

ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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Teachers involved in developing spoken language skills in EFL learners often find themselves in a paradoxical situation. There seems to be a conflict between, on the one hand, the learner’s perception that fluency and naturalness are the key to success and, on the other, their disinclination to participate in activities designed to develop competent speaking skills. This suggests a need to reexamine our practice to see how we can exploit the motivation inherent in the learner’s positive perception of the ability to speak English fluently.

To develop fluency, we must generate a need to speak, to make the learners want to speak. The learners themselves must be convinced of the need to relate to the subject and communicate about it to others. They need to feel that they are speaking not simply because the teacher expect them to, but because there is some strong reason to do so; not only inside the classroom but also outside.

Students must be given opportunities to develop their own skills. They must be encouraged to help each other and they **will** do so if they are given the appropriate situation and consistent long-term encouragement.

As one of the principle of Communicative Language teaching goes, to learn it do it. So doing fluency activities or practice can only develop fluency. One good and motivating way – we think-of implementing this type of practice is taking English outside the classroom.

In an effort to make this a reality a couple of English student-teachers in the elementary level (sixth grade) designed and put into practice several activities to take English outside the classroom. This experience was recorded in a major paper that they presented in order to get their degree in July 1998.

In view of the interest and originality of this experience in this paper, we intent to reflect on the importance of English outside the classroom and the role of the community in this undertaking. The paper will end with a sample of the activities proposed and carried out by the above-mentioned teachers.

English outside the classroom. Why?

It must be pointed out that the main reason why students do not use English outside the classroom (regarding the fact that they live in a Spanish-speaking country) is because they

seldom find a motive to do so. The teacher's task is to create a favorable atmosphere that encourages them to put into practice the language items already acquired during the lessons.

The term **English Atmosphere** does not imply a forced and artificial language. Teachers should encourage an open atmosphere out of the classroom to make participation possible as in real life. As it is important for the students to explore alternatives with their real life situations, it is also essential for the teacher to explore alternative with the students about their learning program, their areas of interest, their psychological characteristics and the sources available in the community (a stadium, a theater, a lounge, a doctor's house, a museum, etc.).

There are several reasons to take English outside the classroom:

Firstly, it satisfies the student's curiosity and will to discover new horizons in the social and human spheres.

Secondly, it turns the subject matter into vivid realities, thus, engendering motivation.

Thirdly, it develops their likes and searching habits.

Fourthly, it enables the students with multiple choices to discover new values and relations by widening their understanding of the vivid experiences.

Fifthly, it trains and educates the students in the individual and collective behavior in different environments.

Lastly, it enables the teacher to identify her/himself with the students, paving the way for the establishment of closer ties of comprehension, sympathy and friendship.

All these reasons are enough to undertake the difficult but profitable task of using the target language outside the classroom. However, it is important to consider a close-up at the factor community before going into the practical activities.

The community.

School and community policies and resources are of paramount importance in the implementation of a curriculum. The community in which the learning center is located has become increasingly important in recent years in curriculum planning and textbooks writing. The socioeconomic level of the community often influences the aspirations or lack of aspiration of parents.

The resources in the community -people, places of interest, services, and facilities- can, when utilized effectively, enrich the experiences of the learners and engender motivation. It will depend on the program and especially on the teacher to sustain such motivation and either to meet the learner's specific needs or to channel them to sources where they could be, met more effectively.

If the teacher wants his students to progress in the mastery of the new language with reasonable confidence s/he must avail her/himself of the instructional opportunities of the community. The learners must be encouraged to consult bilingual persons whenever they feel the need to practice.

The teacher's role is that of giving instructions to those persons who master English about the language to be used with the students.

It is within the community that the child develops his frame of mind. He reflects in his brain the objective reality that surrounds him. His interests are closely related to what he perceives in his environment and as he grows up his mother tongue revolves around that objective reality.

The same process happens, to some extent, when a young learner starts a foreign language. It is very common for an English teacher to come across children who are always interested in knowing how to refer to some vocabulary related to the community or events in it. In fact, if the teacher takes advantage of this interest of the learners there is an obvious likelihood of success.

A communicative homework gives the students the opportunities to learn English outside the classroom. It also makes them resort to other classmates or to any other person who knows the target language. In this way they develop searching habits and communicative skills at English.

The community where the experience was carried out, though small, is huge in terms of resources. It encompassed such a lot of opportunities or possibilities to provide English practice outside the classroom that perhaps not many other small communities can boast.

THE EXPERIENCE.

The experience carried out by the teachers was based on the content of the sixth-grade English syllabus. The activities were derived from the language content of some of the units, in some cases to practice certain functions, in some other cases to practice particular vocabulary areas, or with both aims in mind.

Following is an explanation of how each activity can be implemented:

Activity 1

The activity consisted in a baseball game played by the students at the stadium of the community. Here they make intensive use of functions such as cheering someone, expressing approval and disapproval, etc. as well as the vocabulary items related to this sport, which the teacher has previously presented and practiced in the classroom in the unit about sports and game.

Two teams of sixth graders will be organized. The jargon of baseball comes into being as a positive transference, since the vocabulary used is chiefly English.

The girls may be on the grandstands cheering each team respectively. It figures that what they are likely to shout has been previously taught during the previous stages. These are some of the suggestions:

Function: cheering someone.

- a. ¡Come on hit the ball!
- b. ¡Give us a home run!
- c. ¡Don't be afraid!
- d. ¡Long live x! (In groups). (All these exclamation to the batter).

- a. ¡Come on Ted, strike him out!
- b. ¡You are the best! (Exclamation to the pitcher). Other expressions with different plays may occur.

Functions:

Expressing approval

¡Fantastic!

¡Great!

¡Wow!

Expressing disapproval

¡Oh, no!

¡That's too bad!

¡Bah!

Regarding the players, almost everything will be spoken in English. The conditions will be created. Two English teachers will be the managers. They may ask the students who are in the dugout what they consider more convenient to do at every turn. Then, the coach (a baseball trainer) will make the gestures appropriate for it.

The mother tongue cannot be utterly overlooked. It may be used to clear up some misunderstanding or to avoid ambiguity. The game should not be prolonged. Five innings will be enough; else the activity would not fulfill its objective since they don't have a far-reaching scope at the language. The communicative functions and the dialogues to be used may undergo variations. The individual differences must not be discarded. It would be flighty to believe that one may not come across problems. However, these shortcomings must work for, rather than against, the communicative competence and within it the strategic competence plays its leading role.

Activity 2

VISITING THE DOCTOR. (Possible in a real situation)

Games and competitions are not the only ways to reflect English outside the classroom. Many other solutions may derive from the teacher's constant interest in the matter.

Sometimes, there are choices that are very fruitful to fulfill the difficult task of taking the English language beyond the classroom environment. The finding of these options is what an English teacher must aim at.

Some doctors in the community are competent at communicating in English. They may be of great help in our endeavor to take English outside the classroom if they collaborate with us when we teach our students about ailments and health problems in general.

To make fluency practice on this area more realistic, the teacher can implement a sort of "out-patient's department" with a real doctor willing to collaborate after the functions and vocabulary related to this matter have been practiced in class.

Here is an example:

Student: Good morning, doctor.

Doctor: Good morning. What's the matter with you?

Student: I have a terrible backache.

Doctor: O.K. Let's see. Does it hurt you when I press here?

Student: Oh, yes!

Doctor: It's nothing serious. You must sleep on the floor and take this medication.

Student: Thank you, doctor.

Doctor: You're welcome.

CONCLUSIONS

The application of these activities has demonstrated convincingly that when the target language (English in this case) is taken outside the classroom, both motivation and interest increase; that when the students are able to manipulate the target language outside the classroom, the language becomes more interesting; and that the community can offer an infinite number of opportunities for purposeful and fruitful English-outside- the classroom practice.

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