

HOMWORK IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

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A problem has been observed that creates difficulties in the normal and productive development of the English courses. Without any doubt, doing homework is very important in the learning process of a new language. Doubtless it affects the student's active participation in the classroom and his relationship to partners and teachers. Because of this, a research project was done with the aim to finding out strategies to ensure students do homework and make it part of the learning process, erasing the image of homework as a punishment.

Introduction

When we say tasks we can refer to different kinds: daily tasks, pedagogical tasks done in the classroom and tasks as activities to reinforce learning. Anyway, all tasks have something in common in some way: that is to evoke a communicative use of language and to create habits in those who do them.

We can say a task is a series of processes that allows the student to develop abilities and skills in second language acquisition. It is necessary to take the process of language acquisition not as "*learning that*" but as "*knowing how*". This way, students will not see this learning as an obligation but as a useful tool for their future performance. Through tasks we shall allow students to use right rules in a suitable, real context.

Teachers assign homework for many reasons. Homework can help students to review and practice what they have learned, get ready for the next day's class, learn to use resources, such as libraries with their reference materials and encyclopaedias, and explore subjects more fully than time allows in the classroom.

Method

Time limits for students to hand in their homework will be the first step to consider. The next step will be doing and preparing homework with direct participation from the teacher. In other words, what techniques must be developed by the teacher to instil motivation in students to do their homework?

After a week's observation to find out what kind of homework the teacher usually gives, it was noticed that homework was generally from the workbook and tape. That procedure, although necessary, could be supplemented giving students a chance to demonstrate their aptitudes for drawing, dramatisation, etc. and for the development of creativity.

The third step is related to the kind of homework students like to do. A survey was made whose results show a certain attraction to things like greeting cards, drawings, collages, comics, etc. with a communicative or competitive purpose. Likewise, they show

an affinity for current themes like music, cinema or singers' biographies.

Likewise, it is necessary to remember that homework plays an important role as a complementary activity and is a part of an organised and researched lesson plan. Homework is also a work tool in classroom and multiplies the chances for students' practice of the second language out of the classroom.

Subjects

The group chosen to be the subject of this project is the tenth grade. It's made up of ten students with an average age of 16 years and with great academic differences among them. This group has been chosen because it has the greatest apathy toward lessons and no motivation to do complementary activities such as homework.

Procedure

In order to encourage students to do homework an informal survey was made to find out preferred activities (hobbies, music, free time, etc.). Then, activities with specific goals were designed.

Results

With the first test, students had the opportunity to learn basic vocabulary necessary in the classroom and were encouraged to use it. They were also encouraged to ask open questions about anything interesting to them. 50% of students did this homework. They were asked about *what they thought about*

homework, how they felt doing it, and whether they learned any vocabulary or not. They said that it was a new way to do homework because they had always filled in the workbook and now what they did was more realistic.

They had doubts about the pronunciation of words in questions. We could see trouble in word order in sentences (Spanish syntax), trouble with Wh-questions and spelling. This fact could explain why they don't speak in the classroom although they know the words. They admit they know the vocabulary but they prefer not to speak. Here, the teacher's role is important because he/she can encourage the students to use the language they are learning.

About 50% of the students didn't do homework. A strong link was observed among the three findings: they were motivated to do the homework but 30% of them didn't understand it very well; didn't understand the meaning of the words and had grammar deficiencies; and 20% were completely uninterested in it.

Here we can see a clear relation between grammar limitations and low interest in doing the homework. The lesson plan for the classroom must be clear and organised to encourage students to do homework that is interesting and in accordance with their abilities.

The second homework was done by 70% of the students. They had more interest in doing the homework. Perhaps in the classroom they found clear ideas on the basic questions and were encouraged to participate in the activities. 30% of them continued in their apathy about the activity.

They argued they didn't understand or they didn't have enough time. In this homework we found syntax and grammar deficiencies and misuse of prepositions and conjunctions. All the writings were analysed and corrected.

Work done in and out of classroom is intended to encourage students to speak, think and communicate in the second language. We can see in students' attitudes to homework that motivation is not only given by the teacher but some of them are predisposed to expressions like "I have never been good at English" or "It's not important for what I want to do in the future".

The third activity was making up dialogues. Students should hold short dialogues with communicative value. They must use situations and people from their own life. The success of this activity was not seen in homework but in classroom responses. Students were more confident in the classroom and they participated spontaneously. Some students argued that the activity was very easy and some said that it was attractive because it was easy to do.

In the next two activities we can see important progress participation during the

classroom activities. 90% of the students brought their homework and it was possible to revise it.

Conclusion

We have three items to discuss and these are classroom observation (which was very important because classroom development is directly linked to practice done when students are doing homework), reactions and responses from students. They said they were bored of always doing homework from the workbook and of working at home. We can see progress in this item because of many reasons like novelty, relation to work in classroom and practice of the second language in classroom.

Dealing with these three items we can say that the lesson plan and homework must match, students must acquire vocabulary via their homework, and that the classroom environment must encourage students to express their opinions, likes and dislikes, hobbies, etc. This way, they can see a reason for doing homework. •