The use of drawing tasks as a creative strategy for pupils in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Maureen Rajuan, the second author, who passed away on April 28th, 2015. She was my pedagogical and research advisor during my bachelor's degree studies and encouraged me to take our research a step forward and publish it. She was a great trainer and a senior lecturer at Achva Academic College of Education, Israel, and prior to her death she was chosen as the Head of the English Department.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of drawing tasks as a creative strategy for pupils in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The study of 39 fifth-graders (15 girls and 24 boys) used anonymous feedback forms, interviews and a whole-class discussion to elicit pupils' attitudes towards drawing strategies. The main findings revealed that drawing increased pupils' motivation and participation in EFL lessons, as well as promoted comprehension and retention of content materials. Based on the results, we believe that drawing activities are specifically suited to foreign language learning for emotional and academic reasons. Teachers should clarify the goal of drawing activities in the EFL classroom and emphasize their importance for pupils' demonstration of acquired content knowledge, rather than the aesthetic elements of artistic production. We recommend the addition of drawing tasks to expose pupils to alternative learning strategies for foreign language learning.

Keywords: EFL classroom; drawing; creativity; motivation; teaching strategy

Introduction

Although pupils' motivation to learn is a basis for successful teaching (Fasko, 2000/2001; Rawat, Qazi & Hamid, 2012), creative tools are rarely referred to in the literature (Craft, 2011; Fasko, 2000/2001; Fatt, 2000; Lin, 2011; Morris, 2006; Rawat et al. 2012; Shaheen, 2010). Teachers do not address creativity in the classroom because they do not regard it as necessary (Craft, 2011; Fasko, 2000/2001; Lin, 2011). However, teachers who embrace a creative approach in their instructional methods not only promote educational innovation, but

also foster pupils' motivation (Elliott, 2007; Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003; Hopperstad, 2008; Hoyt, 1992; Morris, 2006; Seglem & Witte, 2009), as well as develop creative thinking and behavior skills (Craft, 2011; Dewey, 1938; Fasko, 2000/2001; Fatt, 2000; Lin, 2011; Morris, 2006; Rawat et al. 2012; Shaheen, 2010). For these reasons, creativity has become an essential component in the educational field. Although many models explicitly identify attitudes toward the learning situation as a major factor responsible for differences in motivation, they do not refer to specific strategies in the classroom that might be manipulated to improve motivation. Creativity is one such specific factor on which we focus here to pursue the question of how the content is molded by the instructional design.

Enabling pupils to develop creative abilities should be part of the school curriculum (Craft, 2001; Fasko, 2000/2001; Fatt, 2000; Poole, 1980). This idea is emphasized by Rawat et al. (2012) who point out the difficulties of reading and writing acquisition and recommend having pupils draw pictures of objects they see instead of writing words. Specifically, teachers should offer drawing tasks and expose pupils to alternative ways of learning in addition to written and oral assignments. This is supported by Dewey (1938) who advocates a conscious choice of form, as well as content, to obtain better results in teaching. Drawing can be a helpful tool because it is a rather natural learning approach among children that facilitates the unconscious acquisition of learning materials. Illustrations can serve a motivational function for pupils (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003; Hopperstad, 2008; Hoyt, 1992; Seglem & Witte, 2009) and drawing pictures can make reading a text a more enjoyable experience. As a result, pictures may increase pupils' positive attitudes towards illustrated texts that may result in more positive attitudes towards reading in general (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). Elliott (2007) found that when pupils knew they would have to draw after reading, they read the text more carefully and paid more attention to what they read. The implementation of this strategy was found to be more enjoyable than summarizing a text in writing. "Learning occurs when one creates a personal interpretation" (Hoyt, 1992, p. 584). Through drawing, pupils personalize the text and understanding is better achieved allowing pupils to extract information in a meaningful way (Elliott, 2007).

Pupils learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often face many difficulties and "Motivation is one variable important in second language acquisition" (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic, 2004, p. 2). Motivation facilitates language acquisition and fosters literacy. Unmotivated pupils, on the other hand, are often unable to take part in the learning process (Bahous, Nahla & Nabhani, 2011; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Creativity in the EFL classroom can be enhanced through drawing tasks (Seglem & Witte, 2009; Peggy & D'Amelio, 2000) that are incorporated into the regular curriculum. For these reasons, the

drawing methods suggested here were chosen as the focus of investigation in shaping pupils' interest and attitudes towards language learning (Dörnyei, 2003). There is a need for content specific research on how different designs work in classroom practice, how they match the characteristics of the content and how they influence pupils' learning (Osterlind, 2012).

Purpose

This project was carried out in the framework of the first author's student teaching practicum under the supervision of the second author, her pedagogical advisor. In this study, we examine if drawing activities can be used as an instructional tool to increase pupils' creativity and motivation in the EFL classroom as part of the regular school curriculum.

The investigation seeks to determine whether the explicit content of the subject matter and the implicit strategies embedded in the instructional design are well-matched (Jackson, 1968). We hope to contribute to the literature aimed at answering the open empirical questions of whether strategies that apply to some subject matters apply to other specific subject matter content (Osterlind, 2012) and whether the use of these strategies will have the desired effect on students' motivation and on their levels of achievement in language learning (Dörnyei, 2003). There appears to be little research directly associated with these questions in the context of second language learning.

Our research questions are:
1. Do drawing strategies promote motivation and participation in the EFL classroom?
2. Do drawing strategies promote EFL learning of content specific materials?

Method

Participants and setting

The study was conducted in an elementary school in Israel in a 5th-grade class that is heterogeneous in terms of gender (15 girls and 24 boys) and academic level. The pupils came from families of medium to high socio-economic backgrounds. The school maintains a high standard of EFL achievement as measured by standardized exams of the Ministry of Education. I taught a weekly 45-minute EFL lesson throughout the school year, under the supervision of my cooperating teacher and my Pedagogical Advisor, as a student teacher in fulfilment of the practicum requirement.

Procedure

Each lesson throughout the school year focused on reading comprehension of an English text through which pupils learned new vocabulary and practiced the four language skills of

speaking, listening, reading and writing. As post-reading activities, pupils were assigned drawing tasks in order to present the ideas that they had learned from the texts or to express new and creative ideas connected to the content introduced in the lesson.

Every lesson focused on one EFL text (a poem, a song, a story or an informative text) taken from the textbook or chosen according to the school requirements and those of the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. After guiding pupils through the text using reading strategies, a post-reading task implementing drawing strategies was used. In the next stage, pupils were asked to present their drawings that connect between the information in the text and their personal understandings. In the final stage, pupils completed questionnaires referring to the specific drawing strategy of the lesson.

Research tools

Triangulation (Nunan, 1992) was attained through the combination of the following research tools. The action taken was assessed by anonymous feedback forms that were given to pupils once a week. In the feedback form, pupils referred to the specific drawing activity or assignment of the lesson and marked whether they liked it and whether it helped them to improve their English and to understand the theme of the lesson (seven closed yes/no questions). By using anonymous feedback forms, I hoped to receive a genuine picture regarding their thoughts and opinions because I feared that some pupils might censor their real attitudes knowing that I am the one to read their responses.

The feedback forms also contained two open questions to give the pupils the opportunity to write about the specific parts of the lesson that they did or did not like and to add suggestions. I explained to the pupils that I wanted their opinions in order to improve the ways I teach them about texts and to help them improve their reading comprehension. I also told them that the results of the questionnaire would be written in a research report and that their answers would be anonymous to protect their privacy. In addition, I assured them that nothing that they wrote would be used for grading or assessment purposes by me or any of their teachers. Over time, the pupils came to perceive the giving of written feedback at the end of the lesson as an integral part of their English lessons with me and filled in the short questionnaires willingly and quickly. Pupils allotted five to seven minutes to complete the feedback questionnaire, but were given another five minutes as and when needed. The completion of the feedback questionnaire within a short time frame was cardinal so as to prevent pupils from getting bored and resorting to write the same feedback over and over again.

Another research tool was individual interviews with pupils containing open questions. Every two lessons, I conducted one interview in which the pupils referred to their thoughts regarding the drawing activities (whether they helped them to understand the lesson, to improve their language and to understand a text), as well as their attitudes towards drawing in general and how drawing affects them. As a natural continuation of the feedback forms, pupils were forthcoming in their opinions concerning the drawing activities.

Assessing pupils' attitudes towards drawing was also done in a classroom discussion carried out towards the end of the year by the English teacher. Since I was not present in the discussion, I hoped that the pupils would feel freer to express their opinions regarding the use of drawing and that I would gain a more authentic picture. The classroom discussion was open-ended and focused on the pupils' attitudes toward drawing activities that they had engaged in throughout the year in English lessons. The pupils' answers were recorded by two student teachers who were present in the classroom.

Permission to carry out the study in the framework of the regular school lessons and to publish the findings anonymously was obtained from the school principal in accordance with the guidelines of the Israeli Ministry of Education.

Data Analysis

Pupils' responses to the open questions of the questionnaire, the individual interviews and the classroom discussion were combined. The quotations were read multiple times and analysed following conventional qualitative methods (Mason, 1996; Silverman, 1993). Consensus was reached between the two authors through peer debriefing. The main categories that emerged were drawing as a reading comprehension strategy, as an assessment tool, as a motivational method and as a means for the expression of emotions. In the second stage, the main categories were further divided, through a similar process, into recurring themes of relevance to the subject under study and were coded with subtitles. The results reported here refer to the match between drawing strategies and two of the four main categories: drawing as an emotionally motivating tool and drawing as an academic strategy for the comprehension of EFL content materials.

Findings

The main finding reveals that most of the pupils like to draw, in general, and like to draw in EFL lessons, in particular. Of the total 354 quotations to open questions, 66% of the pupils' quotations referred to the theme of motivation of which the large majority of comments were of a positive nature. Pupils' responses that were repeated many times included such things as "I like to draw very much" and "It's fun to have drawing assignments in class." Only 2% of the quotations reflected conflicts, or negative attitudes: "I do not like to draw very much." Pupils' comments related to drawing as a strategy that helped them understand the content material of English lessons was 18% of the total number of comments. An interesting finding was that a few pupils wrote that although they do not like to draw, drawing helps them in English class. See figure 1 below:

Figure 1: *Comparison of four categories of pupil's quotations regarding positive and negative attitudes towards drawing activities*
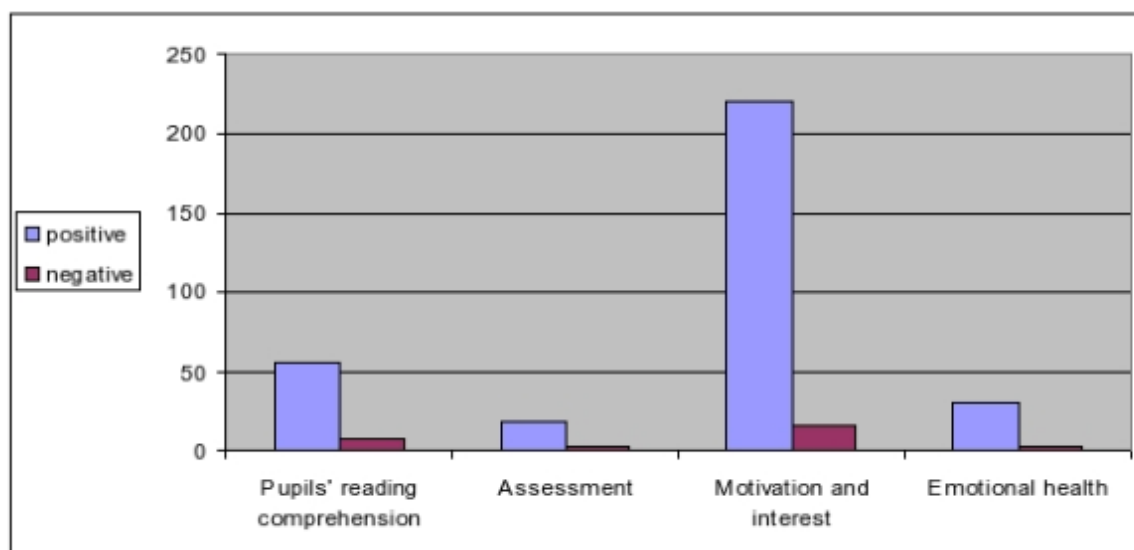
The high rate of completion of drawing assignments (above 90%) during the short time allotted in the lessons also attests to a high level of motivation to engage in this activity: "I prefer drawing in class because at home I'm busy with other things and don't have time to draw." The completed drawings showed no difference between the girls and the boys in level of motivation to engage in drawing tasks and to complete them successfully.

Match between drawing strategies and motivation

Applying drawing tasks in EFL lessons resulted in pupils' engagement in creativity and led to positive outcomes. Reasons given for enjoying drawing activities in English lessons were "Drawing makes lessons experiential" and "Drawing activities break the routine;" "All lessons

are the same and it's boring, but drawing is different." Significantly, drawing had positive effects on pupils who often avoided participating in lessons: "The drawing assignment encourages me to participate more." There was one pupil, for example, who rarely participated and a lot of pupils did not want to work with him in collaborative assignments. However, once I started combining drawing activities in my lessons, he gained the courage and desire to participate. In addition to gaining a new approach to learning English, he was able to gain confidence and the respect of his peers by presenting his pictures in front of the class. Another girl gained confidence through a drawing assignment by receiving validation from her peers. She explained that "They asked to copy my drawing." Still another pupil said that drawing helps her participate in English lessons for a very different reason: "I have ADD, but drawing assignments help me concentrate."

One of the drawing activities I implemented to increase pupils' motivation and arouse their interest was based on the strategy suggested by Whitin (2002). Pupils listened to the song "Octopus's Garden" by The Beatles and were told to imagine the garden described in the song and then draw it. Pupils were free to use their own ideas that emerged after reading and listening to the text. The following drawing was chosen as representative of pupils' motivation regarding the theme of the lesson. In this picture, we can see the octopus's garden as the pupil imagined it, after listening to the song "Octopus's Garden" by The Beatles. The drawing shows one pupil's interpretation of the song by drawing objects that are mentioned in the song, such as the cave, octopus, garden, shade, sea, waves and a coral. However, this drawing also reflects the pupil's imagination in choosing the details that were not mentioned in the song, such as colors, shapes of objects and different plants and animals, as well as the "Welcome" sign:

Figure 2: *Example of a pupil's drawing showing a creative interpretation of a song*

Appreciation of the creative approach was acknowledged by the pupils, many of whom wrote, "I enjoyed using my imagination" and "Drawing helped me to develop my imagination." A few pupils stated that they liked to imagine the details of the song before completing the drawing task: "Before I drew, I imagined the garden and then it became easy for me to draw it." Some pupils imagined themselves as other people "When I had to be a weatherman, it was very creative" and some pupils imagined themselves in other places, "I prefer drawing at home because I can take ideas from other places." Pupils were also aware of the freedom to use their imagination to complete the task, "I mostly liked when we had to imagine the song because everyone could imagine something different."

Match between drawing strategies and EFL content materials

The match between the creative instructional approach and the learning content in EFL was expressed by many of the pupils. One pupil, for example, referred to imagination as a central component in understanding the language: "I liked to imagine it because it helped me understand the English." Drawing assisted pupils in understanding general information and focusing on the main ideas of a text: "By using drawing, I understand the story/song better"; "I understand the main idea of the story when I draw it"; "Drawing helps me understand sentences." Drawing also promotes the learning of concepts: "Drawing helps me understand the moral of the story in my own way." Some pupils benefited from understanding other details of the text: "Drawing helps me understand ideas because I can see what every detail means and can understand the information". One pupil said, "It is easier to understand a

story by drawing it because you make efforts to go deeper into details, compared to reading a story and describing it."

Pupils referred to drawing as a vehicle for recalling vocabulary: "By drawing words, I repeat them and, in this way, they stay in my memory"; "When I draw, I understand the words I did not understand earlier because it demonstrates the words for me"; "I remember words from stories, but drawings are more helpful for remembering words - it's like giving me symbols to remember them by, and in this way, they get into my memory."

It was also uncovered that drawing had a long-term effect on memory. At the beginning of the year, I taught a few lessons on the topic of the weather based on the unit in the textbook and combined drawing assignments. Although it had been about six months since I taught these lessons, the pupils still remembered the content of the unit, as well as the vocabulary, because they recalled the drawings they had made and referred to them when telling me about the experience: "When I had to study the first chapter for the test, I remembered it only because of the drawing I drew;" "Drawing assignments help me remember what we learned in the previous lesson." One pupil explained the effect of drawing on recalling information, by giving an example of a text and a drawing he created based on that text, "If you mention the name of the story we learned, I won't remember it, but if you mention that I drew a drawing about that story, I will remember the story, as well as the drawing I drew."

The strategy suggested by Greenway (1996) was chosen to enhance comprehension and involvement by reading a poem, asking comprehension questions, and then instructing the pupils to choose one sentence from the poem and draw it. At the end of this assignment, pupils presented their drawings and the class guessed what sentence was drawn in the picture. At the end of the lesson, I showed the pupils the painting on which the poem was based and they compared the differences and the similarities to their own drawings. The following example illustrates a pupil's response to a line taken from a simplified version of the poem based on "Afternoon on a Hill" by Edna St. Vincent Millay. This line was drawn by other pupils as well, but each drawing depicted a different interpretation. The drawing task enabled pupils to use their imagination and creativity and motivated them to take part in this activity whose purpose was to show that there are many personal interpretations of a poem.

Figure 3: *Example of a pupil's drawing showing a creative interpretation of a poem*

Pupils understood that the objective of combining drawing assignments in English lessons is to reach the goal of learning, rather than focus on the aesthetic appearance of their drawings as expressed in the following quotation:

> *Even if my drawing is not beautiful, you would not say, 'It's not pretty, I don't want it.' This makes me feel comfortable because I'm not forced to create the most beautiful drawing in the world. This is not an art lesson.*

Conclusion

Our first research question regarding motivation was answered by pupils' quotations that drawing tasks are creative activities that break the classroom routine and make learning more enjoyable which, in turn, increase motivation and participation. A reason that might explain why pupils of this age are fond of drawing tasks may be that they are still young children. Drawing, in this sense, represents their natural mode of communication as a common activity carried out outside of school (Rawat et al. 2012). However, as children mature, they prefer using verbal and technological tools in order to show meaning, rather than visual means (Edens & Potter, 2001; 2003). Therefore, pupils who do not like to draw will benefit from the rare opportunities in which they are encouraged to draw in the classroom and become exposed to an alternative learning strategy.

Nonetheless, pupils who do not like to draw may find drawing boring and stressful. Consequentially, instead of motivating these pupils, they might feel demotivated in the class because they know they will need to draw something after they have read the text. Teachers should, thus, develop sensitivity to such pupils and need to take into consideration their negative reactions towards drawing tasks. One way to address those pupils can be by offering a task that contains both drawing and writing. For instance, pupils can draw their reaction to the text and write as many sentences as they wish to describe their drawings (Rajuan & Gidoni, 2014).

Our second research question was answered by pupils' quotations referring to the appropriateness of drawing activities in English lessons. Drawing helps pupils develop a deep understanding of texts as it requires them to take into consideration all of the details and to choose what is most important to be drawn as explained by Hoyt (1992) who states that drawing requires both evaluation and analysis because pupils need to decide what information is the most important to be included in their drawings. Pupils' drawings may reflect different things, like what they learned from the text or what they liked best, etc. This method gives the pupils the option of choosing what is important to them, rather than merely being told what to draw. When pupils share information about their drawings and explain the reasons for their choices of what to draw, the rest of the class learns from them (Paquette, Fello & Jalongo, 2007). A deeper understanding regarding different perspectives about a text is created when pupils discuss their work (Whitin, 2002). This serves to raise pupils' interest and engagement.

It is natural for children, especially in elementary school, to invest a lot of time making their drawings beautiful and colorful. However, once the teacher points out that the drawing should reflect their understanding of a text rather than represent a decorative drawing, students will come to understand the purpose of drawing in the EFL classroom. They will, therefore, understand that they should spend time on the content and not on the appearance. Essentially, teachers' emphasis on the content of the drawing can also reduce stress among pupils who do not know to draw. Once pupils realize they are being judged by the content of their works, they will gain more confidence to draw and might even share their works in class.

The importance of the teacher's response towards pupils' drawings cannot be understated. It is essential for teachers to create a supportive classroom climate in which negative comments on pupils' drawings are not allowed. Failure to do so may

destabilize pupils' confidence as drawers in situations in which classmates may negatively judge pupils' drawings. This may lead some students to create alternative drawings or to refuse to present their drawings in the classroom (Hopperstad, 2008). In order for teachers to minimize such negative outcomes, they can establish clear class rules that are repeated at the beginning of every lesson.

Most teachers, excluding art teachers, do not feel confidant to incorporate creativity in their lessons (Craft, 2001). However, teachers should not be intimidated to expose themselves to new learning experiences. Pupils are encouraged to use their creativity when seeing their teachers do so (Fasko, 2000/2001; Lin, 2011). We attribute our positive results to the author's own motivation when presenting drawing tasks, the specific creative design of each task in relation to the learning objective of the EFL content materials and the supportive classroom climate created by clear guidelines.

Although this research was conducted in the EFL classroom, other language teachers may benefit by these findings. Indeed, we believe that creativity is one such element that should be presented in every teaching atmosphere so as to increase motivation and maintain an affective learning arena.

Future Research Directions

Towards the end of the year, I have come to realize that many weak students benefited from drawing tasks. This came up when conducting the individual interviews and after receiving the students' responses from the class discussion in which I was not present. In that sense, it may be worthwhile to investigate whether drawing is really better suited to weak students than to strong ones. Another direction for further research concerns ADD and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder students. Since not all special needs students are diagnozed, some of them may not even be aware of the source of their difficulties. Drawing in lessons might be a beneficial tool to aid those students and to facilitate their learning.

Little is known about the negative effect of drawing in the classroom. Therefore, it is worthy for future research to examine the drawbacks of drawing methods amongst pupils in general and EFL learners in particular. Additionally, providing teachers with alternative strategies and approaches for pupils who do not like to draw, can contribute to a meaningful, calming learning atmosphere.

Biodata

Yasmin Gidoni is an EFL teacher who teaches English in a junior-senior high school in the North of Israel and studies for attaining her master's degree in Educational Counseling at the Seymour Fox School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. She has lectured about the benefits of integrating drawing tasks in the EFL classroom at the 2013 National Conference of the English Teachers Association in Israel (ETAI) held in Jerusalem.

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