



EDUCATION AND SECOND LANGUAGE

- 1. A LANGUAGE IMMERSION AS A STRATEGY TO CREATE SPACES
OF COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH*
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THINKING IN THE REFLECTIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESSES*

A LANGUAGE IMMERSION AS A STRATEGY TO CREATE SPACES OF COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this work is to show how through the creation of new strategies to teaching English learners can improve their communicative competence in English, being this a determinant aspect of learning a second language. In this way, we analyzed the students of the university and emerged an idea of doing an immersion in English. The aim of this project was to create an enjoyable environment for students where they could improve their communicative competence in English through real situations of communication and didactic activities to interact among them.

KEY WORDS

English language – immersion - communicative competence - learning of a second language - interaction.

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INTRODUCCION

Nowadays, it is really important to learn English since it is the worldwide language; it means that many fields such as technology, businesses, tourism, knowledge and communication indicate that English is the most useful language around the world. As a result, to know this language gives people better opportunities to push up their careers, that is why almost all the countries in the whole world include English in the curriculum of schools and universities.

On the other hand, teaching and learning process of English as a second language in the Colombian context present some difficulties for different reasons; most of them are related to the way how the process is seen by teachers and students. Learners feel that they don't need to make any effort to interact because all the activities in the classroom are based on grammar structures and memorization that are not linked with real situations of communication.

NEW STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AND LEARNING

Considering that traditional strategies of English teaching don't have good results, it has no sense to keep on working with methods that don't contribute to the main objective of learning a language, communication, this skill must be fostered through a dynamic approach as a perfect way to make it possible since interaction and needs of expression are the starting points to the improvement of the communicative competence.

According to Brown & Hanlon (1970), “Language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language -natural communication- in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding”. In brief, it is important to present to students new ways of learning through real situations where they live the language and realize about the importance of English in their lives.

Now, it is necessary to understand that the concept of “communicative competence” exceeds the limits to know speaking, listening and reading. Hymes (1972), states that communicative competence can be defined as the ability that the speaker acquires to know how to use properly a language, distinguishing the possible different social situations; in other words, know how to use a language on different contexts.

DIAGNOSTIC AND POPULATION

Previously we had talked about the need to try new strategies out in order to make learning processes meaningful for students. Because of this, it emerged the idea of English immersion with students of the University. The purpose was to live a certain period of time using the target language students are learning, doing our best to make ourselves understood. It would make students practice all those topics and knowledge they have received in their classes.

In this way, a language immersion is a way to make learning of a language more interesting to students; it also includes the improvement of abilities such as interaction, which helps to make more confident and solid a group of students, as well as the knowledge gained in English culture with activities native people do in their free time.

Definitely, what we were looking for with this activity was to provide a friendly, fun and enjoyable environment to communicate in English, trying to remove the barrier of fear by talking or being teased. In this context, we organized an unusual learning environment compared with what is experienced by students at the university.

The Immersion was planned and aimed by the Cundinamarca University, Girardot. The participants were 76 students of the different programs with ages between 17 and 25. The English levels that had been stipulated for the development of activities were A2 and B1. The immersion took place in Piscilago Park in Melgar for two days (May 28th and 29th, 2015). It was supported by American people, English teachers and a team of facilitators from seventh semester of the Education program.

OBJECTIVES

- To create an enjoyable environment for students where they can improve their communicative competence in English through real situations of communication.
- To design an English curriculum based on communication that can be adapted and used in other contexts.

METHODOLOGY

For the development of the immersion, the leaders planned the activities and strategies to make this project something significant to participants, the logistic was proposed since the beginning of the semester.

During the two immersion days people were divided in three teams: green, blue and orange and they competed to defend their colors. Different playful and didactic activities were developed, such as volleyball, water polo, soccer with three legs, capture the flag, water wars, karaoke and campfire where people could practice English all the time. Additionally, there were activities of interaction with native speakers. This strategy of English immersion presented the language in a different way to encourage students to interact with the leaders, the native people and among them. The instructors spoke in English because it was important that the participants caught English in a natural way.

RESULTS

This immersion was an excellent opportunity to make students practice their knowledge of English in real situations and meet native people with a different culture. We achieved the exposure of students with English the two days.

Despite we realized that students had a lower level of English than we expected, they were eager to participate in the immersion, even though we identified some problems to understand the activities and keep a conversation. However, they started to catch the meaning of what we said when we gave them more specific explanation and examples.

The activities we planned had good receptivity, but the most important aspect to stand out is the excellent interaction of students with Americans. They participated without fear and talked for about an hour.

CONCLUSIONS

To learn a second language is a process where communication is the essential aspect. In this way, an immersion in English as a pedagogical strategy is a perfect way to incorporate students in a different context outside the school or university and let them socialize and remove the pressure felt in a regular classroom. Moreover, the organizers of the process created the appropriate spaces to develop communicative competence of students in real situations where they had to use the language as a response to the need to interact with others. The most relevant aspect was to generate that necessity to use English in a comfortable way through interesting and enjoyable activities to overcome the fear to speak this language.

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