Implementing - DAP - Developmentally Appropriate Practices to Increase Second Grade

Student Interaction in EFL Learning

Leidy Bibiana Chavarría Upegui

Universidad de Antioquia

Thesis, Research and Practicum Advisor

Claudia Posada Roldán

Medellín

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Abstract

The objective of this action research study was to explore Developmentally Appropriate Practices – DAP - to design, implement and analyze the impact of performing age-related activities with second grade students while fostering progress in interaction of FL learning. The participants were 44 public school students, aged 7 to 8 and their homeroom teacher. The process of implementation lasted 20 weeks, the data was gathered from surveys, checklists and observations. DAP actions allowed this research to gather qualitative and quantitative outcomes that were classified into three main categories: DAP impact on age-related activities, English interaction to promote language skills and the development of social skills.

Key words: Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), developmental stages, young learners, age-related activities, English interaction, development of social skills

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of

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Acknowledgement

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Preface

Practicum represents a stage of great learning and achievement for a pre-service teacher's professional and personal life. It is the opportunity to implement different theoretical perspectives provided during the Bachelor´s Degree in Foreign Language Teaching. This is how a qualitative action research design initiated aiming to provide the practitioner with central elements to explore the context, identify the issues to be addressed and to put into practice actions leading to the improvement of student interaction in EFL learning. The work performed during this project, led me to consider the consequences of ignoring developmentally appropriate practices. In addition, it led me to find and develop age-related activities which targeted the specific developmental stage of second grade students.

Description of the Context

This section addresses the general characteristics of the school where this study was conducted. It includes the description of the geographic context, environment, facilities and the social phenomena given there. It also states the mission and vision of the school, status of the foreign language teaching-learning process and the efforts made by the institution, teachers, coordinators and administrative staff. It concludes with the description of the research project participants.

This action research study was carried at the I.E. Alfonso Upegui Orozco a public school located in Medellín, Colombia, guided and supervised by the Colombian Ministry of Education. The school provides pre-school, primary and high school education to the population neighboring Robledo Pajarito and San Cristobal. The environment of the school and its facilities are ideal for learning since they offer a peaceful learning atmosphere. It has spacious classrooms, green areas, fresh air and a privileged location, which provides a broad view of the city; here urban and rural elements converge. The institution offers co-education to 26 groups from preschool to high school levels, to a student population of 1,015. Due to recent development of massive social housing projects in the sector, the area where the school is located faced an integration process between a historically rural area and urban type neighborhoods. This phenomenon led to abrupt transformation of the social and natural contexts.

Concerning the mission and vision, as set out in the PEI, Institutional Education Project, the school targets strengthening skills such as citizenship, social responsibility and environmental protection, I found the following:

MISSION: The school provides an education, which enhances analytical and critical thinking, through the application of a curriculum focused on the

development of academic and citizenship competencies, which aim to reinforce values that promote healthy coexistence and environmental protection. VISION: In 2020, the Educational Institution Alfonso Upegui Orozco aims to offer quality education based on the development of academic and citizenship competencies, by educating students in values such as respect, responsibility and tolerance. It also aims to foster student leadership within their social context to establish relationships of equity and environmental sustainability[1] (Institutional Education Project, [PEI], 2011 – 2016, p.193).

Currently, the school works closely with the University of Antioquia by allowing practicum students from the program in Foreign Language Education to contribute with their language experience mainly at the primary levels, since the school only has one English teacher imparting FL at the high school levels. It is important to point out that the school staff, reports having groups at the high school, which accomplish A2 levels of English. However, they also acknowledge that the process is not so successful at the primary level due to the time allocation for English, an hour a week, and the fact that at this level teacher are experts in didactics but they are not proficient in English.

The study population consisted of 44 second-grade students, 21 girls and 23 boys who enrolled for the 2017 academic year and whose ages ranged between 7 and 8. Spanish was their native language and English their foreign language. The classroom for second grade students is spacious, with university chairs for each student and with a television, video beam and internet access. Students live in the neighboring school areas, some more rural, others more urban, both within a low-middle socioeconomic stratum. Families are often single-parent households and in

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[1] Researcher translation in order to preserve the text uniformity.

some cases children stay with their relatives during the week and with their parents on weekends. The cooperating teacher states that students are in the process of strengthening reading and writing skills in their native language.

The cooperating teacher, CT, has a diploma in Primary Level Education Teaching with an emphasis in Spanish. She previously worked three years in the private sector and seven years in the public sector. Currently, she teaches all academic subjects including English. The pre-service teacher is Leidy Bibiana Chavarria, a student of the Foreign Language Education program at the University of Antioquia, her teaching experience is limited, her current role was to identify aspects which can help improve the English class.

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Statement of the Problem

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A month of class observation allowed me to identify that students lacked engagement with the activities proposed for the English class, since they were not age-related. This became more evident as students easily lost interest in EFL learning tasks and discipline problems gradually increased. The following indicators were common during the observation phase and serve as support to this analysis:

- English activities lasted more than the time allotted, this situation was associated to two different factors; first, the type of task developed was complex because **the task required an association skill that was not age-related**, second, writing was time consuming for students since at that age students were just beginning to develop this skill (Observations: February 8, 15, 22 March 1, 8, 2017). In addition, students were taught vocabulary through videos and using text-to-speech online tools to learn pronunciation. The CT used from three to five videos per class **without taking time to**

effectively teach pronunciation of English vocabulary (Observations: February 1, 22, 2017)

- During a class discussion, students mentioned that their favorite scholar activities were painting, making crafts, telling stories and lastly reading and writing (Class discussion, March 8, 2017). Student's favorite activities were not part of the English class, all activities involved writing and many students were frequently left behind. As a result, **students lost interest in the task and their disruptive behavior increased,** they interrupted their neighbor's work and there were fights among the kids. The time for class activities was used in solving classroom management issues rather than on language learning.

- Since there were so many classroom management issues, **exposure to English was limited** and the topics needed to be addressed in Spanish. The fact that the CT was not proficient in English increased lack of exposure, the language learning process was restricted to translation; the CT affirmed that: "students have reached few competencies in English because primary school teachers have basic knowledge of this language" (Interview, February 16, 2017).

- The class **did not follow a well-defined method or approach.** In an interview to the CT, her response to the question about the method she used for teaching a foreign language was, "I like to use ICT's as a tool for facilitating the teaching-learning processes" (Interview, February 16, 2017). She did not mention a specific method or approach to addresses student needs or context requirements.

In conclusion, the opportunities for students to learn the basic content of English at this grade level was limited, the activities needed to address student interests in addition to

implementing more age-related activities, this might then allow the teachers to boost the skills required at this stage of development more effectively. Considering these factors, this study focused on the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice approach –DAP, since it opens alternatives to face the challenge of targeting the specific developmental needs of second graders.

Theoretical Background

The work that I observed during this research project has prompted me to look into the cost of ignoring developmentally appropriate practices. As stated by Morgan, (2013) "when we ignore or interrupt healthy development, we tend to have problems. Exposing kids over the long term to environments, programs, and expectations that are not appropriate to their development has some clear effects" (para. 7). Namely an increase in behavioral problems caused by a zero-tolerance attitude from adults and their constant punishment. Additionally, and even more relevant is the fact that ignoring DAP implies the lack of development of the foundational skills that should be incorporated before any other formal learning is done (Morgan, 2013, para. 8).

What is DAP?

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children - NAEYC - (2005), Developmentally Appropriate Practice –DAP- is an approach that "involves teachers meeting young children where they are (by stage of development), both as individuals and as part of a group; and helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals" (Overview section, para. 2)**.** Rosen & Jaruszewicz (2009), support the importance of this approach in child education stating that "this concept is a cornerstone of most early childhood teacher education programs, suggesting that practice is appropriate when children are encouraged to construct their own knowledge through interactions with the physical, social, and cultural environments" (p.

163). Based on previous work by (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), the authors also mention that, "this approach is based on a long history of research on children, influenced by theorists such as Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Erikson" (p.162).

The DAP initiative was formally established in the United States and has influenced educators from different countries to reformulate the traditional curricula to target appropriate practices to foster the holistic development of young learners. For instance, Blooming Flowers, an action research study conducted in India in 2014 explains how they worked under the principles of developmentally appropriate practices.

"The experience at Blooming Flowers views early childhood not as a universal, decontextualized process of development towards a taken for granted state of maturity, but that which draws attention to children's engagement with a range of settings, relationships, activities, and skills through which they acquire culturally locate competencies and identities" (Kalpana Vengopal Institute, 2014, p.135).

The DAP Position Statement adopted in 2009, presents three core considerations to help practitioners make decisions to meet children learning and development needs:

What is known about child development and learning — referring to knowledge of age-related characteristics that permits general predictions about what experiences are likely to best promote children's learning and development.

What is known about each child as an individual — referring to what practitioners learn about each child that has implications for how best to adapt and be responsive to that individual variation.

What is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live — referring

to the values, expectations, and behavioral and linguistic conventions that shape

children's lives at home and in their communities, (…) (National Association for the

Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009, p. 9).

Therefore, it is important to define second graders' developmental stage and their specific

setting as well as student individual needs. According to Piaget's theory of stages of cognitive

development, from ages seven to eleven children are in the ***Concrete Operations Stage*** as cited

in (Heo, Han, Koch, & Aydin, 2011)**:**

In this stage, children not only can use symbols, but also can manipulate these symbols

logically to solve problems. By six or seven years old, most children develop the ability

to conserve number, length and liquid volume. Classification and seriation are important

logics to solve the basic arithmetic in a school. The concrete operations stage can be

viewed as a transition between pre-logical thought and complete logical thought of older

children who have attained formal operations stage (p.134).

Piaget's theory can work as a reference to focus on how children learn at this specific

stage; however, it is necessary to consider the individual pace at which each child develops the

cognitive skills.

Regarding the students surrounding context, the school has aimed to provide students

with a curriculum based on academic education, citizenship competencies and environmental

protection (I.E Alfonso Upegui Orozco, 2011 - 2016). It diagnosed that in the field of discipline

"the weaknesses lie in the fact that the scholar population comes from different parts of the city,

with diverse ways of life and behavior, which bear no resemblance to the context of the

educational community" (I.E Alfonso Upegui Orozco, 2011 - 2016, p. 193). Considering the

above, it is essential to make emphasis on student education in values and their appropriate

incorporation of social conventions. In this matter, DAP suggests that "a number of factors in the

emotional and social domain, such as independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and

cooperation, predict how well children make the transition to school and how they fare in the

early grades." (NAEYC, 2009, p. 7).

The DAP Position Statement also provides a list of guidelines for developmentally

appropriate practices, among them, the following which are highly important to this research

study since they contemplate language learning implications:

> Clearly, children who hear little or no English in the home would have even more initial
>
> difficulty with comprehension in English. For these children to gain the vocabulary and
>
> the advanced linguistic structures they will need for elementary grade reading, their
>
> teachers need to engage them in language interactions throughout the day, including
>
> reading to them in small groups and talking with them about the stories. Compelling
>
> evidence has shown that young children's alphabet knowledge and phonological
>
> awareness are significant predictors of their later proficiency in reading and writing. A
>
> decade ago, many preschool teachers did not perceive it as their role—or even see it as
>
> appropriate—to launch young children on early steps toward literacy, including
>
> familiarizing them with the world of print and the sounds of language.
>
> Play is an important vehicle or developing self-regulation as well as for promoting
>
> language, cognition, and social competence. (NAEYC, 2009, p. 14; 32).

Integrating DAP in EFL teaching

According to the book Teaching Languages to Young Learners, it is important to

consider some differences in teaching a foreign language to children.

Children are often more enthusiastic and lively as learners. They will have a go at an activity even when they don´t quite understand why or how. However, they also lose interest more quickly and are less able to keep themselves motivated on the task they find difficult. (Cameron, 2001, p. 6)

The author of the book also suggests practical notions to teach children EFL based on developmental psychology theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Brunner:

The child as sense maker. We can take from Piaget the very important idea of the child as an active learner and thinker, constructing his or her own knowledge from working with objects or ideas. Environment provides the setting for development through the opportunities it offers the child for action (p.5)

Words and meaning. Vygotsky's theories develop the importance of the *word* as unit. The word is a recognizable linguistic unit for children in their first language and so they will notice words in the new language. We teach children words in a new language by showing them objects that they can see and touch, and they have single word labels in the first language (p.7).

Scaffolding. The term scaffolding introduced by Brunner refers to support a child in carrying out an activity; this has proven to maintain young learners interested in the task. It can be done when simplifying the task, reminding the child of what the goal is and demonstrating an idealized version of the task (p.8).

Language routines. Brunner also says that routines can provide opportunities for meaningful language development; they allow the child to actively make sense of new language from familiar experiences and provide a space for language growth (p.11).

Considering the afore mentioned and the fact that these children belong to an EFL context, it is important to state that foreign language learning is a process which generally lags a step or two from that of the mother tongue. Nevertheless, tasks still aim to cover basic literacy skills, vocabulary development and phonological awareness, all through age-related activities and practices for second graders in an EFL learning environment.

Research Question

How can the Developmentally Appropriate Practice approach –DAP- contribute to the design and implementation of activities to increase second grade student interaction in EFL learning at a public school?

General Objective

To design and implement age-related activities through the DAP approach to foster second grade student interaction in English class.

Specific Objectives

- Identify the age-related activities according to DAP approach.

- Implement DAP activities to improve language skills in the EFL class.

- Analyze the impact of implementing DAP approach regarding student interaction in EFL.

Action Plan

The action plan from the second to the fourth school term was designed bearing in mind the DAP approach principles for EFL learning. Additionally, the school syllabus and the In-Situ Program were also considered, as it was important to incorporate literacy, vocabulary and the development of social skills. This was done through the use of games, visual aids, songs and videos focused on phonics, labeling activities, sequencing, storytelling and handcrafts. In

summary, challenging and doable activities. Moreover, it was imperative to contemplate

appropriate strategies such as establishing routines for the English class, small group activities,

setting examples of ideal outcomes and dividing activities into stages.

The following chart describes the action plan in detail:

TERM	ACTIONS
SECOND TERM March 27th to June 09th Weeks: 10	Topic 1: The alphabet (Social skills: Respect)[2]. Activities: Songs and chats, fishing game, mini book, online matching games. Achievable Goal: Students create a paper chain spelling their names.
	Topic 2: Family members (Social skills: Responsibility). Activities: Finger puppets, matching games, storytelling using sequences. Achievable Goal: Students create a poster with their family tree.
TIRD TERM July 4th to September 8th Weeks: 10	Topic 3: Community helpers (Social skills: Tolerance). Activities: Mimic working actions, sort and classifying, matching worksheets. Achievable Goal: Students create a poster representing community while performing a community helper's puzzle.
	Topic 4: Toys & Positional words (Social skills: Generosity). Activities: Fishing game, TPR game. Where am I? TPR game using prepositions of place. Where is my toy? Achievable Goal: Students create the content for a mini book using toys vocabulary and prepositions of place.

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[2] Material for working on the development of social skills was taken from character education curriculum available at: http://characterfirsteducation.com/c/curriculum.php

The data collection instruments for this study were observations, checklists, and a student survey after each topic. Descriptive observations provided specific elements to reflect on the changes introduced to the English class, they were documented and analyzed every class. The checklist, was designed by the pre-service teacher so that the CT would objectively track student interaction with the target language through a range of age-related activities and the development of the different social skills. It also included a separate item for comments and suggestions concerning student performance, teaching practice and the impact of DAP in the classroom. At the end of every topic, every four weeks, students filled-in a smiling face survey to express their feelings about the class activities, how difficult they were, how much they learned and what they learned about the magic word. These instruments were cross-referenced to evaluate the outcomes of the implementation.

Development of Actions

The following is a report on the progress and adaptations of the Action Plan during the second and third school terms of 2017. It is important to bear in mind that between May 11th and June 16th there was a teacher strike in the public sector, students missed four weeks of class and the school calendar was modified to replace the missed classes within the academic year. Consequently, the data collection timeline took place as of March 27th to October 6th.

Adams, (as cited by NAEYC 1998), advocates that "a fundamental insight developed in children's early years through instruction is the alphabetic principle, the understanding that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds (p. 4)". At that point, second grade students were in the process of strengthening reading and writing skills in their mother tongue, therefore, it was useful for them to be introduced to the English alphabet parallelly, which was done using alphabet songs and vocabulary chants to generate phonological and linguistic

awareness. This was complemented by matching activities such as the fishing game and the online game Monster's House, through the games, students had to choose a letter according to its sound. The mini book emphasized the use of vocabulary and phonics, that is, words related to the beginning sound of each alphabet letter. At the end of the topic, students created a paper chain spelling their names both physically and orally, this activity fostered student motor skills as they manipulated concrete material with a language specific purpose. The second and third topics; Family Members and Community Helpers focused on vocabulary building and word recognition. This facilitated student interaction using English words related to their everyday context, activities centered on sequencing, sorting and classifying. A storytelling session about "The Frog Family" introduced the topic Family Members, after listening to the story, students had the opportunity to play the role of the family members and act out the sequence of the story while repeating key words. They also worked on a matching activity in which they had to cut images and match the frog characters to the frog family member's names. Yet, another activity was the finger puppets, here students listened to a song which referenced the name of the fingers and at the same time, associated them with the family members, students were then able to associate the different vocabulary. The Community Helpers' topic employed flashcards for students to perform an association task, they manipulated images with the name of different community helpers, their tools and working places were emphasized. After, students made a classifying activity choosing three of their favorite community helpers, drawing and labeling their tools and working places. This topic ended with the creation of a community, students began by making a puzzle of different community helpers which they in turn placed on a big poster, this was done in groups to reinforce the concept of cooperative work. During all the classes dealing with community helpers, the vocabulary was reinforced by having the flashcards pasted in the classroom,

watching videos and playing games related to the topic. The last phase of implementation, highlighted the topic of toys and prepositions of place; during this stage of the project, activities were recycled with the aim of setting patterns for students to perform doable activities while still being challenged. For instance, the fishing game introduced toys' vocabulary, where student worked on word recognition and meaning. In the mini book activity students linked toys vocabulary and prepositions, they made their own drawings and wrote sentences indicating the different positions.

Regarding citizenship skills DAP served its purpose by introducing magic words at the beginning of each topic, additionally, students were able to enhance their English vocabulary as the magic word was in FL and it was associated to an animal which represented it, also in English. The meaning and application of the magic word was reinforced in students' daily situations through a reflection addressed in Spanish at the beginning or at the end of each class. These reflections led to fruitful outcomes in student interaction in discussions, they also showed a process of improvement in student behavior and classroom atmosphere specially when working in teams and following rules to participate in proposed games. This does not necessarily mean that fights among students and disruptive behavior were not part of class routine since students were still in the process of acquiring self-regulation skills.

<div align="center">**Findings and Interpretations**</div>

For the analysis of data gathered in the course of the implementation phase, I adopted the method suggested by Burns (1999) following these stages: assembling, coding and comparing the data, building meanings and interpretations and reporting outcomes (pp. 157–160). After carrying out these five steps, three main analysis categories were taken: Age-related activities, English interaction to promote language skills and DAP Impact on social skills. Each

category was crossed referenced by coding and analyzing the different data collection

instruments defined in the action plan. The categories worked as a framework to guide this

report reflecting on the contribution DAP had on second grade student interaction in EFL

learning at this public school.

The 20-week intervention process focused on gathering qualitative data however, to

evidence certain trends and to validate outcomes, a process of quantitative data analysis was

also performed. The researcher's instruments for DAP implementation were observations which

provided me with specific elements to analyze the categories. Three surveys tracked the

perception of classroom activities by 44 students[3] and a CT checklist comprising five aspects of

class development in addition to her comments that supported the degree of validity of the

different DAP classroom actions.

Age related activities

DAP literature on how children develop and learn set the basis to support the design of

activities which targeted the developmental stage of second grade students. The DAP Position

Statement claims that "The way teachers design learning experiences, how they engage children

and respond to them, how they adapt their teaching and interactions to children's background,

the feedback they give—these matter greatly in children's learning" (NAEYC, 2009, p. 8).

Strong evidence of ***student engagement, development of motor skills, seriation and matching***

appeared after cross referencing the data analysis. Regarding ***student engagement***, the

implementation demonstrated students' high interest in performing the proposed activities,

especially when they have the opportunity to interact with concrete material, that is to see, touch,

move and perform a role. Observations indicated that:

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[3] There were student absences while conducting surveys.

"Students loved the family finger video, the rhythm of the song cheered them up enough

to dance and clown around with the characters… it was relaxing and interesting for kids

because they were active and used their bodies to learn instead of just sitting quietly and

listening to the teacher" (Obs. July 26, 2017).

One of the strategies that helped me connect students to class was the use of games with the

purpose of introducing a new topic at the beginning of the class or to give feedback after

performing an independent task:

"Reinforcing explanation with simple mimic games is definitely a great strategy for kids,

they associate meanings with actions and it facilitates vocabulary acquisitions. I addition,

these quick games allowed students to be active in roles through which they could play

and learn at the same time. I noticed that it is better when games are short and quick

because you get student attention and you can easily move to a writing, listening or

independent work task" (Obs. September 20, 2017).

Let us now turn to *the development of motor skills*, Developmentally Appropriate Practices for

large groups requires a lot of preparation time, for instance, when the group made handcrafts,

although it was time consuming, it was worthwhile as students connected to the activity and

interacted with the material while using the target language, "Students were relaxed cutting,

drawing, pasting, writing the names of their relatives and using the English vocabulary they

learned to make the family tree, as students advanced in the activity, they seemed happy and

proud of the nice results" (Obs. August 2, 2017). During the different implementation stages the

CT highlighted the use, management and presentation of materials, "The PST[4] took into account

the use of audiovisual material at different stages of the class. I emphasize the practitioner´s

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[4] PST. Pre-service teacher.

creativity when designing and executing class"[5] (CT Checklist: July 26, 2017). The CT also

wrote, "The PST mixes different materials and educational resources enhancing their

pedagogical use, she promotes cooperative work, she implements activities that allow students to

manipulate concrete material"[6] (CT Checklist: August 23, 2017). During the last phase of

implementation, the CT stated, "The PST is acquainted with different teaching materials and

available resources, she uses them creatively, flexibly and with clear purposes"[7] (CT Checklist:

September 6, 2017). On the topic of *seriation and matching* skills, that is, the doable and

progressively challenging activities addressed in DAP theory, I evidenced that theory and

practice overlap:

> "As students already knew the coloring matching test strategy, they performed this
>
> activity in less time compared to the previous coloring test. This test included many more
>
> options than previous, and I was glad to hear students' responses in English when I asked
>
> what they saw in each image" (Obs. September 6, 2017).

Student surveys and the CT checklist coincide on the fact that the degree of difficulty of the

activities was in line with the stage of development of the students. Item 4 in Table 1, reveals

that the CT scored with 100 percent that activities were doable and appropriated for students'

developmental stage during DAP implementation. Her comments also supported that, "The PST

establishes appropriate correspondence between the degree of complexity of the contents with

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[5] La estudiante en práctica tuvo en cuenta material audiovisual para utilizarlo en diferentes momentos de la clase. Destaco la creatividad de la practicante para diseñar y ejecutar la clase.

[6] Leidy combina los distintos materiales y recursos educativos para potenciar su uso pedagógico y promueve el trabajo colaborativo. Realiza actividades que permiten que los estudiantes manipulen material concreto.

[7] La estudiante en práctica, conoce los materiales de enseñanza y los recursos didácticos disponibles y los utiliza con creatividad, flexibilidad y propósitos claros.

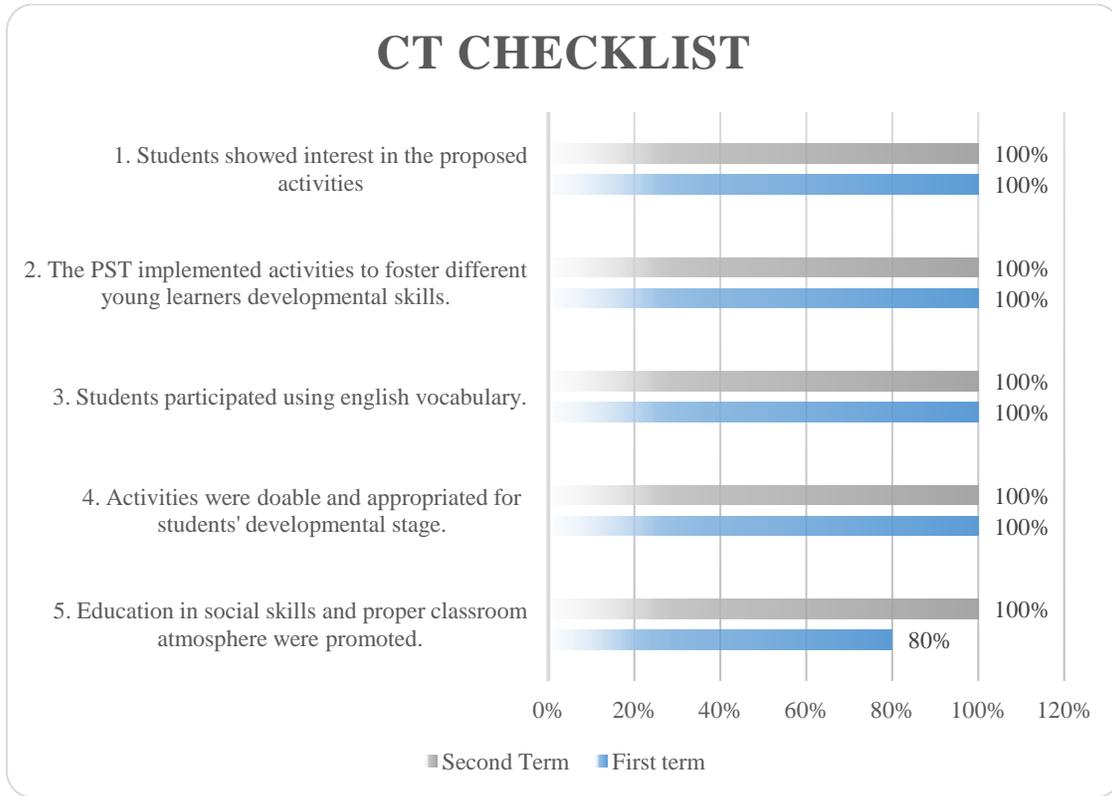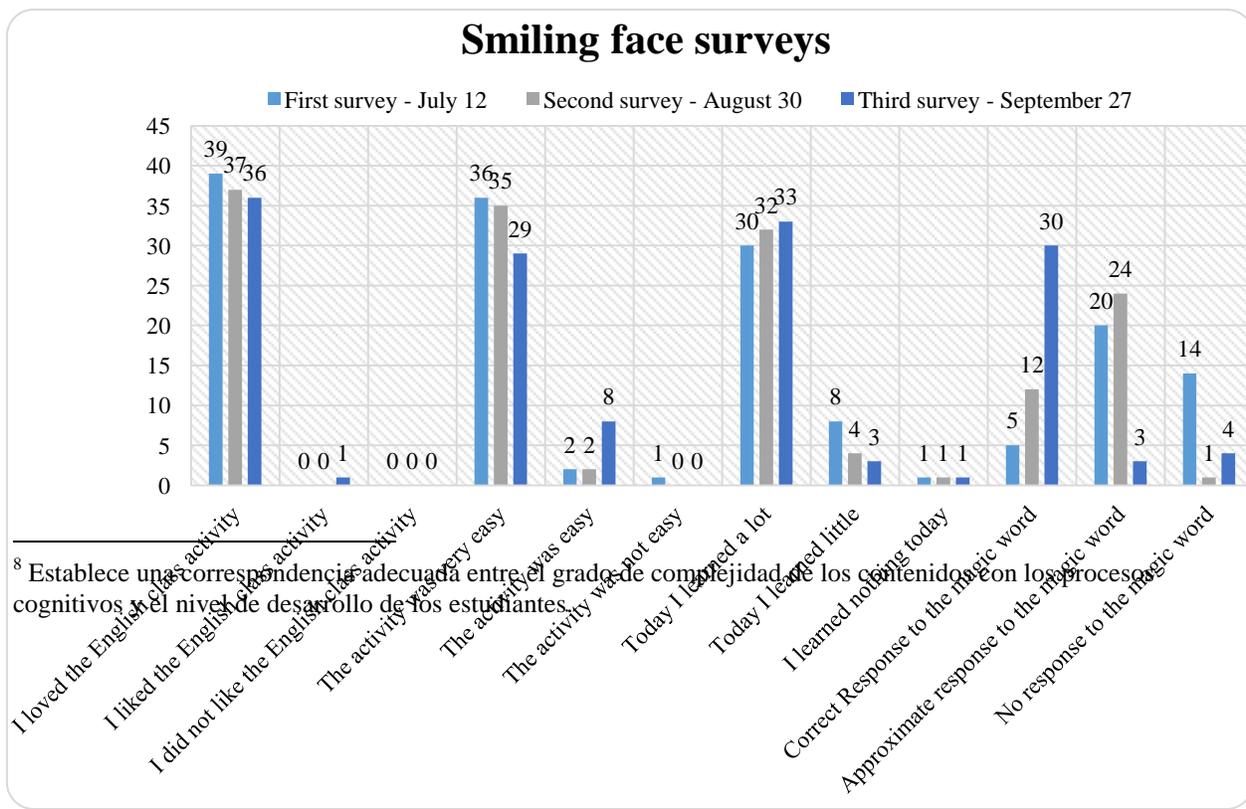the cognitive processes and the level of development of the students[8]" (CT Checklist: September 13, 2017).

CT CHECKLIST

Item	Second Term	First term
1. Students showed interest in the proposed activities	100%	100%
2. The PST implemented activities to foster different young learners developmental skills.	100%	100%
3. Students participated using english vocabulary.	100%	100%
4. Activities were doable and appropriated for students' developmental stage.	100%	100%
5. Education in social skills and proper classroom atmosphere were promoted.	100%	80%

Table 1

Similarly, student surveys concur with the CT´s viewpoint, Table 2 shows that most

Smiling face surveys

First survey - July 12 / Second survey - August 30 / Third survey - September 27

Category	First survey	Second survey	Third survey
I loved the English class activity	39	37	36
I liked the English class activity	0	0	1
I did not like the English class activity	0	0	0
The activity was very easy	36	35	29
The activity was easy	2	2	8
The activity was not easy	1	0	0
Today I learned a lot	30	32	33
Today I learned little	8	4	3
I learned nothing today	1	1	1
Correct Response to the magic word	5	12	30
Approximate response to the magic word	20	24	3
No response to the magic word	14	1	4

[8] Establece unas correspondencia adecuada entre el grado de complejidad de los contenidos con los procesos cognitivos y el nivel de desarrollo de los estudiantes.

students found activities easy to perform during the three surveys 92,3 % in the first survey, 94,6% in the second and 78,4% in the third. Students also reported positive results in terms of their self-assessment about their level of learning. Their responses show a successive increase during the implementation as follows, 76,9 % survey 1, 86,5% survey 2, 89,2% survey 3. These results suggest that DAP literature allowed me to identify and put into practice age-related activities and teaching strategies to meet the challenges of this student population.

Table 2

English interaction to promote language skills.

Promoting English learning while working on foundational cognitive skills was the priority of this project. It is important to bear in mind the teaching context of this study because it implied students' limited exposure to English, parent's limited knowledge of the language and the lack of English proficiency in primary school teachers. It is also relevant to consider that students' literacy skills in their mother tongue was in a process of development and it was the ideal moment to work in student's fundamental language skills in EFL acquisition. According to National Association for the Education of Young Children – NAEYC & International Reading Association – IRA, (1998) "learning a second language should not mean losing the first language. In fact, early childhood programs that support children's development in their home language are, at the same time, helping children develop future proficiency in English" (p.2). Data analysis show great evidence about ***literacy skills, phonological awareness, word recognition and vocabulary building.*** The first goal for students in the English class, was to learn how to spell their names using the English Alphabet, this way, ***literacy skills*** in FL were developed from the basis of previous knowledge of Spanish alphabet, according to the

observations and CT checklist, meaningful learning was achieved, "Students remember well last class activity and its objective; they mentioned that they learned the spelling of their names in English and that they made a paper chain to say it" (Obs. July 5, 2017). Likewise, CT mentioned that, "The PST established methodologies that target the students' multiple intelligences. She planned activities that enable the acquisition of meaningful learning"[9] (CT Checklist: July 12, 2017). Similarly, positive outcomes on *phonological awareness* appeared:

"Students mentioned the differences in writing and pronunciation and repeated the toys vocabulary pronunciation. Working of phonological awareness is highly important for students, as they are exposed to English only during class time and they should start to notice that writing and pronunciation work differently in English in comparison with their mother tongue" (Obs. October 4, 2017).

However, working in writing skills was demanding and time consuming since it was still a complex task for kids even in their mother tongue:

"I saw students were not so happy when they must write, they prefer drawing or coloring. I had to give an example of how to write the names of the relatives of some students to help them progress in the assigned task. Undoubtedly, writing is a fundamental skill they should keep working on" (Obs. August 2, 2017).

Word recognition and vocabulary building were the most representative languages skills promoted with DAP, effective feedback using visual aids, crafts, labeling and classifications activities provided a positive impact on EFL learning:

"It is evident that the time devoted to give feedback on vocabulary and word recognition has increased student use of vocabulary in English, progressively, they are able to

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[9] Las estrategias metodologías establecidas respondieron a las inteligencias múltiples de los estudiantes. La estudiante en práctica planeó actividades que posibilitan la adquisición de aprendizajes significativos.

remember previous vocabulary and incorporate new words. Making a comparison, I see

the difference between the second session studying the community helper's topic and this

one that is the fourth, students mention more words and participate with more confidence

using English vocabulary" (Obs. September 6, 2017).

Evidence on student interaction in EFL appeared in the CT's Checklist, she indicated that

students interacted and participated using English vocabulary 100 percent of classes (see Table

1). In summary, these results show that Developmentally Appropriate Practices were essential to

adapt teaching strategies to implement activities that privileged English interaction in this

classroom.

DAP Impact in the development of social skills

Single-parent household families, possible lack of affection and lack of self-regulation

that led to classroom management difficulties were recurrent concerns this study had to address

too. DAP principles illustrated me on the importance of incorporating topics focused on social,

cultural and character education in any subject matter of the curriculum.

"When young children are in a group setting outside the home, what makes sense to

them, how they use language to interact, and how they experience this new world

depend on the social and cultural contexts to which they are accustomed" (NAEYC,

2009, p. 10).

In order to work in alignment to what the school promotes in regards to the development

of social skills while promoting FL interaction, this project targeted to work in *citizenship*

skills, self-regulation and cooperative work by including as part of the curriculum English

vocabulary content referring to values such as respect, responsibility, tolerance, generosity,

among others. These were called "magic words" and they were implemented through reflections

on classroom situations and students' daily life. Group activities were also carried out to strengthen cooperative work, leadership skills and respect for the diversity of ideas. Contrary to expectations, this study found significant outcomes in regard to the development of social skills. The process of education in *citizen skills* went from bottom to top, at the early stages of implementation it was difficult for students to mention the magic word in English or give accurate examples based on their experiences using their mother tongue:

"When I asked kids about the magic word, they still hesitate or do not answer but, when I asked about the animal related to the magic word they made the connection and said respect, some of them in English and others in Spanish" (Obs. July 12, 2017).

Gradually, students' understanding improved, "The final reflection was great; today students learned the importance of time and the importance of doing their best in every activity…" (Obs. August 16, 2017). Then, I observed that, "Students spelled correctly magic word because they remembered the English alphabet. They mentioned some situations like being tolerant at home, ~~such as~~ respecting their brothers' and sisters' belongings and sharing with their relatives" (Obs. August 23, 2017). Furthermore, there was a significant positive correlation in the process of teaching students to write and spell the magic word in English, statistics in Table 2 show an increasing and significant improvement when students were asked to write the magic word, correct responses went from five in the first survey to 12 in the second survey and 30 in the third survey.

Further analysis from observations showed that DAP had positive impact on students' *self-regulation*. At the beginning of the school year, it was difficult for kids to embrace class rules and routines. Class reflections about the magic word reinforced the benefits of contributing to maintain a proper class environment, although it was fruitful it was a

challenging process, "Students misbehave almost all the time, their attentiveness decreased, and

I had to stop many times to ask for silence" (Obs. July 26, 2017). Gradually, I started to identify

students' individual needs that were influencing negatively class environment, actions such as

having difficult students work outside the classroom with the CT and assigning them roles to

help with class material were helpful:

> "Classroom environment with the kids who were inside with me was great, they were
>
> connected with my instructions and feedback all the time and they enjoyed performing
>
> the activity. The three students who were outside needed special attention. They
>
> performed the activity well, however, they tried to get my attention all the time by
>
> interrupting their classmates work" (Obs. September 6, 2017).

Reflections on how lack of self-regulation affected students' performance also

contributed to raise awareness

> "…Students should be aware about the consequences of not paying attention to the
>
> explanations, most of the students completed the activity but always the same students
>
> were behind, and the final reflection worked well as they were able to mention concrete
>
> examples of how disruptive behavior affects their progress in the assigned task" (Obs.
>
> October 4, 2017).

DAP implementation on social skills also fostered ***cooperative learning*** through

activities in which students had specific roles and tasks, the CT mentioned about the actions

taken that, "The PST, takes advantage of the different class moments to work on education in

values. She promotes cooperative learning and stablishes roles for students" [10] (CT Checklist.

August 2, 2017). Carrying out group activities within a crowded class was demanding when

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[10] Leidy, utiliza los diferentes momentos de la clase como oportunidad para enseñar y transmitir valores. Realiza trabajo colaborativo y establece roles.

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dealing with classroom management and monitoring group progress, nevertheless positive

outcomes came out:

> "Each team had around 6 to 7 students and there was a team with 4 students, it was
>
> curious to observe that the 4 students' team advanced more and worked better. I mean
>
> this team did not fight, did not asked constantly for support, they assigned themselves
>
> roles and they created a really nice community, they were also the ones to finish first"
>
> (Obs. August 23, 2017).

Observations also provided evidence that students were cooperative when performing

individual activities, "I noticed a positive attitude regarding cooperative work, students who

finished first volunteered to help the ones who were behind" (Obs. September 27, 2017).

Including social skills in the English class curriculum helped to generate a better classroom

atmosphere for students and to reinforce citizenship skills that kids needed to interact in their

context, The CT wrote a key comment in this regard, "The student in practice has an empathic

attitude, she is open to learning, is a mediator of conflicts and links content to the interests and

life experiences of students"[11] (CT Checklist, October 4, 2017).

Together, these results provide important insights to the research question in this project

showing that the DAP approach provides teachers with a broad set of consideration to teach

young learners while working in both, the development of cognitive skills for academic success

and the social skills children need to coexist in a healthy environment.

Conclusions

According to the objective of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of

DAP helped me as pre-service teacher to have a clear view of students' cognitive stage

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[11] La estudiante en práctica tiene actitud de empatía, es abierta al aprendizaje, mediadora de conflictos, vincula los contenidos a los intereses y experiencias de vida de los estudiantes.

characteristics and the context needs. Here, I address how DAP approach allowed me to take good decisions and identify age-related activities according to my students' developmental needs.

The changes in the class material and type of task, increased student engagement, student perception about the activities was outstanding and the CT also highlighted the variety, use and specific purposes of EFL teaching materials. However, it appears to be a complex affair due to the required time for material preparation and the number of students in this class, DAP recommendations for the setting include "resources to ensure small class sizes and low ratios of teachers to children. Teachers will more effectively implement and individualize the recommendations from literacy research if they can work with smaller groups of children" (NAEYC & IRA, 1998, p.2).

DAP implementation achieved important results in EFL student interaction. Literacy skills in FL were fostered parallelly to students' mother tongue which facilitated, word recognition, phonological awareness and word recognition. The impact of introducing the magic word as a way to promote social skills in the English class was an important factor that raised my awareness of the importance of taking into account students context, I learned that building kids character is fundamental to educate good citizens, the reflections students made were enriching and I was able to observe a gradual improvement in students' behavior and cooperative learning.

Although carrying out DAP at a public-school setting is a complex matter, institutions should be aware about the great benefits this approach provide for students and teachers as it priorities quality and effective education.

Reflection

I have always considered that educators have a great responsibility in their hands and that their profession involves dealing with very serious issues. I knew this practicum was not only about teaching English and as PST I had to struggle with the challenges of facing an unknown field. At the beginning of this project, I had little understanding and experience in teaching young learners.

Conducting action research allowed me to broaden my perception of teaching children and targeting the social dynamics of a low-middle social strata public school. The approach I decided to implement posed even more challenges as it implied time, devotion and determination. At the end of the process, I was glad to say that all efforts were worthwhile, I evidenced how this study brought great benefits to the participants and how it enhanced my teaching skills.

My final reflection is about the importance of constantly reflecting and questioning our teaching practice. This is how we can meet students' specific needs, develop suitable strategies according to their learning context and above all is to make professional development a top priority.

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