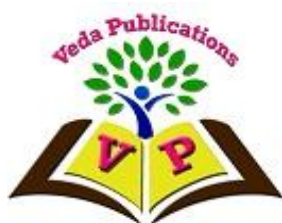JOELL
Veda Publications

"How to Change Things When Change is Hard"
Motivating Libyan College Students to Write and Participate Actively in the Classroom by Using the Heath's Change Model

Dr. Hameda Hussein Almrabett Suwaed

(Department of English, Sabratha college of Arts, University of Alzawia*)*

Veda Publications

ABSTRACT

In EFL contexts, while much research is conducted towards helping students cope with the challenges of writing in a foreign language, studies on how EFL writing teachers deal with the challenges that they face such as students' low motivation and mixed levels are few and far between. Such an imbalance needs to be addressed since how teachers teach might have a direct impact on how students learn. Using action research and focus group with third year writing students, this study investigates the influence of using Heath's model of change in motivating college students to write in English and participate actively in the classroom. It also suggests the way in which English teachers promote students' learning. The findings of the study show that following the suggested model can broaden students' perspectives on studying English language and help them to be more active and motivated college students.

1. INTRODUCTION

The challenges of teaching English writing and encouraging students to write are many (Daoud, 1998:391). However, one of the most difficult issues to deal with is students' low motivation and their unwillingness to write. For many students, to write in the first language is a difficult task that needs a great range of knowledge and practice. To write in English language is even more difficult for EFL students. In addition to the knowledge and skills required for writing, they need to have linguistic knowledge and the ability to use appropriate English lexical expressions, (Kroll, 1991:140) and (Pitt, 2005:97).

Based on Heath's (2010) model of change, the objective of this article is to suggest ways to motivate students to write in English and participate actively in the classroom. Motivating students should be a priority for teachers of students in any subject and any age.

1.1 MOTIVATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Students' motivation plays an important role in their success of learning a foreign language

(Lightbown and Spada 1999). Harmer (2009:98) defines motivation as 'some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something'. There are two types of motivation: 1) extrinsic means the motivation that students bring to the classroom from outside like the need to pass an exam. 2) Intrinsic motivation, on contrast, is the motivation that is generated by what happens in the classroom; like the teacher's method or the activities that the teacher uses (Harmer 2007:20).

While it may be easy to have motivated students, sustaining that motivation is challenging task for the teacher as students might start to get bored or they might find the subject more difficult than what they thought. One of the main goals should be to help students to take part and to stay interested in the subject. This can be achieved by selecting appropriate level of challenge so that the tasks are neither too easy for the students so they get bored; nor too difficult so they become frustrated. In addition setting goals for students to achieve is one of the strongest sources of motivation for example, to be able to write in English. Furthermore, involving students in some decisions in the classroom; for example which topic to write about plays an important part in motivating them. Finally, using activities such as writing in groups can greatly motivate students not just to write but to discuss, argue, and to evaluate each others' work, (Harmer 2007:20). Boughey (2008:133) states that the group work was good technique to introduce many information and practices to students which might be difficult to be explained to them individually.

1.1THE CHANGE MODEL

According to Heath (2010) for things to change somebody has to start acting differently. Each person has a rational side and emotional side. You need to reach both and you also need to clear the way for them to succeed. In short one should focus on three phases:
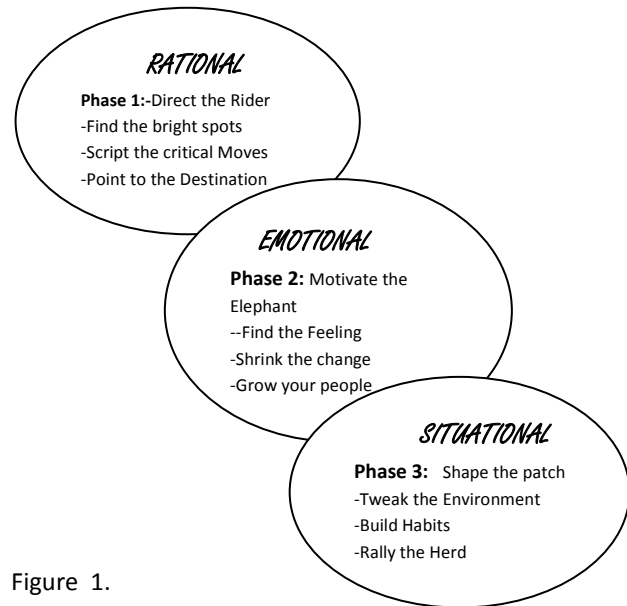

Figure 1.

1. THE RATIONAL PHASE

This phase focuses on the rational side in which we need to: (a) Follow the bright spots by Investigating what's working and clone it; (b) script the critical moves by thinking in terms of specific behaviors not of the big picture; and (c) point to the destination by considering that change is easier when you know where you're going and why it's worth it.

2. THE EMOTIONAL PHASE

This phase focuses on the emotional side by (a) find the feeling by making people feel the change; (b) Shrink the change: break down the change to small changes; and (c) Grow your people: inspire them to feel more determined and more motivated. And when you build people up in this way, they develop the strength to act.

3. THE SITUATIONAL PHASE

This phase focuses on the surrounding environment by following these steps: (a) Tweak the environment: when the situation changes, the behavior changes. So change the situation; (b) Build habits: Look for ways to encourage habits such as relocating the work space; and (c) Rally the herd: behavior is contagious. Help it spread.

3. THE STUDY

3.1CONTEXT

In the college of Arts in Sabratha where I teach second year English writing, it soon becomes

Dr. Hameda Hussein Almrabett Suwaed

VEDA'S

JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)

An International Peer Reviewed Journal

http://www.joell.in

Vol.2 Issue 2
2015

clear for me that second year students are not highly motivated to participate in the classroom. They were mostly passive; thinking that writing is really difficult subject for them to learn. As a result, their participation was poor; they became frustrated and disruptive. This highlighted the need to promote more effective ways for them to learn.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since no research related to how to motivate Libyan university students' to learn writing and being more active students, was available to inform this inquiry, an action research approach was considered. According to Cohen (2007: 299) action research is a flexible and responsive approach to improve education by changing it.

Along with the action research, in this inquiry I used focus group as it allowed me to discuss with the students their opinions about the classroom.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The focus group data were analysed with reference to the main aim of the research which is investigating the influence of using Heath's model of change on motivating students to participate actively in the writing class. During the discussion some notes were taken. I looked for answers related to students' opinions about the activities that are used in the class as well as whether they are interested about them. The data were initially coded under the broad heading then gradually modified into sub-categories referring, for example, how students conceive their work together as a group.

4. METHODOLOGY

According to Hayes (2008:6), 'an imaginative teacher can overcome the constraints of a resource poor school and make use of the everyday environment in creative ways to promote students' learning'. Inspired by this assumption and based on the model explained above, I decided to create a learner-centred environment that recognises the importance of cooperative learning and active participation. The core principle was that students work together in small groups to write the tasks.

Adapting the steps mentioned by Heath (2010) and mentioned above, I started with the rational phase

In this phase we need to clone the successful

spots, provide clear directions to students because they feel confused because of the lack of clarity, and to set achievable goals.

As I analyzed my situation, I found that for my students working in groups was working well and they showed interest in the idea so I continued to use it. In addition, my students showed interest in drawing so I continued to ask them to draw pictures that illustrate their paragraphs. For example if they are writing process paragraph about recipe, the picture will be the steps of making the dish or the final picture of it. Later on, we used these pictures to decorate the classroom and to remind them of the topics that we already covered. Then, they moved gradually to make handmade artifacts such as making New Year cards.

According to Heath (2010), any successful change requires a translation of ambiguous goals into concrete actions. In this since it's not good enough to ask my students to say 'work as group'. I need to explain 'group work' into working together to achieve good results for example. Then, when they make progress in working together, I move to another goal such as the focus on dividing the roles among the group members properly. What is essential though is to join the long term goals with short term critical moves. It is important to point to the students where are they heading (you will write an article for the newspaper soon)

For my students my long term goal is to make them able to write academic essays. My critical moves are writing with less grammatical and spelling mistakes and focus on cohesion.

So far I've been dealing with the rational part of the students by giving them directions- both a start and a finish. At this stage students are prepared to change and therefore I need to focus on the emotional phase

The emotional side requires focusing on encouraging students and giving them the sense of achievement. Being interested broadens students' learning and they become more open to new ideas. When students achieve a goal like writing a paragraph with a good level or winning a game, they are encouraged to participate more in the class.

Dr. Hameda Hussein Almrabett Suwaed

According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), teachers can develop positive motivation in their students by helping students experience success.

The sense of success is important, because students are easily demoralized. Therefore, they need support and encouragement by showing them their progress. For my students, I remind them of what's already been conquered. 'Writing an essay is not going to be easy, but you've already written a paragraph and I'm sure that will help you to write extended pieces of writing'.

I used to highlight the positive points in every work they did, and at the same time I emphasize the next goal that we need to fulfill. If they wrote good outlines I say 'I'm very pleased with your work. But here's what I want to see next lecture: I want to see perfect paragraphs and good group work. If you accomplish that, we will be ready for the next task.

When you set small, visible goals, and students achieve them, they start to believe that they can succeed. They break the habit of failing to write and begin to get into the habit of writing.

So far, the main challenge of change is to keep students moving forward. Whereas they need directions, they need motivation too. The students have to believe that they are able to overcome the change. In addition, to make changes stick, we've got to think about the situational phase

We make change more likely to happen by changing the surrounding environment and building habits. If you want students to be motivated, you need to think about changing their way of setting and giving lots of signs to tell them that they are getting close. Based on this, I decided to use spread tables in the class where students set in groups of five or six students and they select a name of their group and a leader. Each group has selected a name that reflects their personality, for example a group selected 'smart group' and that was extra motivation for them because they were trying to be the best in every lecture and to prove that they represent the name well. For the leader of the group, it was in turn among the members of the group. The main roles of the leader are making sure that every member of the

group understood the given instructions and organizing the discussion and dividing the tasks among his/her group.

In addition, to change students' behaviors, we need to change their habits. It's unrealistic, however, to think that we can change the classroom environment dramatically. So how can we create a habit?

The first thing to realize is that even small environmental tweaks can make a difference. In my class, I noticed that the class is not really clean and students are carless and throwing rubbish everywhere. So I was gradually trying to create the habit of keeping the classroom clean. I asked them ' if you have the authority and power to change anything in the class, including the teacher, what are you going to change? Most of them said 'the classroom'. I asked 'why? And most of their answers were 'because it looks gloomy and it is not clean'. I said 'what if we clean it together because it is our class and you decorated it because from making the new years' cards you seem professional'. They agreed and we started the work and by the end of the week the class looked different: clean and colorful. What is important is that students felt that it is their idea and it is their second home so they kept it clean and tidy. As you try to make a change, the hardest struggle will be to maintain your students' motivation, to keep them on the road. How can you create an environment that would make it easier for the students to change? Supportive habits- like working in groups can make a difference.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A focus group discussion was held with the four groups in second year to discuss the methods of teaching being used so far and whether they are aware of the changes in their motivation and behaviours if any. The main questions were: what do they think of using activities like group work, drawing, using visual aids in the class? Did you notice any changes in your level and behaviours? If yes, give examples.

Students' answers show that they are not happy with the traditional way of teaching and they feel bored and not motivated. Students' answers showed that it was better for the students to work together

and interact with each other. The students commented that this helped them to concentrate more. According to Boughey (2008:86), group work is a useful technique for EFL teachers as it enables them to present information and comment on students' writing in groups.

1. Teamwork is essential part to create new atmosphere in teaching, because the students feel bored in normal classes which just depend on the listening without sharing'. This way opens many chances to communicate and interact in the classroom. It is like conference table which students feel that they are self important and have to invent a great job together.Furthermore, many students reported that they were able to learn from their classmates and complete tasks that they could not normally do on their own. According to Hedge (2005) group work helps students to learn from each other's strength. The discussion with students showed that these students felt more positive about their learning and gained self confidence and motivation.

2. It encourages the students to attend all the lecture with exciting and amazing feeling'.

3. It creates great motivation to study hard and it makes a big challenge between students in groups, which makes everyone looking forward to be in the top, to be the best in the college.Moreover, students mentioned that they felt a sense of achievement and gained self confidence and life skills such as teamwork, time management, how to present their ideas and listening to others and accepting different opinions. What was remarkable is that they were aware to certain extent that is what we need in Libya nowadays.

4. In my point of view working in groups, a thing which is hard for some of us to do, will provide us the sense of 'one hand one heart', without being selfish which is what we need nowadays.

Although the group work technique was considered favorably both by the students and by me as writing teacher, some students mentioned that they prefer individual assignments or at least not to write in groups all the time. They had concerns about the evaluation as some members of the group will work hard and others will not. Because there is no space in the college for students to practice their hobbies, writing class was the best place for talented students to draw, act and write poems. This was achieved by using variety of activities and it played a major role in motivating students and keeping them moving.

5. It will help you to know yourself more and what you are able to do that might help you to discover your character especially some sides you never know about it, for example, if you never know that you can draw, tell jokes and even sing or write a poem it would give you some motivation that you can do things that you never do it before'. The idea of keeping the class clean and decorating it by using stickers and students' drawings was highly appreciated by most students.

6. When you study in clean and tidy class, it really gives you motivation to study'

7. With the new design of giving the class new look and trying to make it fancy, we feel much more comfortable and looking at all of this beautiful things around us make us feel happy'.

Observation of the class definitely showed that both the use of range of activities and the group work (as means of providing students with more practice) have been enthusiastically received by students. Students were interacting more, were more mentally and physically engaged and produced more authentic work and achieved better results in writing tests. According to Hyland (2003:81) using a variety of activities and of classroom interaction such as group work helps to motivate students to write and participate in the classroom.

Although initially it required a great deal of hard work to put students into groups, to teach them how to work together, besides teaching them the content

Dr. Hameda Hussein Almrabett Suwaed

of the subject, as students learnt how to work together, more tasks could be achieved in the class with less supervision and the physical effort and, most importantly of all, with a large degree of success and satisfaction.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although it is not always the case, writing can be an interesting subject in the EFL classroom. The key is to follow the change model: students should have clear directions, sufficient motivation, and supportive environment. In other words, when change works, it's because the rational side, the emotional side, and the situational side are all aligned in support of the change.

This study showed that students can be highly motivated by using activities like group work, mainly when it is combined with interesting writing tasks. The successful students' experience with writing will help them to gain confidence as writers. With clear goals and guidelines, writing class offers students the opportunities not only to learn writing, but also to actively participate in that learning.

It's important for the teachers to be patient and to bear in mind that big changes come from a succession of small changes. It's okay if the first changes seem almost small. The challenge is to get the students' level and motivation improving, even if the improvement is slow at first. With each step, the students feel less scared and more active, because things are working. With each step, you will notice the change in their levels in writing and in their attendance and participation.

REFERENCES

[1] Boughey, C. (1997) 'Learning to Write by Writing to Learn: a Group Work Approach'. ELT Journal: 51(2):26-134.

[2] Cohen, L. etal. (2007) Research Methods in Education. New York: Routledge.

[3] Daoud, S. (1998) 'How to Motivate EFL Learning and Teaching of Academic Writing by Cross-cultural Exchanges'. *English for Specific Purposes*. 17(4), 391-412.

[4] Harmer, J. (2007) The Practice of English Language Teaching. Essex: Longman

[5] Harmer, J. (2009) How to Teach English. Essex: Longman

[6] Hayes, D. (2008) 'Non native English Speaking Teachers, Context and English language Teaching'. *System.* 37 1-11

[7] Heath, C. and D. (2010) Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard. London: Random House Business Books

[8] Hedge, T. (2005) *Writing.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

[9] Hyland, K. (2003) Second Language Writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[10] Kroll, B. (1991) *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[11] Lightbown, P. and Spada, N. (1999) How Languages are Learned. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[12] Pitt, K. (2005) *Debates in ESOL Teaching and Learning: Culture*, *Communities and Classrooms*. London: Routledge.

Dr. Hameda Hussein Almrabett Suwaed