

PROJECT WORK AMONG THE STUDENTS: ITS EFFECTIVE METHODS

Стаття містить основні концепції проектної методики, запропоновані зарубіжними авторами, наголошено на ефективності її використання в навчальному процесі. Особлива увага зосереджена на особистісно-діяльній підході з метою оптимізації пізнавальної та творчої діяльності студентів.

Project work is not a new methodology. Its benefits have been widely recognized for many years in the teaching of subjects such as science, geography and history. In language teaching, however, it is a relative newcomer. The aim of this research is to provide a simple introduction to project work, to enable you to introduce it smoothly into your classroom. Project work captures better than any other activity the two principal elements of a communicative approach. These are: a) a concern for motivation, that is, how the learners relate to the task; b) a concern for relevance, that is, how the learners relate to the language. We could add to these a third element: c) a concern for educational values, that is, how the language curriculum relates to the general educational development of the learner [1].

Positive motivation is the key to successful language learning, and project work is particularly useful as a means of generating this positive motivation. If you talk to teachers who do project work in their classes, you will find that this is the feature that is always mentioned - the students really enjoy it. There are three reasons:

Firstly, project work is very personal. The students are writing about their own lives - their house, their family, their town, their dreams and fantasies, their own research into topics that interest them. Students, in other words, are being given the opportunity to tell the world about themselves.

Secondly, project work is a very active medium. Students aren't just receiving and producing words, they are: collecting information, drawing pictures, maps, diagrams and charts, cutting out pictures, arranging texts and visuals, carrying out interviews and surveys, possibly, making recordings, too. Project work is learning through doing.

A foreign language can often seem a remote and unreal thing. This inevitably has a negative effect on motivation, because the students don't see the language as relevant to their own lives. If learners are going to become real language users, they must learn that English can be used to talk about their own world. Project work helps to bridge this relevance gap:

Firstly, project work helps to integrate the foreign language into the network of the learners' own communicative competence. It encourages the use of a wide range of communicative skills, enables learners to exploit other spheres of knowledge and provides opportunities for them to write about the things that are important in their own lives.

Secondly, project work helps to make the language more relevant to learners' actual needs, because they are learning how to communicate about their own world - about their country, their ideas, their life, etc. Project work thus enables students to rehearse the language and factual knowledge that will be of most value to them as language users.

Thirdly, project work establishes a sounder relationship between language and culture. The purpose of learning a foreign language is to make communication between *two* cultures possible, English is not just for talking about the ways of the English-speaking world.

It should also be a means of telling the world about your own culture. Project work helps to create this approach. With project work the language acts as a bridge enabling two cultures to communicate with each other.

There is a growing awareness among language teachers that the process and content of the language class should contribute towards the general educational development of the learner. Project work is very much in tune with modern views about the purpose and nature of education.

Firstly, there is the question of educational values. Most modern school curricula require all subjects to encourage initiative, independence, imagination, self-discipline, cooperation and the development of useful research skills. Project work is a way of turning such general aims into practical classroom activity.

Secondly, cross-curricular approaches are encouraged. For language teaching this means that students should have the opportunity to use the knowledge they gain in other subjects in the English class. Project work clearly encourages this. Project work brings considerable benefits to the language classroom, but it's important to be aware of the implications of the way of working.

Teachers are often afraid that the project classroom will be noisier than the traditional classroom and that this will disturb other classes in the school. But project work does not have to *be* noisier than any other activity. Students will often need to discuss things and they may be moving around to get a pair of scissors or to consult a reference book. And some activities do require a lot of talking. If the students are doing a survey in their class, for example, there will be a lot of moving around and talking. However, this kind of noise is a natural part of productive activity.

But the traditional classroom has quite a lot of noise in it, too. There is usually at least one person talking (and teachers usually talk rather loudly!) and there may be a tape recorder playing, possibly with the whole class doing a drill. There is no reason why project work should be any noisier than thirty or forty students giving a choral response - quite the opposite, in fact. Project work is a different way of working and one that requires a different form of control. In project work students are working independently. They must, therefore, take on some of the responsibility for managing their learning environment. Part of this responsibility is learning what kind of and what level of noise is acceptable. When you introduce project work, you need also to encourage and guide the learners towards working quietly and sensibly. Remember that they will enjoy project work and will not want to stop doing it, because it is causing too much noise. So it should not be too difficult to get your students to behave sensibly. It takes longer to prepare, make and present a project than it does to do more traditional activities. But bear in mind two points:

Firstly, not all project work needs to be done in class time. Obviously, if the project is a group task, most of it must be done in class, can be done either by groups in class or by individuals at home. You will be surprised how much of their own time students will gladly devote to doing projects.

Secondly, when choosing to do project work you need to recognize that you are making a philosophical choice in favour of the **QUALITY** of the learning experience over the **QUANTITY**. Project work provides rich learning experiences — rich in colour, movement, interaction and, most of all, involvement. In this respect, projects are doubly valuable. They are not just rich learning experiences in themselves. The positive motivation that they generate colours the students' attitude to all the other aspects of the language programme. Learning grammar and vocabulary will appear more relevant, because the students know they will need these things for their project work.

It is likely that most students will speak in their own language while they are working on their projects. However, rather than seeing this as a problem, we should consider its merits.

Firstly, it is a natural way of working. It is a mistake to think of L1 and L2 (the target language) as two completely separate domains. Learners in fact operate in both domains constantly switching from one to the other. So it

is perfectly natural for learners to use LI while working on an L2 product. As long as the final product is in English it doesn't matter if the work is done in LI.

Secondly, project work can provide some good opportunities for realistic translation work. A lot of the source material for projects - leaflets, maps, interviews, texts from reference books, etc. - will be in the mother tongue. Using this material in a project provides useful translation activities.

Thirdly, there will be plenty of opportunities in other parts of the language course for learners to practise oral skills. Project work should be seen as a chance to practice that most difficult of skills - writing. There is no need to worry if the students use LI to do it [2].

Some teachers are concerned that without the teacher's firm control the weaker students will be lost and will not be able to cope. Again, the answer to this worry is to see the positive side of it. Not all students want or need the teacher's constant supervision. By encouraging the more able students to work independently you are free to devote your time to those students who need it most [3].

Paradoxically, it is often in the traditional classroom that the weaker students can be neglected, because the brighter students take more than their share of the teacher's attention. It would be wrong to pretend that project work does not have its problems. It certainly demands a lot of the teacher in terms of preparation and classroom management skills. It also requires a change of attitude about what is really valuable in language teaching, and you need to work with your students to develop a responsible working environment. But, in practice, most teachers find that their worst fears about project work do not materialize. The work is so motivating for the students that it produces its own momentum. The noise of the well-managed project classroom is the sound of creativity. And that's what we want to encourage not suppress. The key to successful project work is good preparation. You'll need some basic materials and equipment. It's a good idea to have some reference books available: a dictionary, a grammar book, an atlas. Students will want to know new words or constructions for expressing their ideas. And if you haven't got reference books available, the students will ask you! This will not only become tiresome for you, but it also misses out on an opportunity for learners to become more independent and to develop some useful research skills [2].

Use each project not only to learn and practise language, but also to help your students to learn a bit more about project work. Preparation, then, is the key to making project work a success. Prepare your classroom by providing some basic materials. Prepare your students by practising the skills and techniques they will need. Most important of all, prepare yourself for a new way of working that is challenging but very satisfying. Assessment of project work is a difficult issue to tackle. This is not because project work is difficult to assess, but because the best way to assess project work may conflict with official procedures for assessing student's work. There are some guidelines for assessing projects, but, of course, you know best what is necessary and possible in your own system. There are two basic principles for assessing project work:

a) The most obvious point to note about project work is that language is only a part of the total project.

Consequently, it is not very appropriate to assess a project only on the basis of linguistic accuracy. Credit must be given for the overall impact of the project, the level of creativity it displays, the neatness and clarity of presentation and most of all the effort that has gone into its production. There is nothing particularly unusual in this. It is normal practice in assessing creative writing to give marks for style and content. Many education systems also require similar factors to be taken into account in the assessment of students' oral performance in class.

b) The second principle is that, if at all possible, don't correct mistakes on the final project itself- or at least not in ink. It goes against the whole spirit of project work. A project usually represents a lot of effort and is something that

the students will probably want to keep. It is thus a shame to put red marks all over it. This draws attention to the things that are wrong about the project over the things that are good. It's rather like criticising a gift that someone has given you. On the other hand, students are more likely to take note of errors pointed out to them in project work, because the project means much more to them than just any piece of class work.

There are two useful techniques - encourage the students to do a rough draft of their project first, correct this in your normal way. The students can then incorporate corrections in the final product. If errors occur in the final product, correct them in pencil or on a separate sheet of paper. It is then up to the students whether they wish to correct the finished piece of work. But fundamentally, the most important thing to do about errors is to stop worrying about them. Projects are real communication. When we communicate, all we can do is the best we can with what we know. And because we usually concentrate on getting the meaning right, errors in form will naturally occur. It's a normal part of using and learning a language. Students invest a lot of themselves in a project and so they will usually make every effort to do their best work. And remember that any project will only form part of the total amount of work that the students produce in the language course. There will be plenty of opportunities to evaluate accuracy in other parts of the language programme. Project work provides an opportunity to develop creativity, imagination, enquiry and self-expression and the assessment of the project should reflect this [3].

As a conclusion we want to attract your attention that project work is one of the most exciting developments in language teaching. It combines in practical form both the fundamental principles of a communicative approach and the values of good education. It has the added virtue of being a long-established and well-tried method of teaching in other subject areas.

References

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