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## Table of Contents

21st Century Skills In The Teaching Of Foreign Languages At Primary And Secondary Schools <i>Mário CRUZ, Edite ORANGE</i>	1
A Comparative Analysis Of Emoticon Functions And Forms In First And Second Language <i>Hilal BOZOGLAN, Duygu GOK</i>	13
A Comparison Between Solar And Wind Energy According To Different Locations <i>Mine SERTSÖZ</i>	21
A New Approach for Teaching Accounting Based On Technology <i>Adalmino PEREIRA, Helena Costa OLIVEIRA</i>	31
A Research on Self-Efficacy and Future Expectations of Students in Vocational High Schools <i>Ata PESEN</i>	34
A Study Of Malaysian Students Adaptation From A Dependent Learning Environment To An Independent Learning Environment <i>Jane Jeevamoney DAVIES</i>	44
Accountability in Local Public Administration: A Case Study <i>Sandrina TEXEIRA, Amélia SILVA, Maria José Angélico GONÇALVES</i>	49
Adoption And Implementation Of Information And Communication Technology Into Geography Teaching: A Systematic Review <i>Filomena FAIELLA, Antonina PLUTINO, Maria RICCIARDI</i>	58
An Analysis Of Vocabulary Teaching In Turkish Courses In Terms Of Creative Language Acquisition <i>Gözde GÜZEL, Tülay SARAR KUZU</i>	66
An Exploration Of Arab Students Opinions On Higher Education System In Romania <i>Sorin IONESCU, Florin DĂNĂLACHE, Iuliana GRECU</i>	74
Assessment Of Usage Efficiency of Information Technologies In Educational Institutions <i>Behcet ÖZNACAR</i>	80
Bilfen Learning Awareness Scale High School Form Validity-Reliability and Standardization Study <i>Mustafa OTRAR, A.Nilgün CANEL</i>	92
Cavit Orhan Tütengil's Contributions To The Field Of Communication Studies <i>Elif Küçük DURUR</i>	107
Cinema and Geography: A Theoretical – Practical Model (From Film To Lesson) For Learning Geography <i>Antonina PLUTINO, Filomena FAIELLA, Mariagrazia IULLANO</i>	112
Comic Strip And Science Communication Scicom Narratives <i>Aquiles NEGRETE</i>	123
Comparative Study On The Engagement Of Students With Autism Towards Learning Through The Use Of Mobile Technology Based Visual Schedule <i>Nurdalilah Mohd RANI, Siti Humaira RAMLI, Rafeah LEGINO, Mustaffa Halabi Haji AZAHARI, Muhamad Fairus KAMARUZAMAN</i>	132

Conceptions of Learning in Accounting <i>Anne ESKOLA</i>	139
Design Of Open Content Social Learning That Increases Learning Efficiency And Engagement Based On Open Pedagogy <i>Benneaser JOHN, Jayakumar JAYARAJ, Thavavel MURUGESAN, Muthukumar ARUMUGAM, Poorna KJ</i>	147
Detail In Architecture: Between Art And Craft <i>Juraj Dulencin</i>	157
Development Of Project-Based Blended Elearning Courseware Model For Enhancing Teachers' Ict Skills In 21st Century <i>Narong SOMPONG, Nattaphon RAMPAI, Yaowaluk PIPATJUMROENKUL</i>	162
Discussing The New Audience In Turkey In The Example Of University Youth: An Area Study <i>Adem YILMAZ</i>	168
Distance Education In Work Life:The Case Of Turkey <i>Elif Yuksel OKTAY</i>	179
Effect Of Education To Society Culture In The Digital Age <i>Ziya ŞAHİN, Nergüz BULUT SERİN</i>	198
Effectiveness Of Behavioral Strategies Training (Bst) For Mothers In Reducing Anxiety And Conduct Problems Of Children With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Adhd) <i>Zahra AZEMNIA, Shahrbanoo GHAHARI</i>	205
Effects Of Dynamic Geometry Software Integrated Workshops On Mathematics Teachers' Beliefs <i>Ümit KUL</i>	211
Efficiency Of Matrix Protocol (Mp) On Relapse Prevention And Improvement Of Quality Life In Methamphetamine Abusers(90 Days Follow Up) <i>Siamak GHASEMNEJAD, Shahrbanoo GHAHARI</i>	215
Enhancing Students' Vocabulary Knowledge In Thai Studies Through Lexicographical Process <i>Kasidit WATCHARAPHAN</i>	225
Environmental Attitudes and Awareness Of Turkish, Libyan And Northern Cyprus University Students On Water <i>Şerife GÜNDÜZ, Fidan ASLANOVA</i>	234
Eurimages Membership And Turkish Cinema <i>İrfan HİDİROĞLU</i>	243
Evaluating Competitiveness Using Fuzzy Analytic Hierarchy Process: A Case Study Of Port Enterprises in Turkey <i>Ednan AYYAZ, Mehmet ÖZBİLGİN, Fatma KÖŞ AYDIN</i>	248
Evaluation Of Language And Speech Materials For Language And Speech Disorders: A Study Of Meta-Synthesis <i>Serkan DİNÇER, Özgül AKIN ŞENKAL</i>	255
Evidence-Based Mental-Health Promotion For University Students – A Way Of Preventing Drop-Out <i>Klára TARKÓ, László Lajos LIPPAI, Zsuzsanna BENKŐ</i>	261

Examination Of Perception Of Communication Skills Of The Secondary School Teachers In Terms Of Various Variables <i>Songül ŞAHİN, Nergüz BULUT SERİN</i>	268
Examination Of Social Media Usage In Teacher-Parent Communication: Whatsapp Example <i>Nesrin ÖZDENER, Öznur TANRIVERDİ, Nagihan DÖNMEZ</i>	277
Findings Of Social Gender Inequality In Counseling Process <i>Azize Nilgün CANEL, Denizhan ÇETİN</i>	285
Implementing Open Source Platform For Education Quality Enhancement In Primary Education: Indonesia Experience <i>Marsudi Wahyu KISWORO</i>	295
Importance Of Practical Lessons For Students Of Technical And Engineering <i>A. Ramirez-LÓPEZ, D. F. Muñoz-NEGRON &amp; S. Romero-HERNANDEZ</i>	302
Improving Nos Understanding Through History Of Science Instruction: Contextualized Explicit And Reflective Approach <i>Mustafa CANSIZ, Semra SUNNGUR, Ceren ÖZTEKİN</i>	307
Increasing Undergraduate Students' Exam Performances In Statistics Course Using Software Socrative <i>Nuri BALTA, Selim GÜVERCİN</i>	314
Integration Of Technology-Based Resources In Adult Learning And Teaching Contexts: A Literature Review <i>Seda KHADIMALLY</i>	322
Interactive Learning By Using Augmented Reality Technology: The Development Of Electronic Publication Course For Education In Thailand <i>Paitoon SRIFA</i>	331
Intercreativity and sMOOC. The importance of the Collective Intelligence in the ECO European Project <i>Sara Osuna ACEDO, Lucía Camarero CANO</i>	335
Investigation of Anger Expression Styles Of The Secondary School Students Through Picture Drawing Method <i>Müge Yukay YÜKSEL, Hacer YALÇINTAŞ, Beyza ÖZOĞLU, Ferit GÜNEŞ</i>	345
Investigation Of Mobile Assesment Environment Design Studies <i>Melih KARASU, Tarık KIŞLA, Jale İPEK</i>	355
K-12 Teachers' Perceptions Of Barriers And Benefits In Technology Usage <i>Carol TODD, Lin B. CARVER</i>	362
Mobile Learning Adoption by Language Instructors in Taibah University <i>Sabah Sadiq Hussain BAKHSH</i>	370
Model Mediated Higher Education Course <i>László Horváth</i>	396
On The Use Of Euklid Dynageo In Geometry Lectures At The High Schools Or Universities <i>Engin CAN</i>	407
Online Learning Is A Process, Not Finesse <i>Riad S. AISAMI</i>	411

Opinions And Recommendations about the Interaction Improvements of Environmental Education And Technology <i>Emete GERÇEL, Fidan ASLANOVA</i>	418
Practice-Based In Service Teacher Training In Health Promotion And Mental Health Promotion On The Basis Of Antonovsky's Theory <i>Zsuzsanna BENKŐ</i>	425
Predictors Of Student Preferences For Blended Learning: An Empirical Investigation <i>Gheorghe MILITARU, Anca-Alexandra PURCAREA, Olivia-Doina NEGOITA</i>	431
Processes of the School Management, Usage of Information Technologies in Adolescents and Aggression Relation <i>Emete GERÇEL</i>	437
Psycho-Social And Educational Aspects Of Development Of Financial Literacy In Adults <i>Jaroslav VETEŠKA</i>	447
Pupils' Mathematical Self-Concept In The Beginning Of The Sixth Grade <i>Päivi VALLI, Päivi PERKKILA, Raine VALLI</i>	451
Smart Development And Educational Technology In Rural Areas: Lessons From Two Case Study Regions <i>Michael STEINER, Johannes MOSSBÖCK</i>	459
Social Intelligence Of Teachers And Coping With Demanding Situations In Teaching Practice <i>Miroslav FRANKOVSKÝ, Zuzana BIRKNEROVÁ, Lucia ZBIHLEJOVÁ, Anna LELKOVÁ</i>	464
Some Characteristics Of E-Learning Materials In Secondary Technical Education In Slovenia <i>Damijan ŠTEFANC, Mojca Kovač ŠEBART, and Jasna MAŽGON</i>	471
Student Perception Of Technology Use In Maritime Education <i>Cheah Phaik KIN</i>	479
Students' Perception Of Computer Assisted Instruction In Hong Kong Higher Education <i>Hon Keung YAU, Sin Yi CHONG</i>	484
Students Understanding Of Mathematics Using From Prototypical Examples: Analyze In Linear Algebra <i>Sinan AYDIN, Yaşar AKKAN</i>	502
Study On Developing The Assisting Program For Customized Housing Design For The Elderly <i>Junu HEO, Jae Hee CHUNG, Jong KIM</i>	506
Syllabus or Silly-Bus? A Suggested Technology, EQ And Performance-Based Non-Native ELT/EFL Teacher Training Syllabus (TTS) <i>Hidayet TUNCAY</i>	514
Teacher Education Through Ict. Moocs: New Learning Environments <i>Alberto FORNASARI</i>	527
Teaching And Learning Accounting In An Innovative Business Simulation: Portuguese Case Study <i>Helena COSTA OLIVEIRA, Manuel SÁ, Teresa BARROS, Vânia ARANTES</i>	533
Teaching And Learning Advanced Calculus Using The Web <i>Marta G. CALIGARIS, Georgina B. RODRIGUEZ, Lorena F. LAUGERO &amp; José E. VALENTINI</i>	539
Technology In Education <i>Dilek ÜNLÜ</i>	545

The Achievement And Satisfaction Of Undergraduate Students Of Phranakhon Rajabhat University Through Multimedia Learning On Environmental And Natural Resources Management <i>Hattaya NETAYARAKS</i>	548
The Application Of Smart Devices In Teaching Students With Special Needs <i>Hüseyin GÖKSU, Tolgay KARANFILLER, Kamil YURTKAN</i>	552
The Development Of Online Mobile Classroom Using Power Generated From Solar Cells <i>Sunchai PATTANASITH</i>	557
The Impact of an Augmented Reality System in Teaching Machine Dynamic Course for Engineering Students <i>Ali ALMUSAWI, Adhraa Al.RESHEIDI, Maisaa Al.JADEEDI, Abdulrahman ALSAADI, Halima Al.RIYAMI</i>	562
The Information And Communication Technology Learning Package For Enhance Graduated Students' 21st Century Skills <i>Nattaphon RAMPAI</i>	565
The Lea's Box Project As A Pratical Implementation Of Educational Data Mining Algorithms <i>Lenka FIRTOVA</i>	569
The Reevaluate Statistical Results Of Aproach About Pedagogy Of Anatolian In Parents, Lived In One Anatolian City Using Artificial Neural Network And Multivariate Regression Analysis. <i>Esmâ UZUNHISARCIKLI, Vesile ŞENOL, Erhan KAVUNCUOĞLU, Raziye PEKŞEN AKÇA, Fevziye ÇETINKAYA</i>	573
The Use Of Kinect In Teaching And Learning Environment <i>Hakan YÜKSEL</i>	585
The Use Of Learning Objects In Teaching Linear Algebra <i>Marta G. CALIGARIS, Maria Elena SCHIVO, Maria Rosa ROMITI &amp; Matias MENCHISE</i>	590
Two Different Methods Usage In Multi-Digit Numbers Subtraction With Borrowing And Success Results <i>Engin CAN</i>	595
Universities And Globalization Processes. The Study "Young Universe" By The Generational Observatory Of The University Of Bari Aldo Moro <i>Giovanna Da MOLIN, Alberto FORNASARI</i>	598
Unpdating Of Programming Lessons For Students Of Computer Engineering <i>A. Ramirez-LÓPEZ, D. F. Muñoz-NEGRON, S. Romero-HERNANDEZ</i>	603
Use Of Interactive White Board For E-Learning: An Innovative Better By Far Idea <i>TELLA, ADEYINKA</i>	608
Use Of Technology In The Application Kitchens Of Vocational Education Schools <i>Mutlu DOĞAN</i>	627
Using Touchscreen Technology To Support Basic Numeracy Learning Process For High Functioning Children With Autism <i>Muhamad Fairus KAMARUZAMAN, Harrinni Md NOR, Mustaffa Halabi Haji AZAHARI</i>	632
Video Games, Computers, Mobile Phones & Social Network Use Among Immigrant and Native Adolescents in Southern Spain <i>Soriano Ayala, Encarnación; González-Jiménez, Antonio José, and C. Cala, Verónica</i>	640

## 21st Century Skills In The Teaching Of Foreign Languages At Primary And Secondary Schools

**Mário CRUZ**  
mariocruz@me.com

**Edite ORANGE**  
editeorange@gmail.com

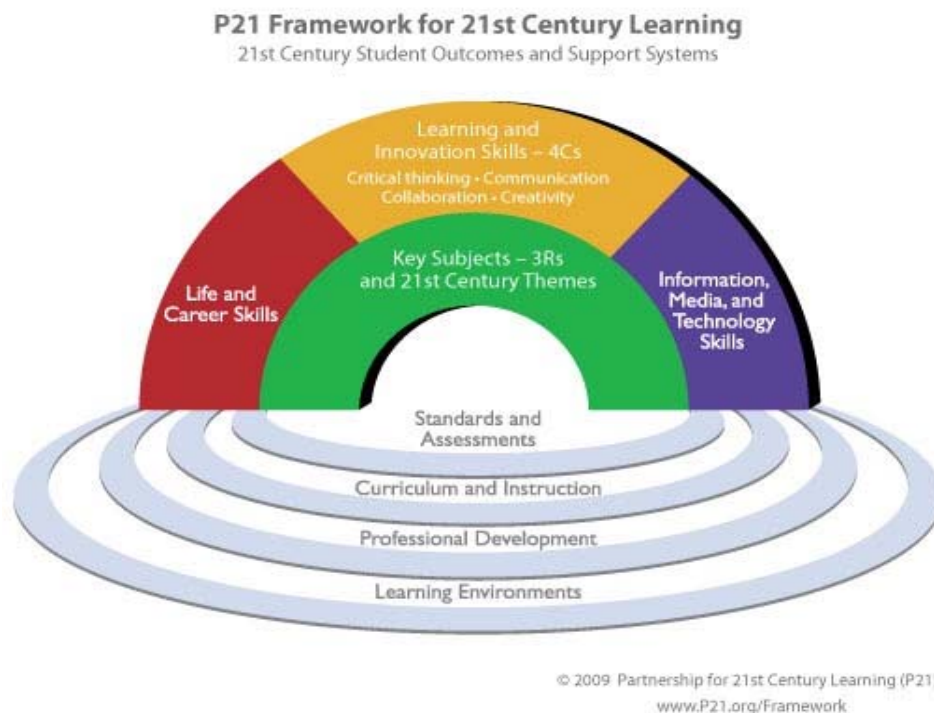
### ABSTRACT

Taking an experiential communicative approach (Fernández-Corbacho, 2014) into account, enriched by gamification strategies (Foncubierta & Rodríguez, 2015), in this paper we intend to disseminate teaching practices in English and Spanish as Foreign Languages at primary/secondary schools, which account for the development of 21st Century Skills, namely: collaboration and communication, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving. Therefore, we will present practices, developed within a Master's Degree practical training, which illustrate the work of these skills in the classroom using: a) Web 2.0 applications in collaborative learning; b) creative and (hyper)sensory tasks which develop critical reflection; c) cross-cultural activities.

### INTRODUCTION

In present-day interconnected society communication plays an increasingly important role due to the prominent digital and multimedia technology, which make part of our daily tasks and life. Indeed, this technology makes the whole process of communication and peer-to-peer collaboration easier, by which pupils are able to critically interpret messages, convey their own points of view and show their creativity in solving problems (cf. Cruz, 2011).

The P21 Framework (see Figure 1) includes both 21st century student outcomes (represented by the arches) and support systems (represented by the pools). The first ones, the pupils outcomes, are related to the skills, knowledge and expertise pupils should master to succeed in work and life, namely: a) key and core subjects such as reading, writing and arithmetic; b) learning and innovation skills, such as creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration; c) information media and technology skills, which are related to information literacy both digital and analogical ones; d) life and career skills, which include flexibility, self-direction- cross-cultural skills, productivity and leadership. The latter are necessary to ensure pupils' mastery of 21st century skills. In fact, standards, assessments, curriculum, instruction, professional development and learning environments must all be aligned to produce a support system that enhances the above stated skills.



**Figure 1:** P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning (cf. P21, 2010, 2015)

Taking into consideration that pupils may create and express themselves through languages, we may consider that languages learning is the basis for professional success in the 21st century. Therefore, we believe that language education and cultural understanding may be at the heart of developing critical cultural awareness, i.e., global awareness for pupils. In this way, by learning languages, pupils shall develop skills which allow them: on the one hand, to interact with pupils from the target language and cultures, discussing issues and finding possible solutions towards them; on the other hand, they may develop respect towards their points of view and values, which can be different from their own.

Through languages pupils are able to achieve the following 21st century framework goals, namely: a) pupils will be able to use various types of reasoning to think and reflect critically and solve problems in both conventional and unconventional ways; b) pupils may communicate in diverse contexts through a great variety of means, including technologies (both Web 2.0 and 3.0 tools), sharing their own ideas and interpreting and assessing others' own points of view; c) they are also able to work together in an effective way, accepting responsibility and compromising within the achievement of team's goals; d) pupils are able to use technology effectively to research, access, create, and communicate information in a creative way; e) they will become motivated, self-directed and reflective pupils, who are able to manage their goals and time autonomously; f) they are also able to work respectfully within socially and culturally diverse teams (P21, 2010, 2015).

In this article we will discuss how 21st century skills, learning and innovation skills or the 4Cs in figure 1, can be put into practice in the languages classroom. Firstly, we will focus on what the 21st Century Skills framework conveys, by analyzing reports which deal with its definition and core concepts which are related to it. Secondly, we will present some new approaches which according to our opinion may facilitate the implementation of the 21st Century Skills in the languages classroom, namely: the experiential communicative and the (hyper)sensory approaches. Last but not least, we will present some activities related to the teaching of those skills in languages learning.

## 1. 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN THE LANGUAGES CLASSROOM

Learning another language and understanding the culture(s) of the people(s) who speak them is seen as a key skill in the global society in which our pupils will live and work. In fact, language education is quite critical to the pupils success in the world of the future, and language arts is regarded as one of the key subjects which pupils have to master, including "English" and other "World languages" (P21, 2015, p. 2). At the same time language education approaches shall promote understanding of academic content at much higher levels by dealing with 21st century interdisciplinary themes as key subjects, namely global awareness which encourages pupils' "understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages" (idem).

During the search we have conducted we have identified different studies which try to portray the kind of knowledge which we should develop within the upcoming years. Some of these studies focus on the fact that technology is responsible for changing the world through globalization and in this way the following skills are highly needed: a) expert thinking, i.e. "the ability to solve unexpected problems for which there are no predictable and programmable rule-based solutions"; b) and complex communication which "involves interacting with other people to acquire information, to explain it, or to persuade others of its importance" (cf. Jerald, 2009, p. 3). This technological and digital world is changing rapidly and presently

"technological literacy is an essential component of job readiness. It is important that students become competent in the use of technology and associated applications. More importantly, they must be able to apply their skills to practical situations. Thus, students should learn technological skills in the context of learning and solving problems (...). Students must be able to build on what they already know as they learn new languages, adapt to new systems, and weigh the benefits and applications of technological development. (...)" (Metiri Group, 2002, p. 13).

Other studies tend to connect the language and technology skills because they see digital interaction in heterogeneous groups as necessary for effective collaboration. OECD (2005, p. 4) focus on this on its report, seeing a competency as more than just pure knowledge: "it involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating". According to OECD (idem), pupils will need these skills due to globalization which is creating a even highly interconnected world.

This assumption is stated in Gardner's *5 minds for the future*. This author considers that "most of our students are already way ahead of us digitally whether we are teachers or parents" and this requires new teaching approaches to develop specific skills which he describes as "minds": the disciplined mind, the synthesizing mind, the creative mind, the respectful mind and the ethical mind. The first type of mind is related to discipline, i.e., "work regularly and steadily on things" (Gardner, 2008, p. 5) and seeking for expertise in a specific field but

at the same time being ready for interdisciplinary ways of working (Gardner, 2008, p. 6-8). The second type of mind is all about training pupils on “looking for the current best synthesis, deciding what our ultimate synthesis should look like, picking a method, deciding what are we going to look at, listen to and why, examining what are we going to ignore and why, and importantly, how are we going to record information, using equations, mind maps, stories, formulas, taxonomies (...)” (Gardner, 2008, p. 9). The third type of mind, the creative mind”, implies “thinking out of the box” and it can be fostered by letting pupils take chances and risks while they are undertaking projects. This is the kind of feature computers are not able to perform but once again technology may help pupils achieve it. *Differences* is the key word in the following type of mind. The respectful mind is about “recognizing that the world is composed of people who look different, think differently, have different belief and value systems” (Gardner, 2008, p. 12). The last one, the ethical mind, is related to the interrelationship between oneself’s interests and the ones from the community, bearing in mind that we should expose pupils to ethical dilemmas and having them think about them.

All the reports we have read have in common the following features: pupils must engage in activities that let them learn the essential skills for success in present-day world, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. These reports emphasize that language learning may contribute to make pupils take on a new view of the world, as they are able to understand the world better because of the knowledge they have of the cultures of the languages they are learning. While pupils are learning a language they are developing: a) communication, i.e. the ability to understand and interpret messages, to present information, etc.; b) cultures, because they learn about the cultural views, practices and products of the people who speak the target-language; c) connections, as pupils are able to access knowledge from other subjects through the target language; d) comparisons, as pupils are able to identify similarities and differences between their own culture and the ones of the target language, reflecting upon their views of the world, practices and cultural products (cf. P21, 2010). Taking this into consideration, we believe that by undertaking the experiential communicative approach enriched by (hyper)sensory strategies, teachers are able to develop skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration within language classrooms. Let us now focus on these approaches in the following chapter.

## 2. THE EXPERIENTIAL COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH AND (HYPER)SENSORY STRATEGIES IN LANGUAGES TEACHING

Experiential learning seeks to introduce a change from an experience or some experiences that are relevant and valid for the student, connected with real life. It is a holistic approach that aims at improving the potential, self-esteem and self-concept of the pupil. According to this approach each student is unique and learning is seen as a cyclical process which is made out of significant and lasting experiences.

In this context interaction and communication play an interesting role, but so our needs and interests. In fact, the experiential communicative approach invites each pupils to develop interest in exploring. Creativity, flexibility, the need to take risks and take the lead characterize this learning approach. If we draw a comparison between the communicative approach and the experiential approach, we may see that the latter seeks the personal growth of pupils, enhances their self-esteem, motivation, and respect for diversity, and at the same time fosters their ability to take risks.

Fernández-Corbacho (2014) sums up the features of this type of learning a teacher shall bear in mind, namely: a) classroom tasks shall engage students in cooperative strategies, making them responsible for their learning; b) authentic use of language with meaningful and stimulating activities shall also be advised; c) each task shall pose challenges and therefore generate interest.; d) there are different learning styles in each classroom group and in this way the type of activities shall be varied; e) affection and security are of utmost importance as pupils need to feel both safe and part of a community, but also rewarded for their achievements. Regarding the use of ICT as a tool for class, Fernández-Corbacho (idem) proposes several activities: webquests (a trip, for example), wikis and blogs with multimedia material), social networks, etc.

As stated by Fernández-Corbacho (idem), our students are primarily people who enjoy experiences and are full of expectations regarding what life has to offer. For this reason, learning based on mechanical and abstract tasks, or with little relation to the real world, makes them disconnect from learning itself. That is why the emotional dimension fosters their connection to their own identity, their previous experiences, and with the world of sensations.

By ignoring these issues, some foreign language course books fail to provide authentic communication activities. In order to learn in an effective and lasting way learners must feel, experiment, observe and reflect on the language and on the learning experience itself. Indeed, we can not forget what Mora (2015:WEB) calls “encendido emocional”, i.e., the affective component that, in turn, develops in each pupils "personal input, initiative, and self-direction in the learning process" (Knutson, 2003).

Moreover, we should not neglect that our pupils bring to the teaching-learning process their own "internal syllabus" (Jiménez Raya, et al, 2007), which may influence their own learning. Therefore, it is relevant to create situations and materials which are significant for students in order to respect their knowledge, which has already

been socially constructed in the community to which they belong (Freire, 2007: 30) or often created in communities of speakers of the target language.

In order to encourage the sharing of knowledge and the questioning among students, it is necessary to develop activities which provide training opportunities for learners, so that they are able to succeed in true intercultural encounters and develop their critical cultural awareness. This critical pedagogy is the commitment to the act of teaching to read the world in a critical way and to transform the dominant conventional educational relations (Cruz, 2011: 83). However, we should not confine the learners only to the sphere of interaction offered by the physical / face-to-face world. We should give them the opportunity to (re)create knowledge in the virtual world by letting them use blogs, glogs, webquests and social networks, in the era of connectivism (Siemens, 2004; Downes, 2006), developing a critical hyper pedagogy, according to Dwight & Garrison (2003) model. As Mora (2015:WEB) states, these digital tools are excellent facilitators of learning per se, but in the same way as with other forms of support analog learning, they must be well designed and well adapted to the context in which learning occurs.

We see language learning as a commitment to citizenship, an environment in which pupils should be engaged in activities in which they train and develop their intercultural communicative competence (Cruz, Araújo e Sá & Moreira, 2009). The higher the number of opportunities pupils have to train these skills, the better they will be prepared, as future citizens, for intercultural encounters and the requirements they entail. In fact, we believe that multisensory practices, which are used mainly in special education environments, can cope with this effective preparation of our students, based on experience and fostering multimodal learning.

Together with the experiential communicative approach, multisensory learning transforms the senses in perception channels that activate the brain connections (Shams & Seitz, 2008). Multisensory learning offers the pupils the opportunity to gain something through experience. In fact, reading how to make an orange cake is not as productive or as effectively as creating a real one. When making a cake, the pupils learn what ingredients are part of the recipe, by touching them and smelling them. They are able to stir the cake, see how long it takes to bake and even smell once its done. Finally, they also taste it.

We agree with Arslan (2009: WEB) when the author refers that

“every lesson should include a hands-on experience. If the lesson is about fractions, let the children play with plastic pies with slices to understand. If the lesson is on writing, play games that allow students to identify better writing techniques. Use the computer and online resources to take learning to a new level where they can see and hear and interact. Consider the potential of touch screens in education, where a child can easily slide objects back and forth on the screen and learn in the process.”

Looking back in time, we see the roots of multimodal learning in approaches such as Total Physical Response (cf. Richards & Rodgers, 1986:87) or Bloom's Taxonomy (cf. Anderson & Sosniak, 1994). However, it is with the Theory of Multiple Intelligences of Gardner (1993:60-61) that the multisensory approach gains its greatest expression.

In our opinion, approaches, methodologies and resources to be taken into account should be based on the social realities that we have in a *glocal* society (Cruz, 2011). Therefore, learning a foreign language should be an area of communication intervention, intercultural dialogue, maximizing the multiple skills of our students, according to the perspective of García (2010) and of an affective relationship with the languages (Marques, 2004).

In this context, we may say that experiences provided by learning through holistic and hypermedia resources are relevant, but not enough. It is therefore necessary to integrate the experiences which learners have the opportunity to carry out, including reflection activities and stimulating critical analysis, so that pupils are able to assimilate and create proactive knowledge which they may use in other contexts (Fernández-Corbacho, 2014).

Taking this into account, we believe that the gamification pedagogy serves this purpose. In fact, the game assumptions are taken into the classroom, stimulating the integration of experience and critical analysis and reflection on the teaching-learning process. According to Foncubierta & Rodríguez (2015), the use of gamification is seen as the technology which the teacher uses in the design of a learning activity (either analog or digital) introducing game elements (logos, time limit, punctuations, dice, etc.) and thinking (challenges, competition, etc.) in order to enrich the learning experience, direct and / or modify the behavior of students in the classroom. In fact, gamification aims at influencing the behavior of students at a given task, creating and producing experience, domain feelings of a given content and, at the same time, autonomy for their achievement (cf. Hamari & Koivisto, 2013).

Particular important in this type of pedagogy is the affection or the so-called “encendido emocional” (Mora, 2013), which we have discussed before, i.e., the motivation and the emotional involvement of the students on the task. It is the emotion that “calls” the pupils to actively participate in gamified tasks. We can tell if a pupil is engaged in a specific task if they are quite cooperative and curious for what comes next and quite dependent on immediate feedback.

Let us now focus on activities in which pupils are able to develop collaboration, creativity and cross-cultural awareness skills.

### 3. COLLABORATION, CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING: 21ST CENTURY SKILLS INTO PR@CTICE

Bearing in mind that the experiential communicative approach is about letting pupils engage in present-day and real tasks, developing a sort of emotional involvement, we will now give examples of practices we consider that represent this sort of activities. These activities were developed by students of the Master Degree in Teaching English and Spanish at the School of Education of Oporto Polytechnic Institute, who were under our supervision. The following activities were developed during their practical training at local schools, being rigorously planned and taking into consideration both the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and National Programs for English and Spanish as Foreign Languages.

#### 3.1 COLLABORATION

One of the activities we would like to draw your attention upon is related to the use of a *WebQuest* and *Glogster* in the Spanish classroom. This activity can be undertaken during a set of lessons related to traveling aimed at A2 level Secondary School pupils (according to the European Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The teacher has to explain that the pupils will have an adventure themselves, a *WebQuest* called “La ruta Azteca”, which can be found at <http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=268782>. The *WebQuest* presentation shall be done in plenary. It is advised that the teacher explain the purpose of a *WebQuest*, its features, work tasks, processes and even assessment. Pupils also need headphones for the activities as they have to listen to audio and watch some videos.

According to Dias (2010), *WebQuests* increase pupils motivation, being often cooperative in nature, requiring students to take on roles where they are part of a team that must accomplish a specific task. In fact, they have to become experts on a certain topic and share this information with their group. The *WebQuests* may offer opportunities of knowledge (re)construction through: a) a vision of learning as a social practice; b) the development of multiple intelligences; c) the reading and writing production based on peers collaboration; d) the development of the learners’ electronic competence; e) and also the creation of interdisciplinary practices based on the use contents from other curricula subjects.



Figure 2: Introduction Page of *WebQuest* “La Ruta Azteca”

In Figure 2 we are able to see the organization of *La ruta Azteca* itself. Pupils have to follow specific stages: a) introduction, which consists of a short paragraph that presents the activity to the students. It often has a role or scenario involved; b) the task informs the learners of what the outcomes will be; c) the process identifies the steps the students should go through to accomplish the task. It also includes the online resources they will need, providing scaffolding for the information organization; d) evaluation sections which describes to the students how their performance will be evaluated; e) the conclusion summarizes what the learners will have accomplished by completing the *WebQuest*, and often provides additional opportunities to extend their thinking.

**PARADA 1**

En la primera parada de nuestro viaje vais a descubrir como y donde vivían los Aztecas a través de los enlaces siguientes:

- [El Imperio Azteca \(Vídeo\)](#)
- [Civilización Azteca](#)
- [Cultura Azteca](#)
- [Los Aztecas \(Prezi\)](#)
- [¿Cómo y cuando surgió el Imperio Azteca?](#)
- [Hernán Cortés, el conquistador del Imperio azteca](#)
- [La llegada de Hernán Cortés a México](#)

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**PARADA 2**

En el corazón de México D.F. encuentras algunas ruinas de la antigua ciudad de Tenochtitlán. Puedes descubrir más sobre esta ciudad aquí:

- [La grandeza de Tenochtitlán, la capital de los Aztecas](#)
- [Templo de Tenochtitlán en Apocalipto \(Mel Gibson, 2006\)](#)

---

**PARADA 3**

En seguida descubre la Ciudad de los Dioses que está cerca de Puebla: Teotihuacán. Tienes aquí

**Figure 3:** Process Page of *WebQuest* “La Ruta Azteca”

In our opinion one of the most important stages of the *WebQuest* is the Process stage (see Figure 3). In this stage pupils have the opportunity to simulate a bus trip around México, making three stops, in which they discover the wonders about history, geography and culture of the Aztecs. In the Task Page pupils also have the chance to find out what the final outcome is and some tutorials on how to undertake it. The aim of this specific *WebQuest* is to create a digital poster (see Figure 4), by using *Glogster* Web 2.0 tool. *Glogster*<sup>1</sup> is a cloud-based platform for digital storytelling and interactive learning; It allows users to mix all kinds of media on a virtual board to create multimedia posters and it encourages interactive, collaborative education and digital literacy.

Al final de la WebQuest deberás haber conseguido elaborar un mural digital con imágenes, texto y videos que represente los rasgos generales de la cultura de los aztecas, utilizando la herramienta 2.0 GLOGSTER.

No te olvides hablar sobre:

- la ubicación del imperio;
- la vida cotidiana;
- la gastronomía;
- el idioma / sistema de escritura;
- la arquitectura;
- la organización de la sociedad;
- algunas curiosidades.

Glogster EDU

Tutorial de Glogster EDU

GLOGSTER: Enseña con tu póster digital interactivo

**Figure 4:** Task Page of *WebQuest* “La Ruta Azteca”

As stated by Wistrom (2012:WEB),

“Glogster is a great technology tool to use in the classroom because it is so flexible. You can use it for biographies, time lines, math formulas, instructional writing, experiment results, spelling plural verbs, country or state profiles, and much more. Many EFL teachers love it for its visual impact, and teachers

<sup>1</sup> *Glogster* for education can be accessed here: <http://edu.glogster.com>.

from elementary all the way up to high school can find a use for this classroom technology. Basically, any poster you can do on paper, can be done better as a *glog*. You can share them on interactive whiteboards on LCD projectors, or embed them in class websites or student blogs. *Glogs* can be worked on in school and out of school. Best of all, students love to create *glogs*. When you integrate technology into an area of education where it is not traditionally used, it instantly becomes a great motivator for students. So, why not sign up today and see what everyone else is talking about! Glogster EDU is free, so you have nothing to lose.”

Particular important in the *WebQuest* is the Evaluation Page because pupils have got the chance to autonomously assess their own piece of work, taking into consideration a table with the description of each performance level and punctuation. Therefore, failing is almost impossible. In the following figure you may see one of the groups’ outcomes:

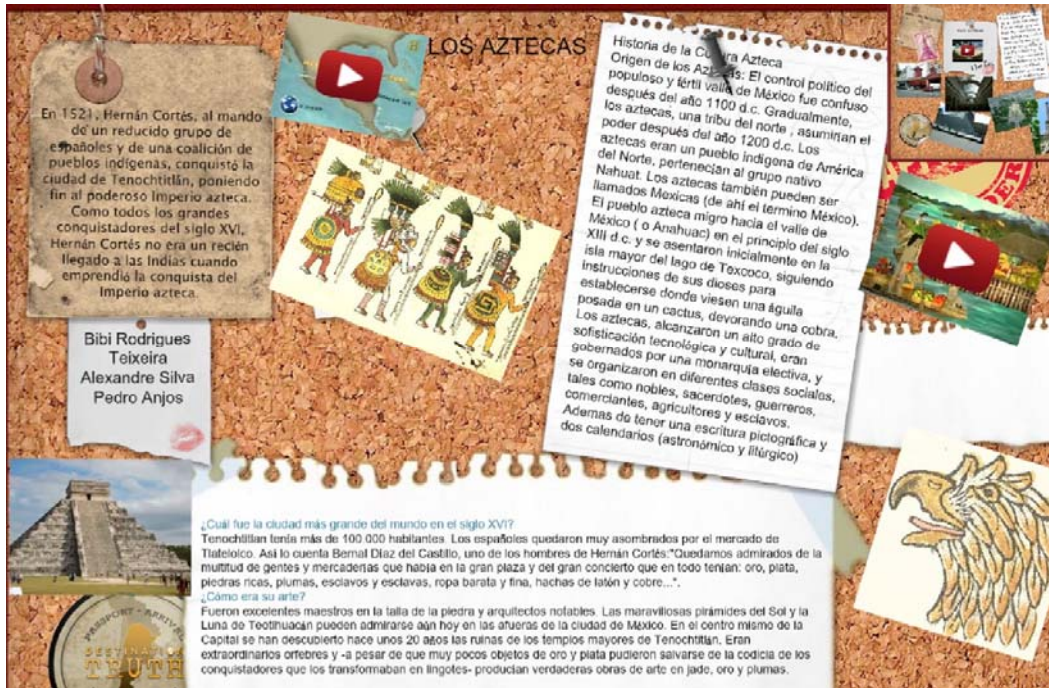
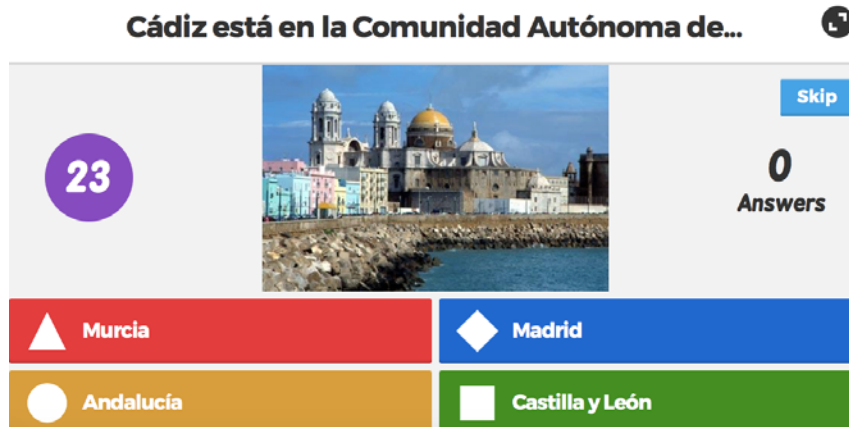


Figure 5: Sample of a poster one of the group of pupils built

The multimedia poster building allows them to develop creativity skills. Let us now focus on other activities which may stimulate this skill.

### 3.2. CREATIVITY

The following activity can be undertaken by pupils of A2 level of English at Primary School. It involves the use of another Web 2.0 tool, namely: *Kahoot!*. *Kahoot!* is a classroom response system which creates an engaging learning space, through a game-based digital pedagogy based on quizzes. Its quick pace, suspenseful music, and instant scoreboards keep competition lively and learners get engaged. The quizzes can be built by teachers beforehand, as in the example below (Figure 6) which can be accessed at <https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/26c94b5a-ef39-4821-9c3e-233a7b5331e1>, or by the pupils themselves during the classroom.



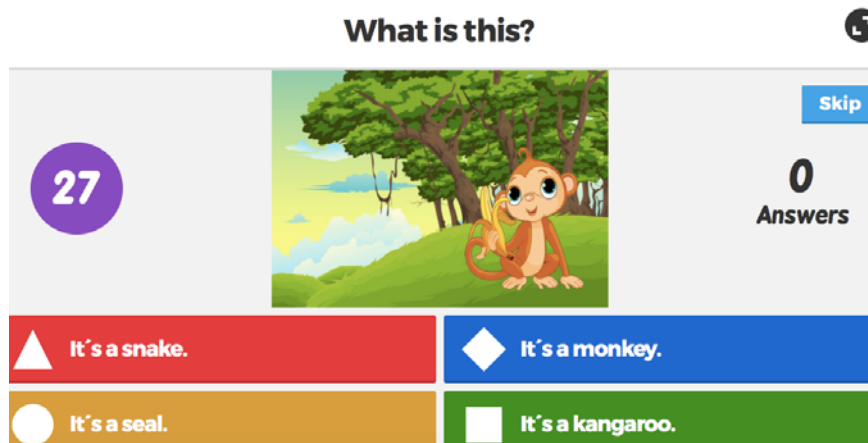
**Figure 6:** Sample of a Kahoot! built by teachers

As stated by Valle (2015:WEB), *Kahoot!* incorporates the gamification model in a clear way, by having the following features:

“1) fast feedback- Students get immediate feedback on their devices as they answer the questions; 2) transparency- Students are informed instantly of their position on the leaderboard, which is projected on the screen; 3) goals- The goal of course is to win the game. My prize is usually exemption from the quiz containing the vocabulary or grammar items featured in the game. My goal as a teacher is to motivate the students to master and to become excited about my content; 4) badges- The winner receives a trophy badge projected on the board; 5) leveling up within the community- Students are able to move up on the leaderboard as they play the game; 6) onboarding (learn the game as you play)- Students learn to play as they begin the game. They go on <http://kahoot.it>, enter the code that is projected on the screen, type in their name, and begin playing. There are no lengthy explanations; 7) competition- All of the students in the class play against each other; 8) collaboration- Students help each other to get ahead when they notice classmates falling behind; 9) community- The game gives recognition to the winners in the community, pointing to their achievement within the group. The smile it puts on the winner’s face is priceless; 10) points- The winner is the one who earns the highest amount of points, based on correct answers as well as speed.”

Apart from these features, *Kahoot!* is also interesting because it provides real time results that can be downloaded for use, in order to keep track of pupils’ learning outcomes and success.

However, as stated above, our interest in *Kahoot!* deals with the possibility to stimulate creativity in pupils. At the end of a didactic unit you may ask pupils to create their own quizzes to test other pupil’s knowledge. In the picture below (Figure 7) you may see an example of the type of *Kahoots* primary school pupils may develop. The topic of this *Kahoot* is *Animals*. Pupils were asked to create their own *Kahoot!*, using language structures and vocabulary they have learned during the lessons.



**Figure 7:** Questionnaire Sample of the “Wild Animals” Kahoot!

Other ways of getting pupils involved in stimulating their creativity is making them develop either the so-called *fotonovelas* or small comic videos. The first ones are small stories pupils create having the format of comic books. They are particularly interesting because pupils have to: a) write a script, collaborating in writing and sharing ideas for dialogues and actions; b) they make a story board with the necessary pictures and dialogue they would use per frame; c) they take the pictures, by using their mobile phones; d) after uploading the pictures onto computers or iPads pupils work with *Comic Life* to create their stories by adding the pictures and copying and pasting the dialogue from their documents. *Comic Life* can be accessed at <https://plasq.com/apps/comiclife/macwin/>.

The same idea can be done with videos by using any video editing tool, such as *iMovie* or *Windows Movie Maker*. In Figure 8 one can see a project work about the *daily routine* topic in Spanish language. This was created by a pupil studying Spanish for the first time. This girl was able to express herself in an imaginative way and at the same time she trained some language vocabulary and structures related to the daily routine, content which is taught in Spanish A1 level (*Yo me despierto a las 7 de la mañana, Me cepillo los dientes después de desayunar*, for example). She used her mobile phone camera and *Windows Movie Maker*.



**Figure 8:** Video frames created by a pupil at Spanish A1 level about daily routine

In the following sub-chapter we will focus our attention on activities which promote critical thinking through activities which allow pupils to reflect upon things and make them solve specific problems.

### 3.3. CRITICAL THINKING

In this sub-chapter we will present some activities which may be seen as critical thinking tasks. We believe that this skill can be fostered by using authentic material which may pose and induce pupils into questioning and solving problem-situations.

The basis of the following activities are the understanding of picture or story books. We have opted for authentic ones, rather than graded versions. According to Mourão (2003), real books are intended for native readers and entail authentic language used in natural contexts. In order to prepare pupils to be “full participants in a literate, democratic and multicultural society we need to focus on the ways of thinking that are involved in many uses of literacy in school and in the community. These uses require abilities of reflection, of critical thinking, investigation and problem solving” (Fisher, 1998:16).

As stated by Erkaya (2005), using real books with pupils in order to develop critical thinking skills can be an engaging, natural, familiar and fun task. According to Fisher’s research (1998), one may find strong didactic reasons to use real books to make pupils develop critical cultural awareness and thinking skills, namely: a) pupils become able to transfer what they learn to other specific contexts; b) they develop some strategies which help understand any kind of text, by being able to question and discuss topics and even language styles, i.e., meta-linguistic knowledge.

There are some picture books that instantaneously pose pupils some questioning. This is the case of titles such as *Molly’s Magic*, *A Story of Affirmation*, and *La Ciudad de Arusabnarg*. We will focus on the latter for the Spanish language classroom at primary school level. This story can be found here: <http://www.aragon.es/estaticos/ImportFiles/06/docs/Areas/EducaSensib/MedioAmbienteNiños/Leer/ARUSABNARG.pdf>.

This authentic picture book can be introduced by making pupils aware of the 3Rs policy: reduce, recycle and reuse. We can use some web resources, such as the ones offered by *Los Colorados*, a musical band from

Panama which produces didactic resources for stimulating pupils' consciousness of the climate changes and the need to save energy and recycle things.

Therefore, to warm up and prepare pupils for reading, we may use some comic strips from this band (see Figure 9). A video about the policy of the 3Rs may also be watched. This music video which is performed by endangered and wild animals can be accessed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKB\\_7MUPxT4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKB_7MUPxT4). After this, pupils may have the chance to solve a quick quiz in order to see if they understand the differences between reduce, recycle and reuse. These materials can be found here: <http://www.panamarock.com/loscolorados/>.

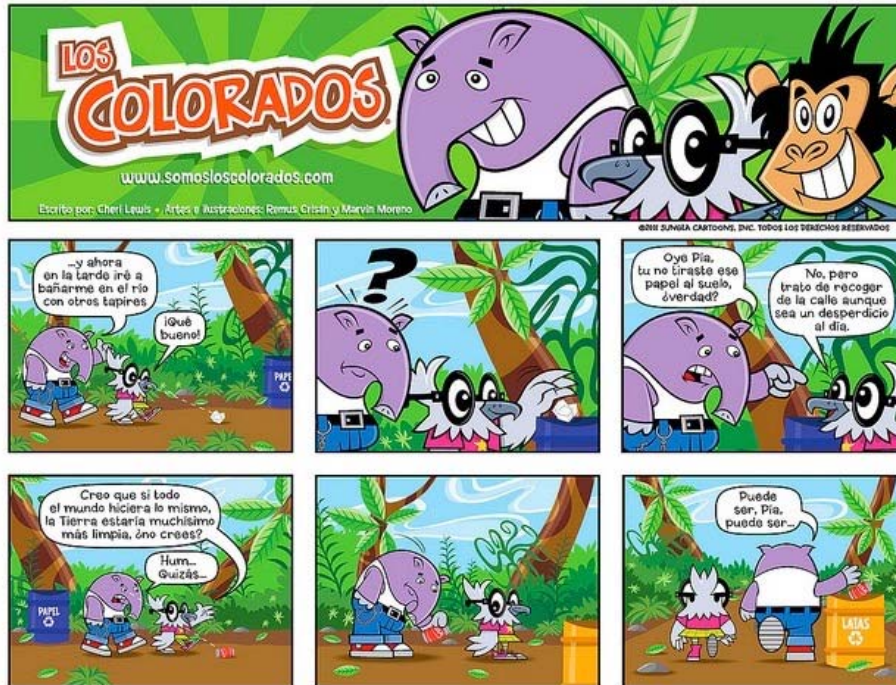


Figure 9: Comic Strip from Los Colorados

Then pupils they learn the fact there is a Spanish city whose inhabitants still do not know how to recycle. This story is read aloud in an interactive and engaging way and pupils easily find out that the inhabitants of the city speak a different language (*séver*), which is written backwards. By using a reading guide (Figure 10), pupils are able to analyze the story and at the same time help the *Arusabnarg* inhabitants learn how to recycle.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GUIÓN DE LECTURA</b></p> <p>Nombre: _____ Grupo: _____ Número: _____</p> <p>Lee el cuento "La ciudad de Arusabnarg" y contesta a las cuestiones.</p> <p><b>1. ¿Qué peculiaridad tiene la lengua que hablan en Arusabnarg?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Se habla y se escribe al _____.</p> <p><b>2. Traduce algunos significados de palabras escritas en la lengua "séver".</b></p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>séver=</td> <td>Nomodóc =</td> <td>arusab=</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ocinú=</td> <td>Arusabnarg=</td> <td>sacsom=</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>3. ¿Cómo es la ciudad de Arusabnarg?</b></p> <p>La ciudad es _____.</p> <p><b>4. ¿Cuáles son los personajes principales del texto?</b></p> <p>Los personajes principales del texto son _____ y _____.</p>	séver=	Nomodóc =	arusab=	Ocinú=	Arusabnarg=	sacsom=	<p><b>5. ¿Qué hay en el centro de la ciudad?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>En el centro de la ciudad hay</b> _____.</p> <p><b>6. Un día la bolsa de basura reventó y todo se quedó muy sucio. ¿Quién ayudó la ciudad con un plan? ¿Cuál era el plan?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ ayudó la ciudad con un plan: _____.</p> <p><b>7. ¿Sabes qué tipo de basura se debe echar en estos contenedores de color azul?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Se debe echar _____ y _____.</p> <p><b>8. Cita dos tipos de materiales que podemos echar en los contenedores amarillos para que sean reciclados. El texto del cuento te ayudará. Es la que recogieron los habitantes del barrio Ollinome.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Podemos echar _____ y _____.</p>
séver=	Nomodóc =	arusab=					
Ocinú=	Arusabnarg=	sacsom=					

Figure 10: La ciudad de Arusabnarg's reading guide

In the following picture you may see some of our primary pupils teaching how to properly recycle by removing authentic waste (with some words in Spanish, such as *leche desnatada*, *galletas*, etc.) and throwing it in the corresponding yellow, green and blue dustbins:



**Figure 11:** Pupils teaching Arusabnang inhabitants how to recycle

As we have seen before, motivation, engagement and pro-activity are the key words for an effective teaching approach based on 21st Century Skills in languages learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

The 21st Century Skills are a set of competences that pupils need to develop in order to succeed in the information age. The collaboration and communication, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving skills shall be trained at schools as earlier as possible.

According to literature, studies show that pupils shall be able to think deeply about problems, solve issues in a creative manners, work in groups, communicate clearly using analogue and digital tools and at the same time deal with information. In fact, the rapid changes which occur in our economy and information driven world require pupils to get flexible, take initiatives, lead if necessary and create something new.

In this context, technology may open up huge opportunities for us, language teachers. We have presented some activities and tasks which deal with Web 2.0 tools, such as *Kahoot!* or *Glogster*, which enhance languages learning by offering pupils chances of portraying their work and train some skills, namely: collaboration, creativity, information analysis and writing.

However, we must also be aware that technology does not substitute some in-classroom analogue approaches and strategies which contribute and are highly effective in the development of these skills. Authentic story books may be quite adequate in the training of critical thinking skill, as they pose pupils questions and invite them to solve some problem-based situations. They are a means which offers cross-cultural approaches by making pupils contact with authentic and cultural products of the target-language.

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