

Práctica 5: Summary
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A: STARTING POINT

- School details:
 - IES Santa Brígida, secondary school in a medium-sized town in the north of Gran Canaria with approximately 500 pupils from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Apart from ESO and Bachillerato, the school has just started a PCE.
- Group details:
 - 1st year PCE in office administration.
 - 20 pupils.
 - All pupils are over 15 years old and are at serious risk of dropping out of full-time education, because of lack of interest, poor motivation or in some cases special educational needs. Most of them come from the 2nd or 3rd level of ESO and have repeated years more than once.
- Classroom details:
 - 21 desktop computers + my personal laptop.
 - The computers are running Windows XP except for one which is running Windows 98. They are between 2 and 5 years old and mostly have the following specifications:
 - AMD Sempron 2800+
 - RAM 500MB
 - Hard disk 150 GB
 - Other classroom equipment includes:
 - A projector and Ebeam interactive whiteboard connected to the teacher's computer.
 - Headphones and a microphone for each computer.
 - Loudspeakers for the teacher's computer.
 - A conventional whiteboard.
 - The computers are arranged around the walls in a U shape with the pupils facing outwards. There are also tables at the front of the classroom for the pupils to sit at for explanations at the whiteboard or for tests.
 - The technician, who is the only person with administrator's rights for operating the computers, is not available on site. Communication is generally via a classroom incident logbook.

B: PUTTING THE EXPERIMENT INTO PRACTICE

- Materials used
 - Malted units for 1^o ESO:
 - *My New School*
 - *The Town*
 - Malted was installed on all the computers except one, in which the DVD was used.
- Practical aspects
 - Preparation

- Malted was installed on all of the computers with the relevant units for 1st and 2nd ESO.
- One DVD was copied for the computer on which Malted was not installed.
- Using the interactive whiteboard, I explained to the class the various parts of a Malted unit and how to work through it as well as how to send the written activities and recordings to me by e-mail.
- The Units
 - We had a total of 15 sessions.
 - Aims of the units:
 - to revise language items connected with talking about personal details and interests.
 - to learn language for different real life functions, including place descriptions, expressions of place and time, giving directions etc.
 - Contents of the units:
 - the present of the verb To Be,
 - the indefinite article a/an
 - the basic question words,
 - some classroom language,
 - the numbers from 1 to 100 and ordinals from 1 to 10,
 - There is/ there are,
 - prepositions of time and place
- The students worked individually through the activities at their own pace and as they finished each section of the unit I directed them towards online reinforcement activities, links to which they found on a page dedicated to the unit on my teaching [Wiki](#). I was available to guide them when they did not understand the task or when they were unclear about how to continue with the unit.
- Problems
 - We encountered a few technical problems particularly with the use of the microphone for the activities which involved recording. This was either due to a faulty socket or in some cases to the fact that voice-recording appeared to be disabled in the computer.
 - The first listening activity in *My New School* does not have any sound in the version 3.0 on the DVD. This has been rectified in an updated version on the website, but it was impossible to install this on the computers without administrator's rights.
 - Some students worked too fast without completing the activities or paying attention to what they were doing. Others were easily distracted by their favourite websites and other online temptations. I have realised that the online back-up activities, although helpful and attractive, are not actually sufficient for me to check whether the students have understood and taken in the language items in question. I have decided to create worksheets for each section which the students will have to download from the Wiki, complete using a word-processing application and e-mail to me for correction. These documents will be useful for them later as revision notes before any written test.
- Assessment

- My daily classroom log consisted in mapping each individual student's progress through the activities. I also noted down any attitude or behaviour problems, since this is a major part of our assessment criteria for this particular group.
- Once the students had finished the first unit, *My New School*, I tested each of them individually by asking them to complete one task from each section of the unit at the teacher's computer. Due to the simple nature of the contents they fulfilled this task successfully almost without exception.
- At the end of the second unit, *The Town*, which we had spent much more time on and the contents of which we had gone into in considerably greater depth, I chose to provide a written test using screenshots from Malted with one activity from each section of the unit.
- When they had finished each unit the students downloaded a survey from the Wiki which they completed and emailed to me. It asked them to reflect on what they had learnt, what had proved easier or more difficult and whether they had enjoyed the unit.

C: RESULTS

- A summary of the pupils' opinions
 - In the initial survey most of the students expressed a willingness to use the computer to learn English and the belief that it was a possible means of learning a language. However, few of them expressed much interest in English as a subject, and most of them valued it only with 3 out of 5 in importance.
 - In the final survey a change had occurred in many of the pupils' outlooks: almost all said that working with Malted was better than a traditional class and that they had worked better than they would have in a traditional class. Those who made least progress with the method admitted that they had not always read the explanations of the activities. A particularly satisfying observation was that the pupils who had made most progress during the experiment expressed their appreciation for the methodology and in some cases a change in attitude towards learning English. Many also said that they would like to be able to use Malted from home.
- My assessment
 - Assessment of the units

The experience has been very positive and, although at times the way ahead seemed unclear, more and more it has become apparent to me that this method could be extremely effective with this type of pupil. As they got used to the methodology, it became easier and easier to set them to work and many of them could have happily progressed to other units.

Both these units proved to be successful. The contents of each were suitable for the group, containing as they did language items of clear practical utility. I had been concerned that for pupils of fifteen, sixteen or seventeen years old the design and premises of *My New School* would appear childish, but in fact I received no such complaints and in general the class accepted the materials as relevant and useful. However, I still believe that it would be interesting to develop units specifically for a course such as this.

It is probably also the case that, apart from their use of the voice-recording facility (something which I recognise as one of the great benefits of Malted, since it allows even

the shiest most nervous students to practice and improve their speaking and pronunciation), these units do not take full advantage of the possibilities that computer-based learning offers, both in terms of multimedia functionality and as far as access to the Internet is concerned. There is a real opportunity here for interaction with the real world through the English that the students have learnt.

One feature that I miss is the ability really to monitor the students' progress through the unit. I imagine that working in a classroom with the computers linked in a network and with appropriate software this would be easier. My method of recording the pupils' progress through the units was fairly crude and without watching over each student it is difficult to ensure that they are really using a rational process to reach the correct answers and not just trial and error.

Once again I repeat that the experiment has overall been a success and both the class and I are keen to continue using Malted throughout the year.

- Suggestions

My only suggestion with reference to Malted in general is if it could somehow incorporate a way for the teacher to check up better on how each pupil is working in the same way as the Moodle platform allows the tutor to see, for example, how often a pupil has tried a test and with what success. I believe that this would also make it possible to make worksheets an integral part of the unit, whether as homework or in class.

Specifically for these units I would suggest more use of Internet resources (for example, a link to Google Maps in the section of *The Town* which practises giving directions or a WebQuest related to place in a real town or city in order to practice the vocabulary. I also think that the use of video or cartoon would bring to life some of the dialogues.

Otherwise I would like to encourage the authors of Malted units to carry on producing more and more material. The more choice available, the more teachers will be motivated to use Malted in its many different applications, whether it is for a complete course in a computer room, as in my case, or for occasional activities in the classroom or any combination of uses.