Faculty of Education

English Department

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ACTION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

"Motivation and self-confidence to promote group and pair work in

my 9th E classroom"

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Abstract

This research is based on my experience as a teacher of the 9th grade E at "Liceo Politécnico San Joaquín", located in Avenida Santa Rosa in San Joaquín. The problem addressed in this active research paper is that 80% of my students refused to participate of the activities planned by me. These students rejected to take part in the activities for several reasons, being embarrassment the most common and absence of interest, which can be understood as a lack of self-confidence and the low level of motivation they had in order to learn a foreign language.

Resumen

Esta investigación fue hecha en base a mi experiencia como profesor a cargo del 1° medio E del Liceo Politécnico San Joaquín, ubicado en avenida Santa Rosa, comuna San Joaquín. En esta investigación se busca dar respuesta a la inquietud que me aqueja cuando noto que el 80% de los estudiantes de dicho curso no participan de las actividades planeadas para el transcurso de las clases. Dichos alumnos se niegan a participar por distintos motivos, de los cuales, el que más se repite es la vergüenza, que se traduce en un poco confianza de los alumnos con sus habilidades, y la poca motivación que éstos tienen para aprender un nuevo idioma.

I. Introduction

The school I am attending at is different from the rest of other schools in which I have worked. This institution is in Avenida Santa Rosa near "La Legua", which is well-known for its level of violence and some other issues as drug trafficking and marginalization. I have students who actually live there and some others who come from other neighbors not far away from the school. Ninth grade E has 24 students; nonetheless, just 15 of them attend classes regularly. The sitting arrangement of the classroom is in rows and students tend to change seats every class, except seats at the back of the classroom. These are always occupied by the same five students and none can be there, but them. Besides, they seem to be the leaders of the class and my attention is focused on them most part of the time because, apart from being the leaders, they share some characteristics. Nevertheless, the rest of the students also share these, which are a low level of motivation and almost no self-confidence.

Motivation is one of the most used words by teachers all over the country. However, why do we need motivated students in our classroom? According to Penny Ur (1991), the characteristics this kind of students are:

- Positive task orientation: the student is able to take challenges and trust on his/her   success.

- Ego-involvement: success is important in order to promote a good image of himself/herself.

- Need for achievement: merely to overcome problems and complete his/her goal.

- High aspirations: the student wants to stand out from the rest.

- Goal orientation: student knows the importance of learning and will do whatever is in his/her hands to achieve it.

- Perseverance: setbacks are not a reason to stop doing what he/she is doing.

- Tolerance of ambiguity: the student will not feel frustrated if he or she does not understand at first; the knowledge will come eventually.

All these characteristics allow the teacher to reach his/her objective: to teach a class in which people involved can experience knowledge from each other as a way to grow up together.

II. Background

I started my final practicum at "Liceo San Joaquín" in September. This is a high school, whose main purpose is to prepare students to work as technicians. The specialties students can choose are electricity, industrial mechanics, and telecommunications. This school is mainly composed by male students and just a minimum percentage of the students are female. Teachers' average age is around 35 and most of them are graduated from universities in Santiago.

I am in charge of two classes: Ninth D and ninth E. However, I will focus this action research on 9° E, which caught my attention the very first time I was introduced to them. This group of students has a particular characteristic that can be perceived easily: they all reject to participate in the English class. I observed the mentor teacher spoke in Spanish most of the time; English was seldom used and translations were right after the use of the foreign language. He also used the course book (Teens Club) to plan the class in order to fulfill schools requirements. In his class, he had to push students, and sometimes had to beg them to complete the tasks assigned.

Time is not a problem in this school. The school works in the following way. They set the classes into two blocks together. The time allocation for each class is 90 minutes. 9th E has the following schedule: On Monday, they have English from 09.45 to 11.15. On Wednesday they start from 13.40 to 15.10. Although the time is not a real problem, it can become a disaster if the activities do not engage students.

I asked a student what his opinion regarding the English class was, and his answer was related to the boring activities the course book has. He also mentioned that the book was about issues which had no relation with his preferences and interests at all. I asked the same question to three more students and their replies were similar.

III. Problem

Ninth graders are used to work individually and very seldomly, in pairs. They do not work in groups because they tend to get distracted and do not finish the activities planned. Besides, students refuse to work on any activity related to reading out loud, discussing ideas from a reading or a listening, sharing opinions with the rest of the students and some others associated to groups activities.

IV. Research question

All the previous explanation of the problem leads me to the question: Which teaching practices do I have to implement/improve to promote motivation and self-confidence in my students?

V. Hypothesis

Despite the fact that students have had English class during several years, it is their experience with English what does not motivate them. However, I strongly believe that the origin of the problem I am investigating, it is the poor attention my students receive from the school about their interests and the minimum importance English has in their lives. Besides, the activities they are used to are not attractive and do not engage them to the point they do not want to participate of these. Regarding the problem, this proposal will focus its attention on trying to engage students to the English class and raise their self-confidence in order to make them participate on the activities planned.

VI. Objectives

The class I am in charge is different from the other classes I have had. Despite the fact the class has no more than sixteen students, I have problems to engage them in the activities I have for them. My students share many similarities in terms of behavior, reaction to stimuli, vocabulary, lack of motivation and self-confidence. Thus, this research will cover the needs and problems of all the class and no student will be left aside of the solution. Having said this, the goals of this research are:

VI. a. General objectives

- To promote group and pair working by creating a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom.

VI. b. Specific objectives

- To show students the benefits and the importance of working in groups.
- To stimulate students to trust on their own skills and abilities regarding any activity they participate in.
- To find out appropriate techniques and activities to improve self-confidence in students.
- To promote sharing of knowledge from both students and the teacher.

VII. Rationale

To make students participate in class is a real challenge for newly qualified teachers. Professors try to focus their activities on students' interests in order to make exercises attractive to learners, but this is not always accomplished because there are factors to take into consideration with the activities previously planned by the teacher. The factors are motivation or the repercussion of having students who are less motivated than others or just not stimulated at all, and the lack of confidence regarding their skills. There are several implications on having these less or not motivated students in class, such as less or no participation in tasks, no question in order to clarify doubts, laziness, misbehavior, continuous talking among students, and some others that difficult the progress of the class or the activity planned.

When I realized that my goals were not being accomplished in my class, I started wondering who the problem was: students or the teacher? I noticed that it was our problem, neither theirs nor mine, but ours. However, my role here is to drive students' attention to motivate them to take part in the class.

VIII. Theoretical Framework

In this action research I will explain how necessary encouragement and self-confidence are in any classroom. The theoretical framework is centered on what motivation is, its two aspects (intrinsic and extrinsic) and the importance of promoting self-confidence on students in order to have more active participation in the activities planned by the teacher.

VIII. a - Motivation

Taking into consideration the problem I have in my class, I would like to define motivation. Brown (2000), claims that "*motivation refers to the intensity of one's impetus to learn*" *(p.75)* differing sharply on the behaviorist psychologist Skinner's operant conditioning model[1], which makes emphasis on the reward. According to this, anyone can be encouraged to participate in a specific activity that gives the person what he or she wants from that action (knowledge, self-accomplishment, or some other goals related to learning). However, this definition refers to a person who is actually motivated to be part of any activity; the real dilemma is how to encourage the student to take part of an action given by me.

Another way of understanding motivation is the one that Maslow gives in his book *Motivation and personality* (1997). Maslow affirms that there is a hierarchy of needs that must be satisfied from bottom to top in order to do some other activities. To reach the

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[1] Skinner, B. F. The Behavior of Organisms. Copley Publishing Group. 1938.

top, all the other needs have to fulfilled, otherwise the motivation will be placed on satisfying those related to breathing, food, sleep, security of body, family, friendship, self-esteem, confidence and the like. Keeping this idea of the pyramid in mind given by Maslow, students must satisfy all those previous needs and just then, they will be incentivized to do some other activities related, for example, to the English class at school. Taking both ways of understanding motivation, I realized that encouraging students is a difficult task that teachers must accomplish during class.

The implications of having students stimulated in class are countless. The teacher is encouraged to continue with the activities he has done so far to keep students engaged. As a consequence, students will participate actively in the tasks proposed by the teacher, which will eventually generate a better environment in the classroom.

Motivation can be understood in two different aspects: intrinsic and extrinsic. As Harmer (2001) points out, "intrinsic motivation, by contrast, comes from within the individual. Thus, a person might motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself or by a desire to make themselves feel better" (p. 51) .The definition of intrinsic motivation given by Harmer explains the way in which we do something in order to reach something else; in this case the self-rewarding one. In addition to this, students who are intrinsically motivated in class will just participate because their ultimate goal is the knowledge itself.

Intrinsic motivation is the most difficult to reach because it has relation to self-reward, meaning that just the individual knows and decides when to direct his effort to obtain that final goal. If we consider Maslow's method, this will be the final aim if all the others needs were covered; meaning that the student has no other basic necessity, and can center his attention on any other activity. In this moment the teacher can intercede and catch students' attention with a group activity, a pair one or a single task.

On the other hand, Penny Ur (1991) explains to us extrinsic motivation. This is completely the opposite of intrinsic motivation, and a reward is needed in order to reach the goal. Penny Ur claims: *"Extrinsic motivation is that which derives from the influence of some kind of external incentive, as distinct from the wish to learn for its own sake or interest in tasks" (p. 277).* It is common to see this type of motivation in schools in Santiago. Most of the teachers decide to encourage students to participate in class by offering them certain prizes in order to facilitate their work. Happy faces, stars, and even marks are incentives that teachers are used to keep students focused on the task assigned. I have personally experienced this situation in which the teacher offers a reward to students if they complete the task in the time allotted, and offers an extra reward to the student who finishes first.

 I would like to add that this practice is not a sin. In my opinion, rewards are suitable at certain levels and necessary in some others; for example, If a child refuses to participate in class, a reward may be an option to facilitate teacher's work, but if the practice becomes to a non end action, the solution can be more controversial than the problem because the child can get used to it.

VIII. b - Self-confidence

Another issue that goes hand in hand with motivation is self-confidence. If a student does not feel confident with his/her capacity of doing or completing a task, the person will refuse to even take part of an activity. Self-confidence is hard to understand because I consider motivation as the only factor that interferes in my class, but self-confidence can be an important issue to take into consideration as well. Brown (2001) defines self-confidence as: *"Learners' belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing a task is at least partially a factor in their eventual success in attaining the task"* (p.62). This new factor can be another problem to solve apart from motivation itself. Moreover, if the teacher promotes self-confidence in students, they will be eager to participate in different kinds of task no matter how difficult or challenging they are. Brown (2000) argues that no success can be reached if there is no self-confidence involved in the process, meaning that there is no possibility to take aside this factor in the process of any activity. If this is true, this issue is as important as motivation because it will define whether to reach the teacher's goal or not. Consequently, if the teacher does not facilitate the development of self-confidence in class, students will still feel reticence to participate in class.

It is worth mentioning that an interesting way to achieve these factors in my class is by guiding students through the variety of activities and also letting them working by themselves and see which their responses to the activities are, either group ones or pair work. These techniques of guiding and letting them alone is the one described by Vygotsky (1935) in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This way of monitoring

students can be used to develop students' self-confidence, by letting them know that they are doing an excellent work and at the same time motivating them to continue with more difficult activities or even participating actively in class by answering the questions, completing the exercises given by me or just discussing the ideas proposed in class.

Students can increase their motivation level by knowing, from the teacher, that they are learning English in such a way they will not be in need of any monitoring. In this way teacher can even show students that they can do whatever they want to do if they put just a little of effort on what they are doing, and not just in class, it can be in any other situation in their life. This simple action will definitively help me in my future class with my future students who show themselves more reserved than other to participate in my activities.

IX. Methodology

The methodology used on this research paper is simple and it should not be a problem for teachers. Due to the fact that students are not motivated and their level of self-confidence is low, the teacher's job must be focused on raising it, and encourage students to participate in the class.

IX. a - Data collection

The teacher must investigate what students' interests are and how involved they are with those themes at the beginning of the year. A short survey is essential to gather this information. After having the information, the teacher has to decide which of those will be useful for the class taking into consideration that the topics must be discussed in English. The teacher will plan his classes just after collecting the information and deciding which topics will be more suitable and not before. The lesson plans should not be centered on long grammar explanations, and activities have to be in pairs and in groups to achieve our goal, engage students and raise their self-confidence.

IX. b - Instruments

A. Checklist (explain purpose of each, in different sections)
B. Questionnaire
C. Classroom videos
D. Survey

In order to check if the activities are giving results, the teacher must create a checklist and a short questionnaire to correct his future problems or change any activity that has no positive response from students. This data is essential to supervise teacher's own practice and see how students react to your class. Recording the activities will also help to see teacher's own performance and check if explanations or instructions are concrete and understandable enough for students. A video per week is enough material to analyze for a teacher and a third person. These collections of videos can be seen by colleagues in order to give feedback to the teacher.

The questionnaire must be directed to students in order to know their reactions to the activities and teacher's performance. Having said this, the questions must be short and concise. The following questions are examples that can be included in this questionnaire in order to gather the information required.

1.- Are the activities too long?

2.- Are the instructions clear enough for you?

3.- Are visual materials suitable for the explanations given by the teacher?

IX. c - Data analysis

It is important to analyze what the teacher did on his class. After collecting the data with the instruments listed before, the teacher must dedicate time to examine his performance in class and how students reacted to the different activities. In this particular exercise, a third person would be essential in order to make comments and give feedback about the data collected. The teacher also needs to check the information in order to see if the application of different activities and his performance has made an impact on students or not.

Fourthly, the use of English must be gradual for the student, whereas the teacher should be consistent with the use of English in the classroom. It is understandable that students do not want to use English. Considering this factor, the teacher should not force students to use it from the very beginning, although the teacher must facilitate the use of L2 by using his body language and even by using mimics.

X. Action Plan

Based on my objective, the activities planned must be based on students interests and not directly taken from the course book; for example, if I want to include a song in my class, I will ask my students what their likes related to songs and music are beforehand.

Apart from timing and the type of activity, the main objectives are to incentivize students to participate actively in class by including topics of their interest in class, to promote self-confidence in students by congratulating their improvement in order to stop inhibition, and finally to show students that as a group, students and teacher, can learn together from each other, by contributing with questions, doubts and experiences or ideas related to the topic of the class.

The teacher can also take the students to watch a movie or use the computer lab in order to make the English class more attractive. Besides, an outing can motivate students to participate in my class and be closer to them.

Teacher must promote self-confidence by congratulating students after participating in any activity or question. There are different ways to congratulate students. One of these ways is to let them know that they are doing the activity in the correct way, e.g. congratulations, terrific, that is very good and keep working on it). Another way to raise students' level of self-confidence is to encourage them to make comments about the class or about a specific

activity. Finally, to give students space to analyze a song of their like at the end of the class can also be used as a way to praise students and engage them.

By doing these actions the student will feel confident of his/her own skills and inhibition will be avoided in a couple of sessions. In addition to this, other students that usually reject to participate in class will look for this reward and finally more and more students will do the same. It will become a tendency eventually. Also, the teacher must clarify that all together can learn from one question asked by anyone. Furthermore, students will understand the idea of learning in group and not individually as the way they are used to.

XI. Timeline

An appropriate time to put into practice what I suggested is at the beginning of the year. In March the teacher meets his students and can apply the survey to know students' interests and likes. A week after video recording, make surveys and data processing, the teacher can modify his lesson according to the information gathered. Then, the teacher can implement the activities. After a month the questionnaire can be given to students to assess what the teacher has done lately. The teacher can repeat this activity monthly and see if changes have given results or not.

XII. Resources

The resources needed are the ones that a normal English classroom has: the whiteboard, markers of different colors, a course book previously chosen by the teacher, posters or flashcards stuck to the wall, students' notebooks, a computer, a datashow and speakers. The teacher will also need a camera to record his classes and questionnaires to investigate students' interests

Students have to understand that trusting their own abilities is essential to achieve any goal. Moreover, students need to feel comfortable in the classroom in order to participate in the activities planned by the teacher, so the classroom must be decorated in such a way it looks attractive to students to create a comfortable atmosphere that invites them to participate. Both the teacher and the students can participate on decorating the classroom.

Finally, the teacher has to give feedback and comments on students' work to promote self-confidence and encourage them to keep participating in the activities.

XIII. Limitations

Something that prevents students from doing what you do not want them to do is to have a plan B ready when the group or pair work is not working. Having a plan B as a backup activity can save you from being exposed to any awkward moment in which students are having problems with the activity or they just feel frustrated their results. It is important to support students in every activity planned for the class. Giving examples and doing some exercises in order to clarify any doubt can facilitate teacher's work.

A possible limitation for this action research proposal is time. I suggest investigating students' interests in order to plan the class and to know what kind of topics include. This is a hard task and requires plenty of time.

There is a possibility of having problems when students are working in groups, for example: misbehaving. To avoid misbehaving in class, the teacher can assign roles to each student in the group. Thus, students know that they have a role to play in the group apart from dealing with the work. It is also important to supervise students' work and give them deadlines and make them understand that there are some formal aspects they have to fulfill in order to maintain the order in the class.

XIV. Conclusions

To conclude this action research proposal, I would like to point out what this written work meant to me as a newly qualified teacher.

First, although the number of students I worked with in Liceo Politécnico San Joaquín was around 15; I strongly believe that my main objective: to promote group and pair working by creating a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom, is completely achievable in a regular class by following the procedure specified in this proposal. Despite the possible problems I can find in a class, I believe that motivation is the most important for an English teacher because no motivated students ends in a meaningless class for students and a real problem for the teacher.

Regarding my specific objectives, it is important to show students how beneficial is to work in groups in order to share knowledge with their own classmates. It is also important for me to stimulate my students to trust on their skills in order to raise their level of self-confidence. I believe that a considerable percentage of students in Chile do not trust on their abilities and refuse to take an active participation in class just because this reason. This is a real challenge for me, nevertheless I know I will accomplish them, by gaining experience in the future.

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