previous knowledge with the new knowledge they are going to be taught in the English class.

In order to practice which was taught in the previous stage of the lesson, teachers can work with guided practice with the aid of games and vocabulary flashcards and sentence frames for them to speak and use the language. Finally, the last stage involves the students speaking freely, so they produce as much language as they can base their utterances on the



previously content taught (vocabulary and grammar). In order for them to speak, we can form conversational groups in which they are free to speak with their classmates.

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