Developing Global Awareness and Self-Management: Diploma Foundations & the Dubai Women’s College Bazaar

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Introduction

Students in Diploma Foundations (DF) face a challenging first year at college, during which they must make many transitions: from school to college, from dependence to greater independence, and from membership of known communities to membership of unknown communities. To further steepen the learning curve, these shifts take place within the context of learning in an English rather than an Arabic medium, a major transition in itself. Diploma Foundation students, typically, are in the early stages of the process of becoming literate in this shifting context, literate in the sense of possessing “a range of skills that enable them to participate fully in all aspects of modern society, from the workforce to the family to the academic community” (Kasper, 2000). Student participation in the Dubai Women's College (DWC) Diploma Foundations Bazaar Project is designed to take the student closer towards this ‘full participation’ in the life of Dubai and the UAE, and to facilitate growing self, community and global awareness.

The DWC Bazaar is an annual three-day event in which students from all programmes participate. Students on the two ‘Foundations’ programmes, Diploma Foundations (DF) and Higher Diploma Foundations, raise money for charity, whilst students in other programmes run their own businesses in order to develop entrepreneurial skills, and gain invaluable work-related experience.

The DF Bazaar Project

A brief description of the DF bazaar project is given here to provide an overview of the learning, whilst a more detailed rationale follows, relating theory to practice. The DF project is driven by the key question: How can we work collectively in the DWC Bazaar to help the community? The question is to be addressed by the students through the medium of the bazaar and answered by their actions and subsequent reflection. The project work divides into four main stages, labelled as follows for the students:

- Researching
- Planning, drafting and improving
- Doing
- Reflecting

The final ‘product’ of these stages is the Diploma Foundations International Children's Village: a collection of booths relating to different countries which provide information for children, and a series of games booths in which the visiting children can play. Money is raised for charity through the selling of ‘passports’ which give a child access to the village. The visiting child fills out his or her passport by visiting each country booth and answering a question about that country. A completed passport is then exchanged for a small gift.

Learning & graduate outcomes

The DWC Bazaar is a project vehicle designed to allow students to focus on the shared
values of Dubai Women's College, such as innovation, teamwork and flexibility, and to develop the HCT Graduate Outcomes (GOs). This article will outline how particular graduate outcomes are targeted through the Diploma Foundations DWC Bazaar project. Whilst all of the graduate outcomes are in many ways inseparable in any learning context, two are highlighted here, to illustrate how this project allows students to develop in these areas. The two outcomes focussed on are:

- Communication & Information Literacy (GO 1)
- Global Awareness & Citizenship (GO 3)

The achievement indicators for each of these outcomes, as outlined in the HCT Learning Model 2006, are given in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Outcome One: Communication &amp; information literacy</th>
<th>Graduate Outcome Three: Global awareness and citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:</td>
<td>According to their credential, HCT graduates demonstrate an appropriate level of competence in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 communicating information, opinions, concepts and ideas effectively in English through the spoken and written mediums to a variety of audiences;</td>
<td>3.1 recognizing and analyzing ethical dilemmas, and practising ethical decision-making;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 selecting, understanding, evaluating, and making effective use of information from a variety of sources presented in both spoken and written form in English; and</td>
<td>3.2 recognizing and analyzing the issues affecting the local, regional, and global environment; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 acting ethically in the use and presentation of information from a variety of sources.</td>
<td>3.3 recognizing and analyzing the interrelations between local, regional, and global contexts and cultures.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Graduate outcomes 1 & 3, HCT Learning Model 2006

Learning base: project, content or task?

Though it is beyond the scope of this article to fully clarify the distinction between content, task and project-based learning, an outline is given below. Some strong common threads from these three inter-related methodologies can be identified which
aid the understanding of the learning process undergone by the students in the 'DF Bazaar' project.

Project-based learning (PBL) falls under the umbrella of content-based learning (CBL) (Grabe & Stoller, 1997: 20), which is described as based on a 'subject-matter core' in that “the fundamental organisation of the curriculum is derived from the subject matter” (Stryker & Leaver, 1997: 6), rather than pre-ordered language points. In the case in question, the DF International Children’s Village in the DWC Bazaar is the project vehicle and so acts as this CBL 'subject-matter core'.

Fried-Booth (2002: 6) describes PBL as “student-centred and driven by the need to create an end-product”, though it is the actual 'route' to this product that makes the work valuable. She highlights the benefits as including opportunities for students of different abilities to work together and to their own strengths and talents. In Thomas's (2000) review of project-based learning, he identifies five criteria that need to be present for successful learning: autonomy; realism; constructive investigation; a driving question; and centrality. Thomas's final two criteria, a driving question and centrality, can be mapped on CBL's 'subject-matter core'. The 'constructive investigation' and 'autonomy' of PBL are echoed in the encouragement of students in CBL to “gather, synthesize, evaluate, and articulate interdisciplinary information and knowledge” (Pally 1997, Kasper 2000) and the 'realism' is seen in CBL through the learners' opportunities to “become familiar with sociolinguistic conventions relating to audience and purpose” (Soter 1990). See Figure 1 below for a diagrammatic representation of the relationships of methodology to the project structure.

Task-based learning (TBL) and its tasks provide the 'interface' (Littlewood, 2004: 324) of student experience with the project or subject-core matter, in that it is these smaller chunks of learning which the learners tackle in order to address the key question of the project. The repetition of tasks is built into the learning framework to allow learners to work with and improve their language skills (Willis, 1996: 132), which, in TBL, is the specific focus. This focus, however, in the context of PBL and CBL can be broadened to include those kinds of skills given in Table 1 above, i.e. the achievement indicators of the HCT graduate outcomes which will lead to the learners becoming Kasper's 'literate individuals of modern society'. Taking the above discussion into account, in the context in question, a hierarchy of organisation can be identified as follows in figure 1:

Subject-core matter (CBL) /project vehicle (PBL)

Project question - How can we work collectively in the Bazaar to help the community?

Thomas's criteria for PBL: driving question & centrality

Tasks (TBL)

Project tasks - examples: decorating a booth, organising a schedule

Thomas's criteria for PBL: constructive investigation, autonomy & realism

Figure 1: the relationship of CBL, PBL and TBL in the DF Bazaar Project

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In reviewing the literature on CBL, PBL and TBL, the clear advantages that come to the fore are the motivational benefits, student-centredness and increased student autonomy evidenced in use of this approach (Grabe & Stoller, 1997).

**Learners, language, & communities**

A broad analysis of the learners' language abilities is now provided in order to contextualise the project work. Diploma Foundations students typically have an elementary level of English, with a vocabulary probably no more than a few hundred words. They struggle with the common problems faced by the majority of Arab-speaking learners of English, such as difficulty in acquiring vocabulary due to the 'distance' of Arabic (L1) from English (L2). With regards to skills work, further difficulties lie in the fundamental operations of recognizing and reproducing words orthographically i.e. in reading and writing correctly. Perhaps the most obvious cause of this is the reverse direction of script. However, the tri-consonantal root of Arabic morphology (Cook 2004) compared to English also appears to interfere with the reading and writing processes, causing 'vowel blindness' (Ryan 1997). This results in misread and mis-spelt words, as vowels are omitted, reordered amongst the consonants, or erroneously inserted, despite the consonant structure remaining intact: e.g. wman for women, pnik for pink, and clear for colour.

A general lack of accuracy is apparent in both writing and speaking. Speaking fluency tends to be the strongest area of many of the students' English ability; however, this production tends to contain fossilised errors and the output remains firmly within a comfort zone of content, with a very limited range of structures and vocabulary employed. In addition to the problems highlighted with regards to language, independent learning and self-management skills are often undeveloped, probably due to a lack of requirement to apply these skills earlier in their education. Similarly, strategies employed for language learning are very limited.

Moving on to context and language communities, the complexities of the learning situation are compounded by the many different communities of English speakers that live in Dubai and the UAE; it could be argued that rather than expanding and helping improvement in English, this could be a factor in the restricted, limited development of English of some language learners. Social and economic needs drive communication between communities, needs such as to shop, to employ or be employed, and to learn. Each need encompasses many functions; for example, requesting help, giving an order, or presenting ideas. A basic representation of the interaction of communities in this context is given in figure 2, though, as the examples given show, each of the three broad communities is readily broken into many smaller sub-sets:
The central zone of 'simplified' English represents the communicative comfort zone which many DF learners at DWC have found hard to break out of, probably due to a lack of real or perceived need or desire to do so. The transition beyond this zone to one of more accurate, appropriate and complex communicative English is what is required for achievement of the desired learning outcomes. This is expanded upon below.

GO 1 (see table 1), achievement indicator 1.1. is: communicating information, opinions, concepts and ideas effectively in English through the spoken and written mediums to a variety of audiences. Figure 2 above demonstrates the ready availability of a 'variety of audiences' in the UAE with whom the learners will need to communicate for various purposes. Here, if one adopts Meyer's view of successful communicative competence, the interconnection of the HCT graduate outcomes is apparent. In this view, communicative competence in L2 indicates a need for 'intercultural competence', described as:

the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures. (Meyer 1991: 137)

A significant difference between the UAE and many other language learning situations is that there is not a discrete juxtaposition of L1 culture with that of the L2, due to the broad and varied number of communities involved in the communication in L2 (see figure 2). This factor strongly binds the success a learner may have in developing in the area of GO1 with that of GO3.

Returning now to the notion of community and linking culture to this notion, the learners typically have had limited engagement with communities outside their family. First-hand exposure and interaction with other cultures tend to be defined by the learner's own dominant community, the family. Culture is defined for the purposes of this article by Lantolf's neo-Vygotskyan definition as follows:
Dubai and the UAE are unique in their demographic composition and goals for the future as city and country. The drive and goals of the city entail that these learners, in order to participate as Kasper’s ‘literate individuals’, will need to engage successfully with other cultural models outside their own dominant cultural model. This participation, given the DWC goal of 100% graduate employment and the development of employment in Dubai in the multi-nationality private sector, will be in the work context as speakers of English (L2). It is a complex situation, perhaps largely unparalleled in the global context.

One of the achievement indicators for GO3 is: 3.3 recognizing and analyzing the interrelations between local, regional, and global contexts and cultures. In the project these learners, due to low L2 levels and also their limited interaction with communities or cultures other than their own, are focussed initially on recognising these ‘interrelations’, with analysis being developed later. Hall (1999) supports this with the additional suggestion that: “allowing students the freedom to move between their first and second languages, especially in the early stages of their participation in the various activities, would provide them with the cognitive security they will often need” (Hall, 1999: 150). For DF students, it must be recognised that elements of all levels of learning and much of the higher order learning processes need to take place in the learners L1, with the transition to L2 being structured, paced and unforced.

Hall discusses Bakhtin’s process of self and community development, development essential for these learners due to the rapid changes in the UAE and the role the learners are required to play in this transition. The first stage of self-development is defined as follows:

... the development of consciousness about our lives, our practices, our roles within them, and the consequences of our participation is necessary to the development of our ability to change the ways in which we live our lives. To develop this understanding, we need to step outside these practices, and engage in the analysis and reflection of our own and others’ actions. (Hall, 1999: 143-4)

The learners need supported opportunities to reflect on their own actions and interactions, as well as those of others. This reflection, following a task-based learning strategy, needs to be followed by further opportunities to practice that which has been reflected upon, to allow learners the opportunity to improve their performance in these settings. Such repeated practices give, among other things, ‘cognitive security’ with the learners’ development of ‘discourse expectations’, i.e. who can be expected to say what and when (Hall, 1999: 145). Paradoxically, by providing learners with minimized risk-taking and giving repeated delimited practice with restricted functional language, we are assisting learners with the provision of these ‘building blocks’ to move out of their ‘comfort zone’ of minimally communicative, yet limited and inaccurate English in which many at present are ‘fossilised’.
Key needs of the learners in relation to the development of GOs 1 and 3

Following from the above discussion, some key needs of these learners in relation to GOs 1 & 3 are:

- to become aware of 'set-pattern' interactions in English and the functional language used
- to have repeated opportunities, with strong support, to participate in these interactions
- to develop awareness of issues arising when expected patterns/registers of interaction are not adhered to
- to reflect on one's own participation and performance in interactions in different settings
- to identify differences between different cultural models
- to develop an understanding of differences in perspective of members of different communities
- to recognise the role of 'self' within interactions inside and outside one's own community
- to develop flexibility and tolerance in order to deal with differences from one's own cultural and personal model

The goal of the DWC bazaar project is to provide learners with opportunities to develop in the areas of the GOs, particularly 1 and 3, and to meet the needs of our learners as outlined above.

Explication and discussion of the stages of the project

The project process will now be examined in greater detail, with reference to the discussion above to illustrate how graduate outcomes-based work is integrated and channelled through an authentic project vehicle. The project process divides into four main stages of activity: researching, preparing, doing, and reflecting, each of which is examined below.

The initial stages of the project require research and investigation into different countries, their histories and their culture. Students conduct research on different countries, with this stage covering five days of independent work. Student groups receive research guidelines for each day and report back on findings to the teacher at the end of the day. The culmination of the week of research is a group presentation and...
the production of an information brochure and poster about the country. After day one, on which all groups research general information about their particular country (demographics, geography, etc.), each group is guided to different research areas, such as: sport, art, and traditions.

The countries are chosen from all around the world, reflecting the international make-up of the UAE and, particularly, Dubai. Learners are encouraged to compare and contrast their research in relation to their knowledge of their own country and culture. The variety of countries focused on, and the fact that few of the countries are English-speaking as L1, is intended to circumvent problems of learners developing a "dichotomous, polarized view" of the relationship between their own culture and that of a dominant English culture (Harklau 1999: 117).

The DWC library provides support in the development of achievement indicator 1.2 for G01 (selecting, understanding, evaluating, and making effective use of information from a variety of sources presented in both spoken and written form in English) in the form of taught sessions on accessing and using appropriate materials, both online and paper-based for the research. The project has built-in tasks to focus learners on achievement indicator 1.3: acting ethically in the use and presentation of information from a variety of sources. This is done through the introduction of a learner-created research log in Excel and the explicit requirement to include appropriate referencing in any work they produce. This is only the second project for these learners at the college, and the first in which the learners have encountered the requirement for clear, explicit, systematic referencing of work.

Other activities at this stage include listening to guest speakers from the particular country being researched by a section. These speakers, members of the 'foreign' researched community, are also members of the Dubai community, as are the learners. They are also, sometimes, members of the college community. Thus the learners have the opportunity to notice the interrelationship of different communities and to compare and contrast those aspects that this interrelation highlights.

The known and safe community of the class is also stepped out of during this stage, with learners participating in a department-wide quiz. Using MS Sharepoint, an online software that enables collaborations and the development of online information-sharing communities, learners compile their country information in one Excel file for the whole department. This information is then used as a study sheet for an inter-departmental quiz, in which learners form teams with students from other sections. In this way, learners are given the opportunities to work outside their usual learning community, to forge new learning relationships and to develop group work skills.

The second stage of the process includes planning and preparation for participation in the DF 'International Children's Village'. This work has several strands. Firstly, the research and project 'products' of the initial research stage (brochure and poster) are discussed with regards to the quality and presentation of information and the targeted audience (the children and general visitors). The learners have the opportunity to reflect on their initial outcomes and the work is redrafted, incorporating feedback from the teacher and other students, this time with a more specific focus on the Bazaar audience.
The same process of drafting and improving is employed in other elements of the project. Students make the games for the visiting children to play (see figure 3 below) and conduct a pilot session in which other sections and faculty play the games and complete feedback forms. Students use their experience from this ’dry-run’ together with the collated information from the feedback forms to adapt and improve the games for the actual event. Language work here includes ’instructions for game playing’ and ’dealing with customers’. Maths and technology skills are employed for collating information from the feedback forms completed by the game-players, and the production of charts showing the results. Another element employing the drafting and improving process is the ’Bake Sale’, an event held pre-Bazaar to allow the students to raise money to pay for games and decorating materials needed for the Bazaar. Students work in groups to organise the making and selling of cakes, a three-day mini-project culminating in a college-wide sale of home-baked goods. Functional language work includes ’instructions for recipes’ and ’dealing with customers’. Technology and maths skills are developed with the creation of simple sales and cost analysis spreadsheets.

These elements are rich in opportunities for learners to develop skills in the areas of the needs identified above. The learners trial their participation in set-piece interactions, get feedback from teachers and students alike, and are given opportunities to incorporate this feedback into the next participation, i.e. during the Bazaar. Hall argues that:

. . . how we learn to become a competent participant in a practice very much depends on the opportunities we have to participate in and develop a familiarity with the practice . . . We feel more confident, and thus perform more competently, in those practices with which we have experience.

(Hall, 1999:150-151)

Thus, both the trial-run of the games and the Bake Sale allow learners to practice and improve upon language performance and also to gain experience in interacting with different communities, within different interaction patterns, for example: seller/customer. This process aids the ’development of consciousness’ about one’s life and builds towards success in terms of successful language use and ’citizenship’ (GO3) in the outlined context.
Activities take place during all three days of the bazaar, with learners running the booths, greeting and giving information to the visitors, and managing the games. The learners are responsible for carrying out the list of duties agreed upon in class, and for fulfilling shift work on each of the three days. These three days are the culmination of three weeks of research and planning, and they provide many authentic situations for the learners to participate in with greater 'cognitive security', and more possibilities of successful interaction due to the preparation they have undergone. During the Bazaar, the learners self-manage on an individual and group level, with the teacher operating primarily as observer.

The main reflection, the final part of this stage, takes place during the week following the Bazaar, in class with the teacher. A combination of spoken and written reflection activities are used to encourage the learners to consider and evaluate their own participation and that of their group members in all stages of the bazaar project. The learners reflect on many elements of the work they have undertaken, including language use, language development, interaction with visitors, and teamwork. However, as previously noted, reflection is not solely used in the final stage of the project. It is built into the other stages of the Bazaar project, as shown in Figure 4 below, as a cohesive device ensuring that at each stage the learners can build successfully on the previous stage. Figure 4 below shows the major activities of the four main stages of the project, and indicates the integration and movement between these stages, as outlined above.

Figure 4: main activities of the four stages of the project
Challenges

Though a valid, authentic project vehicle should drive itself in terms of energy and purpose, the teacher has many roles to play in the complex dynamic in which their learners are operating. Fried-Booth (2002: 18) describes the role of the teacher as “that of a participant and coordinator . . . responding to a language point that may need presenting or revising, and anticipating linguistic or logistical problems.” These responsive and anticipatory roles are very much those of TBL (Willis, 1996). Stryker and Leaver's 'essential skills' for CBL instructors include similar ideas for team work and language work, plus more affective-area skills such as: “helping students develop coping strategies . . . [and] developing and maintaining high levels of student self-esteem” (Stryker & Leaver 1997: 293). Finally, Thomas (2000) in his review of PBL literature, identifies appropriate teacher intervention in PBL in relation to possible gaps in knowledge from the learning process as including the following:

i. Intervening to require explanations and justifications from students at different stages of the project.

ii. Making knowledge building overt, public and collective (e.g. via computers).

iii. Emphasising learning vs. work completion. Thomas 2000: table 1

So in PBL the teacher has a broad and deep range of roles to perform, from language learning management, to motivator, through to Thomas's cognitive explicator identified in (i) above. The teacher in any learning context has a complex role in the learning dynamic; however, in a PBL context, this part is perhaps more intense and exposed, unsupported by course materials or texts. The project process can be exhausting for all involved, learners and teachers alike. So, as team work supports and facilitates learning for the students, it is also vital for the teachers. Teachers in DF at DWC are organised into 'clusters', each of which comprises three or four section teachers working as a team, sharing ideas, offering peer-advice and support and organising activities and class events on an intra-departmental level.

For learners, the experience presents its own myriad challenges. As noted in the introduction to this article, the learners in DF are experiencing many transitions, with this project commencing 10 weeks into their new life at the college. In Thomas's (2000) overview of strategies of intervention to improve PBL, he highlights issues in relation to the acquisition and presentation of knowledge, which are of relevance to the learning context here:

Students have difficulty knowing when they comprehend fully . . . [and] difficulty recognizing gaps in knowledge and knowing where they are in knowledge acquisition activities.

Thomas 2000: table 1

Learners may not yet even be aware of challenges they are facing or appreciate that they could be going further into the learning process. Thus the teacher roles as outlined above are key to the success of the project.
The final challenge is assessment. From the discussion above, it can be seen that the learning process in this project is rich and complex, and therefore assessment is not straightforward. However, it is the process that the learners go through, the transition, that is key. Assessment has been designed to reflect the process, empirical evidence being used by the teacher to assign each learner a grade from 1 (low) to 10 (high) in relation to each 'graduate outcome' area. Observation, learner portfolios and reflective writing is used as evidence of learner development. Teacher-created achievement indicators are used, for example: “knowing how to behave when visiting the teacher's desk/managing your booth/working with children” (PPD documentation, DF, DWC, 2006). The averaged grade is the learners Personal & Professional Development (PPD) for that learning cycle (a 10-week 'block' of learning). The assessment system is reviewed and revised every year by the cohort's teaching group in order to best assess the learners' participation in the actual process which takes place.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of the learning process experienced by DF learners participating in the DWC DF Bazaar project, and has gone some way towards explicating the process of development the learners need to go through in order to be successful participants in the future of their country. The transition process begins with the learners' development of awareness of cultural or community boundaries and awareness of one's own self as on one side of these boundaries. This is followed by increasingly effective interactions at these boundaries with members of other communities. Therefore, global awareness and successful communication for DF low level language learners are key components for the learners' development. Awareness of the self, the community and the global context are key factors for effective communication in contemporary times in a dynamic environment.

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