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Promoting Autonomy Through Project Work[*]

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This article presents teacher and learners' experience implementing project work as a strategy the authors used in an undergraduate foreign language teaching program at an important public university in Colombia. In order to find support for their view that project work is an effective approach to developing future teachers' autonomy, students who had participated in project work were interviewed and their responses were analyzed using Benson's contributions 1997, 2001 on autonomous learning**,** and Legutke and Thomas (1991) on project work as a framework. The authors discuss the following issues based on the students' experience: stages in the development of the project, characteristics of project work, and its relevance to developing learner autonomy.

Keywords: project work, learners' autonomy, planning, negotiation, students' participation, reflection.
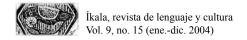
Este artículo presenta la experiencia de una profesora y sus estudiantes en la implementación del trabajo en proyectos en un programa de pregrado para preparar profesores de lenguas extranjeras en una importante universidad de Colombia. Con el fin de encontrar apoyo para su visión de que el trabajo en proyectos es un enfoque efectivo para el desarrollo de la autonomía de los futuros profesores, se entrevistaron a estudiantes que habían participado en los proyectos y se analizan sus respuestas con base en las contribuciones de Benson (1997, 2001) acerca del aprendizaje autónomo y las de Legutke y Thomas (1991) acerca del trabajo en proyectos. Se discuten los siguientes temas basándose en la experiencia de los estudiantes: las etapas en el desarrollo del proyecto, las características del trabajo en proyectos y su relevancia para el desarrollo de la autonomía del estudiante.

Palabras clave: trabajo por proyectos, autonomía del estudiante, planeación, negociación, participación del estudiante, reflexión.

Cet article présente l'expérience faite par une professeur et ses étudiants de l'utilisation du travail par projets dans un programme de premier cycle universitaire pour la préparation de professeurs en langues étrangères dans une université importante de Colombie. Afin de trouver un appui à la réalisation de son objectif, à savoir faire du travail par projets le point essentiel du développement de l'autonomie des futurs professeurs. Elle s'est entretenue avec des étudiants qui avaient participé aux projets et leurs réponses ont été analysées à partir des apports de Benson (1997, 2001) concernant l'apprentissage autonome et ceux de Legutke et Thomas (1991) concernant le travail par projets. On y discute les suivants thèmes en se basant sur l'expérience des étudiants: les étapes dans le développement du projet, les caractéristiques du travail par projets et son influence pour le développement de l'autonomie de l'étudiant.

Mots clés: travail par projets, autonomie de l'étudiant, planification, négociation, participation de l'étudiant, réflexion.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to share teacher and learners' experience in implementing project work as a strategy the authors used in the *Licenciatura* program at the Universidad de Antioquia in order to develop students' autonomy. Previous research carried out by Frodden (Frodden and Cardona, 2001), has shown that students and teachers in the *Licenciatura* had a limited view of learner autonomy. Given the importance attached to this concept by the Universidad de Antioquia, strategies for promoting learner autonomy were subsequently introduced and implemented (Frodden, Picón and Usma, 2001). Project work has been one of them.

In order to show how project work was experienced by students and to find support for our view that project work is an effective approach to develop future teachers' autonomy, Claudia Mesa carried out interviews with students who had participated in project work (see Annex 1) and, with Cristina Frodden, analyzed the interviews using Benson's contributions (1977, 2001) on autonomous learning as a framework and the characteristics of project work proposed by Legutke and Thomas (1991)

In the following section we provide a brief theoretical background for our experience. Then we describe the context where project work was implemented, including the site, the students, and the program. The description of the program is the result of a project called "The changes of the *Licenciatura* Program in the Universidad de Antioquia", which Claudia, the junior author, developed as a student in one of Cristina's courses. Then we relate the process of implementing project work in the classroom and how this strategy contributes to the preparation of the "new" teacher of foreign languages—an educator engaged in research in order to improve educational and social conditions in our society. Finally, we present students' perceptions of their experience with this approach and discuss our findings with reference to the characteristics of project work.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Benson (1997) presents three versions of autonomy: the technical, the psychological, and the political. The technical version, associated with

positivism, emphasizes learning-to-learn in order to promote independent life-long learning. The psychological version, associated with constructivism, stresses the inner transformation of the individual regarding attitudes, behaviors, and personality in order to take charge of their own learning. Based on constructivist principles, this version emphasizes authentic and real learning environments, negotiation and social mediation, self-awareness and self-regulation, and the role of the teacher as facilitator (guide).

The political version stresses learners' control of the process and content of learning. It also focuses on students' becoming aware of the context of learning, such as the purpose and the implications of learning a particular language, and the potential for personal and social change provided by learning another language. This version is associated with critical theory.

Benson acknowledges that these versions are an oversimplification of the diverse ways of looking at autonomy. It is difficult to find supporters of pure positivism or pure constructivism. Besides, the division between constructivism and critical theory is not very clear-cut, and these two also have to deal with "facts" and with empirically tested "truths."

Holec (1981: 3, cited by Benson, 2001) defines autonomy as: "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". More recently, Benson (2001) stresses the idea of *control* over one's learning instead of "taking charge" because the construct of control is more amenable to being observed, and observable behaviours provide better guidelines for teachers' actions in order to promote autonomy. He goes on to posit three levels to describe control over learning: learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. Learning management can be described in terms of the behaviours learners use to plan, organize, and evaluate their learning. Control over cognitive processes involves making inferences about the psychological processes learners undergo in their learning, based on observable behaviours. Control over content is crucial to the development of autonomy. Determining how they will learn but not being able to decide what they will learn, learners will not really be engaged in self-directed learning. The social and political dimension of autonomy is particularly evident in institutionalised contexts of learning. In order for students to participate

and exercise control over the content of their learning, they need to learn how to interact with others, and will need different abilities from those needed for individual self-directed learning.

Autonomy is a complex concept; therefore it is difficult for teachers to know where to start in fostering it. We think that project work is an appropriate strategy to develop learner autonomy because it is a teaching practice supported by principles an it puts students in charge of their learning process. Legutke and Thomas consider the "project method" posited by Kilpatrick (1921, cited by Benson, 2001) as the precursor of project work. In the "project method" students plan, execute, and work in groups; and through group work they acquire the skills to participate in a democratic society. According to Legutke and Thomas' (1991) project work

> is a theme- and task-centered mode of teaching and learning which results from a joint process of negotiation between all participants. It allows for a wide scope of self-determined action for both the individual and the small group of learners within a general framework of a plan which defines goals and procedures. Project learning realizes a dynamic balance between a process and a product orientation. Finally, it is experiential and holistic because it bridges the dualism between body and mind, theory and practice, or in John Dewey's words 'experience and thinking'. (Dewey, 1916: 146), (160).

In the transmission model of teaching, students' capacities are not taken into account in the organization of learning and in the expected outcomes; nor is their ability to act independently from the teacher's control acknowledged. Project work, on the contrary, assumes that students possess a basic capacity to direct their learning and to exercise their autonomy in the whole learning process (Legutke and Thomas, 1991).

The context

The Universidad de Antioquia is the senior state university of the provincial city of Medellín. Like most public universities in Colombia, it is under-funded

and currently undergoing a government-driven restructuring process. As part of this process, study programs are being evaluated in order to obtain accreditation. *Licenciatura* students, like most students in this university, belong mainly to working- and middle-class families. As a consequence, many of our students work and study at the same time, having little time for independent work. Project work was implemented in three consecutive semesters in Oral Communication III, i.e., with students, ages ranging between 18 and 30 who were in their third semester and had attended 240 hours of English. The product of Claudia's project: "The changes of the *Licenciatura* Program in the Universidad de Antioquia" was the basis of the following description of the program.

The curriculum of the *Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras* at our university was adjusted to meet the requirements of the *Consejo Nacional de Acreditación* (CAN) in order to obtain accreditation. To carry out this change there was an evaluation process of the pre-existing curriculum and some problems were detected. Students were not being prepared as transformative agents of society; pedagogical courses were very theoretical and disconnected from reality; research skills were hardly developed; and there were weaknesses concerning students' exposure to clear research models.

Decree 272 establishes that *Licenciatura* programs must promote the development of research abilities and inquiring attitudes in students. In the old program, students had to carry out an action research project in the teaching practicum; however, they had no previous preparation to carry it out. As a result, in order to promote research skills, a research component was introduced in the new syllabus, which consists of five levels of *Seminarios Integrativos,* three *Proyectos Pedagógicos* and *Investigación I* and *II*.

The purpose of *Seminarios Integrativos* is to introduce students into a real educational environment and to teach them some research techniques. The aim of *Proyectos Pedagógicos* is to apply those research techniques to solve a real educational problem related to foreign language acquisition. In *Investigación I* and *II* students learn how to pose research questions, how to organize and analyze information to develop a research project, and especially how to do action research, which is the method used in the practicum.

The objective of the new pedagogical component in the curriculum is to develop a reflective and critical capability connecting theory and reality. That is why *Seminarios Integrativos* go hand in hand with every pedagogical course.

PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE COURSE

In this section we relate the process of implementing project work following the stages proposed by Legutke and Thomas (1991). According to them there are six stages in project work: opening, topic orientation, research and data collection, data processing, presentation, and evaluation. In our experience, however, evaluation is not the final stage, but is formative and carried out throughout the process.

1. Opening

The role of the teacher is crucial at this stage, especially if students are not familiar with project work, as was the case in our situation. Cristina had to explain clearly that project work was a rather long-term endeavor that required the selection of suitable members to accomplish all the tasks during the semester. At this stage, two teams from previous semesters presented their projects to the class, to show students what was expected from them. Students did some role-plays that gave them an idea of the difficulties they could face regarding collaborative work and out-of-class work (see Annex 2), and Cristina presented some guidelines for successful project work (see Annex 3).

At this stage**,** it was difficult for students to realize that they had to find team members who had a compatible schedule and who could balance their strengths and weaknesses. Issues such as who had a computer or that they could not team up with their usual friends and expect others to do their work, surfaced.

2. Topic orientation

Students were responsible for choosing the theme of their project. Every team was asked to select three possible topics and present them to the whole class. In this session students explained why they were interested in those alternatives and their objectives and motivations. In this class session**,** classmates and

teacher usually listen attentively, ask questions in order to clarify ideas**,** and help the team select the final topic. This is a very important activity since some students choose topics that are trivial. In other cases the topic was too large to be approached in sufficient depth in one semester.

Difficulties encountered at this stage are related to the fact that students are supposed to think of possible topics out of class, but unless they have to hand in something they tend not to do the work. Sometimes they have only a vague idea of one topic, or each team member has thought about a different topic and they have not discussed what topics interest all of them as a team. As a consequence, we had to spend two or three class sessions on these issues and some students got bored.

3. Research and Data Collection

At this stage students must think about collecting data for their project. Cristina asked students to write some questions regarding what they want to know about the topic of their choice in order to guide their search for relevant data, and provided possible sources of information such as experts, web sites, or books.

Students need to consider the following issues:

* What kind of data is relevant to the project?
* Where will the data be collected?
* Are there likely to be any practical difficulties in collecting the data?
* How much information is needed to satisfy the aims of the project?
* How long will it take to collect the data?
The teams need to spend time together scheduling the various activities of the project. In this course, students are asked to write an action plan for which Cristina gives some guidelines (see Annexes 4 and 5). The idea of planning and scheduling at this level of detail may be unfamiliar to some students and they may need to be convinced of the necessity of this activity. For instance, students may need to be convinced that the assessment criteria rely, at least in part, on their ability to actually manage the project activities in an independent

manner and that this involves planning, scheduling, and organizing their own work. The action plan requires visualizing the whole project and this is not an easy task for students. Most have never been asked to do something that exacting. Besides learning new academic topics, students learn how to plan, which is very useful not only for academic purposes, but for life.

Data collection must proceed according to the agreed methodology that should have already been written by the student. It cannot be a haphazard process and hence, the need for careful pre-planning. The most important issue that is likely to arise is to know when enough data has been collected to satisfy the project requirements. In order to decide this, it is advisable to refocus on the aims of the research proposal and the questions that students set out to answer by data collection (Kelly, 1990).

4. Data processing

Reading skills facilitate the process of carrying out the data processing. In this kind of work it is very important to be able to:

- Preview the materials contained in books, journals, articles, and interviews in order to decide on their relevance to the topic.
- Skim to determine whether it is worthwhile continuing to read a particular book or article.
- Read with the aim of extracting information and ideas relevant to the topic of the project.
- Ignore material that is not relevant to the project.
- Make connections between ideas already read and ideas currently being read in order to build up arguments and complete ideas.
- Question what is being read and make notes on doubts or queries to be expanded later.
- Read for specific items of information.

At this stage, it may be decided to continue searching in certain specific areas or to discontinue the search and concentrate on the writing process (Kelly, 1990).

After the reading stage, students start the process of writing the article, essay, hand-out, or any other final document. In this stage they must have a very precise idea about the final presentation. They have to summarize and organize the information they already consider useful. Here students must be able to condense information, always considering the objectives and the level of comprehension of their audience.

5. Presentation

At this stage students have to think of the structure and format of their presentation. The team will have to decide on issues such as how they will motivate the audience, in what order they will present the information, which member of the team will be in charge of which section of the presentation, what resources they will use—VHS, Power Point slides, transparencies, etc. If the format chosen is that of a workshop, they have to design activities for the audience for which they may need to prepare additional handouts besides the regular ones with the main points of the presentation.

After having defined all these issues, students have to rehearse in order to guarantee good pronunciation and intelligibility, to calculate the time needed for the presentation and make necessary adjustments. Presentations should last a maximum of one hour for the audience to have time to comment and ask questions on the topic and to assess and give feedback on the presenters' performance.

6. Evaluation

Students were assessed throughout their work on the project in order to give them timely feedback to redirect their actions. Since both process and product are valued, students were assessed on their participation in class, their participation in teamwork out of class, and their presentations in class. In order to promote student responsibility and reflection on their learning, we negotiated the criteria to be used in the assessment of all these aspects, which Cristina then used to devise the assessment formats (see Annex 6). With these tools, students self-assessed their performance and the team members assessed their

partner's at least three times during the semester. The information gathered through these formats was handed back to each student for them to reflect on their process and find ways of improvement. The whole class and Cristina, taking into account criteria that we defined from the very beginning of the semester, assessed final project presentations.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROJECT WORK

In this section we present the characteristics of project work according to Legutke and Thomas (1991: 158–160) and explain or show evidence of how they were experienced in our courses.

1. **Themes do not derive exclusively from academic disciplines but from life.**

Through these projects, students not only improved their communicative skills but also learned content related to their future role as teachers. The following are some topics chosen by students: How Do Teachers Teach English in Medellín? Close-Captioned TV to Learn a Foreign Language, How Is Education Financed in Colombia? The History of the English Language, Cognitive Learning Strategies, The Changes in the Foreign Language Teaching Program, Teaching English with Few Resources, Medellín: Multilingual City, Affective Learning Strategies, Teaching English to Children at the Columbus School, Using the Internet to Learn English , CIIC (*Centro Internacional de Idiomas y Culturas de la Universidad de Antioquia*). Since students had the opportunity to choose content and it was directly related to their process of becoming teachers, their learning was authentically self-directed. This control over learning content is one of the fundamentals in the development of autonomy (Benson, 2001: 99).

2. **Experiential learning involves discussion, experimentation, reflection, and application of insights.**

When implementing the action plan, students faced the problem of constantly thinking about practical activities. This implied looking back at what they had done, visualizing future actions, and making decisions on every single aspect

when carrying out what they planned. This constant reflection allowed students to be active learners since their ideas and decisions were based on the actions for which they were responsible.

> *Al final cómo lo íbamos a presentar. Era un tema muy extenso (…) Era hacerlo dinámico, que la gente no se fuera a dormir. Nos metimos por el Power Point, qué le metemos aquí,(…) volvámoslo más dinámico, cosa que los compañeros también estén participando y el tema también se nos prestó mucho. Las estrategias cognitivas son para practicarlas los estudiantes. (…) Llevar las actividades adecuadas (Merylein)*

Reflection is defined as the affective and intellectual activity through which individuals engage in exploring their experiences in order to understand them better (Boud, *et al*., 1985, cited in Benson, 2001) and is considered "a key cognitive process underlying self-management in learning if action is seen as its logical outcome" (Benson, 2001: 90).

3. There is a jointly constructed and negotiated plan of action, which undergoes change.

Project work is an organized and systematic set of activities with a final result. In project-learning environments, language itself is not the only object of attention (Legutke and Thomas, 1991: 167). Other activities and their constraints must be considered when designing the action plan: information resources, social arrangements, potential outcomes, and schedule restrictions. In spite of this planning, many activities may not be carried out as they were conceived because of unpredictable situations or new decisions when implementing the project.

> *Tuvimos reuniones como muy organizadas, ya que la profesora nos dio una hojita, una copia que se llamaba el* action plan*, entonces ahí nos mostraba como el orden que se debe tener y las restricciones que hay que utilizar para realizar el proyecto. (…) La dificultad era como seguir al pie de la letra (…) el* action plan*. Era como difícil, porque uno dice que va a hacer algo cierto día y a cierta hora, pero no sabe qué puede pasar, que se enfermó la mamá de alguien, que llegué tarde, entonces eso fue un poquito difícil, cumplir al pie de la letra lo que habíamos propuesto. (Felipe)*

4. Project learning is investigative.

Project work is not a simple activity or assignment where students work in isolation outside the classroom and present final results at the end of the course.

> (*La experiencia fue) muy enriquecedora. A pesar de que en los semestres anteriores habíamos hecho una que otra exposición, pero digamos como exposición, no como un trabajo de investigación. Había sido más superficial y sólo como para indagar en el tema, sí, de una forma muy superficial, no tan relevante como ésta. En cambio esta fue como la primera investigación muy en serio que hacíamos. (...) Esto fue como una introducción a la investigación, y eso es necesario. Además me parece muy bueno que sea en tercer semestre, que uno no se esté dando cuenta por allá en sexto o séptimo, o inclusive más lejos. (Pacho)*

Project work develops in cycles going from abstract ideas, to experience, reflection on observations, new understanding, and the emergence of new project ideas (Legutke and Thomas, 1991: 158).

5. Project learning is learner-centered.

Learner-centeredness lies not only on the fact that students choose the topics of their projects, i.e., the content of learning; but also on the fact that through the students' choice of strategies to achieve their project aims, project work permits students to discover their strengths, interests, and talents.

> *Yo a veces llegaba a una parte del trabajo en que quería hacer las cosas mucho más amplias, desarrollar mucho más tema pues. Quería yo exponer más cosas de las que me tocaban pues, pero eso ya no da para una clase y eso. Entonces uno ve ahí la verdadera pasión. Pues personalmente lo veo así, de la investigación. Que eso no es una cosa para tratar para una nota o un final y ya. No, eso es un proceso. Que a uno le gusta y que a mí me gustaría seguir viviendo, ya sea con otros trabajos, con otras materias. (Pacho)*

Students who show intrinsic motivation carry out activities just for the pleasure of learning, or because the want to achieve (Vallerand 1997, cited in Benson, 2001). Intrinsic motivation produces more meaningful learning and is promoted in situations where students are self-determined and feel that they control the learning process (Benson, 2001); therefore, when students do project work, they take control of their learning and develop more significant learning.

6. It requires cooperative abilities of small groups.

Small groups organize their work, monitor the results, and help each other to solve the difficulties encountered. In carrying out the tasks involved in the project, group members are accountable both to their team and the learning group as a whole.

> *Todos trabajamos y todos los equipos trabajamos en diferentes proyectos, (...) si nosotros tenemos un trabajo que consideramos que aportó algo a los otros compañeros, que aportó algo al profesor, y tuvo buenos resultados, creo que es un buen trabajo. (Edward)*

Students may have their own individual purposes and set their own individual goals; however, decisions about content are dependent on the situation of learning, call for social interaction, and have social consequences (Benson, 2001). In classroom settings, students cannot disregard their classmates' and teacher's interests, and need to negotiate the content of their project within the small group and also with the class.

7. Product is as important as process.

The cyclical nature of experiential learning is as important as the result of the process. Whereas in traditional teaching, the product implies a change in cognition, in project work the product involves not only changes in the knowledge base, but changes in skills and actions beyond the cognitive domain. It represents the holistic and multi-sensory nature of learning (head, heart, and hands).

Buscamos fuentes, nuestro trabajo final tuvo las herramientas de un trabajo que haya que exponer, o sea, (...) utilizamos todas las herramientas precisas para ello. Utilizamos lo que fue videos, utilizamos proyector, utilizamos copias, una cantidad de cosas que creo que los alumnos nos hayan entendido el proyecto. (Edward)

The product of the project is a reflection of the students' views of themselves and of the world, and is negotiated among the members of the group, who own and identify with their achievement as individuals and members of a group.

8. It involves an interdisciplinary approach to learning.

Legutge and Thomas (1991), whose experience with project work has been mainly in secondary schools, emphasize the idea that teachers from different subjects have to participate in project work and be involved in team teaching. In our case, Claudia saw the interdisciplinary nature of learning in her project. There, they used video camera in the interviews and they edited a video, so they had to learn new skills. They not only had to read and understand legal aspects related to the topic, such as how laws and decrees work, but they also had to understand the structure of the educational system in Colombia and how it works. This means that in project work, students develop and acquire not only academic but also other kinds of knowledge and abilities that do not have a direct relation with the main topic.

9. Teachers and learners assume multiple roles.

According to Legutke and Thomas (1991) the teacher may take the role of manager, researcher, facilitator, participant, and the student that of manager, researcher, teacher, secretary, actor, and writer. In our courses, the role of actor was not observed, but we found that both teacher and students took the role of monitor in formative assessment.

Cristina siempre nos daba las pautas: hagan un outline, cuáles son los temas, especifiquen más los temas, íbamos a hacer una entrevista, cómo vamos a hacer las preguntas, siempre el apoyo de Cristina estuvo ahí. Esas asesorías fueron como la base de esa exposición, siempre estuvo como guía,

y eso fue muy importante. (...) El proyecto fue evaluado por el grupo, la profesora también dio una nota y nosotros nos evaluamos. Ese proceso de evaluación es bueno, porque mirá, son tres puntos de vista. (...) A mí me parece muy adecuado, porque sí son los que están participando y son tres puntos diferentes y se puede llegar a un punto de encuentro. (Merylein)

Esa ruptura de, de tender a uno liderar algo. Es que liderar no es fácil para todo el mundo y asumir algo, una investigación de la que uno nunca ha hecho parte. Entonces eso es bueno... (Pacho)

The fact that students could take the role of teachers was very important because the students are studying to become language teachers. When each team presented their choice of topic to the class, when they shared their action plans, and when they explained how they were working, other students gave them feedback and/or suggestions. In their final presentations, each team "taught" their classmates about the topic they had worked on, and students self- and peer-assessed their performance—a role usually taken by teachers.

10. Learners are partners who contribute to the content and process of learning (open, process-oriented curriculum).

Project work is usually included in the weaker version of the process syllabus (Breen, 1987, cited in Benson, 2001), a negotiated syllabus component, since students participate in decisions regarding the content, the procedures, and the results of their research activity.

Porque se trataba de una materia de lenguaje oral, se trataba de estar en contacto con los compañeros y lo hacíamos siempre, siempre lo hacíamos en inglés. Entonces sirvió mucho, porque se obtuvo un mayor conocimiento tanto de la lengua como de la participación de los integrantes del equipo y del grupo en sí, que todos en clase hacíamos comentarios alusivos a como nos iba, qué dificultades teníamos, entonces todo eso nos sirvió para una auto-evaluación y auto-corrección. (Carlos)

Besides, collaboration and discussions among participants, when sharing experiences about project implementation are communicative opportunities for social interaction and language learning (Benson 2001).

11. Project work assumes self-direction and learner autonomy.

In project work, control over learning is transferred to the students and the teacher acts as a facilitator, providing an appropriate environment where students take responsibility for their learning.

> *Hay más participación del estudiante. Es que él es el que está ahí. Él es el directo responsable de esa presentación, de ese proyecto, de esa investigación. Y como él es el directo responsable, el TIENE que responder por eso, tiene que buscar, tiene que indagar, tiene que aprender. Mientras que si el profesor llega y nos da el video. Bueno sí, ahí quedó. Recibimos, escasamente dijimos unas palabras, pronunciamos, nos corrigieron, pero ahí quedó. (Merylein)*

Conclusion

Project work enhances autonomy because it is a research endeavor in which learners take control of their own learning. They learn how to learn, and can thus apply the knowledge acquired in this experience to life-long learning. They decide what they want to learn, set their own goals and plan actions to reach those goals, and they evaluate the process and the results of the experience in order to learn from it. They also develop the skills needed to work collaboratively: they engage in dialogue, they develop their own criteria, and they make decisions jointly. The following statements of students illustrate this (emphasis ours):

> *Es importante que hubiéramos aprendido a realizar un proyecto, ya que esto no nos va a servir solamente para la clase de Cristina, o para la clase de Edgar, o cualquier clase de otro profesor, <u>eso sirve para toda la vida</u>. (...) En nosotros que vamos a ser futuros profesores, o algunos que ya lo son, sirve eso como para hacer proyectos investigativos, o <u>mejorar situaciones en la escuela o colegio</u> donde se esté desempeñando el profesor, sirve mucho ese proyecto. Sirve mucho también eso del action plan, eso es excelente. (...) Eso sirve para <u>tener un plan</u> para seguir en el desempeño pues del trabajo. (Felipe)*

(Trabajar de manera independiente) yo creo que para nuestra carrera es muy importante como licenciados ya que cuando nos graduemos y estemos trabajando en un colegio o en cierta parte dando clases, uno tiene que estar al tanto de la enseñanza de la lengua extranjera. O sea, no utilizar tanto los métodos tradicionales, uno investigar, y creo que la independencia hace que uno investigue, que no esté diario pegado del profesor sino hacerse uno independiente. Hacerse uno como estudiante para después hacerse uno como profesor. (...) Antes me apoyaba mucho en el profesor, en los trabajos que él colocaba, en las notas que él daba. Ya ahora uno tiene otros objetivos, que es uno hacerse profesional, sin necesidad de tener un profesor al lado. Sí tenerlo, pero como guía, no como hacerme tan dependiente de él. (Edward)

Pues ya ve uno que la responsabilidad no es de uno solo, sino de todos y uno tiene que reconocer que uno está interactuando con otras personas, ponerse de acuerdo. (...) Tener criterios no es así de sencillo (...) Entonces uno de los objetivos podía ser ese: aprender verdaderamente a trabajar en grupo. (Pacho)

In our view, features of all versions of learner autonomy, the technical, the psychological, and the political (Benson, 1997) are evidenced in our experience with project work. This means empowering students to use language learning to improve the conditions in which they and those around them live, study, and work. It involves redistributing power in order to make a more democratic society. This is the position supported by the Ministry of Education when it states that(:)

la autonomía tiene que ver principalmente con el desarrollo de la capacidad que las personas y los colectivos tienen para autogobernarse, darse las normas requeridas para la convivencia; autoexigirse, apoyarse mutuamente para el logro de metas de beneficio común, tomar decisiones y autocontrolarse" (Min. Ed., 1998, 25).

All the features mentioned by the students who participated in project work make it worthwhile to adopt it as a pedagogical strategy to educate the teachers this country needs.

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Annex 1

Guide for the interview

1. Cuéntame de tu experiencia en el trabajo del proyecto que hiciste en el curso de Cristina/Edgar.

2. ¿Te acuerdas de cuál fue el proceso que siguieron?

3. ¿Cuál crees que era el objetivo(s) de trabajar en equipo?

4. ¿Crees que se lograron esos objetivos?
   ¿Por qué sí? ¿Por qué no?

5. ¿Por qué crees que para ese curso se escogió trabajar en un proyecto y no como se hace tradicionalmente en otros cursos (usando videos, fotocopias, texto guía, etc.)?

6. ¿Qué opinas del rol del profesor en el desarrollo de este tipo de proyectos?

7. ¿Qué piensas del proceso de evaluación?

Annex 2

Role plays adapted from hadfield's 17.3 Middlemen

Role play 1 (Team work)

Partner 1: Your partner is always busy. Every time you want to agree on a time to work together on your project he/she says he/she has to work. The only time he/she is free is on Sunday afternoon and that's when you go out with your boy-/girlfriend.

Partner 2: Your partner is very lazy. The only thing he/she does is attend classes and hang out in the cafeteria. However, when you propose to work together on Sundays he/she says he/she can't.

Role play 2 (Team work)

Partner 1: You are in mid-semester and up to now you have prepared most of the project alone. Your partner suggested the topic and provided some ideas for the project, but never showed up for the meetings you had arranged. You are worried about how you will organize the project presentation.

Partner 2: Your partner is very inconsiderate. He/she asked you to work on the project with him/her because you are very imaginative and he/she likes your ideas. Now he/she is saying he/she does not want you on the team anymore because you missed some meetings.

Role play 3 (Teacher—student conflict)

Student: Your teacher is very demanding. She requires you to do a lot of work outside class. You wished you had all the time to do all the tasks she asks you to do, but you have to work to support yourself.

Teacher: You are having trouble with a student who is not handing in his/her assignments on time. How will he/she learn if he/she doesn't practice what

we are presenting in class? There is no point in doing the task a week or two weeks later. He/She will not be able to keep up with the course objectives.

Role play 4 (Teacher—student conflict)

Student: Your teacher expects you to do things you have never done before. She asks you to do homework that you do not understand. You do not come to class because you have not done your homework and are afraid she will put you on the spot.

Teacher: You are worried because various students are not coming to class and those who come do not participate actively in class. Some are not preparing well for class, e.g., they have not done their homework. They do not seem to realize that they will not have time to learn everything they need to learn if they do not start working from the beginning of the semester.

Annex 3

Suggestions for successful project work

➢ Write down the names and telephone numbers of each team member.

➢ Agree on a schedule to meet with your classmates weekly or biweekly and commit yourself to it.

➢ Make sure the time and place for the following meeting is clear for everyone.

➢ Make sure it is clear what you are supposed to do in the meeting.

➢ Come to the meeting with something to contribute to the project, for example, materials, web sites, names of people who can provide information (in English preferably), ideas to improve group work, and/or ideas about how to organize the information collected.

➢ If you commit yourself to do a specific task, think of the time it will take you to do it, and commit yourself to having it done by then. Don't promise what you can't accomplish.

Annex 4

Suggestions for designing your action plan

In order to design your action plan it is suggested that you do the following:

1. Divide the big task of working on a project and doing a final presentation of it into smaller tasks or activities.

2. List those activities.

3. Think about what you will need to have done to do each of the activities listed, and add them to the list.

4. Decide who is doing each activity based on each member's strengths and weaknesses. (You may decide to do an activity because you want to learn how to do it, not necessarily because you are an expert at it.)

5. Decide which activities need to be done in a meeting with the whole team and which can be done individually.

6. Imagine how much time you will need for each activity.

7. Imagine what resources you will need to do each activity.

Annex 5

Claudia and Andres' Action Plan

WHAT	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	RESULTS
To read decree 272	Andrés and Claudia	Tuesday, 30 April at 4:00 P.M.	At Home	Summary
Discussion about decree and definition of questions for Rodrigo Arias	Andrés and Claudia	Thursday, 2 May at 10:00 A.M.	Library	Conceptual Map and Questionnaire
Interview with Rodrigo Arias	Andrés and Claudia	Tuesday , 7 May	Rodrigo's Office	Tape and Notes
To read "Curricular adaptation proposition for program 476"	Claudia	Thursday, 9 May at 5:00 P.M.	Home	Notes
To read "Criterions and procedures for previous accreditation of academics programs of pregrado and educational specialization"	Andrés	Tuesday, 14 May at 4:00 P.M.	At Home	Notes
Definition of questions for students	Andrés and Claudia	Tuesday, 16 May at 4:00 P.M.	Cafetería "Tronquitos"	Questionnaire
Interview with students	Andrés and Claudia	17.18.19 May	Cátedra teachers' office	Video and Notes
Definition of questions for teachers	Andrés and Claudia	Friday, 19 May	Library	Questionnaire
Interview (with(teacher)	Andrés and Claudia	Tuesday, 23 May	Teacher's office	Video and Notes
Interview (with teacher)	Andrés and Claudia	Thursday, 25 May	Teacher's office	Video and Notes
Hand-out	Andrés and Claudia	Saturday, 27 May At 2:00 P.M.	Claudia´s house	Hand-out
Edition of the video	Andrés and Claudia	Sunday, 28 May at 1:00 P.M.	Andres´ house	Video
Edition of the video	Andrés y Claudia	Tuesday, 1 June at 4:00 P.M.	Andres´ house	Video
Rehearsal	Andrés y Claudia	Thursday, 3 May at 10:00 A.M.	Andres´ house	Students prepared

Annex 6

Self- and peer-assessment formats

SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT WORK
Oral Communication III – 2002-II – Cristina Frodden

Name: _____

Date: _____

In the space provided in the first file, write the names of your team members. Then, under each member, write the word that best answers the question. Choose among the following:

NEVER   RARELY   SOMETIMES   OFTEN   ALWAYS

NAMES:			ME
Does he/she / Do you bring materials for the project?			
Does he/she / Do you read the materials?			
Does he/she / Do you help others to learn?			
Does he/she / Do you listen to other people's ideas?			
Does he/she / Do you use English in the discussions?			
Does he/she / Do you attend meetings?			

SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT OF CLASS PARTICIPATION

Name: _____

Date:_____

In the space provided in the first file, write the names of your team members. Then, under each member, write the word that best answers the question. Choose among the following:

NEVER   RARELY   SOMETIMES   OFTEN   ALWAYS

NAMES:			ME
Does he/she / Do you come to class?			
Is he/she / Are you prepared to participate in class?			
Does he/she / Do you talk about the topic in English in class?			
Does he/she / Do you ask questions?			
Does he/she / Do you answer questions promptly?			

SELF- AND PEER-ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT PRESENTATION

Oral Communication III – 2002-II – Cristina Frodden

Name: _____

Date:_____

In the space provided in the first file, write the names of the presenters. Then, under each member, write the word that best describes the criterion. Choose among the following:

POOR   INADEQUATE   FAIR   GOOD   EXCELLENT

NAMES:			ME
Content			
Coherence			
Use of resources			
Interaction with the audience			
Accuracy			