

ELT Research Papers 14.03

The impact of teacher education on pre-service primary English language teachers

Simon Borg, Marilisa Birello, Isabel Civera and Theresa Zanatta

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1

Introduction

Many thousands of prospective English language teachers are trained around the world each year. However, while insight into the impact of pre-service teacher education is essential for its improvement, our understandings of whether and how it makes a difference to trainee teachers of English are very under-developed. Additionally, tools for assessing the impact of pre-service language teacher education are not widely discussed in the literature. To address these gaps, the larger project this report draws on followed a group of pre-service teachers of primary English on a teacher education programme at the Universitat de Barcelona. Using a range of innovative qualitative measures during the teachers' final year of study, our goal was to examine the manner in which different teacher education experiences (i.e. a theoretical course at university and teaching practice in schools) impacted on these teachers' conceptions of effective English language teaching. Here we focus on the first of these – the impact of an ELT methodology course on trainees' beliefs – and this report addresses two particular issues: (a) how can visual methods be used to examine pre-service trainees' beliefs about effective EFL lessons? and (b) to what extent do pre-service trainees' beliefs about effective EFL lessons change as the result of an ELT methodology course? These two issues give the report both practical and empirical value; in practical terms, we experiment with visual methods for assessing impact which can be adopted in pre-service language teacher education contexts elsewhere; empirically, our concerns relate well to contemporary research interest in the study of teachers' beliefs and their development through teacher education.

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Theoretical background

This project was informed by three strands of literature:

- 1. *Training impact measurement.*** The study of the impact of pre-service language teacher education is not, theoretically, well developed; outside education, and particularly in the field of management though, the measurement of impact has a long history. One particularly influential model for studying training impact comes from the work of Kirkpatrick, who proposes four levels of impact ranging from immediate reactions to longer-term impact on organisations (see Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2006). This model is significant in that it highlights the multi-dimensional nature of training impact; thus, asking trainees to complete end-of-course questionnaires ('reactionnaires') may provide a measure of immediate reactions to the course (the most basic level of impact) rather than of any deeper and lasting learning. Kirkpatrick's ideas underpin much contemporary thinking in training impact measurement outside education (Donovan and Townsend, 2004, for example, propose nine training impact outcomes based on Kirkpatrick's four levels of impact) and this work informed the multi-dimensional manner in which impact was approached in this project. Kirkpatrick's ideas have also informed contemporary analyses of the impact of continuing professional development in education (e.g. Goodall et al, 2005; Guskey, 2000; Guskey, 2002; Huber, 2011; Muijs and Lindsay, 2008); in this context, too, there have been criticisms of the limited, typically summative and quantitative manner in which training impact has been measured. One of our goals in this project was thus to implement a qualitative and longitudinal impact assessment strategy.
- 2. *Mainstream research on the impact of pre-service teacher education.*** In education generally, in the 1990s concerns were raised about whether pre-service teacher education made a significant difference to trainees; Richardson (1996: 113), for example, concluded that teacher education seemed to be a weak intervention, 'sandwiched between two powerful forces – previous life history ... and classroom experience as a student teacher and a teacher'. Today it is recognised that pre-service teacher education can have a significant impact, particularly when it provides opportunities for trainees to learn experientially, to link theory and practice, and supports them in overcoming prior (and often simplistic) notions of teaching and learning derived from their own experiences as learners (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hammerness, et al., 2005). In this study we sought to facilitate such conditions and in particular to give trainees opportunities to become aware of and to reflect on their prior notions of effective language teaching; this awareness, we believe, can make trainees more receptive to new ideas during their training and can thus facilitate training impact.
- 3. *Research into the impact of pre-service language teacher education.*** Some studies have examined how pre-service teacher education impacts on language teachers. Collectively, their results are mixed. In some cases (e.g. Borg, 2005; Pennington and Urmston, 1998), evidence of impact on trainees' beliefs and practices has been limited. In contrast, other studies (e.g. Busch, 2010; Mattheoudakis, 2007) do provide evidence of such impact. Further studies (e.g. Richards, Ho and Gibling, 1996) report that trainees attending the same teacher education courses were affected in variable ways by it. Despite the variety of conclusions in this work, one common point that emerges once again is that pre-service teacher education is more likely to impact on trainees when they have opportunities to become aware of their prior beliefs about teaching and learning, to reflect on these and to make connections between theory and practice. There is also further evidence in this work of the value of a qualitative and longitudinal approach to studying impact. These are all ideas which informed the way we worked with the trainees in this project.

The strands of literature discussed here provided a sound theoretical rationale for this project and supported our interest in studying and seeking to enhance the impact of pre-service language teacher education.

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Methodology

Research questions

The larger project this report draws on addressed the following questions:

1. What conceptions of effective English language teaching do a group of pre-service primary ELT trainees have at the start of the final year of a university-based teacher education programme?
2. What impact does a theoretical course on language teaching methodology have on these conceptions and what factors during the course support or hinder such impact?
3. What impact does teaching practice in schools have on trainees' conceptions of effective ELT and what factors support or hinder such impact?
4. On the basis of 2–3 above, what conclusions emerge about (a) the impact of pre-service language teacher education, (b) the factors (i.e. related to training, trainees and context) that affect this impact and (c) how impact can be enhanced?

Given the scope of these questions and the significant amount of data we collected for this study, in this report we will focus on questions 1 and 2. Additionally, we also assess the value of visual methods as a strategy for examining pre-service teachers' beliefs.

Context for the study

The context for the study was the Menció de Llengües Estrangeres programme (Specialist Programme in English as a Foreign Language) at the Universitat de Barcelona, Spain. Trainees on this course specialise in ELT for primary education. In common with many similar programmes around the world, this education degree lasts four years; the first three years are taken up mainly with foundations and content courses (e.g. Educational Psychology, Sociology, Catalan and Spanish Language), while most of the specialist methodology courses take place in the final year. All trainees at the university preparing to become primary school teachers (irrespective of their subject specialisation and proficiency in English) are required to take a general introductory ELT methodology course in their third year of study (see Table 1). The specialist ELT Methodology course offered in the fourth year

(see Table 2), and which we examined in this project, is taken only by those trainees who want to become teachers of English.

Table 1: Introduction to ELT Methodology – Third Year Course

1	Key issues in English language teaching and learning
2	Teaching the language: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and culture
3	Developing the language skills: oral communication and literacy
4	Course content: planning and assessing learning
5	Learner autonomy and language learning strategies

Table 2: ELT Methodology – Specialist Fourth Year Course

1	Personal Learning Environments (PLE) and Personal Learning Networks (PLN) for ELT
2	Learning and teaching English as a foreign language: a child-centred approach
3	Using language to interact
4	CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) classrooms: from curriculum objectives to classroom activities

In this project we worked with a group of 52 trainees who started their final year at university in September 2012. During this year, two key components addressed the development of trainees' pedagogical skills in primary ELT: first, the 18-week course on language teaching methodology described in Table 2, and second, a four-week practicum in schools in February and March 2013. As already noted, in this report we focus on the first of these.

Data collection

Above we noted that the assessment of the impact of teacher education has been criticised for relying on quantitative measures typically collected at one point in time (usually the end of the course). In response, here our approach was both qualitative and longitudinal, as we explain below. Apart from their research value, the methods we used here have practical value for teacher educators elsewhere who want to examine the impact that their work has on teacher trainees. The larger project had the following stages:

- 1. Baseline data.** Just before the start of the fourth year course on ELT Methodology (as noted earlier, this course is taught at the start of the trainees' final year of study), all 52 trainees were asked to complete a pre-course task (see Appendix 1). This had two stages. Firstly, trainees were asked to draw a picture that for them represents a successful primary ELT class/lesson. Then, they were asked to write an interpretive commentary in which they explained the meaning of the picture and of key elements in it. Trainees were allowed to write these commentaries in Catalan if they wanted to, although in most cases English was used. The use of drawings to elicit teachers' beliefs is an innovative strategy in language teaching, and although there is a thriving literature on the use of visual methods in social science research more generally (e.g. Margolis and Pauwels, 2011; Riessman, 2008; Rose, 2012; Spencer, 2011), examples of their use in language teaching and teacher education contexts remain rare.¹ Two key reasons informed our decision to use drawings in this study. Firstly, we felt that they would serve as a valuable awareness-raising strategy for the trainees, one that would promote reflection on their own beliefs about primary ELT. Secondly, we felt that drawings would provide insight into the trainees' beliefs in ways that, say, written texts or interviews alone would not. As Weber and Mitchell (Weber and Mitchell, 1996: 304) state:

Drawings offer a different kind of glimpse into human sensemaking than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the sub-conscious.

The first phase of data collection in this study thus generated 52 drawings through which trainees expressed visually their beliefs about a successful primary ELT lesson. Additionally, though, we asked the trainees to write interpretive commentaries on their drawings. These not only provided further reflective opportunities for the trainees but also generated deeper empirical insight into their beliefs. Without trainees' written commentaries our analyses of their pictures would have been limited to describing visible features (e.g. how classroom furniture was arranged, where the teacher was standing) and any interpretive analyses on our part of the meanings of these features would have been largely speculative. However, the combination of drawings and written commentary provided us with a robust baseline measurement of trainees' beliefs about primary ELT at the start of their year and before they received theoretical input from the ELT Methodology course.

- 2. Interviews.** To obtain further insight into the meanings of trainees' drawings and the beliefs that underpin them, we interviewed a focal group of 12 trainees. Interviewees were selected after a preliminary analysis of all 52 drawings and narratives, and our selection was purposive in that we wanted to represent as many different perspectives on the successful primary ELT classroom as possible. The interviews lasted around 20 minutes each and were conducted in English or Catalan (trainees were given a choice), audio recorded (with trainees' permission) and transcribed.
- 3. End-of-course data.** At the end of the ELT Methodology course, all 52 trainees were again invited to produce a drawing that represents their conceptions of effective primary ELT and once again they were asked to write a commentary on it. Thirty drawings and commentaries were submitted. A comparison of these accounts with those produced at the start of the course provided a measure of the extent and nature of any changes that took place in their beliefs about effective primary ELT during the course.

¹ But see Kalaja et al (2013) for a recent example.

Two further sets of data were collected but are not analysed here:

4. **Personal learning environments.** As part of the ELT Methodology course, trainees were required to compile a personal learning environment (PLE). PLEs are online systems that help learners take control of and manage their own learning. They allow an individual to access, aggregate, configure and manipulate digital artifacts of their ongoing learning experiences. The platform trainees used was Symbaloo (www.symbalooedu.com). Trainees were, as part of their PLE, required to write a summary of the learning it represented and we analysed 52 of these summaries as another way of understanding changes in trainees' understandings of ELT.
5. **Teaching practice.** As explained above, trainees spent four weeks in schools observing, planning and delivering English lessons. To track the impact of this part of the course, we asked trainees to compile a portfolio in which they recorded at least four significant events and experiences (one for each week they spend in schools) and for each they wrote a short commentary on why it was significant and how it influenced (positively or negatively) their views about primary ELT. For this study, we analysed the 12 portfolios produced by our focal trainees. These trainees were also interviewed at the end of the teaching practice phase so that we could explore in more detail with them the impact of this experience on their understandings of ELT. It was also our intention to conduct observations with the 12 focal trainees but this was not feasible given the distribution of these trainees across schools, their teaching timetables and our own work commitments. Only two classroom observations were thus conducted.

The larger study thus generated a substantial volume of data: 52 initial drawings and commentaries and 30 drawings and commentaries after the ELT methodology course; 12 semi-structured interviews before the methodology course and another 12 after; 52 summaries of Personal Learning Environments, 12 teaching practice portfolios and notes from two classroom observations.

Data analysis

While much advice exists in the research methods literature regarding the analysis of qualitative texts such as interviews (e.g. Mason, 2002), procedures for analysing visual data have been less fully discussed. One distinction that is made in the social sciences literature is that between the more qualitative compositional interpretation and the more quantitative content analysis (see Rose, 2012). We did not begin the study with a clear sense of what our analytical approach would be but rather developed this in an emergent manner once the first set of drawings were available for us to analyse. Different members of our team first worked through a small set of drawings independently, noting the features that seemed salient to each of us, then we engaged in intensive discussion of our different approaches and debated the benefits and shortcomings of each. As an example, this process made us aware of the need to avoid speculating about the meaning of visual features on the basis of the drawings alone – we would need to consult the accompanying written narratives to better interpret what trainees wanted their drawings to mean. Our initial discussions of the drawings also highlighted the very wide range of visual features that our analysis could include; for example, did we want to examine the use of colour in the drawings or typographical features such as the fonts used when trainees' labelled their work? Given the volume of data we had collected, we agreed to examine a feasible range of issues in the pictures. These were: configuration of furniture (e.g. single desks or groups), resources (posters, books), people (e.g. how many and their distribution), actions (i.e. what people are or seem to be doing), and text (any writing that has been included in the drawing – e.g. speech bubbles or headings).

As noted above, though, we also elicited trainees' interpretations of their drawings via written comments and (for a focal group) interviews. Following the analysis of each drawing, then, the written commentary was studied for evidence of what the salient features of the drawing meant for the trainee (e.g. if students were seated in groups in the picture, did the trainee explain this in their commentary?). The commentaries also drew our attention to features of the pictures that were not visually salient but which the trainees dedicated space to in writing about the picture. And finally, with the interviewees we were also able to elicit even deeper understandings of their beliefs by discussing with them both their pictures and their written commentaries. An extract from an interview is given in Appendix 3 to illustrate the nature of these conversations.

We repeated this process of analysing drawings, written commentaries and interviews at the start and end of the methodology course and this comparison provided us with insights into the extent to which the trainees' beliefs about successful primary ELT had changed over the 18-week period of this course.

The PLEs, portfolios and classroom observations supported the analysis of the primary data collected through the drawings, commentaries and interviews. That is, we studied these secondary data sources in search of evidence to support the understandings of trainees' changing beliefs about ELT that had been suggested by the drawings, commentaries and interviews.

We would like to acknowledge the substantial contributions made by Mireia Pérez to the analysis of the data during the study.

Ethics

The ethics committee of the first researcher's university approved the study. Trainees were provided with details of the study and asked to indicate in writing whether they wanted to take part or not at two points – at the start (see Appendix 2) and before teaching practice started. All trainees provided consent for their drawings, written commentaries and portfolios to be used in the study; all interviewees similarly agreed to speak to us and to have the interviews recorded. In turn, trainees were reassured that the data they provided would be used without disclosing their identity. We also feel that the ethical dimension of this study was also strengthened by the fact that the tasks we asked trainees to complete – such as producing drawings to express their beliefs and writing commentaries to explain these beliefs – supported trainees in developing reflective skills. In other words, our data collection activities also had learning potential for the trainees in their development as language teachers.

4

Results

Conceptions of effective EFL lessons: before the methodology course

As explained earlier, a whole cohort of final year teacher trainees participated in this study, but 12 of these were studied more intensively as our focal group. We will focus in detail on four of these trainees in order to illustrate how we elicited data about their beliefs as well as to examine the nature of any changes that occurred in these beliefs during the methodology course. We chose these four particular trainees because their initial drawings highlighted four different approaches to providing a visual account of their beliefs about a successful ELT lesson. These drawings are included in Appendix 4.

Anna's initial drawing took the form of a poster – it was composed mostly of words and contained less in the way of graphics. Nora's picture provided a comparison of a past and present classroom situation, Eva's expressed her ideas through a snapshot of a lesson, while Lara's visual showed a sequence of activities in a lesson.

Each of these drawings was analysed according to five categories: the context and distribution of the space, the presence of people, their actions, the presence of text, and the temporality of the drawing. We discuss each picture with reference to these parameters below.

The poster

Anna's drawing portrays stylised text in a poster format or word map. In her written text she wrote that: *'putting into an image what is for me the perfect or a good English Class, I decided not to draw a class as it is known'*.² Her poster has one large drawing of a smiling girl dancing and several smaller drawings interspersed around the page: a teddy bear, a hand puppet, a blank book page, a wall poster and tiny decorative icons – stars, hearts and music notes. There is no teacher, only a smiling, dancing girl who appears to be about 6–8 years old. The young girl appears to be very happy. This poster is filled with text. Altogether, Anna wrote 42 words naming different resources, activities and feelings. The acronym TPR is the largest and is situated at the

centre of the page next to the young girl. Anna's drawing is a symbolic representation, in her own words, of: *'some elements and concepts that are important to me in a good English class'*.

A past and present classroom

The context for Nora's drawing is a classroom situation. Her drawing is divided into two sections: section 1 to the left, shows a traditional female teacher at the board. There are four students sitting at their desks, watching and listening to the teacher. We see a board with the words: 'Present Simple' and 'Vocabulary'. The teacher is pointing to the board with a long stick. She has a speech bubble with squiggly lines to represent text and an exclamation mark. Each student has an open book on their desk. Within this formal context, the teacher is giving a teacher-centred, transmission methodology class. The teacher is the only person talking. Just beneath this part of the drawing is the text: *'How I teached... in unsuccessfully way'*.³ This section of the drawing reveals a point in time of what appears to be a traditional English lesson. The text below the drawing indicates this is a reflection of the past, specifically how Nora was taught English.

The second section, immediately to the right, shows a supermarket setting with five people. There appear to be four sales attendants and one shopper. There are three tables joined together to make the supermarket stall with the various foods to be sold on display: fruit and vegetables, meat, fish and cheese, and bread and pastries. Three chairs are stacked off to the right – they do not seem to form part of the supermarket set up. It is not obvious that this is a classroom setting, although the supermarket stall seems to be made from classroom desks. There is a poster that says: 'SUPERMARKET'. All three of the people at the stall are speaking as indicated by empty speech bubbles. One person is standing next to the supermarket table and she is talking. There is also one person whose back is to the observer. She is facing the stand and has an empty speech bubble. It seems that the people in the picture are carrying out a conversation related to the market. Immediately below this drawing is the text: *'But I'll teach in a*

² Throughout this section, we distinguish between quotes from written commentaries and interviews by giving line numbers for the latter but not for the former.

³ Throughout this report we report trainees' exact words without editing them in any way.

dynamic and successfully way! This section of the drawing also reveals a point in time but the text below this section makes reference to future time, with the use of the future simple: 'But I'll teach...'

A snapshot of a lesson

The context of Eva's drawing is a classroom. The viewer sees only about half of it. Most of the space is taken up by two groups of four individual square desks. There are eight chairs, one per desk, and all of them are oriented towards the board. There is a big window on the left. In front of this wall there are two tables put together; there is one computer on each table; there are no chairs in front of these tables. The viewer is facing the wall with the board, which is placed in the middle. The door is on the right and on the left there are three posters, illustrating the weather. There is nothing on the desks (e.g. no books or pencils). There is a female teacher in front of the board facing the class. On her right there is a boy, standing and also facing the group. The teacher and student are talking, but they are not looking at each other. Both have serious faces. In addition to the teacher and these students, there are eight other children sitting on their chairs, all of them facing the teacher. There appears to be no interaction taking place among the students sitting at the groups of desks. The children are listening to what the teacher and the student standing next to her are saying. The chairs have very high backs, so we can only see part of the students' profiles. They are all in the same position, and are not carrying out any actions.

There is a fair amount of text in this drawing. On the door we can read the label 'English' and 'Class 3A'. On the board, on the top left side there is the date, '21st Friday 2012' and below the date there is the sentence: 'today the weather is cloudy'. On the right side of the whiteboard, there is the topic of the lesson: 'today the lesson is: me'. There are large flashcards on the left with the words 'cloudy', 'sunny' and 'rainy' below their respective drawings. Finally, there are two speech bubbles; the child is saying: 'Hello, my name is...', and the teacher is praising him: 'very good!'. This drawing typifies the snapshot format as it depicts a moment in time.

A lesson sequence

The context of Lara's drawing is a complete classroom lesson divided into three vignettes or sections, labelled A, B and C. Each part has a title, confirming the order of the sequence: A: Introduction/Routines; B: Main class/practice in groups; and C: The end of the class.

In the first vignette (A) we see a female teacher facing the audience and a group of six children forming a circle round her. All are sitting on the floor. The teacher is pointing to a poster on her right with the labels: 'Day', 'Month', 'Season', 'Weather'. We can see part of an empty whiteboard on her left. The six children are looking at the teacher. Three are sitting with their back to the observer and three are facing sideways. They are smiling. Section B is formed of two small vignettes. The first shows a teacher and two groups of five children standing around two different tables. Each table has maths shapes on them: a triangle, a rectangle and a pentagon. The students at one table are discussing their work with the teacher, who is standing next to their table. The three students at the other table are working on their own. There is a poster on the wall showing various geometric shapes: a circle, a triangle and a square. The topic of the activity appears to be cross-curricular: '2D shapes'. It looks as if the students have produced the shapes using sticks and play dough. In the second vignette of section B we see a teacher behind a table and four students standing in front of her, in a sort of semi-circle around the table. The teacher has three maths shapes on the table in front of her. Behind her appears to be an empty bookshelf. The word 'LIBRARY' is written on top of it. In section C we see a whiteboard and on it is written: 'What we have done today?' In her drawing, Lara does not depict the classroom as a whole; instead she concentrates on small groups carrying out different actions. Together sections A, B and C represent the whole lesson. Lara has labelled her drawing: 'My English Lesson.'

Key issues in trainees' conceptions of effective EFL lessons: before the methodology course

One of our overall concerns in this study was to understand trainees' beliefs about effective EFL lessons. An analysis of the first set of drawings, written commentaries and interviews with the 12 focal students highlighted recurrent references to components of EFL lessons which characterised their beliefs at the start of their final year of training. These were:

- a. The physical and social environment of the learning space
- b. ELT methodology
- c. Students' role
- d. Teacher's role

We will now discuss each of these in turn with reference to the four focal trainees introduced above.

a. The physical and social environment of the learning space

The physical organisation of the learning environment was a theme that emerged in all four of the first drawings and texts, and was supported in the interviews. All trainees made reference to the importance of 'flexible' layouts. For example, the first issue that Nora describes in her written commentary on her first drawing is: *'I believe is necessary to have a flexible class layout ... so for example, sometimes could be necessary work in groups ... or in pairs or with the whole group'*. Her 'flexible' classroom organisation in a *'dynamic and successfully lesson'* on the right side of her drawing is in marked contrast to her drawing on the left-hand side of the page of the *'unsuccessfully'* classroom, where the teacher is at the front of the class and the students are sitting in rows facing the teacher. The right-hand side of her drawing exemplifies this flexibility and shows how the students' desks could be joined together to make a supermarket stall and the chairs stacked in the corner of the room so as not to interfere with the real-life context she wanted to recreate. In her interview, Nora states: *'I think that the environment of the class keeps to ... or helps to study to to learn'*. (lines 55–56)

Lara draws both a small group setting as well as a whole group setting in the second part of her lesson. She tells us in her interview that she has not drawn many chairs because the activities require movement and that the furniture must be easily adaptable *'to be able to form a semi-circle'* with the students. This semi-circle set up is visible in her drawing as well.

Eva also talks about the importance of the physical configuration of the learning space. She specifically refers to small groups with the desks arranged in groups of four so as to facilitate group work. Eva believes that group work improves interaction and maximises support within the group: *'the attached tables forming groups of four, reflects one of the methodologies that I think it works to improve the interaction within the students and so, to maximise the helping and the group work'*. Eva has chosen to draw this arrangement, but she explains that the seating arrangements depend *'on the activity you want to carry out'* and that changing the arrangements is positive: *'it is good to change'*.

All four focal group trainees also made reference to the importance of visual input within the learning space. Eva makes specific reference to creating 'print-rich classrooms' by using 'posters' which contribute to creating an atmosphere, *'as if you moved to another country'* with the understanding that these posters show *'now we are in the English classroom'*. In her first interview she expands on this and says that in her drawing the children are learning the words and *'need the support of images ... for me this is also a way of learning'*. (lines 238–250)

Lara's drawing shows two posters: one to show the classroom routines at the beginning of the class and a second one showing different geometric shapes directly related to the learning of maths in English, which the students are depicted as practising. Anna's drawing also shows a large poster with the word VISUAL in large capital letters. Immediately below this word and as part of this poster, she writes *'POSTERS, TAGS, SCRAPBOOK, PICTURES'*. She provides the following commentary on why visual input is so important for her:

If there is like blank space in the walls children are are bored. I am bored in that classroom because it's grey ... maybe one child is like this looking to a poster [i.e. seemingly not paying much attention] but he is reading, he is seeing everyday these words and then he will remember. So, for me, if it's visual it's a way, well if you can see everything comes the first time through your eyes so ... it's very important to have good examples to, for the students to see it and that's why I put posters or the tags. (lines 92–99)

Nora has also shown us that visual input is important to her for setting the scene. In her drawings she has drawn supermarket realia on each of the three tables and a large *'SUPERMARKET'* banner or heading for her students.

b. ELT methodology

The four focal group trainees also shared a belief in the importance of 'active, dynamic, fun classes'. All were quite well versed in the jargon of ELT methodology to talk about active classes, referring to 'classroom routines', 'maths through English ... and stories' (Lara), 'role plays, learning games, realia, corners' (Anna, Nora), 'scrapbooks and TPR' (Anna), creating a 'print-rich classroom' (Eva) and other resources which they felt were necessary for creating 'student-centred, dynamic and interactive' (Anna, Nora) classes where students would be supported and 'scaffolded' (Lara). Nora states that corners with 'interesting magazines in English could encourage the children to read in their free time'. Anna's poster drawing shows a young girl dancing. In her interview she explains: 'I like the kids to move not to stay.' (lines 170–71)

In addition to 'active, fun' classes, all of the trainees coincided in the belief that classroom activities should reflect 'real-life' activities, involve 'real situations' and recreate 'real contexts' where the students would have to use the foreign language to communicate'. Both Nora and Anna gave role plays as an example of a kind of activity that could be set up to be more like 'real life'. Nora drew a role-play scene in her drawing. This was the part of the drawing that was labelled: 'But I'll teach in a dynamic and successfully way!' She explains in the first interview that role plays help the students to 'co-operate (with) each other'. When asked to talk a little more about this belief, she says:

... and, for example, if in the other part of the picture, where the children are all together, so maybe if here is the supermarket, no? So the, the it represents that the children has to talk and ask: 'Ok [imitating children voice], ok I would like to buy this or this' [end of the imitation]. Maybe one child is more shy, but the other not so, then that child that is not pretty shy can help the other one. (lines 102–107)

The focal group trainees also referred to the importance of working in small groups as a methodology strategy. For example, in her interview and written text, Eva explains that she has depicted class 3A, but only half the group is there. The principle behind this, she says, is that it is beneficial when teachers can split the big group and work with a smaller number of children: on the one hand the children concentrate better, on the other the teachers can cater for the different needs of the students. She goes on to say that when teaching a foreign language there are usually mixed abilities within one class, and small groups allow for differentiated learning. Lara writes about the importance of preparing 'tasks where the children had to work in groups or in pairs,' most notably for students

to have 'more confidence' and so that 'each one can learn off the, off the others.' (lines 129–30, 238)

Related to the issue of working in small groups was the belief that teaching methodology should facilitate student interaction. Anna's poster drawing labelled 'role plays' as important interactive activities, while Eva understands interaction as taking place not only among students but also between the teacher and students. In her drawing, the boy standing in front of the class is talking about himself to the teacher and the rest of the students in the class. She writes: 'the boy standing in the class and the teacher besides him intends to mirror the image of a good interaction not only student with student, but also with the teacher'. In addition to this, Eva relates good interaction to positive reinforcement, which she says is what the teacher is doing in the drawing when she praises the work of the students in front of the classroom. She expresses the belief that, by 'congratulating him for his homework and his effort, so they can establish a good learning atmosphere in the classroom'. Lara writes in her text that the 'essential ingredients' of a successful lesson would include students' 'participation and interaction'.

Both Lara's drawing and text indicated that an effective lesson should have a structure divided into three parts: the introduction, the development of the lesson and the final conclusions. Her introduction would include 'the aims of the session, do some routines, speak with the pupils and ... introduce the new topic'. Of the four focal group trainees, she is the only one who made reference to a structure or lesson plan in discussing the qualities of an affective ELT lesson.

Finally, all four of the trainees also referred to the importance of classes where students were engaged in 'inductive tasks or presenting a problem that should be solved' (Lara). Nora talks about 'tricky activities', activities where 'the answer is not when you see it [the students] have to think and reflect about it.' (lines 188–89.) Anna also shared this conception. On her poster drawing she wrote in large capital letters 'DISCOVER'. All four students shared the belief that classroom activities needed to promote student discovery. Nora states it clearly in her written text: 'I would prefer if the students could experiment and learn for themselves'.

c. Students' role

All four participants felt that the student should be at the centre of the learning experience. In her explanatory text, Lara writes: 'a perfect English lesson should be structured in different parts in which the children were the main characters of the lesson'. Nora demonstrated this idea very clearly in her drawing: on the left side (the unsuccessful lesson)

the teacher was the central figure and on the right side (the successful class) the students were talking with each other and there was no teacher present. Anna's poster drawing showed a large young girl, smiling, dancing and singing. Trainees described at length in their accompanying written text and follow-up interview how important it was for them that the class be student-centred and not teacher-centred. At the beginning of her first interview, for example, the first thing that Anna says is: *'well, umh, for me the most important thing is that the students or the kids are, umh, engaged to learn.'* (Anna lines 11–12)

The data also revealed that the research participants believe it is very important for students to have 'fun' and 'enjoy' the classes so that *'students would love to learn as much as we love to teach.'* (Anna) Nora stressed that the very traditional classes she experienced, based on reading and writing and centred on the teacher, were very *'boring'* and that more emphasis on speaking would be better so that *'students could speak English in a funny way so the learning should be unforgettable and significant'*. Common too was the belief that if the students are feeling good about the classes and having fun, then they will love learning English and their learning will be more meaningful. Perhaps Lara expresses it best in her interview when she says: *'if they are learning they are happy.'* (line 92)

As we saw in the data above concerning the value of group work, all four students also shared the belief that students should 'help each other'. When talking about setting up different activities, Nora says: *'I would prefer in groups of three or four some tricky activities, where, for example, two students are really good at this subject and the other one not really so they can help each other.'* (lines 181–83)

d. Teacher's role

Consistent with their view that student-centred classes are more effective, both Nora and Anna felt that teacher-centred classes were not as effective. In her interview, Nora provides us with a very graphic description of why the teacher-centred classroom, which she describes as being 'traditional', is not effective:

... so this picture is based on my experience, so first as you can see is like the way that some teachers teach me and I don't think that was a correct way because everybody was boring and sleeping and in the class, well, was just studying, studying, studying and, well, so that's why I don't think that that way was a better way to learn English because I've been learning English since, I don't know, since I was five I think, and I don't believe that my level of English is the good one. (Nora lines 12–18)

In contrast, for Nora, the role of the teacher should be that of a *'guide'*. Nora says: *'for me the teacher is not the one who teach is the one who guides the children.'* (lines 116–117) She goes on to say: *'obviously some children need help ... the teacher can help but not give the answers just some instructions because it is the child who has to arrive at the answers.'* (lines 119–121) She clarifies this by saying that the role of the teacher is: *'asking questions that makes the children think.'* (line 125) Anna also offers this conception that teachers are guides: *'we always say in every subject we are guiders, we need to guide our students.'* (lines 188–189)

Both Anna and Eva also felt that the teacher must be positive and encourage the students to learn. Anna says that students need: *'a teacher that encourage them to learn and if the teacher feels like what she or he is doing is fantastic the kids receive that.'* (lines 127–129)

Both Nora and Anna also refer to the teacher as being responsible for planning, that an effective teacher is well organised and is always planning. For example, when Nora is asked how a teacher who is a guide can be dynamic, she answers: *'because maybe the word is not teaching, is planned the lesson in a dynamic way.'* (lines 147–148) Anna also suggests that planning means being organised *'because you never know what's gonna happen or how the kids are going to respond to a certain activity and then maybe you don't have a plan 'b' or a 'c' you are like what do I do now ... and for me it's really important to have everything organised.'* (lines 62–66)

Overall, then, prior to the final year ELT methodology course the four focal trainees had clear, generally shared, views about the characteristics of an effective ELT lesson. These emphasised interaction, student-centredness, a flexible physical environment, a print- and resource-rich environment, and supportive, facilitative teachers with a positive attitude.

Conceptions of effective EFL lessons: after the methodology course

The four focal trainees under discussion here produced a second set of drawings and written commentaries at the end of the ELT Methodology course. They were also interviewed again, and we now discuss the insights into their conceptions of effective EFL lessons that emerged from this second set of data. The second set of drawings is included in Appendix 5.

The poster

Anna's second drawing once again portrays stylised text in a poster format or word map. Nineteen different words or expressions are written all over this poster or word collage and different colours are used. While there are 13 smaller decorative illustrations in the shape of flowers, hearts and balloons, there are no people (no teacher and no students). The picture is a symbolic representation of what a successful ELT lesson means to her.

Moments in time

The context for Nora's second drawing is once again a classroom situation. This time there is no indication of past or present, but rather four different moments in time of a successful English lesson. Each section of the picture shows an interactive language-learning context: i. a language-learning game; ii. technology in use (a computer recorded dialogue and PLE, Symbaloo); iii. a parents' visit to the English lesson, and iv. an 'at the market' role play.

In section 1 we see four students: two boys and two girls. One boy and one girl face the observer. The other boy and girl face the other two students across the table. They are sitting around a table and each has a paper with the word 'PICASSO' on it, with a drawing below the title. Each student has a speech bubble. The boy facing the observer has a lost look on his face and a speech bubble with a big question mark in it. The girl beside him is pointing to a picture and has a speech bubble with squiggly lines indicating speech, followed by an exclamation mark. The girl in front of the boy is pointing to her drawing and says: 'Is it the nose?' The boy beside her answers: 'Yes, it is'. The context of this section is a language-learning game where students are thinking, asking and answering questions about what they have drawn.

In section 2 the observer sees a large interactive whiteboard with a drawing labelled 'Symbaloo'. Beside the Symbaloo image is a woman pointing to it. In front of this image, we see a boy and a girl facing and talking to each other. They are both smiling. The girl has a speech bubble with an exclamation mark and some squiggly lines. The boy is smiling and has

a speech bubble with squiggly lines and an exclamation mark as well. Directly behind the boy and girl is a computer terminal with the word 'Voices!' on it. The theme of the context of this section is the use of technology during the English lesson.

In section 3 there is a large upper body drawing of a smiling woman. She has a speech bubble that says: 'Today the parents are here!' Above this woman and to the left, a slightly smaller drawing, we see a table with six faceless children sitting around. To the right of this table is a smiling man with a speech bubble that says: '2 X 2'. To the left of the table is a smiling woman with a speech bubble that says: '= 4'. The theme of this context is parents participating in a maths lesson that is being taught in English.

Finally, section 4 presents two simultaneous actions. In the upper half of this drawing, there is a market scene. There is a poster 'the Market' behind three tables joined together to make one long table with three different sections: one with apples, one with bananas and one with oranges. There is a student at each table: two boys and one girl who is between the two boys. One boy and one girl have a speech bubble. There is another girl, who is smiling, to the right of the table and carrying a large bag. She has a speech bubble. In the lower half of the drawing, we see the side of a tall woman, smiling, her right arm is up and she has a speech bubble which says: 'Well done!' Directly in front of her is a little boy. His right arm is up and he is holding an apple. He has a speech bubble that says: 'I bought an apple'. The theme of the context of this section is an English role play 'at the market'. There are 22 people in total in Nora's second drawing, two of whom were not present in the first drawing: the two parent figures. All four sections of the picture show various actions, interaction and communication. The title of this drawing is: 'Different ways to make a successful English lesson.' All four sections or vignettes are set at specific points in time during an English lesson.

A snapshot of a lesson

The context of Eva's second drawing is once again a classroom. While it is similar to her first drawing, it is much richer in new technologies. The viewer sees only about half of a classroom. Most of the space is taken up by two groups of four individual square desks and chairs with one sheet of paper on each desk. There is a big window on the left. Under this window there are three computers on a long 'counter' with four chairs in front of them. There is a whiteboard in the middle of the drawing. A white screen is pulled down partially covering the whiteboard. There is information projected on it.

There are nine people in the drawing: a female teacher next to the whiteboard facing the class and eight smiling children sitting at their desks, in two groups of four. The teacher is giving instructions and positive reinforcement. She has two speech bubbles next to her: *'Now you can work in groups. If you want, you can use the computer to check information on the Glogster'*⁴ and the second: *'I'm sure you'll do it awesome'*. Five children also have speech bubbles. In one of them we can read *'I'm Claudia'*. The other four have 'bla' in them. The title of the drawing is: *'My successful English Class Part II'*.

On the whiteboard, on the left-hand side there is a reference to the weather, *'today is sunny'*, and the date, *'Friday, 21st May'*. On the right-hand side there is information about the activity which will be carried out the following day: *'tomorrow: Storytelling time with Claudia'*. Projected on the screen there is a Glogster with the title *'Animals'* in capital letters, some illustrations and some text in squiggly lines. On the left, on top of the window, there are the words: *'The Weather'*. Directly beneath the words are three flashcards, each with a word and its corresponding picture: *'cloudy'*, *'sunny'* and *'rainy'*. Between the whiteboard and the door there are three posters, all three of them have squiggly lines; one of them has the title *'Habitat'* written on it. The picture depicts a snapshot in time: the teacher is giving instructions for a task, and the children, in groups, are carrying it out (the speech bubbles imply they are discussing the task).

A lesson sequence

Lara's second drawing once again depicts the structure of a successful lesson. This second drawing, instead of being divided into three vignettes, is now divided into four different sections. Lara leads the audience from one section to another with the letters A, B1, B2 and C. In each vignette written information is provided to reinforce the visual information and consists of messages written on whiteboards or posters. With this information we derive the following sequence for the lesson:

A) Learning objective. Whole-class discussion of main concepts and preparation for task, B1) Group work, B2) Groups sharing their work with other pupils, and C) Plenary, summing up the work carried out and discussing achievement.

The topic of the lesson is 2D shapes. Lara does not depict the classroom as a whole; she concentrates on small groups carrying out different actions. All four vignettes show a teacher with a small group of children. There are no conventional desks or chairs in A. There are two big tables in B1, one big table in B2 facing two groups of two desks and chairs, and two desks and chairs in C. All four vignettes have a whiteboard. In total there are 19 people in the drawing. In vignette A, we see a female teacher facing the audience, with two children (a boy and a girl) on her right, sitting on the floor. The teacher is holding a flashcard with the picture of a triangle in it. The little girl is volunteering; she has her left hand up.

In vignette B1 there are two groups of three children standing around two tables and carrying out some task in relation to some shapes, there is a square on one of the tables and a square and a triangle on the other table. The teacher is standing between the two groups of children. In B2 there are two children standing on both sides of a table, facing the audience. These children are talking to two groups of two children sitting at their desks, with their back to the audience. The teacher is standing on one side of the room, between the children sharing their work and those listening. There are also two shapes on the table: a square and a triangle. In vignette C the teacher is standing, facing the audience, and talking to two children who are sitting at their desks. The child on the right has his arm up, as if volunteering to participate. All are smiling. The drawing contains text. For each vignette there is a sentence on the whiteboard, indicating the activity being carried out: A – *'Today's objectives are:'*, B1 – *'Mathematical shapes'*, B2 – *'Describing our task'*, and C – *'What have we done today?'* There is also a poster in B1 with the words *'Oral work'* and some images. In vignettes B1 and B2 one of the children has a speech bubble next to him, with the text *'bla, bla, bla'*. In B1 and in B2 the teacher is carrying some sort of notepad. In B1 we can see the notepad has the text *'notes'*. Lara has given the title *'My Perfect English lesson'* to her drawing.

⁴ Glogster is an online learning platform – see www.glogster.com

Key issues in trainees' conceptions of effective EFL lessons: after the methodology course

We will now once again analyse the second set of drawings, written commentaries and interviews with reference to the following four themes in order to shed light on trainees' beliefs about effective ELT lessons after the methodology course:

- a. The physical and social environment of the learning space
- b. ELT methodology
- c. Students' role
- d. Teacher's role

a. The physical and social environment of the learning space

In the second set of drawings, commentaries and interviews very little reference was made to the physical organisation of the classroom setting. Much of the written commentaries and spoken text during the interviews focused rather on explaining what was happening in the drawing. Although Anna made reference again to the importance of a print-rich classroom and the presence of realia, and all of the drawings showed richer resources in the classroom, little written and spoken text was dedicated to the explanation of these resources. The only exception to this was the presence of new technologies, most notably the interactive whiteboard and web 2.0 apps on computers. For example, Anna added the words 'Symbaloo', 'App 2.0' and 'Blogs' to her second drawing. These words were written in the colour turquoise, which in her written text she classified as 'New things I've learned in the past subject *Didàctica de la Ll anglesa – Menció*' (i.e. the ELT methodology course). Another example of reference to the new technologies and web 2.0 apps occurred with Nora. She drew an interactive whiteboard in her second drawing with 'Symbaloo', the PLE she had created while doing the ELT Methodology course. In her interview, Nora says she drew: 'a teacher who is teaching through the Symbaloo and there are some kids who are with voices with the application in the computer.' (lines 8–10) This part of her second drawing was one of the new vignettes Nora added after having completed the methodology course.

Eva also makes reference to the new technologies and web 2.0 apps she had learned about in the methodology course. In her second interview she talks about using a 'projector'. In her second drawing she depicted some images projected onto a screen, hanging over a whiteboard. In Eva's first drawing, there is no screen, just the whiteboard. In the second drawing, however, it is filled with a collage of drawings and texts under the title 'Animals' in large

letters. In her interview and text, Eva tells us that this is a Glogster poster, which she has prepared for the students to come up to the board and interact with. Glogster is a web 2.0 app that students worked with during the methodology course. This app allows users to make interactive, multimedia online posters. In her explanatory text, Eva writes that she realises it is important to incorporate new technologies and that 'this is why I draw a class with a projector on it and I created a learning situation with a Glogster application'.

b. ELT methodology

As stated above, the majority of the written texts and spoken texts from the second set of interviews focused on describing and explaining what was happening in the drawings. Much of this text was thus directly related to several issues concerning methodology, which were not dealt with at all or to the same extent in the first set of drawings.

CLIL, the instruction of languages through content (Content and Language Integrated Learning) was one area of methodology discussed at much greater length and with deeper understanding by all four focal group trainees. For example, Anna has added the words 'CLIL – *Gaudi in Barcelona*' to her second drawing and in her written text stated that this was one of the 'New things I've learned in the past subject *Didàctica de la Ll anglesa – Menció*'. In her interview she elaborated on her understanding of CLIL and its use in the classroom: 'the best topics are those that are familiar to the students.' (lines 146–153) She states that CLIL is a tool that she believes is useful but that: 'I don't know if I will be able to do CLIL.' (lines 129–134) Nora has also incorporated CLIL into her second drawing, which contains two additional vignettes not present in her first drawing, both of which show CLIL instruction: the first vignette showing the instruction of Art in English and the second vignette showing the instruction of Maths in English. In her written text she says that she 'completely agrees with the CLIL methodology.' Eva also makes reference to the importance of CLIL instruction; in her second interview she talks about using stories to do CLIL but suggests that sometimes it's not always possible to do it in some schools:

I was thinking more about then and of course reading aloud and things like that, but now I realise that it's important that the stories have a lot of things that you can do linguistically with them because sometimes with CLIL you cannot do that in some schools. (lines 157–160)

Finally, Lara does not specifically refer to CLIL, but she does make reference to integrating cross-curricular content in the English classroom. Her first drawing showed this through the use of teaching

maths concepts in English (the different geometrical shapes and how to make them). Her second drawing once again shows the instruction of maths in English, but this time, she told us, she has added the teacher going around the class, observing the students as they are working on different maths activities and taking notes according to a rubric she has, in order to assess how the students are doing. This further understanding of what needs to be done by the teacher during a cross-curricular content lesson demonstrates Lara's deepening knowledge of how CLIL can form part of a successful language lesson.

A second example of methodology items in this second set of data is the incorporation of classroom projects. Classroom projects were often mentioned in the second written texts and interviews as being particularly important for students, as they are both student-centred and can provide meaningful experiences. Lara writes in her explanatory text that: *'another aspect I included in the drawing is the idea to give to the pupils meaningful experiences which embrace also teaching different content through a variety of strategies based on projects'*. Eva also talks about the importance of planning projects:

... but I think that making projects ... that involves making a lot of things that you cannot do in traditional learning; for example, making projects you can do eh groups eh research you can make groups eh you can eh I don't know you can do a lot of things and also you can learn content, which is something I think that the pupils are more engaged with. (lines 283–87)

One other methodology issue not prominent in the first set of data was the topic of storytelling. Several of the focal group trainees gave importance to storytelling in their second drawings and interviews, saying that it was a critical instructional practice for primary English teachers. Second drawings and written commentaries referred to storytelling corners and teachers reading to students. Comments during the second interview also reinforced the importance of storytelling. For the focal group trainees, storytelling was considered to be an important skill to be developed by teachers in practice. Anna includes the word *'Stories'* in her poster word collage and Eva writes in her explanatory text: *'I added different methodology situations in which the teacher creates a learning environment, like working in little groups when doing certain tasks or working with the kids sitting on the floor to read a tale (the storytelling time)'*. When asked about storytelling during the follow-up interview, she says: *'now I realise that it's important that the stories have a lot of things that you can do linguistically with them.'* (lines 158–159)

c. Students' role

Lara writes in her explanatory text that she feels it is important for students to interact in a way that allows them to *'become aware of their learning process'*. Aligned with this is the belief that students need to become autonomous learners. In the third paragraph of her written text, she explains in detail the nature of this interaction through a sequence of whole group to small groups or pairs to individuals:

In terms of interaction, I would propose the same kind of interaction as I suggested at the beginning of the course, due to the fact that I strongly believe that working first with the whole group and the teacher, then in small groups or pairs and, finally, individually is what most helps pupils learn and develop their autonomy and self-esteem. In addition, I consider that this approach helps pupils to become aware of their learning process, due to the fact that they can realise that, at the end of the unit, they are able to do something new alone that they couldn't do at the beginning of it.

Nora also shares this belief that students must be autonomous: *'I mean students have to experiment by themselves have to find ways to arrive to some point.'* (lines 229–230) She adds that it is the *'children who have to do the things.'* (line 231) She gives the example of teaching maths in English, which she has drawn in one of her vignettes: *'in maths, for example ... you can start with some kind of problems, real problems and then help the children asking questions but they have to arrive to the final result not the teacher.'* (Nora lines 236–328)

Eva's second drawing depicts a successful lesson in which students take on responsibilities normally reserved for teachers. Her drawing contains a whiteboard with the text: *'TOMORROW: STORYTELLING TIME WITH CLAUDIA'*. She tells us in her interview that Claudia is a student who is *'going to do the story.'* (lines 173–175)

d. Teacher's role

In the second set of drawings, commentaries and interviews, the focal group students elaborated a great deal more on the role of the teacher. Their drawings showed teachers doing many more varied tasks, a greater range of teacher talk and teachers taking on more varied roles in the lesson.

One expanded role of the teacher seen in the second drawings was that of teacher as observer and evaluator, taking notes and providing on-the-spot assessments. For example, when explaining her second drawing Lara says that: *'the pupils are working in small groups and well, they are doing some different activities and the teacher is taking notes and if any case helping them if they need.'* (lines 27–29)

When asked to elaborate a little more and explain what kind of notes and why the teacher would be taking them, she answers:

I was thinking in the assessment and and they, well, I really like the rubrics and I thought that you would have a checklist or something like that and she was passing by walking around the class and checking what each pupil was doing. (lines 45–49)

This belief that the teacher is also an observer and evaluator was not demonstrated in the first set of drawings.

The teacher as a guide and/or facilitator also featured in this second set of data. Nora once again in her second written text insisted that the teacher's role is to be 'a guide', just as she had done in her first drawing and interview. She states again that teachers should not give the answers, rather they should help students discover the answers by guiding them with questions. She explains that when teaching maths in English, as she has shown in her drawing, teachers need to start the activities with '*some kind of problems, real problems and then help the children asking questions.*' (lines 237–38)

Another teacher role evident after the methodology course was that of setting the tone for the class. In their second interviews, Nora, Anna and Eva tell us that teachers help to create the class environment and by doing so affect what students are capable of producing. For example, Nora says that teachers must '*help to make students feel comfortable during the lesson.*' (lines 46–47) She goes on to say that teachers must '*help students feel safe to take risks in the class when they are speaking, then maybe they will feel comfortable writing.*' (lines 172–173) Along similar lines, the focal trainees indicated that teachers must display a positive attitude and provide positive reinforcement to students so that they will perform accordingly. This is evident in Eva's second drawing where the teacher is saying: '*I'm sure you'll do it awesome.*' Anna states: '*I think maybe it's because what we feel about the students it's what you give is what you get.*' (lines 349–350). She adds that if you believe that your students '*want to learn ... but if you go in with an attitude that they are not going to do anything,*' then they will behave as if they '*don't know anything.*' (lines 349–352)

5

Discussion

In this report we have focused on drawings, written commentaries and interviews collected from four focal primary EFL teacher trainees before and after a specialist ELT Methodology course. Our goal in comparing these two sets of data (which, as explained earlier, were part of a much larger database) was to discern to what extent trainees' beliefs about effective ELT lessons had changed by the end of the course compared to the beginning. In concluding this report, there are two particular issues we would like to comment on: our methodology and the findings themselves.

Methodological issues

Methodologically, this study was innovative in the way that it used drawings as a tool for gaining access to trainees' beliefs about effective ELT lessons. This strategy for eliciting trainees' beliefs was productive both in terms of quantity of data and of quality. In this report we have only been able to discuss a small set of the drawings we collected, but even from this sample it is clear that the use of drawings has much potential in the study of trainees' beliefs and how they develop. Drawing pictures was received enthusiastically by trainees and it was a task which we were also able to embed quite naturally into the ELT Methodology course. It had formative value – encouraging trainees to reflect on their beliefs – as well as empirical value as a source of data collection for research purposes. There was a certain level of attrition for the second set of drawings (30), compared to the first (52) and this can be explained in terms of the administration of the task – the first was completed in class on the first day of the methodology course; the second was completed after the course and out of class. Nonetheless, a complete pre- and post-set of 30 drawings still represents a substantial volume of data for comparative purposes.

It must be stressed, though, that the drawings alone provide a limited basis on which inferences about trainees' beliefs can be made. To take an example, one of the drawings showed a poster on the classroom wall, which was labelled: *'Our Favourite Errors'*. From the picture alone, it is difficult to know with any certainty what beliefs are at work here. One interpretation is that this was a traditional classroom where error correction was important to the teacher.

A second interpretation is that this represents a student-led approach to error correction (through which students actively seek out their own 'favourite' errors). Given such ambiguities, and our desire to understand what the pictures meant for the trainees, the written commentaries and interviews were a vital part of our methodology. All trainees produced short written commentaries to explain what their pictures mean and our focal trainees were also interviewed, allowing them to articulate even more fully the beliefs underpinning their pictures. The explanatory data provided by the trainees gave us more confidence in our interpretation of their pictures. The fact that some members of the research team were also the tutors on the methodology course provided advantages when it came to making connections between the pictures and this course; nonetheless, it was still vital to avoid speculation regarding the meanings of the pictures and to collect data explaining these meanings from the trainees themselves. Drawings, then, are a valuable way of enabling trainees to articulate their beliefs; their power is maximised, though, when combined with additional explanatory data, written and/or oral, through which the meaning of the pictures is confirmed by the individuals who drew them.

Returning to the drawings, we believe that in this report we have also provided concrete examples of how such data can be analysed. The detailed commentaries on the drawings presented here illustrated the different facets of drawings that can be examined and provide models which other researchers experimenting with the use of drawings in the study of trainees' beliefs will find useful. The categories of drawing we identified – e.g. snapshots, sequences, posters – also provide insight into how drawings of classrooms can be classified.

Changes in trainees' beliefs

A comparison of four focal trainees' beliefs about effective EFL teaching before and after the fourth year specialist ELT Methodology course did not reveal radical changes. The introductory methodology course they took in their third year had established in these trainees beliefs about the value of student-centredness, print-rich classrooms, interaction, fun and varied resources, and these were in strong evidence in the initial drawings that the trainees produced. For example, a summary of

the beliefs we extracted from the original drawing, written commentary and interview of Nora reads as follows:

- Lessons where teachers talk and students listen are not effective
- Classes should have a flexible layout, to accommodate whole-class, group and pair work
- Class set up should include 'corners' for reading and computer work
- Lessons should be dynamic and involve plenty of listening and speaking
- Lessons should include role plays and involve real situations
- Students should experiment and learn for themselves
- Resources should include learning games, English magazines, computers and realia.

While some of these beliefs (e.g. the first one) derive mainly from the trainees' own experience as a language learner, the majority of these issues were covered on the third year methodology course.

After the fourth year methodology course, the analysis of the same trainee's drawing, written commentary and interview generated this set of beliefs about effective EFL lessons:

- There are many different ways to do a successful English lesson
- Lessons should have CLIL content
- Parents should have opportunities to contribute to lessons
- Lessons should use new technologies
- Lessons should include activities such as role plays
- Lessons should use English as a medium of communication
- The teacher's role is to guide
- Resources should include language-learning games, computers, realia and parents.

There are clearly ideas here that were motivated by the fourth year course, such as the value of CLIL and technology. In the other focal trainees there were similar examples of ways in which the fourth

methodology course had extended their beliefs about effective ELT lessons; for example, their understandings of effective teacher roles were enhanced to include that of observer and formative assessor and, in terms of learning activities, the trainees became more aware of the value of class projects. The notion of the autonomous learner, while present in the original set of data, also seemed more pronounced after the methodology course. Overall, though, these changes represent growth that was consistent both with the knowledge being promoted on the course and with the principles established in the third year methodology course the trainees had taken – beliefs were confirmed and extended rather than being subject to any radical reform. There was also a philosophical consistency in the beliefs underpinning both courses that facilitated the impact of the second course without the need for significant cognitive adjustments on the part of the trainees. They certainly expanded their understandings of the possibilities available to them as primary EFL teachers of English, but did so in way that built naturally on what it was they already knew and believed.

From a more critical perspective, questions can be asked about the extent to which trainees' drawings and explanations reflected their beliefs about ELT or whether these outputs were simply mirroring the content of the methodology course (i.e. whether they reflected the knowledge trainees had acquired during the course). The nature of trainees' explanatory comments suggests to us that while they had clearly obtained knowledge from the course, they had also internalised it – i.e. they believed that the ideas they were encountering did provide the basis for effective English lessons and were able to justify why. A more robust test of the degree of such internalisation, though, will be an analysis of what happened when these trainees experienced real classrooms during their teaching practice. As we note below, this is an issue we will explore in subsequent publications from our larger project.

6

Conclusion

We have found this project rewarding in both practical and research terms. In terms of the pedagogy of teacher education, the use of drawings and trainee commentaries on these has provided us with a useful additional tool through which we can facilitate trainee reflection during their pre-service teacher education programme. There is no need, of course, for teacher educators who adopt this strategy to engage in the very detailed analysis of the drawings that we have undertaken here; getting trainees to produce drawings and to articulate their views on them can in itself be a valuable developmental activity, especially when done periodically over time. In research terms, we have enjoyed the opportunity to conduct a systematic study in our working contexts, and while we have only be able to comment here on part of our work, there are several additional facets of the project that will provide the basis of further publications. For example, we have not reported here on what happens to trainees' (idealistic?) beliefs when they encounter the reality of the classroom during the practicum – this is a situation in which we would expect tensions to emerge and one we look forward to examining more closely in the near future.

This study, of course, also opens the door to continuing work of this kind and we would like to replicate this research with trainees at the start of the third year methodology course, as it would be very interesting to see what beliefs about effective ELT lessons they have at the stage where they have had no methodology input at all. Following graduates into the classroom is another issue that is of great interest to us as we continue to examine the contribution that pre-service teacher education makes to the work of novice teachers of English.

In conclusion, we thank the British Council for funding this work.

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Appendix 1: Baseline task

Task 1A:

A Successful Primary English Language Teaching (ELT) Lesson

Step 1: Visual narrative

Do a drawing or visual narrative of what a successful primary ELT lesson means to you. Your picture can include whatever you feel is necessary to represent your ideas.

Step 2: Written narrative

Write an explanation of your drawing where you provide your own personal interpretation of what you have depicted or shown. Explain what the picture means to you. Point out the factors that you feel have influenced your ideas about foreign language learning and teaching. You can use the language you feel most comfortable with to write your narrative interpretation (about 200–250 words).

Appendix 2: Informed consent sheet

Dear students,

You have completed a task that involves the practice of reflective inquiry, that is thinking about what you are doing and/or studying. As designers of this course, we believe this is an important task to help you better understand what you know and believe about language teaching as we begin this course.

The first part of this activity involved completing a drawing or visual narrative. The second part involved doing a written narrative or text where you explained what you drew and why. The third part involved preparing a short English summary of your written text. As discussed, we will repeat this task again at the end of the course to see how you have developed and what you have learned during this course.

This sequence of tasks has much formative value for you as you study to become an English language teacher. It has allowed you to think about what is important to you now and will allow you to see your professional growth with this course.

This sequence of tasks is also important from a research perspective, as it may serve to provide the teaching/teacher development community with valuable information about teaching and learning to become a successful English teacher. For this reason, the research group PLURAL, at the University of Barcelona, would like to be able to use the information that you have prepared.

If you agree, PLURAL will analyse your visual and written narratives and summaries, and will prepare a written report based on the work you have done. PLURAL will offer a workshop in the spring explaining the information gathered and the results of this research. You will be invited to attend and participate in this short workshop.

This initial work forms part of a larger research project that PLURAL is co-conducting with the University of Leeds. This project also involves face-to-face interviews with ten students. These interviews will last about 20 minutes and will be conducted in Catalan.

If you are interested in allowing the PLURAL research group to use your data, we need to have your written consent. All the data collected will be treated confidentially and used to further our understanding of what teachers in training understand and believe constitutes effective English classes/lessons. We will use the data in publications we produce and all references to individuals will be anonymised.

If you do not wish to participate in the study this will not affect your studies on this course. If you agree to participate now and later change your mind you can inform us orally or in writing and we will not include your data in the study.

Thank you for your interest and possible collaboration.

Isabel Civera and Theresa Zanatta, Lecturers,
ELT Methodology

I _____
give permission to have my drawing/visual narrative, written narrative and English summary used for research purposes as part of the 'Impact of Teacher Education on Pre-Service Primary English Language Teachers' research project conducted jointly by the PLURAL research group, University of Barcelona and the University of Leeds.

Date: / / 2 0

Signature: _____

Appendix 3: Interview extract – trainee talks about their drawing

(Isabel and Theresa are the interviewers, ZiVi is the trainee)

Isabel so this is your picture and we will be talking about it and what you wrote as well

ZiVi yeah

Isabel but |am| we will start in English because you wrote it in English

ZiVi yes

Isabel but you can change language you can:: switch to:: Catalan Spanish when you feel you need [to explain things]

ZiVi ok

Isabel you have to be comfortable, ok?

ZiVi yes

Isabel so if you would like to start explaining [what you drew]

ZiVi [well] I drew this because |e::| | we did an exercise last year/ and:: we introduced all the pupils | working and talking between them | not with the teacher | like always has been for me | teacher talks and then you just answer/ or do whatever but the:: we tried this last year | let the pupils talking between them they answered between them and the teacher wait to the finish of the:: activity/ then to correct it | and I love it and I think this is the way things have to be done in English

Isabel where did you do that?

ZiVi with:

Isabel in methodology

ZiVi yes with Theresa

Isabel and why you think that is good?

ZiVi because:: | they talk | and practice is the best thing to know a language | if you feel comfortable in your class and |a| safe to talk | then it's the best way to learn I think | because sometimes | just repeating | and doing the same things the language don't get into you | if you have to talk if you are | you have to do it | then you are forced to speak | and to communicate with your friends and if you get it like a:: an exercise/ like something normal/ | then you get it better I think

Isabel and how did you prepare it? How do you think the teacher has to prepare | an activity like that? How do you make sure that the children can do it?

ZiVi well | I think experience | is one point | maybe I don't have that thing but I | I will | I hope I will have in the future but |a::| I think that you have to think | what you want | them to know so ¿structures? You have to show it first that that's important then after the structures what they have to answer/ because they have to do to have something to u.- to get on | so it | some:: words/ {(AC) and structures like I said before} so if you have your blackboard do you have this do you have that and then the answers yes I do |nyt| it's easier for them to do it | ok then they have something/ where to look and | the way to speak I think that's | they they get it

Isabel yes

ZiVi and they don't notice that they are repeating sometimes | lot of things and that's good too I think | well the:: | teacher as I said she had to observe and go around the class | and look what |em| chil do children do and |em nyt| what's wrong | and what's not and take notes I think that is important because as I put here our favourite errors as I learnt last year with |e::| it's important to know | what you have done wrong but don't but don't get it like a bad thing | I think you done this but I think it is better to say it like that | it is not wrong you are | practicing but | come on | next time we will | do it better | so I think it's the best way to do things

Theresa you mentioned taking notes when the teacher is going [around]

ZiVi [yes]

Theresa observing why is that? Why would you think that's important?

ZiVi {(AC) because otherwise you wouldn't remember} | I think

Theresa and what kind of notes do you take | would you take?

ZiVi well | errors/ and who's |em| who is acting who's not | that's important and because there's a shy person you have to help them to do it to encourage them give him or her a safe place to do that like I said before

Theresa yeah

ZiVi and motivate them to do things I think that this kind of activity lemons and apples and that thing | motivates them you have to pay this and how do you do it? |e::| this is for | early years as you can see it maybe it's too easy | |nyt| but you can get it harder with years you can | if you have this money you have to pay these things and how you will do it | and then you can | improve more the language/ the intonation and that things and | you have to take notes about that intonation pronunciation |e::| | words they say and who's:: who is acting who's not | who is xxx maybe sometimes | who is not who have to | maybe | press more him or whatever

Theresa so it is a way to follow the progress of your students?

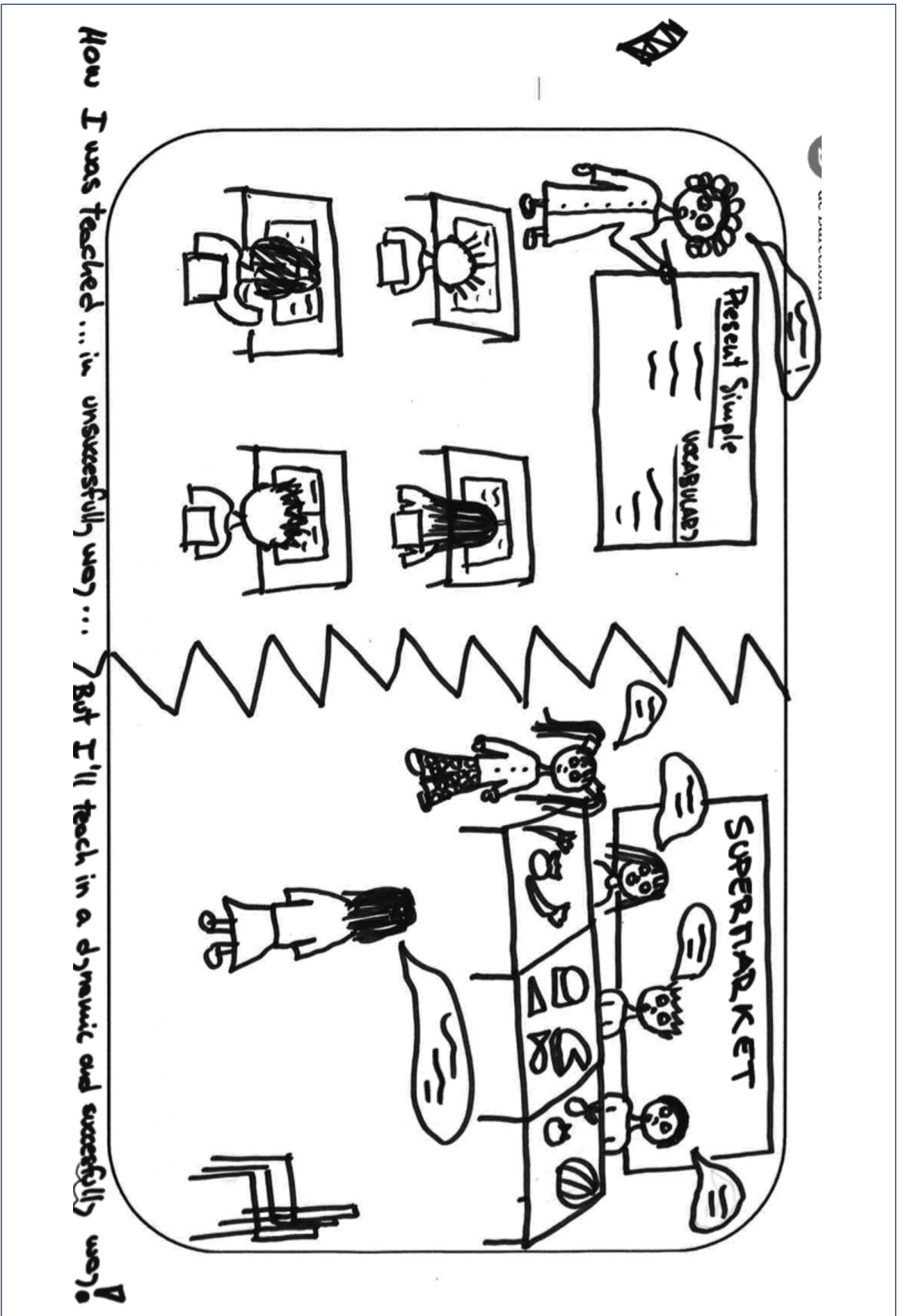
ZiVi yes [yes yes]

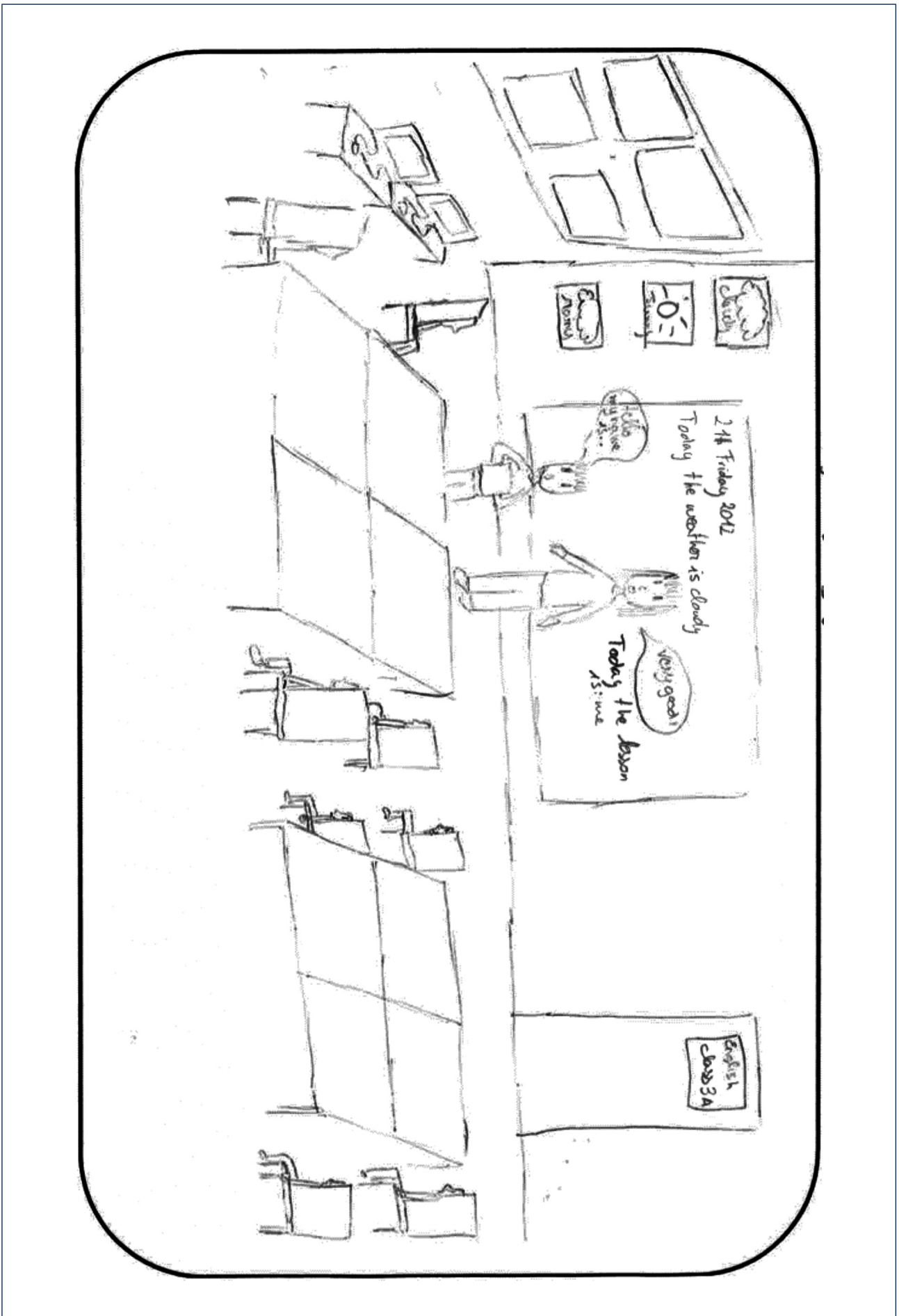
Appendix 4: First set of drawings

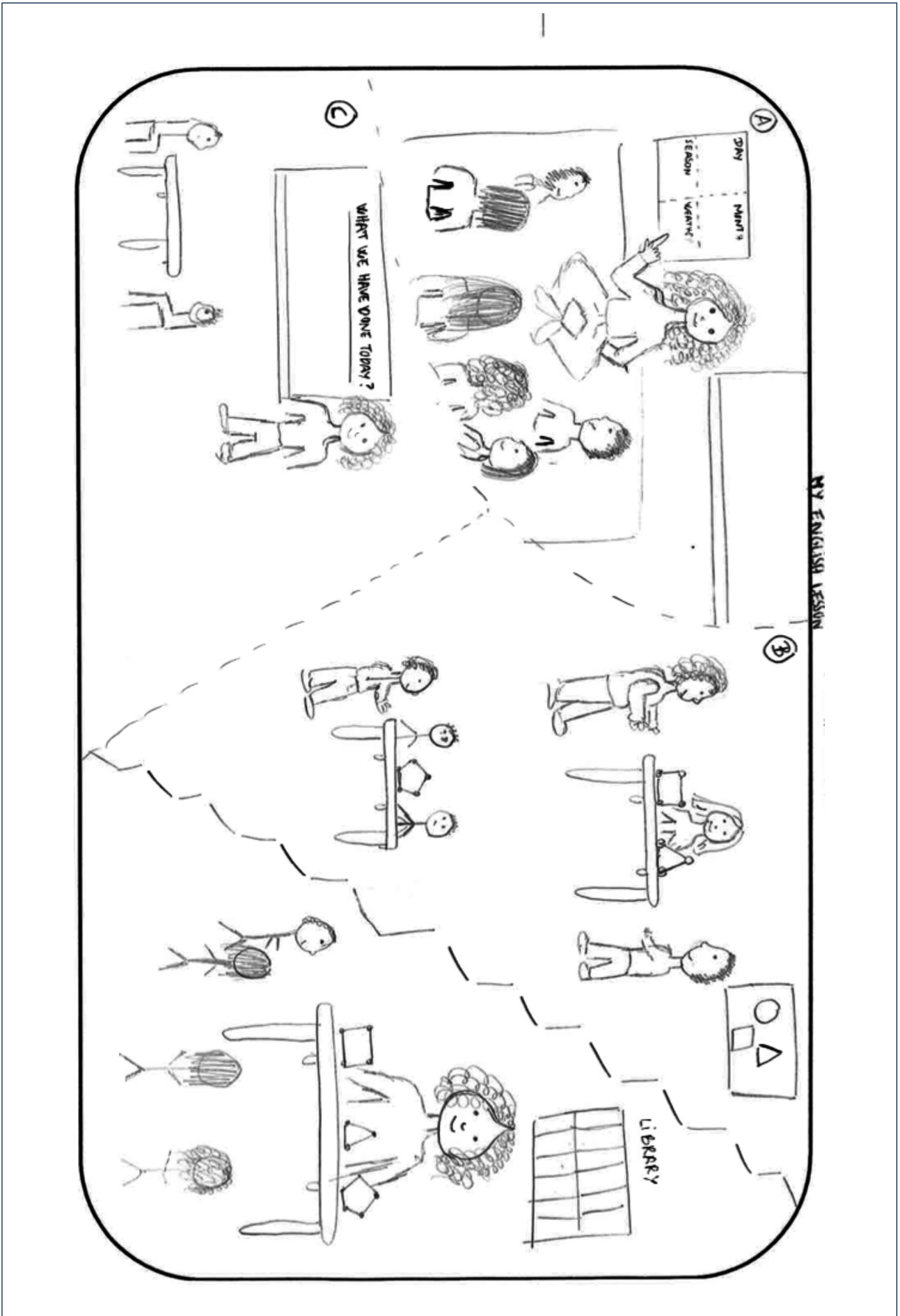
These are exemplars of the four kinds of drawing produced by the focal students at the start of this study (i.e. before they did the ELT Methodology course).

The poster – Anna 1









Appendix 5: Second set of drawings

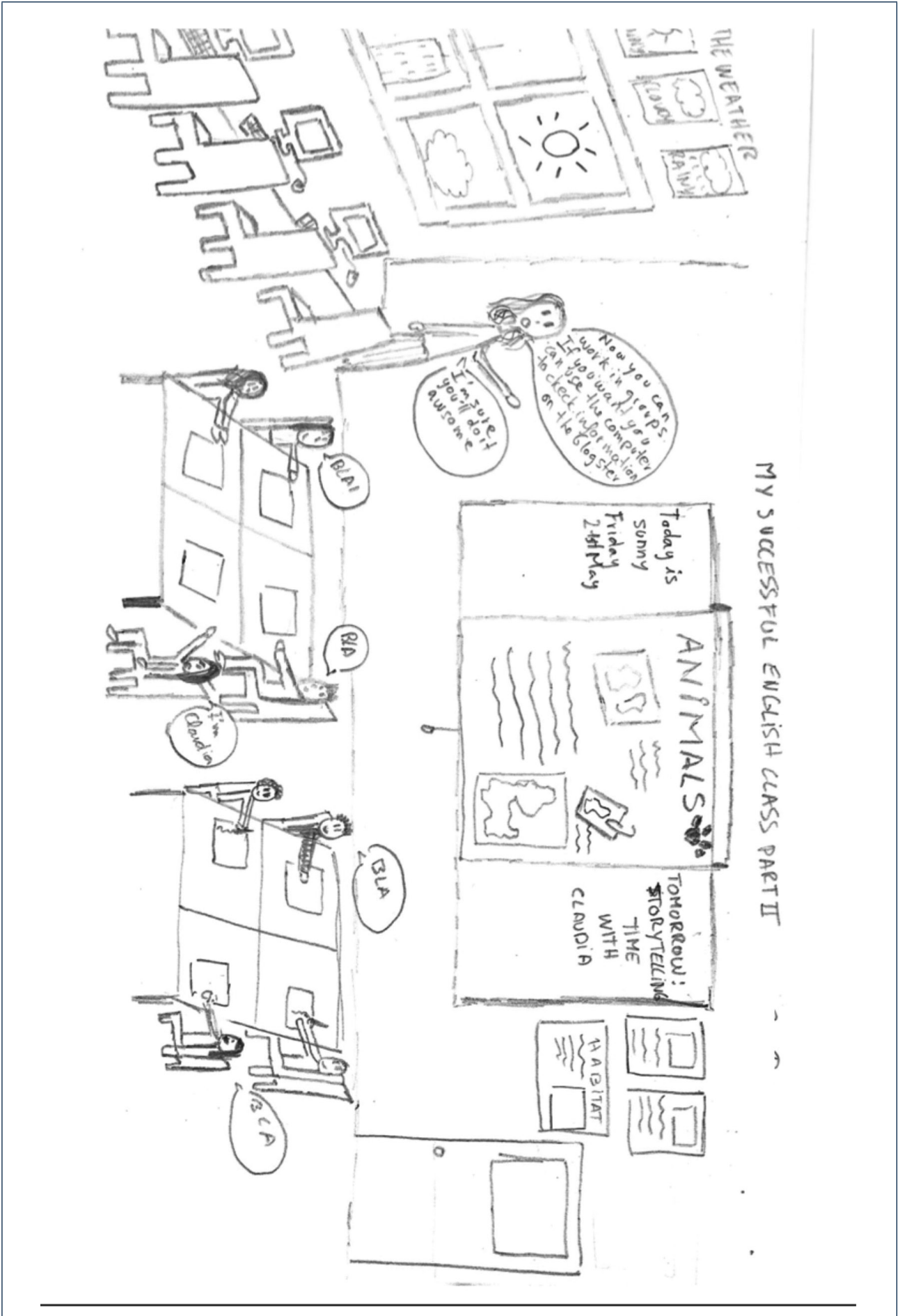
Here are the four drawings produced by four focal trainees (the same trainees from Appendix 4) after they did the ELT Methodology course.

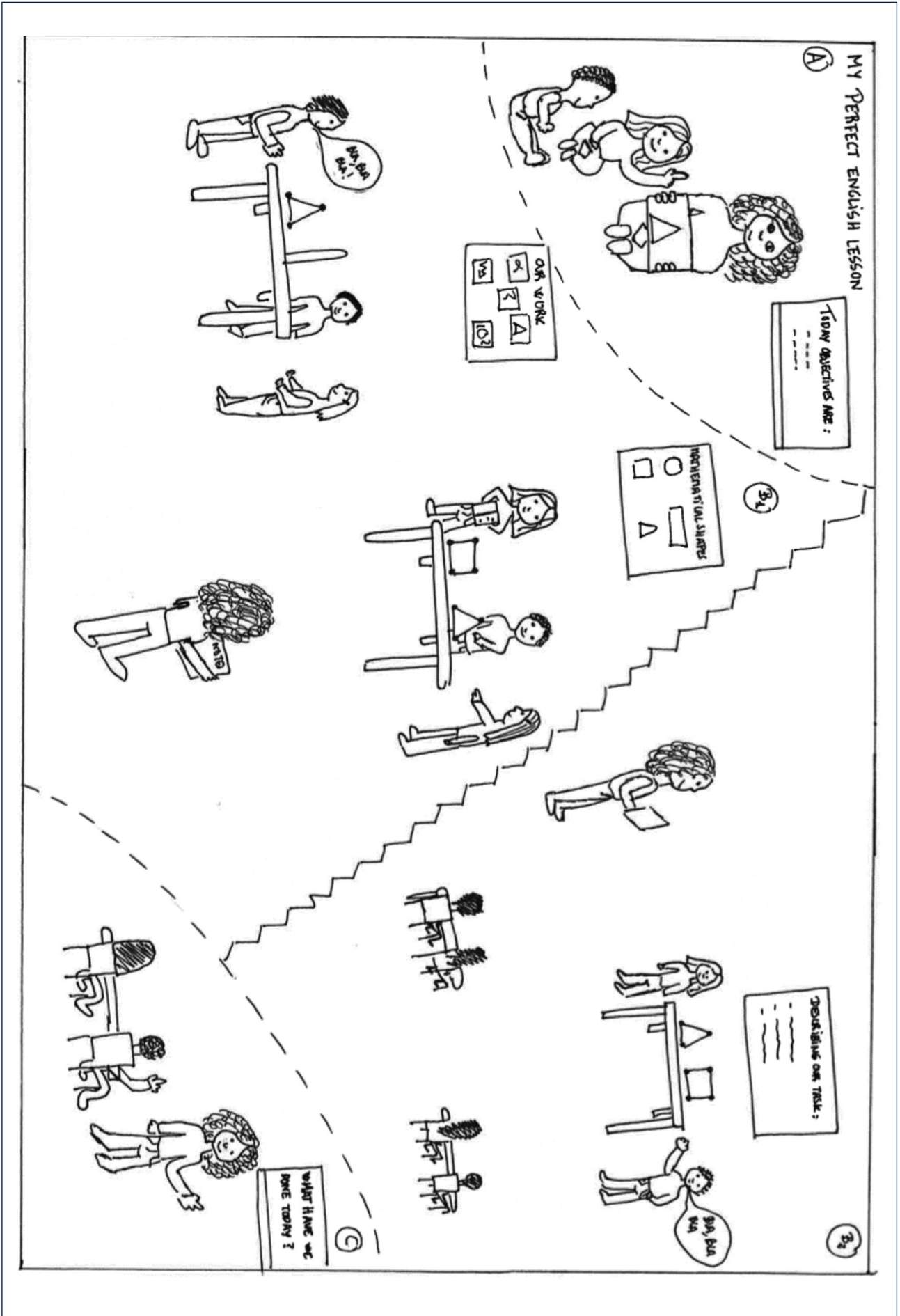
A poster – Anna 2



Title: Different ways to make a successful English lesson







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