**R546 Spring 2011**

**Reflection and Personal Exploration Activity, Option A.**

**Brainstorming**:

* Song Smith software to create a personal song that the students its topic/title.
* Think Fast where students have to respond quickly when the ball is thrown at them to a topic or idea that has been assigned by the class. responding and throwing the ball is time constrained.
* Comic creation in which students impersonalize a character in a dialogue using Extranormal.
* Youtube story telling, using the tool to retell a famous story and maybe add a twist to it.
* Google Earth Bio, using google earth to create a biography for each students background, school, etc
* Checkerboard for morphological synthesis, students will have to come up with a role play using the topic and the setting that they created with the checkboard.
* KWL chart at the beginning of each week, a mix with 3 day agenda.
* Backward book walk for students to choose a book and give us a tour starting from the back.
* Student-teacher vs. teacher-student, change of roles.
* Fat and skinny question about a video on the topic of the week.
* Go fish vocabulary
* Creating online Venn diagram to share with classmates and collaborate.
* Fishbowl for reviewing past material and additional collaboration.
* Webbing for reflecting what have been learned and sharing with the class either on the board or online then vote on the winning webbing that provide best reflection and organization on the topic.

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| Strategy/Tool | Category/intended concept & idea | Priority during the semester | Positives | Challenges | Support |
| Song Smith Intro | Motivation- get students out of the regular class environment. | Early | Students love music and cool things, this is a great motivation and icebreaker tool. | Students may not know how to use the tool or do want to record their voices. | A quick demonstration for the tool and producing the first song by the teacher. |
| Goals and Expectations cards | Motivation – helps students take charge of their own learning agenda. | Early | An icebreaker between the students and also helps them start thinking of what they hope to achiev on the long run from this class. | Sharing personal goals and agenda from in the first time is not a common practice and students might feel uncomfortable. | Explain that they are sharing things that are related to this specific class. students may share only personal information if they prefer. |
| Think Fast | Motivation- enforces fast remembering and recalling. | Middle | Gets students thinking and paying attention to what others have said while in the same time sharpening their speaking skills. | Students language level may not help them to participate in a fast manner. | Explain that this activity is just for remembering not for language skills. |
| Create comics | Creative- allows other types of self-expression and opining more interaction options. | Middle | In Extranormal, students work individual or in teams to create and impersonalize a character in a dialogue, the best/funniest comic that utilize the weeks concepts. | Students might use inappropriate words or stereotypes. | Ask students to be creative in their comics but within the acceptable limits. |
| YouTube story retelling | Creative- additional self-actualization activity + Dr.Bonos’ lateral thinking “Go dig someplace else” metaphor. | Middle | Planning and creating a video that retells a known story using media of students’ choice. Students might add a little twist at the story events. | Time consuming and might result in students withdrawal from the activity for its new nature. | I will explain that we are not looking for perfect graphics and production, rather a creative way of retelling the story. |
| Google Earth Biography | Creative- creative adaption to the students needs to share their own geographical knowledge. | Early | Students will use google earth recording or the trip feature to show the class a quick bio about their background. I will ask them to choose the things they want to include or not. | Students might face some language difficulties using the past tens.  Students lack of skills using the tool. | Prior to this activity, I will go over past tens and its different forms.  A short user manual will be assigned as a reading assignment. |
| morphological synthesis | Creative- Rogers psychological safety. | Middle | From a matrix of motivation strategies on X axis and creative strategies on Y axis, students will create a role playing scene that facilitate the two strategies. They have also to decide on one of the weekly topics. | Students might go for the more familiar strategies, repeating each other. | A special reward will be assigned to the group that create the best combinations and performance. |
| KWL Chart | Critical- activating prior knowledge and building background. | Continuous | At the beginning of each week students will write the things they know about this topic, things they want to learn, and share it with a friend to at the end of week we will bring back the chart and check whether they have achieved what they wanted to learn. | Many times the students do not know what they want to learn. | I will indicate that our class is not restricted to what the book is suggesting and that options are open. |
| Backward Book Walk | Critical- quick familiarization as a step into independent reading+ inferring skills. | Middle | Groups of students will be assigned a chapter from the assigned book , each group go on a backward fashion from conclusion to title. Each group will present the parts of the chapter they thought were important. | Students are not used to jump into reading without following the usual vocabulary-images- examples path. | As a new approach, student are expected to have different way of approaching the task, being different is good. |
| Fat & Skinny Questions | Critical- the difference between factual and complex thought questions. | Middle | Before lesson, students will preview the lesson material and work in pairs to write up 3 fat and 3 skinny questions about the concepts of the lesson. At the end of the class the whole class answer some of the questions. | Students might not be able to differ between the two types of questions. | A sample of targeted questions on a previous lesson to explain the concept. |
| Webbing | Cooperative/Critical- making connections between learned concepts and creating categories. | Middle | As a debrifing activity after each chapter, in gorups students will create a webbing graph and summerize the chapter ideas and concepts.  Students will share their webbing with other groups and discuss similarities and differences and rationale their choices. | Webbing could be very limited or very broad.  Students may not be able to read each other webbing. | This activity should be done after a trail with the teacher.  An online webbing tool could be used for additional sharing options. |

**Reflections on the strategies list.**

Before reflecting on this list, it is very helpful to provide a quick background on the setting that was used for brainstorming the strategies. The students that are targeted by this strategy list are EFL students in a technology college at Saudi Arabia. The students language performance level is identified as high-novice with prior exposure to many of the topics that are covered in the curriculum via other technical courses where English is not the primary language of communication. The class that this list will be used for is an English language course that meets for two hours four times a week.

The class follows a multi-focus approach that addresses the four basic skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing using a thematic chapters with corresponding activities that addresses these four skills. The most important aspect of this class is the nature of the students and their cultural influence on what is perceived as acceptable and not, causing students to be extremely shy, introverted, and minimalist. Also the students are very reluctant to try anything new that might put them on the spot or expose their lack of knowledge of skills, which results in an extreme process of repetition in activities.

From this brainstorming activity I have learned some very important aspect of choosing creative, critical, and collaborative learning strategies.

***Know the context and the environment:***

The first thing that I was thinking about is what I can and can not do in such an environment that I described above. This took most of the time during the brainstorming as I had to cross examine every strategy that I choose and figure out if it is feasible or far fetch. I had to cross many of the strategies that I thought was very helpful in creating creative and critical such as six colored hats and creative dramatics due to such restrictions and also because that the negative outcome of forcing such strategies is greater than the positive outcome on the long run. So knowing your situation very well will help you in creating the most appropriate conditions to promote self-actualization and personal talents.

***Modifications sometimes are a must:***

Even when I thought that a strategy was a perfect match for the objective that I was hoping to reach, I had some difficulties figuring a proper language skill or concept that could be used in such strategy. Adjusting the strategy to fit the pedagogy and the curriculum was the only answer to this problem. Goals cards, expectation charts , and KWL charts are favorites for me, I thought that they help the students be more focused. However, I knew that my students are not going to benefit from these strategies as a one shot activity. My solution was to use the goal and expectation charts as an icebreaker and self-exploration tool and then on continues approach I plan to utilize the KWL charts as an idea and goals regrouping tool. Many students come into such language classes with the idea that they will learn English, however they do not know what aspect of the language they want to focus on, this combination of the two strategies should teach the students to develop a focus and maintain it during thorough out the semester.

**You got to be push the limits and be there for guidance:**

As the list started to formulate, I started to notice that it is becoming more like the educational settings that I described as the traditional repetitive environment. It was obvious that new horizons have to be explored even it would mean some undesirable outcomes, as I reached a conclusion that trying to change the statuesque has its cost. Here I was torn whether to accept this cost or avoid it as it would be affecting the students learning and progress. Based on what we have done so far in the class, it seems that promoting interaction and communication among students and raising their level of collaboration is crucial to create a creative and talent adopting class. Also, Maslows’ advice to promote self-actualization through multiple means while maintaining Rogers’ psychologically safe environment as a mean of promoting creative thinking. For these reasons I included some new and uncommon activities for the students to try their hidden talents in areas they have not been educationally targeted before. Song Smith, for example, is a song writing tool that align the students’ voice with corresponding cord producing an interesting song performed by the student. Here, the students are not placed in a situation that require something out of their ability, like using a guitar. Instead the activity provide the support that the student need to place him in a comfort zone allowing for best performance.

Similar to previous approach is the Google Earth Biography and Create Comics, which provide the students with opportunities to explore themselves individually or with others in a more relaxed settings that reward creativity and minimize stereotyping and criticism.