

Milena Vidosavljević¹⁵

University of Belgrade
Faculty of Philology

Sladana Vidosavljević¹⁶

University of Priština – Kosovska Mitrovica
Teacher Education Faculty in Prizren – Leposavić

THE PROJECT BASED LEARNING: CONNECTING THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Summary: Modern foreign language teaching is increasingly striving to create conditions where students can work collaboratively, where they can be active and motivated, gaining autonomy of learning, and developing a critical thinking about certain social problems. One of the methods that enables them to work together on certain activities are projects. By learning and adopting a particular foreign language, through the teaching based on projects, both teachers and students become researchers who solve problems, practically act, using language skills and getting acquainted with new topics, among which the theme of the environment is highlighted. Through planned projects, activities and collaborative work, foreign language learners can deal with current environmental problems with mentoring of teachers, and thus to some extent influence their own development of ecological awareness, which is of great importance for every individual in a society that strives to our planet continues to be preserved. Therefore, the aim of this theoretical paper is to point to the interdisciplinary approach that is reflected in linking the topics of project learning, foreign language teaching and ecological topics and problems in order to positively influence the development of language skills and competence in foreign language learning, but also on encouraging the development of ecological awareness of all students.

Кључне речи: projects, activities, learning, foreign languages, ecology.

INTRODUCTION

One of the numerous tasks of the school is to encourage students to develop systematic, planned learning and acquire working habits. What knowledge will students master, which values, attitudes and

¹⁵mika_vido_88@yahoo.com

¹⁶vidoslada@hotmail.com

habits to develop depend on goals, tasks, programs, and how these contents are presented. The student's knowledge and habits must and can only be achieved by their own activity, and the teacher cannot give them or impose them. Therefore, the first and most important condition in learning is the conscious activity of the student, because if it is reduced to mere memorizing and reproduction of certain material, the acquired knowledge will not be operational. A key element of quality education is adequate and planned knowledge.

Modern didactic tendencies are increasingly advocating the necessity of practical and pragmatic learning, with the aim of linking certain extracurricular activities with topics and contents that are studied in the educational process. Certainly, based on its characteristics, project teaching has a special place in the realization of this type of learning. Project teaching is a curriculum that looks based on the needs of the social environment and that it should be based on students' activities on certain research or work projects. Work on projects should be organized in such a way as to match the individual abilities of each student, to encourage him to actively learn by thinking and concluding, solving the problem. Acquired knowledge in this way is practically applicable in most cases.

For language teaching and learning, projects works are very important because provide opportunities for students to develop confidence, cooperative skills, learning autonomy, all language skills, critical thinking skills. Taking into account that the language teachers represent the most important source of motivation and inspiration to students, it's necessary that they use modern teaching methods as the project approach which can be useful and valuable for learning new topics, such as environmental. Daily, the environmental education is becoming more important for our planet so for the students who are learning foreign languages, this education could be very interesting and practical to learn more about it, raising their environmental awareness and language skills through many projects. Therefore, the aim of this paper to highlight the importance and strong connection between using projects in foreign language teaching where the students study the most important environmental topics developing, at the same time, their four language skills, such as grammar, writing, reading, communication and raising the awareness about today's ecological education.

WHAT IS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL)?

Project-based learning (PBL) represents a model that organizes learning around projects. The projects are tasks which are based on questions or some problems that include students for designing, investigating activities, making appropriate decisions, solving the problems (Jones, Rasmussen, Moffitt, 1997; Thomas, Mergendoller, Michaelson, 1999).

These learning activities are long term, interdisciplinary and every student has an active role (Challenge 2000 Multimedia Project, 1999). It is important to point up that projectbased instructional strategies come from the constructivist approach evolved from the work of psychologists and educators such as Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget and John Dewey. According to constructivism, children study by constructing new ideas or concepts based on their current knowledge (Karlin, Vianni, 2001).

The project-based method connects project outcomes to curriculum and goals, start employing questions or posing questions to introduce students to central concepts and principles, raise student's responsibility for managing much of their learning, and base projects on authentic, real-world problems and questions that students care about (Thomas, 2007, see in: Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010: 13).

Well-designed projects ask students to resolve the problems and issues, important for everybody in the classroom. Then, the projects allow to students to be creative and active in their learning while they are making important choices during the project and also quality interacting with teachers as co-learners in the experience, which is not the case in the traditional student-teacher relationship. Finally, projects provide extensive evidence of process work and self-directed learning and demonstrate what key concepts and skills the students have learned (Project-Based Learning: A Resource for Instructors and Program Coordinators, 2006: 4). PBL offers students to show their own ideas and opinions, and make decisions that affect project outcomes and the learning process in general. The final product results in high quality, authentic products and original presentations (Project-Based Learning, 2010).

In project teaching, the emphasis is on discovering new facts, and within which students acquire different skills related to planning, organizing and conducting research, making decisions, reporting. The project itself is a complex task and it includes several phases:

1) initiating the project and selecting the theme, i.e. the goal of the project activity; 2) time and content planning of the project, which involves obtaining the necessary material; 3) the implementation of the project, with documentation of activities and results; 4) presentation of the result (Durbaba, 2011: 130). What is precious for the students themselves is that they themselves choose different types of activities, that when planning and executing a project, the teacher is only an associate, which creates a positive atmosphere in the school and the students gain the experience that is the result of their wishes.

Therefore, the basic stages of students' work on the project are talking about the topic, the common choice of the topic and the goal of work; observation of the problem - setting up a research question - hypothesis; determination of tasks and methods of work; development of a research work plan; realization of the project plan and the foreseen work program; presentation of the results of the work - presentation (essay, poster, exhibition, etc.) and evaluation of work.

The research on project-based learning has indicated some benefits for students who work collaboratively on learning activities in contrast with students who work alone. An additional research finding was that students who have difficulties with traditional classroom are more successful and have benefit significantly from a project-based learning experience which are in accordance with their learning style and interests (Darling-Hammond et. al., 2008).

At the same time, the advantages of project teaching in relation to others are reflected in the student activity, greater freedom of communication among group members; better student-student relationship, as well as a student-teacher; by applying project teaching students learn socialization skills, develop communication, tolerance and reduce various prejudices; the greatest advantage in team work, increasing the self-esteem and self-confidence of students; higher motivation of students for work and learning; the knowledge and methods that are adopted are long-lasting, and the skills and habits they acquire are applicable in everyday life.

The role of teachers in PBL

The role of teachers in project teaching is primarily to stimulate creative research, to assist them in project design, not to give instructions, but to lead the planning process, set realistic goals, tasks and purpose of students' needs and their possibilities, present contemporary and current content, together with students participate in

the work, encourage social co-operation, advise students, direct them, motivate them, teach them self-assessments and strengthen their self-esteem, together with students, evaluate results and suggest improvements in their work.

The teachers who are ready to use project-based learning activities and involve actively their students in that, need to change their own role and methodical style. Therefore, the teacher's role is not dominant, but they act as guides, advisors, coordinators and facilitators (Papandreou, 1994).

In that case, they should discover how to guide and mentor their students, to teach them how to question and how to develop hypotheses and strategies for some information. As co-learners, most teachers highlight that using this approach is an excellent experience, especially when students share their own unique projects and activities with the "community" through their Web page presentations. Also, many teachers, through project based teaching, make new peer connections, and find quality support and encouragement from a wide variety of their colleagues and content experts (Project-Based Learning, 2010).

In other words, project teaching successfully combines interdisciplinary and correlation of content, collects materials and information, performs trips and constructs graphic representations, tracks processes, phenomena, etc. most often they take time, which contributes to relieving students. Students thus become independent in their learning and work, creatively wake them up, self-educate them, and enable them to independently evaluate their self-criticism.

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AND PROJECTS

The project-based approach motivates foreign language students to learn by allowing them to select topics that are interesting and relevant to their lives (Katz, Chard, 1989). Moreover, many benefits of incorporating project work in foreign language settings have been suggested.

Primarily, the project-work gives an opportunity to every student to develop its independence and confidence while using some of the foreign languages, as well as the self-esteem and positive attitudes toward learning process (Fried-Booth, 2002, Stoller, 2006:27). Further, the most important benefit of project works is improving language skills, as grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking. Using project-based approach, the students can use certain foreign language in a

natural context and participate in activities which require authentic language use (Haines, 1989).

Authentic activities in foreign language teaching give the opportunity to students to examine the task from different perspectives, increase collaboration and reflection, and allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome (Reeves et al, 2002). In addition, project-based learning provides opportunities for “the natural integration of language skills” (Stoller, 2006:33). Some of the learning projects which can be very useful for foreign language skills development are: speaking projects - panel discussions, debates, speeches and presentations on audio/video cassettes, oral proficiency interview on audio/video cassettes, recorded talk journals; listening projects - TV or radio news in certain foreign language, transcripts, paragraph dictation, summarized scenarios of a recorded media; reading projects: readings about different topics, book reports, newsletters, reflection papers, newspaper; writing projects: journal entries, diaries, letters to pen-pals, e-mail correspondence, book reports, field trip reports (Thi Van Lam, 2011: 145).

The project work progresses is a very important and valuable in language classes because students have enhanced motivation, engagement and enjoyment according to the specific context and their interests. As for motivation, projects tasks increase interest, motivation to participate, and promote effectively learning. “Enjoyment and motivation also stem from the fact that classroom language is not predetermined, but depends on the nature of the project” (Kriwas, 1999: 149; Lee, 2002; Brophy, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000:149, see in: Fragoulis, 2009: 114).

By learning and acquiring some of many foreign languages and cultures, students have quite enough time to plan, revise and reflect on their own learning, using PLB project approach. Utilizing the PBL approach, students evaluate themselves continuously. PBL is a frequent process which involves teacher assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, and reflection (Thi Van Lam, 2011: 142). Therefore, it is undeniable that these activities lead to meaningful and reflective learning which is necessary for increasing student’s awareness about many social topics. One of these topics is also the environmental education. Connecting language teaching and learning with environmental topic in many project works could be significant for the students who would learn the certain language, developing their environmental awareness.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The modern society reached in its historical development a unique degree of alienation from nature. Therefore, the environmental protection and ecosystems started to be urgent global problems in the coming decades of the twenty-first century. If the people continue with truly changing the Earth's climate, damaging natural systems such as water, air, soil and biodiversity, the whole world will face with serious dangers and difficulties. For these reasons, the environmental education of every person, from the youngest to the oldest member of the population, is something which is necessary in this field (Vidosavljević, Marković, Krulj Drašković, 2017: 1054).

“Acquiring knowledge about the protection and improvement of the environment is the most important factor in the formation and development of environmental awareness, environmental education and without that there isn't an environmental awareness (Vidosavljević, Marković, Krulj Drašković, 2017: 1054)”.

It's a fact that many social themes attract attention of language students and teachers, and one of them is the environmental degradation of the planet and ecological issues. The global warming, water pollution, deforestation are the themes which raise our awareness of the troubled state of Mother Earth. So, when educational institutions start to recognize and study the value of environmental education, the task of foreign language teachers should be start promoting environmental awareness while teaching English, Spanish, French, Italian and other languages (Dianna Sanchez, personal communication, January 2010, see in: Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, Stoller, 2012: 3). In this regard, second language education plays also a significant role in people language learning about and participating in environmental protection. Many foreign language course books include environmental education topics, such as waste minimization, endangered species or deforestation (Jacobs, Cates, 1999: 43).

The main question is what have all these problems got to do with the foreign-language teaching? Isn't the job of foreign language teachers to teach the grammar, vocabulary, skills and culture? The author Kip Cates (1990: 42) indicates that there are two good reasons why the ecological issues are the world problems we should care about. One is ethical and personal. Many language teachers find it morally wrong to just stick their heads into their textbooks and pretend these problems

don't exist. Another reason concerns the aspirations to be a language-teaching "profession".

The incorporation of environmental education into a second/foreign language teaching serves to raise the environmental awareness of students about global environmental problems. "Language teachers play a special role in converting teachers' education towards sustainability because they play a vital role in the global education community. They have the potential to bring about change in the education system that will reshape the knowledge and skills of future generations (Stavreva Veselinovska, Kirova, 2013: 253)".

On the other side, "environmental awareness and literacy provide students with the ability to understand and utilize the language of the environment, and respond to its grammar, literature, and rhetoric. It involves understanding the underlying scientific principles, value systems, and the cultural, aesthetic, ethical and emotional responses that the environment invokes" (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010: 5).

In general, raising students' environmental awareness and teaching them about the base of the movements that they could engage in is very necessary nowadays, taking into account a huge number of challenges that our planet faces every day. By integrating environmental education into the foreign language classroom, language teachers can:

(1) increase students' interest in contemporary issues that might directly influence their futures;

(2) teach students how to contribute to a healthier and more sustainable world;

(3) advance and develop language learning and meaningful communication (Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, Stoller, 2012: 3).

PROJECT WORKS IN CONNECTION WITH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL TOPICS

The language skills and environmental awareness can be developed by engaging the students in project work that oblige skill integration and connections between what students are learning in the classroom and their lives outside of it (Jacobs 1993).

"Certain teaching methods used in second language education that seem particularly suited to environmental education are projects. Projects enable students to spend an extended period of time using their own initiative to go deeply into a particular topic, often one of their own choosing. They can also serve as a vehicle for students to link classroom

learning to the outside world and to take actions related to their chosen topic“(Jacobs, Cates, 1999: 46).

Environmental education in the foreign language teaching has the aim to raise ecological awareness of students, so through project activities and using language skills, they can write letters to organizations, read articles about this topic from newspapers, magazines, use the songs in other languages with environmental themes, communicate about environmental issues related to some events at the local level (Tang, 2009, Jacobs, Cates, 1999, see in: Stavreva Veselinovska, Kirova, 2013: 1066-1067).

Author Brown (1991) indicates that environmental topics come to life through a variety of reading and writing projects that involve researching topics of interest and writing academic papers; writing and illustrating children’s books or comic strips; creating posters, brochures, or bulletin board displays; and writing stories or opinion pieces for the school newspaper. In the similar way, listening and speaking projects, where the students develop their skills in some foreign language, can involve students in debating the most important environmental topic, giving them a chance to adopt earth friendly habits and discover other interesting environmental themes developing their communicative competence (Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, Stoller, 2012: 5).

By promoting foreign languages, content learning and project works, these ecological topics can provide teachers the chance to help students understand how many daily actions can benefit Mother Nature. In addition to exercising and learning languages, foreign language teachers could organize field trips to local recycling centers where the students have a possibility to learn how important recycling is, how the process works, and what items can and cannot be recycled. In this way, the experiment of classes with language teaching-lessons and activities designed around global issues could serve for teachers to discover a new excitement in the classroom which comes from a focus on student language-learning centered on communication in the foreign language about real-world issue (Cates, 1990: 48-49).

For example, the projects with guest native speakers of the certain foreign language can be very interesting for the classes because they can educate students about environmental topic and actual issues. Many themes in this area and vocabulary can be introduced, so the students can make some questions to ask the speakers, using the certain language, and practicing the communication. Likewise, during guest speaker presentations, students can make take notes, and prepare an oral or written response in which they explain what they learned and

what they can do to be more environmentally responsible (Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, Stoller, 2012: 5).

Similarly, the role plays can be also used as a connection between projects, language learning and environmental topics. Carefully designed role-play activities may serve for relevant topics and give students opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of environmental themes using foreign language, to motivate students to discuss and express opinions about issues, encourage students to connect what they have learned about the environment to their daily lives, and help students determine when it might be appropriate to take action and possibly persuade schoolmates, family members, and their communities to be more environmentally responsible (Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, Stoller, 2012: 6).

CONCLUSION

The connection of these mentioned topics could be very interesting, motivated and practical for all participants of language learning. In general, PBL or instructional approach puts students in position to use the knowledge that they get about the certain foreign language, as well as the environmental topics.

Indeed, blending the teaching of environmental matters and foreign languages, the language teachers get an opportunity to experiment with different social topics and create positive effects which are reflected on facilitated learning new words and their meaning, enhanced students' concentration during classes and reducing tension and fear of foreign languages (Stavreva Veselinovska, Kirova, 2013: 1070).

On the other hand, creating ecological awareness of children, learning about the principles of ecological action and training for their conscious and responsible implementation in the protection, renewal and improvement of the environment is a long and gradual process that begins at school. In that sense, ecological education should follow a new philosophy of life, the relation between people and nature based on the awareness of "harmony of nature" and "harmony with nature" (Vidosavljević, Marković, Krulj Drašković, 2017: 1054).

Taking all this into account, the role of foreign language teachers is of great importance because, using the project-based approach, and activities such as writing, reading, analyzing, talking, investigating some of the environmental issues using foreign languages, they can constantly

develop students' language skills and competence, and even of that, change the conscious about ecology, planet and raise their ecological awareness which is a priority to build a sense of obligation for their own destiny, the fate of the environment and the fate of the entire society.

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PROJEKTNO UČENJE: VEZA IZMEĐU NASTAVE STRANIH JEZIKA I EKOLOŠKOG OBRAZOVANJA

Sažetak: Savremena nastava stranih jezika sve više teži ka stvaranju uslova gde učenici mogu raditi kolaborativno, gde su aktivni i motivisani, gde stiču samostalnost učenja ali i razvijaju kritičko mišljenje o određenim društvenim problemima. Jedna od metoda koja im omogućava da timski rade na određenim aktivnostima jesu projekti, to jest, projektna nastava. Učeći i usvajajući određeni strani jezik, pomoću nastave stranih jezika zasnovanoj na projektima, i nastavnici i učenici postaju istraživači koji rešavaju probleme, praktično deluju, koristeći znanje jezika i upoznajući se sa novim temama među kojima se izdvaja i tema životne sredine. Pomoću isplaniranih projekata, aktivnosti i zajedničkog rada, učenici stranih jezika mogu se baviti aktuelnim ekološkim problemima uz mentorstvo nastavnika, i samim tim, u određenoj meri, uticati i na sopstveni razvoj ekološke svesti što je od velikog značaja za svakog pojedinca u društvu koji teži da se naša planeta i nadalje očuva. Imajući u vidu pomenuto, cilj ovog teorijskog rada jeste da se ukaže na, takozvani, interdisciplinarni pristup koji se ogleda u povezivanju tema projektne nastave, nastave stranih jezika i ekoloških tema i problema, kako bi se putem projektnih aktivnosti pozitivno uticalo na razvoj jezičkih veština i kompetencija prilikom učenja stranih jezika, ali i na podsticanje razvoja ekološke svesti svih učenika.

Ključne reči: projekti, aktivnosti, učenje, strani jezici, ekologija.

