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NETWORK PROJECT AS A MEANS OF IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY PROJECT ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

The comprehensive nature of network projects builds up the foundation of universal study activities of a learner and a set of transferrable, vocational and special competencies of a student viewed within the scope of contemporary cross-cultural communication. The analysis of Russian and foreign models of net communication implemented while teaching a foreign language allowed to define the specific features of a network project and outline the characteristics of the described phenomenon: correlation with objective reality, correlation with the doer of the action, pedagogical relevance, product-directed character. The implementation of network projects provides access to acute authentic data in a foreign language, gives learners an opportunity to gain experience of cross-cultural communication, shapes the skills of behavior in a different cultural environment, forms intellectual flexibility, and enhances tolerance towards culture and mindset of foreign language speakers. Using resources of foreign sites, Web 2.0 social tools, telecommunication means of getting in touch with foreign language speakers lets learners perfect their personal experience of autonomous acquisition and application of knowledge, consider issues from various angles in accordance with cross-cultural approach, treat learning material reflectively, come to well-founded conclusions, make decisions, act reasonably in an indefinite situation, cooperate with representatives of a different culture. Implementing network projects in studying process makes the content of foreign language classes acquire a new meaning. The development of integral and analytical abilities helps build up a set of personal intellectual features, encourages the evolutions of the inner world of a learner as the subject of the educational process.

Keywords: Network, project, competencies, communication, implementation, Web 2.0.

1. Introduction

Recent reorganization of the educational system of the Russian Federation prompts us to consider project work as the most effective means that guarantees the learner's educational outcome.

E.V. Biryukova points out that computerization of contemporary society, the development of web-technologies, the expansion of educational opportunities of the Internet specify the information environment of an educational institution that nowadays is supposed to aim not only at building up the learner's proficiency in foreign language skills but also encouraging the learner's personal progress by enhancingthe positive skills of management, empathy; interpersonal, critical, argumentative, and cooperative skills (Biryukova & Savelyeva, 2016).

2. Problem Statement

To achieve the newly stated educational results with consideration of contemporary information environment is only feasible by correctly combining all of its components, employing the flexibility of its structure, focusing on the needs and abilities of the student who is considered as the subject of education. The peculiarities of managing foreign language education are analyzed by A.V. Tschepilova in the paper devoted to the issues of educational content and its results (Tschepilova, 2018). Network projects as a means of implementing project activities expand the boundaries of educational process and make studying of a foreign language interesting and exciting.

3. Research Questions

The results of experimental work described by a group of researchers headed by T.S. Makarova testify that project work intensifies foreign language learning, motivates learners, helps implement interdisciplinary approach, and consider individual features of each project participant, their personal scope of language skills (Makarova, Matveeva, Molchanova, Morozova & Burenina, 2017).

Implementing network project activities modifies the way teaching is organized as well as the way of personal interaction in contemporary information environment of an educational institution.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims at finding out the specific features of a network project as an effective means of implementing project activities at comprehensive and higher school.

5. Research Methods

While carrying out the research, sources related to pedagogics and methodology were analyzed; relevant data was generalized, compared, interpreted, and systematized.

6. Findings

Network projects at school is a way of building up universal study activities that are claimed to provide learners with an opportunity to carry out studying, formulate learning goals, search for the necessary means of achieving goals and employthese ways. I.V. Bogovskaya points out that mastering a

foreign language is interrelated with complex and multifaceted cognitive activities and influenced by the necessity to gradually and systematically develop research skills of schoolchildren via stimulating their cognitive performance (Bogovskaya (2), 2016).

E. G. Tareva points out the specific features of foreign language teaching at higher school (Tareva, 2017). Thus, the process of education in higher school changes qualitatively due to network projects that ensure building up a set of transferrable, vocational and special competencies and provide the foundation for a student's professional way of carrying out research activities. As I.V. Bogovskaya claims, those studying for a bachelor's degree greatly benefit from getting introduced to project forms of work, problem tasks, communicative and self-assessing tasks. Project work helps raise students' awareness of the importance of research skills, presentation, analytical and reflexive skills as integrated complex results of foreign language education (Bogovskaya (3), 2016).

Project work creates educational environment that encourages studying efforts of learners with excellent academic performance as well as of those with weak performance. It is crucial to bear in mind that a network project admits of various modes of participation suitable for each learner, such as collecting relevant information, processing it, using web-tools to present the end-product. While working at a project, learners with better-developed language skills assist their partners in completing the task, correcting mistakes, commenting on grammar material. Cooperative studying also serves to improve interpersonal relations by building up a climate of trust among the participants. Practical Experience has confirmed that co-research helps learners who find it difficult to communicate with their peers, establish better and more stable relationship with other learners, develop interest in independent research, become aware of the importance of their work and feel successful. For instance, while studying the topic "Austria" students make a virtual tour of the country and comment on what they see, act out conversations between tourists and citizens of Austria.

The analysis of home and foreign sources on project-based learning enabled us to highlight its following features: correlation with objective reality, correlation with the subject of the activity; methodological relevance of the project; focus on the end-product (Babu, 2013; Devkota, 2017; Förster, 2011; Mairinger, 2017; Schüßler, 2004; Tabor, 2013).

Correlation with objective reality means addressing a problem that is socially and personally significant; the problem whose solution requires employing integrated knowledge.

Correlation with the subject of the activity is focusing on learners' interests, their self-organization and responsibility.

Methodological relevance of project activities is based on considering the degree of learners' knowledge of a subject, general and special skills of communicating with project participants.

Individual psychological (emotional, creative, social, motor, will) sphere should form an integral unity with the methodological organization of project activities.

Product-orientation means that project activities should have a well-defined tangible result irrespective of the form: be it a wall-newspaper, video, exhibition, staged performance, collage, sculpture, event, excursion, or holiday.

Network projects also mean applying the resources provided by virtual educational environment via services that help to upgrade educational content and create the conditions necessary to satisfy

information-cognitive needs of schoolchildren and university students. A network project is a research activity based on IT that has a common problem, goal; ways and means of achievinga joint result. Using IT allows to reach communicative and cognitive goals including the processes of looking for, collecting, processing, analyzing, arranging, transferring and interpreting gained data.

To work out the details of a network project one needs to define the common topic of the project, the acute problem, its aim, goals, directions, stages with concrete results and participants.

The key elements of a network project should be stated; expected problems and possible ways of tackling them should be described, a list of the main educational products resulting from the project as well as criteria and indicators of result evaluation should be made clear.

The skills of joint use of social Google tools (documents, maps, photographs, video, mail, sites, blogs) and the skills of net communication and team working are a crucial part of network projects.

Due to its peculiarities, a network project is wider and more voluminous as compared with a traditional project. The specific features of a network project are conditioned by the remote location of its participants, the variety of means of getting in touch with each other, and numerous opportunities to present and broadcast the resulting product.

Implementation of network projects requires defining participants' roles. They can be as follows: the author of the project, a network coordinator, a technical advisor, a scientific advisor, project participants, local coordinators.

The whole set of the abovementioned roles is not necessarily applied to each network project; it can vary according to the aims, the type of network project, the opportunities available to a teacher and the specific features of managing a network project. On the other hand, the assignment of definite roles to project participants and their fulfillment of the functions as defined by the roles makes it possible to organized effective network project activity.

Planning network project stages is also of utmost importance. Any project is supposed to cover the following stages: building up the motive, discussion of project relevance, setting objectives and ways of solving them, data collection, researching, data comparison, developing a practically significant end-product, and presentation.

At the first stage the problem is defined that appeals to all network project participants. Then the topic of a network project is formulated together with project aim, goals and expected result.

G. Yu. Semyonova emphasizes the importance of well-defined gradual work on tasks that will help learners to correctly plan their activities on each project stage. She also says that project participants should be aware of the system of grades and criteria according to which their work is going to be accessed (Semyonova, 2017).

Managing a network project is time-consuming, so it is necessary to define deadlines that are known to project participants in advance.

The result can be made public via being placed on a web-site in the form of an article, presentation or video, etc. The form of presenting the end-product is decided upon before implementing the project.

The work of a net coordinator who creates mailing lists, a project site, and posts the necessary materials, is vital for implementing a network project.

The information regarding the results of a network project should be transparent and available for those wishing to get acquainted with it.

Implementation of a network project is pedagogically justified only if the project requires data collection in different countries, regions, cities and towns as well as comparison of observation of various social phenomena. Besides, a network project can include comparative research of events, phenomena, facts in order to single out existing tendencies, work out a hypothesis and make a decision. A network project can form the foundation for joint communicative and cognitive research activities.

A network project is an effective means of managing learners' distance activities. There is no necessity to schedule participants face-to-face meetings as task completing and data searching are possible via the Internet. Moreover, participation in a network project allows each team member to choose appropriate individual tempo.

Any work should be meticulously organized. In case of a network project, organization is carried out via a joint table of progress for all project participants. By means of this table, every task is divided into a number of questions. This table is a means of tracing and analyzing the activities of each team member.

Besides the table of progress, as G. Yu. Semyonova claims, a team chat in a social network is also effective (Semyonova, 2015).

Modern technologies make it possible for the group leader to regularly contact team members, trace their activities, submit necessary comments as the work proceeds. It is important for a team to know that the activities of all participants are not left unnoticed. At the same time, for effective team work it is necessary to find out the reasons why a member is unable to start working at a specified time. It makes team contact vital for it gives an opportunity to discuss why the required work is not carried out and what should be done about deadlines.

Using Google docs is recommended as a tool for sharing personal results of a network project. The possibility of co-editing a document and providing comments makes advantageous the use of cloud technologies. Learners can add the required data at the time they feel convenient while the teacher can modify teamwork through comments.

This mode of work systematizes and directs team activities. Furthermore, cloud technologies make it possible to identify the author of a document and the changes introduced.

The creation of team google documents starts with making a file with the accounts of project participants. It is necessary to let each person who creates a new document provide access to it to all team members or some of them according to the situation. A new document should be created for each question of a project task. This task is to be completed by the group leader if it is the first time team members have worked in a network project and with google documents. Later on, members of an experienced and well-adjusted team create new documents by themselves.

The characteristic feature of network projects is laying out the results by means of various web tools. It allows learners to acquire new skills in the process of project work. To pursue this goal it is recommended to switch technical tasks between project participants at different stages.

The indisputable advantage of a network project is the required peer assessment carried out in accordance with definite criteria and the possibility to compare one's result with the result of other groups.

At the final stage of the project after drawing together all the results, it is recommended to access the work of each team member and provide an opportunity for all participants to evaluate group work.

Modern information environment provides great opportunities for students to communicate with native-speakers in real and extended time. Moreover, all learners are actively involved in educational process and submerged in foreign language environment.

The technology of teaching competitive specialists at the first level of vocational training makes it necessary for them to get the experience of cross-cultural communication in project activities. Project technology of teaching a foreign language is a way to gain the experience of cross-cultural communication while modeling cultural environment; to build up skills of appropriate behavior in different cultural environment, to form intellectual flexibility and tolerance regarding different culture and its representatives.

7. Conclusion

New forms, ways and means that serve to guarantee the ability to effectively use information technologies while learning a foreign language are actively applied in contemporary educational process at comprehensive and higher schools.

Project technology allows implementing personal- and subject-centered approach in education, guarantees a more efficient process of building up vocabulary and grammar skills, making learning process natural, authentic and meeting contemporary social demands.

Using network projects at comprehensive and higher schools updates learners' personal experience of autonomous learning, skills of planning studying activities, predicting and evaluating their results, cooperative team working.

At the first level of vocational training, the skills of considering a problem in its ontology are built up, as well as the skills of conscious behaviour in an indefinite situation, planning one's actions according to the interdisciplinary approach, using knowledge to get a project result significant from either a theoretical or pragmatic point of view, which is at the same time subjectively, or objectively innovative. Through development of integral and analytical skills while implementing project activities students' intellectual qualities are shaped, their inner environment as subjects of education is developed.

Implementing project work in foreign language teaching and cultural studies allows to pedagogically expand educational opportunities and considerably enrich studying process. Projects meaningfully modify the educational content of learning a foreign language; students cognitive skills are enhanced, their communicative culture is built up, skills of productive work are perfected.

Modern information environment allows access to up-to-date authentic data in a foreign language. As compared with Internet resources printed information in published works is rigid, fixed and soon becomes obsolete.

Implementing network projects at comprehensive and higher schools motivates learners to carry out active research, stimulates their creative abilities, abilities to communicate and cooperate. Project

work allows concentrating on the issues that are personally important for each participant, and achieving the depth of thought and argumentation. Systematic practices of cooperative work builds up independence, responsibility for one's actions and teamwork skills.

Applying the resources of foreign sites, social Web-2 tools, IT ways of communication with native-speakers raises the level of cognitive motivation and interest of students, who become active participants of foreign language learning.

Joint work at a project does not only create a positive atmosphere and contributes to team building, but also helps the teacher to more efficiently control the process of education. Implementing network projects significantly expands the scope of the teacher's function who now acts not only as the project leader but also as a facilitator, technical advisor, etc.

Project participants learn the skills of performing various social roles: the leader, the doer, the facilitator of joint activities, the generator of ideas, etc. Moreover, participation in network projects develops the skills of problem-solving that can further help learners to better adapt their professional career and social life (Rein, 2007).

Managing contemporary patterns of network projects is a fresh impulse and new potential of project and research work. Network projects expands the frame of an educational establishment, teach to cooperate and implement joint projects, share data and get priceless experience of communication with participants from other towns, cities and countries.

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