EVALUATING THE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE ABILITIES THROUGH PROJECTS

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Abstract: *Until recently, the educational institutions were preoccupied, almost exclusively, with the teaching and learning processes and they interacted very little with other institutions. Nevertheless, the schools, high schools and universities have started to play an increasingly active role in the communities they belong to, they have become part of these communities. The project also has an important function: the recognition of the fact that education is not just a theoretical issue, but a practical one too. Our paper aims to present how the English communicative abilities of students can be evaluated by means of projects and some conclusions regarding the utility of such a demarche.*

Keywords: evaluation, communicative abilities, projects

1. Introduction

Modern society requires higher education graduates to be able to face many varied challenges, to adapt to increasingly complex situations. This is one of the major causes for which traditional education based on the transmission of knowledge, has to be replaced by a modern education that should prepare students to manage on their own, to become "the managers of their own learning process." [1]

In the case of modern education, it is not only the modern teaching methods that are changing, but also the evaluation ones. The modern evaluation methods will measure and assess the students' abilities, with an emphasis on the qualitative elements.

For a very long period of time, the activity of the schools, high schools and universities focused almost exclusively on the educational process, interacting very little with other institutions, but this situation has started to change. School "is becoming part of a community and is participating in its specific projects, with social, cultural and productive characteristics. It will connect to other projects specific to other institutions, in

order to ensure a functional correlativity at community level, a high level processuality that will reflect positively on the functioning of all the elements of the community assembly. The didactic project also meets another requirement: the recognition of that education is not just a theoretical issue, but more of a practical one." [2]

The arguments presented above are the main reasons why we chose to analyze the role projects play in evaluating students,

2. Theoretical aspects

Evaluation is one of the three fundamental operational components of the education process, the other two being teaching and learning. Evaluation "represents the regulatory and self-regulatory element of reverse connection, through the education system seen as a cybernetic system". [3] By means of the evaluation, the teacher receives important information about how effective the strategies and methods that he uses in the classroom are, and how accurate the established operational objectives are and to what extent they are found in the students' performance

Teachers should be aware that the assessment is not just marking knowledge tests. It should highlight the extent to which the students have acquired certain practical skills. We have thought that in order to find out to what extent the students have managed to acquire certain communication skills in English, the method of the project is one of the most appropriate, the assessment being carried out in close connection with the training and highlighting results obtained over a long period of time.

Referring to teaching, we can say that "the project designates a thorough investigation carried out by pupils/students/teachers, focused on a general theme, on a specific topic of interest to them, for which they want, must, and can know/do more." [4]

The method of the project is a way of training by means of which the students carry out research oriented towards a well-defined goal, which is achieved by combining theoretical knowledge with practical work. This research may be the result of individual or team work and ends with a product: objects, equipment, records, scientific papers.

3. Methodology of a project

"Making a project requires documentation, fieldwork or laboratory work, making hypotheses, testing and valorizing them. The project makes the student familiar with situations he is faced with in life, develops a sense of responsibility, contributes to the maturation of thinking." [5]

In most cases, "The method of the project is used in combination with other methods. The project may take various forms depending on the nature of the activity, the degree of complexity of the topic, the school age etc. [...] Its achievement requires documentation, hypotheses, laboratory, workshop and field activities, finding solutions and their checking and verifying solutions, establishing conclusions etc." [6]

We also have to mention that there is a clear link between the projects we want to ask the students to produce and the needs of organizations. Because of this

interdependence, we chose to conduct a study on the evaluation of the briefings made by the second year students.

The theoretical aspects related briefings were taught during the lectures. During the seminar classes practical issues related to the making of the briefing (details regarding the structure of the briefing, how to treat each part of the briefing, linking words, etc.) were discussed. Subsequently, the students began the making of the briefings during the seminars and the teacher fulfilled the roles of animator, consultant or authority for the approval of the partial and final results, he answered the students' questions throughout the conduct of the project; he encouraged the students to teach themselves and to formulate correct questions about the briefings; he encouraged them to assess their own work and progress.

The briefings were conducted by the students individually, the teacher employing the individual work method. They went through the following steps: 1. planning; 2. documentation; 3. information processing; 4. presentation of the briefings. By choosing individual work, we aimed to involve the students actively in the learning process, starting from the idea that there was a common goal that all the students had accepted. In this case, working individually allowed the students to maximize their own learning and that of their colleagues. Those who presented the briefings played, for a short period of time, the role of teachers and presented information that their colleagues could use for other courses. Thus, one could talk about cooperative learning too. Moreover, the colleagues were able to participate in the evaluation of the presenter's briefing by filling out the template given by the teacher.

The last stage, the evaluation of the projects was of particular importance and, within it, all the components of the project, in our case, of the briefings, were subjected to a careful analysis.

During the making of the briefings, the teacher assisted the students, encouraging

them to discuss the difficulties they encountered, the aspects they were not content with. She produced evaluation cards by means of which she recorded observations regarding the activity and, to

develop the assessment capacity of the students, the students received the scoring template by means of which they assessed themselves and their peers:

Evaluate your colleagues' briefings according to the following criteria:	
1. Contents (appropriateness of ideas, support of the points)	2 p
2. Organization (clear transitions, coherence, logic)	2 p
3. Delivery (body language, voice, self-confidence, enthusiasm, naturalness)?	1 p
4. Accuracy (language mistakes / errors) and range of vocabulary (use of advanced vocabulary adequate to the topic)	2 p
5. Preparation (knowledge of the subject, observing the time limits, visual aids to illustrate the ideas used)	2 p
6. Interaction with the audience (answering the questions / comments from the audience)	1p

4. Results

In compliance with the proposed structure and with the recommendations for each component of the informative briefing, the students were able to move from the presentation part of the lesson to that of the production, which resulted in briefings that were useful both from the point of view of the teaching process and from that of their practical application.

The briefings that were evaluated were made by second year students of the Faculty of Military Management of the "Nicolae Balcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, as project activity for the discipline of *English Language - Military Terminology*.

5. The analysis of the students' briefings and the role of projects for student assessment

For our study, we analyzed four informative briefings. They were chosen in the order of their presentation and were made individually by the students. The analysis was made in terms of the quantitative and qualitative results that the students obtained.

Our paper has highlighted one of the ways in which the project method can be used to train future officers for their collaboration with English-speaking partners in international theaters of operations.

The effectiveness of a project, in this case,

of a briefing, is given by the utility it has. In order to make a briefing that is useful, one needs to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during the laboratory classes, seminars and lectures and to take into consideration all its components; the students must be aware of the different types of briefing and of their different structures. In addition to ideas that must be organized in a clear manner and supported with convincing arguments, the author of a briefing must also be able to present it in a persuasive way, paying attention to gestures, as well as to pronunciation and to the confidence he conveys. The accuracy of the presentation and the preparation work will also be items that will have their say regarding the success or failure of such an approach. Finally, the students who deliver briefings learn to interact with an audience and to adjust their behavior according to the feed-back they receive.

We have no doubt that the delivery of briefings is a prerequisite for obtaining career performance.

Furthermore, for the students, the delivery of these briefings was a very useful exercise regarding the application of theoretical knowledge in practical situations and a necessary preparation for the future activities as commissioned officers (either as commanders or as subordinates).

6. The results obtained by the students

Following the project activity carried out for the discipline *English - Military Terminology*, the second year students of the Faculty of Military Management of the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu individually conducted interesting briefings that were accepted for assessment, measurement and marking.

Through the delivered briefings the students demonstrated that they had:

- assimilated the theoretical knowledge regarding the military information briefings;
- respected the specific structure of a military information briefing;
- identified and taken into account the factors upon which the success of the presentation of a briefing depends;
- changed their gestures according to the feedback received from the colleagues during the presentation;
- been able to form global, coherent and realistic visions regarding the assembly of the aspects involved in delivering military presentations;
- facilitated the communication between all the persons participating in a military briefing;
- provided the premises for high professional performance following the valorization of the skill of transmitting information through presentations.

One can affirm that the demarche of making briefings proved useful for the training of the students and such projects should be conducted for as many disciplines as possible.

8. Recommendations for teachers and students

In order to carry out a project, "the emphasis is laid on stimulating the pupils' or students' own efforts, on encouraging

initiative, leaving them more freedom to solve the problems by themselves, on the choice of methods and working technique,s on setting the material and technical means they needed, on the monitoring of the individual tasks and on the self-control used to achieve them, on the final synthesis, making those that designed it to feel accountable for its achievement."[7]

The teacher's role is different from the role played in the case of the classical methods, as he "must keep a low-key profile, to ensure that some intentions do not fade in the face of difficulties that may arise in the way of achieving a stable project. He does not guide the pupils' (students') demarche step by step, does not make all his views known because this would mean a return to the traditional education. Its role is that of animator, or consultant or authority for approval and sanction of the partial and final results. The teacher ensures discussion of the project, analyzes the means of its achievement, facilitates the critical analysis of the viewpoints, determines how the activity will be finished, cooperates with the pupils and the students, but he does not substitute himself for their effort and activity."[8]

9. Conclusions

Considering all the issues raised in this paper, we recommend using the method of the project to help students deepen their theoretical knowledge, to acquire practical skills, to develop their scientific documentation skills, the capacities of analysis and synthesis of the researched materials. Finally, these briefings were an incentive for the students who were encouraged to take responsibility and who thus had the opportunity to deal with situations that simulated real life.

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