

GROWING SELF-ESTEEM AND DISCOVERING INTELLIGENCES THROUGH ORAL PRODUCTION

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After having applied a needs analysis in an eleventh grade course of English, I could notice that there was a big lack of security and self-confidence in the students. They expressed in different data-gathering instruments their fear when speaking in front of the class. Also, they talked about their insecurity when pronouncing English and the need for more opportunities for developing speaking. Therefore, the implementation of an innovation in class was carried out in order to respond to the students' needs and make them discover their talents. The implementation was successful and students improved some areas of their communicative competence.

Introduction

While my students were immersed in the English class, I could observe in them insecurity when they had to perform an oral presentation in class. Through the needs analysis that was applied I could detect the students' necessity for feeling accepted and respected by others. Their insecurity at doing oral presentation was not just grounded in their level of English but in their low self-esteem. The individual needs to have a very well constructed self-confidence and also believe in him/herself.

It is within this reflection that I consider of great importance to rethink again my role as a teacher: How can the teacher help the

students to believe in themselves? I believe that one of the most important contributions is to construct an appropriate atmosphere inside the classroom where the students can discover their multiple intelligences and their capabilities. Furthermore, they can learn, through their self knowledge, how to respect and value their peers. As can be seen, the classroom has to be a community in which the students can construct meaning and can develop their personality.

It is in the hands of the teacher the search for strategies and the planning of effective activities that enhance students' performance inside the educational setting in order to construct bonds of confidence among the class' participants that help them to make their learning meaningful in and outside the classroom. Therefore, students have to discover their own talents for the benefit of their own learning; one strong intelligence can help them develop another.

Procedure

Participants

This innovation was implemented in an 11th grade course in a public school located in the 19th zone of Bogotá (Ciudad Bolívar). The school is named CEDID Guillermo Cano Isaza. It has three shifts with approximately 800 students in each one. This school offers elementary and secondary education. Its educational goals are based on education in

technology in three modalities: Industrial, Science and Commerce. This sort of education attempts to make people capable of solving daily problems as well as to project and develop themselves in their own social environment.

The target population selected for this innovation was the highest level course of the industrial modality. This course is comprised of thirty-four students: twenty-six males and eight females with ages ranging from 16 to 19; they take two-80 minutes English lessons per week.

In this innovative educational proposal the students were encouraged to plan carefully an activity in which they could relate their previous English language knowledge with something they really wanted to do. Activities such as singing a song, playing a role, writing and presenting a story, dancing and doing a mime, presenting a monologue, writing and performing a dialogue, translating and presenting a poem, were carried out.

Each one of the students' activities was monitored, taking enough care to give them the space in class for rehearsing and asking questions about their doubts. During the preparation of the activities, the students were provided with feedback that encouraged them to continue developing their idea. A video of Fernando Botero's life was presented with the purpose of making them reflect upon the different obstacles he has had to surpass in order to reach his goals in life. The students wrote about their insights.

The most relevant aspect of this classroom innovation was the fact that I had to take into account the developmental process of each student's proposal. In most of the cases, teachers are focused on the final result but it

is in the process where we can value the students' effort and discover also our students' strengths and weaknesses.

Theoretical framework

In this brief framework I would like to tackle the following aspects that I consider important as a point of reference for this classroom innovation. The first one is the concept of multiple intelligences which has been a very useful theory in current educational processes. The second area has to do with the importance of self-confidence and self-efficacy beliefs in students' performance inside the classroom and in the construction of a community where respect and tolerance should be valued as principles for getting along with each other.

When Gardner (1993) speaks about the multiple intelligences' theory, he makes us reflect about the importance of considering the individual as a unique being among other individuals. The intelligence, he says, is not only one and unique inside the person's mind. There are endless possibilities of intelligence according to the culture and society where the individual exists. Therefore, it is of undisputable importance to look for activities inside the classroom in which students can discover and take advantage of their more developed intelligences in order to enhance the other ones.

In traditional educational practice we can observe that students are evaluated and valued according to their linguistic and logical-mathematical skills (Mettetal et al.: 1997). There is a need to reflect upon different talents that the individual possesses and which are also important. The appreciation of the type of intelligence required by athletes, musicians

and corporate leaders has to be taken into account inside the classroom to make all the students feel accepted and valued and also to enrich learning with different talents and possibilities. Guiding students to develop social skills for admiring and respecting differences has to be one of the most important goals to achieve in the pedagogical process.

In this innovation, one of the purposes was to help the students to take the risk of performing oral second language production in front of an audience so that they could feel that they were able to develop their own ideas. As Dulay et al. (1982) say the students who are eager to try new and unpredictable experiences, and who are willing to guess before knowing for sure, are likely to seek out situations that require real communication in the new language. Thus, the teacher who intends to encourage students to take some risks in life has to create an appropriate classroom atmosphere to make the students feel confident in order to try to construct their own knowledge. This makes us realize that

the self-confident, secure person is a more successful language learner (ibid).

Self-efficacy beliefs influence students' performance inside and outside the classroom to a great extent. Bandura (1997) points out that people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action are required to attain designated types of performances. Self efficacy beliefs provide the foundation for human motivation, well being and personal accomplishment. This is another important task of the teacher; guiding students toward a proper belief of themselves, creating activities in which the students can prove and discover their own abilities to perform something. Bandura also pinpointed a portrait of human behaviour and motivation in which the beliefs that people have about their capabilities are critical elements (Pajares: 2002). These reflections make us realize that to construct a community inside the classroom where students know how to value themselves as well as others, it is necessary to guide them toward their own knowledge, toward the discovery of



11th Grade students from CEDID Guillermo Cano Isaza taking part in a speaking activity

their own capabilities and the construction of strong beliefs of confidence and efficacy.

Findings

Through the implementation of this classroom innovation it was possible to observe a positive change toward oral activities. Students began to show attitudes of dedication and respect for what they and others were preparing. They were interested in doing good presentations. Likewise, collaborative work took place inside the classroom.

I could also see that very often they opted for writing their ideas before they were asked to present monologues or opinions regarding

given topics in front of the class. They felt that English learning could have strong relation with what they like and enjoy in life. Likewise, they gained a positive attitude toward this subject.

In the evaluation instrument I applied at the end of the activities, students expressed that they felt more secure and confident when doing their presentation because they became aware of their capabilities. I could notice that they improved their pronunciation. Nonetheless, they admitted their need to learn more vocabulary.

As a teacher, it was rewarding looking at my students as actors in the class; I was aware of the multiple talents they have and I was able to learn from them. I could observe a

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My big Love

All begin since, I don't
 wanted life, that day
 I was coward because I
 thought in killed me,
 But all change since
 He offered me aid, love,
 affection, in that instant
 I was a very happy
 woman I loved him and
 now I know there's an
 other between him and me
 I felt sure of the love
 that I feel for him.

Sample of ideas prepared by one of the students before expressing her ideas to the class (Used with permission)

class where discipline was achieved because of the respect and support they showed for each other. At the end of the class presentations, a proposal was made for presenting their activities in the main auditorium to the whole school and the students accepted this challenge without any pressure on my part.

Conclusions and pedagogical implications

- Self- confidence is a factor that really influences the way students learn and perform their activities inside the classroom. Thus, as teachers, we need to plan activities in order to help the students believe in themselves.

- The experiences students live inside the schools have to be meaningful for their lives. The classroom is one of the contexts where people, since a very early age, learn how to get along with others and how to work with others. It means, they learn about cooperation and collaboration. Activities based on the principles I have gathered in this paper can help adolescents change their attitudes towards their peers, building bonds of respect and tolerance.

- When students are trying to perform an activity, it is important to value not only the final result but the process they have to follow in order to achieve their goal.

- It is of great importance to research about the different intelligences students have

developed through their life's experiences in order to look for strategies to foster new capabilities in them.

- The creation of a good atmosphere inside the classroom has to be one of the teacher's main purposes if he/she intends to construct a classroom community in which all the participants are valued and accepted. Here, language learning serves two purposes: the development of communicative competence and the construction of each individual.

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