

Project specification

MEi:CogSci 1st year semestral project

TOPIC OF SPECIALISATION –

Teaching English as a second language, teaching methods, teaching adults

PHENOMENON & (PERSONAL) GOALS –

We will design an experiment that will focus on uncovering the importance of „good mood“ and humor in class, where English as a second language is taught. It seems obvious that students prefer dynamic learning environment but does that really increase their abilities to learn and remember, or does it only make them more willing to spend the time outside of class and that is what accounts for their improvement? This question interests me as a part-time English tutor and as a student as well.

Interdisciplinarity of the project lies in the natural mixture of methodologies of education and psychology of learning.

LEARNING OUTCOMES –

I hope to find possible improvements to ways of teaching English as a second language with the focus on teaching vocabulary. I also expect to learn the proper way to set up, execute and evaluate an experiment as I have never had the chance to conduct a psychological experiment.

PROJECT

Name: The importance of humor and “having fun” in class

Description: We hope to find a correlation between humor/student’s enjoyment of the classes and learning vocabulary. The experiment created for the purposes of this project will be focused on a group of 6 adults on a level B2/C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of the Council of Europe. The classes are held twice a week. This experiment will be a trial that should help us discover any flaws in the proposed design and show us possible outcomes.

PROJECT PLAN

1. Recherche & literature research

Goals: The goal of this step is to find previous research into our area of interest as well as ideas of experimental methods we did not think of. Literature about how people learn (especially) languages in general might be useful.

Milestones: 9.4.2014 – presentation of studied literature

Deliverables: presentation of studied literature

Relevant literature:

Askildson, L. (2005). Effect of humor in the language classroom: humor as a pedagogical tool in theory and practice. *Arizona Working Papers In Second Language Acquisition and Teaching*, 12, 45 - 61.

Aboudan, Rima. "Laugh and learn: Humor and learning a second language." *International Journal of Arts and Sciences* 3.3 (2009): 90-99.

Hulstijn, Jan H., and Batia Laufer. "Some empirical evidence for the involvement load hypothesis in vocabulary acquisition." *Language learning* 51.3 (2001): 539-558.

Brown, Thomas S., and Fred L. Perry. "A comparison of three learning strategies for ESL vocabulary acquisition." *Tesol Quarterly* 25.4 (1991): 655-670.

2. Formulating hypotheses

Our main hypothesis is that not only people of all ages enjoy classes that offer dynamic approach with humor and fun, such class will also help them to learn more effectively. While we agree with Socrates on "I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think", we hope to find a correlation between teaching with humor and the number of new words learned.

3. Planning of experiment

Goals: prepare and set-up of the proposed experiment

Milestones: 12.3. – discussion in class in order to find flaws of the proposed experiment

Deliverables: design of an experiment

The experiment will be focused on one class of students that meets twice a week. The experiment will have two phases; each will take two lessons plus final testing.

In the first phase, the Monday class will be lead in following way: the teacher will try to set a good mood in the class via speaking exercises, where all students work in pairs and are encouraged to talk about the things that interest them and skip questions that bore them. The teacher walks around the class, correct students' mistakes, asks them more questions and jokes with them. After 20 minutes, the class proceeds to work with

assigned books and during these 70 minutes, students are presented with several new words. The teacher focuses on 10 of them, each is provided with a context if possible, but not a joke. At the end of class, the vocabulary is reviewed and tested.

In the second phase of the experiment, the Wednesday class will again focus on 10 new words, but this time the lesson will avoid humor and joking among students. The exercises should be in a similar form as in the Monday class, with the possible exception of the opening speaking exercise, as those often give students the opportunity to joke. The vocabulary review and test at the end of the class will follow.

We hope to be able to find more than one group to test this hypothesis and/or repeat the whole 2 stage process more than once in the same group.

4. Realization of the experiment

Goals: compile the data

Milestones: 14.5. preliminary results

Deliverables: answers from tests

Experiment will be run between 9.3.2014 – 10.5.2014. The main group of students will be on level B2/C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of the Council of Europe. There are 6 students in total in this group, who promised to attend both lessons.

5. Data analysis & interpretation of data

Goals: find patterns in the data

Milestones: 14.5. preliminary results

Deliverables: the statistics of the groups within both versions of the experiment.

We will focus on the statistical changes in overall test results of students after being exposed to different teaching environments.

Possible outcomes are:

- A) Humor in class will have no significant impact on the number of words remembered
- B) Students exposed to humor during class will have better results than their peers taught without humor

6. Documentation of project

Goals: prepare a poster and presentation for the conference

Milestones: 4.6. poster deadline

Deliverables: poster