Didactic Unit: A jungle in classroom

Throughout this essay we are going to develop one of the fifteen didactic units included in the teaching plan and it also emphasises on the principles of a communicative approach. According to the General Act of the Spanish Educational System, the curriculum for Primary Education is open to further development. This didactic unit tries to adapt it to the characteristics of our social and cultural environment, as well as to the needs of pupils belonging to fourth year (Second Cycle).

This didactic unit deals with vocabulary related to wild animals, actions they can do and what they can’t do, thus working a basic communicative function towards communicative competence: asking and saying where wild animals live.

The development of the didactic unit will be during the second term of the course.

1. CONTEXTUALIZATION

This didactic unit is thought to be developed in the Public school from Molina de Segura (Murcia). This is a town around 65,000 inhabitants.

The building of the school is from the 80’s and it has notable needs of improvement in relation to the building and the materials: there is not a gym, neither a music class and the dining room is not enough to cover the demand. The school is compounded by three different buildings: two of them are dedicated to Infant Education and a changing room for Physical Education activities, and the third one is the building of Primary Education with 12 units, an audiovisual room with 15 computers, a dining room, an arts and technology class, and a playground, apart from the headmaster’s office, the secretary’s office, the psychologist office and the staff room.

In our class, there are 20 pupils. There are two gypsy kids. Both of them present the problem of school absenteeism, specially the girl, who helps regularly her parents in the ambulant sale. There is also a little girl from Romania and a boy with language learning difficulties: he is dyslexic and this alteration of the language causes him distorted perceptions of letters and words. He has authentic problems with reading and writing skills and needs special treatment in Spanish language, Maths and English lessons because of his general difficulties at learning.

In this didactic unit all these aspects have been considered and the methodology has been designed in order to help to solve these difficulties.

This unit is intended for twenty students in the second year of the second cycle of primary education: 4th Level. They already know vocabulary about wild animals (except the kids aforementioned), as well as some other expressions needed to indicate what animals eat, do, etc.

This unit is carried out during the Second Term. It is intended for eight sessions, fifty minutes each one.

We are provided with an English classroom with all the necessary materials and resources, including an English corner and a classroom computer. In order to create a good learning environment, posters and
students’ products are hanged on the walls. A computer lab with English multimedia and Internet access is at our disposal outside the classroom.

The selection of materials for this didactic unit has been previously thought about with the aim of trying to cover different aspects of language learning and language use.

Posters, Flashcards and Photos, Songs and Chants, Word cards, Stories, CD’s and CD player, Blackboard, Worksheets, Board Games, Computers and Computer Games and the Classroom Mailbox.

Curriculums Links

Main Legal References:

The Organic Law 2/2006, of May the 3rd, of Education
The Royal Decree 1513/2006, of December the 7th
Decree 286/2007, of September the 7th

The new curriculum is closely based on the Common European Framework (CEF) and identifies Basic Competences for foreign language learners. In this sense, the present didactic unit has always accounted the philosophy of the CEF, being perfectly in line with the new curriculum.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the area of foreign language teaching in Primary Education is to learn to communicate in the foreign language. This implies adopting a communicative approach based on communication and the progressive development of communicative competence. And that is the basis of the didactic unit.

General objectives

- Understand and use the English language to communicate in the classroom.
- Produce simple and brief written texts about topics they are familiar with.
- Use previous knowledge and experiences in the learning of the foreign language and develop in a progressive way autonomous learning strategies.

Didactic objectives

- To acquire and use the vocabulary and structures related to wild animals and action verbs.
- To understand a story and its vocabulary.
- To reproduce a dialogue bearing in mind intonation, rhythm and stress.
- To produce simple written texts (from given models) related to the unit.
Basic Competences

The new law has introduced basic competences which a student has to develop throughout the years of Primary and Secondary Education.

This didactic unit contributes to the acquisition of these basic competences and is in line with the objectives and contents of the LOE.

3. BLOCK OF CONTENTS

Block 1. Listen, Speak and Converse

- Understanding oral messages related to the topic of the unit, coming from the teacher or different digital or audiovisual means.
- Participation in real or simulated communicative situations expressing vocabulary and functions related to wild animals and its actions.
- Familiarization and recognition of characteristic English sounds, as well as rhythm and intonation, mainly worked with the songs but also during all sessions.
- Interest in using the foreign language, verbally and non-verbally, with a careful pronunciation.

Block 2. Reading and Writing

- Association of graphic signs, pronunciation and meaning of the new foreign words.
- Reading and understanding of different meaningful messages adapted to the students’ competence.
- Autonomous use of reading strategies (use of visual elements and previous knowledge about the topic, skimming, scanning and deducing meaning from the context).
- Interest in using ICTs to understand and produce texts.
- Reading and writing of different texts related to habitual communicate situations.
- Using songs, stories, games, etc to learn vocabulary and to practice the structures related to the topic.

Block 3. Knowledge of the Language

Linguistic Knowledge

- Linguistic Exponents: Can the lion run? Yes, it can/No it can’t. Where does the elephant live? The elephant lives in Africa. “Is it...?” , “Can I/ you/ it...? Yes, I/it can. No, I/it can’t”, “I/ you/ it can run/ swim...”
- Vocabulary: Related to Animals: lion, crocodile, monkey, etc, Actions: run, fly, swim and jump and Adjectives: big, small
- Classroom Language: Stand up, sit down, listen to me, Can you repeat, please? , What is ---------- in English? , silence...
Reflection about The Learning

- Participating willingly in the class activities.
- Respecting other classmates’ contributions.

Block 4. Socio-cultural Aspects and Intercultural Awareness

- Use of various strategies (repetition, imitation, the reading of texts, the use of dictionaries) for the acquisition of new lexicon, language forms and structures.
- Confidence in their own capacity to learn a foreign language.
- Value the cooperative work as a way of achieving individual and collective learning objectives.
- Receptive attitude towards those who speak other languages and have a different culture from their own.

4. ACTIVITIES

As regards the Methodology to follow, around which the activities proposed must be presented, all the Units are made up of different stages: Presentation (we present our students with the new vocabulary and introduce items pupils have already seen in previous units and years). Focused practice stage (in which the students manipulate the vocabulary present) and Communicative practice stage (students do activities based on a communicative perspective), feedback and correction stage (we check whether the students have internalized the new input, and make the necessary adjustments, modification and remedial work for the teaching-learning process to become successful-significant learning).

This didactic unit has been designed to be as adaptable and flexible as possible, and Lessons are structured in the same way because we want our pupils to familiarize with the dynamic of the class.

Lesson 1. (Listening, Speaking)

Warm up (15’): the warm up stage is divided in two routines. The first activity is related to the Today’s Poster and the other one is different each lesson.

Classroom routines: As we said before, starting the lesson routine, every day, one of the students (by list order) can complete the Today’s Poster. Taking into account the changes on date, month, day of the week and the weather. (5’)

Menu’s Poster. Regarding with the most important activity in the warm up stage, we show the Animals’ Poster to the children. Along with these, new words are introduced orally. Then we invite them to say what things they can see. It’s possible that they say it in Spanish, but we will repeat the word in English, indicating the picture and thus doing an initial assessment (10’).
Developing the lesson (25’) after that is time to start with the second stage: Developing the Lesson with the first activity:

Act. 1: Missing flashcards. To start, we point to the photographs on the poster and encourage the children to say every word with us. Later, we say: Close your eyes! Hiding a flashcard. Then we say: Open your eyes! And tell us which one is missing. The procedure is repeated hiding a different flashcard every time until they all have been named. (10’)

Act. 2: Next activity is Match the word cards with the flashcards. We put the flashcards on the blackboard again and ask some child to go out to the blackboard, then we give him/her a word card and encourage him/her to repeat with teacher, later he/she must place it under the correct flashcard. (10’). After having introduced the main vocabulary of the unit through listening and speaking skills, we are going to present the next activity which is....

Act. 3: Match. As you can see at the annex, with this worksheet children can enjoy matching the pictures with the corresponding words. As we all know, children love playing and we have prepared this funny Board Game to close this lesson.

Closure (10’):

Act. 4: Board Game: Rock, Paper, Scissors! In pairs, children take turns playing “Rock, Paper, Scissors!” with a partner. The winner moves their counter one space and says the word. The first person to reach “Finish!” wins.

Lesson 2 (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)

Warm up (15’): Now let’s move on to the warm up activity on Lesson 2: It’s the game: “Stop the bus” where the whole class takes part.

Classroom routines: (5’)

Game: Stop the bus, whole class. All Ss need pencil and paper to play this game. We write a letter on the board, and shout, "Start the bus." Then students write down as many words beginning with this letter as they can think of. When one S shouts out, "Stop the bus!" everyone stops writing. The students all get one point for each word. The S who has the most words wins an extra point. This is a good activity to review all kind of vocabulary. (10’)

Developing the lesson (25’) the class continues with a song.

Act. 1: Song (5’). “Animal Friends”. In this activity, children can listen, sing and act performing the song.

In the Pre-Listening activity: We show images of the objects that appear in the song. And ask the children to say what they are seeing.

In the While-Listening stage: We deliver a page with the lyrics of the song and write on the blackboard the most important words. Later, the children listen to the song and in the second time they can also sing it.
Finally, at the Post-Listening activity: It’s time to perform the most important phrases of the song and children enjoy imitating us while they sing the song again. All of us know that the children love to sing songs and this activity result very useful and attractive to our pupils.

Act. 2: Categories on the blackboard. Children are divided in two teams. First we write some wild animals with other categories of vocabulary on the blackboard and we read them aloud. Then we ask: (“Can you circle a wild animal?”. Obviously, the first one who circles the right item wins one point for his/her team (10’).

Act. 3: Make your cards. As you can see in the annex, children need crayons, pencil and scissors. They must make their own cards following the given instructions: Cut out the square, draw 4 animals and fold along the lines. (10’)

Closure (10’):

Act. 4: Card-game Dialogue, This activity is in pairs. In turns, one child chooses a corner of the card and asks to other: Is it big? Or Can it swim?, in order to guess which animals is.

Lesson 3 ( Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing )

Warm up (15’): let’s continue with the warm up activity on Lesson 3:

Classroom routines: (5’). Poster: Introduce actions (run, fly, swim, etc). Teacher shows flashcards and the first who guess it put the flashcard on the poster. Actions’ flashcards and word cards are hung at the front of the class. (10’)

Developing the lesson (25’)

Act. 1: Listen and do: teacher gives pupils several cards with the pictures of wild animals. Then gives instructions (Lions run, Kangaroos jump, etc.), pupils perform by groups of animals (10’).

Act. 2: Mimic game: One of the children acts, by mimic, as a wild animal in front of the other partners, and they must guess which animals is. (10’).

Act. 3: Worksheet. (5’)

Closure (10’):

Act. 4: The Rubbing out game. Draw on the blackboard several wild animals, farm animals and pets; divide the classroom into two groups. Ask each group to rub out one wild animal. Team wins one point for each correct answer. (10’) This activity can be enlarged asking children to rub out one part of the body of each animal.
Lesson 4 (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)

Warm up (15’):

Classroom routines: (5’)

Guess which animal it is: Show the poster with some flashcards face down, and then give one clue. (This animal can fly and it’s small) and pupils try to guess. (10’)

Developing the lesson (25’)

Act. 1: Worksheet: Which animals it is? Look and complete.

Act. 2: Bingo: Children complete the bingo chart with 6 different animals. They can write the names and draw the pictures in the squares. As the words are called out they should cover the corresponding picture/word with a piece of paper (10’).

Act. 3: Anagrams: Mix up the letters of one of the words and write them on the board. The children try to find the “hidden” word. Again, once the children are confident with the activity they can make their own anagrams for each other. (5’)

Closure (10’)

Act. 4: Blind guess (card game): in groups of five, a dealer chooses card at random and checks, pupils take in turns to guess (Is it the...?), the one who guesses keeps the card (10’).

Lesson 5 (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)

Warm up (15’)

Classroom routines: (5’)

Drawings in the air. The Animals poster is hanging on the blackboard. Teacher chooses a word and draws the outline of the item in the air. The children try to guess what you have drawn. (10’)

Developing the lesson (25’)

Act. 1: Writing on backs: Children work in pairs. They take turns to choose a word from the unit and then write it on their partner’s back with their finger and the partner tries to guess the word.

Act. 2: Word search: Deliver a page to children with two grids; in the first one they must research wild animals, in the other grid children can make their own word search. Finally, each child gives his/her grid to other classmate. (10’).

Act. 3: Odd one out: Prepare sets of flashcards or word cards which belong to the same word group. Include one element which doesn’t belong to the group. Place the cards on the blackboard and children try to identify and name the “different” word. (5’
Closure (10’)

Act. 4: Memory game: Start by saying: In the jungle there’s a (lion). Next child continues: In the jungle there’s a (lion) and a (crocodile). And children take turns to add new words, but must remember all the items which have gone before. The activity can be adapted to fit the different word groups previously learnt in other units. (10’).

Lesson 6 (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)

Warm up (15’)

Classroom routines: (5’)

What’s under the numbers? : Place different flashcards of the unit you wish to revise on the blackboard, face down. Number each flashcard with a number card. The class plays in teams. The teams take turns to choose a number and name the object on the card. If the team can say what it is they win the card. If not, the card is replaced. (10’)

Developing the lesson (25’)

Act. 1: Animal Quiz. (10’) Encourage children to write questions and answers on different cards, then divide the class into 5 teams. Wins the team who answer correctly the most number of questions.

Act. 2: Worksheet: Write True or false sentences. (10’).

Act. 3: I Spy Game: Choose a word from the unit (animals, actions, etc) and begin the game by saying: I spy with my little eye, something beginning with (M). The children guess the word that you are thinking of. Ask volunteers to choose the word for the class or, alternatively, have children play in groups. (5’)

Closure (10’)

Act. 4: Noughts and Crosses Game: Divide the class into two teams, “O” and “X”, and give five Post-its, to each. The teams write either “O” or “X”. Place 9 flashcards on the blackboard (three rows of three cards). The teams take turns at pointing to a card and naming it correctly, to be able to stick one of their Post-its on the card. The first team to place three in a row, vertically, horizontally or diagonally, wins the game. (10’).

Lesson 7 (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing)

Warm up (15’)

Classroom routines: (5’)

Listen and read a STORY: We read aloud a brief story about food. Then children must read again in turns and say what they think the story is about. (10’)

Developing the lesson (25’
Act. 1: Sing the Song (5’) after this story, we will sing the song again in order to consolidate the vocabulary and the linguistic structures learned in the unit. We have come to the next activity which is called: the Classroom Mailbox

Act. 2: The Classroom Mailbox. Write, draw and mail. This is a final task and each Ss must complete their own project and send the letter, without sender’s name, through the Classroom Mailbox to other classmate (each time to someone different. Teacher can do a raffle with the class’ numbers). (20’)

Closure (10’)

Act. 4: Guess the sender. One of the children can be the postman and distributes the letters. When children receive their letters they must read it and check it in order to correct them if necessary. Finally, they must ask questions such as: Is the macaroni your favourite food? To guess who the sender is. When the sender is found, the letter must be returned.

Lesson 8 ( Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing )

This session takes place in the computer room. A computer is available for each two pupils. We use the interactive unit Wild Animals, from the CD – ROM Clever Kids, published by Oxford University Press. First, children can practice and enlarge the vocabulary and structures of the unit through this didactic computer games.

5. METHODOLOGY

The present unit starts from a communicative and learner – centred approach. All the activities have been designed with the aim of practicing diverse communicative situations within contexts that are familiar and related to the pupils’ experiences and interests. This way, a relation is established between what the children already know and what they gradually assimilate, thus allowing for significant learning.

A relaxed and playful atmosphere is created through the diversity of activities, and the use of games, music and dramatization to create a low affective filter.

The nature of the materials and activities used for the development of this unit allows us to cater for diversity and a mixed ability classroom. If some difficulties appear along the teaching – learning process, reinforcement activities can be designed by adapting the materials and activities proposed.

6. ASSESSMENT

Legal Reference:

- Decree 286/2007, September the 7th.
- Order of 7th April 2008
Evaluation must be understood as one of the main educational components. The principal aim of evaluation is to reflect on the teaching-learning process, so it must cover all the aspects of the linguistic learning.

Actually, there is no need of an explicit evaluation, what is normally known as “test”, because during Primary Education the assessment instruments for a foreign language should be based on the systematic observation of the teaching-learning process.

Nevertheless, using a “test” can be also very interesting because thanks to that children can practise listening, reading and writing, and it will also help the teacher to achieve a better idea of how each pupil has improved during those days.

So this Unit is evaluated in different ways.

- During all sessions, the teacher must be careful about the use of language the children do, and see if they are improving their pronunciation, behaviour... how they do the activities...
- Nevertheless, a written examination must be done too, in order to see if they are able to recognize and produce the vocabulary worked in class.

Notwithstanding that, we need some criteria in order to assess students’ knowledge about the topic and about the foreign language itself. We should take into account that evaluation criteria must be established according to the specific objectives of the Unit.

As we can see, our duty as foreign language teachers is to assure that every objective of our Unit is evaluated in order to be aware of the grade in which our students have achieved what was expected.

7. CONCLUSION

The design of my didactic unit is an activity that integrates a great diversity of tasks and purposes full of contents and formative intentions.

The English as a Foreign Language subject contributes to the acquisition of abilities, skills and attitudes that will allow the students to approach and gain direct knowledge of a language, way of life, customs and social organisation that are different from one’s. It contributes to the student’s education from a global perspective that encourages the development of their personality and the establishment of relationships that are defined by social and cultural tolerance in a world where international communication is increasingly important.

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