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Entrepreneurship and Student Motivation

In our English as a second language (ESL) Communications class, small teams of students speak enthusiastically to their peers about the companies, products, and services they created. When it comes time for students to continue to the next group, they are so focused on presenting the results of their projects that nobody moves. Later, the students fill out surveys that describe their total engagement, and their responses illustrate why the unit was a success. Almost every student liked the topic of entrepreneurship and envisioned using the information in the future. Every student stated that his or her English skills improved as a result of working on the three-week project that inspired them to think and communicate like businesspeople.

As we planned the unit on entrepreneurship and discussed the class objectives, we kept a focus on student involvement. The discussion evolved and eventually centered on a major question: "How can we meet our department's curricular objectives through an engaging project-based learning experience connected to our course's textbook?" That question inspired the development of this unit and led to the positive results at the end. To describe how those results were achieved, this article outlines the entrepreneurship unit in detail.

Motivation through authentic materials and project-based learning

Instructors in all disciplines understand the importance of student engagement and motivation to academic success. The idea of a classroom full of unmotivated (and therefore often unenthusiastic) students strikes fear into the heart of the best instructor. Motivation is a key element in language learning, as has been well established in the literature (Fidaoui, Bahous, and Bacha 2010; Gilmore 2011). Researchers distinguish between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation, the former stemming from a learner's internal desire to learn a language for its own sake, and the latter indicating a desire to learn in order to reach an external goal (e.g., a better job). Learners of English as a

second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) who demonstrate both types of motivation have a higher likelihood of continuing language study and accomplishing long-term goals (Rubenfeld, Sinclair, and Clément 2007; Wang 2008).

Research shows that the use of authentic materials and content encourages motivation in language learning (Dooly and Masats 2011; Fidaoui, Bahous, and Bacha 2010; Gilmore 2011; Rubenfeld, Sinclair, and Clément 2007; Wang 2008). As access to these types of materials is increasingly available via the Internet, instructors are able to more easily incorporate them into lesson plans to supplement and enhance textbook units and topics. Gilmore's (2011) study suggests that using authentic materials allows students to better develop communicative competencies through "rich input" and "drawing learners' attention to useful features through careful task design and follow-up practice activities" (810). If instructors work to ensure that the materials fit well into the language objectives of the course, merging language and authentic content can greatly enhance students' learning and motivation (Dooly and Masats 2011).

It is also important that students' motives are congruent with their goals (Rubenfeld, Sinclair, and Clément 2007), which helps ensure interest and success. Project-based learning (PBL) entails students working together over an extended period to research and report on complex tasks, and it teaches real-world skills and language that will be used in the workplace and other authentic environments (Tsai 2012). PBL uses authentic materials to allow for this merging of content and language. By integrating language, technology, and media education through PBL, instructors encourage students to reflect on their own learning and focus on language that will help them reach their goals (Dooly and Masats 2011). To this end, instructors reach their productive goals when they use the tools of PBL and incorporate authentic materials into their courses.

Background of unit on entrepreneurship

We teach adults in the Academic English Studies (AES) program at a college in the United States, and the Intensive English Program consists of approximately 100 intermediate- to advanced-level students. We

both taught a course called High-Intermediate Communications, and each of us had approximately 15 students from Japan, Korea, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

Both classes used the same textbook by Folse and Lockwood (2010), and all the tasks related to Unit 3, "Business: The World of Entrepreneurship," which includes three parts: (1) the characteristics of an entrepreneur, (2) developing a company, and (3) analyzing a new business. Some of the project's tasks came directly from the text, while others were innovative and supplemental.

Through working on Unit 3, students made progress reaching the objectives outlined on the course's syllabus, which were to:

- use communication skills to give formal and informal presentations on academic topics;
- take notes and summarize lectures on academic topics;
- practice and improve note-taking strategies;
- practice and improve discussion and interview skills with classmates and native speakers; and
- use clear and comprehensible pronunciation.

These objectives could have been met through topics other than business; however, specific reasons influenced our decision to develop this project-based unit on entrepreneurship. First, individual students have a great deal of interest in the topic. Students will study business in the future, and many others also want to learn about it; all are consumers, and some are relatives of business owners. Student interest in the topic is reflected in the fact that Economics is currently the most popular major for international students at our college. A second reason that guided our decision is that entrepreneurship is popular on our campus. During winter break, 20 undergraduates participated in a first-ever workshop called Understanding Innovation: Entrepreneurship and the Liberal Arts. Studying this topic connects our curriculum with the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and contributes to the ongoing goal of greater integration between the CAS and our department. A third and major reason for our decision is that students benefit from the authentic experience of participating in this project-based unit. They complete the project

in teams, as do students in a business course or employees at a company. They may find themselves in a similar situation one day, designing a company or developing a product or service. Certainly everyone benefits from using persuasive skills in speaking and learning to work with diverse group members, no matter what future professional aspirations each person may have.

Implementing the unit on entrepreneurship

What follows is a description of the nine steps we took to complete this project, depicted in Figure 1. Some of the steps presented here are optional, and not all of them need to be followed exactly to successfully teach this unit. This allows for a great deal of adaptability to various teaching environments.
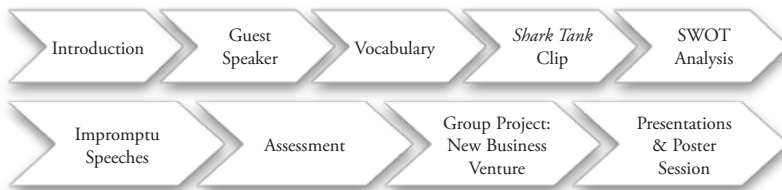

Figure 1. Steps to implement unit on entrepreneurship

Introduction

The instructors introduce the topic by asking students to define both *entrepreneurship* and *entrepreneur*. As individual students share their definitions, the instructor writes them on the board. The class compares these definitions with those found in the textbook: "Entrepreneurship is one aspect of business in which a person, or team, starts a new company or business rather than work for a more established organization" (Folse and Lockwood 2010, 79), and an entrepreneur is an individual who starts his or her own business. Each class discusses the topic and generates a list of examples and vocabulary related to starting a new business. Students then use Moodle, the Learning Management System at our college, to post questions that they want to ask the guest speaker in the following class session.

Guest speaker

In the next class session, an invited entrepreneur guest speaker talks with both classes about starting a new business. This activity provides students with a personal connection to the topic by allowing them to engage in dialogue with an entrepreneur who discusses statistics about small businesses, how the entrepreneur started his or her own incubator-based start-up within an existing company, and the pros and cons of starting a business. The guest speaker also answers student questions.

In lieu of interacting with a guest speaker, students can access information online. For example, students could read an article, such as "Meet the Man Who Wants to Diversify Silicon Valley by 2040" on the National Public Radio website (Walker 2013), or watch a video conversation with an entrepreneur, such as "Elon Musk: The mind behind Tesla, SpaceX, Solar City…" on the TED Talks website (Musk 2013).

Vocabulary

In this step, students receive a vocabulary handout for the unit, including both topic-specific and academic vocabulary. The handout includes a pronunciation guide and definition for each word. Students write sentences using the words and share the examples in groups and with the whole class. Suggestions for the vocabulary list include the following:

> *entrepreneur*
> *investor*
> *competition*
> *service*
> *product*
> *customer/client*
> *merge/merger*
> *revenue*
> *venture*

We also include vocabulary related to listening and speaking strategies (e.g., *persuade/persuasion, concede/concession, counter/counterargument,* and *gist*), as well as vocabulary that, while not necessarily related to business, is useful for students in business and in other academic settings. Examples of these terms include *template, attribute, perceive, subjective,* and *trait*.

Shark Tank clip

Students watch a short clip from the popular TV show *Shark Tank* in which an entrepreneur pitches his new business idea to the "sharks" (investors). This activity gives students the opportunity to see entrepreneurs pitch and discuss their ideas for products. Students analyze the entrepreneur's business idea and persuasive strategies as well as the investors'

questions and negotiation tactics. Students also watch a short clip of an interview with Daymond John (Evans 2012), one of the investors on the show, who shares advice for entrepreneurs. After watching these clips, students can discuss them in groups or as a class; write personal reactions to the clips and relate them to their own interests and ideas; pose questions to classmates; and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the business pitch they watched.

SWOT analysis

Students complete activities in the textbook to prepare for the unit lecture (Folse and Lockwood 2010, 97–110) on what are called SWOT analyses. The SWOT analysis looks at a company's internal **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses and external **O**pportunities and **T**hreats that might help or hinder its success. For example, a start-up technology company may create a SWOT analysis similar to that in Figure 2.

This is a popular analytical tool used in business schools, in companies, and for personal evaluation. In our case, students listen to a lecture two or three times and take notes on the different components of a SWOT analysis before discussing and answering questions relating to the lecture. More information about SWOT analyses and a helpful template to use with students can be found at www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm.

Impromptu speeches

Students give short (two-minute) impromptu speeches on the textbook topic, "My personality fits my career choice because …" (Folse and Lockwood 2010, 115). In the speeches, students explain why they chose their current or planned future career and how their personality contributed to their decision. Students have approximately five minutes to prepare for their speeches, and instructors give informal feedback after each speech.

For more information about matching personality with career choice, see http://jobsearch.about.com/od/careertests/a/careertests.htm.

Assessment

In this step, students take a test relating to the topic of business and are assessed on listening and note-taking skills as well as knowledge of relevant vocabulary. They are also assessed on content relating to entrepreneurship and persuasive strategies for communication. Questions about entrepreneurship assess students' knowledge of the topic, as taught in the unit. For example, here is one question:

What is an advantage to starting a business?

A. Entrepreneurs can do something they enjoy.
B. Entrepreneurs always make a lot of money with their new business.
C. Entrepreneurs are usually successful.

This could also be asked as an open-ended question, and an accompanying question could ask about the risks associated with starting a business. (The best answer to the given multiple-choice question is "A"; entrepreneurs sometimes make a lot of money, but not always, and entrepreneurs fail more often than they succeed—particularly first-time entrepreneurs.)

In the section about persuasive strategies for communication, questions based on an exercise from Folse and Lockwood (2010, 89) evaluate students' skills at identifying language as being used to persuade, counter, or concede. Here is one fill-in-the-blank example:

"I'll grant you that; however … " is language used to _____.

A. persuade
B. counter
C. concede

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Innovation and creativity • Recruitment of excellent employees	• Limited start-up funds • Lack of experience
Opportunities	Threats
• Consumer demand for our product • Currently little competition	• New competitors entering market • Economic recession

Figure 2. Sample SWOT analysis

Percentage of Grade	Section	Description
45%	Listening and Note-taking	• Take notes on a new lecture (not heard before) • Listen twice to the lecture
45%	Vocabulary	• Syllable stress • Fill-in-the-blank sentences • Use words in complete sentences
10%	Content	• Questions about entrepreneurship • Using persuasive language

Figure 3. Assessment of content and skills

Voting Form

1. Imagine that you are a very wealthy investor. In which company would you like to invest?

2. Imagine that you are a wealthy person. You have as much money as you want. Which product or service would you buy?

3. Which team has the best overall poster?

4. Which team gave the best overall presentation?

5. Which team completed the best SWOT analysis?

6. Which team should present its idea on the TV show *Shark Tank*?

7. Which team has the most interesting idea?

8. Which team uses the best English?

Figure 4. Student voting form for group business ventures, posters, and presentations

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Self-Evaluation: Entrepreneurship Project   Name: _____

1. What were your strengths as a team member?

2. What were your weaknesses as a team member?

Peer Evaluation (Note: This information will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your team members.) Provide an overall evaluation of each of your team members:

    a. Team member:

    b. Team member:

    c. Team member:

Figure 5. Student evaluation form

The overall purpose is to evaluate students' knowledge, make them aware of gaps that might exist in their understanding of relevant concepts, and reinforce their comprehension of key terms and ideas as they prepare for the group project. (The correct answer to this sample question is "B.")

Figure 3 displays the general sections of the test we used; they can be adapted as necessary to fit individual teaching situations.

Group project: New business venture

Students are next assigned to work in groups of three or four to create a new business venture. They receive a handout with project requirements to guide their work. (See the Appendix for a modified version of the handout.) Students brainstorm business and product/service ideas, then choose their favorite. Students complete a business proposal describing the business and product/service, and answer questions about competition and why an investor should invest in their venture.

They then complete a SWOT analysis of their business and create a large poster with information about their company, product/service, and the SWOT analysis. Each group presents the information to their classmates in a formal 10-minute presentation.

Presentations and poster session

The final component of the project is a joint poster session between the two classes. Each group has an opportunity to present its new business venture to the members of the other class and other instructors in the AES program for five minutes. Each group presents four times, with four to seven people listening each time. The students then use a variety of categories to vote for each other's posters and business ventures. (See Figure 4 for the voting form.)

Students also complete a self-evaluation and peer evaluation of their own work and their group members' work on the project; we take the evaluations into consideration for the final grading. (See Figure 5 for the evaluation form.) Students receive a group grade, unless peer evaluations indicate that an individual student's grade should be altered.

Reflections

As mentioned earlier, students completed anonymous surveys at the unit's conclusion,

allowing the instructors to obtain data about the students' experiences. Twenty-seven students completed the survey, including future undergraduate and graduate students pursuing varied degrees. Almost everyone liked studying entrepreneurship, and some students expressed that the unit increased their interest in business or would be helpful for their future plans. Students were asked to share any additional comments about what they liked and what they would change in the unit. One student would have liked to have selected her own group rather than having the instructor assign it. Some students suggested giving more time to complete the project. Obviously, teachers in other contexts may have different class schedules and could certainly adapt the timeframe of the project.

The remaining comments were very positive. Students appreciated the topic, the teaching style, the opportunity to work with a group, and the chance to improve both speaking and listening skills during the presentations. One student liked the topic because it combined education with entertainment. Overall, students' engagement and their motivation to learn more led to improved English language acquisition for our students as they examined entrepreneurship.

This project was based on a textbook unit, but it could easily be adapted in another course using a different text or no text. Materials regarding starting a business, SWOT analyses, and personality and career tests are available online, and instructors could present their own lecture as a listening exercise or search for a presentation on a site like Academic Earth (http://academicearth.org) or TED Talks (www.ted.com/talks). Local business professionals could be invited to give a short talk or lecture about their business ventures. Although this project was designed for a listening/speaking class, it could be modified to focus more on reading and writing skills. For example, instead of having students create a poster and presentation of their new business venture, they could write a more detailed business plan with a SWOT analysis as a key component.

Conclusion

We strongly feel that this project is adaptable and appropriate for large numbers of English-language learners around the world who plan to use their English in an international business setting. The students who participated in this project were a diverse group, and the majority of them were able to apply the topic to their personal interests and goals. With a bit of effort, students can tailor the content of numerous types of business ventures they study to their interests and experiences. For students with less education or business experience, this project could be an excellent introduction to the language of business. Likewise, for those with more business experience, this project could help them review and become even more comfortable with business terminology that they use in their workplaces.

The topic of entrepreneurship is particularly beneficial for English-language instructors because it inspires students to be creative and pursue their personal interests while learning valuable vocabulary and common business skills. We therefore hope that this article provides ESL/EFL instructors with flexible tools to link teaching to students' practical plans with the goal of increasing their motivation and learning.

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(See Appendix, next page)

A Paragraph-First Approach…

learning, minimizes the complexity of effective writing instruction, and leaves students underprepared for the kinds of written communication that will be expected of them in the academic and professional worlds. Ideally, multiple pedagogies would be used in any writing classroom, though time limitations often mean that instructors must choose which pedagogy they will rely on most heavily for a given class. Still, the paragraph-based approach outlined in this article, an approach that relies on a conventional paragraph and essay structure, and that is intimately involved with the strategic implementation of the logical relationships appropriate to a particular mode of organization, has definite advantages in the ESL/EFL academic writing classroom. The challenge of this approach for the teacher is to ensure that students' ideas and content are not lost in an obsessive pursuit of the correct form. After all, the purpose of a recipe is not just to produce food, but to produce food worth eating.

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Appendix   Handout for New Business Venture Project

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Overview:

In groups of 3 or 4, you will propose a new company and describe its product or service. You will complete a SWOT analysis for your new business and prepare a poster explaining your business, its product or service, and your analysis. You will present your poster to the class and to students in the other Intermediate Communications class.

Requirements:

1. As a group, turn in a 1-page (typed, double-spaced) proposal describing your business and the product/service you will provide.
2. As a group, complete a SWOT analysis for your new business. This will be on your poster (see #3).
3. As a group, design a large poster that you will present. Your poster should include:
    a. Your new company's name and logo
    b. A detailed description of your company's product or the service that it provides
    c. Facts about your company: number of employees, year established, location(s), type of customers, and yearly revenue
    d. Your SWOT analysis for your company
4. As a group, give a 10-minute presentation to the class and the other Intermediate Communications class about the information on your poster.

Project Schedule (*indicates graded items):

First class meeting:	Complete the activities/questions on pp. 87 and 95 of the textbook (Folse and Lockwood 2010) as a group.
Second class meeting:	Business Proposal due* (see template below)
Third class meeting:	Complete your SWOT analysis as a group.
Fourth class meeting:	Poster due*/Presentations in class*
Fifth class meeting:	Joint poster session and presentations with the other class*

Business Proposal (Template)

Paragraph 1: Describe your new business.
- Explain why you want to start it.
- Describe your product or service and why it is special/unique.

Paragraph 2: Describe your goals for your company in its first two years.
- How will you achieve your goals?
- How will you communicate about your product/service to customers?

Paragraph 3: Imagine you are writing to a wealthy investor about why he or she should support your business.
- Describe your competition and how your business will be better than your competition.
- Describe why the investor should give you money.
- Think of two or three arguments the investor might pose and counter those arguments.