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Literature in the MFL class. Shakespeare and the generation gap project

Abstract
Lack of motivation is a major concern in language teaching. With the engagement that projects bring into the classroom, success and language learning grow progressively easier. Active learners are the sustaining force of any classroom. As long as students accept literature tasks as relevant and teachers turn knowledge and culture into a journey of adventure and fun, young learners are encouraged to let motivation take hold and say: "Learning literature is worth it".
Keywords: Shakespeare, Jenny Joseph, learning through projects, grammar and communication, generation gap

Resumen
La falta de motivación es uno de los problemas que amenazan el entorno educativo. La actitud participativa que aporta la enseñanza por proyectos permite promover un aprendizaje significativo. El poder dinamizador de los proyectos es sin duda el pilar del éxito en el aula. En el momento en que los alumnos perciben la literatura como un componente valioso para su aprendizaje y los docentes recrean el conocimiento y la cultura literaria en un escenario de diversión y aventura, la motivación y el entusiasmo crecen por lo que oiremos a nuestros alumnos decir: "Aprender literatura merece la pena".
Palabras clave: Shakespeare, Jenny Joseph, aprendizaje por proyectos, gramática y comunicación, salto generacional.

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to popular belief, projects do not involve special talents. A successful lesson so trains students involved that rewards are the ability to communicate fully and effectively in any situation. An accomplished student can only perform well the tasks set with appropriate guidance. Projects involve cumulative learning. To help students to try to fulfill their duties and to develop their capacities, the organization of projects must be planned in accordance with the communicative needs in any interacting situation. We need to promote the desire to try as without it there would be no effectiveness to the language lesson and to the students´ communicative needs. It is interesting to analyze not only what types of activities emphasize communication but also what kinds of tasks are likely to achieve motivation and engagement. All the projects in the world will not make of a student a great learner. For this reason formal instruction must not be neglected. Grammar is therefore the channel of achievement. Language is defined in dichotomous terms. It is divided into grammar and communication. Grammar and traditional tasks give a feeling of security that open-ended, project-based activities cannot give as there is no limit to the manipulation of content and communication.

Projects stimulate effort and the activities set cannot be accomplished without hard work. Repetitive, mechanical tasks involve no effort whereas projects make students dare to succeed. Performance increases with practice. With grammar-oriented activities language is an abstraction. With projects language becomes real. When completing a task the interrelation of a variety of personalities, the setting for the development of simulation and the risks taken in everyday life provide a context for the expression of natural language and communication. If students do not achieve accuracy and immediate results, they tend to set up mental barriers against learning that will make them feel isolated and excluded from the language lesson. Therefore we have to create an environment that is likely to promote self-satisfaction.

Accurate grammar is the standard for teenagers to test themselves against. But we need to make them feel that they can enjoy language. We need to push them to work and to speak without feeling uneasy. There is no language at one end with no functional purpose and reality at the other where real communication takes place. These two worlds are not mutually exclusive. This alienation syndrome, so common in language learning and teaching, needs to be overcome by providing students with the right context where both grammar and communication are logically interrelated. Students

usually have too much practice in abstract learning (grammar tasks) and less practice in decision-making, communicating according to real life needs and every day problem-solving situations. Language does not stay within the narrow limits of grammar. Language evolves, it changes and transforms into a whole cluster of attitudes and perceptions that are influenced by the specific situation in which language is used.

This article has been written in an effort to make students aware of how language evolves and how the connections that prevail between the 17th century and the 21st century world can be successfully perceived. The conflicts and the generation gap that students experience in real life, which can be exploited in the lesson through the use of songs and discussions about personal experiences in their family household, are analogous to the conflicts characters experience in Shakespeare´s literary works and Jenny Joseph´s poems.

The tasks presented here will help us to justify and implement literature in the bilingual classroom. Feelings are universal. They are timeless and the way students feel is no different from the way characters felt in 17th century England as experienced in Shakespeare´s plays. Shakespeare was a master of playwriting but also a master of emotions. Love and hatred, anger and rage, passion and madness are not old-fashioned, boring ideas that were experienced in ancient times and faraway lands. They are real and as such with this project students will have the opportunity to envision literature in general and Shakespeare´s Age in particular with a positive attitude and with the motivation necessary to succeed in language learning.

LESSON PLAN

Title: "*Youth has no age"*

Aimed at: 3rd year of E.S.O.

Time allotted: half a term. Two lesson per week.

Works selected: Shakespeare´s *Romeo and Juliet* and Jenny Joseph´s poem *Warning*.

Objectives:

- To make students aware of the connection between Shakespeare and Josephs´ world and their world and to relate personal experiences.

- To learn to share ideas, to interview another person and to present information to an audience as well as to argue a point of view.

- To write a poem, to describe imaginatively and to respond to a writer.

Competences to be developed: sociocultural, historical and linguistic competence.

Assessment: portfolio of activities.

Task 1. We are going to begin this project with an engaging activity in order to introduce some relevant information about Shakespeare´s life and works. This fun game will work as an ice-breaker for students. This game will be called: "*You are not Shakespeare. I am Shakespeare…*"

Reading endless facts and information about Shakespeare can be a boring experience. To turn it into some light-hearted practice and to hold the attention of young learners, each student in class will be given a slip of paper with some brief information about Shakespeare together with a list of literary insults selected from a variety of his most famous plays.

Getting started. The teacher illustrates the activity and starts the game by offering some general information about Shakespeare. For example: I am Shakespeare: "I have written world famous plays like *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth* and *Othello*". One student stands up in anger and choosing one insult, projected on the wall from the selection of insults listed below, says: "*Away, you three-inch fool*". You are not Shakespeare, I am Shakespeare: " *I married Ann Hathaway and had three children named Hamnet, Judith and Susanna".* Another student stands up and also pretends to be Shakespeare. Beginning with an insult, each student will take it in turns to provide information about Shakespeare to the rest of the class in a fun and engaging way. At the end of this task we can give students five minutes to write down as much information as possible about what they have learnt about Shakespeare. For homework they will be asked to prepare Shakespeare´s curriculum vitae. They will be encouraged to do extra research at home and to find out more relevant information and facts about William Shakespeare, as in the example below.

Curriculum Vitae

Name: *William*

Surname: *Shakespeare*

Place of Birth: *Stradford upon Avon*

Date of Birth:

Marital status:

Studies:

Current employment:

(…)

Selection of Shakespeare´s insults:

"A most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise breaker, the owner of no one good quality."	All's Well That Ends Well (Act 3, Scene 6)
"Away, you three-inch fool! "	The Taming of the Shrew (Act 3, Scene 3)
"I am sick when I do look on thee "	A Midsummer Night's Dream (Act 2, Scene 1)
"I must tell you friendly in your ear, sell when you can, you are not for all markets."	As You Like It (Act 3 Scene 5)
"I'll beat thee, but I would infect my hands."	Timon of Athens (Act 4, Scene 3)
"Thine face is not worth sunburning."	Henry V (Act 5, Scene 2)
"Thou art unfit for any place but hell."	Richard III (Act 1 Scene 2)

Task 2. Students are going to interview the language assistant. Interviews are always enjoyable because they satisfy our curiosity. The assistant is going to pretend to be Shakespeare. In small groups students will be encouraged to write up interesting questions. The assistant will have to do some previous thorough research on Shakespeare´s life and works to answer any possible questions like:

a) *What made you fall in love with your wife, Mr. Shakespeare? Was it love at first sight? Was it an arranged marriage?*

b) *Was your love story similar to the stories we can find in your plays? Are your plays autobiographical?*

c) *Why did you move to London leaving your wife and children behind? Is it because you had an affair with another lady?*

d) *How do you feel about the idea of having men performing the role of women in your theatrical performances?*

e) *Do you think that the burning out of your theater was an accident or an act of revenge carried out by a rival playwright?*

f) *Why do you think you became so famous?*

Task 3. Introducing the concept of the "*generation gap*". Connections with the 21st century world.

Poem by Jenny Joseph "**Warning"** written in 1961: *When I am an old woman I shall/wear purple with a red hat which doesn´t go/and doesn´t suit me. And I shall/spend my pension on brandy and/summer gloves and satin sandals and say/we´ve no money for butter (…).*

We are going to use a modern poem to make students aware of how the generation gap they often experience with their parents can be observed in Shakespeare´s time. We will begin with some quick analysis of this poem. Once read, we shall start by asking students some questions about the general understanding of the poem.

a) What does the poem suggest? Do you expect an old lady to behave in this way? Is her attitude surprising or shocking? In what sense?

b) How would you describe the tone of the poem?

c) What is striking about this lady´s attitude? Is she being moody? Is she behaving like a spoilt brat? Or is she just bold for her age? Is she showing an alarming attitude? Why? Is her behavior against social standards or is she showing vitality and inventiveness?

e) Do you have to behave in a certain way depending on your age? Why/why not?

After a whole class discussion on the meaning of this poem, we can brainstorm a list of the stages in a person´s life: toddler (tiny-tot), elderly, newborn, teenager… Students have to write those stages in chronological order.

Newborn (neonate), baby (infant), toddler, child, teenager, youngster (twentysomething), young adult (thirtysomething, fortysomething), middle-aged (fiftysomething…), elder (senior citizen), centenarian.

Task 4. We are all expected to behave in a certain way depending on how old we are. There are things we are allowed/not allowed to do and that are socially or morally (un)acceptable. We will start the next activity with a quick guessing game.
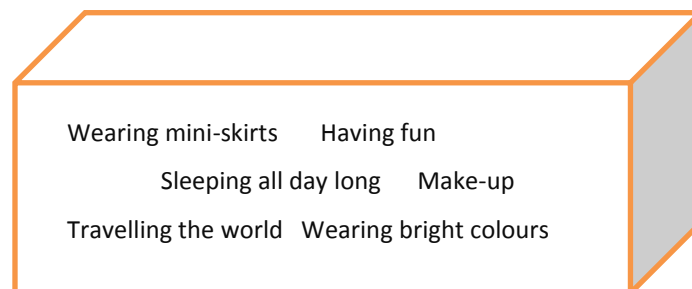
"Mum is my hero. I can get dirty without worrying about my appearance. I am obsessed about my toys and my skinned knees. I don´t have to think about the consequences of my actions". **How old do you think I am?**

Students will be given a card with a specific age (2, 56, 18…). They will have a few minutes to jot down some notes about the things that they *can/cannot/have to/must* do or say according to the age they have been given. Think about how you would say those things according to your age, the tone you are going to use, the attitude you are going to show. Students stand up and mingle. They read their notes to other students in the class who in turn will have to guess their age. With this activity students will have the opportunity to practice a variety of modal verbs.They will be encouraged to use body language, mime and gestures to be more theatrical for some light-hearted practice. For example, you are <u>four months old</u>. What are the things you **can** or you **cannot** do:

I can: Scream all day long   Sleep all the time   Get cuddles and kisses

I cannot: Move around on my own   Get myself understood   Stand on my own feet

Task 5. Follow-up activity. Jenny Joseph´s poem gets students started on writing their own poems as it gives them an excellent train of thought to follow through. Students write a poem on what life would be like or how they want their life to be like when they get old. They will have to write down a few notes first about the things they would like to mention in their poem (clothes, free time, hobbies, responsibilities, likes, dislikes, attitude…). Fill in the box with those words or ideas.

Wearing mini-skirts   Having fun

Sleeping all day long   Make-up

Travelling the world   Wearing bright colours

Now students use those words to build up their poems starting with the line "*When I am an old woman/man, I shall…*".

Task 6. Students listen to the song by Cat Stevens "*Father and Son*". They will be given a selection of lines from the song before they plunge into a thorough analysis of the contents of this song. In their groups they have to decide whether those lines were uttered by the father or by the son and justify their answers.

*Take your time, think a lot (**father**)*

*When I do he turns away (**son**)*

*Just sit down, take it slowly (**father**)*

*And I know that I have to go away (**son**)*

a) Do you think there is a good relationship between the father and the son? How do you know?

b) Pay attention to the way they speak. (*The father is more sensible, reasonable and calmer. The son is more passionate, he speaks louder and sounds angry, confrontational, rebellious…*)

Now students write an acrostic poem with the word "*Parents",* as in the example, to reflect how they feel about their parents:

They **P**retend to understand you

And they simply don´t listen

They say they ca**R**e

But they ar**E** hardly there

N……

……T

S……

This activity will help us to introduce the fragment from *Romeo and Juliet* "*Deny thy father and forget thy name…*" Students will watch a video of the balcony scene first as a springboard for a heated debate on the topic of generation gap issues. Below are some possible questions to generate whole class discussion.

a) What problems may cause the generation gap?

b) What conflicts do parents and children have?

c) Are there any usual areas of misunderstanding? If so, make a list in your groups (ex. Going out, staying out late, friends...). What problems may Romeo and Juliet have with their parents? Will those issues be the same as the ones that you have with your parents nowadays?

d) What is Juliet asking Romeo to do? What makes their relationship difficult?

e) Why is she asking him to "Forget his name"? Is this an act of disobedience? What consequences may it have in 17th century England?

The balcony scene may be seen as a breach in the social order where children are expected to obey their parents. This fragment is an example of teenage rebellion that goes tragically wrong, and Shakespeare lets Romeo and Juliet decide for themselves as they are ultimately responsible for their decisions and therefore for their own mistakes. Think about the way you are and you behave with your parents. How would you describe your behaviour. This activity will give us the opportunity to generate new vocabulary items such as: *confrontational, a spoilt brat, a daredevil, rude, moody, I stand on my own feet, they let down the law, I speak my mind, I am too opinionated, I stand on my own feet…*

This activity will also give us the chance to analyze language in Shakespeare´s time. Words like "*thine, thy, thou, nay, ay, hast, doth …*" are not familiar to young learners. To familiarize students with English from the Renaissance period, we can create a simple matching up exercise. What is the equivalent to Shakespeare´s language in modern day English?

17th century English	Modern day English
Nay	*Good-bye*
Ay	*Your*
Farewell	*Promise*
Swear	*I think*
Methinks	*Yes*
Thy	*Your*

As a follow-up task students will be encouraged to write a story using 17th century English and share it with the class.

Task 8. Students listen to the song "*We are young*" by Fun, as opposed to the poem by Jenny Joseph "*When I am an old woman*". Different activities can be used to exploit this song: fill in the gaps, correct the mistakes, unscramble some key words, find the words in the song that mean the same as their Spanish counterparts and so on. These activities will be followed by some questions on the concept of "*youth*" like: *What words or ideas come to your mind when you hear the word youth?; Mention positive/negative things about being young; What are the differences between your generation and your parents´ generation?; Do old people understand youngsters?* Quotations by famous authors could also be used to encourage further discussion: "*Youth is wasted on the young*" (George Bernard Shaw); "*Good habits formed at youth make all the difference*" (Aristotle); "*Forty is the old age of youth; fifty the youth of old age*" (Victor Hugo; "*Youth has no age*" (Picasso).

Poetry grows out of phrases taken from songs that transform into new patterns in students´ minds. Songs become the starting point of their creativity. Students try to make powerful connections with the structure of a song and just follow the steps to create figments of their imagination. Using songs as a technique to collect a bagful of structures, vocabulary and ideas is an excellent way to promote creativity when students feel stuck. The more repetitive a structure, the better the results as the poem finally pops up without effort. We need to start with interesting songs to make students´ imagination take off. Students are going to create their masterpieces and finally listen to each other´s poetry readings. They will use the structure from the song **LET´S + verb** to create their poems. E.g. "**LET´S** <u>have</u> fun and never <u>be</u> tired. **LET´S** <u>get drunk</u> and always <u>run</u> wild…"

"We learn that we can harness more of the brain´s power by providing stimulus to its affective and creative hemisphere, by involving the personality, the imagination, music, movement and fantasy and by stimulating the limbic system through emotion and what is pleasing. This power can be invaluable in introducing language into the learner´s short-term memory, where it can then begin to be processed by whatever language device the learner has available. It seems that the brain´s tendency to recall "*features of the landscape*" which are distinctive or unusual could and should be turned tour advantage as teachers. Just as we use visuals to present and recall target language words and expressions, so we can call upon the distinctive strengths of rhythm and music. In particular there is the area of language associated with music in the form of songs, rhymes and indeed jingles, as the hyperbole-manufacturers of the advertising world discovered long ago." (Hamilton 2003: 43)

Task 9. As a round-up task, students prepare wall displays about everything they have learnt in this unit on Shakespeare and Jenny Joseph´s life and works in small groups. They may include a selection of sonnets, lines taken from famous plays, information on the socio-cultural context in which Shakespeare and Joseph lived, a description of the Globe Theatre, 21st century poetry… Illustrations can be included. Students must keep the information simple and clear. Based on the information gathered by each group, the teacher prepares a battery of questions from each display for students to answer. Students stand up and walk around the room quickly scanning information from the displays in order to fill in the questionnaire. This will help them to consolidate their knowledge about the authors studied in this unit. We can turn this into a competitive task in order to make the activity more exciting and motivating for students.

CONCLUSION

The events of the past are interpreted at the present. Today´s feelings had a presence in the past and the other way around. Past attitudes and emotions still prevail today. They become the present because they exist nowadays. The way to express those feelings may be different in each century but the essence remains the same. Through the generation gap project students can change the way they look at literature since the past is no longer a fantasy.

"A human being´s world hangs together, its events fit into each other; no matter how devious their connections, there always are connections, in one big framework of time and space… *The world* is something human." (Langer, in Janeway, E. 1971:134)

Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and Othello are part of us with their indecisions and self-conflicts. All of us have experienced anger, all of us have been haunted by the "*green-eyed monster*" and have suffered the misfortunes of unrequited love. Feelings are not old-fashioned. They are timeless and as such they are part of our students´ lives. It is for this reason that bridging the gap between 17th and 21st century literature can bring students to appreciate old forms of literary works to their fullness. Characters´ attitudes and emotions in Shakespeare´s plays are no different from students´ feelings. Romeo and Juliet´s conflicts with their parents in 17th century England equal those of students in the 21st century world as seen in Joseph´s poem *Warning*. The generation gap conflict is not exclusive of the present. It is deeply-rooted in the lives of human beings of all times and places, either real or imaginary. Literature is concomitant to life. It is a projection of students´ lives. No matter how distant works may seem to students. Our job as teachers is to turn literature into an engaging process that takes our students through an emotional journey of self-satisfaction and excitement. To make young learners love literature and to make it timeless and real is always a challenge. We have to make sure that students are not barred from plunging into a reading adventure that will take them to cherish all forms of literary expression, may that be a poem, a play or a song.

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