FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY THROUGH SELF-ASSESSMENT: A SAMPLE LESSON

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The present paper offers a lesson proposal aimed at fostering intrinsic motivation and improving writing skills. It reports on part of the results of the author's doctoral dissertation. The theoretical background and the practical aspects supporting this lesson plan are in line with the newest teaching techniques identified by Marzano et al. (2001) and mandated by the New Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a lesson designed to help students develop writing skills and intrinsic motivation. Teachers must be aware of the fact that the greater the students' motivation, the greater their effort. Most frequently, teachers will motivate their students by using rewards and punishments. These motivating tools mainly target the development of extrinsic motivation. When these are the only means used to encourage students to learn, students do not develop a passion for learning that is of their own. Consequently, they may not internalize the material presented by the teacher. Students learn best when they *learn because they want to learn.* Therefore, a fundamental job of a teacher is to aid students to become independent learners. The best way to accomplish this goal is by raising intrinsic motivation. When students are motivated, they: 1) can achieve learning goals, 2) increase their effort and energy in order to successfully complete a particular task, 3) increase their autonomy and persistence in the completion of activities, 4) develop cognitive processing, and 5) improve their performance (Chauncey and Walser, 2009; Kirby and McDonald, 2009; Willingham, 2009). According to Raffini (1996: 3), intrinsic motivation is *"fueled by students' psychoacademic needs to control their own decisions (autonomy), to do things that help them feel successful (competence), to feel part of something larger than themselves (belonging and relatedness), to feel good about who they are (self-esteem), and to find pleasure in what they do (involvement and stimulation)".*

This lesson may be used with different ELLs depending on the students' level of English proficiency. The goal of the lesson will be to teach English writing while aiding students to accomplish socio-emotional growth. The lesson uses research-based strategies: *"Research-based is a buzzword today for teachers when it comes to choosing modes of instructions, curricula, and forms of assessment. Particularly since the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), teachers can no longer rely solely on their knowledge of best practices or their years of experience"* (Hill and Flynn, 2006: 5). The strategies and activities of

this lesson plan fit into the set of strategies that have been recognized as successfully leading to an increase in academic achievement by Marzano et al. (2001). This lesson plan is in line with the most current trends of English teaching since, according to the NCLBA, ELLs must be taught in content by using a variety of scaffolding techniques (Curtin, 2009: 69). With this lesson, ELLs have the opportunity of acquiring the L2 in a meaningful content; thus serving a double purpose.

LESSON COMPONENTS

After this brief introduction focused on the main theoretical issues behind the creation of this lesson, we present a description of its components by way of framework before moving on to the sample:

1. **OBJECTIVES**: There are two types of objectives, namely content and language objectives.

   Content Objectives: They identify what the students will be able to do in a particular content area.

   Language Objectives: They identify the specific language skills the students will be able to use and learn.

2. **STRATEGIES**: They refer to the way students are going to be working during the lesson. We have selected Kagan and Kagan's (1998) Cooperative Strategies.

3. **ACTIVITIES**: This section is composed of several subsections:

3.1. Introductory Set:

3.1.1. Review of previous lesson: Here, we use review questions and student self-assessment. For the student self-assessment, students select an option from the *We are all smart* chart to illustrate what they have learned during the lesson. With the review questions, we aim to repeat generalizations and make students support them with facts. The intention of this review is to help students remember what we have previously studied so we can help them create meaning of new information by using the pre-existing background knowledge that was generated during the previous lesson(s). The importance of this subsection is justified by the research on background knowledge carried out by Marzano (2004), who talks about the general correlation between academic background knowledge and generalized academic performance. Moreover, he points out that the existing knowledge that a particular student has about a specific subject will determine how much new information that student will learn. We also paid attention to Vygotsky's (1978) theory on scaffolding as a teaching strategy. In this type of instruction, the teacher offers scaffolds or supports to assist the learner's development. The scaffolds increase the learner's capability to build on prior knowledge and comprehend new information (Olson and Pratt, 2000).

3.1.2. Introductory Activity: This is a warm-up activity that serves as a preview which is connected, directly or indirectly, to what is going to be studied in the lesson.

3.1.3. Cooperative Strategies: As we mentioned earlier, we have used Kagan and Kagan's cooperative strategies (1998).

3.2. Procedure: Here, we provide directions for educators to carry out the lesson.

4. **CLOSURE**: The teacher will ask questions in order to find out if students understood the main ideas of the lesson. Furthermore, the teacher will include a closing story or interesting fact with the purpose of offering students wider views of the content of the lesson. We not only want our students to feel like learning more about what they have seen in a particular lesson, but also to help them create connections with other multiple areas of knowledge. Students will also have the opportunity to play a game, which serves a double purpose. On the one hand, we try to make students feel relaxed so they can successfully organize all the acquired information in an efficient manner. On the other hand, we want our students to remember the writing lessons as a *fun time* so we increase their motivation and willingness to participate in further writing instruction.

5. ASSESSMENT: There are two types of assessment:

5.1. Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy.

We will be asking questions using Bloom's Taxonomy, which consists of six different types of questions aimed at fostering higher level thinking: 1) Knowledge: the teacher asks questions that require students to recall data or information; 2) Comprehension: the teacher's questions attempt to determine if the student understands the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems; 3) Application: students are invited to think about situations where they could apply what they have learned during the lesson; 4) Analysis: these types of questions challenge students to separate material or concepts into component parts so that their organizational structure may be understood; 5) Synthesis: these questions are used to help students build a structure or pattern from diverse elements (put parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure); 6) Evaluation: these questions are used to assist students in making judgments about the value of ideas or materials.

We will be suggesting a set of questions that could be applicable to this lesson. Nonetheless, we must be aware of the fact that these questions are just a guide. They may vary, while carrying out the lesson, to better adjust to the necessities and characteristics of the students and the particular teaching situation/environment.

5.2. Student self-assessment using Multiple Intelligences Theory.

In order to foster higher-level thinking and to provide students with an opportunity to create meaning in a way that is most significant to them, the teacher will invite students to turn in (the following day) a self-assessment grid of what they studied in that particular lesson. The teacher will tell students they have eight different ways of talking about what they learned, one corresponding to each type of the eight multiple intelligences. We provided these different choices so students can develop a sense of autonomy: *"The single most important strategy for building a sense of autonomy in students is to provide them with choices"* (Raffini, 1996: 17). Even though the teacher will provide eight different types of self-assessment, students will have to pick only one of them.

A SAMPLE LESSON

1. OBJECTIVES:

1.1. Content Objectives:

- Students will be able describe the steps in setting and working towards goal achievement.
- Students will be able to develop a feeling of competence by enabling themselves to experience effort-outcome dependence in the grading process.

1.2. Language Objectives:

- Students will be able to generate and organize ideas using a variety of planning strategies (e.g., mapping, outlining, drafting).

2. STRATEGIES:

2.1. Cooperative strategies:

2.1.1. Debate: A topic for debate is presented to the class. The teacher may facilitate and direct the discussion. Students may take notes. Then, teams are formed, usually with two Agree and two Disagree students per team. In teams, students debate the issue. As an extension, students may write an essay on the topic. For broader issues, students can simulate a court case with a judge, attorneys, jury, defendant, and plaintiff.

2.1.2. Response Mode Chips: The teacher invites students to talk about a topic. Each student may participate in any order. As they talk, students use Response Mode Chips which contain responses such as *Summarizing, Giving an Idea, and Praising an Idea.*

2.1.3. Roving Reporter: While students are working on projects, one student from each team may, for a certain amount of time, be a *Roving Reporter,* wandering the room gathering information which might be useful. This role is sometimes called *Scout or Spy.*

2.1.4. Carousel Feedback: The teams' products are displayed in tables. Each team has a predetermined time to visit another team's product. The teacher will use music. They can be in this other group as long as the music is playing. When the music stops, they need to move to the next group. They will move clockwise. During the specified time, the teams discuss their reactions to the other team's project. Person #1 in each group records feedback in a feedback form. When the teacher calls time, the teams rotate, observe, discuss, and give feedback on the next project. A new recorder is selected in each round. The teams continue until each team rotates back to its own project or until the teacher calls time. The teams review the feedback they have received from the other teams.

2.2. Modeling: The teacher will model how to do the activities.

2.3. Independent practice: The teacher will provide students with time to work independently towards completing the requested task.

3. ACTIVITIES:

3.1. Introductory Set: Review of previous lesson (repeat generalizations and have students support them with facts). Review Questions: 2 minutes. Ask questions using Bloom's Taxonomy. Student Self-assessment of previous lesson. Examples: 1) Knowledge: Can you name one of the steps you have to consider while setting up your own *short-term goal*? 2) Comprehension: Can you provide a definition for *personal goal*? 3) Application: Can you think of a situation where you could benefit from setting your own personal goal? 4) Analysis: Why do you need to set clear and specific steps in order to achieve your goals? 5) Synthesis: Can you create a song/poem/chart/ etc. about how to set up and accomplish a goal? 6) Evaluation: How effective do you think goals are? Are you a person who believes in the value of goals?

3.1.1. Introductory Activity: *Writing Success Contract.*

3.1.2. Cooperative Strategies: Debate.

3.1.3. Procedure: The teacher will use transparencies titled *Writing Success Contract* to model how to create this particular type of contract.

3.2. Student Practice.

3.2.1. Activity: *Writing Success Contract.*

3.2.2. Cooperative Strategies: Response Mode Chips, Roving Reporter, and Carousel Feedback.

3.2.3. Description: First, the teacher will distribute the pages titled: *Writing Success Contract.* (S)he will give students some time to think about what they would like to write in each section. Then, the students will share their ideas with the rest of the partners in their group using the cooperative strategy Response Mode Chips. Before starting the activity, the teacher should make copies of the Response Mode Chips. We recommend laminating those chips so they can be reused at a different time. The teacher should provide each student with at least 2 of each type of Response Mode Chips. Next, students will be given some time to work independently filling out their own Writing Success Contract. While working independently, one student per group will be allowed to roam the room observing what the rest of the students in the class are writing. In order to do that, they will use the cooperative strategy Roving Reporter. The teacher can make it more interesting and fun by providing students with an object they will be carrying around while roaming the room. For example: a hat, a pair of sunglasses, a tie, a wig, etc. We recommend the same object is used with all the teams so to avoid a *conflict of interest.* Finally, when everybody has finished writing their Writing Success Contract, all the students will observe their partners' contracts using the cooperative strategy Carousel Feedback (see Appendix 1).

4. CLOSURE OF THE LESSON:

4.1. Repeat overall big picture of what students were supposed to learn: With a *Writing Success Contract*, you will establish all the steps you are going to be taking in order to get the grade you really want to see in your report cards.

4.2. State generalizations and ask students to support them with facts from the lesson: Who

can tell me why you are responsible for your own success? What is a goal?

4.3. Add a closing story or interesting fact. Closing Story: Inspirational Quote: *"Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments."* (Albert Einstein).

4.4. Game: Minefield (active/cooperative).

Split the group into 3 subgroups. One group will be the mines. They will be stationary in the playing area. A second group will be the rowers trying to get across the playing field. The trick is they will have their eyes closed. The third group will be the assistants. They will be located on the other side of the playing field and will direct the rowers safely across. If a rower bumps into a mine, they blow up. The groups should rotate so everyone gets to enact all three roles.

4.5. Inform students of the topic of the next lesson: *"In the next writing lesson, you will be..."*

5. ASSESSMENT:

5.1. Bloom's Taxonomy:

5.1.1. Knowledge:

True or False:

- In a *Success Contract*, you are held responsible for your own grade. T / F. (answer: T).
- A *Success Contract* is something that you do *mainly* because you want to please your teachers and parents. T/F. (answer: F) Note: A short discussion could follow this question. For example: The main person you really have to be faithful to is yourself. When you take responsibility for your own actions, you gain self-confidence, which makes it easier for you to become a successful person.

5.1.2. Comprehension:

1. Why do you think your success in life depends mainly on your own actions?
2. What type of goal do you think a *Success Contract* is? (Answer: Most likely, if done during a quarter, a short-term goal.)

5.1.3. Application: Can you think of any other situation where you will use a *Success Contract*?

5.1.4. Analysis: How could using a *Writing Success Contract* help you improve your writing skills?

5.1.5. Synthesis: Can you develop a new format for a *Success Contract* that could be used in writing? What about creating a *Success Contract* that could be used in any subject area?

5.1.6. Evaluation: a) If you were the principal of the school, would you encourage all the teachers to train their students into the creation of *Success Contracts*? b) Student self-assessment using Multiple Intelligences Theory. During this lesson students are given the first portion (4 intelligences per lesson. Today's lesson: 1. Word Smart, 2. Number Smart, 3. Art Smart, 4. Music Smart). (See appendix 2.)

5.2. Formal:

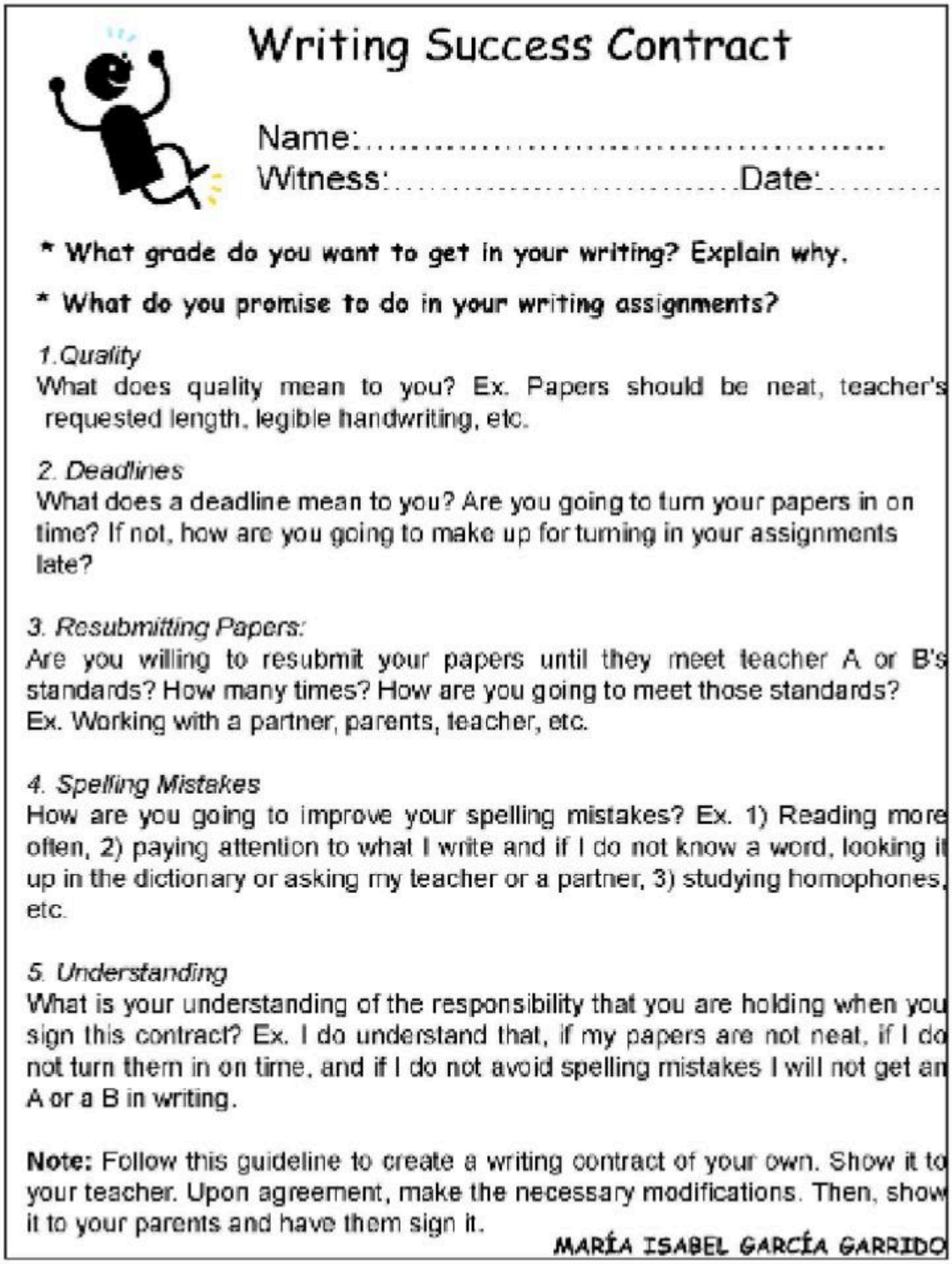
5.2.1. Observation: The teacher will evaluate the way students work cooperatively using the rubric (teacher and students, as a whole class, should design a rubric to be applied to this project).

5.2.2. Student self-assessment: Students will turn in their self-assessment on the following day. The teacher will invite the students to compare and contrast their self-assessment with a partner.

FINAL REMARKS

This lesson helped students not only to improve their writing, but also to foster higher-level thinking, which led them to understand the importance of making good decisions and setting clear and attainable goals. The students enjoyed the debate and requested to have more debates in the classroom. Therefore, as a whole group, we decided to have a *court room* the following day. Students were invited to gather their thoughts about the writing contract and get ready to participate in another debate about the importance of being held responsible for their own grades. The debate took over three hours. Students were eager to expose their ideas and provide plenty of reasons to justify the need for taking responsibility for their grades. During the following writing lessons, students followed the writing contract. Since they knew exactly what they wanted to accomplish, and how to attain it, they

concentrated their efforts and worked cooperatively with their partners in an attempt to benefit from each other. They seemed to be highly motivated and proud of the improvements in their writing, which we personally believe was helping to build their self-esteem. In a nutshell, we believe this particular lesson provided a great opportunity for students to understand they have to take control of their own development, something which demands commitment, enthusiasm, discipline, responsibility, good judgment, effort, and self-confidence.



Writing Success Contract

Name:.....

Witness:.....Date:.....

*** What grade do you want to get in your writing? Explain why.**

*** What do you promise to do in your writing assignments?**

1. Quality
What does quality mean to you? Ex. Papers should be neat, teacher's requested length, legible handwriting, etc.

2. Deadlines
What does a deadline mean to you? Are you going to turn your papers in on time? If not, how are you going to make up for turning in your assignments late?

3. Resubmitting Papers:
Are you willing to resubmit your papers until they meet teacher A or B's standards? How many times? How are you going to meet those standards? Ex. Working with a partner, parents, teacher, etc.

4. Spelling Mistakes
How are you going to improve your spelling mistakes? Ex. 1) Reading more often, 2) paying attention to what I write and if I do not know a word, looking it up in the dictionary or asking my teacher or a partner, 3) studying homophones, etc.

5. Understanding
What is your understanding of the responsibility that you are holding when you sign this contract? Ex. I do understand that, if my papers are not neat, if I do not turn them in on time, and if I do not avoid spelling mistakes I will not get an A or a B in writing.

Note: Follow this guideline to create a writing contract of your own. Show it to your teacher. Upon agreement, make the necessary modifications. Then, show it to your parents and have them sign it.

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Appendix 1. Writing Success Contract. Designed by María Isabel García Garrido.

We all are smart (1)

1. Word smart 	**WRITING, READING, SPEAKING.** 1. Write a *ONE PAGE STORY* where you will use the information that you learned today in class. Read it to a partner. Discuss with him/her your points of view.	**WRITING, READING, SPEAKING.** 2. Create a *DICTIONARY* of the terms you learned today. Discuss with your partner what you thought about the material you learned.	**LISTENING AND SPEAKING.** 3. Create a *WORD SEARCH* with the most significant words of today's lesson. Invite your partners to find words hidden in a grid of letters.	**WRITING, READING, SPEAKING.** 4. Write a *SUMMARY* of everything that you learned in today's lesson.
2. Number smart 	**LOGICAL REASONING.** 1. Create a *SECRET CODE*. Use some of the words from the lesson, re-write them using your secret code, and invite your partners to figure them out.	**LOGICAL REASONING.** 2. Write about the *PROBLEMS* you had (understanding something or with a partner) during today's lesson. Explain how you solved them.	**LISTING.** 3. *CREATE A LIST* of questions you would like to ask: 1) the teacher; 2) a partner to test how much he/she understood today's lesson.	**VENN DIAGRAM.** 4. Create a *VENN DIAGRAM* where you will be comparing and contrasting what you learned today with what you learned in a previous lesson.
3. Art smart 	**ILLUSTRATE.** 1. Write about what we did in today's lesson. Create a *DRAWING* that illustrates your writing.	**CARTOON CREATION.** 2. Create a funny *CARTOON* where you will be talking about everything that you have learned in today's lesson.	**COLLAGE CREATION.** 3. Use magazines, old books, pictures from the internet, etc, to create a *COLLAGE* that summarizes everything you learned in today's lesson.	**DESIGN.** 4. *DESIGN a line of clothing* that you would like your partners to wear if we would ever do this lesson again. *DESIGN a building* where you would like this lesson to take place.
4. Music smart 	**SINGING.** 1. Write a *SONG* about what we did in today's lesson.	**WRITING POEMS.** 2. Write a *POEM* that is a summary of what you learned in today's lesson.	**TONGUE TWISTER.** 3. Create a *TONGUE TWISTER* to explain what we did in today's lesson.	**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.** 4. Think about several *MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS* that you would like to use when singing about what we learned in today's lesson.

Appendix 2. Student self-assessment. Chart created by María Isabel García Garrido.

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