



Enhancing Motivation and Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence through the Joint Course Methodology

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The aims of the joint course methodology

It is impossible to determine one single aim only. Or perhaps it is possible: the primer aim of this methodology is, and should be to provide the highest standards of education to our students. This might sound like a commonplace, but I believe this is outstandingly important. Our shared belief about the importance of this issue was the basis of the cooperation between the instructors, and between the instructors and the people who provided an amazing amount of support backstage to help us with the technical and administrative issues.

There are more special aims as well, which derive from the peculiarities of the given cultures. One of these was that the Hungarian students wanted to master English at a high level. This is an aim that is articulated at every level of university education, as the value of students' degrees are increased if accompanied with appropriate language proficiency.

Another special aim was to help students make themselves understood with the widest possible audience, and language is just one tool in this quest. It is also important to teach them the right way of thinking. During the course students learnt about the importance of HOW they verbalize their thoughts. It is important to tailor their message to the audience's needs, and like this they can tell more. The goal is not to speak more but to speak in a way that the audience can understand and make use of. It is also important to consider the other party's cultural background and characteristics. I believe this is among the greatest achievements of this course.

A year ago we organized a joint course with the KNU in South Korea. The course was especially beneficial professionally, even though we did not have enough time to cover the full syllabus due to the many cooperative tasks this special course meant for the students. Success was achieved by making students realize that



multiple perspectives on issues may operate at the same time, and that certain problems – historical, legal : as these were the foci of the course) are so complex and bounded in culture that it is impossible to find a correct solution without bearing in mind the other party's cultural background. Students managed to go beyond their own boundaries and understand Others' perspectives. They were communicating with their peers a lot, using diverse media, and finally they got the point: the point is not to talk more about the same issue, but to explore the other's way of thinking, and to make myself understood in a way that that suits my partners' cultural framework.

I was very happy when we started our shared work with Professor Miller. She started to become interested in cooperation in Puerto Rico, but back then I couldn't imagine how we could cooperate, given our very different fields of teaching. I didn't exactly know what she was engaged in, I only knew she taught Health Care science, and not History, like myself. A year later I realized that a particularly important aim of the joint course methodology is that it can bring together people of different fields to share what they know, and share their practical knowledge. This is how we started the work, bearing in mind the needs of our students, who strive for practical knowledge and not lexical. Unfortunately, Hungarian tertiary education still extensively emphasizes the need for broad lexical knowledge whereas practical issues are often neglected.

Students as learners

We advertised the course for Advanced Studies students, who are the most outstanding students of the 10 faculties of our university. I have been involved in training Advanced Studies students as the leader of Grastyán Endre College for Advanced Studies. In general I can tell that these students are eager to know more, to update themselves, are enthusiastic and interested in diverse fields.

A lot of historians applied, I think this was due to the topic of the course: globalization is a hot issue today that students majoring in social sciences are especially interested in. The topic also coincided with the aims of the College: to educate students who have an inclusive worldview, are sensitive to societal problems and are responsible citizens.

The course also taught our students to think globally. Unfortunately we tend to think nationally only.



The 'Good Work' project taught us that there is a recipe to find solutions to economic, societal and political problems on a global level, and individual cooperation is essential. It took some students a semester to realize this, but I think it was worth. Some students are still skeptic, but at least they were presented with a new viewpoint that hopefully will open up their minds.

Students also learnt that there are other possible interpretations of issues, not only the one they are familiar with. They learnt that sometimes the other interpretations are conflicting with their own, and they also tried to discover the hidden causes. It was a great experience for us teachers to see how their minds opened up, how they became more open, and braver, and also capable of admitting that their interpretation is only one of the existing many.

These issues are important because we have to build the future together, and in doing so we can rely on our common, shared experiences. We are most grateful to Professor Miller for making us familiar with the Good Work project and for working with us on exploring these vitally important issues.

Very briefly: motivational trends in Hungary towards learning English: just to illustrate the points

Motivation, i.e. the force that drives people to pursue different ambitions was found to have contributed to the success of this course. Students taking part in this course were all very motivated learners, and, most importantly, very motivated language learners.

In the literature language learners' motivation is either described along the intrinsic-extrinsic continuum, or the instrumental-integrative continuum (Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994). An intrinsically motivated learner finds pleasure in learning the language itself, for various reasons, whereas an extrinsically motivated learner is interested in the outcome of learning: achieving better grades and results or passing an exam.

As for the other continuum, the instrumentally motivated individual pursues ambitions for which language is a tool: to get a degree, scholarships, to be able to read English books or understand movies. Integratively motivated learners, on the other hand, would love to become familiar with the target language community: these learners strive to achieve proficiency in order to be a member of the target culture,



acquaint with native speakers of the target language and get an insider's view of their culture.

In our case mostly instrumental motivation played a key role. Students mostly desired to sign up for this course, at least initially, to be able to speak with native speakers of English to improve their language and communication skills.

These experiences are in line with certain studies conducted in Hungary with primary- and secondary- school EFL learners. These studies found that students' main motives were intrinsic and instrumental (Heitzmann, 2008; Nikolov, 1999; 2003).

These experiences can also be rooted in the specific context and setting: the privileged position of English in Hungary (Nikolov 2002, Medgyes, 2005) contributes to students' underlying beliefs that it is in their own interest to learn this global language, which accounts for instrumental motivation. As for instrumentality, in a foreign language learning context students' main concern is not integrating, but making use of the language. In Hungary proficiency in a foreign language is not that widespread even these days.

Thus, proficiency in English does put students in privileged positions: state-certified language exams are required to obtain a degree. It is also prevalent among Hungarian youth to go abroad to work, thus, a good command of English is needed for this purpose as well. Thus, it is not surprising that for EFL students in Hungary intrinsic and instrumental motifs are more characteristic.

However, during the semester it also became evident for us, teachers that students were very much motivated by the fact that they could be participants of such an interesting and unusual course. The fact that they had to cooperate and communicate with peers from a remarkably different culture was very motivational and challenging for them. This leads us to the second point I would like to discuss, and that is how the course contributed to the development of students' intercultural communicative competence.

Development of students intercultural competence and reflections on how they made friends through FB

Globalization has presented language teachers and learners with the challenge of coping in all the more frequent intercultural situations. This is especially important in Europe nowadays. Respect for other languages and cultures have been a desired



goal for the Council of Europe for more than five decades. The earliest document stressing the importance of learning and esteeming languages of other countries was the *European Cultural Convention* ratified in 1954 by then-members of the Council of Europe. Thus, these ideas have been in the center of attention for more than five decades.

With the rapid expansion of the European Union in the past years language learning has gained particular importance in mainstream education in all member states. Promoting language learning has become especially important since 2004, the EU's most significant enlargement in its history, that led to an increase in population to comprise 450 million people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It became increasingly important to make European citizens aware of the importance of effective communication and openness towards other cultures.

In this quest apart from the importance of foreign language learning, the development of people's intercultural communicative competence became also emphasized. Byram (1997) defines ICC as the 'individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries'. An individual with intercultural competence in Byram and Fleming's definition 'has the knowledge of one, or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has the capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts' (1998).

An intercultural approach in teaching not only helps students to better understand other cultures, but it also makes them aware of the distinctness of their own. Constant and conscious reflections on culture and cultural differences make students think about their own culture, and view it in relation to different cultures, thus broadening their scope of understanding. Obviously, the intercultural approach helps not only in reaching the desired goals of making students broad-minded and sensitive to cultural differences, but, through emphasizing the importance of meaning making in communication it also helps them cope with intercultural situations language-wise.

This was a very important achievement of the joint course: our students managed to negotiate meaning and achieve mutual understand through a variety of media: facebook, the BOLT, Skype and email. They created a shared facebook group and exchanged ideas about the course and assignments through facebook. In the beginning some of our students were anxious, but at the same time they were also eager to get in touch with their American peers. It was a great experience for



them, and they discovered and learnt a lot about how to communicate across boundaries.

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