PROJECT WORK

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Abstract

It is generally agreed that the pedagogical aim of project work is to improve the students' knowledge of English through true-to-life activities and tasks carried out in and outside the classroom, over a longer period of time. All the major skills can be developed through project work, with perhaps greater focus on reading and speaking and, depending on the end-product, on writing. Students are encouraged to work in teams and share the tasks of research and documentation, drafting and redrafting, editing and presenting.

Keywords: projects, team work, sharing, end-product, time management

Why project work?

At the beginning of the second term this year, I tried to involve my second year students, attending the English Module, by making them more responsible for their own learning. So, I thought that project work was the most suitable way to encourage them to work independently or in teams towards attaining a goal. They had to choose the topic of the project and decide how to organise their work, establish who does what, the resources needed, the desired outcome.

At the end of the term, when most of the projects had already been presented, they had to write the test paper on the process they had been through, on their experience of working in teams, on the good and bad parts of carrying out a project, on what they had learned and if it was worthwhile.

Here are some of their impressions regarding this activity:

"Our aims were to make an out of the ordinary project, which would keep the audience attentive, to reveal new information and to improve our capabilities to work as a team. I think that we achieved what we wanted to when it comes to the first two goals, since our colleagues seemed interested. Regarding the last aim, we need to work together more and make time to meet when elaborating a project, because up to now we have only collaborated online." ('Cultural Differences in Negotiation' – Victor Z.)

"It is generally known that a project is seen as entity abundant in knowledge, that involves research and is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim. In our case the goal was to make a successful presentation on a noteworthy subject in the actual financial crises." ('Banking' – Andreea T.)

"A main concern I had was that this would be another one of those boring projects, when we stand in front of the class and read/speak about some theoretical information, copy/paste from the Internet. I also had a difference in opinion with one of my colleagues on this matter, and that is why we decided not to present on the established date so we could work a little more on the presentation in itself. The aim is to transform a rather boring theoretical subject in something exciting and captivating. (...) In conclusion, we enjoyed the chance given to us, to work together the whole term, it allowed us to rediscover each other and drew us closer together. In a way we got attached to this project, and can't wait to present it next time!" ('Business Ethics' – Irina)

"The first mistake was that we did not create a communication plan, which I think is very important in developing any kind of projects. Because of lack of communication we could not keep the project on track: first, we did not meet deadlines and second, we needed extra materials. (...) I think that a project like this gives us the opportunity to start to mature as individuals, to learn to listen, to have responsibilities and to improve our communication skills." ('Managing Human Resources' – Vanda)

"The ultimate scope when working together within a team to complete a project is to generate new ideas and to share them with the others. By working together with my colleagues at this project, we have discovered that it is not just the end-product that matters but also the journey that led to it. (...) Team work is usually very interactive and has many advantages. It involves confrontation of ideas, discussions, research, communication that lead in the end to a common solution. It is quite amazing to see how people can find common points in such a diversity of ideas. (...) All in all working at this project was a worthwhile experience not just because we enjoyed elaborating on the theme of business ethics but also because working together within a team and sharing ideas gave us pleasant memories." ('Business Ethics' – Alexandra S.)

"I have to admit that I was the cause of some of the problems, being unable to attend the seminars as much as I wanted...I tried as much as possible to get involved and use my experience in the work place as a practical background for the project, ...to bring examples from my personal experience, from the various situations I encountered at work. An advantage was that all of us work, or worked at some point..." ('Business Ethics' – Irina)

"The outcome was a 12 page project on all the aspects of human resources management. We did not intend it to be a difficult lecture, with unknown terms and never ending definitions, we tried to make it an easy presentation, which would appeal to everyone. In my opinion (and my hope) is that we have succeeded." ('Managing Human Resources' – Maria)

"Finally, I want to talk about my team and about working in team in general. It was great because I like brainstorms and ideas popping out of our heads. I like searching on the Internet and finding new things. I like long discussions on Messenger about what should we change or add to the project. I like difficult moments, when nobody knows anything and has no idea about what's next. This was our project, it was about good parts and bad parts. Even talking to you, teacher, made us reconsider our work and rethink the strategy. I don't know about others, but I enjoyed it a lot and I would like to be a member of the same team again! (...) The team made out of Donah, Zlatina, Ana and Alina had a real interesting and well-prepared presentation...There was another great team, the one made out of the five guys that had a good presentation on the global crisis. Congrats to you all!" ('Corporate Social Responsibility' – Loredana)

"I am pleased with the final result of our project and I strongly believe that my colleagues feel the same way. We truly enjoyed our assignment and the topic that we chose, and I believe that we all gave 100% in our work.(...) This is almost everything about our project (more or less) but to be honest it was a really nice experience especially because we did something we really enjoyed and we had a lot of fun, it was not just any project – it was OUR PROJECT – we worked very hard for, and we would definitely do it again!" ('Books for my Imagination' – Cristina S.)

I shall summarise what my students expressed in a more vivid way:

- ➢ Most of them were happy to work in teams as they could rely on each other's knowledge and have fun at the same time.
- ➢ Some used their work experience or tried to apply the knowledge acquired elsewhere in the classroom (learning by doing).
- ➢ All agreed that too much theory would not stir the audience's interest, so they learned from past mistakes and tried to present things creatively. The outcome of their projects was a case study, or a role play, a quiz, a poster, a lively presentation, a video film.
- ➢ They tried to involve the audience and thought at an early stage of the effect of their work on their colleagues. That is why they sometimes had to change the topic, because they believed it was not exciting enough.
- ➢ All students mentioned that they worked hard and tried to give their best. Work was not confined to the classroom; they met outside the classroom, too or kept in touch by Messenger.

> ➤ They used various sources of documentation, mainly the Internet but also books and articles, and extracted and processed the information creatively, acknowledging the sources they had used.
> ➤ They also appreciated their colleagues' ideas and many talents and declared that by working on this project they had become more responsible, better listeners, they had learned to respect other people's work and effort.
> ➤ Students felt more involved and "passionate", had a feeling of work well-done and of ownership and they enjoyed every minute of participating in the project. All of them declared that they would like to repeat that experience and that they had great fun.
> ➤ The drawbacks are quite insignificant as compared to all the benefits brought by working on the project. Sometimes time management was not very effective. Some students could not attend classes regularly and certain activities could not take place on schedule.

Conclusion

Not only students, but also teachers can benefit greatly from project work. Students, who otherwise were quite difficult to motivate, had fun, enjoyed sharing ideas with their colleagues, were proud of the outcome of the project. We should not forget to rely on our students' knowledge and creativity and encourage them to unfold their personality and willingness to take on responsibility for their own learning.

References and bibliography

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The author
Dr. Radadiana Calciu has been a Lecturer in English and German since 1996. Her main activity is to teach Business students how to communicate effectively in an international market. By tackling a wide range of topics, such as negotiations, presentation skills, intercultural aspects, business ethics, etc., students get prepared for their future jobs, while improving their language competence as well. Another important field, where she is active is Quality Management, as she is aware of the need that modern universities have to develop systems for the ongoing improvement of their teaching/learning environment.