

The Project Work as a Way to Promote Group Interactions: An Experience From Teachers to-be in Primary Education

MSc. Kenia Santiesteban Leyva¹

Abstract

This work is an answer to one of the problems still unsolved about the teaching-learning process, related specially to the used of project work for the achievement of a higher group interaction for the sake of a cooperative English learning process. The proposal presents the design of a group of project works for the units of the English program from Teachers to be in primary Education. It contains the way students were organized so as to favor group interaction as well as the results obtained from their application.

Introduction

One of the purposes of our schools today is to intend and to achieve good levels of material and cultural development for its population, along with an uninterrupted social process in which an excellent place is granted to the education of people. As teachers, we recognize the formation of the present and future individuals as an essential part in the construction of the new society.

Our education based on its historical mission and on the interests of the labor class, has as an end, the formation of the new generations and whole people according to the scientific conception of the world, which is the dialectical and historical materialism, to develop the individual's intellectual, physical and spiritual capacities, and to foment on him, high human feelings and aesthetic likes.

¹ Associate Teacher, Language Department, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Las Tunas University, Cuba. Email: keniasl@ult.edu.cu

The achievement of this purpose implies the continuous and permanent improvement of the quality of the educational process, incorporating the scientific contributions to the pedagogical professional practice which enrich the human culture and set rules regarding the theoretical conception and the practical instrumentation of the teaching- learning process.

Schools must educate in coordination with the needs of society, to develop the individual not only for its personal profit, but mainly for the benefit of the community he or she is part of. The role of our school is indispensable in the accomplishment of such task. The school should offer the students the mechanisms that allow them to learn for themselves in such a way that those skills acquired while learning may be useful when meeting the challenges of their professional careers. Therefore, project works in the educational process gain further didactic and educational values every day.

Dr. Carlos Rojas expressed that "the recognition of the role of project works as a way of cognitive activity is a question broadly accepted in the pedagogical literature as well as by the professors and teachers; however all the results expected from its application have not been achieved yet." (C. Rojas 1982) So, our students need, beyond any doubts, to learn how to carry out a project work, how to study, how to think; abilities which are not acquired overnight. It takes conscious, systematic work until students feel the need to acquire the contents for themselves.

The study about the effectiveness of project works has been the goal of this investigation for the following reasons:

- It is adjusted to the problems of each territory and its schools and has to do directly with the quality of the teaching-learning process.
- It becomes necessary that professors and students be concerned about the quality of project works as a way to improve the learning activity and the cognitive independence.
- It is necessary to achieve in the students an independent, dialectical and creative thought by means of a project work system, as a fundamental component of the intellectual education.
- Project work as organizational form of the process propitiates the development of qualities in the personality.

Many authors have researched into project work, but students have only deepened on the cognitive part, not on the qualitative one. It has been approached by different foreign authors as: Klingberg (1972), P.I.Pidkasisti (1976), N. Talizina (1985).

In our country, project works have been subject of investigation, by authors as Gladys Valdivia (1988), Rojas Carlos (1982), Alberto Labarrere (1996, 1998), Rico Pilar (1996), and Josefina López (1990).

At Pepito Tey Teachers Training Collage this topic has been researched by Marcos Conde (2000), Yoannys Martínez (2000), Yuritza Pérez (2000) and Alexis Vásquez (2001).

Nevertheless, the literature consulted does not reflect project work as a way to promote group interaction. That is the reason why this investigation has declared the following :

Scientific problem:_The none stability of group interaction related to the activity of studying in group II from Teachers to be in Primary Education.

Investigation objective:_Validation of a set of project works for the achievement of a greater stability of group interaction during the activity of studying from Teachers to be in Primary Education.

1.1 Foundation of the Proposal

For the determination of the proposal an initial diagnose was applied to characterize the current state of students; among the main difficulties we found are the following: the low development of abilities on finding main ideas, on summarizing, on locate information and the none existence of suitable learning strategies in the majority of the cases and the lack of cooperation on the fulfilment of tasks.

Taking all this into account the author decided to propose the development of project works because it is proved that a better organization of the activities of studying constitute an essential way to the solution of the difficulties.

The author determines to apply project works as an organizational form in order to transform the situation of the group because project work, not only facilitates the cognitive development of the students, but also the qualitative one when it is organized in a form that favors cooperative learning. It allows the solution of the contradictions between the level of the student's knowledge and the complexity of the new tasks, between what they owned and what it is asked.

In this solution the students must be confident, sure on the taking of decisions, students need hours of laborious search that allows them the self evaluation of their possibilities and efforts. They also need to develop the collectivism this work becomes richer in the way the partners criticize, value and bring new contributions. It also favors to achieve a better group interaction, making better consolidation of the relationships.

Professors should keep in mind the orientation of project work in a systematic way, to achieve not only a better learning in the students but also a better interaction among them. For it, teachers should analyze the personal characteristics of the students, to know everything, starting with a diagnosis not only to look for information in the cognitive area but in many other respects.

With the development of project work, students get the necessary knowledge that allows them to act and to move with decision and independence and to face the challenges of life from the own school. In general sense it contributes to the formation and development of the personality, as well as it promotes a better group interaction among the students which is something that favors their learning.

It was necessary also to determine how to organize project work, for that the author decided organize them in such a way that will promote group interaction and in turn contribute to the solution of the cognitive problems detected.

It was necessary to make an analysis of the English syllabus of the Course for Teachers to be in Primary Education which has a total of 60 hours class, with a frequency of 4 hours class every two weeks and its content is distributed in 6 units. Among the general objectives of the syllabus one is the consolidation of habits in the development of project work on the students.

1.2 The Study Made was Based on the Following Questions

Which are the main objectives and contents that are propose in the English syllabus?

How to raise the development of the abilities of: to summarizing, to determine the main ideas and to locate specific information by means of the treatment to those objectives and contents propose?

How to raise the development of group interaction from the content is proposed in the syllabus?

What are the most appropriate units for the realization of project works?

What grade of difficulty do the contents offer for the realization of project works?

Reflections on the organizational and methodological order were made. They favored the taking of decisions in the elaboration of the proposal, based on the following questions.

Which are the means we have for the implementation of this proposal?

What points students, which are the possibilities they offer?

Are the students capable of working independently with these means?

What time should be devoted to the realization of project works taking into account the level of difficulty of the tasks, time of solution and the desired results?

How to make the distribution of the tasks of studying?

Which are the possibilities of interaction among the students that the way in which the project work is organize offers?

In which phase of the lesson is the realization of the project work more productive?

Which is the structure that the selected project works should have?

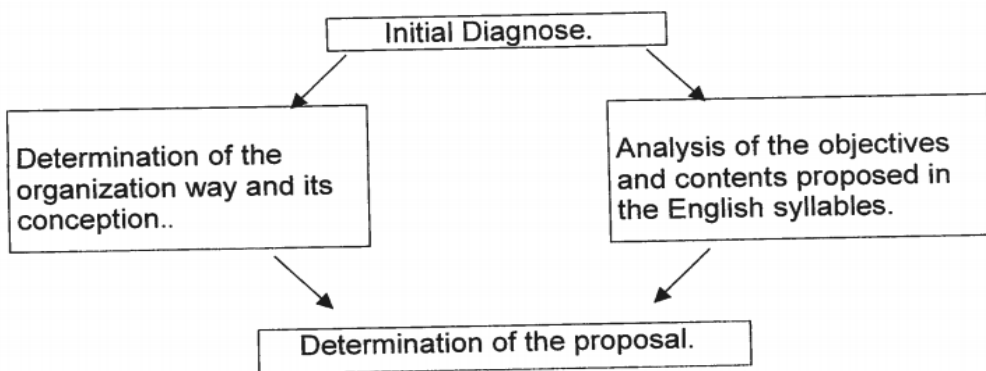
Which is the methodology that should be followed during their elaboration?

How to fulfill the stages of orientation, realization and control?

How to carry out the analysis and evaluation of the results?

Based on all these aspects the author determined that the proposal was a set of project works apply to the success of group interaction and that its realization will conduct also to the systematization of the abilities where difficulties were detected.

Graphic Representation of the Proposal Determination



With the determination of the proposal, it was very necessary to select the units in which project works will be introduced and the abilities to develop with each of them according to the objectives and contents of the English syllabus and the individuals and group particularities.

The author selected the units in which each project work was going to be oriented. For the selection of these units the author took into account their significance according to the content and the interests of the students on the topics due to their newness and their organization.

The author selected the units 2, 5 and 6 because the topics get the adolescents attention and motivate them, but also because they do not know much about these selected topics and with the intention of contributing to the formation of a general culture.

The ability proposed was that of summarizing because with the development of it, the ability of selecting the main details in a context is systematized which is something very important because it constitutes an action inside the internal structure of this ability.

Summarizing implies that students do a careful reading of the orientated text; to determine main ideas in each paragraph; to classify the ideas according to their importance and to select thematic, general and partial ideas; to hierarchy and order the main ideas; to eliminate the supporting details and finally to make the summary.

The proposal is sustained on the theoretical foundations expressed in chapter I and in the necessity of achieving a group interaction that drives the improvement of interpersonal relationships; using as fundamental way project work as organizational form that propitiates a cooperative learning and with this the personal and group growth as long as students do not only acquire new knowledge but rather cooperation feelings are developed, sense of ownership, mutual help, solidarity, as essential elements for the establishment of solid interpersonal relationships according to our aspirations.

Starting from the elements mentioned and the necessities of learning the selected sample, where the development of base abilities as: to select the essential ideas, to summarize, to locate information constitute an important element for the achievement of new learning, it is that the author selected intentionally the units 2, 5 and 6 to elaborate the system of project works that she proposes.

This system propitiates the combination of the individual and team work. Each member of the team is the responsible of the performing of an individual action that favours the development of the activity to be developed by the team. This characteristic is manifested in all stages of project work, stages that were conceived according to the objectives of the investigation.

The group of project works that forms the proposal has a reproductive character, and it is related to the ability we are intended to develop and it constitutes an essential base for the acquisition of new learning with more level of complexity.

With the realization of these project works we propitiate the systematisation of the proposed ability, as well as the necessary strategies to learn how to learn in some cases, and in others to better the strategies they follow.

The way in which its realization was conceived will lead the necessary individual and group activity for the achievement of solid learning that demonstrates the superiority of the results reached by means of the collective effort.

It was necessary to divide the group into teams; these were formed according to the results of the Sociometric Test. Later on the author decided to carry out the proposal.

It is very important for both, teacher and student to be sure about their roles at the time of developing the project work for the success of each activity.

1.3 A Project Work to be Developed as an Example

First Project Work

Unit #2: How electronic communications are changing our lives. History.

Theme: The computers and their history.

Final outcome: Presentation and discussion of a report.

Objectives: To summarize the essential aspects about the computers, the different generations that have existed and the elements that have characterized each generation by means of the searching of information in *Encarta* and *Ocean* Encyclopedias and striking in the formation of an general culture at a reproductive level.

Bibliography

Encyclopedia Encarta

Encyclopedia Ocean

Orientations for the Students

The development of this activity required the organization of the individual activity and by teams, for this, each team will have a responsible that will be in charge of distributing the individual tasks that will share the realization of the work of the team.

The realization of the work will be organized by different stages, an initial with a character of orientation where the general objectives and actions to be developed will be discussed as well as the educational tasks will be distributed; a second stage of individual execution where each member of the team will fulfilled his or her function under the orientation and control of the leader of the team and the professor; a third stage of connective conciliation of the work carried out individually, where each member should explain to their partners the result of his or her activity, which will be evaluated for the rest; a fourth stage, to prepare the report the team should present to be the discussed in the group.

For the presentation of the report the team should be based on material that express originality and creativity. The report should have a brief introduction, development and conclusions. In the introduction the essential aspects should be reflected according to the importance of the topic, in the development they should reflect the summary of the essential ideas extracted from the oriented bibliography and in the conclusions they should explain how the realization of the work has influenced on their formation.

All teams will come prepared for the presentation of their works, from the six teams one will be selected, to present the report and the rest will function as opponents, which will permit the interchange, the necessary valuation for the success of the work.

The work should be carry out in a period of time of fifteen days and required the participation and mastery of the thematic of all members of the team.

To the development of the work if is very important to consult all the oriented bibliography.

At the Time of Evaluating the Following Indicators Should be Taken into Account

Valuation by the team of the realization of the work and its importance.

Fulfilment during the execution of the work of the individual and group tasks for the sake of the fulfilment of the final objective.

Discipline and organization in the fulfilment of the tasks during the stage of execution.

Interchange of opinions and valuations among the rmembers of the team that favors help cooperation among them.

Mutual demand among the members of the team to the fulfilment of the quality in the activity.

Quality in the summary and elaboration of the final report.

Quality in the presentation beginning with the adequate use of the mother tongue and the selected recourses.

You Should not Forqet that to Summarize you have to

Read the information carefully.

Determine the main ideas in each consulted bibliography.
Classify the ideas according to their importance.

Select general and supporting details.

Order main ideas.

Eliminate complementary ideas.

Write the summary.

Actions to be Developed

1. In the oriented bibliography locate the information about the history of computers.
2. Read the information carefully.
3. Determine the main ideas about the topic in each bibliography, for this, remember to determine the main ideas of each paragraph and then bring all the information
4. Classify the ideas according to their importance and relation to the objective and content of the work according to their opinions.
5. Select those ideas that you consider that are general and which are partials in each oriented bibliography.
6. Order the main ideas selected from each oriented bibliography.
7. Eliminate the unnecessary ideas of the ones extracted from each oriented bibliography.
8. Make a summary beginning with the main ideas extracted of each orientated bibliography.
9. Refer to the importance of this work for your professional formation.
10. Write a report that reflects the main ideas of the topic beginning with the summarized in each bibliography and based on the following aspects:

Computer generations.

Elements that characterize them.

Computer application.

Parts of the computers and their functions

These Activities will be Measure by Means of the Following Indicators

<u>Indicators</u>	<u>Categories</u>
Social Valuation of the Content of The Activity.	Low Middle High
Objectives or Common Goals	Do Not Exist. Exist.
Organization of the Group.	Low Middle High
Group Interaction.	Low Middle High
The Influence of the Group on The Individual.	Low Middle High

The Social Valuation of the Content of the Activity is Considered

High: When the student masters the content of the activity that he does and positively appraise its social importance, when he feels preoccupation and implication in the valuation that others do of their activity. All the previous mentioned regulates the student's behavior consciously.

Middle: When the student masters and valuates the content of the activity that he does. He feels satisfaction before the recognition that others do of their activity.

Low: When the student masters but does not valuates positively the content of the activity that he does, it shows indifferent before the valuation that others emit of his or her activity.

Objectives and common goals:

They exist: When the objectives and common goals are definite with clarity and precision, all members of the group knows them and know what to do to fulfill them, direct its activity consciously to the fulfillment of the same.

They do not exist: When the objectives and common goals are not clearly defined, they know what they want individually but do not organize their activity to their precision and consecution as a group.

Group Organization

High: When there is a defined formal structure represented by the leaders who are loved, respected and followed by the group. All the members of the group follow the disciplinary norms and each of them masters and does the task that he or she has to carry out.

Middle: When there is a defined formal structure represented by the leaders who are not loved, respected, and followed by all the members of the group. Not all the members master and follow the disciplinary norms, and do not do the tasks that are assigned.

Low: When there is a defined formal structure but the group does not accept it. Generally the disciplinary norms followed and the tasks assigned are not done.

Group Interaction

High: There is a high index of interaction where all the members interchange opinions, valuations based on the mutual respect. It permits the taking of collective decisions that favor the function of the group.

Middle: There is a group interaction where not all members share opinions, criticize or value. The taking of collective decisions is difficult and with it the functioning of the group is limited.

Low: Poor group interaction, the majority of the members do not emit opinions or valuations which makes the taking of collective decisions almost impossible, it affects functioning of the group.

The Influence of the Group on the Individual

High: There is a coherent positive influence that contributes to the personal growth of each member.

Middle: There is an influence that favors the formation of qualities of the personality.

Low: The existing influence does not favor the good development of the personality of the members of the group.

In the Development of each Project Work these Indicators will be Evaluated

For the evaluation of the social valuation of the content of the activity the inclusion on the system of questions of the project work will be taken into account, and one of them will be referred to the importance of the development of the activity on their formation. Besides by means of the observation and control put into practice during the stages of orientation, realization and control, we will prove how this indicator is manifested.

Objectives and common goals will be evaluated based on how the team assumes the collective task and the individual responsibility in the fulfillment of it, the same will happen during the realization stages where the implication of each individual on the fulfillment of the common objective will be controlled.

The group organization will be evaluated by means of the manifestation in the fulfillment of the established norms under the direction of the leader, the way in which the task is organized and distributed will measure the responsibility of fulfilling it in the assigned time.

The group interaction will be evaluate starting from the number of interactions that propitiates the way in which the task is organized and distributed in such a way that this contributes to the quality in the fulfillment of the desired objective.

The stage of execution requires continuant control that permits to prove this aim and in the control stage the objective will be materialized.

The influence of the group on the individual will be evaluated beginning with the demands that are outline among the members of the team and how they get imply on the fulfillment of them.

1.4 Description of the Proposal

During the implementation of the proposal a gradual process of ascent was appreciated from the initial state to the one desired during the three moments. (Orientation, execution and control)

During the development of the first project work the transformation of the teams was convened with the students although some of them refused to be part of the teams in which they should be included according to the results of the sociometric test and the affective aspect in the activity of studying. Some isolated students wanted to study with advance students and with certain degree of acceptance and some students did not want to study, this explains the previously expressed.

A persuasive work for the understanding of the necessity of working in teams was carried out. New members should be incorporated to the teams who would be also contribute to the success of the activity. The leader of each team was selected.

The author proceeded to the detailed orientation of the activity, carrying out all the necessary explanations to each team individually, and with the help of the leaders from each team the tasks were distributed. The time in which the activity would be carried out was also established, the date in which the activity will be check by the teacher and the leaders of each team to see the evolution and to reinforce the orientation in the cases that needed it, was also determined. Two weeks after the orientation of the execution, the activity was developed, all the members carried out their individual tasks and the report of each team was presented. The most dynamic students were sure of themselves. They were independent in the expression of their approaches, and the isolated ones showed features of shyness. The first ones tried to impose their approaches, the seconds did not defend theirs, and most of them were carried out on the part of the professor reflexive questions directed to the necessity of a good communication, in respect to the other ones. This facilitated the exchange among them and as at the end we elaborated a collegiated report and organised the way in which it would be presented.

During the presentation the team in charge of presenting the report showed mastery of the activity developed, nevertheless, among the opponents unsatisfied faces were observed, inadequate expressions and others that did not respect other's opinions and interrupted them with comments. Because of this the teacher's pedagogical conduction was necessary, making emphasis on the rules to communicate better. This propitiated a time of discussion and the participation was specially directed to listen to those students that generally remained passive and they were isolated in the activity of studying.

Finally a general valuation was carried out where the students attributed the success of the activity to their appropriate organization and mainly because every body participated which allowed the exchange of opinions and the achievement of the proposed objective, as well as the recognition of the importance of the activity.

1.5 Analysis of the Results

In the development of the investigation the author took into consideration the initial diagnosis, 6 teams constituted the sample representing the 100% of the students from the group.

When the author evaluated the initial state of the group, she got prepared to carry out the activities.

During the development of each activity the students demonstrated great interest and enthusiasm because they were motivated by the topics they should investigate about. Each team developed each activity with success and quality that represents the 100%. Nevertheless few students demonstrated that they know some of the things related to the topics to be investigated.

It was observed that each activity brought substantial changes in the group. This activities organized in teams develop cooperation and strengthen other values such as humanism, companionship, responsibility, among others. There was no positive social valuation of the content of the activity, but as these project works have been carried out, it was observed that these activities were fairly valued, this was evidenced when all the students worked, carrying out good works, but students were also conscious that they would acquire knowledge that will help them as teachers to be.

There were no objectives and common goals in a conscious and organized way, but when students carried out each project work it was observed that these objectives and common goals were formed. It was evidenced that a good cooperation developed among the members of the group, while some were working at the library looking for the information they needed, others were working at the computers labs. The interaction among the members of the teams was good.

Conclusions

After the application of this investigation the author considers that the project work constitutes an effective way not only for the development of the cognitive independence of the students, but also for the development of qualities of the personality such as: responsibility, laboriousness and solidarity.

The instructive-educational effectiveness of the project work depends greatly on the planning, organization and orientation of the activities to be developed, according to the individual and group diagnose.

The proposal applied constituted an alternative for the planning and organization of the project work for the success of a group interaction that supports the acquisition and consolidation of knowledge, as well as the development of solidarity, companionship, as values that we defend in our society.

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