FULFILLING ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICUM REQUIREMENTS THROUGH NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION: OUTREACH PROJECT AT UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL, CAMPUS NICOYA

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ABSTRACT
The outreach project, “Mejoramiento de la Competividad de las microempresarias del Golfo de Nicoya por medio de la capacitación en el idioma ingles” (Improving Competitive Skills of Grassroots Entrepreneurs through English Language Training in the Gulf of Nicoya, Guanacaste, Costa Rica) initiated in 2008 by professors of the Universidad Nacional, Sede Chorotega, in Nicoya, Guanacaste, Costa Rica implemented the use of non-formal education teaching to fulfill the practicum for teacher-students majoring in secondary high school EFL teaching while providing adult women in underprivileged rural areas with necessary language skills. As a result, the adult learners and teacher-students mutually benefited.

In this paper the authors present the process developed before, during and after the project. The design, development and evaluation of the needs analysis for three rural communities by the teacher-students with the guidance of the project leader professors is discussed. An analysis of the process undertaken by the participants is described and the results are outlined and discussed.

Keywords: NON-FORMAL EDUCATION, ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICUM, OUTREACH PROJECT, NEEDS ANALYSIS.
RESUMEN
Los y las estudiantes de la Carrera Bachillerato en la Enseñanza de Inglés en la Universidad Nacional, Campus Nicoya inician sus estudios universitarios con la perspectiva sobre cómo van a desarrollar su carrera en el futuro, especialmente como maestros de Inglés en sistema educativo formal de Costa Rica. Está situación fue así hasta el año 2008, cuando académicas de esta universidad tuvieron la iniciativa de crear el proyecto de extensión Mejoramiento de la Competitividad de las microempresarias del Golfo de Nicoya por medio de la capacitación en el idioma inglés, el cual fue dirigido una población de adultos en contexto no formal, coordinado por profesoras con el apoyo de estudiantes-maestros que llevaron a cabo su Práctica Docente en la Enseñanza del Inglés en los años 2009 y 2010. El objetivo principal de este proyecto fue contribuir al mejoramiento de la competitividad de las microempresas con herramientas necesarias en el mundo actual como es el idioma inglés.

En el presente artículo, las autoras presentan el proceso de desarrollo antes, durante y después del proyecto con la participación de diez estudiantes. En primer lugar se explica el procedimiento del Análisis de Necesidades llevado a cabo por los futuros profesores para diseñar, desarrollar y evaluar las clases en tres comunidades rurales de la Región. Seguidamente, se describe el proceso y los insumos proporcionados por el proyecto a la práctica y viceversa, con el fin de enriquecer el desempeño profesional de los estudiantes, lograr clases de calidad y su desarrollo integral. Finalmente, los resultados tangibles e intangibles, obtenidos a través de esta propuesta se presentan, junto con las sugerencias a tener en cuenta en caso de aplicar esta modalidad en otros contextos.

Palabras Claves: EDUCACIÓN NO FORMAL, PRACTICA DOCENTE, PROYECTO DE EXTENSIÓN, ANÁLISIS DE NECESIDADES.

Introduction
Traditional approaches to practicum teaching in Costa Rica involve student teachers carrying out their service in high school classrooms within a formal educational system. While this training does have its merits, the alternative presented in this research was to use a non-formal educational context to further challenge and develop young educational professionals while at the same time providing a unique opportunity for underprivileged rural community members to gain greatly needed foreign language skills in order to work in the field of tourism.

The Universidad Nacional, Nicoya Branch has special economical funds to develop outreach projects where the involvement of university students is required as a means of promoting their professional development while providing support to social causes in communities of the region. In fact, one of the goals of this initiative
is for students to gain social awareness of significant inequalities and needs within the Campus course of action. The same as it is declared in the outreach vice-rectory objective number five which stands that “the university should encourage the college students active, continuous and planned participation in programs, projects and outreach activities as mechanisms of providing academic feedback and support”. Accordingly, the university pedagogical model states “it becomes relevant, structuring the curriculum, while contributing to a social construction, not defined apart from actors inserted reality, nor aside a theoretical foundation that supports it and takes into account the role of these actors in the construction and permanent reconstruction of knowledge”. (Pedagogical Model, Universidad Nacional, own translation) To accomplish this goal this project involved the students, accomplishing their practicum, in research and syllabus design, as means to lead them to acquire competences and skills that will, in consequence, prepare them to face successfully their future careers.

**Background**

The project Improving Competitive Skills of Grassroots Entrepreneurs through English Language Training carried out teaching practicums in non-formal education system during 2009 and 2010. In all, ten student teachers finishing their Bachelor of English Teaching major at the Universidad Nacional Nicoya Campus, Guanacaste, Costa Rica completed their practicum requirements with the scope of the project. Their students, registered in the English courses, were twenty adult women between 19 and 69 years of age from economically depressed communities of Costa de Pajaros, Manzanillo, Coyolito and Chira Island located in the Gulf of Nicoya. These ladies are leaders in their communities who have helped to form business associations as means of diversifying economic incomes through promotion of rural tourism and supplementing the primary economy of fishing. For instance, through these associations, there is now a butterfly nursery, tours around the Nicoya Gulf and its islands, a restaurant, a cafeteria and the Friendship Lodge, where visitors are offered services of food, shelter and short scenic tours. Participants turn out to be a plus for the project development and made the two
hour trip to the communities a comfortable and motivating issue for the ten student teachers that carried their practicum in this empowering project. The key to success, however, relies in great amount, in all the process the in service teachers executed to fulfill the requirements of their practicum in a different but challenging setting.

**Needs Analysis Application**

Students’ professional performance was reinforced through the practicum because they had to research in order to propose and implement all stages of the teaching process. Truly, due to the fact that courses should be designed taking into account the learners’ needs analysis, student teachers performed this process in 2008, to have a framework of the learners’ linguistics and affective needs. As a result, the data analysis, obtained in two workshops in each community, interviews and focus groups applied to the potential participants arose pertinent course contents, and updated linguistic and affective needs that were necessary to include in the training courses. As Nunan (2001) points out “Needs Analysis includes a wide variety of techniques for collecting and analyzing information, both about the learners and about the language (p, 57)” In this sense, lesson plans, classroom tasks and assessment strategies were specifically chosen to fit the target population language requirements. Furthermore, the student teachers wrote and modified their objectives based on the groups’ demands in a reciprocal teaching and learning process. In conclusion, this project stands as a significant tool on languages course definition, and even though teachers may had a clear idea of what the students need to learn, it is throughout time that many modifications are made based on the process of learning that take place when we let our students to be part of an open discussion. These lessons, done through a three month period, during the English Teaching Seminar Course, guided them to the next step, and enhance them to take the lead on syllabus design using an English for Specific Purpose approach.
ESP Courses Design

The methodology used in English training sessions is commonly influenced by the social and educational context of the recipient group. The practicum, in this outreach project, provided the reality for free since students-teachers had the opportunity to put into practice the premises of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) approach in order to design the courses syllabus. In recent years ESP has turn out to be an innovative approach in syllabus design and materials production due to the fact its focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students’ real world; instead, it is integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. Moreover, as an ESP teacher, one must play many roles. For example, one may be asked to organize courses, to set learning objectives, to establish a positive learning environment in the classroom, and to evaluate students’ progress. In contrast to the formal education courses, in which the syllabus is already established by the education board or school curricula planners, the student teachers participating in the outreach project were the creators of the courses they thought to teach. In other words, they, assisted by their professors, became responsible of choosing the appropriate methodology and the programme objectives, aided as well by the findings taken from the needs analysis (Finney, 2001, p 75) As a result, the research process supported them to choose the learning styles, suggested topics and suitable activities to be put into practice during their practicum. Thus, they end up with a twelve-unit English for Grassroots Syllabus describing the theoretical foundations, methodology, assessment and scope and sequence of the language to be taught. This process was exhausting but satisfying because it had a specific population of adults with non formal education that contributed meaningfully and actively in the design process. The student teachers were asked to complete this requirement together with the project professors, and the product of it was documented in a paper revised by other professors of Campus and English Native speakers. Although it was not finite, and it is subject to change for better, it became a production that allowed, in this kind of university, alternative activities that offered student teachers insights as language courses designers, a condition that would have been less
common in other educational contexts where that work is already done and needs just to be followed.

**In-Situ Language Development**

The In-situ language teaching happened to be advantageous for future English teachers’ course development. Indeed, the term of context has been incorporated as a key aspect to take into account when implementing English courses. In this case, having this type of language classes was a plus for both the students-teachers and the participants. As Tomlinson (1998) expresses, “language use is determined and interpreted in relation to its context of use” (Tomlinson, 2009, p. 25) Certainly, the participants were grouped in classes based on their jobs within associations that they belong to. Hence, it was possible to tailor the classes specifically to their needs. For instance, some of them work with tourists and needed the specific vocabulary about, tours, accommodations, food services and business. Others, offer just food services, and needed knowledge inappropriate and varied lexicon, money matters, assisting the costumer and so on. In the student-centered approach to learning that was used in this project, new topics were discussed and agreed upon by both the students and the teacher-students. In addition, priorities and order of importance of the topics were set by the adult students. That is to say that there was a clear purpose of using the language for a specific audience and with the same protagonist. To illustrate, a class based on tours turned out easily due to the fact that it was received actually “on the boat” with all the benefits the place and the participants could offer. In consequence, topics, ideas, and possible activities are taken from the environment and implemented in the course.

**Real communicative need**

The project also let the student teachers confront Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. In consequence, English was really used by participants, and there was an evidence of a communicative purpose during and after the classes. According to Krashen (1981), Second Language Acquisition
process “requires meaningful interactions in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.” Class activities created for the adult women learners paralleled Krashen’s theory in that the tasks were meaningful and relevant for the participants in the here and now. After each class and while assisting the tourist, they would had the chance to practice the functions and task performed during classes. There was actually no fixed environment in the project course. The ladies were not acting other roles; on the contrary, they were representing themselves as the receptionist, cooks, waitresses, tour guides, entertainers and so on. For this reason, these ladies were learning a language to communicate (Brown, 2001, p.49.). Additionally, tasks were designed so that participants could recognize on them their practical use in real life, and with which they could feel confident with. This was a major challenge for the senior students who just have theory on how to be an English teacher. Nevertheless, they were able to see the communicative act in the new language, and had the ability to create new spaces where the participants could express their ideas, opinions, emotions, and any other information using the target language. For instance, they were able to create activities real life activities such as The Food Tasting in which local traditional dishes were prepared and later presented resembling a real Food Tasting in which the ladies of the associations had to described and explained the preparation using the English language. This activity was even taken to the University Campus where native speakers, faculty professors and advanced students interviewed the non formal adult English learners on their dishes. The event went beyond the student teachers’ and project professors expectations, and confirmed that it is possible to use the target language to interact meaningfully with others. Finally, this was just one of many activities that gave the future professionals hints to ask themselves how could their future students use the language for communicative purpose and try to transfer the knowledge to other learning contexts.
Contextualized Materials

Being part of an outreach project of adult non formal education enhanced student teachers to be creative and produce activities and materials according to the context. Although one may think this could become a difficult task, on the contrary, it turned to be a relevant point in the preparation of future professionals. In regards to materials, the student teachers had the freedom to design the specific materials for adult learners and which utilized the resources of the natural surroundings so that the apprentices would be able to acquire the language in the most meaningful manner possible. Guided by theories that affirm that teachers needs to be able to personalize and localize materials Mackay (1992), Tomlinson (2006) and to relate them in different ways to the needs, wants and learning styles preferences of different learners Anderson (2006), cited by Tomlinson (2010) The in service teachers were fortunate to work in communities with magnificent scenarios that were photographed and later taken as the illustrations of the situations created by the student teachers, the project professors and the ladies of the associations. Besides those illustrated situations, all the realia, authentic materials, and human resources found in the teaching process, the project had as a product the great outcome of having the English for Grassroots Entrepreneurs Textbook, a document that contain student teachers and professors creations to complement the language learning process. It must be said that since that experience in service teachers felt empowerment and enthusiasm on materials design, and expressed that from now and on they will definitely consider use conceived and develop materials different that should be coherent and principled applications of theories of language acquisition and development, principles of teaching, our current knowledge of how the target language is actually used and the results of systematic observation and evaluation of materials in use (Tomlinson, 2010).

Competences Development

Presently, university graduates must have specific skills that will complement their professional diploma. The Tuning Project (2008) calls them “competences”
and in other literature they are found as the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Skills. Among a list, the ones the authors believe this Outreach project helped the student teachers to acquire, include:

**Ability to communicate orally and in writing:**

Teacher-students were able to strengthen their oral and writing skills while working with adults in non formal settings. In fact, before starting their practicum, they went to the field and began writing the needs analysis project design. The product of it was a document each subgroup had to hand in containing the research process. During the teaching process, students developed their writing skills in plans writing and specifically objectives compositions. Moreover, these linguistic abilities were shaped by means of the organization and implementation of meetings with the participants, the negotiation process carried out before classes, the reports written weekly and the presentations given on the project evolution and success.

**Ability to react to new situations and ability to identify and solve problems**

The outreach project gave the students a bigger spectrum in terms of language teaching and offered a unique environment for them to develop holistically. From the context to the participants, motivation until the social awareness made them grow in life skills. Truthfully, both, the University Mission and the Strategic Plan entail the students to develop social skills that would let them be part of the constructions of a more equitable society. In fact, at the social level, human beings feel nowadays increasingly isolated from each other. In many cases students-teachers may be aware that around us there are people with real problems at all levels, but in general most of them pretend that it happens in different world. For this reason, the Strategic Plan states in its objective number two the need of approaching the communities and persons with less access to education and compensate the benefits obtained as State University students. Evenly, the institution mission asserts, “The University shapes professionals of excellence, with a depth of knowledge, a holistic, vision, innovative, able to contribute significantly to an equitable and sustainable human development” (Institutional Global Plan
2004-2011). The project fulfilled this objective since the students went through a process of empowerment that will give them tools to face the unfairness life brings with it, which will aid them to take a stand on based on the principles provided by the university through its three big areas: Teaching, Researching and Outreaching.

**Ability to make decisions**

Every person, and teachers more, requires the decision making capacity as something vital. In seconds and without having determination things may turn obscure and unsolved. One of the aims of this outreach project since its starts was to let student teachers have the right to make their own decisions in many aspects of the teaching process. Consequently, at the end of the project, both the participants and the teachers expressed their satisfaction for the freedom provided on making decisions. By doing so, they were sure they had fulfilled one of the greatest skills a graduate student may have.

**Capacity for teamwork**

Finally, one of the significant skills or competences the project aids the student teachers with was the ability to develop teamwork. This job was done through three different means. First, the in service teachers work always in cooperative groups. In this sense, they had to build up their ability to negotiate, cooperate, contribute and respect others point of view to reach common objectives. Second, they also had to be in contact with the project professors and accept their guidance. Decisions were then made in relation to others, and self concerns needed to leave space to agreement and group decisions. At last, the lady members of the associations were the first aspect teachers need to take into account when thinking in teaching. There was “the other’s” interest that had to be placed in position number one. In conclusion, those skills will soften the future professional immersion in any institution that will search for the organization’s goals instead of individual claims.
Results and Discussion
The tangible results obtained and documented in the Project’s Final Report will be described in the lines below.

First, it let eighteen out the twenty participants to move forward in their level of English according to the ACTFIL guidelines. Second, the students attended trainings in different skills such as Second Language Acquisition Theory, Communicative Language Teaching Approach and Needs Analysis. Third, the students participating in the project produced pieces of writing on their research and practicum that showed how they develop their research skills especially in data analysis. Fourth, the course syllabus and textbook were edited and published documents and established as resources data for coming English courses at the University. Finally, seven out of the ten students continue their postgraduate studies in the Education Area and one of them was hired by the University to coordinate the Language Courses in the campus.

Conclusions
The participation of ten students in the Competitive Skills of Grassroots Entrepreneurs through English Language Training in the Gulf of Nicoya, leads to the following conclusions.

1. Adult non-formal adult practicums turn out to be a pertinent scenario to develop higher education initiatives that let college students complete their professional development as English teachers.
2. The student teachers fulfilled the practicum requirements, and even went beyond expectations by developing a rigorous needs analysis process that led them to the syllabus design that included in-situ language development, real communication needs and contextualized materials. Three key tools to empowered future Language teachers development.
3. Outreach projects contribute to the University projection especially regarding to its mission statements where the rewards are focused on the underprivileged social groups.
References


