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Implementation of a Project Based Learning Approach for the Senior Year and Fourth Course of Secondary from Henri Becquerel Experimental High School.

Disertación de grado previa a la obtención del título de licenciado en lingüística aplicada a la enseñanza del idioma Inglés

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En tal virtud, declaro que el contenido, las conclusiones y los efectos legales y académicos que se desprenden del trabajo propuesto de investigación y luego de la redacción de este documento son y serán de mi sola y exclusiva responsabilidad legal y académica.

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I want to thank my family for accepting me as I am and teaching me to be free and fair against all odds.

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Thanks to the kids that showed me how important dreams are.

Dedicatory:

To my family and to those faces that might forget me but that I keep in my heart.

ABSTRACT

This Dissertation seeks to show the introduction of Project Based Learning (PBL) in the English program of two secondary levels (4th and 6th years) at Becquerel High School. This is as an 'alternative' pedagogy, which can serve as a precursor of a fundamental paradigm shift: from teaching based on pre-structured linguistic elements and topics listed on a book to learning skills developed through research on student-generated subjects. The following dissertation provides a theoretical framework which includes: First, a brief description of post-modernity and its implications in the way we deal with learners' needs and interests. And second, a review of PBL in terms of the motivational advantages it presents concerning such interests and needs. It is necessary to take into account that the following research corresponds to the initial steps taken to train learners in-group project development during the last six months of their school year. It also analyzes the way each group confronted the approach with different level of connection to the textbook they were meant to use; and tries to discover to what extend learners feel more motivated to use open projects as the main activity in the English classroom. The research showed that over 65% of all learners under study preferred projects and felt they learn more linguistic and study skills through the use of them. Nevertheless, suggestions concerning organization and distribution of work had also high indexes (around 30%). Working on open Projects is more effective in terms of motivation because it shifts the attention of learners from the imposed topics of the textbook to what is relevant and interesting for each one of them within their present reality

RESUMEN

La presente Disertación busca documentar la introducción de Aprendizaje Basado en Proyectos (Project Based Learning- PBL) en el programa de Inglés de dos cursos de nivel secundario (4to y 6to) en el Colegio Experimental Becquerel. PBL es una pedagogía alternativa, que busca servir como precursora en un cambio fundamental de paradigma: desde una enseñanza basada en temáticas y elementos lingüísticos pre-estructurados enlistados en un texto, a la adquisición de destrezas desarrolladas a través de investigaciones sobre temas generados por los estudiantes. La presente Disertación plantea un Marco Teórico que incluye: Primero, una breve descripción de la post-modernidad y sus implicaciones en la forma en la que se manejan las necesidades e intereses de los estudiantes. Y segundo, una revisión de PBL en términos de sus ventajas en el campo de la motivación en referencia a dichos intereses y necesidades. Es importante anotar que la presente investigación corresponde a los primeros pasos dados hacia el entrenamiento de los estudiantes en el desarrollo de proyectos y tiene lugar durante los últimos 6 meses del año escolar. También analiza la manera en que cada grupo confronta el proceso con diferentes niveles de conexión al texto asignado a su curso, y trata de descubrir hasta donde los estudiantes se sienten más motivados al usar proyectos abiertos como actividad central de su clase. Esta investigación muestra que cerca del 55% de la muestra prefieren trabajar con Proyectos y sienten que adquieren más destrezas lingüísticas y de estudio mediante su uso. Sin embargo, pueden notarse también importantes índices de inconformidad en relación a la distribución y organización del trabajo en dichos proyectos (cerca del 30%). El trabajo en

proyectos abiertos es más efectivo en lo referente a la motivación por que redirecciona la atención de los estudiantes desde las temáticas impuestas por el texto hacia lo que ellos consideran interesante y relevante dentro de sus realidades.

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INTRODUCTION

"We must be
the change
we want to see
in the world."



-- Mahatma Gandhi

Nowadays the world lives at an accelerated pace, confronting each one of us with decisions concerning the ever changing role we play in a mass-mediatic and informatic society, where knowledge is no longer taken for granted as a permanent thing but rather, as a construction which scaffolds itself by reassuring or destroying former gregarious or individual beliefs. This is especially significant for those directly involved in a learning process of secondary schools, since this stage is the preparation for the adult life. The question here and now is if education is really aiming to prepare individuals for the life they want to build for themselves or is still seeing learners as empty vases which have to be filled with what we consider "knowledge" (content) in order to perform a role that society has built for them.

Is it possible to incorporate new paradigms? Are we prepared to train learners to be independent? is that a good idea? To what extent can we, should we or are we willing to let learners be responsible not only for expected and planned responsive behavior but also for their authentic displays of teenage curiosity and the human wish to know and show one true self?

Before detailing the problem which generated the present research, it is necessary to briefly give an overview of both the current situation of teenagers regarding their present philosophical framework- if it could be called such- and their consequent ideological position concerning their own education. And secondly, the emerging educational and methodological proposal which aims to address the questions aroused concerning its paradigm in relation to its instructional, social, motivational and formative roles.

During the last few decades, since the massive invasion of computers, reality shows on television and overwhelming amounts of information via media, educators have been trying to find a way to adapt to the post-modern time we live in, Schools have had to compete with the media, the materialistic shallow attitude of society, the apathy and uncertainty that characterize the current historical period. Education is compelled to re-evaluate its role in terms of the importance of skills rather than content and autonomous motivation rather than imposition of "order". Schools must be willing to provide the learners with tools that help them face post-modern times. Allowing them, at the same time, the opportunities they require to

discuss the information and question its validity through their own discoveries and under their own points of view.

However, the problem of education having to adapt to the always changing societies has usually led to newer ways of confronting its role. Thus, throughout the last few centuries, methodology has tried to provide strategies that would enhance the connection between learners' needs and interests and the proposed learning programs. For over 100 years, educators have reported on the benefits of experiential, hands-on, student-directed learning.

Knowing the value of engaging, challenging projects for learners, most teachers, have planned field trips, laboratory investigations, and interdisciplinary activities that enrich and extend the curriculum. "Doing projects" is a long-standing tradition in education. The roots of Experiential Learning lie in this tradition.

Currently, the emergence of a method of teaching and learning called Project –or Problem- Based Learning (PBL) is the result of two important developments over the last 25 years. First, there has been a revolution in learning theory. Research in neuroscience and psychology has extended cognitive and behavioral models of learning—which support traditional direct instruction—to show that knowledge, thinking, doing, and the contexts for learning are inextricably tied. Now we are aware that learning is partly a social activity; it takes place within the context of culture, community, and past experiences.

Research shows that learners not only respond by feeding back information, but they also actively use what they know to explore, negotiate, interpret, and create. They construct solutions, thus they are shifting the emphasis toward the process of learning, beyond content.

In addition, cognitive research has revealed much more about the nature of problem solving. Education has benefited from this research, as teachers have learned how to effectively scaffold content and activities to amplify and extend the skills and capabilities of learners.

The second important development that resulted in the emergence PBL is the fact that the world has changed. Nearly all teachers understand how the industrial culture has shaped the organization and methods of schools in the 19th and 20th centuries. They recognize that schools must adapt to a new century. Furthermore, it is clear that children need both knowledge and skills to succeed. This need is driven not only by workforce demands for high-performance employees who can plan, collaborate, and communicate, but also by the need to help all young people learn civic responsibility and master their new roles as global citizens.

Due to these facts, the need for education to adapt to a changing world is probably the primary reason that PBL is increasingly popular. PBL is an attempt to create new instructional practices that reflect the environment in which children now live and learn.

Despite the fact that current methodology has gone beyond a single approach and is more inclined to use eclectic combinations, research has established the validity of Project Based Learning as an effective tool for learning. A tool that is more connected to the learners' needs, and that, combined with more participative systems of evaluation, is capable not just of getting learners involved but also of guiding them to be independent and autonomous in their process of language acquisition.

Basic Questions:

1. To what extent is school connected with the learners' needs and interests?
2. Does school train learners in the command of the different elements of a Project?
3. How can we both Learners and Teachers be involved in a new motivating process that reviews content and at the same time trains learners in the development and assessment of projects?

Justification

Post modernity has brought new considerations in the role not only of teachers and learners but also of the school structure in itself. The authority of the teachers vanishes as they are placed at the same level than the mass

media and schools become places where "children vegetate without great motivation or interest"¹.(Lipovetsky, 1998).

Advocates of PBL say that the availability of technology that can call up the knowledge of the world's best thinkers with the click of a mouse, that can graph in two seconds what once took hours, and that can put scientific instrumentation in a pocket-sized computer further argues for moving away from century-old models of instruction.

Thus, post-modern education must start shifting to a more reflective sharing rather than instructional role and the use of projects can clearly improve the way learners approach knowledge and enjoy learning. As Bruce Alberts², distinguished cell biologist and president of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), says:

"Everybody is motivated by challenge and solving problems, and we don't make use of that in schools enough, Project-based learning gives everybody a chance to sort of mimic what scientists do, and that's exciting. And it's fun if it's done well."(Alberts, 2005)

Objectives

General:

- To implement a PBL approach within the curriculum of English for the senior and 4th years of secondary school.

Specific:

¹ Lipovetsky, G. (1998) La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo, Anagrama, Barcelona

² Bruce Alberts, current president of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington,

- Help learners organize and select appropriate linguistic contents related to the Topic they choose for a Project in order to complete the requirements of an Upper intermediate level of English.
- Help learners incorporate content of intermediate (4th year) and Upper Intermediate (6th year) text books within their research open projects.
- To facilitate the acquisition of skills in the command of project elaboration according to personal interests and preferences and environmental or personal needs
- To analyze if learners respond better to an open system of use of the textbook (senior year) or to a systematic process of following it in order (4th year).

Hypotheses

1. If the School trains learners on the command of the different elements of an Open Project including the reiterative use of a contextualized linguistic element, learners will be more involved and interested in their language learning.
2. If the suggested methodological process (PBL) allows the learners to choose a specific grammar content freely from a list of content for an Open Project, which includes the reiterative use of such grammar item as a contextualized linguistic element, learners will be more involved and

interested in their language learning process than if such grammatical contents were imposed by the progression in which the book is organized.

Variables.

Independent Variables:

- Suggested methodological process: Project/Problem Based Learning (PBL)
- Free choice concerning specific grammatical items for an Open Project that includes the reiterative use of such item as a contextualized linguistic element.

Depending Variable:

B= learners' involvement and interest in their language learning process.

CHAPTER I

1. PROJECT BASED LEARNING

This chapter is concerned with the theoretical support concerning three main topics. First, the problems aroused by Post-modernity, and its implications in the educational system. Second, once the current situation is established, attention will be shifted towards the need for the learning process to move from content based approaches to more student-centered views of learning such as Situational Language Teaching, Communicative Approach, Task Based Learning; and finally, Project Based Learning as the latest and boldest method regarding students' involvement in the decision-making process of what subject matter "content" should be based on their own interests.

1.1. Post-modernism

One of the clearest explanations of post modernism built upon a contrastive analysis versus modernism is, given by Dr. Mary Klages, Associate Professor of English, University of Colorado at Boulder³

"Modernity is fundamentally about order: about rationality and rationalization, creating order out of chaos. The assumption is that creating more rationality is conducive to creating more order, and that the more ordered a society is, the better it will function (the more rationally it will function). Because modernity is about the pursuit of ever-increasing levels of order, modern societies constantly are on guard against anything and everything labeled as "disorder," which might disrupt order. Thus, modern societies rely on continually establishing a binary opposition between "order" and "disorder," so that they can assert the superiority of "order." But to do this, they have to have things that represent "disorder"--modern societies thus continually have to create/construct "disorder." In western culture, this disorder becomes "the other"--defined in relation to other binary oppositions. Thus anything non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual, non-hygienic, non-rational, (etc.) becomes part of "disorder," and has to be eliminated from the ordered, rational modern society.

³ <http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012Klages/pomo.html>

The ways that modern societies go about creating categories labeled as "order" or "disorder" have to do with the effort to achieve stability. [...]Totality, and stability, and order, are maintained in modern societies through the means of "grand narratives" or "master narratives," which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. A "grand narrative" in American culture might be the story that democracy is the most enlightened (rational) form of government, and that democracy can and will lead to universal human happiness; for Marxism, for instance, the "grand narrative" is the idea that capitalism will collapse in on itself and a utopian socialist world will evolve. You might think of grand narratives as a kind of meta-theory, or meta-ideology, that is, an ideology that explains an ideology (as with Marxism); a story that is told to explain the belief systems that exist.

All aspects of modern societies, including science as the primary form of knowledge, depend on these grand narratives. Postmodernism then is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. In other words, every attempt to create "order" always demands the creation of an equal amount of "disorder," but a "grand narrative" masks the constructedness of these categories by explaining that "disorder" REALLY IS chaotic and bad, and that "order" REALLY IS rational and good. Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favors "mini-narratives," stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability.(Klages, 2007)

In the words of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard⁴ :

"Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward meta-narratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the meta-narrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements--narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the inter section of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable. [...] Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?"(Lyotard, 2004)

Another "modern" statement is the idea that language is transparent, that words serve only as representations of thoughts or things, and don't have any function beyond that. Modern societies depend on the idea that signifiers always point to signifieds, and that reality resides in signifieds. In postmodernism, however, there are only signifiers. The idea of any stable or permanent reality disappears, and with it the idea of signifieds that signifiers

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard: Introduction to The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, <http://www.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/pm/lyotard-introd.htm>

point to. Rather, for postmodern societies, there are only surfaces, without depth; only signifiers, with no signifieds.

Jean Baudrillard⁵, suggests that in postmodern society there are no originals, only copies--or what he calls "simulacra." You might think, for example, about painting or sculpture, where there is an original work (by Van Gogh, for instance), and there might also be thousands of copies, but the original is the one with the highest value (particularly monetary value). Contrast that with cds or music recordings, where there is no "original," as in painting--no recording that is hung on a wall, or kept in a vault; rather, there are only copies, by the millions, that are all the same, and all sold for (approximately) the same amount of money. Another version of Baudrillard's "simulacrum" would be the concept of virtual reality, a reality created by simulation, for which there is no original. This is particularly evident in computer games/simulations--think of Sim City, Sim Ant, etc.

Finally, postmodernism is concerned with questions of the organization of knowledge. In modern societies, knowledge was equated with science, and was contrasted to narrative; science was good knowledge, and narrative was bad, primitive, irrational (and thus associated with women, children, primitives, and insane people). Knowledge, however, was good for its own sake; one gained knowledge, via education, in order to be knowledgeable in general, to become an educated person. This is the ideal of the liberal arts education. In a postmodern society, however, knowledge becomes functional-

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), pp.166-184

-you learn things, not to know them, but to use that knowledge Educational policy today puts emphasis on skills and training, rather than on a vague humanist ideal of education in general. This is particularly acute for English majors. "What will you DO with your degree?"

Not only is knowledge in postmodern societies characterized by its utility, but knowledge is also distributed, stored, and arranged differently in postmodern societies than in modern ones. Specifically, the advent of electronic computer technologies has revolutionized the modes of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption in our society (indeed, some might argue that postmodernism is best described by, and correlated with, the emergence of computer technology, starting in the 1960s, as the dominant force in all aspects of social life). In postmodern societies, anything which is not able to be translated into a form recognizable and storable by a computer--i.e. anything that's not digitizable--will cease to be knowledge. In this paradigm, the opposite of "knowledge" is not "ignorance," as it is the modern/humanist paradigm, but rather "noise." Anything that doesn't qualify as a kind of knowledge is "noise," is something that is not recognizable as anything within this system.

The important concern for postmodern societies is who decides what knowledge is (and what "noise" is), and who knows what needs to be decided. Such decisions about knowledge don't involve the old modern/humanist qualifications: for example, to assess knowledge as truth (its technical quality), or as goodness or justice (its ethical quality) or as

beauty (its aesthetic quality). Rather, knowledge follows the paradigm of a language game⁶, as laid out by Wittgenstein and elaborated by Lyotard

There are lots of questions to be asked about postmodernism, and one of the most important is about the politics involved--or, more simply, is this movement toward fragmentation, provisionality, performance, and instability something good or something bad?

On another level, however, postmodernism seems to offer some alternatives to joining the global culture of consumption, where commodities and forms of knowledge are offered by forces far beyond any individual's control. These alternatives focus on thinking of any and all action (or social struggle) as necessarily local, limited, and partial--but nonetheless effective. By discarding "grand narratives" (like the liberation of the entire working class) and focusing on specific local goals (such as improved day care centers for working mothers in your own community), postmodernist politics offers a way to theorize local situations as fluid and unpredictable, though influenced by global trends. Hence the motto for postmodern politics might well be "think globally, act locally"--and don't worry about any grand scheme or master plan.

The foresaid situation has very serious implications regarding education, since most of what is taught at schools and the way how information is transmitted there follows a "modern" approach which is clearly disconnected to what post-modern learners' needs and preferences are. Such

⁶ The concept is also detailed by Jean-François Lyotard Introduction to The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, <http://www.idehist.uu.se/distans/ilmh/pm/lyotard-introd.htm>

disengagement generates an urgent need for a change in the way we approach “knowledge”.

This need for a change is clearly exemplified by the description given by numerous teachers and philosophers who perceive school as an institution designed for former times.

“Modern schools cannot enclose the atomistic diversity of children that post-modernity brings to light”⁷.(Zacarias, 2006)

“School is the mechanism that modernity builds to enclose children, limiting not just the behavior of their bodies but also the categories in which they elaborate their knowledge”⁸. (Baquero & Narodowski, 1991)

“School doesn't exclude [children] but fixes them to a knowledge transmission device”⁹. (Foucault, 1996)

“Pedagogy constructs norms, states normality, rules. Stipulates which are desirable ideals and which are not”¹⁰. (Baquero & Narodowski, 1991)

Regarding teenagers' ideological position, nowadays, they refuse to accept pre-conceived ideas of what is right and/or wrong and do not see teachers as ultimate authorities in the field of knowledge. Most of the information they are exposed to, comes from other mass-media sources, many times more informed than teachers could ever be. Therefore is not surprising to find comments such as the following:

⁷ Zacarias, Natalia

http://www.infanciaenred.org.ar/antesdeayer/dieciocho_entrega/aportes/zacarias.asp (Diciembre 2006)

⁸ Baquero, R y Narodowski, M. (1991) Normalidad y normatividad en pedagogía, Alternativas Año IV, N° 5.

⁹ Foucault, M. (1996) La vida de los hombres infames, Altamira, Buenos Aires.

¹⁰ Baquero, R y Narodowski, M. (1991) Normalidad y normatividad en pedagogía, Alternativas Año IV, N° 5.

"We face mass media processed childhoods in a consumer world that formulates new rules, where instruction can be found anywhere: cybercafés, McDonald's, shopping malls, bus stations"¹¹.(Duek, 2006)

"New knowledge is developed and legitimized or doomed in different spaces including TV screens that involve both youngsters and adults under the same logic, where "no-experts"-people in general- have a voice they see people alike and show themselves, they are built and rebuilt"¹².(Zacarias, 2006)

"The authority of teachers vanishes as they are placed at the same level than the mass-media and schools become places where "children vegetate without great motivation or interest"¹³.(Lipovetsky, 1998)

For over 40 years, several methodological approaches have tried to connect language learning processes to learners' needs. Starting from linking learning to realistic situations, during the 1960s (Situational Language Teaching), later focusing on the need to communicate – or on communicative functions/notions - as the basis for the Communicative Approach during the 70s¹⁴. Throughout the 80s, the imperative necessity to provide meaningful language input through activities (tasks) resulted in the development of Task Based Learning¹⁵, from which Project Based Learning grew as a bolder view questioning the validity of proposed "content", focusing on the process of learning through investigation rather than on the topics suggested by texts.

¹¹ Duek, C. (2006) "Infancia, Fast food y consumo (o cómo ser niño en el mundo Mcdonald's) en Carli, S. (Comp.) La cuestión de la infancia. Entre la escuela, la calle y el shopping, Paidós, Buenos Aires.

¹² Zacarias, Natalia

http://www.infanciaenred.org.ar/antesdeayer/dieciocho_entrega/aportes/zacarias.asp (Diciembre 2006)

¹³ Lipovetsky, G. (1998) La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo, Anagrama, Barcelona

¹⁴ Richards, Jack C, Rodgers Theodore S. "Approaches an Methods in Language Teaching- Second Edition" (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp 153-155.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 223-227.

1.2 Situational Language Teaching.

The origins of this approach began with the studies on applied linguistics during the 1930s, led by Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby, and it took around 30 years to consolidate their position as an accepted method.

The most important principles of SLT were:

- Language Teaching starts with spoken Language.
- The Target language is the language in the classroom.
- Language points are presented and practiced situationally.
- Selection ensures that general service vocabulary is covered.
- Grammar is graded from simple to complex
- Reading and writing are introduced once sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established

1.3 Communicative Language Teaching

Influenced by Comsky's criticism to structuralism and the incapability of structural approaches to account for creativity and uniqueness as fundamental characteristics of language utterances, several British linguists and the Council of Europe started to pay attention to the role of notions and functions as the basis for the construction of language units.

Thus, throughout the 70s the attention of teachers shifted to a more meaningful, contextualized and trial-error approach focusing on intrinsic motivation and the need to communicate as the central motto for learning¹⁶.

Derived from this view, procedures such as Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) were developed:

- First, the teacher presents an item of language in a clear context to get across its meaning. This could be done in a variety of ways: through a text, a situation build, a dialogue etc.
- Students are then asked to complete a controlled practice stage, where they may have to repeat target items through choral and individual drilling, fill gaps or match halves of sentences. All of this practice demands that the student uses the language correctly and helps them to become more comfortable with it.
- Finally, they move on to the production stage, sometimes called the 'free practice' stage. Students are given a communication task such as a role play and are expected to produce the target language and use any other language that has already been learnt and is suitable for completing it.

The problems with PPP

It all sounds quite logical but teachers who use this method will soon identify problems with it:

¹⁶ Ibid pp 36-47

- Students can give the impression that they are comfortable with the new language as they are producing it accurately in the class. Often though a few lessons later, students will either not be able to produce the language correctly or even won't produce it at all.
- Students will often produce the language but overuse the target structure so that it sounds completely unnatural.
- Students may not produce the target language during the free practice stage because they find they are able to use existing language resources to complete the task.

1.4 Task Based Learning

During the 1980s, the learning process took a turn towards the relevance of communicative, motivating, engaging and meaningful activities involving real communication; such activities were called Tasks.

Tasks are meant to give a sense of achievement, providing input and output processing necessary for language acquisition, where learning difficulties are negotiated and finely tuned for particular pedagogical purposes, conversation being the central focus giving special attention to lexical units and an inductive grammar process. All Tasks should work around negotiation of meaning and the achievement of a final goal¹⁷.

¹⁷ Richards, Jack C, Rodgers Theodore S. "Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching-Second Edition" (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp 223-240

Types of tasks¹⁸:

- Listing
 - o Brainstorming
 - o Fact Finding
- Ordering and Sorting
 - o Sequencing
 - o Ranking
 - o Categorising
 - o Classifying
- Comparing
 - o Matching
 - o Finding similarities
 - o Finding differences
- Problem Solving
 - o Analyzing real situations
 - o Analyzing hypothetical situations
 - o Reasoning
 - o Decision making
- Sharing personal experiences
 - o Narrating
 - o Describing
 - o Exploring & explaining attitudes, opinions, reactions
- Creative Tasks
 - o Brainstorming

¹⁸ Jane Willis, A Framework for Task-Based Learning, Longman ELT

- Fact finding
- Ordering and sorting
- Comparing
- Problem solving
- Development of Projects
- Others

One of the activities considered within Task Based Learning is the development of projects, therefore, TBL is considered a precursor of Project or Problem Based Learning

1.5 Project Based Learning (PBL)

(Also Problem Based Learning)

There is no one accepted definition of PBL. However, Buck Institute for Education (BIE)¹⁹ defines standards-focused PBL as *a systematic teaching method that engages learners in learning knowledge and skills through an extended inquiry process structured around complex, authentic questions and carefully designed products and tasks*. This definition encompasses a spectrum ranging from brief projects of one to two weeks based on a single subject in one classroom to yearlong, interdisciplinary projects that involve community participation and adults outside the school.

More important than the definition itself are the attributes of effective projects.

Outstanding projects:

¹⁹ The Buck Institute for Education (BIE) is a non-profit, research and development organization dedicated to improving the practice of teaching and the process of learning. <http://www.bic.org/>

- Recognize learners' inherent *drive to learn*, their capability to do important work, and their need to be taken seriously by putting them at the center of the learning process.
- Engage learners in the central concepts and principles of a discipline. The project work is *central* rather than peripheral to the curriculum.

Highlight provocative issues or questions that lead learners to *in-depth exploration of authentic and important topics*.

- Require the use of essential *tools and skills*, including technology, for learning, self-management, and project management.
- Specify *products* that solve problems, explain dilemmas, or present information generated through investigation, research, or reasoning.
- Include *multiple products* that allow frequent feedback and consistent opportunities for learners to learn from experience.
- Use *performance-based assessments* that communicate high expectations, present rigorous challenges, and require a range of skills and knowledge.
- Encourage *collaboration* in some form, either through small groups, student-led presentations, or whole-class evaluations of project results.

1.5.1 The Benefits of PBL

Based on evidence gathered over the past ten years²⁰, PBL appears to be an equivalent or slightly better model for producing gains in academic achievement, although results vary with the quality of the project and the level of student engagement. However, as a field, PBL is still in the developmental

²⁰ (pxx.: 2.2.2.1 -8)

stage. For instance, there is not sufficient research or empirical data to state that PBL is a proven alternative to other forms of instruction. .Even though PBL is not appropriate for teaching certain skills such reading or computation; it does provide an environment for the application of those skills.

More important, evidence²¹ shows that PBL enhances the quality of learning and leads to higher-level cognitive development through learners' engagement with complex, novel problems. It is also clear that PBL teaches learners complex processes and procedures such as planning and communicating. Accomplishing these goals, however, requires time for both teachers and learners to master the behaviors and strategies necessary for successful PBL. In Fact, convincing reports have been presented by teachers who consider PBL is a rigorous, relevant, and engaging instructional model that supports authentic inquiry and autonomous learning for learners. Along with encouraging academic proficiency and meeting the traditional goals of education, PBL has important benefits for today's learners. Teachers report that PBL:

- Overcomes the dichotomy between knowledge and thinking, helping learners to both "know" and "do."
- Supports learners in learning and practicing skills in problem solving, communication, and self-management.
- Encourages the development of habits of mind associated with lifelong learning, civic responsibility, and personal or career success.

²¹ Ibid

- Integrates curriculum areas, thematic instruction, and community issues.
- Assesses performance on content and skills using criteria similar to those in the work world, thus encouraging accountability, goal setting, and improved performance.
- Creates positive communication and collaborative relationships among diverse groups of learners.
- Meets the needs of learners with varying skill levels and learning styles.
- Engages and motivates bored or indifferent learners.

However, it is important to point out that as with any teaching method, PBL can be used effectively or ineffectively. At its best, PBL can help you as a teacher create a high-performing classroom in which you and your learners form a powerful learning community focused on achievement, self-mastery, and contribution to the community. It allows you to focus on central ideas and salient issues in your curriculum, create engaging and challenging activities in the classroom, and support self-directed learning among your learners.²²

Despite its risks, a growing group of scholars -among them M.I.T.'s distinguished Professor Seymour Papert- support PBL. They claim that learning is more effective if learners move from hands-on work to abstract thinking by solving real-world problems

²² <http://www.bic.org/pbl/pblhandbook/intro.php>

In a growing number of schools, educators are echoing Papert's assertion that engaging learners by starting with the concrete and solving hands-on, real-world problems is a great motivator. Ultimately, they say, such project-based learning that freely crosses disciplines provides an education superior to the traditional "algebra at 9, Civil War at 10, *Great Expectations* at 11" structure.

A summary of some research made on PBL around the world by the George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF) provides interesting examples of the application of this method:

1.5.2 Project-Based Learning Research

by GLEF Staff²³



Teamwork, technology, and hands-on work are important elements of project-based learning. Credit: GLEF

A growing body of academic research supports the use of project-based learning in schools as a way to engage learners, cut absenteeism, boost cooperative learning skills, and improve test scores. Those benefits are enhanced when technology is used in a meaningful way in the projects. Following are synopses of a range of studies on project-based learning:

²³ <http://www.edutopia.org/> Published: 11/1/2001

1.5.2.1 British Math Study

A three-year 1997 study²⁴ of two British secondary schools -- one that used open-ended projects and one that used more traditional, direct instruction -- found striking differences in understanding and standardized achievement data in mathematics. The study carried out by Jo Boaler, now associate professor of education at Stanford University, found that learners at the project-based school did better than those at the more traditional school both on math problems requiring analytical or conceptual thought and on those considered rote, that is, those requiring memory of a rule or formula. Three times as many learners at the project-based school received the top grade achievable on the national examination in math compared to the regular schools

1.5.2.2 Challenge 2000

In a five-year study²⁵, researchers at SRI International found that technology-using learners in Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project classrooms outperformed non-technology-using learners in communication skills, teamwork, and problem solving. The Center for Learning in Technology researchers, led by Bill Penuel, found increased student engagement, greater responsibility for learning, increased peer collaboration skills, and greater achievement gains by learners who had been labeled as low achievers. The project conducted a performance assessment designed to measure learners'

²⁴ To view this study, you must be a registered user on the Edweek site:<http://www.edweek.org/login.html>

²⁵ <http://pblmm.k12.ca.us/sri/SRIEvaluation.htm>

skills in constructing a presentation aimed at a particular audience. Learners from Multimedia Project classrooms outperformed comparison classrooms in all three areas scored by researchers and teachers: student content, attention to audience, and design. The Multimedia Project involves completing one to four interdisciplinary multimedia projects a year that integrate real-world issues and practices.

1.5.2.3 Cognition and Technology Group

A 1992 study²⁶ of 700 learners from 11 school districts in Tennessee found that learners doing projects using videotaped problems over a three-week period performed better in a number of academic areas later in the school year. The study, by the Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt University, examined student competence in basic math, word problems, planning capabilities, attitudes, and teacher feedback. Learners who had experience in the project work performed better in all categories.

1.5.2.4 Co-nect

A 1999 study by the Center for Research in Educational Policy²⁷ at the University of Memphis and University of Tennessee at Knoxville found that learners using the Co-nect²⁸ program, which emphasizes project-based learning and technology, improved test scores in all subject areas over a two-

²⁶ The study appeared in *Educational Psychologist*, 27 (3): 291-315.

²⁷ <http://crep.memphis.edu/>

²⁸ <http://www.co-nect.com/>

year period on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System. The Co-nect schools outperformed control schools by 26 percent.

1.5.2.5 Does It Compute?

Analyzing data from the math portion of the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress test given to learners nationwide, Educational Testing Services researcher Harold Wenglinsky found that the effectiveness of computers in the classroom depended on how they were used. In his report, "Does It Compute?"²⁹ Wenglinsky found that if computers were used for drill or practice, they typically had a negative effect on student achievement. If they were used with real-world applications, such as spreadsheets, or to simulate relationships or changing variables, student achievement increased. Data were drawn from the samples of 6,227 fourth graders and 7,146 eighth graders.

1.5.2.6 Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound

Three elementary schools in Dubuque, Iowa, showed significant test score gains after incorporating the Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound³⁰ (ELOB) program. At ELOB schools, learners conduct three-to-six-month-long studies of a single topic with an emphasis on learning by doing. After two years in the program, two of the three schools advanced from "well below average" to "well above the district average" on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. One elementary school raised its average score from the 39th to the 80th

²⁹ <http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem>

³⁰ <http://www.elschools.org/>

percentile. After four years in the program, student scores were "above the district average in almost every area." Separate analyses showed similar test score gains in ELOB programs in Denver, Boston, and Portland, Maine.

1.5.2.7 Laptops

Since 1996, ROCKMAN ET AL³¹, an independent research firm in San Francisco, has studied the impact of widespread use of laptop technology on teaching and learning. The focus of the firm's multiyear studies³² has been on dozens of public and private K-12 schools participating in a pilot laptop program sponsored jointly by the Microsoft and Toshiba corporations. Through both observation and feedback from laptop-using teachers and learners, researchers have documented a shift from lectures and other teacher-centered forms of delivery to lessons that are more collaborative and project-oriented. Teachers, researchers note, become facilitators in project-oriented classrooms, with learners increasingly assuming the role of directors of their own learning.

In a 1998 report, researchers note that three-fourths of the teachers who participated in a ROCKMAN ET AL survey reported that project-based instruction had increased since the introduction of the laptops in their classrooms. Among the many reported benefits of this project-based approach to learning are greater student engagement, improved analytic abilities, and a greater likelihood to apply high-order thinking skills.

³¹ <http://www.rockman.com/>

³² <http://www.rockman.com/projects/>

Laptop-using learners also performed better on a ROCKMAN ET AL-administered writing examination. However, the research firm did not identify significant differences in the standardized test scores of laptop-using learners. Researchers offered two possible explanations for the lack of significant improvement in this area: 1. Standardized tests are not designed to reflect the types of learning that laptops support. 2. Because the learners had been using their laptops for less than two years, it might have been too soon to see noticeable gains in areas that are covered by standardized tests.

1.5.2.8 Successful School Restructuring

A five-year study³³ by University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers found that structural school reform works only under certain conditions:

1. Learners must be engaged in activities that build on prior knowledge and allow them to apply that knowledge to new situations.
2. Learners must use disciplined inquiry.
3. School activities must have value beyond school.

In their report, "Successful School Restructuring," the researchers at Wisconsin's Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools found that even innovative school improvements, such as portfolio assessment and shared decision making, are less effective without accompanying meaningful student assignments based on deep inquiry. Researchers analyzed data from

³³ <http://lanes.panam.edu/journal/library/Vol1No1/success.html>

more than 1,500 elementary, middle, and high schools and conducted field studies in 44 schools in 16 states between 1990 and 1995.

1.5.2.9 Union City, New Jersey School District

The Center for Children and Technology at the Education Development Center, Inc., monitored a two-year technology trial³⁴ that was first implemented in the district in September of 1993. The study found that after multimedia technology was used to support project-based learning, eighth graders in Union City, New Jersey, scored 27 percentage points higher than learners from other urban and special needs school districts on statewide tests in reading, math, and writing achievement. The study also found a decrease in absenteeism and an increase in learners transferring to the school. Four years earlier, the state had been considering a takeover because Union City failed in 40 of 52 indicators of school effectiveness.

1.5.2.10. Developments of the first two years in Problem Based Learning³⁵ within the Hong Kong Institute of Education³⁶

Besides the research done by GLFE and more into the field of ELT the Bed programs at HKIE evolved from an established teacher-training program at Certificate level to a Degree status involving a parallel evolution of curriculum and pedagogical practice based on PBL.

³⁴ http://www.edc.org/CCT/ccthome/tech_rept/CCTR3/CCTR3.html#ex

³⁵ <http://www.google.com.ec/search?hl=es&q=Current+Developments+in+Problem+Based+Learning&btnG=Buscar&meta=>

³⁶ <http://www.ied.edu.hk/>

An evolving context

Following a decade of constant economic growth in Hong Kong (1987-97). Hong Kong Government addressed the issue of upgrading school education by expanding the opportunities for a graduate teaching profession (Chief Executive Address, 1997). As the major provider of teacher-training in Hong Kong, five former Colleges of education were combined to form the HKIEd and this Institute upgraded to degree awarding status 1 from a Cert. Carried along with this process, teaching staff have responded by upgrading their own qualifications¹³⁷ and their course teaching Bachelor of Education Honors degree programs in Primary school teaching (BEd) offered by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd).

The process

Although free to choose any one of these three research Problems (classroomgender-attention exercise: “How do I learn?” or “Moving from Secondary to Tertiary education”) all learners were required to report not only their findings but in addition, a critique of the research methodology. Their presentations provided a context for enhancing language skills in tandem with relevant presentation IT-skills. The critique of the research methodology provided a context for learners to practice being knowledge ‘questioners’. Subsequent to their assessed presentations, invited reporting groups presented their research findings at the International Teacher and Education Conference (1999).

³⁷ Of the full-time staff, 65% are currently studying for PhD level qualifications.

Assessment was based on three set 'targets': a written research Proposal, an oral presentation of the research Project (to local conference standard) and a final written research Report (following local Conference guidelines). Grading of each of these three 'targets' is by means of set descriptors. The three 'targets' and set descriptors were issued to all learners in their first class meeting.

Pedagogy in the class meetings was student/group-centered: groups self-reported to the class; the use of power-point encouraged focused presentations. This combination of self-reporting via computer files facilitated 'drafting/re-drafting' and encouraged the perception of 'research' rather than being strictly linear as a process which is essentially a spiral. Redrafting was not seen as an 'error' rather than an essential part of the progress of good research, indeed of becoming good learners.

In the second year of the experience, in addition to providing the assessment descriptors and the nature of the 'problem' in the first class meeting, all learners received a Module timetable listing a projected analysis of the language skill(s) employed for each class meeting. For example, an input session be coded (listening/questioning/note-taking), a class session may be coded as (speaking/ presentation skills/ listening to critique/ supportive-questioning). Presenting such an analysis to learners served to recall that this activity had an underpinning focus on language.

The research on the process could mention at least five points in respect of good language learning:

1. Language learning as a developmental process;

Dynamic interplay between empathy (of the teacher who monitors and encourages) and lowered inhibition (of learners) in this project has helped the latter to mobilize their linguistic resources, culminating in the attainment of self-selected goals in two domains – cognitive (e.g. how to present their findings) and affective (e.g. surged confidence manifested in the learners' presentation of the research at the 1999 International Teacher and Education Conference).

2. Language learning as a process of negotiation;

The boost to learners' confidence can be ascribed to the diminution of fear, without the learner having to flinch at every missed ending or wrong form. Equally valid is the claims that, as the case studies reveal, the Problems give leeway to learners to negotiate learning routes. In more specific terms, what they do and how they proceed are primarily at the discretion of the learners with the teacher as facilitator.

Learners are empowered to select for themselves how best they could exploit the Problems and when they choose to terminate certain approach perceived to be less profitable.

3. Language learning as a decision-making process

Learners show they have developed study skills (e.g. IT skills in presentation), are able to pursue learning outside class (in a non-conventional setting) and negotiate a learning agreement with themselves and others.

4. Language learning as a meaning-focused activity

What is more encouraging in the research Problems is that multiple role-playing (e.g. student as learner, researcher, presenter; teacher as facilitator, listener, co-presenter) permits meaningful transaction to be conducted with a variety of strategies (e.g. language counseling skills, Kelly, 1996) across varying domains, linguistic, academic or affective. A widening of the role of the learner as an equal interlocutor in the process results not only in power-sharing, but also in meaning-making.

5. A non-linear process.

There are stages in learning when explicit instruction is a prerequisite, when form focused practice draws maximum language benefits and when communication is geared towards notions and functions. This research has shown just such needs to be met but it goes great deal further than mere notional or functional competence. In fact, it also promotes social competence – language helps to share feelings, to establish relations, to negotiate meaning.

In the view of some socio-linguists: "language is not an organism or a passive reflection, but a social institution deeply implicated in culture, in society, in political relations at every level" (Joseph & Taylor, 1990). This view supports the notion that language is used for meaning negotiation, that it does not or need not proceed in neat steps and that participants may choose to abandon or adopt specific approaches or strategies without detriment to the learners' progress.

Conclusion

Dr Victor Forrester, from the Department of Education Studies, Baptist University, Hong Kong provided a very clear conclusion to the work developed at HKIE:

"The introduction of Problem based learning is not merely an 'alternative' pedagogy, rather it serves as a precursor in education of a fundamental paradigm shift. [...] Education is not static, nor consensus driven for its curriculum is essentially a contestable arena.[...] Language assessment is also a highly contestable arena, that testing has little connection with the real language being used either inside or outside of the classroom. The account of current curriculum and pedagogic developments at the HKIEd which links these two parts, illustrates Problem Based Learning serving to 'move' teacher trainees from being passive acceptors to becoming active, questioners. This paradigm shift within these trainee teachers is one whose longer-term effects we will follow with keen interest. 38"(Forrester& Chau, 1999)

1.3. MOTIVATION

This section will review certain definitions connected to the implementation of PBL and its aims concerning learners' needs and interests as a relevant factor to improve motivation towards the learning process.

³⁸ Forrester, V. & Chau, J. (1999) Current Developments in problem based learning within the Hong Kong Institute of Education. In J. Marsh (Ed.) *Implementing Problem Based Learning Project: Proceedings of the First Asia Pacific Conference on Problem Based Learning* (pp.201-208). Hong Kong: The University Grants Committee of Hong Kong, Teaching Development Project.

1.3.1. Implementation/ Implement:

CARRY OUT, ACCOMPLISH; *especially* : to give practical effect to and ensure of actual fulfillment by concrete measures.³⁹

1.3.2. Content:

During the present paper the word content would be used as: Particular linguistic elements to be studied as part of an specific requirement for the level

1.3.3. Skills:

An ability to do an activity or job well, especially because you have practiced it: Cambridge International Dictionary of English

Proficiency, facility, or dexterity that is acquired or developed through training or experience. See Synonyms at ability. Dictionary.com

A skill is an ability, usually learned and acquired through training, to perform actions which achieve desired outcome.⁴⁰

1.3.4 Interests:

[C] Your interests are the activities that you enjoy doing and the subjects that you like to spend time learning about.⁴¹

³⁹ . Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 10th Edition.

⁴⁰ Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

- the feeling of a person whose attention, concern, or curiosity is particularly engaged by something: *She has a great interest in the poetry of Donne.*
- something that concerns, involves, draws the attention of, or arouses the curiosity of a person: *His interests are philosophy and chess.* power of exciting such concern, involvement, etc.; quality of being interesting: *political issues of great interest.*

1.3.5 Need:

[S or U] the state of having to have something that you do not have, especially something that you must have so that you can have a satisfactory life. ⁴²

need is the psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a goal and the reason for the action, giving purpose and direction to behavior. ⁴³

1.3.6 Project:

A **project** is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service. In the definition "temporary" means any project will have a start date and end date, doesn't mean short in duration. Unique means the product or service at the end of the project should be some thing different than the existing (Can be an invention or an innovation.). It can also comprise an ambitious plan to define and constrain a future by limiting it to set goals and

⁴¹ Cambridge International Dictionary of English

⁴² Cambridge International Dictionary of English

⁴³ Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

parameters. The planning, execution and monitoring of major projects sometimes involves setting up a special temporary organization, consisting of a project team and one or more work teams. A *project* usually needs resources.⁴⁴

1.3.7 Open Project:

During the following research, the term Open Project will be frequently used to refer to projects where learners could choose their specific theme of research of their choice without any restraint.

The connection to learners' needs and interest through the use of projects based on topics they freely wish to research about results in higher motivation towards learning and a deeper involvement with the subject.

⁴⁴ Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

CHAPTER II

2 Methodology

2.1 Field Study

2.1.1 Sample:

The research will take place in the North of Quito at Henri Becquerel Experimental High School with two mixed ability groups: one of 42 senior year learners and another of 40 4th year learners, during the second half of the school year, starting December 2006 to July 2007.

The senior year universe is formed by 14 boys and 28 girls, whose ages are from 17 to 18, taking an Upper-Intermediate Level of English for the second year in a row. In order to reinforce this level they have six periods of class of 45-minutes a week, using an Oxford University Press textbook called Countdown to First Certificate which will be used as guideline for content or rather as a grammar reference material to be used freely by learners according to their own perception of needs. Hence each group of learners will choose any unit from the book as the grammatical item to be first presented to the class and later applied to their particular research project.

The 4th year class has 12 girls and 28 boys, ages 14 to 16, taking Intermediate level for the first time. They have seven 45-minute periods of class a week, using an Oxford University Press textbook called All Stars

which will be used in its regular order. Therefore, the grammar item used on the project corresponded to the unit under study at the moment of development.

During the last five months of the 2006-2007 school year, learners from 4th and 6th years of secondary school at Becquerel High School were introduced to the use of Projects (PBL) as the main classroom activity in the English language class, the process aimed to train learners in the structuring of a project as the first stage of implementation of PBL.

The process was intended to allow learners the most freedom possible in terms of their approach to group project work in order to rise awareness of certain requirements of such work, and to focus the research on the differences created by the two ways in which books were used.

The following stages of the implementation (planned to be fully operational in two years time) will be generated from the analysis of the results from the present research.

2.1.2 Type of Information:

The following research is scientific since it seeks and processes bibliographical, technical and statistical evidence found in surveys, interviews, rubrics, etc.

2.1.3 Compilation Instruments:

Interviews

Surveys

Bibliographical research

Audio Recordings

Anecdotes

Rubrics

2.1.4 Techniques:

- Bibliographical research on methodology and post modernism,
- Internet research on PBL,
- Individual and group recordings and rubrics
- Individual surveys, interviews, anecdotes and diaries

2.1.5 Research methods:

Since the results will not necessarily imply a final description of phenomena but rather information that concerns our observation group, most of the process will be a synthesis, nevertheless if any of the findings calls for a

deeper reflection they will be subject of analysis. The results will be presented in a descriptive manner using graphs and summaries when applicable.

The following is an Explorative/Descriptive research since PBL within the experimental model of Becquerel has never been applied before and, on the other hand, concerning the motivation and interests, the results will be processed and presented in the form of a scientific description

2.2 Objectives of the Research

2.2.1 To involve learners in a process closer to their interests and needs through the use of open projects.

2.2.2 To evaluate their response to this new approach, in terms of their involvement and their linguistic skills.

2.3 Henri Becquerel Experimental School Institutional Project.

Henri Becquerel has been an experimental school since 2001 and both the primary and secondary levels work within a constructivist model.

In the case of Secondary School the last two years are organized in 2 specializations: Science of Society and Science of Nature. Each class of the senior year ("A" and "B") has around 20 learners (around 40 Learners altogether) and they separate for the specialized subjects. They also take 6 elective subjects: 3 the 1st term (September-January) and 3 the 2nd term

(February-June). Four of these elective subjects are in Spanish and two are in English.

The fourth year of secondary has about the same number of learners (40) again separated into two classes ("A" and "B") but no special separation or distribution. It might be interesting to point out that most learners in 4th are men whereas in 6th most are women.

English is a compulsory subject. All learners have to take it in their mixed classes during 6 periods of 45 minutes a week. By the end of secondary they are meant to achieve an Upper Intermediate level of English.

The policy at school is to encourage creativity and "learning for Life" trying to teach learners Whys and What for of all content. Thus, the school offers plenty of extra curricular activities and learners are involved in the decision making of many of the activities undertaken by the institution.

Concerning the role of teachers as decision makers in evaluation we might say that teachers have the freedom to build their own programs and apply the methods they find suitable as long as they fulfill the established standards and all projects are carried out under the supervision of both the department's Head and the Academic Commission. Regarding the grading system, it works with global percentages as follows:

GRADE	PERCENTAGE	GRADE	PERCENTAGE
A	91% - 100%	D	61% - 70%
B	81% - 90 %	F	> = 60%
C	71% - 80%		

Within this framework it was possible to suggest a procedure for the elaboration of projects as a core activity in the English learning process with links to the proposed grammars for both Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate level.

An outline of the suggested process for the elaboration of projects was presented to the English department coordination at the end o the first term of the 2006-2007 school year, and based on that approval the research started in February 2007.

The information provided above served as guidelines for a process which had a smaller scale and more limited resources.

2.4 The Projects

2.4.1 Logistics

During the first term this year, learners were significantly disconnected to the material that was being presented to them through the textbook. Most of the

time they found the unit activities boring and pointless and the topics dealt with were not entirely within their field of interest⁴⁵.

The prior year students from the senior year had completed an upper intermediate textbook, and in order to reinforce their mastery of the level, this year learners had to work with another textbook for upper intermediate with more exam type activities. Nevertheless they were not meant to take any examination this year since most of them had taken a sample FCE test in 5th course. This allowed considering the possibility of putting aside the exam preparation program and replacing it with a boulder approach. This new approach would try to train learners on project development while keeping the exposure and use of the language closer to their fields of interest and also more authentic material rather than simplified artificial grammar oriented texts.

Thus, a list of content meant to be studied throughout the book was simplified into a checklist⁴⁶ in order to make sure we covered the contents of the textbook. Learners were instructed to choose, from the checklist, the grammar point they felt like reinforcing and incorporate it into their project both in their written report as well as in their oral presentations. Their command of such structure was ensured by the preparation that each group had to do on that grammatical point in order to have a grammar review session. In these sessions learners had to present to the rest of the class how their specifically chosen grammar worked and assign some reinforcement

⁴⁵ See Initial Survey Chapter IV

⁴⁶ Annex 1

activities(which included text book and workbook tasks and internet references for free practice

Therefore, the text book became a reference material learners could access in no particular order but which contents were to be presented to the class through short concise reviews prepared and directed by their peers.

A parallel experiment was carried out with the learners from 4th years with a slight variant which was the use of the textbook in the order it was presented. Therefore, grammar preparation session were not part of their schedule and a more "progressively organized" process of incorporation of the different structures into the reports and presentations of projects was obviously guaranteed.

It is important to mention this variant since the data analysis will also try to compare both groups in terms of their involvement to see to what extend the open use of the textbook had a better or worse effect in the way learners feel concerning their learning of the language.

Once the grammar referential checklist was structured, a procedure for the elaboration of the projects was suggested as a series of sessions which would serve as the structure for the work in projects throughout the second term.

The following summary was presented to both the authorities and learners and was put up on the bulletin board in each class

2.4.2 Procedure for the development of Projects:

A systematic development of the projects will be carried out in 7 sessions, which will require from 11 to 14 hours -approximately 2 weeks-. Unless, for some reason, it either requires more time or is delayed or postponed expecting the projects to be no longer than 3 weeks.

Session 1 (1 Hour)

1. Get grouped
 - 1.1. Groups might be organized freely, by learning style, by abilities, for support, to develop leadership.
2. Select a grammar point from checklist.
3. Choose a topic.
4. Set Objective.
5. Propose result.
6. Set Chronogram.
7. At home: Research, surveys, interviews

Session 2 (2-3 hours)

8. Grammar class preparation
 - 8.1. Presentation
 - 8.2. Practice
 - 8.3. Production
 - 8.4. Homework
 - 8.5. At Home: Find Grammar exercises on the internet for reference

Session 3 (2–3 hours)

9. Grammar class presentations
10. At home: Present survey & interview questions for approval then apply them.

Session 4 (1 hour)

11. Grammar Feedback (Tutorial session with the Teacher)
 - 11.1. Peer Assessment on grammar classes.
 - 11.2. Check Homework and clarify grammar points

Session 5 (1 hour)

12. Present & Discuss Draft
 - 12.1. Justification
 - 12.2. Background
 - 12.3. Data process
 - 12.4. Questions for Quiz.
13. At home: Optional: Send PPP or any other product to be checked and edited before the presentation.

Session 6 (2–3 hours)

14. Presentation of projects
 - 14.1. Bibliographic
 - 14.2. Field
 - 14.3. Lab
 - 14.4. Peer assessment

Session 7 (1 hour)

15. Quiz!! (Feedback Evaluation)

15.1. Questions on presentations

15.2. Grammar review

2.4.3 The Sessions:

2.4.3.1 Session 1: Getting Started

This was probably the most open and intense session. Learners would usually choose who to work with and the topic. They would also set their own schedule within certain parameters, distribute responsibilities, and when applicable they would set their questions for field research.

A significant amount of the interaction among learners took place in Spanish. However, learners did not have any problem when they were interacting with the teacher in English neither when informing him about their topic and ideas nor when presenting their written plan⁴⁷.

The openness of these sessions generated certain difficulties. For once the noise level rise considerably and it appeared to be quite messy though a lot of work was being done. Furthermore, the topics were never censored and the authorities felt slightly concerned when issues such as abortion, suicide and

⁴⁷ Annex 3.3

homosexuality were explored. Though, in all cases learners showed a very scientific (non-biased) approach to research.

2.4.3.2 Session 2: Grammar

During the second session learners were to agree in the way they would present grammar, select the practice exercises from textbook, workbook and grammar reference books⁴⁸ both for class work and homework

Again, the issue here was the extent to which learners responded to their own needs and interests in terms of reinforcement. In this session, learners were to choose the grammar point from the checklist trying to relate their needs with the topic of -the project.

Unfortunately, reflecting on their own needs in terms of grammar was something they had not been trained on and their choices were frequently random or based on simplicity.

Learners also questioned their ability to prepare a presentation for grammar without close supervision and it became hard for the teacher to dedicate all the time each group required. Nevertheless, the groups understood the grammar they were to use within its appropriate context and were able to give clear explanations when required. Their choice of exercises was also quite appropriate and relevant to the grammatical points.

⁴⁸ Grammar in Use, Betty Azar, or any other material available in the Library

This session tended to be a lot quieter but group-work was also involved so the impression of mess and the inevitable change of subject, to talk about whatever they felt like, used to appear. This happened specially if the teacher was unable to satisfy the requirements of a group immediately. Thus, the facilitating role became quite stressful and the dependence on teacher's approval became an issue specially because learners felt they did not have the capacity to "understand" - review – the grammar on their own; despite the significant previous exposure they had had to the same structures for the last two years.

2.4.3.3 Session 3: Presenting Grammar

This was probably the most questionable part of the process due to, first, the lack of security showed by the learners concerning their ability to present the grammar and make themselves understood and second, the noticeable low interest during presentations evidenced in most people from the class.

In term of the completion of exercises and the monitoring of reinforcement activities, most learners were either irresponsible with the work or unaware of the importance of it.

2.4.3.4 Session 4: Grammar Feedback

The feedback sessions turned out to be quite mechanic since most of the time was dedicated to review workbook exercises and grammar practice tests

The time from the assignment of Homework (session3) to the revision was really short and the time left for discussion of problems was too limiting.

2.4.3.5 Session Five: Drafts!⁴⁹

By the fifth sessions, learners had most of the work done in terms of their justification bibliographical research, their field work already tabulated and the 3 questions per group that would be used to build the quiz of session 7.

The only problem that could be pointed out was that the student who knew more did most of the work and since no control was designed to monitor the roles, in some cases, certain learners did all their drafts and others none.

2.4.3.6 Session six: Presentations

This was probably the most rewarding part of the process; learners were very enthusiastic about presenting what they found and what they thought.

There was a variety of ways in which learners presented their findings: debates, short plays, paintings, experiments and inventions but most of them were prepared as a power point presentation (PPP)

Initially, as expected, presentations were not very fluent but as more projects were developed, learners became a lot more confident and some learners ended up presenting their projects without having to read from the PPP(Power point presentation).

⁴⁹ Annex 3.4

Regarding the attention paid to presentations, it is important to mention that the only issue here might have been that some topics were not considered interesting by all learners. Nonetheless, since learners were to take a quiz on the presentations they tried to get the answers for it from the information presented

2.4.3.7 Session 7: Quiz!

Every group had presented 3 questions concerning their research (session 5) that were answered in the report presentation (session six). One question per group was chosen in order to build a short quiz that served as a listening evaluation.

The information required in this quiz could be general or very specific and since not all learners remembered the information from the first groups that presented or were sometimes absent during presentation time we had a short review session (20 minutes) where all the questions were answered and then from there the quiz ones were chosen.

By this session student had already presented their final report which included their analysis, conclusions, recommendations, references and annexes plus all they had presented on previous sessions (corrected if necessary).

It's important to mention that learners could usually send drafts, presentations, reports and even answers to the quiz though internet either for a reviewing prior to due date or for the grade.

2.4.4 Evaluation Process

Once the procedure was established, a grading grid was designed in order to standardize the way the work was to be graded and to carry out a transparent and participative evaluation of each project. Such assessment system complied with the school requirements in terms of the range for grades.

The value given to each part of the process was originally 5 points for each and all items. During the research, this value was negotiated in order to assign more points to the harder work: drafts, reports⁵⁰, oral presentations and quizzes.

6TH			Name	P
Theme	1	Theme	Topic	5
	2	Objective	Aim to do:	5
	3	Product	Presentation/Campaign	5
	4	Chronogram	Dates & Responsibilities	5
	5	survey/Int. Qs	Asked in field research	5
Date 1	T1	GRADE 1	Theme Total:	25
Draft	1	Justification	Why that topic?	5
	2	Background	B/I Researched info	5
	3	Questions	For Quiz	5

⁵⁰ Annex 3.5