Co-constructed EFL learning on different proficiency levels
– Independence and scaffolding

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Acknowledgement

This thesis is dedicated to all EFL students wishing them good luck on their learning journey.

Special thanks also go to all my students, especially the three students from this research, with whom I have had the opportunity to engage in breathtaking conversation about all kinds of topic and who have enriched my knowledge of the world.

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Abstract

The main aim of this research was to delve into the minds of English as a foreign language students and try to find the right amount of guidelines provided by the teacher and materials while using constructivism represented by communicative approach and Dogme methodologies. As these classes were individual, the teacher’s role was to adjust the amount of constructivism and independence according to the student’s preference, which was expressed during interviews in which they reflected on their learning journey. The study also examined if and how the students’ initial level and previous learning experience influenced their willingness and ability to take charge of their learning and direct it based on their needs, moving away from prepared curriculum in form of a textbook or as decided by the teacher.

The findings showed virtually no difference between students on different levels of proficiency and all students were able to deal with a high level of constructivism and effectively direct their learning. Their learning curve showed a notable improvement especially at the beginning; all of this while achieving their goals and especially feeling more confident about their abilities. Another conclusion is that their preference was towards spoken practice of new language in a personalized context of relevant topics, giving them the opportunity to build fluency, practice previous topics and learn new vocabulary at the same time.

Keywords:
constructivism in EFL, Dogme, productive skills, building confidence, personalized context
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In the current interconnected globalized world, it is inevitable that one is going to need to communicate with people from other parts of the planet. English emerged as a leading international language and many pursue acquiring this valuable skill not only for their professional life, but it also finds wide use in entertainment or while travelling.

Nowadays, students have a wide selection of ways to learn; however, their effort is not always successful, and we can see many people being unable to communicate despite being through several years of studying, be it in school settings or outside. Considering that this is often the main purpose of learning a foreign language, the question that arises is therefore to what extent the current curricula and methods reflect this and if the students have the possibility to influence what and how they learn.

This study focuses on the learning phase of the English language, particularly the degree of independence and support that students prefer when learning new topics and practicing their skills. In order to address this, one of the currently most common methodologies called communicative approach, which introduces new language via relevant context, was chosen to serve as the base together with Dogme, a methodology using a high degree of freedom and focusing on student’s spoken production, helping them bridge the communicational gap. Both of them use constructivism, whose degree can be adjusted by the teacher with communicative approach generally offering more scaffolding tools.

Learning journey of three individual students, Antonia, Nicolas and Carolina, was followed and reflected upon. Each of them started at a different proficiency level from complete beginner to intermediate. The work includes direct interviews with all three of them reflecting on their advancement and preferences, as well as teacher’s observation and comments. Their individual goals and attitudes determine the balance of the methodologies as well as the use of additional exercises and materials. Partial comparisons and conclusions are drawn throughout the text; the first one at the beginning of the course, the second one halfway through it and the last one upon concluding the course scope, which hovered around two to three months and estimated 50 contact hours.

The research was conducted in search of the ideal methodology, or a combination thereof, to address student’s needs and goals and also to see, whether their attitude towards constructing their own knowledge and taking charge of their own learning correlates with their proficiency
level. It also includes a reflection on the methodologies and how these deal with student-centered learning and constructivism.

1.1 Research background
Languages can be acquired in a number of ways, be it the natural way or in a structured and guided one. The natural acquisition is closely connected to young learners, who need language as the medium to communicate with the rest of the world. Structured learning is then used for them to polish their skills (think of studying your own language at school). When a person decides to learn a new skill at a later stage of life or as an extra ability, this process can be mimicked or more control over the process can be taken by the guides, most commonly teachers, who follow prepared suggested methods.

The choice of the language for this research is logical; English as a language has become the number one worldwide and is expected to continue its growth of interest (British Council, 2013). This peak is rather recent and the current teaching methodologies are still under development, trying to adjust to the great spread as well as the variety of learners. Their motivation and reasons for doing so are also varied and this needs to be reflected by the approach, scope of target language and also the activities conducted to maximize their achievement.

Recently, there has been a shift toward focus on communication, rather than on grammar and structures (Howatt & Smith, 2014; Huang, 2010; He, 2014). This also influences the methods used in classes and they rely more on use of language as opposed to direct studying of rules and theoretical understanding (McKendry, 2006). Some of the methods also utilize constructivism and zone of proximal development and thus enable the students to take more charge of their own learning (Turuk, 2008). They might at times present a new approach, unlike the traditional school system, and the students’ reaction is not homogeneous.

It is of utmost importance to take this consideration into account when working with a student as their progress is the ultimate goal. Making them participate and co-design the whole process for themselves might pose a new challenge and is not supposed to be the universal solution (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). It should rather be seen as one of the suggestions in order to cater more to the individual needs of the students.
The whole idea of the research stems from the very fact that every person is an individual and despite having an overwhelming amount of research and support in this field, the reality is that most of the teachers follow certain pattern they have been taught. In case this pattern does not accommodate an individual, the students are the ones forced to adjust and this might even lead to forming a negative experience and feeling toward the subject and ultimately not achieving their goals.

1.2 Aim

The research in particular is set in the context of learning a language at a later stage of life. The specific group studied consists of three individual adult students, who come from a comparable background and are facing a similar challenge in terms of their needs. One difference among them is their initial language level. This is set in order to look into their attitudes in search of commonalities and differences based on this premise.

The main aim of this research is examining this process from the point of view of the student and evaluating their willingness and desire to be in charge of their learning as opposed to being guided by the teacher or relying on generic materials (most commonly a textbook). It also considers this in combination with different levels of understanding and experience with the studied foreign language. Last but not least, it reflects on the teaching practice and how the methodologies reflect the findings.

The three core questions of this research were formed as follows:
Do the students prefer constructing their own learning process, or do they prefer relying on the teacher or textbook?
Does their attitude change with their proficiency level and considering previous learning experience?
How do the selected methodologies consider student’s approach to constructivism?

The teacher tried to adjust to the students’ preference and used an appropriate amount of constructivism in classes while keeping the student informed about the process and working with them on the decisions which method or materials to use. For experimental purposes, more difficult materials were at times used, in order to observe the student’s reaction and how they can cope up with those circumstances.
Chapter 2 - Literature

2.1 Literature review
The field of language acquisition as well as language teaching has been a subject of study for a considerable time. The understanding has developed over time and it has incorporated numerous changes and countless new approaches and theories. Not all of these were received positively or became a part of current trends. Nevertheless, it is important to investigate the theories before starting the research itself as it is closely connected with another theoretical frame: constructivism. This popular method of skill acquisition is often regarded as being one of the most efficient (Miranda, n.d.). Its use of putting the theory into practice also had impact on language teaching.

The theory overview is split into two parts which largely overlap. While the first one has a goal of defining constructivism, co-constructivism and their use in learning theories and teaching approaches, the second one focuses more on the connection of constructivism and individual teaching methodologies, which may be used during the research or had an impact on the previous development and attitudes of the students.

2.1.1 Constructivism
Constructivism is a learning theory that originated at the beginning of the twentieth century and the most important people for its development were Jean Piaget, who linked this theory to natural way of acquiring knowledge as children, and Lev Vygotsky, whose research focused on second language acquisition (Miranda, n.d.). The shared core belief is that a learner constructs the knowledge based on their own experience. In this case, direct experience of working with subject is generally thought to be the best way, accompanied by reflection on one’s learning process (Weimer, 2012).

Constructivism can be applied in a variety of cases and offers a flexible adaptation to the participants, subject of learning, goals or circumstances. As such, there are many flexible values to be considered while using this method and it is not a set process that always yields same results and duplicates original knowledge.

One of the core terms in constructivism is Zone of Proximal Development, a term coined by Vygotsky, which represent an area which has yet to be taught or explained to the student, nevertheless, they have the skills necessary be able to deduct the meaning and solve the situation
with only minor help from a ‘more knowledgeable other’ (Vygotsky, 1978). In EFL, it is more common to see the term ‘scaffolding’, which means basically the same with the emphasis of support by the teacher and peers. This term was introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) at roughly the same time as Vygotsky’s theories.

Ideally, the students should be faced with a task they need to work on and the teacher represents a facilitator, whose role is not to tell the student everything and ask them to repeat, but rather guiding the student and providing help and support as necessary. The ultimate goal combines knowledge and skills, meaning the students are not only able to work with theoretical concepts, but also apply them in a given scenario (Seedhouse, 2004; Zimmerman, 1997; Turuk, 2008), combining them with their other previous knowledge and even discovering or inferring things by themselves.

2.1.2 Student-centered classes

The concept of student-centered classes stems from constructivism. It takes the core idea of students being actively involved in the learning process as opposed to the more traditional approach of teacher explaining the subject to the students, who then focus on memorizing (Glowa & Goodell, 2016; Hargreaves, 2006).

The spread of these can be traced back to 1990s (Garrett, 2008; Liu & Shao, 2013) and has gained considerable popularity since then. While it may not be the number one most common method in public school systems (Wilmot, 2011) all over the world, there is a strong tendency and evidence that it can produce better results in comparison to teacher-centered classes.

In a student-centered class, students have a say in what is being taught and the way it is taught, bearing in mind the idea of better accommodating individual students. The students’ voice can be reflected in different context, ranging from the way of teaching, learning and designing the curriculum to even the assessment (Hargreaves, 2006). The level of independence or cooperation can be adjusted; some methodologies, such as Montessori, allow virtually full control over one’s own learning (Montessori, 1912), while others might prefer a more controlled approach, for example aligned with the goals of the set curriculum.

The starting point of these classes is the students’ previous knowledge and eliciting as much information as possible (Liu & Shao, 2013). Once they move to their zone of proximal development, where the learning happens, the teacher is there to guide them, for instance by
using scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). In case they are able to understand the principle or infer the meaning, he or she does not need to intervene and only helps them in case they do not know or come to a wrong conclusion.

2.2 Constructivism in EFL

When we move on to the field of language teaching, there are different methodologies that reflect or incorporate work with students and their knowledge building in a variety of manners, ranging from completely providing everything and working with memory to less rigid approaches giving the students a large degree of autonomy.

Historically, language used to be taught as a subject and the most traditional approach dedicates a lot of time to memorizing vocabulary as well as grammar rules. It is predominantly focused on the theoretical part and exercises (McKendry, 2006). Currently, this method does not seem to be the most popular, even though it has yet to disappear completely and can be seen a lot in places around the world. As such, it does not incorporate constructivism and the teacher is expected to provide the knowledge with students receiving, memorizing and applying it. (ibid)

Nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought a number of experimentative approaches, such as direct methods where the students are fully immersed in a foreign language environment and the explanation is provided using visual or other aids (McKendry, 2006). Another example could be the audiolingual method with focus on listening and speaking for a specific purpose (ibid) or the Callan method, based on speed and repetition, published by R.K.T. Callan (1960). Up to this day, there are language schools and teachers using these methods and many students have learned to speak English this way, nevertheless, this would not represent the current mainstream direction. Constructivism is present in the vast majority of the mentioned methodologies as the students need to find the missing link and deduct the meaning or use other skills to follow the classes. On the other hand, students’ autonomy is neglected and most of these programs are designed in a set way and provide very little space for the teacher’s and student’s own ideas.

The currently preferred methodologies see language as a medium, not a subject of study, and their goals are related to communication (Tejada, Perez, & Luque, 2005). The communicative approach itself has a strong focus on being able to express one’s idea over the small grammar or vocabulary details. The target language is commonly presented or explained by the teacher,
while the students’ involvement can vary. Some might prefer starting by direct explanation and then move on to the use (present, practice, produce); others might start by showing the language in use and then presenting the theoretical part (guided discovery). The connection here is done through the focus on the use of the target language in a presented context after being taught or establishing the meaning. The teachers are encouraged to make the learning personal and use appropriate context, which is to be seen in the majority of currently offered textbooks.

The last mentioned methodology relies on constructivism to a great degree and offers numerous opportunities for personalization of the topics taught or adjusting the process to follow the students’ development. The amount of autonomy using this methodology is thus largely dependent on the teacher’s decision.

2.3 Dogme

One more method that deserves a mention is Dogme, a rather recent sub-methodology that puts the student completely in the center. The authors of this method, Meddings and Thornbury (2010) define it as

“A teaching movement set up by a group of English teachers who challenge what they consider to be an over-reliance on materials and technical wizardry in current language teaching. The emphasis on the here-and-now requires the teacher to focus on the actual learners and the content that is relevant to them.”

Dogme shares numerous features with communicative approach and its variations, such as task-based learning, yet the main difference is in the way students practice language. Communicative approach puts them in a set context and gives them the goal of the conversation, leaving space for them to connect these two dots. Dogme, on the other hand, uses an open conversation, where the starting point or context might be loosely set by the teacher; however, there is no set goal, and everything revolves around what actually emerges in the class and where the students take the class, both in terms of topic and language.

The teacher therefore relies on using topic prompts and based on the student’s individual needs in a set context provides the tools necessary to be able to express one’s ideas (Meddings & Thornbury, 2010). This method appears to be the closest in connecting the ideas mentioned
above in terms of letting the student be in charge of their own learning and having them work independently, incorporating constructivism while acknowledging the teacher’s role as the main source of knowledge as barely any other material is used. (ibid)

An important consideration is that new language, particularly vocabulary and grammar, emerges and is not introduced by the teacher. At the same time, the teacher can create the need for specific language by selecting a relevant topic or asking specific question. It is therefore student-centered while the use of scaffolding supports and eases the constructivism learning process.

The whole approach is conversation-driven and imitates the natural language acquisition focusing on being able to communicate before mastering the grammar. The same aspect is also reflected by personalizing the topics and having the students talk about their life and opinions – something very natural. It also creates a tighter bond between the students and the teacher, especially in individual classes or small groups. (Xerri, 2012)

Thornbury (2012) is constantly working on developing this method and acknowledges the current state as somewhat in flux with a common core already established. As a growing number of teachers adopt this method, it is only a matter of time and cooperation to achieve a more defined version of this methodology which could then lead to a wider spread. (Parry, 2012)

2.4 Criticism

2.4.1 Constructivism

Constructivism relies on own knowledge construction and this may not always lead to correct answers or concepts. It encourages individual understanding of reality as opposed to accepting universal truths as presented by others (Miranda, n.d.). Others, such as Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006), do not regard constructivism and its minimal guidance as the best method.

Fox also stresses out the importance of additional input while using constructivism in order to truly increase the efficiency. These include passive learning, for instance exposure and receiving information. (Fox, 2001)
2.4.2 Student-centered classes

As it has been researched, the students’ reaction to this style is overwhelmingly positive, quoting a more engaged and personal experience, feeling of accomplishment and general academic skills development as the difference marking points (Liu & Shao, 2013). The teachers’ response has also been generally positive (Cubukcu, 2013); however, not in all cases.

One of the main critiques is the initial readiness of the students. This is the case mainly for students who lack basic skills vital for further development which therefore cannot be achieved, in addition they are not capable of taking ownership of their own learning (Khelifi, 2013).

However, research also shows that while the beginning of learning this way might be slower, the final results tend to be better in comparison to a more traditional approach (O'Neil & McMahon, 2005) as well as the initial fear and gradual development of attitude towards this method (especially true for students without prior experience) (Felder & Brent, 1996; O'Neil & McMahon, 2005). The teachers might as well be skeptical of the method at the beginning for the very same reasons as their students.

Further critique has been aimed toward the actual knowledge learned and also the overwhelming focus on an individual instead of a larger body (e.g. class). (McKenna, 2013; O'Neil & McMahon, 2005)

2.4.3 Dogme

In addition to previously mentioned shortcomings of communicative-based approach, Dogme deals with the extent to which it is an actual methodology and not just something that has been around for a while (Banegas, 2012). The authors of Dogme do not necessarily deny this as they see Dogme as a development derived from communicative approach.

The reception of Dogme exposes its strengths and weaknesses. As Coskun (2017) summarizes, the overall reception by both the students and teachers has been positive or even surprisingly positive for some of them, especially for the teachers. The main shortcomings, as per his research, are the implementation of Dogme for lower level students and the discomfort some students and teachers might feel while working without a book or curriculum.

Intrinsic motivation is what drives Dogme, and Worth (2012) points to the goals of some students, who are planning on taking a standardized test and prefer having a book as a supplement, as the exercises there are designed in a similar way to what is expected from them.
during the exam. The last two authors suggest using additional printed materials (be it a coursebook or handouts) in order to overcome it.

What sets back Dogme on the mainstream EFL scene is not only the rigidness of authorities to give the teachers and students more freedom and autonomy, but also the lack of outcome predictability and its alignment with the curricula. (Parry, 2012; Coskun, 2012).
Chapter 3 – Research considerations

3 Research methodology

Having presented the theoretical background of the research, this part will move on from the general research related to the whole field to outlining the specific research and its framework in this case. As the topic has a narrow scope, it is important to consider this while describing the settings.

The whole project took place in one place, city, over a specified short period of time and further use of this research needs to consider this fact and acknowledge that same research might bring different results elsewhere.

The theoretical part examines constructivism as such in its first part and then moves on to the use of constructivism and students’ freedom to decide the direction of their learning in the context of English as a foreign language practice. This should establish a sufficiently strong base for the actual research, bearing in mind the outcomes of previous research and using the way constructivism is applied and its outcomes.

The previous theoretical research was then used by the teacher, who worked with the student and presented them the options of course structure, letting them choose their preference. This was done after an initial getting to know each other, establishing a relationship full of trust, reflecting on previous learning and aligning the course structure and forms used with the desired outcomes based on student’s individual goals.

The empirical part is based on two major elements as using additional sources of input data (triangulation) strengthens the validity of research. (Bryman, 2012) The first of them is a series of three semi-structured interviews (Department of Sociology, Harvard University, n.d.; Valenzuela & Shrivastava, n.d.; Zorn, n.d.); the first one conducted at the very beginning with a focus on previous learning experience and goals, the second one to track the progress and possible changes in attitudes half way through the courses (around the 4-week mark), and the last one reflecting on the whole journey at the end of the course (after circa 8 weeks). All of the interviews are semi-structured with set goals and information that needs to be obtained and their respective outlines can be found in appendices. Most of the information, or the most important and relevant parts, are then represented in the research either by full quotation or paraphrases.

The second element of the empirical part was the observation and its conclusions by the teacher and researcher in one person. The observation served as a secondary source to complete the
information and also a tool to provide evidence for student’s claims or question them. The focus of the observation was both on the learning outcomes as well as the subtler attitudes and reactions to certain activities. Formal testing, both oral and written, might be a part of this, too.

The material from all of these sources were then put together and additional literature sources were used throughout the text to provide more background for the answers, results and possible changes in the student’s mindset. (Cresswell, 2009)

The conclusion then summarizes the findings and looks at the journey as a whole, comparing the development of all three students and relating this to their levels and other factors in search of the answers to address the established research questions, using either individual examples or generalizing based on the sample as a whole. (Bryman, 2012).

3.1 Research considerations
Having reviewed the previous research about the implementation of constructivism in English teaching and its criticism, the corresponding details of this research can be closely specified. As it has been said earlier, this research focuses on the same issue through the lens of individuals who encounter themselves at a different stage of learning. This also defines the scope - focus on individual stories and attitudes as described during personal interviews along a course of roughly eight weeks, which represents a period of time sufficient to reflect on their learning journey and note a possible change in their attitudes.

The research itself relies largely on semi-structured interviews, accompanied by class observation by the teacher and researcher in one person. The collected data should be examined as a whole and ongoing comparison between the subject is weaved into the text as well as additional references seeking the explanation of the subject’s attitudes and comments. The research adheres to all necessary standards, such as ethical considerations, confidentiality, consent request or data recording.

3.1.1 Student-centered class
The use of constructivism and student autonomy has been shown in numerous ways and with a flexible degree. The following is the understanding of a student-centered class as per the
researcher. This not only refers to each and every individual class, but also to the design of the program as a whole.

The core consideration remains the same and the student has the power to outline their course and discuss their preference right at the beginning. This was done both as a regular part of the program and as the semi-structured interview, serving as one of the pillars of this research.

Throughout the course, corresponding material in form of a textbook (different series and different level, all widely used and from reputable publishers) was used. This textbook is intended for learning general English and is largely communicative approach based, using elements of grammar and vocabulary in relevant context, as well as focusing on development of all four major skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking). The idea is to include constructivism, for instance by applying the Dogme methodology, to work on students’ fluency and communication skills in combination with communicative approach and other methodologies focused more on the language itself. The balance between these is left up to the dynamics of the class.

Additional materials were used in the classes, be it complementary material with a specific grammar focus (explanation, additional exercises) or skill-based materials, most commonly in forms of authentic articles, videos or audios. A vital part of the classes was also conversation based both on topics from the book and topics that are of interest of the student (Dogme implementation).

### 3.1.2 Individual vs group classes

One specific of the examined classes and students is the size of the class. In all three cases we are speaking about individual classes. As a consequence, collaborative and social skills play a somewhat secondary role.

In typical class settings, the patterns of interaction change, and the teacher has the possibility of working with the group as a whole, splitting them into smaller group, making pairs work and working with individual students (Richards & Bohlke, Creating effective language lessons, 2011). The lack of this was dealt with by adjustments done to the activities and as a result meant an increased and non-stop involvement of both the teacher and the student.

On the other hand, this allowed the teacher for better observation and incorporating more feedback and error correction. It is also the teacher’s responsibility to establish a friendly
environment and ensure that the student feels comfortable and is not afraid of working in his or her zone of proximal development and making mistakes while being permanently observed.

3.1.3 Proficiency levels
The mention of different initial proficiency levels plays a role in the research. Every student comes from a distinct background and this surely influences the way they learn or prefer to be taught. This was considered and described in detail as it is the paramount of this research.

One of the reasons is language as the medium of communication. Most of the class, including grammar and concept explanation, was done in English. Spanish (the students’ mother tongue) might have been used in case of confusion or for minor translations or providing vocabulary. As a result, this supported the learning on all levels and made it more challenging for lower level students while giving them another opportunity to get exposed to the language. Higher levels should have no issues understanding the gist and the use of Spanish should be limited to a bare minimum in their case.

Their levels also reflect their previous experience studying a foreign language. Beginners are expected to have had little experience, more advanced students are expected to have taken a course previously and have better overall language acquisition skill.

3.2 Research sample
The small-size sample selected for the purpose of examination was selected as to represent people at different stages of learning, which is reflected by their different initial levels of English while starting the course. In order to show the whole specter, one beginner, one pre-intermediate and one intermediate student were selected. The criteria used for this selection followed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. (Council of Europe, n.d.)

Beginner students means they have severely limited abilities to express themselves and are starting their learning process. They are likely to understand some basic vocabulary and have had previous exposure to English. Pre-intermediate level already has knowledge of basic structures as well as more ample vocabulary, yet their communication skills and advanced structures need to be worked on. Finally, the intermediate level represents and individual, who is able to
communicate in given language, with a number of mistakes and a missing word here and there. Their focus should be on polishing their skills and putting them into practice while learning more specific grammar points. (Council of Europe, n.d)

All three individuals share a similar background - adults (predominantly younger adults) professionals from different fields, who have decided to learn or improve their English mainly for work-related purposes. Their previous learning experience, both in general and related to English, may vary and this is expected to influence their attitude and therefore is an integral part of the initial interview.

An individual profile of each of them is presented in detail at the beginning of the empirical research.

### 3.3 Teacher and researcher in one person

What is also specific about this research is the fact that the researcher and teacher are the same person. As such, this has both positive and negative aspects to it. Being in touch several times a week (as per the schedule) means spending anytime between three to six hours a week and the dynamic of the relationship can genuinely become a sort of bond between two people, not only a strict professional relationship. While it allows the researcher to be closer and an extended observation, it may also lead to bias based on the relationship with the student.

The advantages, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, helped in forming a complete picture of learning and served as an important complement to the interviews. It also allowed the researcher to be in charge of the amount of constructivism applied and experiment with different approaches, including immediate adjustment to student’s reactions. The level of mutual trust also contributed to students feeling comfortable and fully expressing their opinion during the interviews and course activities.

On the other hand, the fact that the classes were so frequent, made it harder for the researcher to notice changes over the time as these were seen as a gradual development on a day to day basis rather than a comparison of abilities at three separate points of time (initial assessment, midway checkpoint and final evaluation).

The relationship between all the students and the teacher was indeed a friendly one, considering also the similar age and interests; nevertheless, all the observation, interviews and further data processing was done adhering to highest ethical and research standards as described for instance
by Clark and McCann (2005). Both the observation and assessment are, as much as possible, supported by tangible evidence, such as exam results or directly mentioned and discussed by the interviewees. As the students all studied based on their intrinsic motivation and there was no need to fulfil requirements and pass the course, it can be assumed that the teacher-student power relation, an otherwise highly sensitive topic (Al Hinai, 2015), was minimal in this case.

3.4 Ethical Considerations
The whole research is based on personal stories of three learners and they were well informed about the whole intention and plan. In order to participate, they were asked to sign an informed consent informing them about the scope of the research and also their voluntary participation, which can be withdrawn at any time. (Bryman, 2012) The scope only considered their learning, predominantly in the class and the focus was on their progress and mindset development. No personal data, apart from student’s background and first name, were used.

The other consideration is the trustworthiness of their testimony. The teacher and researcher in one person needs to pay close attention to establishing a professional open relationship where the student feels comfortable expressing their own opinion, even though it might not be to the liking of the teacher. He then provides his own insight on the issues.

The last consideration is the language. Some students felt more comfortable discussing these matters in their mother tongue (University of Greenwich, n.d.) and translation was therefore necessary (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In such cases, the researcher translated their answers and ideas and approved the final form of these with the student to double check that the correct message is being conveyed.
Chapter 4 – Initial assessment

4. Individual profiles

Every single person is different, and their background needs to be considered while working with them in educational settings. The same should be said about their learning goals, which are tightly connected with their motivation and as the classes are individual in this case, they also decide the structure and content of the course.

The following part is going to introduce the three selected people and their previous learning experience as well as their expectation from the course. Most of the data comes from the initial semi-structured interview (see Appendix 1), which was carried out at the beginning of the course and complemented by the observer’s view.

4.1 Antonia

4.1.1 Profile

Antonia is in her early twenties and has recently finished a diploma in entrepreneurship. She is from Chile and her mother tongue and the only language she speaks is Spanish. At the time of writing, she does not have a job, and neither has ever had a serious one, yet she is starting her own business in the care and beauty industry following her interest in esthetics and cosmetics.

She has had previous exposure to English both while traveling and studying; however, it has brought very little results and she is starting from the beginnings. For that reason, she was considered a beginner student for this research. The initial interview with her was conducted in a mix of English (questions) and Spanish (her answers).

4.1.2 Learning experience

After finishing an integrated Montessori program, Antonia enrolled to a university and studied first art and then psychology, both of which remained unfinished. When she decided to start her own business, she got the motivation and took a diploma course in entrepreneurship. This course was done using blended method, which was also an important factor for her decision and learning success.

As far her English experience is concerned, she had English as one of her subjects at school, yet there were virtually no results due to the lack of motivation from her side. When she started
traveling, she realized the importance of the language and even went for a four-month course in Australia. Sadly, this also did not bring the desired result as she spent a considerable amount of time with other Spanish-speaking friends. Nevertheless, this has sparked her interest and she wanted to continue studying after coming back home.

She evaluates her current English abilities by saying that she can understand the main idea when other people speak in a slow and clear manner yet answering is the difficult part. Despite knowing some vocabulary, she claims her grammar to be nonexistent and because of this, she struggles connecting the words together and making sentences.

4.1.3 Goals and course design
Antonia’s motivation is being able to communicate with other people while traveling and also preparing for a possible international expansion of her business. The main goal for this course has thus been set as being able to communicate with other, especially in form of a conversation (listening and speaking skills).

Her previous learning experience has influenced her in a way of preferring to study by herself, reading and then clearing her doubts by searching for additional information on the internet or asking other people. Antonia mentions that the blended method used while studying for her diploma benefited her as she had the freedom to study at her own pace while having the support from the teachers. The situation with English is a bit new for her as she is starting from the very basics and would like to get a firm grasp of them. When it comes to other subject, she is comfortable studying alone, but she has never studied English this way.

In terms of materials and learning styles, Antonia does not have a strong preference and welcomes a variety of input. This being said, she would prefer having things explained in form of a conversation while she takes notes to be able to review them later. Reading is also mentioned as one of her preferred ways of learning new information.

In her opinion, the classes should be interactive, and the teacher should be there to guide her, and present new topics based on her shortcomings. At the same time, she wants to have some time dedicated to clarifying her doubts, be it about the topics from the class or her own extra questions.
4.1.4 Teacher’s observation

The ability to understand was far above expectation and Antonia is able to engage in an everyday conversation with an ease. As she had said, the way she expresses herself is not very coherent and the lack of grammar knowledge, for instance verb forms, could easily cause misunderstanding. She is aware of her shortcomings and thinks a lot while speaking.

Another thing that strikes is her motivation. As subjective as this can be, she started the course hungry for information and seems to be well-aware of her goals in the bigger picture.

Summarizing her profile, her background is well-aligned with the proposed way of doing things and the assumption is that she is going to benefit from the methods which are going to be used in this course (communicative approach and Dogme).

4.2 Nicolas

4.2.1 Profile

The second participant is Nicolas, a young man from Chile, who is fully focused on achieving his goal of studying in the US. His high school life ended just two years ago, and he studied business at a university in Chile. As he did not enjoy it, he decided to quit the studies and pursue the aforementioned opportunity which also considers his passion for football and would allow him to play football at the college level.

His English level is currently at the pre-intermediate stage, making it possible for him to express his ideas while lacking vocabulary and committing a number of grammatical errors. Nicolas dares to speak despite these shortcomings and enjoys communicating in English. It is interesting to mention that he has learned most of his English by himself via video games and movies. This will be his second structured course.

He has an interesting work experience related to English; he works for his father helping him translate internal document of administrative character for his company from Spanish to English and vice-versa. As he said, he tries to translate the text by himself and then uses Google translate to correct the mistakes while taking note of them.
4.2.2 Learning experience
During his high school years, Nicolas did not learn much English at school as the classes were not very well-structured. Most of his learning happened subconsciously through video games and movies, without great effort or intention. Such cases are not uncommon nowadays.

His structured learning started a few months ago, together with his decision to study abroad and subsequent need to obtain a required score in TOEFL. He has tried at two occasions, yet the scores he obtained were insufficient and thus he decided to continue the course and is planning on taking the test again when this course finishes.

He states that the previous course has helped him a lot and he is starting to organize the grammar rules in his head and it helps him while expressing himself. Nicolas sees his main space for improvement in communication skills and oral production – fluency and pronunciation. On the other hand, his understanding is better, and he does not have trouble understanding both spoken and written text, unless the speech is too fast or with a strong accent.

Surprisingly, the most efficient method for Nicolas to study is with a help of teacher, who can explain how everything works and help him express himself. He does not feel very confident tackling a topic by himself, which contrasts with the way most of his knowledge has been acquired. Nicolas is a visual learner and likes to underline or highlight words and at times also write a summary in his own words. Mind maps and schemes are also mentioned as useful learning tools.

4.2.3 Goals and course design
Nicolas’ course is designed to specifically target two of his main needs – being able to communicate in an English-speaking environment and obtaining a required score in TOEFL, a standardized exam used to determine the necessary English level for studies at a university. As such, half of his classes will be about preparing for the exam while the rest will focus on general English. Preparation for an exam follows a different class syllabus and some of the methods (especially constructivism, communicative approach and Dogme) will therefore not apply here. The focus of the research will be on the general English classes, which will be designed in a fashion similar to other participants’.

The whole idea of studying abroad was planted by a football academy which specializes in helping talented Chilean youth obtain a scholarship (most commonly partial) at an American
college through football. The approach of people from the academy has made a good impression on him and he is very keen on pursuing this chance. The academy provides a complex service of training, professional preparation, personal motivation, help with recruitment process and placement; the language element is done in cooperation with a private language school.

In his interview, Nicolas mentions the social use of English rather than the academic purpose of the language. He has been to the US before, giving him a better picture of what is coming up, enjoys that place and is excited about the possibility of living there. Apart from this intrinsic motivation, the extrinsic motivation is the score required to be eligible to study at a college. This score is generally set to 80 points of the maximum of 120, which corresponds to a strong intermediate level of English or B1 level according to CEFR.

4.2.4 Teacher’s observation

Nicolas is the only student from the three that has some kind of pressure upon him. The looming exam is an entrance ticket to his future and as the application deadline approaches, he will need to work hard in order to achieve his desired score and pursue his dream.

In terms of his abilities, he is right when he talks about communication being his strength; however, the language aspect, especially grammar precision and Spanish-influenced vocabulary needs to be improved. A lot of his sentences are constructed in the Spanish way, possibly under the influence of his translation job and strategies including Google translate (Benda, 2013; Saz, Lin, & Eskenazi, 2015), and while most of this is not difficult to understand while speaking, it is rather disturbing in his writing. His receptive skills are good, with the exception of reading between the lines and inferring meaning, intention or purpose of certain features or passages. It is likely that this is also the case in his native language, a phenomenon common for younger generation, as he later admits. (Netten, Voeten, Droop, & Verhoeven, 2014; Spichtig, et al., 2016)

The course will consider his wish of focusing on conversation; nevertheless, it will have to include grammar, both following the book appropriate for his level as well as helping him express his ideas.
4.3 Carolina

4.3.1 Profile
Carolina is also from Chile and currently, she is a philosophy professor at a local university. She has an extensive experience, including international, in her field as well as PhD and ongoing research. Her hobby of reading oscillates between work-related topics and novel and much of the reading is done in foreign languages, mainly English and Italian. When she is not reading, she likes to spend time with her son and enjoy outdoor activities or gardening.

The evaluation decided that she was an intermediate student; however, as she admits, there is a difference between the individual skills. The communication with Carolina was fully in English with minor help of Spanish here and there.

4.3.2 Learning experience
While Carolina had English as a subject at school, she was not particularly interested, and both the results and knowledge were nothing to be proud of. She started studying English again in 2009, mainly because of professional reasons. Since then, she has taken a short intensive course in the United Kingdom and this is her first structured course in her home country. Most of what she has learned comes from self-studying, especially reading with a dictionary to translate words.

When it comes to evaluating her skills, she feels confident while reading or listening to someone and understands the majority of what is being said. On the other hand, her oral production is where she sees space for improvement. A part of her family lives abroad and they communicate in English; nevertheless, this does not happen that often.

Overall, Carolina has a very positive attitude to learning and it is a part of her job to constantly continue studying. Apart from her field, she also expresses her liking toward languages; she is fluent in Italian and speaks some French, Greek and Latin as well.

Her motivation to improve her English abilities revolves around two central points: job and family. Her job requires research and cooperation and English has become the lingua franca in her field. Family has already been mentioned earlier, just to add one more piece of information – her son enjoys English a lot and she supports him by reading fairy tales to him.
4.3.3 Goals and course design
Setting the goal was rather easy for her as she is aware of her shortcomings in spoken production. In order to be able to express her ideas better, the specific focus should be on building fluency and confidence. She also adds grammar to her goals, with an additional “obviously” treating as an inevitable part of mastering a language.

When discussing the materials, she prefers being put in a situation to speak or using a text or video as a starting point of a conversation. The one thing she does not wish to see in the classes is an excess of exercises. Both of her suggestions are aligned with her overall goal and should address her needs. The scope of the course has been narrowed down to focus on her weaknesses and not once does she mention listening or reading skills along with vocabulary.

Carolina sees the role of the teacher in guiding her through the course while constantly correcting her mistakes and providing a safe environment to practice. As she herself is a professor, she has an insight into what it takes to transmit the message efficiently.

4.3.4 Teacher’s observation
Carolina is a good example of someone who needs English and is well-aware of its importance as it limits her in her professional life. As a lifelong learner and a current professor, her academic skills should be reasonably high, and she has also specified her preference and what she would like to be omitted. It will be the teacher’s task to find the balance between following her will and pushing her to work on specific things she may not have mentioned. The selected topics will try to reflect her professional focus.

With regard to her current skills, there is a noticeable amount of errors related to direct translation of sentences from Spanish, her mother tongue, to English. This might relate to the fact that she is used to reading and translating individual words in case she does not understand them. Other than that, the overall oral production is rather subpar for an intermediate student, yet her understanding makes up for that.

Once again, we can see an alignment between her learning goals and the goals of the two learning methods which are to be used. In this case, she also had more specific requirements toward the teacher’s role, which will be considered as well.
4.4 Comparison

Antonia, Nicolas and Carolina come from a different background and each of them has a different motivation to learn English, different previous experience and, to a large extend, different learning approach. Nevertheless, there are also similarities, especially in terms of materials and focus of the course.

When one delves deeper into their profiles, one can actually see a similarity at the initial level and first exposure to English during their school years. All of them had a chance to learn English, yet they did not pursue that, be it because of their motivation or, perhaps, the actual classes and environment. The rate of people who speak English in Chile is only among average in the countries that belong to South America (English First, 2017; British Council, 2015) in contrast with the, especially economic, development and being regarded as one of the top countries in the continent. The same studies by EF and British Council also point to the unsatisfactory low level of proficiency and insufficient teaching quality, despite initiatives to improve this being in place.

Over the recent years and English has become a major constraint to further growth of Chile, especially in professional context. Moreover, the traveling opportunities have also contributed to English becoming an object of desire (British Council, 2015). Their motivation reflects this and all of them are learning to be able to achieve more and have more possibilities. As such, they are ready to dedicate their free time and invest money (or their parents’ money) into learning English. None of them is forced to learn and they are committed to the course based on their personal goal and intrinsic motivation.

While they have a clear idea about their goals, their do rely a lot on the teacher and textbook in terms of course design. Carolina, as the most advanced student, formulated her course expectation a little bit better than the rest, yet she also tended to give rather vague answers. It could be argued that their initial level of awareness and autonomy is considerably low, which will be an important factor to keep an eye on throughout the research.

As far as their learning preference is concerned, Antonia and Nicolas are able to describe their methods in great detail. Carolina relies more on her overall abilities and does not mention a specific approach. It is interesting to see young people being so aware of their learning style.

All three would like to focus heavily on their spoken production. This might be related to their not-so-good previous experience at school (schools in general tend to stick to textbooks-led curriculums and work with large groups of students (British Council, 2015)). It is also what most
of the self-taught learners need to work on; both Carolina and Nicolas state that most of their learning happened by exposure to the language rather than through an explicit explanation.

Their philosophy is in accordance with several earlier research outcomes, for instance Fox’s (2001), who speaks about learning through exposure, or Tejada, Perez, & Luque’s (2005) view of learning language as a communicational tool.

All in all, the information they provided is more than enough to design a solid course incorporating their goals and preference and at the same time, it aligns well with the proposed methodology of constructivism and Dogme. None of them straight away refused any approach and the teacher will therefore have freedom to execute the prepared plan with focus on constructivism and building the autonomy of students.
Chapter 5 – Midterm reflection

5.1 Antonia

In the first part of her course, Antonia was a diligent student, not missing any of her scheduled classes and achieving noticeable improvement. This second semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2), took place after roughly a month of the course and 28 contact hours of English with the same teacher. The delivery of this course is rather intense as it consists of three weekly sessions, each of them lasting for two hours. Her situation has not changed much; she is still setting up her business, currently in the preparation phase and focusing on market research and outlining the mission and vision of the company.

5.1.1 Interview

Unlike the first interview in which she preferred to answer in Spanish, this time, Antonia, with a bit of an encouragement, decided to answer the second interview in English, with a short intervention in Spanish in order to precisely answer a specific question. This lead to occasional unclarities, which were overcome either by repeating the question or picking the information from another part of the interview.

In her words, she feels that she has improved a lot, especially in terms of learning new grammar and vocabulary and her focus should now be on putting the theoretical knowledge into practice. Speaking is still not an easy feat for her and she is aware that she has the understanding and that the best way to improve her productive skills is by practicing, which means mainly speaking in the class as this is the only time she uses English actively during the week. On the other hand, the use of receptive skills is not limited solely to the classes; Antonia spends time listening to music in English, watching TV series and movies or reading in English in her free time. As she claims, her level of understanding allows her to follow the plot or main idea even without subtitles or lyrics.

One interesting thing Antonia mentions is the fact that she needs to review the materials and her notes. This shows us a degree of awareness and as well as a reference to what she had said earlier about her preferred method of studying – external input followed up by self-study.

When it comes to reflecting on the classes and teaching, Antonia is generally content with everything. Her appreciation goes especially toward the fact that the classes were designed around her needs and the focus was on what she needed to express her ideas. This also includes
the use of the textbook, which was used selectively to provide a backbone to the course; however, it was not used rigorously. On a similar note, she welcomes the use of a variety of input materials (e.g. videos, listening exercises, reading articles and so forth), which keeps her alert and forces her to apply the same knowledge in different ways or context.

As far as the control over her own learning is concerned, she feels she has had a fair amount of control, especially when it comes to clarifying her doubts and questions or reviewing previous topics. Nevertheless, Antonia relies on the teacher to guide her and prepare topics to help her advance and develop skills or introduce new topics.

Overall, it seems that she does not have any negative comments and is enjoying the course both in terms of learning and the methodology.

5.1.2 Teacher’s observation
Antonia started on the beginners’ level, using second part of the Top Notch Fundamentals book, which is designed to help the students achieve the A1 level according to CEFR, as the base for the course. Despite what the level might suggest, it was possible to incorporate conversation (fully in English) as a vital part of the classes. As it has been mentioned during the initial evaluation, she is able to communicate, yet the lack of grammar structures as well as vocabulary is what held her back. Initial focus on expressing her ideas rather than on precise grammar proved to work well and establish a base to help her feel comfortable and start gaining confidence communicating in English.

Her classes have thus transformed into a mix of Dogme, a conversation around a topic that arises, and grammar-focused classes built around textbook topics using the communicative approach. Considering her limited vocabulary range, the topic of conversations revolved around everyday topics, such as free time, traveling, last weekend, food and future plans. All the topics led to practicing speech and incorporating new grammatical aspects as well as providing the need for additional vocabulary. The need for grammatical explanation arose both from the conversation (expressing past, present and future, word order) and the book (people description – has vs. be). The topics and grammar from the book and were generally linked to the conversation.

The use of additional materials was adjusted to Antonia’s needs and wishes. To provide an example, a part of an episode of the Peaky Blinders series was used to enrich her vocabulary and work on her listening skills. She chose this series by herself and asked to have a look at it in the class to help her understand the story. It should be said that this particular series features a
variety of British accents and vocabulary specific for England in the early twentieth century, which made the understanding a bit challenging even for advanced learners. Antonia did not give up in this situation and tried to understand. A few weeks later, she started watching another series called Sense8, which uses American English and is generally easier to understand.

The advance in this case has been notable. Antonia had previous knowledge and constructing coherent sentences was her main issue. Providing her with the basic structures needed to express her ideas resulted in her being able to keep up a conversation on a familiar topic and being aware of grammar aspects, especially the difference between individual tenses. While some basic errors still persist (she have, forgetting -ed in past), she often uses self-correction with minimal intervention of the teacher.

Her motivation plays an important part in her advance, and she finishes all given homework on top of her extra language exposure as mentioned in her interview. Antonia keeps a notebook full of notes, divided in two parts: grammar and vocabulary. She uses her notes to refer to them both in the class while thinking about a form or correcting herself and during her self-study time.

Overall, she has put an effort into learning a new language and this has been bringing results and her learning curve has been steep. As more complex topics are being introduced and the range of grammar aspects broadens, there has been a slight decline in her ability to effectively incorporate previously covered topics and more attention should be now paid to practice and mastering her abilities before introducing new topics.

5.2 Nicolas
Nicolas has been evenly working on both general English and specific TOEFL preparation during his course. His general course was built around Life 3, a pre-intermediate (B1) level textbook serving as the backbone and extra focus was put on speaking and conversation. The TOEFL preparation included an initial evaluation and then dealt with the reading part, which is yet to be finalized.

As far as the rest of his life is concerned, Nicolas has had several interviews with coaches from various US-based colleges and his dream of studying abroad is on the schedule. His main focus thus remains on football and getting ready for the new challenge.
5.2.1 Interview

In his second interview based on the outline (as seen in Appendix 2), Nicolas expresses the general satisfaction with the course as well as main improvements. The questions are directed towards the general English part and do not mention the TOEFL part (this has been explained to Nicolas prior to the interview).

The main advancement or difference for Nicolas is the way he feels while using English now. His fluency has improved noticeably as well as his confidence. As he states, having conversation is now a much less stressful and easier experience. As this was one of his main goal, it is good feedback that the course has targeted his needs. Furthermore, his vocabulary has improved. All of this is very helpful during his video interviews with American coaches, who provide him with a glimpse of what the communication is going to be like once in the US.

One major achievement is his ability to both think and speak in English at the same time. This is regarded as one of the breaking points in mastering a language, as many teachers suggest (Lingholic, 2013; Fenner, 2011), and helps a person speed up the process of information processing as well as diminish the amount of direct translation related errors.

Despite the advancement, Nicolas would like to continue working on his fluency and pronunciation as this remains his priority. He is aware of the importance of both understanding, which does not seem to present an obstacle for him nowadays, and being understood.

When asked about the autonomy and constructivism involved in the course, his answer approved the mix of doing activities he prefers and having the teacher come up with a variety of tasks as well. In his words, it prevents the course from becoming boring and also forces him to work hard and perhaps focus on things he does not like, yet they are important for the overall skills development. The textbook used, and the rest of the materials are appropriate. On top of this, he also follows the teacher’s advice and watches series on Netflix with English sound and English subtitles to address one of his weaknesses – spelling. So far, it has helped him for example in the case of contractions.

Throughout the interview, not much attention is given to grammar and it has been one of the secondary topics of the course. As his main focus is on communication, the main goal of the language use will be to convey message reasonably clearly and minor, non-disturbing, grammar mistakes or inaccuracies will be dealt with later on.
5.2.2 Teacher’s Observation

Nicolas’ advancement has been a pleasant surprise both in the general course and especially in the TOEFL preparation. His initial assessment showed issues with the reading strategies he had been using and understanding the questions as well as committing mistakes due to the lack of concentration. Much of this has already been overcome and in this case, directly giving him strategies and letting him use them to see their efficiency has proven to be the key.

As far as the general course is concerned, the textbook has been used as the guide, nevertheless, a large portion of the classes is dedicated to Dogme-style conversation, which often includes football as the main topic and a passion of his. While working with the textbook, it is not always easy to maintain his focus on one topic or exercise. Consequently, the advancement has not been as fast as expected and more time has been dedicated to conversation, which he enjoys more.

The improvements he mentions (fluency and vocabulary) align with the goals and teacher’s evaluation. As a person that is not shy and likes to communicate, Nicolas is able to absorb information without explicit explanation and learns well by using the words or structures directly in his speech. He is fast to do so and usually picks up expressions and phrases as a whole. This is a promising sign for the future as it shows his ability to work independently (some of the phrases appear in the class, other are from series, songs or conversations with other people).

His weaknesses remain the same (precision and grammar range); however, his vocabulary has been constantly improving and the fluency he is able to speak with now often makes up for the missing accuracy. In a way, he follows the slang patterns of English, using simpler forms and filler expressions and phrases. An example could be shown with present perfect, which was revisited in the first unit of the book. Nicolas is able to use it in phrases, such as ‘I have never…’ or ‘Have you ever…?’, yet he tends to use past simple in most of the cases in different structures where present perfect would be a better fit. While this may not be the best idea when it comes to using English in the academic context, it certainly will help him ease the transition into a new group of friends.

The second part of his course will be focused on accuracy of his oral production and more attention will be paid to smaller details. The TOEFL preparation is expected to conclude the reading part and move on to listening. Nicolas has been dealing well with constructivism and he will be given the freedom to decide to what extent he would like to use it in his learning. Having said this, the teacher’s role will be in a way similar to a coach, guiding him through the process
and at times forcing him to work harder in order to show him how much he is capable of and also introduce different forms of knowledge sources.

5.3 Carolina

Carolina’s reflection on the course was recorded after a month and a half of classes, which initially took place three times a week and whose duration was two hours. This has then changed as the school year began and her professional duties limited her free time. On top of this, she had a special event she was in charge and missed a whole week of classes.

5.3.1 Interview

In her reflection based on the semi-structured interview found in Appendix 2, Carolina is overall very satisfied with course as it addresses her needs and she can see the improvement. The biggest improvement she notices is her pronunciation and subjective feeling of feeling more confident speaking English. The use of Dogme method and letting the student express their opinion and speak freely on a topic of their interest must have played a role in this process.

Another advancement she sees is in her writing skills; to be precise in the way she formulates her thoughts. While before she would try to translate complex structures from Spanish to English, which often led to confusion and incoherent structures, her new approach is using simpler and shorter sentences, which are easier for her to form and boast a higher rate of accuracy. This was one of the strategies proposed by the teacher and practiced especially during written homework (letters, short essays).

The least advancement has been achieved in terms of grammar. A few new topics were introduced, yet the focus was mainly on polishing the previously learned and more basic structures (e.g. past simple, word order). Carolina mentions this while also adding that she enjoyed delayed feedback as it did not disturb her speech and then provided her with time to reflect on the mistakes.

She liked the role of teacher and the used methodology, especially the fact that it gave her an opportunity to engage in a conversation on topics related to her life and interests, one of the features of Dogme. The focus on oral production was what she had asked for at the beginning of
the course and most of the classes reflected this to her satisfaction. Carolina was also satisfied with the use of a variety of materials (book, extra reading and listening).

During this part of the course a special occasion for Carolina to practice her English arose when her university organized an academic congress and she was the main person in charge. There were also international speakers and all the presented speeches were thus in English, including Carolina’s. Despite her nervousness, she felt rather confident both presenting her ideas and engaging in question and answer sessions as well as informal conversation with her colleagues and other guests.

In the following part of the course, Carolina is not seeking any major changes and hopes to continue studying, despite the time limitation her job brings.

5.3.2 Teacher’s Observation

Carolina started her course with a rather broad yet specific goal in mind, relating to speaking abilities. The course was adjusted to spend more time on speaking, which in reality translated to either having a conversation on whichever topic comes up based on initial small talk (e.g. her son’s school, living in a foreign country) or relating to the topics from the textbook – a book from the National Geographic series was used and majority of the topics were related to nature, traveling, society and ecology. These also happened to be objects of her professional focus and everything then connected into a coherent course revolving around relevant topics easing the conversation and encouraging her participation.

As far as the mix of input is concerned, Dogme has been the dominant teaching methodology, with a high rate of constructivism involved, and communicative approach was used to work with the new grammar, usually practiced through exercises and follow-up conversation. Other skills, such as reading, listening or writing were also integrated, both using graded materials from the book and authentic material from other sources. Several written tasks were then set as homework.

Carolina showed good attitude as English truly is a tool that can help her a lot in her professional career. Towards the end of the first half of the course; however, her job duties became an obstacle to constant attendance and her progress has slowed down accordingly. This is not to say that it has stopped completely.
The biggest improvement can be seen in her fluency and ability to express her ideas, which happens to be the main goal of Dogme. Missing or incorrectly used vocabulary is no longer a barrier in understanding and she can correct herself and make herself easier to understand. In terms of grammar, several mistakes still persist, despite constant correction. Most of these mistakes relate to L1 (Spanish) interference; moving to simpler sentences has helped ease this process noticeably, especially in written production.

All in all, Carolina’s achievement is fully aligned with her initial goal. The second part of the course should be focused on working on the small details (predominantly vocabulary and grammar related) while also introducing new ways to express oneself. Having already achieved a large part of her goals, it may prove to be challenging to keep up her level of motivation as she now feels fully comfortable and advancing from this level requires extra effort. This phenomenon is also known as the intermediate plateau (Richards, 2008).

5.4 Comparison

Comparing the answers of each of the three, several similarities as well as differences can be seen. To draw a partial conclusion, here is a short overview of the most outstanding points, including additional observations as made by the teacher.

All three were positive about their progress, backed up by tangible results, and the one thing they mention in the first place is the development or improvement of their oral production. For Antonia, this means being able to have a conversation, Nicolas is now fluent when speaking and Carolina feels more confident. When we compare this against their goals and Dogme, the alignment is basically spot-on. Considering their initial abilities and the number of classes they have attended so far, this is a major achievement for each of them. It is common that courses focus on introducing new grammar or vocabulary and neglect the development of all abilities, often in pursuit of curriculum goals or due to time constraints. Speaking thus becomes the most difficult skill for the students to develop. (Davies, 1976) The reception of student-centered classes has been similar to what Liu and Shao describe in their work. (Liu & Shao, 2013)

Variety is another thing all of them mention as one of the strengths of the course. Each course uses a book; however, while Antonia’s classes are a mix of working with the book, Dogme conversation and other activities (roughly one third of time is spent on each of these), Nicolas
and Carolina prefer pure conversation, either related to the book or on any topic, and the textbook is used in a different way. Nicolas likes the exercises from the book to practice his grammar and Carolina focuses on the vocabulary introduced. There were no complaints in regard to the topics introduced – the books reflect the interests of the students and provide a good base to be explored further by the teacher, if necessary.

What has proven to be a good idea is giving them written homework. This gives them time to absorb introduced grammar and use it in their own context while also bringing up new vocabulary. The tasks are personalized, and Antonia was asked, for example, to write about her last weekend or favorite food, Nicolas prepared his CV and a cover letter and Carolina wrote an email to another professor, which she actually sent him later.

Outside the classes, the students were also encouraged to give themselves more exposure. Antonia and Nicolas chose the same method – watching series and movies in English, a popular activity they would do anyway. Carolina is more focused on her professional life and continues reading books and articles in English. Especially in Nicolas’ case, the results can be seen as he uses phrases and slang expressions throughout the conversation.

Feedback and error correction play an important role in their learning and both female participants enjoyed the same style of feedback – delayed feedback. Rather than disturbing their spoken production, they prefer being presented with a list of vocabulary at the end of the class (Carolina writes down only the important and useful words for her, Antonia notes everything in a special list in her notebook) and the same applies in terms of grammar. Nicolas, on the other hand, prefers direct correction and is able to pick up new vocabulary and structures quickly just by using it, without the need of being written on the board or spelled, the exact opposite of Antonia.

During the classes, each of them also has their own preference of explanation. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Nicolas is not keen on explicit explanation and a simple spoken explanation is enough for him and he rarely asks additional questions. Carolina prefers a longer theoretical explanation and has questions, especially comparing it to other grammar rules (for instance present perfect vs past simple). Antonia likes to organize things in diagrams and write down the rules, which need to be short and precise. She studies with her notes later on and can recall definitions and apply them in the future.

Their motivation and dedication are what also influences their progress. Antonia has a lot of free time and made English her priority. As a result, she exposes herself to English through series and
songs, reviews her materials, does all her homework and even asks for extra practice. In contrast, Nicolas is rather laid-back and while he also watches series and most of the time brings his homework, he does not dedicate much time to explicit studying at home. His TOEFL course, on the other hand, presents a different challenge and he is more focused in the classes. Still, he does not come prepared for the classes, neither does he bring a notebook or even a pen or pencil. Carolina is very focused on her specific goal, which is conversation, and, unlike the others, she has more responsibilities being a mother and a university professor about to start a new semester while also organizing a symposium. She is able to retain a lot of information presented in the class and use it in the next classes without the need to study.

Apart from the tangible results, there are also intangible changes in their thinking. Carolina now uses simpler sentences, making her production easier to understand and reducing the amount of errors; Nicolas thinks in English while speaking, reducing the time needed to answer and also the number of errors related to direct translation; Antonia has, thanks to the passive exposure, improved her listening abilities beyond the overall level and she even laughs at how easy some the listening exercises from the book are. All these strategies were in a way suggested by the teacher, yet they were not explicitly taught, and the students mastered these skills by themselves, a great example of constructivism (Seedhouse, 2004; Weimer, 2012).

The teacher’s role in the course has been very flexible, trying to accommodate every single one of the students, their personality and their learning style. The relation between them is now a friendly one, both parties feeling that the teacher is a source of knowledge willing to share and help them, not an unquestionable authority. There is also a certain level of genuine care about each other – asking about how the life is going and being happy for other’s success, creating a positive cooperative learning environment that is helpful (Xerri, 2012).

The biggest challenge for the second part of their courses will be keeping up the pace of their advancement and finding further motivation to keep on going after having accomplished a large part of their goals already by now. In addition to this, Antonia and Carolina are expected to have increased workload upon them, which could negatively influence their commitment.
Chapter 6 – Final reflection

6.1 Antonia

In the second part of the course, Antonia managed to sustain a similar pace to the previous part. As far as the textbook advancement is concerned, she finished an A1 level book and then moved on to textbook from a different series, this time at B1 level. Effectively, this means that a whole level was skipped. It should be noted that in terms of grammar, not much has been skipped and in fact the first three units only presented one new topic (present perfect) and the rest was just a review. Considering that the classes were personalized, and the textbook was used as a base and plentiful additional material has been introduced and worked with. As a result, extra vocabulary has been brought up, skills practiced, and this made the transition much easier. There were also extra classes with specific focus on pronunciation. Her actual level thus reflects the B1 level.

6.1.1 Final interview

Reflecting on her learning, Antonia appears to be overwhelmed by the result and shows very positive attitude towards English and the course. Individual parts of her interview (based on outline in Appendix 3) connect in a bigger picture and resonate well with the methodology and focal points of the course.

When Antonia evaluates her skills, two topics reappear: confidence and disparity between spoken sounds and spelling. She feels comfortable speaking and has no problems understanding; however, she at times struggles when it comes to spelling. This works both ways – understanding a word when reading and spelling a word when writing.

English has now become a part of her daily life and she can use it for entertainment (with her friends, watching movies and series or listening to music) as well as professional purposes (work-related research online).

As far as grammar is concerned, she is aware of the rules, yet the use of them is not yet fully automatic, causing her to make basic errors, such as forgetting to change verbs in their past forms. In her speaking, she often realizes it and corrects herself, even more so when reminded by the teacher. In writing, she is usually able to pick up these mistakes by herself.

Her initial goal of being able to express herself in daily context was a realistic milestone on her journey and she thinks this has been achieved. She still wants to continue improving and this is
not the final goal for her: ideally, she would like to be completely fluent and able to use English as well as her native language.

Comparing this course to the previous unsuccessful attempts leads her to focusing on various aspects of this course. One of them is being the lone students. Thanks to this, she was able to advance at her own pace, which was rather fast, and when she needed additional explanation, there was always time for that. The dynamic of the course was different from other courses and the variety of materials as well as logical development and connection of theory (mainly grammar) and practice kept her mind busy and motivated, unlike in other courses where too much time was dedicated to a specific topic and waiting for others, which led to boredom.

Throughout the course, Antonia has kept a notebook full of own notes, divided in two parts. The first part were grammar-related topics, the latter vocabulary list (English word and its translation). These notes helped her when studying at home. In addition to this, she also appreciated further simple grammar overview handouts provided by the teacher.

When asked about her general study skills and the development thereof, Antonia is a bit hesitant and expresses her interest in further learning of all kind, but not in an organized way. Moving to languages, she regards learning English as easier given the fact that we are exposed to it on a daily basis. Learning another language would not be much easier to her, despite having the experience of learning English.

Antonia’s course has not finished yet and she is still excited to get to know more. She found studying this way interesting and enjoyable and realizes, that there is still more, especially mastering the rules and making them automatic while speaking.

At the beginning of the course, Antonia thought that learning English was impossible and now her attitude has changed. She speaks of the course as of providing her the tools and now it depends on her to use those. Antonia concludes by saying: “Learning English was my dream. […] now I know it is not impossible.”

6.1.2. Teacher’s observation

Antonia has gone through a rapid development over the course of a few weeks. Her advancement was both in terms of rules knowledge and vocabulary as well as skills. The course was designed to address her immediate needs and enable her to express herself and communicate with others, all of this while keeping her motivated and changing her attitude toward English and learning it.
The biggest achievement was the improvement of her communication skills. Antonia is a confident person and can sustain a conversation on virtually any topic without major concerns. She does well in all kinds of situations and while both her understanding and speaking might not be perfect, she manages to focus on the gist and understand or get her message across efficiently.

Due to the focus of the course on spoken interaction, her problem with spelling arose. It is curious enough to see her write down vocabulary and perfectly remembering the meaning and context from the previous conversation or being able to use it; however, when it comes to spelling it, she is rather unsure and either checks the spelling with the teacher or does not even try and asks how the word is spelled. Antonia has a similar flaw in her native language as well – occasionally mistaking the spelling of some words that sound the same or similar (e.g. ll and y, b and v).

From the materials she was presented with, there were not many causing trouble or being too difficult for her. Even if the material was more difficult, she handled the challenge well. Especially her understanding is strong and she it would be interesting to see how she can apply this outside the classes, something there were not many opportunities for.

It has not always been easy to maintain the same level of excitement and bringing materials of her interest – there were situations when she did not enjoy the topic and preferred a change, either voicing her opinion or just simply not cooperating as expected. This can be seen in two ways – possibly as avoiding unwanted topics or re-directing the classes to improve the outcome for her. Incorporating the textbook and its simplified English (especially graded listening) sometimes even made her laugh.

Revisiting her reflection, there is not much to disagree with. Perhaps the most beneficial part of the course for was the possibility of advancing at her own pace, something she was used to while at Montessori school. The methodology presented plentiful opportunities to develop on the topic or readjust and move on. Also providing a platform to express her opinion was motivating. Her positive attitude made the whole learning experience much more enjoyable both for the student and the teacher.

The final course outcome has surpassed the expectation and, in many ways, completed her previous incomplete knowledge and through making English more interesting enabled her to advance at a fast pace. If sustained, she could soon be fully fluent in English, bearing in mind the necessity to fully eliminate elementary mistakes caused by lack of attention.
6.2 Nicolas

The second part of Nicolas’s course was similar to the first one with one important motivation change – after consultation with his family and study agency, he decided to not pursue the required TOEFL score and instead take ESL courses at his future college. As this was only confirmed less than three weeks before the end of the course, the classes were conducted basically in the same structure as initially intended: half of them focused on general English, the rest on TOEFL preparation. The TOEFL preparation remained unfinished, fully covering the reading topic and being amid the listening section. No formal tests were carried out, except for the ongoing TOEFL exercises and one TOEFL reading mock test.

6.2.1 Interview

Nicolas’s interview (based on Appendix 3) is again filled with his relaxed attitude and open communication. Similarly to the previous one, he is able to critically reflect on his own learning and points out the good as well as the bad. Nicolas is proud of his achievements and feels that his goal has been ‘totally’ accomplished.

The topic that gets the most attention is yet again speaking, where the development has continued, and he now feels very confident with his speaking skills. On top of this, reading is another skill he mentions and elaborates on this idea. On the first instance, he mentions the speed of his reading as a major achievement; the second time he mentions this receptive skill is when discussing the impact of the course on his general skills. The impact of the reading strategies introduced in the classes has impacted his reading abilities in Spanish as well, making him understand easier. The other receptive skill, listening, was not an issue for Nicolas; however, he perceives it more natural and perform it without paying much attention, which enables him to take notes at the same time.

Improving productive skills (i.e. speaking and writing) was one of his goals. While speaking remains the most difficult skill for him, his speech has become more fluent, especially when speaking about everyday topics. This was also the highlight of the course for him – having the opportunity to interact in English. It also contributed to enriching his vocabulary. With regard to writing, not much has been done but he feels that his essay structure has improved.

The methodologies applied in the classes were to his liking and while he does not comment directly on them, he points out the benefits of short theoretical explanation and then focusing on
the use if this feature in a conversation. He also enjoyed the variety of inputs, not making the classes boring.

What made this course an enjoyable experience for Nicolas was the teacher’s role. As he says, the teacher was not there just to deliver the exercises from the book, but rather served as a conversation partner and provided the support and platform for him to practice and actively work on his skills. The overall relaxed and English-only environment which was created suited him well as opposed to his previous experience with teachers speaking predominantly Spanish. An interesting thing Nicolas mentions is ‘silent work’. In his words, it was when he did not know he was learning but then he was able to see the result.

When asked about the self-study capabilities, he claimed to have improved these; however, in the context of learning a language he, without any hesitation, prefers learning with a teacher or another conversation counterpart, who would give him feedback in terms of error correction and provide the interaction.

Throughout the course, Nicolas recalls one occasion when he struggled – inferring information from the text, a part of the TOEFL preparation. He is aware that he is not very good at this and doing additional exercises was the solution to overcoming this obstacle.

In the future, Nicolas is going to study in the US and will also take an ESL course there (he decided to prefer this option to finishing the TOEFL preparation and taking the examination again before moving to the US). He feels ready for this challenge and is confident he will not have problems communicating with others or in the classes.

6.2.2 Teacher’s observation

The second part of the course was similar to the previous one; nevertheless, TOEFL preparation became more important, especially as the communication goal has already been partially achieved and every class provides enough time for a short warm-up conversation and discussing the exercises also contributes to building fluency.

There is not much to disagree with in his interview. His fluency has improved tremendously, and he is right when he says he is ready for the challenge of living and studying in an English-speaking country. In addition, his weaknesses were accurate – spelling and inferring questions.
Apart from the achievements in English, it is interesting to examine the areas where learning has gone further beyond the course aims. In this case, he mentions them in both the mid-term and final interviews. The first one was being able to think in English. This points to adapting English and making it more natural for him to use this language 100% of the time and his determination despite obvious gaps in his knowledge.

The second one was the ability to multitask and take notes during a listening exercise. It might not seem that demanding, yet it points to the ability to absorb information without the need for explicit focus on the activity, a task extremely useful for living in an environment that speaks another language.

The third are his reading skills. As much as this should be accounted to the TOEFL preparation part of the course, it shows us that reading skills are not limited to one language, quite the opposite. The fact that Nicolas can better understand written texts both in Spanish and English is a proof thereof. His initial TOEFL scores in the reading part were only 10 and 11 out of 30 during the two official attempts and a similar score was achieved during the initial evaluation at the beginning of the course. He kept improving throughout the course and started using several of the suggested strategies, such as skimming or topic sentence, which led to scoring 19 points in the final mock test – an undeniable improvement.

Reflecting on the course, Nicolas’s positive experience was largely caused by the environment, teacher’s role and enjoyability: a number of factors not directly related to a certain methodology. While there is a notion toward the theory and practice pattern typical for communicative approach (skipping the controlled practice part), the unstructured speaking classes (Dogme) also yielded desired results, this time less tangible which he refers to as ‘silent learning’.

Surprisingly enough, even though he normally relies on his notes to help him study, he did not take any notes this time and there are reasons to believe that he did not spend much time studying the materials outside the classes as well.

All in all, Nicolas has proved to be a talented student and had he continued with the TOEFL preparation, his scores in some parts could have been as high as double of his previous result, which is a superb result. The course used his strengths, both that he mentioned and the unmentioned ones, and resulted in a positive learning experience addressing his learning goals and helping him achieve those.
6.3 Carolina

Carolina faced numerous obstacles during the second part of the course, which has influenced the continuity of her development and there were certain setbacks, especially in the fluency during her spoken production, upon coming back to classes after missing a week. In addition to this, she was heavily involved in issues arising at her university, related to internal staff issues and leading to students’ strike. In such state of mind, it was not easy for her to fully focus on English.

Nevertheless, she managed to finish the course and kept working towards her goals as outlined at the beginning. In her last interview, Carolina spoke about the overall achievement, most of it being closely related to her professional needs and use of English in this context. It should be noted that this interview was not conducted in-person due to time constrains. As an alternative, Carolina agreed to have the questions, as in Appendix 3, sent by email and then recorded her answers.

6.3.1 Interview

Reflecting on the improvement of her skills, Carolina is well-aware of how English can help her professionally and puts all the learned skills directly into practice, be it while reading academic texts or expressing her ideas in the same context. She has regularly been using English as a medium of communication via emails as well as while doing research. Moreover, she took part in an academic congress, which was carried out in English (more information on this topic can be found in section 5.3). On all occasions, she felt comfortable using the language and managed to communicate effectively, including an improvement in her grammar. As she has previously been working with academic research in her field, her vocabulary in this area did not pose difficulties for her; however, she has improved in daily situations, such as talking about her life.

The overall goal of fluency and confidence was achieved, even though, as she adds, this is a never-ending process and she plans on continuing.

The highlight of the course for Carolina was the actual teacher’s approach – personalizing the classes to focus specifically on her needs. This was also the main difference in comparison to her previous learning experience. As per her comment, the focus was heavily on practical use of language in personalized context of relevant topics and the theory stemmed from the needs to express herself or was directly linked to it. During the course, she did not feel lost and coped well with all the challenges.
Evaluating her general study skills, Carolina is now more aware and attentive while writing and speaking and she can recognize and correct her mistakes. This is especially true when it comes to structures and grammar. Likewise, she is more confident taking charge of her own learning and directing it toward her needs. Her initial perception of English being a difficult language together with the shyness when many others were able to speak it well has now changed and the course has helped her overcome this mental block.

In the future, she would like to continue studying and take another course, if her commitment permits. The objective of the following course would be similar to the first one: further strengthen her fluency and work on her oral production.

6.3.2 Teacher’s observation

The second part of Carolina’s course was not overly different from the first one – the core of the classes was conversation on topics related to current affairs or daily life, while the textbook served as an input in terms of grammar and supplementary topics.

The learning curve has slowed down and while she managed to deal well with presented grammar and exercises, including one written exam, so-called fossilizations (reoccurring mistakes from the past) still present an obstacle, which has yet to be overcome, until this day. As she states, her grammar range has grown – she is able to use especially present perfect correctly as well as other grammatical features and nuances. This achievement should be accounted to both the book and exercises and the conversation, which often provided opportunities to use and practice this tense.

Carolina’s vocabulary has improved significantly, and she is able to tell small differences between certain words or expressions. Nevertheless, occasional incorrect word choice caused by direct translation or ‘false friends’ is still present. What is most important is the language important for her work and research and she can use academic words well in her production now.

More significant improvement has been achieved in terms of her skill development, especially speaking, which was her main goal. Her production is fluent with occasional lapses related to looking for appropriate vocabulary or grammar forms. Not much disturbance is caused by formulating her ideas and sentences, which used to be the case at the beginning of the course. Despite mistakes or possibly unclear formulations, Carolina does not lose her fluency and in case something is unclear, she paraphrases herself to clarify the meaning.
Arguably, the speaking improvement is hard to be achieved solely relying on a textbook, without active practice. This points to the relevancy of Dogme conversations without a strong focus on a specific grammar form, a common case with speaking exercises suggested by the textbooks. In addition, the topic choice made it an interesting conversation and motivated her to express her opinion. The situations were a simulation of real-life situations she is likely to face based on the environment she usually works in; a number of the topics were related to the current society, environment and also the current affairs happening at her university with regards to gender equality and related jurisdiction. This has been a major factor contributing to the success.

The teacher’s observation resonates with her own, portraying her as a student capable of critical reflection on her own learning process and equipping her with autonomy and the ability to continue studying by herself. She also proved the ability to set a goal and trust the teacher as a guide on the way to it. As this was an individual and fully personalized course, she had a chance to influence where the learning is going and she made choices supporting her learning and was not afraid of working with pure conversation and patiently waiting for opportunities to practice or introduce new grammar and vocabulary.

If Carolina were to continue, which is her actual plan, she would have a strong base to build on and the suggestion for her would be to shift the focus from fluency to accuracy of her expressions and vocabulary, while also reminding herself of her most common reoccurring errors.

6.4 Comparison

Comparing the answers of the three, a surprisingly high level of similarity can be observed. Putting this in perspective, all of them had speaking fluency or communication as their main goal and all the courses were designed with the same goal in mind and using very similar approaches. Their skill development has been undeniable, both as observed by the teacher and by themselves.

One topic all of them mention is the feeling of confidence when speaking English. As this is not a direct language skill, methodology and teacher’s approach need to be considered when seeking the reasons for this development. Most of this is related to their spoken production and the general use of English, one of the most targeted goals.

They are also more aware of the grammatical rules and while they may not be able to incorporate them 100% of the time, they can often correct themselves or realize their mistakes. The grammar
for each of them was on a different level, but the mistakes occur across the board, not only when considering new grammar.

Another common comment was related to the topic choice. The topics were relevant and provided them with a chance to express themselves in real-life context interesting for them. They were often asked to express their opinion or discuss topics they care about, such as travelling, food or society. Some of the topics were related to the book content (National Geographic series), some of them were a simple development of small talk, such as the education of their children, work progress or football.

The dynamics of the class and bringing in a wide range of materials in different forms was also regarded as helpful by all of them. This way, they never felt bored and practiced all their abilities. This also took away the focus from explicit grammar-centered classes and put the languages to use in a context. On top of this, all of them used English in their own context outside the classes both for entertainment and work.

They also agreed that the role of the teacher was a little bit different to the traditional one and he was more of a conversation partner helping you express your ideas rather than an authority explaining rules and forcing you to remember those. This supports Vygotsky’s theory (1978) of ‘more knowledgeable other’ as the information source. Also, the individual attention and focus on individual needs and errors was helpful.

As far as methodology is concerned, they dealt well with being put in challenging situations and not following the typical pattern of grammar exposure (via text or listening) – explanation – controlled practice (exercise) – free practice (conversation). Moving directly to conversation was often their preference and they were able to absorb a quick explanation during the situation and then return back to speaking while trying to include new language.

Despite the numerous similarities, there were individual differences between the three. To begin with, their approach outside the classes was not the same. Antonia took own notes during the classes and used these to study, Nicolas took hardly any notes and practiced mainly through entertainment channels and finally, Carolina focused on practical use of her new skills.

Their pace was also not the same; Antonia advanced faster than the curriculum, Nicolas was more on the slow side when considering the textbook and grammar considerations, Carolina was able to follow the proposed advancement speed, but later on, she preferred unscripted conversation.
Interesting results were also produced outside the language skills itself. Nicolas used skills learned in English to improve his reading in Spanish as well and learned to multitask; Carolina overcame her mental block of thinking that English was difficult and her shyness; Antonia likewise changed her attitude toward English. Despite all of these changes, they do not believe that they would be able to learn a language easier than before or that their own study skills improved.

Also, their individual problems are not the same: Antonia still needs to be reminded of forgetting using the proper form (especially past, present), Nicolas would benefit from widening his structures and using more complex sentences, Carolina still has not managed to get rid of all her L1 influence and related fossilizations. As much as this relates to their levels, each of them struggles with a different aspect of the language.

As far as taking ownership of one’s learning is concerned, Antonia was the only one to actively voice her opinion in cases of dissatisfaction or another preference. The others were more accepting and either they enjoyed all the topics and activities or accepted even the ones they did not fully like.

The expectation of all of them were fulfilled if not surpassed and they are proud of their current achievement and motivated to continue pursuing their goal as they all agree that their skills can still be improved.
Chapter 7 – Conclusion

7.1 Learning evaluation

The learning advancement achieved by all three observed people reflected their preference and overall, it could be evaluated as a success. The test results above 90% or noticeable improvement allow us to claim this, further supported by their self-evaluation and teacher’s observation.

The three chose to focus on the development of their speaking abilities, which meant that a large portion of the classes was built around activities with the goal of targeting them. nevertheless, other abilities were practiced as well, very often used to introduce the topic and start the conversation. Moreover, vocabulary was provided based on the immediate need in a situation. Grammar was also often incorporated without explicit focus and spending too much time on it.

As per their self-evaluation and test results, they have managed to learn topics from the curriculum (in this case a textbook serving as a base for the course), while developing particularly their desired ability of speaking. In this case, the variety of activities and trust built so that they knew that there would be speaking practice for them led to those results. Their goal was thus considered and included, while the teacher also managed to deliver the whole curriculum and laterally develop their skills.

Their previous experience and knowledge were considered, and the course continued from the point where they finished previously and, if necessary, helped them revisit some of the old topics at the beginning or covered faster those the students were already familiar with. As a result, their advancement was steady in terms of new input, similar to what Liu and Shao (2013) describe.

Considering their skills development, a pattern common for all three can be observed. All of them improved rapidly at the beginning of the course and as the course continued, their advancement, while still reasonably fast, was not as notable as earlier. The explanation for this might be found in giving them the opportunity and support needed to overcome the initial barrier or shyness in communication and feeling comfortable using the language despite making mistakes.

The learning process was an open one and the teacher discussed the progress as well as preferences with the students, be it in the interviews used for this research or informally. During the classes, the most common pattern was teacher opening the class and letting the students decide whether they would like to review something, continue with conversation based on small talk, follow the book or any other wish (an approach as suggested by Hargreaves (2006) and
yielding good results). In general, the students felt comfortable asking questions or deciding what to do if given options. At times, however, they relied on the teacher to decide and were not fully in charge of their own learning.

Each of them had their own approach and study preferences. The classes reflected this, and conversation revolved around topic they responded to well. They were encouraged to use their way of learning, be it taking notes, using diagrams or doing extra exercises at home.

The role of homework was also important; especially because it provided them with an opportunity to practice their writing skills and working unassisted by the teacher and having to rely solely on themselves or other available materials. Most of their production created this was of high standard, containing similar mistakes to those made in class.

The evaluation seems to be predominantly positive, yet there were certainly shortcomings as well, especially persistent basic errors in all cases. It was not simple to set the right balance between supporting their production and building their confidence on one hand and, on the other hand, interrupting them to correct their mistakes. In all cases, the focus was more on building fluency.

Additional failure might also be seen when it comes to materials for the students. They will remain in possession of the textbook; however, as some of activities included the use of internet or external sources, they do not have copies of all of these (bearing in mind ecology and not printing every single article on paper). The same applies to the conversations; there was rarely a tangible output apart from vocabulary or ad-hoc grammar presented and then it depends on their notes. In Antonia’s case, this might have led to the issues with spelling words. On the other hand, they were given the vocabulary during or at the end of the class and, in some cases, also additional grammar overview with explanation in Spanish, courtesy of the teacher, which they could refer to later on.

### 7.2 Teaching method reflection

The teaching methodologies applied reflected both the current mainstream English as a foreign language tendencies (communicative approach) and went a step beyond this, making use of one of the newer and more courageous method called Dogme.
In all cases, the methodology proposed aligned with the students’ goals and they were open to adopting this method and did not insist on using a specific approach. This alignment was due to their focus on spoken production and communicative skills, which reflect their needs and future plan for the use of English. By the end of the course, all of them understood well the methodologies and the reasoning behind and followed the classes trusting the teacher and his methodology choice while also directing the learning in whichever direction they preferred.

The communicative approach proved to be a solid methodology to work with grammar-related topics, particularly when the topic was more complex. Building the student’s abilities step by step using scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) (exposure – explanation – exercise - controlled practice - free practice) and presenting the grammar in relevant context were the cornerstones thereof.

In order to build the fluency, Dogme, a methodology with focus on spoken production in personalized context and creating the need for new language (Meddings & Thornbury, 2010), was more relevant and gave the students the necessary freedom to use the language without boundaries set by the book. It was especially helpful in order to introduce relevant vocabulary and expressions or clarify subtle differences between them.

Both of the methodologies share some key concepts, such as personalization and context, and they complement each other well. It was not uncommon that the exercises from communicative approach-based book were the same as Dogme practice - a realization similar to the ideas of Banegas (2012).

The different degree of autonomy presented throughout the classes and use of a variety of inputs resulted in dynamic classes and the teacher taking a guiding and coaching role, often encouraging students to participate in a positive way and not restraining their freedom or punishing them for not doing so. As the course and the relationship between the teacher and the students developed, the students felt more confident taking charge of their own learning.

As for the teacher, both of these methods require more preparation and attention during the classes. Considering the fact that the class agenda is not fixed, rather only loosely outlined to accommodate possible changes as requested by the student, the teacher’s role is not only to deliver the prepared material and correct the student. He or she also have to be attentive during the class and react to student’s responses and attitudes telling him the direction. As such, it is wise to have a set of spare ideas related to the topic, be it questions for conversation, extra activities or additional material. This is especially true when it comes to Dogme classes and the
teacher starts a conversation and has to be able to let it flow naturally. The communicative approach tends to require lesser degree of effort by the teacher if relying solely on the book, which is a viable option and may be better suited for teachers used to relying more on a set lesson plan, similar to what Cubukcu (2013) describes.

Further consideration should be given to the teacher’s personal qualities and non-methodology related learning support. All of the students agree that the supportive and dynamic environment supported their learning as well as finding opportunities to learn English through entertainment (music, series, reading), or fostering the English-only environment. This is not dependent on the methodology and can be applied to any type of course.

There was not much noticeable difference between the levels. All three students reacted similarly and none of them struggled or felt confused by the approach. Their results and learning curve also share the same features. They reflected on the methodologies as being enjoyable and putting them in real-life situations and creating a personalized context, which encouraged them to express themselves. Each of the students had their own personal preferences when it came to learning, taking notes and type of exercises or topics; however, they did not interfere with the methodologies.

7.3 Answering research questions

*Do the students prefer constructing their own learning process, or do they prefer relying on the teacher or textbook?*

As one can observe throughout this research, they do like to work with topics of their interest as the context and prefer human interaction in the center of the learning. When encouraged, they can formulate well their questions or doubts, but as they are not fully aware of all the language features, it does not come naturally to them to explicitly ask to be taught another grammar aspect.

Nevertheless, Dogme or a conversation can often lead to encountering an obstacle and then asking about how to overcome this (be it vocabulary or grammar-related, eventually pronunciation) and similarly when applying their receptive skills. This can in turn spark the interest and the need to get to know more about it. It is more the unawareness of everything a language covers rather than not willing to direct their own learning.
The students’ learning goals were not motivated by a standardized examination and therefore they did not have the need to stick to grammar exercises similar to those found in the mentioned tests, unlike in Worth’s case (2012).

As far as the teacher and textbook are used, none of the students would feel comfortable without having a book as a guide and without a teacher to correct them. Both the teacher and the book (or additional materials about the language) are equally important and should work in synergy; book provides an opportunity to consolidate and review grammar or provide further study material and the teacher’s role is combining relevant context and grammar, correcting errors or helping them in a concrete situation. The human interaction in the classes with a teacher is not to be ignored, too and this bond has contributed to the results, confirming Xerri’s premise (2012).

**Does their attitude change with their proficiency level and considering previous learning experience?**

No major differences were observed during the individual learning processes. Despite each of the students having a considerably different background, their goals were similar and they reacted in a similar fashion to the methodologies. Also, their results and improvement were comparable.

This is, perhaps, the most important finding of the whole research – an assumption could be made that more experienced students (both in terms of general learning experience and language studies) should be able to work more autonomously. This would disagree with Coskun (2017), who expresses his concern in regard to using this methodology at lower levels as well as Khelifi (2013), who refers to difficulties related to greater support need from the teacher while using constructivism.

It also shows us that both methodologies, communicative approach and Dogme, are appropriate for all levels and while they might need to be adapted and adjusted, a fully English conversation can be held even with beginners and they benefit from it. Exposure to authentic materials was also helpful, even at lower levels, confirming Fox’s claims (2001).
How do the selected methodologies consider student’s approach to constructivism?

Both approaches work with similar principles and the student-centered approach (Glowa & Goodell, 2016) is what makes them more enjoyable and motivating than grammar practiced in an isolated or artificially imposed context. In both methodologies, the main goal is to develop the learner’s communication skills while subconsciously using the language rules, the core premise of constructivism (Seedhouse, 2004; Turuk, 2008).

Communicative approach introduced a concept and then put the student in a defined situation with a set goal and this gap provided an opportunity to use constructivism. Most of the time, this meant mixing new knowledge with the previous one and applying new principles in a limited scope. In order to solve the task, the language provided by the book was largely sufficient. At this stage, some language was irrelevant to the student or, contrarily, relevant parts remained hidden. Either way, it then depended on the proactivity of the student and the teacher whether these were introduced or skipped.

Dogme, on the other hand, provided a more open-ended approach and the topics developed naturally, based on the student’s reaction resulting in a constant need to use constructivism. In a way, Dogme forced the students to construct the context and created the need for knowledge, which was then to be bridged either independently or with the help of scaffolding provided by the teacher. Relevant topics and questions or input based on the learner’s interest and interaction were the stimuli for constructivism as well as a teacher’s tool to support constructivism in case the students were not producing any new language.

To conclude, both methods worked well in synergy, mixing the degree of constructivism and not leaving the student fully without guidance. Communicative approach provided a solid base for further review and also a tool to track the progress; Dogme made the content more relevant to the students and allowed them to construct and practice their knowledge. Worth (2012) came to a similar conclusion and supports the idea of the two methodologies complementing one another. In addition, this helped overcome an obstacle identified by Parry (2012), relating to Dogme being unpredictable in terms of its curriculum.
7.4 Further research

Further research can be headed in numerous directions.

Individual courses offer the opportunity to design a course around student’s needs and follow his pace, yet most of the courses in the world are delivered in group setting, especially considering school system. Undergoing this change of the interaction pattern and multiplying the number of individual goals and inputs might make it unable to apply the same approach as here. Examining these findings in group classes would therefore be beneficial.

The scope of this research only considered three people coming from the same country and, assumedly, from a similar socio-cultural background. A different group of people may prove to have different attitudes across the world or based on their background.

English is a language that has a wide use and everybody gets exposed to it on a daily bases, at least in Chile where the research took place. In addition, Spanish and English share some language principles and structures in common, making it easier to translate from one language to another. This might have had some influence on the learners’ journey.

Further methodologies could also be included as the two used ones represent only a share of all of them. As the research points out, the teacher’s role and other methodology unrelated aspects are also important. It would be especially intriguing to see how these rules apply to direct or audiolingual approaches, which are based on passive exposure and pattern repetition.

The research has also shown that all three of them experienced a rapid advancement at the beginning and while their advancement pace remained to be fast, it has slowed down over the time. The question to be posed is whether this was caused by their internal motivation, external factors or the methodologies.

With regards to constructivism, its use might be studied not only during the classes, but also outside them, when doing homework or self-studying. Eventually, it could also be studied during the class, directly reflecting on what was going on in their minds during individual activities.
Chapter 8 – Closing

This research followed three students on their journey trying to master the lingua franca of the modern world – English. Each of them had a slightly different background, motivation and initial abilities. Throughout the process, they managed to improve and with excitement reflected on their journey. From their words, they all feel more confident and actually able to communicate in English, which was their main goal.

In order to determine the amount of constructivism and autonomy they prefer in their learning, communicative approach and Dogme were chosen as the most suitable methodologies, which are built using the principles of constructivism. To reflect the student’s goal, a special focus was placed on spoken interaction.

The students’ freedom to make decisions was well-received and while they were not fully able to direct their advancement to next topics, they did well at deciding which way of practice and topics to choose. Their preference remains to rely on a book or written curriculum as the base and use a teacher to help them when they struggle or correct their mistakes.

The three started on a different initial, yet this did not influence their perception of the amount of constructivism used in the classes. All of them appreciated having the opportunity to practice without limiting guidelines and being able to engage in a normal conversation motivated them and created need for language, giving the teacher the opportunity to not only strengthen their knowledge, but also to add new details or vocabulary.

The topics suggested by the book were appropriate and using them as the base for further conversation proved to be a good decision. As a result, they both enjoyed the classes and learned something new, without the necessity to explicitly focus on the target language.

Both methodologies served their purpose and while communicative approach could be suggested to introduce and clarify new language, Dogme, which uses more constructivism, could be suggested as the better way to practice the language and enrich one’s vocabulary.

The final findings point out both the positives and the negatives of this approach and also consider the specific settings of these three individual courses. It points out the importance of teacher’s persona and their relationship with the student and activities outside the class, which do not depend on a specific methodology.
The research opens the door for further research in the field of EFL and constructivism. It justifies the reliance on person-to-person interaction rather than rigorously sticking to textbooks given the feedback that students prefer it this way.
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Appendix 1 – Initial semi-structured interview

Initial semi-structured interview
Goal: get to know the person, their background, motivation, learning preferences and expectation of the upcoming course

Personal profile
1. What is your education?
2. What is your current job? What were your previous jobs?
3. What are your main interests? (personal and professional)
4. Why do you want to learn English? (intrinsic/extrinsic motivation)

General attitude toward English
5. What is English to you? (necessity, opportunity, obligation etc.)
6. When did you start learning English?
7. How would you evaluate your current capabilities? (include strengths and weaknesses)
8. How have you acquired your current knowledge? (classes, self-study, friends etc.)
9. Which one brought the best (or better) results? (if applicable)
10. Do you use it outside the classes? To what extent?

General study skills
11. Do you continuously study (any other subjects)?
12. Are you capable of studying/understanding a new topic on your own?
13. Which is the most efficient study method for you? (reading, lecture, hands on etc.)

Desires and expectations
14. What would you like to be included in this course?
15. What would you like to be omitted in this course?
16. Do you want the teacher to guide you or would you like to have more freedom?
17. Do you prefer following the textbook or topics based on situation and interest?
18. What result do you hope for? (abilities after finishing this course)
Appendix 2 – Mid-term semi-structured interview

Mid-term semi-structured interview
Goal: track their progress and attitude toward the amount of constructivism in the course

Progress
1. Do you think your English has improved?
2. In which areas?
3. Which skill has been developed the most/the least?
4. Is there anything you wanted to improve but have not had the chance yet?
5. Do you feel any different while using English outside the classes? How?

Class reflection and involvement of co-constructivism
6. To what extent do you feel you have had control over your learning?
7. How has the teaching reflected your preference?
8. What is your opinion about the use of textbook, conversation and other tools?
Appendix 3 – Final semi-structured interview

Final semi-structured interview

Goal: reflect on the course both in terms of outcomes and methodologies, track changes in attitude and self-reliance capabilities, find out future plans related to English.

Reflection - outcomes

1. How have your receptive skills (reading, listening) developed?
2. How have your productive skills (speaking, writing) developed?
3. How has your grammar range grown?
4. How much has your vocabulary improved?
5. How does this reflect your initial learning goal? Was it achieved?
6. Did you use or practice English in addition to the classes? How?

Reflection - methodologies

7. What was the highlight of this course for you?
8. Was this course any different to your previous experience? How?
9. Was there any moment when you felt lost / did not understand? When?
10. What was the most useful way for you to learn during this course?
11. How much time was spent on explanation (theory) and practice?
12. Do you have any written record of your learning?

General study skills

13. Do you think your general study skills have improved? How?
14. Do you feel more confident taking charge of your own learning?
15. Do you think studying English and languages in general has become easier for you?

Future plans

16. What English level (or goals) would you like to achieve in the near future?
17. How do you plan on doing this?

18. Any other final comments?