Introduction to project work

English Plus Second edition contains four **Project** lessons, which encourage your students to work in groups and extend their English language learning in engaging and creative ways.

Project work is very motivating for students. It focuses on subjects which they will know a lot about, or have a strong interest in – their hobbies and interests, their families and communities, their dreams, and their pasts and futures.

Benefits

In addition to being engaging, project work helps develop students' organization and communication skills, their sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and their competence. Starting with an idea, students have to plan, organize, manage and present their work. They will need to be self-disciplined and work collaboratively in groups.

Project work provides a very relevant outlet for students' language skills. Students will see that they can use English to communicate information which is important to them. They will employ English more creatively and independently than in some other classroom situations.

Another benefit of project work is the development of a curriculum-wide range of key skills, such as:

- Researching
- Interviewing
- Presenting
- Conducting surveys
- Organizing information
- Writing and editing texts
- Producing or sourcing visuals
- Using ICT
- Designing.

Group work and mixed ability

Many projects are particularly suited to group work. Cooperative behaviour within the group is essential to complete the work effectively. Students will have to delegate tasks, negotiate and come to agreements.

By dividing the class into groups there is an opportunity to create groups which will benefit from a variety of individuals' strengths. Teachers may fear that weaker students will either be left behind or 'carried' by the stronger ones and will therefore gain little from the experience. However, given the diversity of tasks required, the weaker students may have a different skill they can offer the group, thereby encouraging them to participate confidently. Also, while stronger students are working independently, the teacher will be able to spend time with students who need more help with their English.

Tips for project work

Planning

Decide when in the term you want students to do project work and allow plenty of time for preparation: students will not automatically know how to conduct their research, organize their material and present well.

Initially you may need to show different examples of projects to give students an aim. These might include:

- Posters
- Portfolios of work
- PowerPoint presentations
- Oral presentations
- Short films or audio clips.

Research

Next you need to explain how to research the chosen topic and suggest resources to exploit. Set the collection of information as homework well in advance of the planned production time. Alternatively, provide resources in the classroom and allow lesson time for students to do research. Suggested resources include:

- Internet
- Magazines in English and students' own language
- Reference books in both languages
- Dictionaries and grammar references.

Students are likely to conduct some initial research in their own language and, if working in groups, will probably not always use English to discuss ideas. This is fine. Eventually they will have to translate their work into English. In turn this will show students the relevance of their previous efforts in studying grammar and vocabulary.

Organizing ideas

Once information has been collected, students are likely to need help organizing and editing their work. Suggest they collect their ideas under sub-headings and then decide what is essential and non-essential information.

Writing and editing

Having decided on content, students should work on making their texts interesting and accurate. To check for clarity and accuracy, students could exchange texts and ask for feedback from each other. Encourage use of dictionaries and grammar references.

Suggest that students provide you with a rough draft of their work first, so that you can identify errors. This is preferable to marking their final work as students may be demoralised if your corrections draw attention away from the positive aspects of their finished projects.

Presentation

Possible presentation materials include:

- Card and paper
- Scissors
- Colouring pens
- Glue
- Digital camera or mobile phone
- Computer and presentation software such as PowerPoint

Once the project is finished, display or allow students to present their work, as appropriate. Ensure that students are able to take pride in the final outcome. They will have invested a lot of themselves into their work and should take pleasure in seeing the finished work.