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A COMMUNITY PROJECT FOR THE TEACHING OF FRENCH TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language develops the tools for dealing with various types of survival challenges, technical skills, and interpersonal exchanges across and among cultures. This means that it is quite important to learn not only English, but also some other languages as French, which has been regarded as third language of international communication and work. The objective of this paper is to propose a community project for the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community. The current research is carried out through action- research. During the process, qualitative and quantitative procedures are combined and the dialectical unit between the levels of the knowledge is established. This paper provides teachers of French with a useful communicative booklet of exercises that will help them contribute to the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community as well as with a proposal of a procedure to implement community projects with that aim. The main transformations are produced in the school as it has a project for the teaching of French, which is a motivating extracurricular activity; and in the subjects of research, who showed an increasing progress in their knowledge about the French language and culture, in interest, motivation, participation and their performance in the target language.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language develops the tools for dealing with various types of survival challenges, technical skills, and interpersonal exchanges across and among cultures. This means that it is quite important to learn not only English, but also some other languages as French, which has been regarded as third language of international communication and work.

The idea of learning several languages – French among them – has been stressed by outstanding personalities. For example, Fidel Castro Ruz (cited by Dr.C Mirta Cárdenas González, 2011) who states that mastering foreign languages is one of the manifestations of people's general culture and remarks its learning should start from childhood by dealing not only with English but also with some French.

Nowadays, the teaching of French is a real need at school due to the great importance and relevance that it has acquired all over the country. Although it is not taught in schools, there is a huge representation of francophone community in Cuba, thanks to a France-Cuba Alliance. Many activities have been carried out in our country under its guidance and support. Thus, foreign language teacher education institutions have leaded different initiatives.

The creation of special interest groups and community projects are among those initiatives, which contribute not only to the teaching of the target language but also to the vocational formation and professional orientation of the students.

During the academic year 2014-2015 the authoress carried out a special interest group at "Benito Juarez" elementary school, where 4th grade students were able to communicate in French language at a basic level after implementing a system of exercises to develop their speaking ability.

The authoress continued with the idea of developing the speaking ability in the French language in children, that is why she decided to create a space where students could learn the French language, and at the same time they will be vocationally encouraged towards the study of foreign language teaching. In order

to fulfill this idea she decided to create a Community Project at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School, where she does her practicum.

The idea was presented to a focus group. It was supported by a description of the context and of the sample, and by a summary of the available antecedents. After some discussion, the group agreed that it is a very important research topic and that the problematic situation demands action research by the teacher of French.

First, the authoress explained that it is necessary to take into account that at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School there are not any antecedents of a community project of Foreign Languages; second, the fact that the speaking ability in French Language have scarcely been treated before in any Primary School in the area; and finally, because of the communicative competence relies mainly on developing speaking. Moreover, in the initial survey to the students the authoress could realize there is a lack of knowledge about French culture, though they are quite interested in developing the speaking ability in French Language.

This situation could be given due to the fact that the students have not taken this subject before, because it is not part of the curriculum. In addition, some other factors that might be influencing are the lack of time to teach French and the fact that they cannot practice the language outside the classroom. This reality shows that the teaching of speaking needs to be improved. It is the authoress task the development of communicative exercises for the teaching of the French language, which might contribute to the development of the speaking ability, so as to increase the students' cultural level.

The mastery of the speaking ability in French language is a priority for many second- language or foreign-language learners. Speaking, as a productive skill, must be mastered by the students, who should be able to communicate, at least, simple messages. According to Camacho Delgado (2005), speaking is the ability to use the language in a fluency way for interactive communicative purposes during the oral communication. It is the use of communicative strategies and the language domain system, expressed in students' productive capacity.

Different books, articles, web sites and previous researches have been consulted in order to find a scientific solution to the current situation. For example, Marie-

Laure Poletti and Clélia Paccagnino in their books *Grenadine: Méthode de français pour les Enfants 1 and 2* propose communicative activities for the teaching of the French language to young learners; Judith Charest et al in their book *C'est à ton tour! 101 Jeux d'expression orale* present a great variety of games to work with students' motivation in the French lessons; Richard Graham in his web site Genki French offers creative games and activities to improve French language teaching to young learners; Guillermo Alonso Águila and José F. Manso Hernández (2007-2008), Félix G. Arboláez Martínez and Dayana Monteagudo Chaviano (2014-2015) in their research papers propose communicative activities for the development of the speaking ability in French; meanwhile Sucel D'Alina Díaz Zumaquero (2012-2013) proposes a system of lessons to teach French language to secondary school students through a French club. All of them properly referred to the development of communicative skills in French at different educational levels and offer practical solutions through proposals of activities; though the results were satisfactory some difficulties remained, mainly related to the contextualization of the activities.

The existent problematic situation leads the authoress to a scientific problem:

Scientific problem

- How to contribute to the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community?

Object of research

- The teaching learning process of the French language

Field of action

- The teaching learning process of the French language to young learners in their community

Objective

- Propose a community project for the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community

Scientific Questions

1. What are the theoretical-methodological foundations that back up French language teaching to young learners in their community?
2. What is the current situation of the teaching learning process of the French

language in 5th grade students at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School within a community project?

3. What changes could be introduced in the teaching learning process of the French language at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School that might contribute to its improvement?
4. What transformations occur in the teaching learning process of the French language after implementing the changes at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School?
5. What scientific results emerge from the investigation process that might contribute to the improvement of the teaching learning process of the French language?

Scientific Tasks

1. Determining the theoretical-methodological foundations that back up French language teaching to young learners in their community.
2. Diagnosing the current situation of the teaching learning process of the French language at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School.
3. Planning the changes that could be introduced in the teaching learning process of French at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School.
4. Evaluating the transformations that occurred in the teaching learning process of the French language after implementing the changes at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School with the backup of the focus group.
5. Elaborating the community project, the procedures for developing the project and the booklet of exercises that emerged from an action-research process.

Subjects of research

A group of twenty students is taken as an intentional sample because it is the group where the authoress does the practicum. These students were selected according to their interests towards learning the French language.

Scientific methods

The current research is carried out through action- research. During the process, qualitative and quantitative procedures are combined and the dialectical unit

between the levels of the knowledge is established.

Theoretical and empirical methods were utilized in order to gather, organize and process information; whereas percentage analysis as a mathematical method was used with the purpose of analyzing and processing information.

The theoretical methods used were the logical-historical, the analytic-synthetic, the inductive-deductive and the systemic approach. The *logical-historical* permitted to understand the evolution and development of the teaching learning process of the French language to young learners in their community, to reveal its history, the main stages of its development, and its major historical connections. The *analytic-synthetic* was used in the processing of the methodological theoretical information obtained from the different consulted sources as well as the resulting data from the application of the different instruments. The *inductive-deductive* was used in the establishment of general and particular theoretical considerations expressed by different specialists on the topic object of research and in the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through the different instruments applied. And the *systemic approach* to explain the systemic character of the whole process.

From the empirical level different methods and techniques were used, which provided the direct practical contact with the research object, the reflection on the process of implementation of the proposal, and the assessment of the transformations. These methods and techniques were document analysis, observation, interview, questionnaire, learning research journal, recordings, and triangulation. They are explained in detailed in 2.2.

Practical contributions

This paper provides teachers of French with a useful communicative booklet of exercises that will help them contribute to the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community as well as with a proposal of a procedure to implement community projects with that aim.

Structure of the paper

This paper is structured into three main parts: introduction, discussion and conclusions. The discussion is subdivided into two epigraphs. The first epigraph

deals with theoretical and methodological foundations and the second one with the process of building the proposal in an action research process. After the conclusions, some suggestions, the bibliography and appendixes are included.

DISCUSSION

1. Theoretical and methodological foundations that back up French language teaching to young learners in their community

1.1. The teaching of the French language

French is evolving, re-inventing itself, changing and not hesitating to break the rules; it is therefore becoming a multifaceted language, changing and adapting to modernity and cultural realities. Moreover, today's French across the French-speaking world reflects the diversity of relationships that French speakers have with this shared heritage (The French Language Observatory, 2014)

It is very difficult to identify the specific points of the importance of a language around the world, even more when it has played important roles through history.

French is a Romance language that belongs to the Italic branch within the Indo-European family. The language of "L'Île de France", i.e. of Paris, has its antecedent in the Latin from Gaula: the Roman colonization is the main cause. The Romans made disappear almost all the languages, at least, in northern France. Romanization was progressive. When Paris assumed the French language, it started a rich literary and artistic production; this fact helped French to become the national language.

Since the XVI and XVII centuries, French replaced Latin as an international language, mainly on diplomacy, and in the international communication of the European continent, where nowadays it is still used in some Forums. The French language is among mandatory languages in the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union. Its influence encompasses the African continent and has made necessary the creation of the Group of Francophone Countries.

During the XIX century, the French Alliance was created to spread the French

language in the French colonies of the period and abroad. This institution, founded in 1884, was created by a group of important personalities, such as Ferdinand Marie Lesseps, Jules Verne and Louis Pasteur and its main objective was to impel the projection of France to the world. The French Alliance funds and aids to schools contribute to the formation of teachers of French, foster publishing, permit editing its own bulletin and back up the organization of seminars and conferences all over the world. (Microsoft Encarta, 2007). The teaching of the French language has become a process of innovation and practical movement all over the world with the creation of the French Alliance.

The development of methods and approaches for its teaching are closely related to the theories and ways of application used to teach other languages. Many methodologies have emerged through history, and they have developed in agreement with didactic researches, but also taking into account the political, economic and cultural situation of the world.

During the 70s, the communicative approach is developed in France, which focuses on the effective use of the language. Language is conceived as an instrument of communication and social interaction. This approach takes into account the linguistic and extra-linguistic dimensions of language as well as the four communicative abilities. Learning is no longer a passive process, but an active one, that takes place inside the individuals in their activities and communication, under the influence of the social context and the guidance of a facilitator. The teacher conducts the process and can use authentic documents, which were not conceived for pedagogical purposes. The foreign language is preferred, but it is possible - when necessary- to use the mother tongue or translation. Mistakes are considered inevitable.

Every time new methods were created, they were better than the ones created before. Nowadays, it is the communicative approach the one that sustains the basic principles in foreign language teaching.

1.1.1. The Communicative Approach in the teaching learning process of French language

The origins of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are to be found in late 1960s. According to Kathleen M. Bailey in her book *“Teaching speaking skills”*:

“In the mid-1970s the notion of linguistic competence came to be viewed as part of the broader construct of communicative competence—“...the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge” (Savignon, 1991, p. 264).”

The communicative approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop what (Hymes, 1972) referred to as “communicative competence”. Hymes coined this term in order to contrast a communicative view of language and Chomsky’s theory of competence. Chomsky held that linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interests, and errors. Communicative Language approach is best considered an approach rather than a method and it appeared at a time when British language teaching was ready for a paradigm shift. CLT appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive processes of communication received priority. (Richards, 1999, p.159)

The communicative approach is the core of the approach’s potential for being culture-sensitive. It should have a built-in facility for being culture sensitive. An important function is that the facility is to put the micro business of classroom teaching in touch with macro social context. (Halliday, 1970) “Being communicatively competent requires an understanding of sociocultural contexts of language use”. (Bailey, 1995, p.127)

There are various areas of communicative competence, which vary according to specialists and authors. For instance, Canale and Swain (1980) in their *Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing* pointed out four areas of the communicative competence: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic. Since then, these areas have been modified and

renamed by different linguists, language teachers, and researchers, but the concept of communication has been kept as their rallying point.

As it has been stated by Bailey (1995):

“... there are various models of communicative competence but in addition to linguistic competence, communicative competence includes sociolinguistic competence, or the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts the strategic competence and the discourse competence. Sociolinguistic competence entails register (degrees of formality and informality), appropriate lexical choice, style shifting, and politeness strategies. Another component of communicative competence is strategic competence—the ability to use language strategies (such as circumlocution and approximation) to compensate for gaps in one’s second-language skills. A fourth component is discourse competence, which includes “rules of both cohesion — how sentence elements are tied together via reference, repetition, synonymy, etc. — and coherence — how texts are constructed” (Lazaraton, 2001, p.104; see also Bachman, 1990; Douglas, 2000).”

Because communicative competence is a multifaceted construct, it is important that curriculum planners, material writers, teacher educators, researchers, test developers, and teachers working with young learners understand the complexity involved in speaking a foreign language.

On the roles assumed for teachers Richards and Rodgers on their book *Approaches and Methods in Languages Teaching* (1999) pointed out that:

“CLT teacher assumes a responsibility for determining and responding to learner language needs. This may be done informally and personally through one-to-one sessions with students, in which the teacher talks through such issues as the student’s perception of his or her learning style, learning assets, and learning goals. It may be done formally through administering a needs assessment instrument, such as those exemplified in Savignon (1983). (...) On the basis of such needs assessments, teachers are expected to plan group and individual instruction that responds to the learners' needs.” (p.167)

Finocchiaro (1983) contrasted the major distinctive features of the Audio-lingual Method and the Communicative Approach, the authoress have selected the most suitable features of CLT to the current research.

- Meaning is paramount.
- Dialogues center on communicative functions and are not normally memorized.
- Contextualization is a basic premise.
- Language learning is learning to communicate.
- Effective communication is required.
- Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
- Any device which helps the learners is accepted – taking into account their age, interest, etc.
- Attempts to communicate may be stimulated from the very beginning.
- Careful use of native language is accepted where feasible.
- Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
- The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
- Communicative competence is the desired goal and implies the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately.
- Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning which maintains interests.

The communicative teaching of any foreign language has to work along with the principles of a communicative methodology. The following set of principles of Communicative Language Teaching drawn by Professor Neil Naiman (1989) and explained by Camacho (2002) is taken as an important basis for the fulfillment of the objective of the proposal of this work.

➤ Meaningful practice beyond the sentence level

This principle emphasizes the idea that language operates at levels higher than isolated words or sentences, that language acquires meaning in context, that practice in the classroom should provide students with whatever bits of language they know in order to convey real communicative purposes (orally or in writing) and to process stretches of language as they occur in real life. This principle has implications in terms of students' motivation since it implies asking them to communicate and to process real meanings of language.

➤ Student-centered class

This principle claims that if students are expected to develop skills they should be given many opportunities to participate in pairs, in groups, and for the whole class. In other words, this principle implies that teachers should be “leaving the stage for the students to act”, that students should be active in class.

➤ Task orientation of classroom activities

This principle implies that students should know what they are doing, what for and why they are doing that. It underlines that at the end of each lesson, students should be able to see that they can do something they could not do before, that they learned something communicatively useful. It is related to problem-solving teaching. It states that students should learn by solving close-to-real life tasks and problems. In real life one does not watch the news for the sake of doing it, but rather to follow up on a current issue.

➤ Development of strategies for learning beyond the classroom

This principle acknowledges the need for students to develop skills and modes of learning on their own. In other words, they should not only acquire knowledge but also develop abilities, since it is impossible to teach people everything that they need to know; rather, people should be helped to be able to learn on their own.

➤ Peer correction and group work

This principle considers that in order to help students develop accuracy; teachers should use feedback correction techniques. By using these techniques, students are helped to develop self-correction and self-monitoring skills. And obviously, if students are able to correct their own mistakes, they will certainly have the ability to correct their partners' mistakes as well, while working in groups or pairs, and even in situations beyond the classroom.

1.2. A brief history of the teaching of the French language in Cuba

Learning foreign languages has always been a need for mankind. English and French have been two languages historically taught in Cuba. English has been a component of the school curricula of all educational levels for centuries as it is the most widely known language around the world and is generally referred to as the language of commerce and business. French, another internationally widespread

language, although present in Cuban education has not reached the position of the English language.

French has been taught in Cuba since last centuries, probably since late XVIII, when around 30.000 French colonists flocked into Cuba with their slaves and settled down along the whole island running away from the Haitian revolution. During the first half of the XX Century, it was taught in Letters majoring and in high school as an optional subject.

At the beginning of the Revolution, English and Russian replaced French, but in the 60s, language schools were created. Such an amount of people enrolled in courses of French that there was no room for all of them at language schools. Language-teacher schools were also created, first in Havana and later in other provinces like Santiago de Cuba and Villa Clara. Then, teaching of this language began in higher education, specifically in the Instituto Superior Pedagógico de Lenguas Extranjeras (ISPLE) in Havana.

In the 80s, pedagogical universities started the formation of teachers of French, and students majoring in Spanish and Literature took French as part of their curriculum. By the 90s, French teaching was stopped at some levels of education due to some curricular changes.

Recently, the need of knowing other languages has been stressed for various reasons: (1) the growing process of globalization compels people to be prepared for the reception and transmission of scientific, cultural, political and commercial information from and to everywhere in the world by media such as radio, television, written press, and internet; (2) the rapid advance of science and technology urges people to be in the capacity of assimilating the new technological applications as fast as possible, which would become a difficult task without knowledge of the language of the producers of these technologies; (3) the increasing development of the tourist industry as the cornerstone of the Cuban economy forces us to know the languages of the clients coming from all continents; (4) the internationalist orientation of the Cuban people requires the command of the language of the countries we collaborate with in the fields of health care, education, culture and sports mainly; and (5) the ambitious official program for the development of a

general culture in the people cannot be conceived without the implementation of strategies for learning foreign languages. (Sánchez Sánchez, 2003 p.2)

Lately, the teaching of French has been gaining ground (Sánchez Sánchez, 2003 p.2). French is nowadays taught in universities, languages schools, schools for the preparation of tourism personnel (FORMATUR) and in other institutions supported by the French Alliance.

French was included in the curriculum of the Majoring in Foreign Language Teacher Education in 2001. The syllabus devoted to the teaching of French has among its objectives to create Clubs or Scientific Societies to get the students familiar with the French language.

Hence, students from this major have made some attempts to teach French in schools as an extracurricular activity. For example, during the academic year 2005 - 2006, a project was carried out at “Ernesto Che Guevara” school in Santa Clara city where students from ninth and eleventh grades had the opportunity of learning and practicing some French in an international exchange with students from Simon Fraser University. A group of young teachers came from Canada to make a team-teaching for a month. That gave the possibility of exchanging knowledge, making and strengthening friendship ties, and sharing the rich culture of the francophone world (Zumaquero, 2012-2013).

Another attempt made by student- teachers is the creation of special interest groups in primary, secondary and pre-university schools in Santa Clara, which contribute not only to the teaching of the target language but also to the vocational formation and professional orientation of students. The first groups were formed in 2010 and new groups are formed every academic year. At the beginning of 2015, the Regulation 75/2015 from the Ministry of Education was passed. This Regulation establishes to expand the teaching of foreign languages to children over seven years old, and to adolescents and young people under seventeen years old, through the development of community projects organized by the languages schools in coordination with other educational centers and organizations in the community. (Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba, 2015).

A *community project* is defined as "... a group of activities organized and oriented to satisfy and solve the most outstanding needs of the community. It is aimed at those who are part of the community" (Juan Pablo, 2009). It is also seen as "... a term applied to any community-based project. This covers a wide variety of different areas within a community or a group of networking entities." (Taken from Wikipedia, 2015) In other words a Project is a group of organized activities to satisfy certain needs or fulfill an objective/ end. Summing up, it helps to encourage and strengthen the knowledge, due to the benefits of it to the future, whether it is in the community or not (Franco, 2010). Community projects are aimed at contributing and strengthen of the community space, pro of the harmonic and sustainable development of the inhabitants. (Blog de Educación, 2015)

According to the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, *community* is seen as a group of members who live in a certain locality and interact with one another while sharing common interests or goals. Similar to this definition the Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1975), states that it comprises people with common interests living in a particular area. For the purpose of this investigation, it is regarded as a group of people who live in a certain area. And according to the authoress belief a *project* implies a group of organized activities to satisfy certain needs or fulfill an objective/ end. This definition was handled by David Orozco (2015) as :

"The term *project* despite of being used daily, might have different meanings, and is not always used in the same way. The word's origin is Latin *projectus*, derived from *proiicere*, which means to move something or someone forward. A project is a decided and planned intervention by a person who wishes to generate favorable changes in a specific situation. It is a group of activities coordinated and connected each other, which take place with the aim of producing certain goods and services able of satisfy needs or solve problems." (p.3)

After having analyzed these concepts it is necessary to point out that teachers should contribute to the sustainable development of communities through the integral, individual and collective knowledge of the capacities of the members of a certain community, in order to face their problems, satisfy some needs and

improve their life standards while making an adequate use of the available resources. (Universidad de Granma, 2015)

Community projects are regarded as useful activities for providing continuous education of all members of the communities, which is a permanent goal of the Cuban State. Therefore, these projects are derived from the Cuban State policy and are aimed at fulfilling the maxim stated by Martí “*Ser cultos es el único modo de ser libres*”, which is better likely to be achieved if educational institutions become the center of culture in the communities.

The development of community projects contributes to strengthen education based up on studies, respect and solidarity of children and youth that are been educated in Cuba. Each and every project should enroll not only school staff and students but also families and organizations of such communities.

In Cuba, the special attention given to childhood and youth in Health, Education, Protection, and Social Assistance areas, which is widely recognized in Latin America and worldwide, makes it easier the creation of programs with the aim of transmitting culture and values to contribute to their formation and education.

Hence, many community projects, if not most, involve children and young people. The creation of community projects for foreign language learning from the ages of 6 to 17 is an example, which to authoress belief should contribute not only to the learning of English but of some other foreign languages like French.

There are valuable antecedents of community projects for French learning. The community project *Chantons et Jouons en Français* and the special interest groups created by student-teachers of foreign languages in Santa Clara are among them. The first is leaded by Monique Peainchau, professor of the French Alliance in Cuba, and has been a success among the children in Havana. The rest has been part of the professional-research training of the Foreign Languages Teacher Education Program and has contributed to the motivation, programing, creation, investigation, rescue and revitalization of cultural, ethic and aesthetic values of children and young people in their community.

The research carried out by the authoress is an instance of a present-day

community project of French language learning in an elementary school, which aims at the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community.

1.3. The teaching learning process of French language to young learners

It is widely held today that foreign language learning should be part of the education of every child. It is said that children have an uncanny gift for language acquisition and for vocal mimicry, which should not be wasted, especially as it seems to be lost in adult life. Young children are believed to have not only special powers of imitation, but also greater flexibility, greater spontaneity and fewer inhibitions than adolescents or adults. The earlier a second language is learnt the more possible it is acquired in a way which is similar to first language learning.

The European commission (cited by Gwen McCrossan, 2016) stated that:

“Opening children’s minds to multilingualism and different cultures is a valuable exercise in itself that enhances individual and social development and increases their capacity to empathize with others [...] As young children become aware of their own identity and cultural values, Early Language Learning can shape the way they develop their attitudes towards other languages and cultures by raising awareness of diversity and of cultural variety, hence fostering understanding and respect (European Commission, 2011:7)”

The literature review confirmed the authoress’ belief in the importance learning by using all their senses. As Gwen McCrossan (2016) cited in her article *French at Early Level: “Children can learn almost anything if they are dancing, tasting, touching, seeing, and feeling information” (Dryden & Vos, 1997).*” (p. 38)

The acquisition of a foreign language is the most substantial environment in the life of any child. Thus it is very important to review what the experts express about teaching languages to young learners. But first it is necessary to clarify the concept of young learner and their main characteristics.

Gail Ellis and Janet Leclerc on their article *Managing young learners* expressed that “The term “young learner” in the network covers a wide range; 4-18 years of age...” Another writer, Rojab Siti Rodliyah, declared that “Young learners can be

included into those aged 7-11 years”. The Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE) defines as young learner children between the ages of 7 and 12.

The term *young learner* is defined as “... a child who is in their first six years of formal education, from the age of 6 to 12” (Harmer, 2012). The reason for this choice is that in the lower limit of 6 roughly corresponds to the start of formal schooling in many countries, while the upper age of 12 approximates to a time when many children have begun to experience significant cognitive and emotional changes.

Taking into account the definitions of young learner given by different authors and the Cuban context, the authoress states that young learner is a child who is in primary school from the ages of 5-6 to 11-12.

Many researches about teaching languages to young learners have been carried out by outstanding specialists. It is worthy to mention the works of Vygotsky, Piaget, Bruner, and Cameron. The authoress believes it is important to take into account their theories and basic principles in order to establish the characteristics of young learners.

The following chart taken from Kang Shin (2001) shows these experts theories:

Children are active learners and thinkers. (Piaget, 1970)	Children construct knowledge from actively interacting with the physical environment in developmental stages. They learn through their own individual actions and exploration.
Children learn through social interaction. (Vygotsky, 1962)	Children construct knowledge through other people, through interaction with adults. Adults/teachers work actively with children in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) = difference between the child's capacity to solve problems on his own and his capacity to solve them with assistance
Children learn effectively through scaffolding by	The adult's role is very important in a child's learning process. Like Vygotsky, Bruner focused on the importance of language in a child's cognitive development. He shows how the adult

adults. (Bruner, 1983)	uses “scaffolding” to guide a child’s language learning through finely-tuned talk. (Cameron, 2001)
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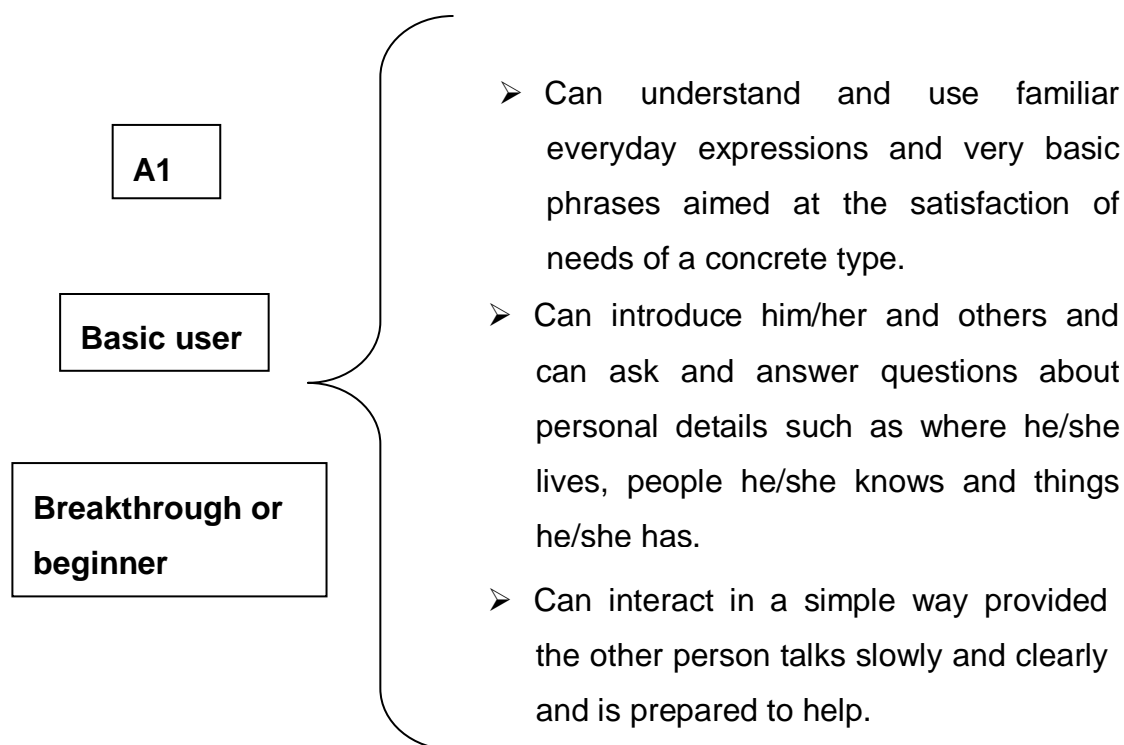
Knowing the characteristics of this type of learners is quite significant for conducting successful learning. The authoress, following Cameron (2001), considers these features:

- Children are active learners and thinkers, who construct knowledge from actively interacting with the physical environment in developmental stages
- They are enthusiastic and lively as learners
- They want to please the teacher rather than their peer group
- They will have a go at an activity even when they do not quite understand why or how
- They also lose interest quickly on tasks they find difficult
- They learn through their own individual action and exploration
- They are developing as thinkers
- They understand the difference between the real and the imagery
- They can plan and organize how best to carry out an activity
- They can work with others and learn from others
- They can be reliable and take responsibility for class activities and routines

Based on the above theories and characteristics, the authoress asserts that children need safety and support if learning is to take place. It means that they will learn (at first) best from doing things through play and action in a warm and engaging environment where they feel safe; and that the job of teachers is to identify what developmental stage individual children have reached so that they can guide and help them to achieve appropriate learning objectives.

Moreover, the authoress supports the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community by the international standards around the world, such as The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) that is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. Taking into account this, the children that make up the community

project are classified as starters (Young Learners), and according to the CEFR, they are at a pre-level A1 with an elemental knowledge of the target language. The Pre-level A1 establishes:



2. Building up the proposal in an action research process

2.1. General research strategy

As it has been declared in the introduction, the current research is carried out through action- research. According to Eileen Ferrance (2000) in her book *Themes in Education: Action Research*:

“It is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the “research.” Often, action research is a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change” (p.1)

Moreover, "... within second language education, action research has usually been associated with the study of classroom actions rather than addressing social problems associated with language teaching. Bailey (2001: 490) maintains that action research for language teachers is 'an approach to collection and interpreting data which involves a clear, repeated cycle of procedures'." (Thomas S. C., 2007, p. 94-106)

The authoress of this paper followed Thomas S. C. (2007) cycle of investigation in order to conduct an action research project. It encompassed the following steps: (a) identify an issue, (b) review literature on issue and ask questions to narrow focus of issue, (c) choose method of data collection, (d) collect, analyse and interpret information, and (e) develop and implement and monitor action plan. The first step consisted on identifying the issue. It is said to be the most difficult, anyway it entailed defining the purpose and the topic, the focus, the product, the mode, the time and the resources. The second step was the review of the literature on issue and ask questions to narrow focus of issue. It consisted on reading some background literature on the topic, because reading about what others have discovered before can give teachers more ideas about how to conduct their own action research projects by following similar research methods or adapting the methods used for their own contexts. The third step dealt with choosing method of data collection. Once the problem had been identified and even read up on, it was time to plan and decide on a strategy to collect data. The fourth step involved collecting, analyzing and interpreting information. The main purpose of this stage was to make meaning of data gathered in order to determine the value of the intervention and involved sorting through the data to discover important themes relating to the issue under investigation. Finally, the fifth step was aimed at developing, implementing and monitoring action plan. At this stage, the authoress reflected on the results. This reflection involved some change in teaching practice which was monitored. (Thomas S. C., 2007)

2.2. The three first steps

Identifying the issue

The process of identifying the issue was complex. It allowed the authoress to address a problem related to the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community, investigate on that issue, ask questions in the context of research and assign herself the tasks in order to find solutions to the problem detected. Furthermore, it included the what, the how, the when, and the why of the research topic, which permitted to bring about changes in a specific area of the research context and, even better, improvements in practice.

Reviewing the literature on issue and asking questions

The review of the literature on issue and the questions to narrow focus of issue was the second stage to be developed. It provided ideas for strategies in identifying promising practices. The authoress found worthy to spend some time collecting and reading several pieces of literature because it allowed her to reflect and to learn on other authors' experiences and to adapt the methods used for her own context.

Once the problem had been identified and even read up on, it was time to plan and decide on a strategy to collect data. As Thomas S. C. (2007) points out it is very important to use a variety of data collection tools – quantitative, qualitative, or both, as appropriate – for each topic or issue, helping to ensure the validity of the results. That is the reason why different methods and techniques were used, which provided the direct practical contact with the research object, the reflection on the process of implementation of the proposal and the assessment of the transformations. These methods and techniques were: document analysis and collection, observation, interview, questionnaire, learning research journal, recordings (audio and video), and triangulation.

The *document analysis* was used to gather the necessary information about the teaching learning process of French to young learners in their community; the document collection included sets of documents relevant to the research context, e.g., course overviews, lesson plans, students' writings, classroom materials and texts, assessment tasks, student profiles, student records. The *observation* permitted watching and noting classroom events, happenings or interactions, as a

participant in the classroom. It allowed the authoress to evaluate the students' development of the speaking ability in French during the lessons. The *interview* was used to conduct a conversation that explored the focus area; this helped the authoress evaluate the students' previous knowledge about the French language and culture. The *questionnaire*, sometimes also called a survey, checklist or schedule, permitted to get three types of information: factual, behavioral, and attitudinal. It was designed with the aim of determining what contents the students preferred to work with during lessons. The *learning research journal* consisted on regular dated accounts of teaching/learning plans, activities and classroom occurrences, including personal philosophies, feelings, reactions, reflections, and explanations. It was used to register the changes of the preliminary proposal and helped in building up of the scientific outcome. The *recordings -audio or video recordings-*, were used with the objective of providing objective records of what occurred, which can be re-examined. Photographs were also included. *Triangulation* permitted to compare, contrast and cross-check to see whether what has been found through one source is backed up by any other evidence.

2.3. The fourth step

The fourth stage consisted on collecting, analyzing and interpreting information. Once the data has been collected the teacher then analyzes and reflects on it. Next, the authoress explains the procedure followed, taking as a point of departure the analysis of the data obtained from the different instruments administered to the sample during the process of diagnosis.

2.3.1. Characteristics of the subjects of research

An intentional sample of 20 students from 5th grade at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School was taken in order to carry out the research, which represents the 76, 92% of the population of 5th grade students. This selection obeys to intentional purposes since it is the group where the authoress does her practicum. In addition, it was taken into account the students' interests toward the learning of French language through a Community Project.

The average age of chosen subjects of research is 10 years old and their behavior corresponds to the psychological characteristics of this age. They learn better by using visual aids than through the abstract explanation of rules and show a higher motivation when using games. None of the students has any experience on the learning of French, but they are all willing to learn a new foreign language. The students show themselves quite ready to receive a new subject.

2.3.2. Categories used along the research process

Three main categories were established in order to diagnose the current situation of the teaching learning process of the French language at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School. Each category encompasses some key aspects or subcategories that help the analysis and interpretation of data. The last two categories were also used to assess the transformations that occurred in the teaching learning process of the French language while implementing the project and the system of exercises.

- Guidelines to teach to teach foreign languages at Elementary Schools
 - General objective of Elementary School
 - Aims
 - Methods, techniques or procedures
 - Any other methodological guideline
- Students’ knowledge about the French language, their interests, preferences, attitudes and motivation regarding the learning of the French language
 - Students’ previous knowledge about the French language and culture
 - Students’ interests towards learning it and while learning it.
 - Activities that students prefer to perform during the lessons
 - Students’ attitudes towards the lessons
 - Students’ motivation to learn foreign languages and towards the French language lessons in the learning community project.
 - Material aids that best motivate students
- Achievements of learners of the French language

- Students' progress in the lessons
- Development of the students' speaking ability in the French language

2.3.3. Analysis of the results of the initial diagnosis

Category 1: Guidelines to teach to teach foreign languages at Elementary Schools

In order to know the guidelines to teach foreign languages at Elementary Schools the following documents were analyzed: the Elementary School Syllabus, the French Club Syllabus, and the Regulation 75/2015 passed by the Ministry of Education. (See Appendix 1)

The Elementary School English syllabus states that the main objective of the teaching of foreign languages in the National Education System is to contribute to a general culture through the development of basic communicative abilities. It suggests that extracurricular activities such as clubs, glees, artistic movements and presentations be done so as to take advantage of students' free time.

The French Club Syllabus, designed by Grisel Moré and Yozami Triana (2012) sets three general objectives of the teaching of French. These aims are:

- "To get the students familiar with specific items related to linguistic and cultural aspects of the French language and culture.
- To develop the students research skill as an essential part of the project.
- To increase students' general culture, according to the objectives of Cuban education." (p.--)

The Regulation 75/2015 encloses all the changes related to the language schools, and allows these schools to create community projects with the aim of spreading up of the teaching and learning of foreign languages to children and young people from 7 to 17 years old. The Regulation has an entire chapter devoted to community projects for foreign language teaching to children and young people. Articles 35 and 36 on Chapter VI refer to their organization, procedures, main activities, duration and evaluation in these projects. Taking into account what is stated in the Regulation, the project will be organized into three modules in which ludic activities, participation exercises, linguistic games, and songs will be developed to

enhance students' motivation towards the target language. Besides, at the end of each module a test will be done (oral and written), which will allow the students to continue to the next module; and once the three modules are fulfilled the students will be accredited for having passed the course obtaining a certificate signed by the principal of the language school.

After having analyzed the above mentioned documents, it can be stated that they all coincide in declaring as a main objective to increase students' general culture while learning foreign languages. Accordingly, the authoress designed the first version of a community project for the teaching of French language to young learners in their community, which will be improved after getting into contact with the subjects of research.

Category 2: Students' knowledge about the French language, their interests, preferences, attitudes and motivation regarding the learning of the French language

Students were given a questionnaire and were interviewed in order to assess their previous knowledge about the French language and culture, their interests, preferences, attitudes and motivation regarding its learning. (See Appendixes 2 and 3) Both the survey administration and the process of interviewing the students were carried out in the classroom and students' behavior was good along the whole process. The students declared that they have never thought of studying French at school. All of them were highly motivated towards the learning of a new language. Talking about the activities they wanted to do, they expressed their preferences towards working with songs, games, tongue-twisters, dialogues, visuals and videos. When they were asked about the communicative functions they wanted to learn, they only referred to giving personal information and greeting. Finally, while asking students about the cultural items they wanted to learn, they declared they would like to learn about French customs and traditions, important places and important personalities.

The results of the initial diagnosis showed that the students' knowledge about France or the French Language was low. Half of the students could refer to some

symbols of France (like the Eiffel Tower), and could easily localize France in a world map. The 90% of the students could not recognize any other French speaking country but France; however they were able to mention three out of six of the countries that have land borders with France, such as Italy, Germany and Spain. All the students recognized that the French language has very difficult sounds due to the differences they notice as compared their mother tongue. In sum, the students' knowledge about the French language and culture is low, taking into account that a 41, 6% is placed in this level according to the scale used to process their answers. However, they were highly motivated and showed interests on starting learning the language.

Category 3: Achievements of learners of the French language

- Students' progress in the lessons (reactions after the first contact with French)

Through the participant observation (See Appendix 4) that was carried out at the end of the first two lessons with the aim of corroborating the stated information in the questionnaire and in the interview to the students, as well as to assess the students' reactions after the first contact with French. The main findings confirmed the previous information as to motivation, interest, positive attitude towards learning French and active participation of the students in class when using games; and demonstrated that they are in what the CEFR call an A-zero level.

Since the beginning of the project the authoress used a learning research journal (See Appendix 5) in order to write her reflections on what exercises of the preliminary proposal really worked with the students, and which ones do not. All that work had as main objective the redesign of a system of exercises for the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community, which should be provided to teachers in a booklet.

2.3.4. Reflections and regularities of the needs assessment

In order to identify regularities about the studied problem taking as point of departure the data obtained through the administration of different empirical methods, triangulation was used.

1. The authoress realized that learning foreign languages is seen as an important component of people's general culture, that educational authorities are very interested in answering to the demands of the Cuban society as to foreign language learning, and that there is a need of developing extracurricular activities to have the students spend their free time in useful activities. Accordingly, there are different clubs devoted to the Environmental Education, Sexual Education, Vocational Orientation, among others at "Mártires del Moncada" Elementary School, but a French language Club has never been in plan.
2. The authoress also realized that there is certain flexibility in the curriculum that allows the implementation of different formative activities and that there are some attempts to promote foreign language learning mainly through special interests groups or clubs, but none of them has reached "Mártires del Moncada" Elementary School.
3. She could assess that the subjects of research have limited information about French speaking countries and about the French culture, that they are really starters as French learners; and that even though it is the first time the students get involved in learning French, 5th grade students from "Mártires del Moncada" Elementary School are willing to learn it and prefer games, videos, riddles, pictures and objects in the teaching learning process.

The results obtained in this step allowed the authoress to plan new changes that could be introduced in the teaching learning process of French language at "Mártires del Moncada" Elementary School. In doing so the teachers' research journal was very helpful and allowed to make the necessary changes and permitted the monitoring and evaluation of the proposal implemented.

2.4. The fifth step

The fifth step entailed developing, implementing and monitoring action plan. At this stage, the authoress reflected on the results and used her reflections to introduce some changes in teaching practice and consequently in the final research results. That is why, the proposal, its implementation and results are discussed next.

2.4.1. Proposal of a community project for the teaching of French language to young learners in their community

The *Community Project for the Teaching of the French Language to Young Learners in their Community*, which had been planned in the previous step, was developed, implemented and monitored.

This *Community Project* is understood as a planned intervention in an Elementary School of the Camacho-Libertad community with the overall aim of teaching the French Language to Young Learners in their Community and with the following specific objectives:

- To guide the vocational orientation of the students
- To have the students get familiar with basic linguistic notions of the French language
- To have the students get an elemental knowledge of the target language (A1)
- To widen the students' general culture

The project is developed as a part of the professional-research training of the Foreign Languages Program, which comprises the participation of the authoress in research projects.

The current community project of French language is being carried out with 5th grade students from "Mártires del Moncada" Elementary School, located in Camacho-Libertad neighborhood, in Santa Clara, in coordination with the Language School.

2.4.2. Rationale of the proposal

The current research is based on the Marxist-Leninist philosophy which is the basis for interpret it. From this philosophical perspective, practice is the supreme end of the scientific activity, not only because it generates the theoretical activity as a result of the verification of the contradictions manifested on it, but also because it is where the veracity of the hypothesis is proved. The relationship between practice, theory, and improved practice is appreciated and manifested in the scientific method used in this research.

The psychological precepts are based on the work of L.S. Vygotsky, who proposes that each stage or period is characterized by a social state of human development and that precisely the driving forces of mental development are the contradictions. On this basis, the overall needs of students in Elementary School and their physical characteristics were identified as well as the psychological and socio-cultural features of the context that surrounds them. (Vygotsky, 1981)

According to Vygotsky, learning is a social activity and is not just a process of individuality, as it has been held. It is a production and reproduction activity of knowledge through which the child assimilates modes of activity and interaction, and later in school, the basic scientific knowledge as well, under conditions of orientation and social interaction. (Colectivo de Autores, 1996). As Vygotsky (1979) remarks what the child can do in collaboration today could be done independently tomorrow.

Pedagogically, this research is backed up by the Socialist Pedagogy. This pedagogy claims that there is a need of an active and conscious involvement of the students in the teaching learning process so that the students become not only the object of education, but its subject. This kind of participation occurs when there is a goal that encourages the students to learn because every human action is determined, motivated, and influenced by the need of accomplishing a goal.

This proposal is also methodologically based on the communicative approach. The communicative teaching of any foreign language has to work along with the principles of a communicative methodology. The authoress follows those stated by Neil Naiman (1989) and explained by Camacho (2002) as an important basis for the fulfillment of the objectives of the proposal of this work. These principles - as explained in 1.1.1- are meaningful practice beyond the sentence level, student-centered class, task orientation of classroom activities, development of strategies for learning beyond the classroom, and peer correction and group work.

2.4.3. Structure of the proposal

The *Community Project for the Teaching of the French Language to Young Learners in their Community* consists of two main parts or components: a general

structural component, which comprises the procedures for the development of the community project, and a methodological component, which consists of a system of exercises provided in a booklet in order to put the teaching of French to young learners into action.

2.4.4. Procedures for the development of the community project

In order to develop the Community Project for the Teaching of the French Language to Young Learners in their Community, the following steps were kept in mind. These steps may serve as basis for further attempts.

1. Making contact with the educational institutions
2. Making contact with the family of the students.
3. Designing a syllabus for the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community
4. Reviewing of the literature to support the building up process of the project
5. Assessing students' needs
6. Improving previous proposal of a system of exercises taken from the previous academic year (2014-2015)
7. Implementing the system of exercises for the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community,
8. Monitoring the teaching learning process of French
9. Redesigning the system of exercises and elaborating a booklet
10. Reflecting on the changes that occur along the process
11. Draw conclusions and recommendations

The first steps in the creation of the community project were making contact with the educational institutions and the family. In order to implement the project three main actions were carried out to guarantee the necessary coordination and relations. An agreement with the selected school, the language teacher education

program, and the language school was signed. And the permission of the parents of the students was required.

Then, the third step was the building up of a program, taking into account what has been established in the Regulation 75/2015 , specifically in its Articles 35 and 36 on Chapter VI about community projects for language teaching to children, adolescents and young people. According to this document, the project will be organized into three modules in which ludic activities, participation exercises, linguistic games, and songs will be developed by the teacher or professor. Besides, at the end of each module a test will be given (oral and written), which will allow the students to continue to the next module; and once the three modules are fulfilled the students will be accredited for having passed the course obtaining a certificate signed by the principal of the language school.

The fourth step consisted on the review of the literature to support the building up process of the project, and in the fifth step, the students' preferences and needs were assessed through the administration of different empirical methods. These needs were taken into account when improving the proposal of a system of exercises taken from the previous academic year, i.e. in the design of the exercises and in the determination of the content to be taught in the lessons.

Consequently, in the following steps, the initial proposal of exercises was improved and administered to the students and monitored. Some of them remained, some others changed and new ones were created in the process of implementation. These steps were carried out with the aim of redesigning the system of exercises and elaborating a booklet for the teaching of the French language to young learners in their community.

During the process and the end, it is necessary to reflect on the changes that occur along the process. That is why the tenth step should be seen throughout the process. Finally, drawing conclusions and recommendations is the last step of the cycle.

2.4.5. System of exercises for the teaching of the French language

As the methodological component of the project consists of a system of exercises, it is necessary to point out some key concepts that were taken into account during its elaboration. So, in order to design a system of exercises to teach the French language, different concepts of system were analyzed:

- A staff of teachers from the CECIP at “Félix Varela” Pedagogical University defined a system as a pedagogical and scientific result, as an analytical construction supported by theoretical principles which aims at the optimization of a pedagogical system and the achievement of certain results in the educative practice and the improvement of the existing ones. They pointed out that a system emphasizes on the static and structural aspects of the object of study without altering its dynamic aspect, and as a scientific and pedagogic result, a system must meet the general characteristics of all systems: completeness, centralization, hierarchism and integrity.
- According to Webster’s Dictionary (11893:895), a system is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole.
- Grijalbo’s Dictionary (s.a:874) defines a system as: an arranged and coherent whole of rules, norms or principles related to certain matter. Is an organized whole of things, means, and ideas that contributes to a same goal.
- Von Bertalanffy (cited by Rodriguez, A., 2010: 35-36) defines system as a whole of interrelated elements and also provides the following features:
 - A system is a way of existence of the objective reality.
 - The systems of the objective reality can be studied and represented by man.
 - Man also creates systems with fixed aims.
 - A system is a whole of elements distinguished by certain kind of arrangement.
 - A system has relative limits; they can only be separated to study them with determined purposes.

- Each system belongs to a wider system, it is connected and stands apart from another system.
- Each element of a system can be assumed as a whole.
- The idea of system is wider than the idea of sum of the parts that compose it.

The authoress follows the definition and ideas given by the staff of teachers from the CECIP, because it is the most suitable to the proposal's objective.

The system of exercises for the teaching of the French language designed by the authoress has a systematic and systemic character because there is a connection between the exercises. The interrelated exercises proposed by the authoress meet the students' needs and preferences and fulfill the CLT principles.

The system has a great value to have the students get an elemental knowledge of the target language (A1), to have them get familiar with basic linguistic notions of the French language, to guide their vocational orientation, and to widen their general culture.

The system designed has a total of twenty exercises in correspondence with Module 1 from Regulation 75/2015. Most of them were designed for presentation and controlled practice stages and were structured considering the objective, the material aids, and the procedure. Some sample exercises are presented below.

Examples of the exercises

Example 1

Un tour à Paris !

Objectif : Se familiariser avec la fonction communicative *parler sur La France* pour renforcer leur culture générale.

Matériel: Vidéo « Paris »

Procédures :

Avant de regarder la vidéo :

- a) Travailler avec le titre de la vidéo. «Un tour à Paris ! »

b) De quoi la vidéo s'agit ?

Pendant l'écoute de la vidéo :

c) Écoute et dites quels sont les lieux les plus importantes à Paris ?

Après de regarder la vidéo :

d) Dites les lieux que vous aimiez le plus ?

e) Quel endroit vous voulez visiter ?

Exemple 2

Casez les phrases que Jack et Marie ont dites :

Objectif : pratiquer les fonctions communicatives «*se saluer et dire au revoir*» et «*demande et dire le comment on va* », pendant qu'ils renforcent leur politesse et des bonnes manières

Matériel : aucun

Procédures : le professeur copie le dialogue désorganisé au tableau et les étudiants devront le copier correctement dans leurs cahiers. Organiser les étudiants par dyades et les faire travailler avec le dialogue.

Jack

Salut, Marie !

Comment vas-tu ?

Très bien, merci.

Au revoir, Marie !

Marie

À la prochaine Jack !

Salut, Jack !

Bien, merci. Tu vas bien ?

a. Pratiquez le dialogue en changeant les noms avec votre copain.

b. Maintenant, vous allez pratiquer le dialogue mais en changeant les noms et les réponses pour des autres phrases que vous déjà connaissez.

Exemple 3

Quelle heure est-il, Monsieur le loup ?

Objectif : se familiariser avec la fonction communicative « *Demander et dire l'heure* », pendant qu'ils renforcent leur vocabulaire, politesse et manières

Matériel : Aucun (peut-être ruban cache ou cordes à danser pour faire des lignes)

Procédures : Avant de commencer ce jeu, il est important de situer les étudiantes dans le contexte suivant : le jeu se passe dans une bergerie (espace de jeu ressemblant à un carré). Ensuite, il faut choisir quelqu'un pour jouer le rôle du gros méchant loup. Les autres participantes et participants sont des moutons. Ceux-ci se placent à une extrémité du carré et le loup à l'autre extrémité. Les moutons posent la question suivante: « Quelle heure est-il Monsieur le loup ? ». Le loup, qui leur fait dos, répond n'importe quoi: « Il est 8 heures (ou 9 heures) ». Les moutons peuvent donc avancer et suivre le loup. Dès que le loup dit qu'il est midi, il peut se tourner et essayer de toucher à un petit mouton. Le but est de se rendre le plus proche du loup sans se faire toucher. Attention: si le loup vous touche, vous devenez le loup.

The exercises were put into practice during the current academic year (2015-2016) and the authoress monitored its implementation along the whole process.

2.4.6. Reflections about the process of implementation of the system of exercises

Along the process of implementing the system of exercises, the authoress recorded what went well, what exercises worked and which did not work in her research journal. Three examples of her reflections are given below.

Example 1

1. Un tour à Paris!

Objectif : Se familiariser avec la fonction communicative « parler sur La France » à travers des exercices que les apprenants devront réaliser en couple et en groupe, au même temps que les étudiants renforcent leur culture générale, la valeur de la responsabilité et l'amour pour Cuba, et aussi le respect pour la culture étrangère.

This was the first exercise of the second lesson: "Connaissant la France". It was given to the students with the objective of having them get familiar with the communicative function mentioned above. The students were quite impressed with the images shown in

the video. Their behavior was good, though they asked a lot of questions, and wanted to know everything, this attitude showed a high motivation towards the community project and the learning of the French language. Also the students participated actively in all the activities. Some teachers got involved in the activities, they expressed they found interesting the video.

It can be said that this activity should be in the booklet of exercises, because of the students' attitude to it.

Example 2

Casez les phrases que Jack et Marie ont dites

This exercise belongs to the third lesson "Bonjour!". The students participated enthusiastically though they presented some trouble with the pronunciation of some combination of sounds that do not have Spanish equivalents. It is necessary to add an item that allows the work with the pronunciation of those sounds.

Example 3

1. Quelle heure est-il, Monsieur le loup ?

This exercise belongs to the lesson 10 "Quel heure est-il?". The students' loved this activity, because it consisted on a game where they had to move around the classroom. Even the shyest children participated actively. It could be seen an increase in their motivation towards the French language. This activity must be in the booklet.

At the end of this step, the authoress decided to support her reflections by the criteria of some specialists, some members of the community where the project was implemented (5th grade students, school teachers, members of the families of the subjects of research).

2.4.7. Some criteria about the Community Project

➤ Specialists criteria about the system of exercises

The specialists consulted consider that the system of exercises proposed in this research is appropriate, suitable, profitable, varied, and original. They also agree that it meets the students' needs and interests, adjusts to and considers their

capabilities and potentials to learn the foreign language. The specialists also declared that the proposal fulfills the principles of communicative language teaching.

➤ Criteria of some members of the community

Two school teachers, the 5th grade students and five family members were interviewed in order to know their opinions about the project. The school teachers stated that the idea of the project is a good one as it helps. The students said that they are able to say something in French that they could not say before. “*Puedo comunicarme con mis familiares en el extranjero y que cuando mi tío me visite saber lo que me está hablando*”, “*ya se decir muchas cosas en francés que antes no sabía ...*”, expressed some of them. They also said they liked the games and the lessons and that they enjoyed the lessons they had in the school yard. The interviewed family members pointed out that their children are happy of being in the project. One of them remarked the happiness of her child after winning a drawing contest. All these members of the community agreed that the *Community Project for the Teaching of the French Language to Young Learners in their Community* contributes to the education of children.

➤ Main transformations in the teaching learning process of the French language

The main transformations that occur in the teaching learning process of the French language after implementing the Community Project at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School in an action research process were the following:

- A proposal of a procedure to implement community projects with the aim of teaching the French language to young learners in their community is given.
- Classroom materials for teaching French are enriched with a booklet entitled *Learning French in my Community: a Booklet for Young Learners*, which contains very motivating exercises that were designed taking into account students’ preferences and the type of activities that their age demands.
- Students’ interest and motivation increased as they were learning cultural items related to the French speaking countries and developing the speaking ability.

- Students participated actively and enthusiastically in most of the lessons.
- The average of correct answers in each lesson increased along the process.
- Although the students are children and they show themselves very unquiet because of their ages, their behavior was good, which allowed an active interaction between each other and with the teacher.
- Students' knowledge about the French language and culture also progressively increased.
- Students can understand familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases
- Students can use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases
- Students can introduce him/her and others
- Students can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has.
- Students can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly

It is worthy to mention that during the French lessons, many students who did not belonged to it, were attending to the lessons, showing motivation towards the learning of the French language.

The system was improved taking into account the results of the process of monitoring, the criteria of specialists, members of the community, and the analysis of the transformations in the teaching learning process of the French language. The entire system appears in a booklet entitled *Learning French in my Community: a Booklet for Young Learners* and can be found in Appendix 6.

Thus, in spite of the achievements of the subjects of research and of the positive transformations, they are some weakness in the process, which to the authoress belief should be taken into consideration in further research. Some of them are the shortage of material aids and time to develop the project and the narrow classroom space. Thus, it is necessary to take more advantage of all the opportunities to get families more involved in the process. These reflections involve some new changes in the process as those stated in the recommendation of this paper.

CONCLUSIONS

1. French language teaching to young learners in their community is backed up by:
 - an understanding of the French language as a language of international communication and work,
 - a communicative perspective supported by the aims and principles of CLT,
 - the accumulated experience in the teaching of French in Cuba,
 - the assumption of *community* as a group of people who live in a certain area and share a common goal and *young learners* as is a child who is in primary school from the ages of 5-6 to 11-12,
 - the recognition of the potentialities of children for learning foreign languages,
 - the assumption of the school as the main center of culture in the community and of the CEFR as reference to plan the expected achievements.
2. The current situation of the teaching learning process of the French language at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School is characterized by the lack of community projects for the teaching of foreign languages, although educational authorities are very interested in answering to the demands of the Cuban society as to foreign language learning, and by the limited information about French language and culture of the subjects of research, who are really starters as it is the first time they get involved in learning French and are willing to learn it by using games, videos, riddles, pictures and objects in the teaching learning process.
3. Community projects can be implemented in order to change the current situation in the teaching learning process of the French language at “Mártires del Moncada” Elementary School.
4. The main transformations are produced in the school as it has a project for the teaching of French, which is a motivating extracurricular activity; and in the subjects of research, who showed an increasing progress in their knowledge about the French language and culture, in interest, motivation, participation and their performance in the target language.
5. A proposal of a procedure to implement community projects with the aim of teaching the French language to young learners in their community and a

booklet entitled *Learning French in my Community: a Booklet for Young Learners* emerged from the action research process and are offered as practical results.

6. The booklet contains the system of exercises, which was designed taking into account the students' needs and meets the requirements of the communicative approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To take more advantage of all the opportunities to get families more involved in the process.
- To spread up the proposal to other communities.
- To present the results in different scientific events so as to raise awareness about the importance of learning the French language.

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