

ICFL International Conference on Future Learning 2020

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Teacher empowerment in the English classroom: Complementary views around the participation in a collaborative project of innovation

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Abstract

This work is based on the principles of collaborative innovation (Nussbaum, 2013; Masats et al., 2020) and the collaborative research in *colabor* (Leyva y Speed, 2008), according to which teachers must find spaces to work together (Whitaker, 2002) and thus be able to develop innovative classroom proposals. This often implies that these proposals are designed, implemented and assessed by mixed teams made up of in-service teachers, pre-service teachers and researchers (Masats & Guerrero, 2018). Our objective is focused on the verification of these premises. To do so, we analyse the data obtained in individual and focus group interviews where participants are asked about the adoption of the Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach in the English classrooms of a secondary school that has taken up the challenge of adopting this methodology with the collaboration of a team of researchers specialised in language acquisition in multilingual environments. The high school is located on the outskirts of the city of Barcelona and hosts a large number of students at risk of exclusion. The participants of this study are students of the participating high school, the in-service English teachers who implement PBL in their classroom, the other in-service English teachers of the school and a group of pre-service trainee teachers who voluntarily support teachers and researchers in their goal of transforming classroom practices.

The analysis of the views of these stakeholders allows us to sustain that the presence of pre-service trainee teachers in the classrooms facilitates the development of didactic PBL proposals based on teamwork. Likewise, their presence and support empower both students and teachers alike. First, teachers who participate in the collaborative research and innovation project report they are able to improve their classroom practices because having a pre-service teacher in the classroom allows them to offer their learners more individualized attention and the presence of researchers allows them to keep updated on the latest pedagogical trends. Second, pre-service teachers maintain that having the opportunity of co-teaching with expert teachers and of being mentored by researchers offers them an invaluable training experience. Third, from the students' perspective, the didactic proposals presented to them through the application of the PBL approach are tailored to their interests. Moreover, they also sustain that the participation of the

group of pre-service trainee teachers, who only address them in English, contextualizes the real use of a foreign language in the classroom. The in-service teachers also feel pre-service teachers have a positive impact on students but they see it as a consequence of the fact that pre-service teachers offer students a role model that is generationally closer to them than that they can offer. Finally, the researchers appreciate the possibility of being allowed to conduct collaborative research in real classroom contexts.

In conclusion, collaborative research is especially relevant in schools located in socioeconomically underprivileged milieus because it increases human resources in the classroom. Besides, collaboration between in-service, pre-service teachers and university researchers is crucial to promote innovation in the classrooms and to collaboratively grow as educational professionals.

Keywords: Project-based learning, secondary education, collaborative innovation, research in colabor, English as a foreign language

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Data was collected within the framework of research project entitled '*Teachers as agents of transformation through their engagement in cross disciplinary innovative projects in the English classrooms (DATE)*' sponsored by Obra Social "la Caixa". Project Reference: 2016ACUP-001 (2017-2020).

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