The importance of Task Based Language Learning (TBLL) in the ELT Mexican curriculum.

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In the world, there is a variety of conditions that impact in the language learning policies; every country has its own perspective of when it is the best age for people to learn English, as well as the method that better suits to their educative objectives.

In Mexico, since 1993, the foreign language learning curriculum in public education has a communicative approach. It began in the 70s as a subject in secondary; it was not until 2009 that the subject became official for preschool and primary. The latest update of the Mexican curriculum demands that students of preschool, primary and secondary "learn English by using English" (SEP, 2017).

Since there are not environments where students use the language in a social and real context, the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico (SEP), decided to include in the English learning curriculum three learning environments so that students practice the language in a social way; these environments have the purpose of letting language teachers develop activities where students feel proximal to reality.

Also, the SEP organized the curriculum into communicative activities which warranty the social practice of the language during the learning process. In this regard, we have to keep in mind the fact that learning is "essentially collaborative and social, and both teacher and students are patterns in this collaborative learning" (Gibbons 2002: 13), thus the conditions we create as teachers in the classroom, must entail contexts where students use the language in pairs or teams, aiming to allow them to use the language in context.

Some ways to reach this purpose is through project work, task based learning, as well as implementing cross curricular activities. According to Stoller (2002), project work, as an extension of content based instruction, represents "a versatile vehicle for fully integrated language and content learning" (Stoller 2002: 109), this type of work has the advantage in that "it combines all four language skills and the joint effort of several children" (Pinter 2006: 137).

For Nunan, content based instruction "can raise motivation and heighten the engagement of the learner in his own learning process" (Nunan 2004: 132). Thus, as project work integrates a cross-curricular work, it could engage children, "making English language more vibrant environments for learning and collaboration" (Stoller op. cit.: 117). Therefore, pupils will derive benefit from taking part in language projects and thematic units, since they allow teachers to "stand back and let children take the lead, supporting them as they take risks" (Cremin 2009: 8).

Another consideration to be taken into account in the language classroom is directly connected with valuing the students' ideas and evaluating their outcomes from different perspectives. It is important because children can reach stages where they will be able to "make insightful self judgement and to engage in small group peer-review and assessment of their creative endeavours" (ibid.: 9). This assessment may "help learners to understand more about the language learning process and to become more independent" (Cameron 2001: 233). At the same time working on a

thematic unit paradigm, is "an integral part of a learner-centered approach [and it is also] linked to the principles of learning to learn" (Pinter op. cit. 136). All this considerations, support the premise that a language instruction process based on themes and contents, provides students, not only from language skills development, but also of skills that will be useful for them in other areas of knowledge.

Putting these ideas into practice

The Rock band project

I had the chance to be part of two language projects with 11 year-old students. One of them was a project called "the rock band", which aimed the use of personal information questions; students pretended to be the members of a fictional rock band, they chose a name for the band and a name for every member, as well as their ages and nationalities; they got characterized. They had to get prepared for answering some questions in a press conference; some pupils were interviewers and the others the members of the rock band.

In this thematic activity, students had the chance to learn by using dictionaries to look up linguistic resources such as, languages, clothing, types of music, likes and dislikes, artists around the world, English names and surnames, etc. The support of the teacher consisted in modeling the pronunciation and intonation of phrases as well as explaining its social use.

The difficulties found were that students took more time than expected when they had to look for information related to their rock band and the linguistic resources to ask and answer questions.

As a result, students had the chance to foster their imagination, association and creativity, since they had to wear clothing different from their school uniforms as well as designing crazy hairstyles and deciding on a catchy name for themselves and the band. Moreover they were able to use in a specific context linguistic resources and consequently practice the language in a social way.

The Wrist band project.

Another project was called "Designing a wrist band". I found this project in the web page of the British Council Mexico. This project consisted in asking students to believe they were the designers of a wrist band.

Students made teams so they could deliberate on a design, a colour, a price and a slogan for the item. By using dictionaries and the help of the teacher, in a graphic organizer they jotted down their ideas.

Students had to prepare an oral presentation with the help of graphic organizers and scripts at the same time of fashioning the band with colour pencils, paper and other materials. During this process, they had the chance to be creative and fostered their problem solving skills and independence towards language learning.

As it happened in the rock band project, the development of this project implied that students had taken more time than planned, however in the end it was worth, since they were able to make an oral presentation of their actual wristband, using again the language in a specific context.

As a conclusion, I can say that task-based language instruction and learning, is essential so students are able to interact with others as well as working collaboratively; it fosters their creativity and enhances the role of the teacher. In Mexico the EFL curriculum supports the task based paradigm, since the approach of the subject privileges interaction and collaboration among peers, so that students learn the language by using it in social contexts; in other words, it brings to the classroom more opportunities to learn through projects, approaching us to the achievement of the curriculum's objectives.

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