

Accomplishments: Raising awareness of human rights and developing skills in secondary school

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Abstract

Since the beginning of this century, international organisations together with local legislation have strongly recommended initiatives for education on Human Rights with the aim of deepening the exercise of democratic citizenship and respect for fundamental freedoms. In this context, this interdisciplinary project is designed for young teenagers with the objective of raising awareness and placing them in a position to exercise their rights and responsibilities. It integrates different areas of Language, History and Social Studies with Human Rights Education. The project uses authentic material and provides teachers and students with a significant context to promote and develop skills for communication and participation. In the end, students share their productions outside the classroom boundaries.

Keywords: human rights education; interdisciplinary project; exercise of rights and responsibilities.

Resumen

Desde comienzos de este siglo tanto organizaciones internacionales como así también la legislación local recomiendan iniciativas para la educación en Derechos Humanos, con el objetivo de profundizar el ejercicio de la ciudadanía democrática y el respeto por las libertades fundamentales. En este contexto, se presenta un proyecto interdisciplinario diseñado para jóvenes adolescentes con el fin de crear conciencia y colocarlos en condiciones de ejercer sus derechos y responsabilidades. El proyecto integra diferentes áreas de Lengua, Historia y Estudios Sociales con Educación en Derechos Humanos. Además, utiliza materiales auténticos que proveen a docentes y estudiantes un contexto significativo para promover y desarrollar habilidades para la comunicación y la participación. Por último, los estudiantes comparten sus producciones fuera del aula.

Palabras clave: educación en derechos humanos; proyecto interdisciplinario; ejercicio de derechos y responsabilidades

Preview

Level: 3rd year secondary school

Language competence: A2-B1 (Common European Framework of Reference)

Age of students: 14–15

Type of project: Interdisciplinary

Theme: Achievements that have contributed to the preservation of basic human rights

Estimated time: Approximately 5 weeks (see chart with timeline under Instructional plan)

Summary

Students need challenging topics, which can help them see and understand reality from different angles. In this sense, and along with a Human Rights approach to English language education, we propose a project to be developed in ten lessons, which illustrates theoretical concepts in the area of Human Rights and teaching. The project addresses the generative topic achievements, and relates it to a sensitive issue for all Argentinians: the recovery of the kidnapped children during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, a period of state terrorism in this country. This period involved countless atrocities and human rights violations to such an extent that its consequences still impact on the Argentinian society. It is estimated that around 500 children were born in captivity and stolen from their mothers, to be subsequently given up for illegal adoption and their identities hidden. So far, only 118 have been restored to their biological families. In this project, students will focus upon the recovery of one of these grandchildren: Estela de Carlotto's grandson, Guido Montoya Carlotto. Ms. Carlotto has devoted her entire life to pursuing the whereabouts of her daughter and the son she had during captivity.

Ms. Carlotto's ceaseless struggle has given her enormous popularity worldwide. Her own strength, together with other mothers', led them to found in 1977 an internationally recognised organisation strongly committed to fight crimes against humanity: *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. This non-governmental organisation has been granted five consecutive nominations to the Nobel Peace Prize, among other worldwide awards.

This project is developed to illustrate her life-long achievements. It includes tasks with a clear goal in raising awareness of the importance of knowing and exercising human rights in general, paying special attention to identity and citizenship.

From Theory to Practice

Working in the field of education in the 21st century presents us with many different interdependent challenges. To begin with, there is no denial that the role of school in society has changed: today, the need to address acceptance and respect for diversity must be in the limelight. The heterogeneous classroom is no longer an exception: our students

come from different social and cultural backgrounds. Together with this, society needs more than ever before people who actively and critically participate in world issues. This complex and challenging scenario, which both teachers and students face, invites us to reflect on different and interrelated concepts such as democracy, multiculturalism and plurilingualism.

As language teachers, we cannot disregard the importance of considering how all these concepts influence our teaching practices as well as our purposes in the short and long term. As 21st century educators, we need to acknowledge that teaching a language is more than teaching its form and meaning: teaching a language is about educating critical and responsible citizens. A citizenship and human rights education framework is the basis of language teaching in this direction.

Byram (1997, 2000) introduces the concept of intercultural competence which includes *skills* (the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, and the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture); *knowledge* (of social groups and their products and processes); *attitudes* (curiosity, openness, readiness to suspend disbelief); and *values* (critical cultural awareness/political education). As Starkey (2005, p. 32) affirms, this competence paves the way to “develop citizenship skills as well as familiarise learners with key concepts associated with democracy.” He also states that “adopting a human rights approach to language teaching provides a sound framework within which controversial issues can be examined” (p.31). These issues will be significantly meaningful to students and will help them learn citizenship knowledge, skills and language at the same time.

One of the challenges for the teacher, then, is to carefully select content and design tasks to promote language learning and at the same time help students become full and active citizens. Bearing this in mind, we should support and develop skills for communication and participation, such as resolving conflicts, arguing, listening and accepting differences, considering alternatives and establishing constructive and peaceful relations with peers. These skills are applicable inside and outside the classroom and contribute to the civic education of students. In other words, it is crucially important to relate education for democratic citizenship to language learning in order to promote “openness to the other, respect for diversity and the development of a range of critical skills, including skills of intercultural evaluation” as Osler (2005, p. 4) affirms.

As language teachers, we have a fundamental tool in our hands. As educators, we cannot understand our practice away from the key role language plays in our everyday life promoting democracy and fostering awareness of the importance of Human Rights.

Materials and Technology

- Computer with Internet access and speakers

- Examples of stories of real-life adventurers/achievements/challenges such as the story about the 16 Uruguayan rugby players who survived two months after their plane crashed in the Andes or the story about the 33 Chilean miners who survived 17 days after they got trapped in a mine. Teachers can consult the suggested websites below to find the stories that suit their students best: [National Geographic](#), [Live Science](#), [My Hero](#)
- Copies of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) and information about it.
- [Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo](#)
- [Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo](#)
- Estela Barnes de Carlotto ([biography](#))

Preparation

1. Invite students to start thinking about the topic of adventures and overcoming difficult situations.
2. Be ready to read and listen to different stories of people who have accomplished their dreams and who have had to sort out obstacles and complications in order to fulfil those dreams.
3. Have copies of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and/or find a web page from where students can get it.
4. Familiarise students with safe and reliable web pages to search information.

Instructional Plan

	Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4		Week 5	
Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Tasks	A, B, C	D, E, F	G	G, H	I*	I	I**	I	I	I

* Final outcome, ** Oral presentations

Table 1. Project timeline.

General objectives

Students will:

- analyse and express their opinion about different achievements
- reflect upon the concepts of identity, respect and tolerance
- discuss, analyse and reflect upon different life stories in which human rights have been violated
- develop skills for identifying, acting on and defending human rights

issues

- negotiate different points of view by means of dialogue, cooperation and respect
- become aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding identity
- develop their intercultural communicative competence in English

Specific objectives

There are linguistic, intercultural, and citizenship and human rights objectives. In relation to language, students will:

- describe a photograph orally, identify the people on the photograph and share what they know about them
- read quotes and give their personal opinion, justifying it
- read texts and make informed decisions
- share previous knowledge about the organisation *Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*
- read news articles and relate their content to topics discussed in previous classes (life achievements, characters' personalities; articles in UDHR)
- investigate about a person with a significant achievement
- share their findings in small groups
- design a presentation
- give their presentations to the class

In relation to interculturality, students will:

- demonstrate willingness and ability to engage in dialogue with others
- express themselves with respect
- allow others to express their viewpoints, avoiding hostility and confrontation and resolving conflict when necessary

In relation to citizenship and human rights, students will:

- develop values such as respect, mutual understanding, social awareness and openness
- familiarise with the UDHR
- scan the UDHR for specific rights and justify choices
- choose one person who has fought for human rights and investigate about that person
- engage in civic participation locally by sharing their research with the school community
- involve the international or global community by sharing their presentations on YouTube, Facebook and blogs.

Session 1 (40 minutes)

- Write the word *Achievements* on the board and ask students to brainstorm words related to that topic (some expected answers: effort, hard work, patient, ambitious, goal).
- Ask students to complete task A from the handout:

A - Read the following quotations related to this topic. Do you agree with them? Expand (give examples to illustrate these quotations):

 - “Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” (Henry Ford)
 - “There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.” (Paulo Coelho)
- Divide students in groups of three and ask them to read the texts in task B. After that, they answer the questions in task C. Circulate around providing help and feedback.

B - Your city is giving an award to the person who has the most important achievements. Read about the four candidates:

	<p>Candidate 1: Alicia Alicia got married after she graduated from high school, and had two children. Her husband died in a car accident. She went back to school and became a teacher. She teaches in a school for children with learning problems. She has helped more than 100 children learn to read and write.</p>		<p>Candidate 2: Jacob Jacob can't walk. He has used a wheelchair since he was a little boy. He always loved his science and math classes. He is now studying to be a doctor, and he is the top student in his classes. He wants to help other people who can't walk.</p>
	<p>Candidate 3: Kyra Kyra's family had to leave their home country because of a war. When she was in high school, she worked at night to earn money for her family. After she graduated from high school, she started her own business. Her business has given jobs to more than 30 poor women.</p>		<p>Candidate 4: Rick Rick is the oldest of ten brothers and sisters. He loves art, and he made beautiful drawings and paintings as a child. His parents didn't have money to pay for his education, so he worked in a factory for five years to study at an art school. He has given more than 100 paintings to hospitals to put in sick people's rooms.</p>

Figure 1. Achievements. Taken from: JOHANNSEN, K. L. (2010). *World English 1 Teacher's Edition*. USA: Heinle, Cengage Learning.

C - Write the name.(not more than one)

- Who? _____
- Had to leave his/her country? _____
- Wants to help others? _____
- Is determined and decisive? _____
- Is studying now? _____

- Ask students to provide support for their answers (sample answer: Kyra had to leave her country because of a war). For homework, students do task D.

D - Choose one person to recommend for the award. Why did you choose her/him?

- Students read and investigate about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (in Spanish if necessary). They can find out when it was written, who wrote it and why. They bring information to the following class.

Session 2 (80 minutes)

- Recycle the topic of the project and check homework.
- Ask students to work in pairs in order to do task E from the handout:
E - Ask your partner who s/he chose. Do you agree? Why or why not? Did you change your mind?

- Students negotiate ideas and listen to each other's opinions in order to come to a conclusion. They write it down.
- Then, the class discusses their findings about the UDHR, sharing the information they have found interesting. General comments and opinions are expected.
- Divide students in groups of five. They re-read the information about the four candidates carefully and complete the chart using the UDHR in order to do task F.
F - Reading in depth. For this task, you should read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Read task B again and relate each person with an article in the UDHR. Take into account words such as war, education, equality, freedom, etc.

	ARTICLE/S	REASON
Alicia		
Jacob		
Kyla		
Rick		

- Monitor students' performance and provide help and feedback if needed.
- Check task F orally. Students support their answers (For me in Alicia's story we can find articles because...).

Session 3 (40 minutes)

1. Write on the board *Mothers and grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo* and elicit information about that organisation. Students brainstorm everything they know about this organisation and its members, and how it relates to Human Rights. Hold a whole class discussion. Create a collaborative mind map on the board.
2. Exploit the news article in task G. The class speculates about the photograph and revises the questions usually answered in a text of this type (who? where? when? what?). Then, they scan the text to confirm their opinion/guesses.

G - Another GREAT ACHIEVEMENT took place in Argentina. Read the following article:

Saturday, August 9, 2014, Buenos Aires Herald

'I feel happy with the truth'

Estela Barnes de Carlotto, president of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo and her grandson Ignacio Hurban/Guido Montoya Carlotto pose for cameras at a news conference in Buenos Aires yesterday. A music teacher in Olavarría, Buenos Aires province, is making his first public appearance since he was identified as the long-sought grandson of Carlotto, the country's leading human rights activist.



3. Ask students to answer these questions. Tell them to have the UDHR at hand.
 - Do you think this was a great achievement? Why?
 - What can you say about Estela de Carlotto's personality?
 - Which articles from the UDHR are related to this event?
4. Monitor students' performance and provide help as necessary.

Session 4 (40 minutes)

1. Check task G orally during the first part of the class.
2. Ask students to do task H. They justify their answers (they can choose a famous person, a friend or a relative).

H - Ask your partner who s/he chose. Do you agree? Why or why not? Did you change your mind?

3. Give students time to think, brainstorm, plan and edit their answer.

4. Ask them to share their answer with their partners.
5. Tell students they are going to prepare a presentation based on the topic. Read aloud task I. Tell them they will start working on it the following classes so they should think about who they will work with and the person they will choose. They should bring information to work in class.

I - Final project. In groups of six prepare a short presentation of a person or group of people who have made great achievements promoting human rights (you can design posters or prepare a PowerPoint presentation). Do not forget to design activities for your partners to do after your presentations!

Share! Let's share all we have done with the school community: choose ONE of the following:

- Hang your posters in the school hall, or
- Visit other classrooms and tell your partners about those people you have investigated and why it is important to promote human rights.

Sessions 5, 6 and 7

1. Divide the class in groups of six. During these classes, students will work on their final task and the preparation of the handout they have to design for their partners (Task I). This activity consists in preparing a short presentation of a person or group of people whose achievements in promoting human rights have been outstanding. They can design posters or prepare a PowerPoint presentation. They can also make a short video.
2. Each group agrees on a number of relevant aspects to make their presentations: who the person is / was; his or her origin and background; what accomplishment they will focus upon and how it is connected to human rights; the impact of that achievement on society; etc.
3. Allow some time to discuss which the most effective way of making the presentation could be (Prezi, PowerPoint, Glogster, others). Provide help if students are not familiar with these tools.
4. Each group designs different activities for their classmates to solve once their presentation has been completed. These activities can be related to lower order features (retrieving information, describing, locating, summarising, among others) or they can be more ambitious and aim at higher order features (evaluating, analysing critically, supporting opinions, comparing and contrasting, etc.).
5. Circulate around the classroom, monitor, help students and provide feedback.

Sessions 8 and 9

1. All groups deliver their presentations (approximately 20 minutes each).
2. Classmates complete the activities their partners have prepared for them.

Session 10

1. Place posters in the school hall in order to share students' outcomes with the rest of the school community.
2. Ask students to visit other classrooms to comment on what they have investigated, the reasons for having chosen those people and why it is important to promote human rights.
3. Encourage ways of going beyond the school as a whole class: students can upload their videos on YouTube and/or create a Facebook page of their course or a blog in order to display their presentations.

Language focus

This project addresses the following linguistic aspects (among others):

Notions/ Functions	Linguistic exponents (Grammar and vocabulary)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing events (challenges/adventures/achievements) • Asking and giving factual information 	<p>A: What was (his / her) biggest achievement / challenge? B: (S)he / They (lost / won / fought for / found / discovered / had / went to / decided) A: When / Where did it happen? B: It was in 1999 / last year / 3 years ago... It was in / at... A: How was the (fight)? B: It was great (in the end) but (he) had a terrible time (at the beginning). (First / Then / Next / While... Luckily / Fortunately). (Suddenly / Eventually / Amazingly) A: What (were / was) you / she doing when (that) happened? B: She was (marching / studying hard / looking for some information) when... / While she was (looking for them)...</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing personal qualities 	<p>A: What kind of personal quality do / does (you / she) have / need? Why? B: (He) is (ambitious / determined / reliable / experienced / careful / patient / intelligent) because...</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing opinions / justifying opinions 	<p>A: What do you think about...? Why? B: (In my opinion / Personally / I think / I'd say that/ I believe that...) because... A: Do (you) agree with (him) about (that)? B: Of course/ (he is) right. / Yes, I agree / I couldn't agree more / That's not entirely true / I'm not so sure about that / I'm sorry to disagree with you, but A: Why did (you) choose (him)? B: because (I) think that, (he) fought (for / in favour of / against) (Human Rights / peace / racism / equality / justice / the independence of...)</p>

Table 2. Language focus.

Related Websites

- [United Nations](#) (official website)
- [Life Pre-Intermediate](#) student's book
- Student interactive for organizing information and preparing presentations [ReadWriteThink](#)
- To create presentations: [Prezi](#) or [Glogster](#)

Conclusion

The 21st century presents educators with a radical challenge: we no longer solely teach our discipline but our classes are definitely the starting point in the development of a citizen who is aware of his/her responsibility in the world and who is sensitive to human rights. This project has illustrated how different life stories can be analysed in the light of a human rights framework and used to foster a deeper understanding of values. In addition, the relationship between language and communication has been

brought to the fore since students are encouraged to engage in a genuine exchange of information, ideas and opinions. As Nelson Mandela once said, “Without education, your children can never really meet the challenges they will face. So it's very important to give children education and explain that they should play a role for their country.”

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