



LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH SPORTS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT WITH FIELD HOCKEY AND LANGUAGE

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RESUMO: Projetos interdisciplinares têm sido utilizados ultimamente como um importante recurso para a educação. Estes estão baseados no desenvolvimento de constante interação entre diferentes disciplinas e metodologias. O objetivo geral deste estudo foi observar a motivação e o envolvimento de um grupo de estudantes aprendendo Inglês, em um nível intermediário, com a prática do esporte Hóquei sobre Grama. A amostra desta pesquisa foi composta por oito adolescentes do sexo feminino, com idades entre 12 a 14 anos de idade. Atividades físicas foram desenvolvidas em sessões de uma hora, com a periodicidade semanal, durante o período de três meses. As aulas foram lecionadas em um total de duas horas em cada encontro. Uma hora da aula foi subdividida para a introdução (geralmente envolvendo conteúdos históricos, regras e características da modalidade de Hóquei sobre Grama), e também exercícios do livro de atividades da escola de idiomas, envolvendo as habilidades de escrever, escutar, ler e falar (*writing, listening, reading, speaking*). Logo após, as atividades foram estruturadas em uma hora de atividades práticas, onde o foco principal foi nas habilidades de escutar e falar (*listening, speaking*) com o grupo interagindo em atividades físicas de técnicas e táticas do Hóquei sobre Grama. Como resultados deste estudo, foi possível observar que as estudantes tiveram muito mais oportunidade de interação comparado a um aula regular em sala de aula. Juntamente, o entusiasmo e engajamento foi mais intenso durante o projeto, pois a curiosidade e busca de conhecimento para aprender mais sobre a modalidade de Hóquei na Grama estiveram presentes, assim como vocabulário específico e cultural sobre a modalidade. Conclui-se que múltiplas habilidades podem ser melhor desenvolvidas quando os estudantes podem aprender em diferenciados ambientes, com a oferta de diferentes desafios propostos pelos professores. Este projeto interdisciplinar pode auxiliar os estudantes a evoluir mais em suas habilidades comunicativas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: interdisciplinaridade; esportes; idiomas.

RESUMEN: *Proyectos interdisciplinarios recientemente están siendo utilizados como un recurso importante para la educación. Estos se basan en el desarrollo de la interacción constante entre diferentes disciplinas y metodologías. El objetivo de este estudio fue observar la motivación y la participación de un grupo de estudiantes que están aprendiendo inglés en un nivel intermedio, con el deporte del hockey sobre césped. La muestra se compone de ocho adolescentes, de entre 12 y 14 años de edad. Las actividades físicas se desarrollaron en sesiones de una hora semanales durante tres meses. Las clases fueron enseñadas en un total de dos horas. Una clase de una hora se subdividió para la introducción (en general contenidos históricos, normas y características del hockey sobre césped) y también actividades de lenguaje del libro de ejercicios de inglés adoptado por la escuela, que implican habilidades de escritura, escuchar, leer y hablar (writing, listening, reading, speaking). Poco después, las actividades se estructuran en una hora de actividades prácticas, donde la atención se centró en habilidades para escuchar y hablar (listening, speaking) con el grupo interactuando actividades físicas de técnicas y tácticas de hockey sobre césped. Como resultado, se observó que los estudiantes tenían muchas más oportunidades para la interacción en comparación con clases regulares en la escuela de idiomas. En conjunto, el*



entusiasmo y el compromiso fueron más intensos durante el proyecto, pues la curiosidad y la búsqueda de conocimiento para aprender más sobre el deporte del hockey sobre césped estuvieron presentes, así como el vocabulario específico y cultural sobre el deporte. Llegamos a la conclusión de que múltiples habilidades se desarrollan mejor cuando los estudiantes pueden aprender en diferentes entornos, con la afreta de diferentes desafíos planteados por los profesores. Este proyecto interdisciplinario ayudó los estudiantes desarrollar más sus habilidades de comunicación.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: *interdisciplinaridad; deportes; idiomas.*

Introduction

Interdisciplinary projects are being used lately as an important resource for teaching. According to Ivanitskaya (2002) interdisciplinary learning is characterized by the integration of multidisciplinary knowledge across a central program theme or focus. With repeated exposure to interdisciplinary thought, learners develop more advanced epistemological beliefs, enhanced critical thinking ability and metacognitive skills, and an understanding of the relations among perspectives derived from different disciplines.

Moran (2010) states that interdisciplinarity interlocks with the concern of epistemology and tends to be centred around problems and issues that cannot be addressed or solved within the existing disciplines, rather than the quest for an all-inclusive synthesis. The author also explains that interdisciplinary projects mean any form of dialogue or interaction between two or more disciplines: the level, type, purpose and effect of this interaction remain to be examined.

For Klein (1990), interdisciplinarity has been shaped not only by ideas, but also the way ideas were structured in the curriculum of schools and learning environments. The author also states that the need for interdisciplinarity has been reflected in epistemological writings ever since the origins of Western science.

Interdisciplinary projects are based on the development of wide interaction through different subjects and methodologies, allowing different areas to communicate among each other and develop new possibilities of learning in different contexts.

This study was designed with the proposal to apply physical activities through a sport, structured by lessons where the importance of a different way to teach was highlighted for the experiment.

Research results have demonstrated that school age children should engage daily in moderate to vigorous physical exercise involving a variety of activities (STRONG et al., 2005).



The US Department of Health and Human Services (2009) claims that comprehensive school-based physical activity programs should help youth meet^[1] physical activity needs, stressing that PE practices should be enjoyable and engage kids in friendly interaction.

Several studies have demonstrated the relationship between physical activity and quality of life. Active individuals have demonstrated to be healthier, to be more positive about work, and to deal better with everyday stress (WEINBERG; GOULD, 2011).

Stone and Klein (2004) have also concluded that people who exercise frequently not only improve their health and fitness, but they also develop a sense of pleasure and strength, which has positive implications on other aspects of their lives.

Scientific evidence also suggests that physical activity can improve academic performance and influence positively other factors related to academic success (HILLMAN et al., 2009).

The main objective of this study was to observe the motivation and engagement of a group of students learning English, in a lower-intermediate level with the use of the sport Field Hockey.

Methodology

The research carried out has followed a qualitative approach with descriptive and experimental features. Marconi and Lakatos (2008) stress that such method focuses on evaluation, explanation, and interpretation, aiming at the understanding of some situation or phenomenon.

A participant observation approach has been chosen for the study, where the English teacher was collecting data through notes and pictures from the classes and interactions during 3 months. After this period, data was analyzed and it is presented in the following section (results).

The location where the research was conducted has been Achieve Languages School, located in Nova Petropolis in Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil. The school has German, French, Spanish and English courses, offered to children, teenagers and adults, from Monday to Saturday. More than 300 students are enrolled in the morning, afternoon and evening shifts.

The sample of this study consisted of eight female teenagers, aged from 12 to 14 years old. The students are part of a lower-intermediate level and the class was every Wednesday in the second semester of 2015 (from August to November), in a class involving 2 hours per week.

For the research, firstly the project was introduced to the principal and the pedagogical coordinator for evaluation. After some pedagogical meetings in early August



2015, the project was analyzed and approved. The researcher started the selection of materials, mainly from sports books written in English and the school bought all the equipment (sticks and balls) to be used in the practical classes that happened in an Elementary school close to Achieve languages school.

The classes were taught for a total of two hours. One hour was planned for the introduction of the class (usually with contents of History, rules and features of Field Hockey), and also the work on general exercises from the English book adopted by the school for the regular classes (activities involving writing, listening, reading and speaking skills). Then it was followed of physical activities during an hour session, once a week, over a three-month period, in which the focus was on the listening and speaking skills while the group was practicing physical activities.

The teacher was conducting activities of warm-up (about 10 to 15 minutes), where many exercises for stretching and flexibility were employed to teach movements and body image. It was already a part of the class where the students had to show one movement and explain it in English, with the goal of speaking and listening by the others. The main part (about 30 minutes) of the class was consisted by technical and tactical exercises for learning the basic movements of Field Hockey, where the students could interact with the teacher by asking and talking about what they were learning. Games and matches were also organized for the students, where they could practice all the skills, indeed the communication in English, required for all the moments of the class. In the last part (about 10 to 15 minutes), a final stretching was done with a talk about what the students learned and how motivating and enthusiastic the activities were for them.

The teacher in the last part was using a notebook to register the main answers and perceptions from the students, data used to analyze and comprehend how the project was giving signs of motivation and engagement during the interdisciplinary project involving sport and English. The results of these notes and observation made are going to be presented in the next section.

Results

As results of this research, it was possible to observe that the students had more opportunities of interactions in English (speaking skill) compared to a regular class. One of the main goals proposed in this study was to offer a new space for interaction, using creativity and students enthusiasm for learning. The group had a very homogeneous feature, because all the adolescents were from the same city, exactly in the same level of English and the same time of classes (1 year studying English at a private language school and about 2 to 3 years from regular Elementary school where they were studying).

In the preparation classes for the outdoor classes, students showed curiosity for the new topic: learning a new and challenging sport (before never practiced by them) in a totally different space (a field with sports equipment). Although the curiosity for learning a new sport in English was the most observed component in the research, the improvement for new vocabulary occurred because new texts and materials were used for the classes: students started to get more information about the History, rules and techniques of Field Hockey.



Engagement was visible in the theoretical classes, because students were constantly asking information and showing enthusiasm:

[...] “I would love to play this sport and maybe become a professional player!” [...].

[...] “I would love to play in England as Kate Middleton played when she was at the University!” [...].

In these two comment examples, it was possible to observe that besides curiosity for learning a different sport, future expectation and motivation began in the class where two different students were showing interest in getting further practices and learning more about the sport, even imagining new possibilities for traveling abroad and going to an English speaking country.

Besides, the commitment was more intense during practical classes. The students showed enthusiasm to learn more about Field Hockey, the specific vocabulary and the cultural features in other countries (as Field Hockey is more popular in the Commonwealth countries than in Brazil). Many students would love to learn more how Field Hockey was taught at schools and clubs in different countries:

[...] “I as checking online that Field Hockey is very popular in Australia and New Zealand and there are lots of clubs there where girls can play and become players! [...]

It was interesting to see that students were researching more about the sport, specially by Field Hockey isn’t a popular sport in Brazil, where only Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro states have few clubs and places to play and train. And a good sign of interdisciplinarity, was the fact of students bringing new information about Geography, History and English, because mainly the information was collected from international sites and webpages.

The students were observed when using the selected activities regarding two particular aspects: engagement and motivation.

In an educational context, Chapman (2003) defines engagement as the intensity and emotional quality with which students get involved in learning activities. Students who are engaged in the activities put a lot of effort and concentration in the task, showing behavioral involvement. They demonstrate enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity and interest. The opposite of engagement is disaffection.

Children who are not happy are passive, they do not show any effort to carry out the proposed tasks and they give up easily when facing a challenge.

Motivation can be considered as an educational process. Historically, motivation was mainly associated to behavioral aspects, where the meaning came from the individual positive



and negative stimuli linked to award or punishment (SCHUNK et al., 2008). The authors say that nowadays the recent studies point out the importance of social and cultural aspects in the comprehension in the relationship between motivation and learning. They define motivation as a process in which personal, social and cultural experiences can be applied during any activity.

As engagement results, students were constantly showing by comments the following impression about the project:

[...] Wow, I am becoming a very good player, look at that teacher! [...]

[...] I want to learn how to tackle easily when I am playing [...]

[...] I will score many goals when we are playing against each other! [...]

[...] How can I train Field Hockey in Nova Petropolis city? [...]

As motivation results, students were showing by feelings and interaction the following comments:

[...] I loved and I did my best today when you were teaching us how to throw the ball higher. I hope I can become better in our next class! I will also check online how to get some tips! [...]

[...] I think it is a bit difficult to learn this sport, but little by little I am learning a bit more! [...]

[...] I am enjoying very much the activities, because it works out a lot our legs and our bums!!! [...]

[...] Field Hockey is interesting and I want to play after our classes finish. Next year, how can we train teacher? [...]

Through all the comments analyzed and described, it was possible to observe that engagement and motivation were present in most of the classes.

One other feature was the integration and social interaction among the students. They were interacting in a very different way, comparing to the regular classes: during the project the body and communication were used much more than just reading and writing exercises.



In figure number 1, it was registered the motivation and interaction of the students, celebrating a goal scored by them:



Figure 1: students in one of the English classes taught in an outdoor environment.

It was notable how students were collaborating and making more efforts to help each other speaking all the time English, using the right vocabulary and encouraging other classmates to improve either in the physical skill as well as the speaking skill.

This outcome is important to be analyzed, especially in a society where more and more people become individualists in the daily activities. Technologies and teenagers lifestyle conduct for individualism, and it is possible to observe it in many classrooms where students can be introspective and very shy exposing ideas and participating in exercises and educational activities.

In figure number 2, it is possible to observe an activity where students were learning how to use the equipment and support other classmates to play:



Figure 2: students playing the basic movements in Field Hockey.

Although all participants in the experiment had some problems in motor skill development related to the practice of physical exercises of Field Hockey, the students showed a lot of interest in playing the games and activities proposed, even with difficulties.

The data collected during the three months showed that students who participated in the project were motivated, curious and interested, always making questions about the sport, activities and exercises, showing a very receptive behavior to this experimental method for teaching English.

These observations reinforce the importance of using new resources for teaching English in private schools, Elementary and High School classes, offering new methodologies and opportunities for learning.

Conclusion

We concluded that multiple skills could be better developed when students can learn in different environments, offering challenges suggested by teachers. The use of new methods can bring positive results for learning, especially when engagement and motivation are employed and observed during the teaching interactions.



This interdisciplinary project could help students to improve their speaking and listening skills and the interaction developed collaboration among the students. This is essential to bring extra motivation so that students learn and use English in new and unusual situations.

For further studies, new approaches with practical activities, sports and interactive exercises can be structured and different methodologies using specific contents can be carried out.

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