Introduction

Who this book is for

This book is for teachers who want their students to develop confidence in using English in the real world, the world *outside* the classroom. Consciously or unconsciously, students bring the outside world into the classroom, but they may not always have the opportunity to activate what they know and use it in the outside world. Project work takes the experience of the classroom out into the world and provides an opportunity for informal learning. The potential benefit for students is clear: they are working on a topic of interest to them and using language for a specific purpose, with a particular aim in mind. What has already been learnt can now be put to use and what is needed can be learnt when it is needed.

In schools and colleges anywhere in the world you see students carrying bags and rucksacks with logos in English. Students discuss films about to be released starring English-speaking actors, buy magazines with pictures of their favourite pop groups, wear T-shirts printed with slogans and logos in English. They talk about football teams, Formula 1 racing, and international tennis championships. During their breaks they eat and drink food with recognizably English names, read English advertisements, access the Internet, listen and sing along to the latest hits. This book sets out to offer a framework for harnessing all this potential and more.

The projects included in this book have been submitted by teachers from all over the world. Since the first edition of *Project Work* there has been a steady increase in interest as teachers from different countries have taken up ideas, extended them, and turned them into projects that suited their own teaching situation. In order to compile this new edition teachers were invited to submit their projects, using a standard form describing the project and how they and their students had tackled it. It has not been possible to include all the projects, but the diversity of those included reflects the sheer range and variety of project work worldwide. Each project reflects individual teachers' unique contributions to the project work carried out by their students.

Update

The original reason for developing project work at the beginning of the 1980s resulted from the impact of the communicative

approach on what teachers were doing in the classroom. Project work pushed forward the boundaries by bringing students into direct contact with authentic language and learning experiences not usually available within the four walls of an ELT classroom using textbooks.

Project work offered learners an opportunity to take a certain responsibility for their own learning, encouraging them to set their own objectives in terms of what they wanted and needed to learn. This tenet still holds true. In the light of all the contributions to this new edition and further developments in teaching methodology, the tenet is even more securely rooted.

Background

Since the novelty of those early experimental days when teachers sent students out to stand on street corners with their questionnaires or to interview unsuspecting foreign visitors, project work has evolved beyond recognition. What was once perceived by both teachers and students as a marginal activity to be done last thing on a Friday afternoon has now achieved international respectability. Ways had to be found to equip the learner to assume the independence that is thought to be desirable. And project work is, I believe, one of these ways.

Defining a project

Project work is student-centred and driven by the need to create an end-product. However, it is the route to achieving this end-product that makes project work so worthwhile. The route to the end-product brings opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence and to work together in a real-world environment by collaborating on a task which they have defined for themselves and which has not been externally imposed.

Project work lends itself to many different approaches in a variety of teaching situations. It draws together students of mixed ability and creates opportunities for individuals to contribute in ways which reflect their different talents and creativity. The less linguistically-gifted student may be a talented artist, able to create brilliant artwork, thus gaining self-esteem, which would be unlikely in a more conventional language lesson. The collaborative process, relying as it does on the involvement and commitment of the individual students, is the strength of a project. There is no concrete evidence to suggest why and how project work is more or less successful with some learners. Future research into learner differences may shed light on this. What teachers do seem to agree on, however, is that even the

most reluctant, sceptical learner is susceptible to peer group enthusiasm and derives benefit from taking part in a project.

The majority of projects in this book have been contributed by teachers who are not working in an English-speaking environment. This fact alone is an indication of how much things have changed in terms of accessing suitable materials, and the degree to which the process of communication has been transformed by the use of computers, the Internet, and email. It is still the case that students studying in an English-speaking environment have an advantage in being surrounded by the target language, but students' motivation and commitment is generally what drives a project forward and determines its overall success.