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Motivating EFL learners using Self-Determination Theory

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Abstract: This paper discusses the relevance of self-determination theory in motivating adult learners of English as a foreign language in Ecuador.

EFL class provides a unique and fascinating opportunity to test out 21st century ways of learning because English is not so much a content subject (as grammar teachers would have us believe) as a medium in itself. Students should be playing, experimenting and creating…and that will be the answer to every teacher's burning question: "How do I get my students motivated?"

Self-Determination Theory seeks to discover which elements are necessary for intrinsic motivation, and without which, intrinsic motivation is rendered difficult to achieve. Researchers Deci and Ryan (1985) have discovered that the three key elements are *autonomy, competence* and *relatedness.*

In this paper I will show how it can be possible, within the basic framework of the traditional classroom paradigm, to enable EFL learners to feel these three emotions. This does not, of course, guarantee that students will feel intrinsically motivated to learn English, but I submit that redesigning teaching methodologies to reflect these concepts will go a long way toward helping students feel better about learning English as a foreign language.

Many educators, in an attempt to understand intrinsic motivation are turning to the psychology of gaming because people play games out of pure intrinsic motivation. That is, there are "rewards" and "punishments" within the world of the game, but since these have no meaning in the "real" world, the question becomes what makes people *want* to do things? And of course, how can we harness that to use in the classroom, ie: how can we make students want to learn?

Self-Determination Theory is not a panacea. Applying its principles will not magically create intrinsic motivation where none exists. However, what has been discovered is that autonomy, competence and relatedness are three elements without which intrinsic motivation cannot exist. That is, we as teachers cannot make our students feel intrinsically motivated to learn English, but we can remove obstacles that impede their feeling that way.

I will show how to provide students with greater autonomy over their learning, and how doing so will enable them to work more productively. I will show how the feeling of competence can be enhanced by subtle changes to our grading techniques. Finally, I will show how the sense of relatedness is the key to mastering English and being able to use it as a truly global language.

Key words: Autonomy, competence, relatedness, quests, flow, motivation, EFL

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Resumen: Este artículo trata acerca de la importancia de la teoría de la autodeterminación como herramienta para motivar a los estudiantes adultos del inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) en el Ecuador.

El curso de ILE provee una oportunidad única y fascinante para comprobar el método de aprendizaje del siglo XXI, dado que el inglés no es solamente una materia de contenidos (como los profesores de gramática usualmente quisieran que creamos), sino más bien un medio en sí mismo. Los estudiantes deben jugar, experimentar, crear… y esa será la respuesta a la clásica pregunta que se hace todo profesor: "¿Cómo consigo que mis estudiantes se motiven?"

La teoría de la autodeterminación está enfocada hacia el descubrimiento de los elementos que son necesarios para la motivación intrínseca, y sin ella, este tipo de motivación es difícil de alcanzar. Los investigadores Deci y Ryan (1985) descubrieron que los tres elementos clave son la autonomía, la competencia y la relación.

A lo largo de este trabajo se demostrará la posibilidad de lograr que los estudiantes de ILE experimenten estas tres emociones, respetando los parámetros básicos de una clase tradicional de inglés. Esto, evidentemente, no garantiza que los alumnos se sientan intrínsecamente motivados para aprender el idioma, pero presento que el rediseño de las metodologías de enseñanza para que se reflejen estos tres conceptos ayudará al estudiante a encontrar mayor gusto por el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Muchos educadores, en un intento por comprender la motivación intrínseca, están estudiando la psicología del juego porque las personas jugamos por pura motivación interna. Existen premios y castigos en todo juego, pero dado que ello no tiene relevancia alguna en el mundo real, lo que interesa es descubrir qué es lo que hace que las personas quieran hacer las cosas por sí mismas, así como también la manera de incluir esto para usarlo en la clase.

La teoría de la autodeterminación no es una panacea. La aplicación de sus principios no va a crear mágicamente motivación intrínseca donde no la hay. Sin embargo, ha sido descubierto que la autonomía, la competencia y la relación son tres elementos clave sin los cuales no puede existir motivación intrínseca. Esto significa que nosotros como profesores no podemos hacer que nuestros alumnos se sientan intrínsecamente motivados para aprender inglés, pero podemos remover los obstáculos que les impiden sentirse de esa manera.

Se mostrará cómo dar a los estudiantes una mayor autonomía para aprender, y cómo el hacerlo permitirá que trabajen más productivamente. Se mostrará también que el sentimiento de competencia puede ser intensificado mediante pequeños cambios en nuestro sistema actual de evaluación. Finalmente, se discutirá la forma en la que el sentido de relación es clave para alcanzar el dominio del inglés y usarlo como una lengua de verdadero alcance global.

Palabras clave: Autonomía, competencia, relación, búsqueda, flujo, motivación, ILE

Introduction

Teachers want their students to be motivated, and students themselves enjoy and learn more if they are motivated. Unfortunately, motivation seems to be in short supply in most EFL classrooms.

Here in Ecuador, and indeed in many other countries where English is not spoken as a first language, the EFL class tends to consist of the teacher explaining a given grammar point or list of vocabulary items, followed by having the students do exercises in their textbooks to practice. A few days to a few weeks later, the students are expected to regurgitate the lesson in the form of an exam. This is, as Ken Robinson notes in his famous video "Changing Educational Paradigms", is the industrial model of education whereby students are "processed" through a dehumanizing system of grades and levels and marks rather than learning.

Grant Lichtman (2013), speaking at TEDxDenverTeachers, suggests that learning needs to follow a cyclical ecological, rather than a linear industrial model. The latter is the system most of us grew up with and it is, as Lichtman says, "contained, controlled, predictable, scalable, repeatable and measurable"; in other words, students graduate from one level to the next by following syllabi in which they have no input and receive very little output. An "ecological" system, on the other hand is "creative, adaptive, permeable, dynamic, systemic and self-correcting"; in other words learning is designed as a deeply human enterprise in which each individual is motivated to do their best because what they do matters to them, to their peers and to the world.

EFL class provides a unique and fascinating opportunity to test out this 21st century way of learning because English isn't so much a content subject (as grammar teachers would have us believe) as a medium in itself. Students should be playing, experimenting and creating…and that will be the answer to every teacher's burning question: "How do I get my students motivated?"

In **Part 1** of the following article, I will start by focusing on some of the problems with the traditional form of EFL teaching and why it leads to a lack of motivation on the part of the students.

In **Part 2**, I will focus on the three elements of "self-determination theory" enumerated by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the mid-1980s, namely: autonomy, competence and relatedness. For each of the three, I will start by explaining the state of current and related research, then follow up with recommendations for conducting EFL lessons based on my and others' research.

In the section on autonomy, I will start by discussing the problems with Skinnerian-style extrinsic motivators in the form of rewards and punishments. My solutions will include

suggestions on how to implement a "flipped" classroom as well as a discussion of various ways of measuring success beyond simple numeric grades.

As many educators are now turning to gaming psychology for what it can teach us about motivation, in the section on competence, I will focus on what games can teach us about Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's concept of "flow" as well as what Jane McGonigal calls "fiero" and how these elements combine to make a person feel competent and successful. The solutions will imply teasing apart what makes games fun, interesting and challenging and considering how these elements can be recombined in EFL teaching. I will present an idea based on the curriculum of the Quest to Learn school in New York City. I will also look at different types of work required in the playing of games (physical, creative etc.) and show how they too can have intersting counterparts in the EFL classroom

In the section on relatedness, I will show that the old model of essay writing and worksheet completion completely misses the aim of learning English for today's globalized world because these methods are not truly communicative. I will therefore aim to present alternatives in the form of communicating through communicative jigsaw tasks, social media, social justice projects and materials design for other learners.

I will then conclude by summarizing and reviewing why Self-determination theory will need to be the basis of EFL education for the 21st century.

Part 1

When most teachers of English as a foreign language go to a training workshop, seminar or other professional development forum either in person or online, they go because they want the answer to one question:

"How can I motivate my students?"

What exactly does this question mean?

Depending on the teacher it could mean any one of several options:

1. My students are falling asleep in my class. How can I entertain them?
2. My students do not like my subject. How can I get them to enjoy it?
3. My students get distracted easily. How can I make them focus on what I am saying?
4. My students do not seem to be learning or improving. How can I get them to make the extra effort necessary?
5. My students do not see the use of learning English as a foreign language. How can I make them understand how important it is?
6. My students are undisciplined. How can I make them concentrate on their work?

7. My best English speakers have poor grades and vice versa. How can I grade them fairly?
8. Etc.

These are some of the problems teachers face.

From the students' point of view, the picture may be even bleaker:

1. I am bored.
2. I do not feel like I am learning anything.
3. I feel like I am wasting my time.
4. I don't understand why my grades are so low.
5. The work I do for the class is pointless.
6. I am not good at English.
7. Etc.

In other words, the teachers are often quite correct in believing that their students are NOT motivated to learn English.

There seem to be two beliefs underlying this attitude:

1. *Students in countries whose primary language is not English may feel that English is of little use to them.*

They are correct in this if they are under the impression that English is used only in the classroom with peers who already speak their mother tongue; after all, what is the purpose in speaking a second language with people who already know your first?

The solution lies in opening up the classroom to the world. With technology such as Skype, Twitter and Facebook, this is becoming ever easier. Students need to be encouraged not only to passively use social media and the internet by reading and researching, but also to actively communicate on its various platforms. Will Richardson (2012) points out that the teacher is not the only source of information in the classroom anymore, and this is especially true of the English teacher. The EFL teacher should be looked on as more of a facilitator, perhaps even by putting students in touch with native speakers of the language who can help the learners to express themselves more meaningfully.

2. *Students believe that English is learned by memorizing formulas.*

Just because grammar is the easiest way to structure a curriculum and evaluate outcomes doesn't mean that it is the best way to teach a language. Michael Lewis (1993) in "The Lexical Approach" suggests that most of our language is made up of "fixed" (ex: "May I help you?") and "semi-fixed" (ex: "If I were you, I'd…") expressions which, correctly taught, can enable the

novice speaker to begin putting the language to practical use far sooner than beginning with the verb "to be". In addition, Scott Thornbury (2001) focuses on "emergent" language where the student attempts to communicate something meaningful and is helped along by various "scaffolding" techniques.

The final result is that students reach a university level, or even graduate from university scarcely able to use the language. They have not enjoyed learning it, and unless pressed to do so in the future, will most likely forget the little they have acquired.

There is another problem with the way we as teachers wish to control our students' learning experience. Lichtman (2013) says we have an attraction to three "anchors": time, space and subject, i.e: "this is my classroom, my subject, my time". As we shall see, this flies directly in the face of the concept known as Self-determination theory.

Part 2

Self-determination theory (SDT), as defined by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, is a description of the overall set of factors that can enhance or diminish a person's sense of motivation. "The interplay between the extrinsic forces acting on persons and the intrinsic motives and needs inherent in human nature is the territory of Self-Determination Theory." (www.selfdeterminationtheory.org, n.d.)

The "needs inherent in human nature" according to this theory are the needs for autonomy, or the need to feel oneself to be the locus of one's actions, competence, or the need to feel one has the abilities and skills to master the task, and relatedness, the feeling of being connected to others and that one's work matters to others. These ideas, as we shall see, have a direct bearing on education as a whole, and in the field of English as a foreign language education in particular.

Autonomy

There are two kinds of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Extrinsic motivation is most often based on rewards and punishments. Thus, if I study hard, I will get a good grade; if I sell more product, I will get a bonus. This represents the "reward" side of the equation. The corollary is the "punishment" side which can be either receiving something I don't want (ex: I might get a letter sent to my parents if I fail the test) or the removal of something I do want (ex: if I don't make the sale, I won't get the bonus). Skinner called this "operant conditioning", a term he first coined in 1937, which means that the behavior is modified by what sort of reinforcement comes after it.

This is an important concept because this theory is what most teachers, consciously or not, base their teaching style on. In behaviorism terms, there are two behaviors that teachers aim to modify: use of language and classroom behavior.

The former is chiefly modified by means of grades; thus if the student uses the target language correctly on an exam, she will get a good grade. In Ecuador, the trend is to give more and more tests of this nature on the theory that more tests give students that many more opportunities to get good grades and so pass the course. While it is true that it is perhaps unfair to place a heavy weight on a single exam since the student might feel ill, nervous or be otherwise incapacitated that day, the problem is not simply the number of tests, but as I shall show, the type of assessment itself that should be called into question.

The latter is undoubtedly the main source of frustration as gauged by the number of books, seminars and Q&A (Questions and Answers) periods on the topic. Perceived misbehaviors may range from basic inattentiveness in class to active disruption of the lesson and the answer is always the same: reinforce correct behaviors and discourage negative ones, otherwise known as using "carrots and sticks". Sometimes, these may involve letters to parents or trips to the principal's office; at the university or adult level, however, the main system seems to be control through grades. Thus the teacher will often set aside a grade for such intangibles as class participation or effort, with high grades being awarded to those who are most compliant with the teacher's wishes; an arbitrarily autocratic system if ever there was one. In Punished by Rewards, Alfie Kohn (1993/1999) presents a scathing indictment of a system in which students are made to compete for artificially scarce rewards such as stars, grades, or sweets on condition of correct behavior, thus making the students focus less on the reasons for why the behavior is correct than on the ultimate goal of "what do I get if I do what you say?"

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is "the holistic experience that people feel when they act with total involvement" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). It is when the action or task, as opposed to the reward for doing the action or task is what makes the doing of it enjoyable. Csikszentmihalyi calls the moment of such ecstasy "flow" and he defines it as

> "a sense of that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand in a goal directed, rule bound action system that provides clear clues as to how one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what

they will get out of it, even when it is difficult or dangerous." (Csikszentmihalyi M. , 1991)

This, extended to all of the students in a given classroom, is indeed the teacher's dream.

The key point here, however, is that in order to enter a state of "flow", one must engage in the activity voluntarily and for its own sake. Here's where the education system locks horns with motivational psychology, to wit: students, almost by definition, are required to do what the teacher tells them to do, thus thwarting entrance into "flow".

It was once believed that, as per Skinnerian behavioral psychology, extrinsic motivation was all that mattered. Intrinsic motivation was pleasant, but not necessary to achieve the goal. As more research was done in the 1970s and 1980s, intrinsic motivation came to be seen as having greater value, but extrinsic motivators could still be applied for a multiplied effect. However, as Daniel Pink (2009) explains in "Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us", the result of adding extrinsic motivators, such as grades or money to an intrinsically interesting activity was not increased motivation, but decreased. In a seminal experiment by Lepper, Greene and Nisbett in 1973, children asked to draw and then given a certificate for doing so were much less likely to choose to draw in their free time for no reward than those not offered the certificate in the experiment. There have been many such studies replicating the results, both with adults and children, and the effect has even been parodied in television sitcoms such as The Big Bang Theory, where Sheldon, having been given a cookie as a reward for presenting an argument, refuses to continue the argument in the absence of another cookie.

Solutions

There are two problems to the issue of autonomy then: the first is that students must be told what to do in the interest of following the curriculum, while the second is that despite what we know about the detrimental effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation, we are still obliged to give our students numerical grades. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions to this conundrum; however, there are possibilities.

In The Tao of Teaching, Greta Nagel (1994)points out that children become much more open to the idea of reading when they have autonomy over how they may read, and in what position ("including standing up!"). Alfie Kohn (1996/2006) notes that this points up "how the norm is to deny students even the most basic control over their own bodies" (1996/2006, p. 85). Perhaps, then, teachers can look at what options they can give their students and realize that there are often more than they might have supposed. For example, they can allow students to choose:

- *What to work on*: given a selection of tasks, the student can choose what to work on first, next and last.
- *How to work*: whether in pen or pencil, on their laptop, in their notebook
- *Whom to work with*: students should be permitted to choose their partners and teams as often as possible. Teachers complain that if allowed to work with their friends, they will go off-task. This is usually due to the task itself being poorly designed. On a well-designed task, students who work with peers they know and like will often perform better because the stronger students will be more patient with a slower friend, while the weaker students will try harder to keep up with their peers.
- *Where to work*: if going outside isn't possible, then at least allow students the freedom to move from their assigned seats

More adventurous teachers can also consider the implications of allowing students to modify the original task so that each student can find an intrinsically motivating reason for doing it. In EFL, for example, the idea of having students work on a personal project serves the curricular aim of practicing writing while allowing each student to explore a topic of their choosing.

Gaining popularity is also the idea of the "flipped" classroom. In 2007, teachers Jonathan Bergman and Aaron Sams (2012) experimented with the idea of posting their lectures online so that students who were absent could catch up. This led to the idea of posting all of their classes online for all of their students to watch at their leisure at home. This freed up class time for the students to do activities which the teachers were now free to help them with. In other words, instead of the teacher talking during class and sending students to practice on their own at home, the students were now able to do the solitary work of listening at home and the social aspect of putting the new concepts into practice with their classmates at school. This has obvious advantages for the EFL teacher: the students simply have to read the grammar explanation in the book before coming to class so that they can use their time in class for speaking tasks.

The question of grading is somewhat trickier because it directly relates to the types of tests we give our students. A true test of English is one that tests the ability to understand and be understood in English. Thus, traditional exams consisting of gap-fills and multiple choice tasks are not indicative of a student's mastery of the language.

In order to prove that a student can use the language, she must have something to say (or write) that is worth communicating for its own sake, for only then can she be judged on her their

choice and usage of structure and vocabulary. It therefore stands to reason that the student herself should be permitted autonomy, within a given framework, over what she will be tested on. Then she they may be judged against a rubric which she herself should have a hand in designing; alternatively, she and their teacher may simply decide together what it would take to make the project "complete" and be given 100% if she achieves it.

Competence

Games such as World of Warcraft, Bejeweled, Farmville, Tetris and many others have reached such a wide audience and been so commercially successful that naturally game developers are trying to reverse engineer them to find out what it is that makes players want to keep playing.

Katie Salen (2013), director of the *Institute for Play* noted that good game design has a lot in common with good teaching. In a good game, the player is presented with a series of challenges algorithmically designed to follow the player's learning curve. The player's work is intrinsically valued within the world of the game, regardless of whether the game is single player or massively multiplayer. Communicative, creative and problem-solving skills are prized.

Compare this to the classroom where the teacher lectures to a sea of interchangeable faces. The following chart is an admittedly over-generalized and simplified view of how gaming compares with the "traditional" schooling paradigm, but it serves to illustrate some key points regarding how students perceive school (which they often do not like) as compared with video games, which students are playing in ever-increasing numbers.

GAMING	SCHOOL
In some games once you get to an advanced level, you're playing with others. You're pressured not to walk away because if you do, you jeopardize the mission for everyone. There's no direct penalty for that, but they won't ask you back to play, which means that the game will become boring because there isn't much you can do on your own. Thus you learn perseverance and loyalty.	Perseverance is forced because you're doing only what the teacher said and you're doing it according to her criteria for a grade as opposed to learning what you want for your own reasons. Loyalty is called "school spirit" and really only matters at sporting events.
If you "level up" in a game, there are rewards (better team, equipment, missions, mobility etc.), plus there's the exhilarating pleasure of achieving a goal you've set for yourself. There is no penalty if you fail. You just try again.	There are huge penalties for failing in the form of grades. On the other hand, getting good grades doesn't serve as much of an incentive. If you're a bad student and you get a good grade, you're still a bad student and if you're a good student with a good grade you don't really feel that much better about yourself.

If you want to get serious, you'll meet like-minded people who will support and encourage you to be the best you can be. If you don't, you can hang out with lower-level people who will not challenge you. It's up to you.	In the real world of education, you don't want to associate yourself with the "nerds" and "geeks" because that spells social disaster. It's not "cool" to go beyond what the teacher asks.
Each person is an integral cog in the wheel. For example, you have one healer in the group, so they need you.	In class everyone is made to work alone and so doesn't need or appreciate their classmates who are essentially only rivals for grades and attention from the teacher.
The higher you go, the more interesting the content	You can't get more than 100%. Then you're bored and the teacher doesn't know what to do with you.
You set yourself goals and you've worked hard to get where you are so the experience of the game is yours alone.	In school, you are told what to do and judged on whether you have the correct answers or not. Since your aim is to replicate someone else's answers, there can be no thrill of discovery.
You learn exactly what you need to learn to complete the mission at the moment you need it because you need it.	You study things that are unconnected, out of context and irrelevant to your immediate personal reality.
You set your own criteria for success and you measure yourself against that.	The teacher not only sets the task, but also decides on the criteria and SHE judges how you measure up. She is essentially judge, jury and executioner in one and the student has no say in the matter.

In "Reality is Broken", Jane McGonigal (2012) focuses on two aspects that further help to explain the attractiveness of games: "flow" and "fiero".

Csikszentmihalyi's idea of flow, as explained above, is the idea that the person is totally immersed in what they are doing because the task presents a challenge at the most desirable point between too easy and too difficult. "Fiero", the Italian word for pride, has been borrowed by game designers to express the feeling of facing the challenge and winning. Taken together, these two emotions are at the heart of what it means to be fully alive in the present moment… and they are all too rarely experienced within the confines of the EFL classroom.

Solutions

At the Quest2Learn school in New York City, Katie Salen and her colleagues focus on game design as a way of teaching the school curriculum. One key point is the idea of having different types of quests and missions which require mastery of the concepts to complete. This does not mean that the student is taught the material before playing; rather, as the game is going on the player realizes and seeks the information she requires. Although Quest2Learn is a technology-based school system, the basic

concept translates quite nicely to EFL: as the student converses with a partner, she will find she wants to express something beyond her current capabilities and will ask for the help she needs.

The basic idea at Quest2Learn is that students go on "quests", which simply refers to the stage of gathering information in order to complete a "mission" which is the application of that information. In EFL, the quests might involve, on the one hand, finding out the rules of a particular grammar structure or the meaning of certain lexical items, and on the other finding articles to read or videos to watch pertaining to the concept the student wants to talk or write about.

A different way of looking at games comes from Jane McGonigal's (2012) book "Reality is Broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world". She notes 7 different types of "work" inherent in different types of games, which can easily find their counterpart in the EFL classroom:

- High-stakes work: this refers to games that are "fast and action oriented" (McGonigal, 2012). In class, this can be any type of competitive team game such as guess-the-word.
- Busywork: "When we're swapping multicolored jewels in a casual game like Bejeweled or harvesting virtual crops in a social game like FarmVille, we're happy just to keep our hands and mind occupied with focused activity that produces clear results" (McGonigal, 2012). In class, this can be the simple act of completing the workbook. However, it is only fun if the autonomy principle is respected. That means that the student must have choices as to whether to complete his workbook (as opposed to doing some other task), where (at home, on the grass outside the classroom), and with whom. Other choices, such as whether to listen to music while working should be permitted as well.
- Mental work: This "revs up your cognitive faculties" (McGonigal, 2012). In EFL, an interesting speaking task with give and take on the part of both partners, such as a lively debate may fulfill this criteria, as may a challenging writing project, such as writing a story book for children with the aim of teaching a particular value.
- Physical work: many games involve physical exercise such as soccer or tennis. In class, sometimes students find themselves wanting to get up and move around. A treasure hunt of some sort, perhaps one where they have to find the next logical sentence in a text might fulfill this criteria, particularly if they must locate it before someone from the other team.
- Discovery work: "We relish the chance to be curious about anything and everything" (McGonigal, 2012). Allowing students the time to "surf" the internet (in English of course!) for a personal research project can allow them to explore ideas they might not otherwise encounter.

- Teamwork: "We take great satisfaction in knowing we have a unique and important role to play in a much bigger effort" (McGonigal, 2012). This is a far cry from what one teacher called "4 slackers and a worker". The idea here is that the students are each responsible for bringing a different perspective to the work, not in the sense of one student researching and another writing and the third editing, but in the sense of a jigsaw where each student is in possession of information the teammates are not, such as describing a news event from different perspectives. It can also be a creative endeavor, such as one where each student is responsible for writing only what his or her character will say in a play or soap opera script.
- Creative work: Ken Robinson says that creativity is "the process of having original ideas that have value" (2011). EFL class is the perfect venue for true creativity to emerge in the form of creative writing, acting and designing everything from games to short films.

Seen in this light, gaming can be much more than the occasional Friday-afternoon-once-we've-got-through-the-grammar-unit reward we dangle before our students. I would go so far as to suggest that, far from being an occasional treat, gaming should form the backbone of our curriculum because not only would the students feel more intrinsically motivated to learn English, they would also feel a greater connection to their classmates… which is the subject of the final part.

Relatedness

Most people would agree that our ability to use language is what makes us human. There is evidence that animals have various means of communication, of course, but we have the means to communicate through time and space, which they do not: we can read the works of long dead writers, and we can telephone, message or skype with people on distant continents.

English is not, as it often seems to be taught, a collection of grammar rules to be memorized, it is a medium of communication. As such, the learning of English should be a great humanizing experience. All too often it isn't.

The ideas outlined below all speak to a need humans have for their work to matter, to make a difference. The traditional image of the student hunched over her own exam paper with the teacher's voice saying "I want to see what you can do, not what your neighbor can do" needs to become a thing of the past. In the 21st century, we must realize that we are all interconnected and that the whole of humanity is greater than the sum of its parts, no matter how great each individual part may be. In other words, collaboration is the name of the game. Jane McGonigal (2012) says,

"Collaboration is a special way of working together. It requires three distinct kinds of concerted effort: cooperating (acting purposefully toward a common goal), coordinating (synchronizing efforts and sharing resources) and cocreating (producing a novel outcome together)."

This speaks to the essential goal of having students learn an international language.

Solutions

I would like to propose four ways to design our classes so that our students are using English as a genuine communicative tool:

- Communicative jigsaw tasks:

As suggested above, when students are working in groups, each student needs to bring to the table a unique and essential piece of the puzzle. In fact, the puzzle metaphor is quite apt: such tasks are often called "information gaps" where Student A has information required by Student B and possibly vice versa. A typical way to do this is simply to cut up a text. Each student reads a different section, and then without looking at each other's text, they must work out the original order. A variation on this theme is to have different texts on the same topic which the students must compare and contrast, such as an article written by an Israeli and another written by a Palestinian on the same topic.

- Social media

There are many social media platforms available, but I will limit my discussion to the two most popular: Facebook and Twitter.

The latter only permits posts of up to 140 characters, but often permits a wider audience. The student should select people she wants to "follow", be they pop stars, media personalities, charitable organizations, political parties, or even friends and classmates. Comprehension can be demonstrated by having the students "retweet" their favorite posts, as well as posting responses.

Facebook, on the other hand, is a more intimate platform designed to help one keep in touch with friends and family. However, the teacher can create a page for the class on which students can be encouraged to post their work and comment on each other's posts.

In addition to multi-user platforms, students can also create a blog or even a complete website individually or as a class on which they can post their assignments, comments, videos and other projects for the whole world to see.

- Social justice projects

Students may want to select an issue that is important to them and do something about it. For instance, they can write letters for an Amnesty International campaign, or they can get ideas for projects by consulting the www.dosomething.org website. One creative example was a project in

which young people from around the world decided to protest the unfair labor practices in the production of the chocolates sold under the Harry Potter franchise. They made videos which they called "howlers", named after the letters received by students at the fictional school of Hogwarts in which they were told off for misbehaving. They posted these videos on Youtube and directed them to the franchise owners, Warner Bros. (There is more information on this campaign at http://thehpalliance.org/action/campaigns/nihn/). Though this project was not specifically designed for EFL learners, the potential for such projects to be used in a language lesson is enormous.

- Materials design for other learners.

My final suggestion involves creating English games, grammar exercises, vocabulary puzzles, stories, videos and other didactic materials for other learners. The students can design and prepare the materials for the students next door, younger or lower level learners in the same school or institute, post the materials online for students in other countries or even hand deliver printed versions to disadvantaged schools in their own city or country.

Using these ideas and others like them, students become human agents of peace and change. They become fully human in the classroom rather than simple automatons to be processed through the system.

Conclusion

If, as Sir Ken Robinson (2010) says, our education system was designed for the industrial age, to form a minimally knowledgeable, pliant and obedient workforce, then our education system is now obsolete. The people who will succeed in the 21st century will not be those who follow orders, but those who march to the beat of their own drum, those who are individualists in the best sense of the word, those who know themselves, their strengths and their interests and who will not be afraid to step outside of the box to pursue an ideal.

In order to prepare such people for the world, we must not divorce them from the world, hiding them within the four walls of a classroom. Instead we must allow them to experience society and the English speaking world. We must allow them the autonomy to choose what they want to learn and how they want to go about learning it. We must allow them opportunities to feel competent according to their own standards. Finally we must allow them to experience relatedness, thus re-humanizing the EFL classroom. And we must begin now.

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