

PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS: AN ALTERNATIVE TO PROMOTE CREATIVE LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

PROYECTOS PARTICIPATIVOS: UNA ALTERNATIVA PARA PROMOVER EL APRENDIZAJE CREATIVO DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS

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ABSTRACT

Creativity its development and stimulation in XXI Century is still a need in Cuban Higher Education that needs to be solved through the direction of the teaching learning process. There are huge numbers of literatures that recognize the importance of this capacity in the students and specifically in the teaching learning process of foreign languages. The practical proposal of the present investigation was carried out with 1st year pre-service English language teacher, in Las Tunas University. The main objective was to implement the use of participatory projects in the classroom to develop and stimulate creativity. The projects were carried out through stages students have to follow during its realization. We considered important definitions and a literature review to analyze and support ideas with different research related to the same field of creativity and projects. After the implementation of the projects the results we obtained were satisfactory in the development of creativity as a complement in the teaching learning process of foreign languages.

Key words: Creativity, participatory projects

RESUMEN

La creatividad su desarrollo y estimulación en el siglo XXI es todavía una problemática en la educación superior cubana que necesita ser solucionada a través de la dirección del proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje. Existe una gran variedad de literatura que reconoce la importancia de esta capacidad en los estudiantes y específicamente en el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. La propuesta práctica de la presente investigación se realizó con estudiantes de 1er año de la carrera de lenguas extranjeras, en la universidad de Las Tunas. El objetivo principal fue implementar el uso de proyectos participativos en el aula para estimular y desarrollar la creatividad. Los proyectos tuvieron en cuenta los pasos que los estudiantes debían seguir durante su realización. Consideramos importantes definiciones y una revisión bibliográfica para analizar y apoyar nuestras ideas con varias investigaciones relacionadas con el mismo campo de la creatividad y los proyectos. Luego de la implementación de los proyectos los resultados obtenidos fueron satisfactorios en el desarrollo de la creatividad como complemento en el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras.

Palabras claves: creatividad, proyectos participativos

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The last two decades have witnessed an escalation of interest in the nature, place and importance of creativity as an important concept and aim within the teaching learning process of foreign languages. Learning foreign languages has become a fundamental issue in the cultural development of all generations and which prepare the students for being able to participate successfully in the actual society of knowledge, characterize for being diverse and changing. It is a fundamental tool for the affective, communicative, social and professional development. It allows students to attain a higher level of independence, originality, flexibility and fluency in social processes that they participate as active members. Society is willing for an integral professional, regarding for their way of thinking, feeling, and acting. The development of creativity in students of foreign languages is important for their future performance and for the acquisition of knowledge.

Creativity is everywhere; in the way we see, observe and solve practical and theoretical problems all the way creating things for the sake of their aesthetics. In recent years, the field of foreign language teaching learning process has begun to see creativity's potential for the foreign language classroom as well as the necessity for it due to the increasing value it is gaining. It has become our responsibility as foreign language teachers to provide creatively stimulating teaching and thus better prepare our students for life beyond the classroom. Težak (2015) "Creativity has become a buzzword in ELT research", but studies focusing on what is actually going on inside the creative thinking process when it meets English as a foreign language are still few and far between. One of the interesting questions here is how we as teachers can improve and stimulate the use of creativity in a foreign language classroom.

Težak (2015) it was demonstrated that lately there are so many facets of creativity to measure and so much controversy as to what and how these tests measure that they remain an ever emerging point of discussion. This again indicates the complexity of what creativity actually is and how much more observation needs to be undertaken in order to understand it and apply it usefully in the classroom. This study aims to shed light on at least a fraction of the processes that occur in creative thinking and foreign language learning.

The development of creativity it is known as a way of activity with the objective of changing the social reality in relation with the formation of the professionals of education. It had been defined taking into account different factors especially to the object of the specific science and the core of the investigation. Several definitions for creativity may be found in different bibliographical sources in the international and national field. In the definitions provided by most of the authors there is a great attention to the cognitive aspects and the solution of problems, though some others emphasize on the affective components such as motivation and interest, others .emphasize on the fact that it is a product, other studies were focused to explain how in the process it is produce the cualitative change that allow to discover something new. There are many authors that saw the topic as a phenomenon that can be develop through a process or a creative product. An important contribution constituted the works of Mitjás (1995) who refered to the psychological elements as essential in the regulation of the creative performance such as motivation, cognitives capacities, selfdetermination, selfvaloration, security, questioning, reflection, elaboration, the capacity to take decissions, to make projects and flexibility.

For Torrance (1995) the creative thinking was essential. He elaborated the tests of creative thinking in which are determined, fluency, originality and elaboration. He proposed four constituents of creativity as follow:

- (1) Creative fluency, in which the person is able to produce a large number of ideas.

- (2) Flexibility, in which novelty and variation in generating ideas are frequent.
- (3) Originality, which is the ability to produce unique and unusual ideas that are statistically infrequent.
- (4) Elaboration, which means developing ideas to produce many details.

The results of the tests were valuable but this tendency was criticized for many authors.

The authors of this investigation agree with Martínez. (2009) that considered that it is essential to assimilate the conception of creativity from the personal characteristics as a process, product, novelty and also in correspondence with the existence social situation, though there are conditioning of social character that can delay or accelerate the process of formation of a creative person or a result. This author strengthens the epistemology analysis, on a multilateral way. In this sense creativity is oriented in many directions, in which are referred to the person (the person, their learning style, characteristics), to the process (to find relations, to establish phases), to the product (a new and valuable result), to the novelty (the original, the new relation), to the social situation (requirements from the sphere of performance, activity, communication and independence). In the case of foreign languages lessons we can integrate product and novelty and we consider that independence should be present in the person.

Hrešč (2016) Creativity in education is not only a tool used to motivate students and enhance the learning process, but also something that has to be promoted and developed. We live in a world of constant changes and creativity is seen as a social dynamism.

Creativity in the Teaching Learning Process of Foreign Languages

By providing rich and varied contexts for students to acquire, develop and apply a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills, the curriculum should enable students to think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better. It should give them the opportunity to become creative, innovative, enterprising and capable of leadership to equip them for their future lives as workers and citizens. It should enable students to respond positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities, to manage risk and to cope with change and adversity.

Students need time to discover, to explore, to experiment, to learn from mistakes, to adjust and realign their ideas, time to make corrections, time to dream. These are lifetime skills far beyond the measurement of common academic standards, well into and beyond our tomorrows. One of the major aims of education is cultivating creativity, because the root of a creative world is in basic education. A number of studies have been conducted related to the learners' creativity for example; two factors which influence learners' creativity are cultural and social. Cultural in this case refers to learners' access to cultural goods such as, computers, books, dictionaries, painting, pictures, labs and social is related to student's relationships with peers, siblings, parents, and teachers so the context where they are living their experiences of life. Ghanizadeh y Jahedizadeh (2016) found a high correlation between cultural and social factors in learners' creativity.

Creative teaching may be defined in two ways: firstly, teaching creatively and secondly, teaching for creativity, two inter-connected processes that one depends on the other. Teaching creatively might be described as teachers using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, engaging, exciting and effective. Teaching for creativity might best be described as using forms of teaching that are intended to develop students own creative thinking and behavior. However it would be fair to say that teaching for creativity

must involve creative teaching. Teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their students if their own creative abilities are undiscovered or suppressed.

Teaching with creativity and teaching for creativity include all the characteristics of good teaching, including high motivation, high expectations, the ability to communicate and listen and the ability to interest, engage and inspire. Creative teachers need expertise in their particular fields but they need more than this, they need techniques that stimulate curiosity and raise self-esteem and confidence. They must recognize when encouragement is needed and confidence threatened. They must balance structured learning with opportunities for self-direction; and the management of groups while giving attention to individuals. Teaching for creativity is not an easy option, but it can be enjoyable and deeply fulfilling. It can involve more time and planning to generate and develop ideas and to evaluate whether they have worked. It involves confidence to improvise and take detours, to pick up unexpected opportunities for learning; to live with uncertainty and to risk admitting that an idea led nowhere. Creative teachers are always willing to experiment but they recognize the need to learn from experience. All of this requires more, not less, expertise of teachers.

Furthermore, every teacher knows that classes are different. Even if you had to teach one lesson to the same class twice, there would be some differences. Classroom is a place of unpredictable and unexpected; it consists of individuals with different abilities, personalities, attitudes, interests and dreams. Lacking creative thinking, teachers may lack the flexibility to respond to all the unexpected situations in classroom, they may be unable to do much more than follow a course book.

Hrešč (2016) the very nature of language production is creative, what follows are implications of creativity in the process of learning a foreign language. When it comes to the variables that influence language learning, the most important ones are aptitude, motivation, age, language exposure, intelligence and personality traits, while creativity is only briefly mentioned, either as one of the personality traits or a factor that enhances students' motivation. Good language learners are often described as willing and accurate guessers, willing to make mistakes, they constantly look for patterns in language and they are tolerant of ambiguity. As referred Harmer (2001) autonomous, creative and make intelligent guesses.

Two other factors have been acknowledged to contribute to the process of second or foreign language learning, critical thinking and creativity. This capacity should enable the learners to respond appropriately and relevantly to the myriad of situations that can be faced in the day to day life for which no predetermined and fixed language-wise responses are available. In a foreign language classroom teachers need to work taking into account four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) without overestimate none because all are important in the process and specifically for developing creativity there are no differences in the role of creativity in relation to productive and receptive language skills. Some teacher's belief that no creativity is required in receptive skills since nothing is being created when listening to or reading a text; in turn the processes of writing and speaking yield some kind of a product

Harmer (2001) this conclusion is, false listening and reading are also active processes where a person creates meaning using their pre-existing knowledge and expectations. Grammar and vocabulary alone are not enough to grasp the meaning of a text. While reading or listening, people employ different skills, the use of which depends on the type of discourse. Some of these skills are identifying the topic which helps to process the text more efficiently; predicting and guessing the content and what is coming next (and then in

the process of reading or listening these expectations or hypotheses are either confirmed or rejected); interpreting text which means using clues to see what is implied and suggested and go beyond the meaning

Harmer (2001).It can be concluded that receptive skills are not passive and that while reading or listening a certain degree of creativity is required to access the meaning., everything that students discover in the foreign language can be seen as an act of creation but when they produce something original on a piece of paper, they can see the proof of the process. What has to be kept in mind is that receptive and productive language skills should not be separated as what students write or produce orally grows out of what they hear or read. For example a dramatic story can provide stimulus for students to tell their own stories.

Some general factors for its development that can be applied in any classroom are a relaxed and non-judgmental atmosphere where students feel confident, where they do not have to worry about the errors they might make; making public the work students create either in a class magazine, online or on the classroom noticeboard; encouraging students to notice things by asking them to collect data or to look for information outside their coursebooks. A teacher has to be a role model and work with students, not just tell them what to do

Participatory projects to develop creativity

Project based learning will propitiate the development of creative thinking of the students. These projects are special tools for teachers and students to stimulate creativity. It is important to carefully plan it where the students have to produce something new about topics they are interested in, that they have interaction between them, that they look for information, that they feel the nesessity to be prepare, to inform, to help each other, that promote reflection and formation of their own criterium. They are going to design investigations, making explanations, modeling and presenting their ideas to others. This activity allows students to learn by doing and applying ideas because they are going to be engage in real and meaningfull activities that are important to them.

Coffey (2016) Project-based learning is a teaching approach that engages students in sustained, collaborative real-world investigations. Projects are organized around a driving question, and students participate in a variety of tasks that seek to meaningfully address this question. CREANOVA project was a Europea Union project which involved universities, vocational education specialists, and regional governments, creative and technical experts from several European countries. Its objective was to investigate how creativity and innovation is achieved in learning environments, workplaces and design processes. According to the results/findings of this project in developing creativity, students need both freedom and a mentor, a facilitator. Furthermore, it is concluded that collaboration is more important than individual freedom.

Harmer (2001) projects can be organised in a number of different ways but they generally share the same sequence:

1. The briefing/ the choice: projects start when the teacher or the students or the two in combination decide on a topic. Then they define the aims of the project and discuss how they can gather data, what the timescale is and what stages it will go through.
2. Idea/language generation: This is where the students start with the process of idea generation if they were the ones who choose the topic.In this investigation we just take into account this kind of proposal because teacher just give the general topic

and students select from this general topic what are the themes they are going to investigate. It is at this point when students make plans and think about where they can find the information.

3. Data gathering: Students can gather data from different sources. They can consult encyclopedias or go to the internet to find what they are looking for. They can design questionnaires so that they can interview people.
4. Planning: At this point they can start to make a plan of how the final project will be set out. This is where they plan what they are going to say. In our investigation we decide that students always end the project with a written report that will go to the portfolio and also they will do a big presentation.
5. Drafting and editing: This is where a first draft will be produced. This draft will also be self-edited.
6. The result: Finally, the goal at which the whole project has been aiming has been reached.
7. Consultation/tutorial: Throughout the lifetime of a project, teachers will need to be available as tutors, advising, helping and prompting students to help them progress. A frequent problem occurs when students try to do too much in a project, so teachers may need to help them narrow down the focus of their work.

We took into account these steps for the planning, orientation, control and evaluation of the participatory projects, but we considered just the ones that are pertinent in our educational context and specifically one of the changes was in terms of the results because he proposed that projects can be oral or written and we decided both in our projects. The last stage is very important because the teacher has an active role during the projects.

Tejeda (2011) Tutoring offers a possible solution to the demands of higher education while develop processes focus on the students and where teachers acquire a decisive role in the process of orientation, support and advice to the students even to the study so as to life that contribute also, to the integral formation of our students through the realization of personal educative actions that favor the fulfilment of the anticipated objectives of the curriculum.

In these kind of projects we decided that students need to use technology because of the movement of science nowadays these are tools we have in and out of our classrooms everyday such as phones, tablets, computers, foreign language lab, etc. We believe that technologies actually enable young people to be creative. Videos have been a staple part of any language teaching. Because learning is a social activity, teaching methods can scaffold on students' prior experiences and include a focus on community and culture. Students more than ever have an active role in the teaching learning process.

Coffey (2016) Furthermore, because we live in an increasingly more technological and global society, teachers realize that they must prepare students not only to think about new information, but they also must engage them in tasks that prepare them for this global citizenship. Based on the developments in cognitive research and the changing modern educational environment in the latter part of the 20th Century, project-based learning has gained popularity.

Harmer (2001) the advantages of using it in foreign language classrooms are the following:

Students are able to see language in use; they raise cross-cultural awareness, can motivate students, and spark students' creativity. One of the activities he suggests happen after watching a video excerpt, teacher first makes sure that the students understood it. The students then watch it again, this time they have to imagine what would be different if the participants in the video were the opposite sex. Another way of fostering creativity is letting students to film something for themselves. For example, after reading a story they can film one of its scenes.

An ideal language classroom for promoting creativity is:

- a) An environment of trust, sharing, respect, valuing other people's contributions
- b) Large enough for students to be able to move around, communicate more freely, there should be vocabulary posters, mind maps, visual stimuli and realia
- c) A well-equipped room with books, posters, objects that represent English speaking countries
- d) A classroom decorated by the student themselves
- e) Like home where students feel comfortable, safe and self-confident.

Bixby (2016) One way to create a safe environment for sharing, collaborating, and vulnerability is to foster an authentic community within the English as a second language classroom. This does not need to be something we must add to our list of things to do but rather something that, with a bit of thoughtfulness in our planning, can be cultivated through the practice of the English language.

The practice is an essential element to achieve the required communicative competence levels for each academic year and the methods used by the teacher to obtain their purposes. The teaching learning process of a foreign language requires that students feel comfortable during the process though requires validity, vulnerability, interest, spontaneity and automaticity, all of this demand trust. Then students must be creative while learning a foreign language. They are going to be able to practice activities in real contexts where they will have an active role using their ideas and opinions. Teachers should create a creative environment where they consider the cognitive and affective potentialities they have to stimulate in the students. The preparation of every teacher is essential while creating this environment in the classroom because they should favor good relations and the cooperation and communication between students and students - teachers to achieve the objectives of the activities proposed. Teachers have the responsibility and possibility to help students to discover their learning strategies, motivations, interests, aptitudes, and attitudes to achieve their learning. This learning not only referred to contents but to develop the man the society needs with an integral formation.

Glass (2016) Examples of the task that can propitiate student's interaction, collaboration in the classroom are mind maps. This task requires few resources and little preparation. The main requirements are space where students can move around and creativity and imagination. Mind maps can be used for a variety of purposes. The topics you choose can be abstract, they can be controversial, they can be arguments for and against a proposal, they can be students owns opinion about an issue you are discussing in class. In this activity, students must think critically and creatively. They must use the vocabulary and concepts they have studied. They must move purposefully and communicate in English and collaborate. And they, and the teacher, will probably have fun doing all this things.

These kinds of activities are one of the ways to propitiate that our students are active members in the process and increase their interest through the realization of it. Not only in

English even in other foreign languages. Teachers have other possibilities to do the activities, they can make variations and for example they can divide the classroom in groups and give each group a set. Each group will construct its own human mind map, and as a class you can see whether the mind maps are the same, how they differ, and why.

It was stimulating the results we obtained during the preparation and presentations of the projects were the students participate actively and was interesting what students can do and learn when they are interested and motivated. The didactic system must offer varied possibilities for providing evidence of everyone's personal dynamism. If the intention is the formation of creative people, then we need to give the students all the opportunities for their self-realization, organization, education and development. Also teachers may ask the groups to generate its own list of terms and later compare it. It is important to work in another way with the students with lower ability levels giving them the same activity but with another vocabulary easier for them and could be useful to brainstorm set of terms.

The projects must be coordinated and tutored by the teacher that will propitiate the necessary tools for the students to make a successfully task. The results should appear in their portfolios with the objective of fomenting the description of what the student is able to do and to put on record their learning experiences.

Nowadays, to meet social needs we have to achieve unity between the learning activity of the students and their future professional activity so as to reach the desired objective. That calls for the solution of several contradictions such as: those found between the abstract character of the cognitive activity and the object of the professional activity; between the systematic use of the knowledge defined in the professional model and the scattering of its assimilation among the different disciplines; between the individual way of assimilating knowledge and the collective character of their practicum. The criterias exposed in the investigation shows the importance of stimulating creativity in pre-service teachers of foreign languages as a contribution for their future professional performance. This will help them to develop higher levels of communicative competence as well as their spirit of cooperation and help. Teachers need to take into account students characteristics and the cultural information they have at the time of planning the tasks and projects. The use of methods that teach the students how to learn, by living stimulating intellectual experiences which give chance for the reorganization of the information in a logical and scientific way, together with the development of some skills, capacities, intellectual processes and personality qualities may be a way to make learning more effective and useful for everyday life challenges.

Tejeda y Borrero (2011) From the conception of disciplines and subjects in each academic year we may plan project works taking into account the inteligenes that are manifested in our students and plan an interdisciplinary work that stimulate it and develop it, We must reflect how each activity contribute or not to the development of the inteligenes and potentialities of the students and how pre-service teachers can use it in their practicum.

Participatory projects for the development and stimulation of creativity allow solving a need that is frequently present students in the teaching learning process of foreign languages. Also allow the teacher to plan learning tasks guided to develop creativity. The results of the investigation show the importance of developing creativity in the contribution especially in the student's future professional performance. This is considered one of the problems that face students and teachers and its solution depends on the level of creativity and information they have. Participatory projects will help us to favore the linguistic and communicative skills and their spirit of cooperation and help.

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