

MAIN PECULIARITIES OF PROJECT WORK

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Project work is a progressive teaching method which meets requirements of modern educational systems. This research discusses the benefits of project work in English language teaching. Project work belongs to those teaching methods which are repeatedly discussed in magazines and publications on modern teaching methodology. In a world that is changing very quickly teachers are looking for a method which would meet all important requirements of the education process. Many methods seem to fulfill only some aspects of modern education such as acquiring knowledge or memorizing facts.

Legutke and Thomas define project work as "a theme and task-centred mode of teaching and learning which results from a joint process of negotiation between all participants. It allows for a wide scope of self-determined action for both the individual and the small group of learners within a general framework of a plan which defines goals and procedures. Project learning realizes a dynamic balance between a process and a product orientation. Finally, it is experiential and holistic because it bridges dualism between body and mind, theory and practice."⁶ American theoretician of the first half of the 20th century W. H. Kilpatrick defines project work as "heartly purposeful act"

Knoll divides the history of project work into five stages:⁷

1590-1765: The beginnings of project work at architectural schools in Europe.

1765-1880: The project as a regular teaching method and its transplantation to America.

1880-1915: Work on projects in manual training and in general public schools.

1915-1965: Redefinition of the project method and its transplantation back to Europe.

1965-today: Rediscovery of the project idea and the third wave of its international dissemination.

In 1577 an architectural academy in Rome was founded under the patronage of Pope Gregory XIII. The teachers gave their students specific assignments such as designing churches, monuments or palaces. There were deadlines and also a jury to be convinced about the project. These academic and fictional competitions followed real-life architectural competitions.

⁶ Legutke, Michael and Thomas, Howard. *Process and Experience in the Language Classroom*. 1991. London: Longman, 1993.

⁷ Knoll, Michael. *The Project Method: Its Vocational Education Origin and International Development*. Spring 1997. Journal of Industrial Teacher Education.

Some projects can be solo conducted but usually projects are organized through group work. According to Petty group work is attractive and enjoyable for students but at the same time it has a great didactic potential.

Group work contributes to a feeling of cooperation and warmth in the class. This sounds simply but it seems that promoting cooperation is an essential issue to be discussed and applied at our schools. Based on Frazier's view is that "in the past, when the group was the base for most teaching, there may have been less need to be concerned about organizing group experiences for children. Now, however, with the learner more often on his own, we recognize that the values of group experiences must be newly understood and assessed.

Today the ability to cooperate and to help is becoming an important and essential part of education. By the end of the 18th century projects became a part of the engineering education. At this stage the method was transplanted into the United States. Students were asked to design their own machines and construct them according to their own design.

One of the characteristics of project work is that various skills are needed. Students can adopt specific roles which enable them to show what they are good at. For example, someone is good at writing and he/she can adopt the role of secretary. Others are good at operating computers, taking photos, speaking to people, playing musical instrument, drawing sketches, etc. This division of roles naturally stimulates cooperation because students realize they need each other. Everyone can share his/her abilities and knowledge without the fear that he/she cannot contribute to the work of the whole group. In this sense, project work is a proper way to show that there is always something why a person should be respected and appreciated even though his performance at school may be average or low.

Tom Hutchinson, a great promoter of project work, emphasizes four aspects of learning in projects:⁸

Hard work. Each project is a result of a lot of hard work. The authors of the projects have found information about their topic, and put all the parts together to form a coherent presentation. Project work is not a soft option.

Creative. Projects are creative in to aspects: content and language. The teacher shall see each project as a "unique piece of communication".

Personal. The aspect of creativity makes the project very personal. The teacher should not forget that his students invested a lot of themselves into their work.

Adaptable. Project work can be used with all ages at every level of language. The choice of activities is not limited and each topic can be adapted for the specific purposes of a particular group of learners.

Michael Legutke and Howard Thomas describe the characteristics of project work with respect to modern educational systems that demand from the teachers to integrate traditional subjects as much as possible. They point out that: themes and tasks for projects derive from real-life demands rather than from prescribed curricular items which are often presented as isolated pieces of scientific knowledge. Good idea does not make a good project. The learning

⁸ Hutchinson, Tom. *Introduction to Project Work*. 1991. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

process takes place only when the learners get involved with the topic, carry out experiments, various activities and discussions and reflect their work at the end.

Project learning involves detailed planning, determining problem areas, sub-tasks and hypotheses, predicting the outcomes, however, its direction and concrete steps of realization can change during the process as a reaction to new circumstances or changing interests of the learners.

Project learning is investigative in its nature. It is learner-centered. Students can choose the topic and also discover their strengths and talents for specific tasks. There is a balance between the process and product. Students are motivated to create a product which has its own value. Project work is cross-curricular method. It combines traditional subjects together depending on the specific project task. Students work as democratic partners in their groups, the teacher being rather their guide than a source of all answers.

Project work definitely performs new demands on the teacher and his teaching style. He/she should not feel discouraged by initial difficulties but accept that he/she was no more likely to have been born a complete teacher than were all-American football player, the concert musician or the great statesman born to their respective roles. Virtually all performers have achieved great heights only through study and practice.

Simon Haines divides projects into four main categories:⁹

-Information and research projects: These projects are based on working with collected information and data. Though it is important that the students look up much of the information the teacher should provide them with some basic reference materials.

-Survey projects: In these projects students plan and execute an investigation (e.g. the extent to which people of their town speaks English). The planning as well as the processing of data and final evaluation takes place in the classroom.

-Production projects: The aim is to produce a special final product (e.g. newspapers, radio-program, guide, etc.)

-Performance and organizational projects: As the name suggests, the students either prepare an event or the final product is presented in a form of performance. Examples include organizing a British evening, putting on a Talent Show or playing theatre. Teachers should also keep in mind that the timing of most projects can be adapted and changed for each group of learners and needs of the teacher.

Long-term project is the highest level of project work that can be achieved. It should be carried out with classes that are already used to project activities. These projects are often based on an extensive preparation of the teacher. The acceptance of the project by students is necessary and crucial. Long-term projects are not only demanding in terms of preparation but also for various problems which might occur during the work (e.g. motivation or personal problems mentioned in the respective chapter). A good example is a project suggested by Booth which is called "Hospital and spastic unit" lasting over 12 weeks. The objective of this project is to involve students into the community of a hospital through volunteer work. They

⁹ Haines, Simon. *Projects for the EFL Classroom*. Edinburgh: Nelson, 1989.

will keep diaries on their experience in the hospital as well as on their language development. The personal commitment to the task has to be very high as it will take a lot of time to complete the task which takes place mostly outside the classroom. Each project is unique because each learner or group of learners is different. Projects can be changed and adapted for specific purposes. However, each project should go through certain stages and development.

The disadvantages of project work are the noise which is made during the class, also projects are time-consuming and the students use their mother tongue too much, the weaker students are lost and not able to cope with the task and the assessment of projects is very difficult. However, every type of project can be held without any difficulties and so with every advantage possible.

There are several types of projects such as: information and research projects, survey projects, production projects and performance and organizational projects which can be performed differently as in reports, displays, wall newspapers, parties, plays, etc.

The organization of project work may seem difficult but if we do it step by step it should be easy. We should define a theme, determine the final outcome, structure the project, identify language skills and strategies, gather information, compile and analyze the information, present the final product and finally evaluate the project. Project work demands a lot of hard work from the teacher and the students; while, the final outcome is worth the effort.

Throughout the work it's clear that project work has more advantages than disadvantages and is effective during the educational process. Students are likely to learn the language with the help of projects and have more fun.

In conclusion, project work is an effective, interesting, entertaining way of teaching foreign language successfully and should be used at the lesson.

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