

Title: Project “Garage Sale”

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Thematic line: Curricular Practice: Teachers and students, the authors of the curriculum.

Abstract:

A communicative activity was created in order to have a large group of A2 students of different grades interact among each other since they are all from different grades and it is difficult for them to have oral exchanges with peers from other classes, this situation affects their performance in collaborative tasks. This project was done emulating a real life situation, a garage sale, where students had to complete several previous activities and interact with their classmates using their own resources promoting meaningful learning.

Key words: collaborative work, speaking task, communication, meaningful learning, affective filter.

Topic: How much are these? Clothing and prices.

Problem Statement

This English class is comprised by students from different grades. They all took a test that placed them in the same A2.1 level according to the CEFR thus they gather in the same two-hour class. It is a large group with 35 students. Their ages range from 17 to 21 years old. Although they have some concordant interests, the greatest challenge has been their integration since they are prone to work only with their same grade peers. This situation limits their interaction in communicative activities or collaborative assignments.

Justification

The Nuevo Modelo Educativo demands from us to build a better *present* for our children and youth. One of the most significant changes that this proposal includes is that teachers at Escuelas Normales must receive instruction in the use of English and training to teach English

as a foreign language. Therefore, our duty and great challenge as English teachers at Escuelas Normales is to create suitable spaces with interesting and engaging activities and material, to trigger students' and future teachers' immersion in contexts which emulate real situations where they can put their communicative skills into practice. Consequently, by generating meaningful learning in the English classroom, we will be contributing to our students' professional development and providing them with a crucial tool which will help them face the challenges of the 21st century.

Objectives

The main aim of this activity was to contextualize the language in an authentic situation. Thornbury (2105 :91) suggests that "speaking tasks should have some relation to real-life language use." By participating in this garage sale, the learners experienced in the classroom the type of communication they might encounter outside their school environment. Another objective for this communicative task was to challenge the learners to perform in real operating conditions using their own resources and those provided by the input of their peers. To help students become aware of the importance of collaborative work as a source of language acquisition was a significant goal in this particular task as well.

Methodology

The communicative activity was organized around a series of pre-tasks that helped to scaffold the outcome. The topic of the unit is "How much is that? And it is focused on the learners being able to describe prices and discuss preferences. For this objective to be reached learners had to be introduced to the lexical items: clothing, colors and prices. The grammar focus was to identify and use demonstratives this, that, these, those and one and ones to refer to the lexical items as well as comparatives. Functional exponents like **How much is / are...? Which ... do you prefer/like better?** were also introduced and practiced.

Each of the items mentioned above were presented and practiced in controlled and semi-controlled activities in several sessions. There was also a good practice on skills such as listening and writing as well as pronunciation and intonation. It is paramount to mention that learners received relevant feedback in the light of Edge's (1989) advice that there should be

times during the lesson when the teacher helps the learners to focus their attention on accuracy. Nevertheless, this should be done in a positive way so that it encourages learning.

The next stage was to organize the learners in groups. According to Brown, (2001) group work offers several advantages: It fosters a positive atmosphere for cooperation in the pursuit of a common goal and promotes a sense of responsibility and cooperation. But most importantly group work serves as a springboard for interactive language exchanges.

Since this would be the first time that they would work on a group project, the learners were given the freedom to choose their partners regardless the number of members in each team. (the largest team had six members). Firstly, the learners were given a guideline for their project which consisted of a scrambled conversation the students had to put in order. This task aimed to help them to focus on discourse. Then, the learners created a similar conversation to practice the garage sale “transactions” (McCarthy, 1991:13) between the vendor and the potential buyer. After that, the learners had to agree on the items they would *sell* and the prices they would give to each item. The learners transferred this information onto a chart with a list of items, a brief description of each one, and the prices. Then, the students brought realia to the class, they organized the classroom and displayed their merchandise with their price tags on the tables, they also used their creativity to design a cardboard advertising their garage sale. The learners were provided with play money (dollars) to complete their transactions. Finally, the students mingled around role-playing vendors and buyers, asking for the merchandise and bargaining prices to reach an agreement on a reasonable deal.

Results and conclusions

In the quest of a more holistic perspective, some guidelines of the Natural Approach were followed in the implementation of this garage sale project. The communication in the task was expressed through situations, functions and topics as Krashen & Terrell (1995) propose in order to accomplish a communicative oral goal. This implies that although there was some focus on grammar, it was merely used as a springboard to help the learners to develop communicative skills. Krashen & Terrell also claim that *in the long run* students will be better able to speak with more grammatical accuracy if we place our attention in communication first. By having done this in the activity, the learners felt more comfortable and realized that they were actually interacting with different partners from different grades. Learners also found

themselves working naturally in a non-threatening environment. All these factors led to the application of the affective filter which is one of the main features of Krashen's Natural Approach.

Therefore, we can conclude that by identifying the interrelation between pedagogy and practice, we as teachers will be encouraged to look for new ways to approach learning. And consequently, we will be better able to transfer the theoretical concepts into our classroom practice and beyond. We should agree with Scrivener (2005:380) who states that "In looking for ways to move forward as a teacher, you will also find ways to grow as a person" which is a paramount goal in El Nuevo Modelo Educativo in our country.

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Appendix

ESCUELA NORMAL DE EDUCACIÓN PREESCOLAR

PROJECT "GARAGE SALE"



THEMATIC LINE

CURRICULAR PRACTICE: TEACHERS AND STUDENTS, THE AUTHORS OF THE CURRICULUM

PROBLEM STATEMENT

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JUSTIFICATION

The Nuevo Modelo Educativo demands from us to build a better *present* for our children and youth. One of the most significant changes that this proposal includes is that teachers at Escuelas Normales must receive instruction in the use of English and training to teach English as a foreign language. Therefore, our duty and great challenge as English teachers at Escuelas Normales is to create suitable spaces with interesting and engaging activities and material, to trigger students and future teachers' immersion in contexts which emulate real situations where they can put their communicative skills into practice.



OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this activity was to contextualize the language in an authentic situation. By participating in this garage sale, the learners experienced in the classroom the type of communication they might encounter outside their school environment. Another objective for this communicative task was to challenge the learners to perform in real operating conditions using their own resources and those provided by the input of their peers. To help students become aware of the importance of collaborative work as a source of language acquisition was a significant goal in this particular task as well.



METHODOLOGY

Pre-test to scaffold the scenario

Introduction and practice of formal items and grammar structures

Controlled and semi-controlled activities

Group work

Planning the group role and preparing material

Communicative activity







According to Brown, (2000) group work offers several advantages: It fosters a positive atmosphere for cooperation in the pursuit of a common goal and promotes a sense of responsibility and cooperation. But most importantly group work serves as a springboard for interactive language exchanges.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

By having done this in the activity, the learners felt more comfortable and realized that they were actually interacting with different partners from different grades. Learners also found themselves working naturally in a non-threatening environment. All these factors led to the application of the affective filter which is one of the main features of Krashen's Natural Approach.

Therefore, we can conclude that by identifying the relationship between pedagogy and practice, we as teachers will be encouraged to look for new ways to approach learning. And consequently, we will be better able to transfer the theoretical concepts into our classroom practice and beyond. We should agree with Lortmeier (2005:188) who states that "In looking for ways to move forward as a teacher you will also find ways to grow as a person" which is a paramount goal in El Nuevo Modelo Educativo in our country.

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