Get empowered by C.R.E.A.M.

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Abstract

No matter whatever manner you learn it is possible to develop your study skills. Cottrell (2003, p. 55) in this regard recommends the C-R-E-A-M strategy and she was the one who first coined the acronym C.R.E.A.M. She recommends five strategies which seek to empower students with essential learning skills: **C-Creative**: Have the confidence to use individual strategies and styles, by applying imagination to learning. **R-Reflective**: Be able to sit with one's own experience, analyze and evaluate one's own performance, and draw lessons from it. **E-Effective**: Organize space, time, priorities, state of mind and resources (including Information Technology, IT), to the maximum benefit. **A-Active**: Be personally involved and by doing things, physically and mentally, in order to make sense of what you learn. **M-Motivated**: Be aware of one's own desired outcomes; keep oneself on track using short and long-term goals. Cottrell (2003) further explains that each individual strategy in the C.R.E.A.M. framework is in a dependent relationship with each other. For instance, being active fosters learning motivation and interest. Being interested and motivated requires reflection and making sense of your experience. I as an ESL instructor have attempted an action research to motivate my students' learning in the Reading/ Writing and Reading Circle 010 courses through the employment of Cottrell's CREAM framework. For the enhancement of teaching and learning, it is implied that teachers can make use of the C.R.E.A.M. strategy by designing meaningful activities to motivate their students to learn.

Key words: study skills, learning strategise, C.R.E.A.M., motivation, reflective learning

Introduction

Today's modern world has narrowed the communicational gap and the vehicular connection is use of a language that is not native. This phenomenon has given birth to prerequisite that is learning a second language (L2). The accessible resources influx to 21st century 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) has become as a challenge for the teachers who are teaching in the field of English as Foreign language (EFL). Learners' over reliance on open resources has complicated deliverance of teaching style. Students' expectation from their teachers is beyond lectures, the need to rejuvenate teaching flairs has become inevitable.

Pedagogical approaches towards language classrooms has radically changed from a teacher centred to a student centred one. The language teaching pendulum has swung away from grammar translation to the direct method, and then to alternative methods (Richards & Rogers, 2003). Kumaravadivelu (2001) idiosyncratically referred to the belief that any language teaching program "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular socio cultural milieu" (p. 538). Intrinsic motivation is an essential aspect of teaching and learning for instructors who strive to cultivate the learning environment by injecting motivation through innovative and creative teaching strategies." Intrinsic motivation refers to the reason why we perform certain activities for inherent satisfaction or pleasure; you might say performing one of these activities in reinforcing in-and-of itself"(Brown, 2007). Furthermore, teachers tend to complain about students weak concentration span, however they fail to recognize that this new generation is equipped with digital interfaces that are like an appendage to them. The integration of innovative ideas and a touch of creative ignite motivation effortlessly. Ergo, there might be certain socio cultural factors that stifle a teacher's intervention to a prescribed style of lesson. However, openness to explore, learn more, striving for new knowledge and leaving room to soak up from whatever one can get hold off are the people who reach to the heights of their career. Moreover, "expand the 'band width' of experiences from which you derive benefit. Becoming an all-round learner, increases your versatility and helps you learn from a wide variety of different experiences - some formal, some informal, some planned and some spontaneous."(Honey, P). Inquisitive approach towards teaching and learning enthusiasm delivers prosperous results.

Rationale

This critical rationale will outline approaches to teach an EFL Intermediate level/B1 group, as well as the processes of designing the course and sample materials. Any problems and how they would be tackle will also be explored. Many

writers, such as, Hutchinson & Waters (1987), Jordan (1997) and Nunan (1988) in their *Learner-Centred Curriculum*, stress the importance of needs analysis as the determiner of learning goals.Taking into account these concepts put forward the course content was tailor-made contributing to a positive learning experience for these young learners from non-native backgrounds. Three of the materials highlighted used in this course were created based on the contextual needs analysis.

Group profile

The 50 Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) learners' ages ranged from 18 to 21; in a Private university (Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia). Their present situation upon analysis was that these learners had spiky profiles or mixed abilities between pre intermediate to intermediate, lacked in their discourse and genre abilities to use English. The key aspect that was widely noticed was the motivation and enthusiasm.

Context and mean analysis

The course was semester based in nature and time-span for each session was 120 minutes 4 times a week. The classes were held on campus, in a well-equipped room to facilitate the teaching and learning process. As their teacher I had the freedom to produce my own materials to suit my teaching methodology, to achieve the course learning outcomes to the optimal level. The employment of C.R.E.A.M learning strategy was seen as most appropriate strategy for these learners. Many traditional paradigms suggest that students of this era are de motivated and quickly get empowered by boredom. To eradicate this phenomenon they should be extrinsically goaded into educational activities, because "motivation is such a key factor that appears to be more important in learning than intelligence" (Newble et al., p. 2).

Need analysis

As Burnaby (1989, p. 20) noted, "The curriculum content and learning experiences to take place in class should be negotiated between learners, teacher, and coordinator at the beginning of the project and renegotiated regularly during the project". At the beginning of the course needs assessment (diagnostic tests) were used to determine and to glean upon their present language proficiency level. This led to a starting point for identifying and understanding the needs of these learners as Johns (1991) cited in Sanghori states that, "to provide validity and relevancy for all subsequent course design activities, needs analysis should be the first step" (ibid). While Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) claim that, "the needs were seen as discrete language items of grammar and vocabulary," (ibid) Long (2005), as cited in Graves suggests that, "findings of the analysis serve as the input into the design of the syllabus" (2008, p. 162). The results were later shared with the learners to form an

agreement, trust and understanding. As Davies states, "talk about the findings with the learners' then act on the information" (2006, p. 5).

The findings accumulated from the samples of the authentic written materials provided useful insights to decide for the teaching approach for this course. Functional/situational syllabus was selected with a learner-centred approach, as it enhances the learners language usage with motivation for authentic communicative purposes, "To achieve this, the syllabus must be used in a more dynamic way in order to enable methodological considerations, such as interest, enjoyment, leaner involvement, to influence the content of the entire course design" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 92).

Aims

The learners' most important reason for attending the course was to improve their Reading and Writing skills. Mainly, this course aimed to introduce contextualized language in relation to the specific situations faced by the learners on daily basis. The inventory of contents was outlined in a chronicle order with topics linked to one another from easier to harder topics. Hammer, J. states, "some structural or lexical items are easier for students to learn than others. Thus we teach easier things first and then increase the level of difficulty as the students' language level rises" (2005, p. 296). In many situations, deliverance of a course is teacher led pouring in information about skills and language or eliciting activities. However, to yield the most optimal learning outcome, and to allow the learners to realise their full potentials in learning English successfully, the teacher should only be as a facilitator and encouraged the students to map out the type of activities they wanted to do. "A comprehensive discussion of the teacher's role in leaner-centered approach is contained" (Tudor, 1993 cited in Jordon 1997, p. 122). In this case Cottrell's C.R.E.A.M. learning strategy was regarded as the best method to teach this particular group. It is an attempt to liberate the teachers from being restricted in their choices of teaching pedagogy. With the deliberate intention of intrinsic motivation the students of Preparatory year Programme (PYP) were extrinsically goaded into educational activities to spark the desire of motivation and arousal of interest among the learners.

Authentic materials

Tomlinson (2003) uses the term 'materials' to 'include anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. They can be linguistic, visual, auditory or kinaesthetic and can provide experience of the language in use and can help learners make discovery about the language for themselves. Hutchinson reminds us that

"…the selection of materials probably represents the single most important decision that the language teachers has to make" (1987, p. 37).

In the material developing phase Robinson suggests in-house produced materials are more specific for unique learning situation, and "have greater face validity in terms of the language dealt with and the contexts it is presented in" (1991, p. 56-58) and more suitable methodology for the intended learners. According to the discourse and genre analysis related to this group of learners most of the materials were matched to the specific language. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 96) state, there are three possible ways of applying materials: using existing materials, writing materials and adapting materials. The authentic materials used for the teaching and learning in this employment of C.R.E.A.M were either self-developed or adapted from the internet. Crystal & Davy claim, "the text book language is poor representation of the real thing, 'far away from that real', informal kind of English which is used very much more than any other during a normal speaking lifetime" (1975 cited in Gilmore 2007, p. 98-99).

Nunan defines "A rule of thumb for authenticity here is any material which has been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching" (1989 cited in Yuan Yuan & Lingzhu 2010, p. 2). Based on this definition the three authentic materials created to teach this course met the characteristics highlighted by Nunan. Role plays, "At a macro structural discourse level we go beyond linguistic elements to knowledge of organizational features that are characteristic of particular genres, and of interactional strategies… are sensitive to the relationship between language forms and the communicative situations within which they are used…" (Troike, 2006, p. 160). Communicative activities have real purposes: to find information and to break down barriers. Research on second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that more learning takes place when students are engaged in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment rather than in traditional teacher-led classes (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003). Cottrell (2008, p. 55) suggests five strategies which seek to empower students with essential learning skills:

C - Creative: Have the confidence to use individual strategies and styles, by applying imagination to learning.

R - Reflective: Be able to sit with one's own experience, analyse and evaluate one's own performance, and draw lessons from it.

E - Effective: Organize space, time, priorities, state of mind and resources (including Information Technology, IT), to the maximum benefit.

A - Active: Be personally involved and by doing things, physically and mentally, in order to make sense of what you learn.

M - Motivated: Be aware of one's own desired outcomes; keep oneself on track using short and long-term goals.

Communicative activities which can help turn the English classroom into an active and enjoyable place. Extensive Reading/Reading Circle were introduced by a famous book called Who Moved My Cheese, by Spencer Johnson, MD. The moral of the story is to let go of the past, get over things you cannot change, move forward, and realize that there is no reason to fear the unknown because the unknown may be better than anything you could have imagined! It's really all about change and how change has unlimited potential depending on how you deal with it. The gist of C.R.E.A.M was in cooperated in several activities over the semester such as an educational event which was a book inspired poster competition named 'A walk for inspiration' initiated by Ms. Maria Zaheer where a total of 78 students in 5 sections of PYP participated. They were asked to make an inspirational poster related to how they may embrace change in their lives. The criteria of judgment were based on the originality and theme related quotes. The winners and participants were awarded with certificates. The main aim of this activity was 'Language Experience Approach' (Allen, 1960); this comprehension strategy is now been recognized and more widely used for the past thirty years. This strategy uses the students' existing language and prior experiences to develop reading, writing and listening skills.

The language experience approach to teaching and learning builds learners' literacy skills as their personal experiences and spoken language/written language is linked. A language experience story can be effective for class community building. The students were asked to write a short story which could be a personal life experience, a fairy tale of their own version, or totally a new creative story. The C.R.E.A.M. strategy was fully made use of; the students were extrinsically motivated with a prize and certificates, plus the publication of the winner's stories in the university magazine. Furthermore, their authentic materials also provide reading material for beginning level learners to exceed their literacy skills. Follow-up activities can include using the class generated text to teach explicit literacy skills through activities that require learners to select words from the story for vocabulary, spelling, or sound-symbol correspondence activities. The text can also be used to review a grammar point, such as sequence of tenses, word order, or pronoun referents.

Conclusion

By making EAP teaching learner-centered, the students in this course were able to perceive positive learning experiences even though they exhibited passive learning behaviors in the first few classes. Most experts view learner-centered learning as a

major paradigm shift in teaching (Nunan, 1988; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evan & St. John, 1998). In such an environment, the focus is shifted to the constructive role of the learner, which differentiates it from a teacher-centered model in which knowledge is transmitted from teacher to learner. When learners take some responsibility for their own learning and are invited to negotiate some aspects of the course design, the subject matter and course content has relevance for the learner as they feel motivated to become more involved in their learning and often seem to participate more actively in class. Teachers can look forward to enhancing their students' English literacy development as an aid to developing success in their learning.

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