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Fostering students' Engagement in non-graded online handout Completion with the use of The Self-Determination Theory

TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

Para optar al título de Profesor de Inglés y
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1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that within our Chilean educational context, learning English is considered as a skill that children have little intrinsic desire or motivation to develop, and that although most students appreciate it as a universal language that can broaden their professional opportunities, they are not motivated nor committed to learning it (Gómez & Pérez 2015). Due to the fact that education has been recently hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced the closure of schools worldwide and the adoption of distance learning while the contingency lasts, problems that arise from students' lack of motivation have become even more evident and pressing to solve, mainly because of the autonomy and engagement that online learning demands from students in order to be effective.

Motivation, specifically intrinsic motivation, has been well researched in the educational field as it plays a significant role in students' learning and academic achievement. Nonetheless, much of this research has been directed towards developing concrete actions or strategies linked to teachers' performance inside the classrooms, leaving aside the urgent necessity of online teachers to boost intrinsic motivation among their learners. Addressing this issue is of utmost importance not only due to our current social distancing, quarantine, and isolation situation, but also because the future of education is rapidly heading towards online teaching.

In regards with the aforementioned, I conducted an investigation project on online learners' motivation at the co-ed public school where I am currently doing my final teaching practicum, which of course has been carried out in an online modality. Since the Chilean Ministry of Education decreed the temporal shutdown of schools, the target school has been working with an asynchronous online teaching modality through a platform called "Google Classroom" that allows teacher-student interaction. The policy for these online classes consists of an upload of material every two weeks, where students are expected to download the material and send it back once completed, after that, teachers are required to provide personalized feedback.

Regarding my specific group of students, I am in charge of teaching a very cohesive 12th grade class composed of 28 students (20 boys and 8 girls). The students' ages range from 16 to 18 years old and according to the results of the diagnostic English test, carried out by the mentor teacher at

the beginning of the term, they all have more or less the same A2 proficiency level in the target language. In relation to diversity, there are no cultural differences, no observable LGBTQ+ students, and no students with special needs. Moreover, it is important to mention that according to an interview held with the mentor teacher, the writing skill is the one that results most challenging for them.

In an interview held with the mentor teacher at the beginning of the term (Annex N°1) it was revealed that the students respond only to rewards and punishments under normal face-to-face modality. A concrete example of this is that, for students to work and complete activities and assignments, the teacher has to be constantly reminding them that the activity is part of a grade or that not working could make the whole class stay a few more minutes once the class is over. Such is the mentor teacher's concern that he warned me of this situation in advance; "They don't complete non-graded assignments, not at all".

After observing my students' behavior in online classes, I could spot that one of problematic issues is the fact that they were responding only to handouts and/or assignments that were graded and did not engage in any other type of non-graded activity. According to the "Google classroom" platform analysis (Annex N°2), at the beginning of the online classes only a 32% of the class was completing the uploaded assignments. Therefore, the teacher had to start grading every handout. After that pedagogical decision, most students sent back their completed work. Moreover, a short survey (Annex N°3) was carried out in an attempt to understand students' motivation to solve the handouts. This survey revealed that 57% of the students complete their handouts driven only by their desire to avoid a failing grade.

It became apparent that the most pressing issue within this context was that the students rely too much on extrinsic motivators in order to complete activities and/or assignments. Alternatively, the desired situation was to have the students engage and participate in the asynchronous non-graded online activities/handouts driven by their desire of and commitment to learning. Hence, the aim of this investigation project is to design an action plan that responds to the following question: <u>How can I intrinsically motivate my student to participate in online non-graded assignments?</u>

In an attempt to answer the above question, an action plan was created based on the Self-Determination theory (STD), which has been widely applied into the educational field with very positive outcomes. Accordingly, such framework was used to develop concrete STD-based actions

that have been included into the creation of the English handouts that are currently being implemented in my group of students.

Moving towards the structure of this report, it has been organized in four main parts. After this introduction, literature related to the importance of intrinsic motivation, and more specifically, The Self-Determination theory, applied into the education field, will be introduced in order to understand the rationale of the action plan. Then, the action plan will be presented with concrete explanations and examples of its implementation. Finally, a reflection about my learning experience in this process of teaching and researching has been included.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 MOTIVATION

As it was already mentioned, motivation has been extensively researched in the educational field due to its well established positive correlation with students' learning success. Nonetheless, during all these years of research, it has been impossible to agree on a universal definition to this broad concept. One of the most popular definitions of motivation in the educational field was proposed by Dörnyei (2001) where motivation is explained as the driving force that encourages and supports the complex process of learning (p. 9). Nevertheless, this definition may sound rather vague, which is why for the effect of this project, we will understand motivation as proposed by Gardner (1985), who defines this concept as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language" (p. 10). In this regard, this definition is more complete due to the fact that it directs the concept towards the concrete process of learning an L2.

Motivation is also widely accepted to have two different sources. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), motivation can come from the inside or the outside of learners, namely, intrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation, and depending on the source, the effect on their learning process will be affected differently. For the effect of this project, much more importance will be placed on intrinsic motivation.

2.2 INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

The concept of intrinsic motivation was first introduced and used in the field of psychology. However, it was rapidly taken into the learning context and incorporated into pedagogical research, which has established a positive correlation between this concept and authentic engagement to learning. Intrinsic motivation, also known as internal motivation, comes from the inside of learners and it makes reference to students engaging in learning something specific due to the "pleasure and enjoyment" that can be experienced in the process of learning it (Deci and Ryan 2000, p. 69). In an attempt to provide a more detail definition for intrinsic motivation in learning, Wu (2003) posits that it is understood as the "enjoyment of learning a second language for its own sake without any external coercion or pressure" (p. 511). Following this definition, a concrete example

of intrinsic motivation to learn English would be the desire that a particular student has for personal development without placing importance on grades.

Alternatively, extrinsic motivation is the one that comes from the outside of learners and motivates them in the arduous learning process only "for the sake of rewards or the avoidance of punishments" (Wu, 2003, p. 511). This type of motivation can be illustrated by my context, where students only engage in the different activities driven by their fear of getting a failing grade, instead of engaging in the activities out of personal choice and desire to learn.

With respect to the above mentioned, the academic community has been wondering for many years whether there is a most advantageous type of motivation when dealing with L2 learning, and although they have not reached a consensus, according to Legault (2016) the answer is yes. In fact, she argues that extrinsic motivators, such as grades and points, have been proven to have a very negative effect over learners' autonomy which is what in time, sustains the process of learning (p. 2). Moreover, the importance of intrinsically motivating the students is supported by Deci & Ryan (2000), who assert on their article that intrinsically motivated learning is more valuable and helpful in achieving learning outcomes because of the autonomy that involves choosing to learn in a specific way, and doing so for pleasure or personal fulfillment.

Within my current teaching context, and in many other instances that I have experienced as a student and as a pre-service teacher, different extrinsic techniques, namely incentives and/or punishments, have been introduced into teaching in an attempt to boost students' intrinsic motivation to participate in the English lessons. Being this known to be detrimental for students' autonomy, and understanding that autonomy is key for learning success, especially when dealing with distance learning, it becomes urgent to find new alternatives and possible solutions for promoting student's intrinsic motivation in online courses.

2.3 THE SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000) is an approach that was developed under the psychological assumption that people are by nature determined towards the search of mental health and wellbeing, which is linked to feelings of satisfaction. The theory proposes that learning is driven by three innate psychological needs which are Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness, and that when these three psychological needs are satisfied in a learning experience, intrinsic motivation to face such experience is very likely to increase.

When taking this theory into the educational field, much importance has been attached to its effectiveness when promoting students' engagement to their own learning process, as a result of a considerable increase in students' intrinsic motivation. Among many of the studies that have shown positive results, Lyness, et al. (2013) conducted a research that consisted of providing feedback based on the SDT in order to boost students' engagement in learning activities. The results of such investigation confirmed that when the three psychological needs are satisfied in the learning context, "students will engage in activities that interest them with a full sense of volition", and without the need of external rewards or punishments to control their behavior.

2.3.1 AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE, & RELATEDNESS

Deci & Ryan (2000, p. 75) provide concrete definitions for the already mentioned psychological needs that are to be fulfilled in order to promote learners' motivation and engagement.

1)   Autonomy: the necessity to feel the owner of our actions. It is experienced with feelings of choice and being the cause of a specific doing.

2)   Competence: the necessity to cope well in a specific challenging situation or to produce a desired outcome. It is experienced with the feeling of being effective in what is being done.

3)   Relatedness: the necessity to feel connected to others. It is experienced with feelings of acceptance and being part of one particular community.

When applying these concepts into teaching, specifically when dealing with learners' motivation, Lyness, et al. (2013) argue that it is important that teachers take concrete actions with the aim of fulfilling these psychological needs in students. Among many of their proposed concrete actions, the ones to be included into this action plan are: for boosting autonomy, to provide the students with many choices when learning and to provide rationales about the learning gains of doing a specific activity when such choices cannot be given, and for boosting relatedness, to develop group or pair work activities that facilitate interactions among students. For developing competence, Dweck (1999) says that students will experience the sense of competence if teachers encourage personal growth and promote critical thinking in challenging activities in terms of the language. Hence, the concrete action will be dealing with different controversial topics for English activities.

3. ACTION PLAN

The designed action plan draws from the above literature review to solve the research question using the SDT as a framework for fostering students' participation — without the need of extrinsic control — in handout completion. This intervention consists in incorporating two concrete SDT-based actions per psychological need into the English handouts as proposed by Lyness et al. (2013). Moreover, following the rationale of Wu (2003), who studied students' competence and autonomy separately, each psychological need has been separated into different days (Table 1) in order to find out if any of them has a bigger influence over the students' participation than the others.

Table 1. Psychological Needs based Intervention

JULY 9TH RELATEDNESS	JULY 23RD AUTONOMY	AUGUST 6TH COMPETENCE
Creating activities for students to work in pairs and as a class.	Including activity options within the same handout.	Fostering growth and critical thinking through attitudinal objectives.
Including questions that elicit feelings of empathy.	Providing rationales when providing instructions.	Creating writing activities with an optimal level of challenge.

The intervention was organized around Unit 1 for 12th graders, called "Youth Rights & Responsibilities" which is in line with the Ministry of Education's curriculum. The learning objectives for reading and listening focus on the comprehension of general ideas and explicit information from simple texts and the learning objective for writing focuses on expressing opinion through different genres. Finally, the time frame consists of a 6-week period (in line with the time constraints of my practicum) in which 3 handouts will be uploaded onto the platform that students access for the classes. For providing more detail about this, a Gantt chart was created (Annex N°4).

3.1 HANDOUT N°1 "RELATEDNESS" (Annex N°5)

The main goal of this handout is to boost students' relatedness by developing the reading and writing skills through pair and group activities. The handout starts with a viewing warm up activity that prompts students' exchange of ideas via social media. After that, students are to use the information from a reading passage, plus knowledge derived from the pair discussion to answer the comprehension questions. Here, they are to engage in the blog post genre by posting their answers in an already existing Facebook/Instagram group of the school. By the end of the handout, students are to answer questions aimed at acknowledging and validating their feelings.

3.2 HANDOUT N°2 "AUTONOMY"

The main goal of this handout is to boost students' autonomy by developing the listening and writing skills. The handout starts with a rationale of the activities and their learning benefits. For the warm up activity, students have three different options of videos to work with. Each link is accompanied by a short review of the video so students get to choose topics according to their interests. After that, students are to work with a listening activity where they will answer three comprehension questions from a list of 6 options. Finally, students are to produce a text genre of their choice (from the ones that they know — letter, blog post, and short story) for expressing their ideas concerning the topic.

3.3 HANDOUT N°3 "COMPETENCE"

The main goal of this handout is to boost students' perceived competence by developing the writing skill. This handout deals with writing as it has been established to be the skill that is the most difficult for the students. After working in the warm up activity, students are to design a poster centered on the topic of "Youth's right to freedom" where they are to freely write their thoughts and ideas. Nonetheless, there are requirements for the writing activity according to their English level and what has been covered in the unit in order to make the activity challenging enough; for example: word count, vocabulary from the unit, and certain grammatical structures.

3.4 ASSESSMENT

Before implementing the intervention, students were exposed to an SDT Questionnaire (Annex N°6) in order to establish their current levels of psychological needs. The questionnaire contained three statements per psychological need where the participants were to mark the degree on a 1 to 4 scale. Nonetheless, as participation was voluntary, only three students completed the questionnaire, which prevented the gathering of representative data. At the end of the intervention, the same questionnaire will be applied to establish the effectiveness of the action plan in relation to participation, as it would not be possible to compare results. It is expected that a major percentage of students engage in this second instance. Also, as each handout deals with a different psychological need, the percentage of completion will be compared among them so as to determine if there is a bigger correlation between any of them and student's intrinsic motivation to participate.

4. REFLECTION & CONCLUSION

Exposure to L2 teaching theories is an integral part of most universities' TEFL course plans, especially ours. Nonetheless, along my experience as a pre-service teacher, I have realized that theory has no practical value if is not used to enlighten personal research about a particular teaching context.

During my previous practicums, I had been experiencing feelings of frustration especially because of the huge gap I had encountered between pedagogical theory and my own practice and experience in the classroom. Frustration used to arise when trying to apply such theory into my teaching practices, without achieving the same positive outcomes that researches usually state in their papers. In this regard, and after this experience of conducting an action research, I have become a strong advocate of the importance of doing research in the classroom in order modify and personalize our teaching strategies to foster students' learning.

It turns out that during this semester in which I have been developing this action plan, I have been much more effective —understanding effectiveness as linked to students' engagement to learning, hence, academic success — than in other teaching instances in which I have applied certain teaching strategies only because they were recommended in a book. Moreover, it is through classroom research that I could manage to find a possible solution to my students' most pressing learning issue and to adapt my teaching considering the constraints of our current context, which is marked by distance learning. As a result, I was able to develop teaching material with techniques aimed at fostering student's intrinsic motivation to engage in their own learning experience in an attempt to help them in the often arduous and frustrating process of learning an L2. Although due to the time constraints of this final semester the effectiveness of my doings could not be measured and included in this report, I am confident that the implementation is very likely to have a positive impact on my students' intrinsic motivation, hence, authentic learning engagement.

It is also important to mention the immense value I have found in doing research as it has helped me to be conscious about my teaching philosophy and beliefs, and to understand that teaching and learning go hand in hand, as my prior experiences as a student have shaped my teaching identity.

Above all, and due to my learning experiences, I consider motivation to be key in L2 learning success, not only because it maintains the learning behavior over time, but also because students with high levels of motivation, specifically intrinsic motivation, do their best in learning even when the process becomes difficult and frustrating, which is very often. Such belief has led me to always modify my teaching practices and lessons around one question: is this fun and motivating enough for my students to engage in the class? Which is, in a nutshell, what I attempted to expand on and answer in this action plan.

As a final conclusion, this unorthodox online teaching practicum and action research experience have convinced me that being a teacher is a constant process of learning by trial and error and that my professional growth and capacity to be effective are completely up to my commitment to classroom research. Being conscious of this will lead me to structure my teaching around my students' needs and to develop methods, based on L2 theories, to boost all students' motivation and learning equally.

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6. ANNEXES

- Annex N°1: Mentor Teacher's Interview (Extract)

7. Overall, do students usually complete non-graded assignments? Do their homework?

ANSWER: They don't complete non-graded assignments, not at all. They usually want to gain something with the activities given, so, that's why it is important to do activities that motivates the learning process with points.

PART 3: ONLINE CLASSES

1. What's the percentage of students who have easy access to the online classes?

ANSWER: 100% of the students.

2. How many students are actively participating in the online sessions, submission of worksheets, completion of activities, etc? are they always the same? are they the same students that usually participate in the "normal" English classes?
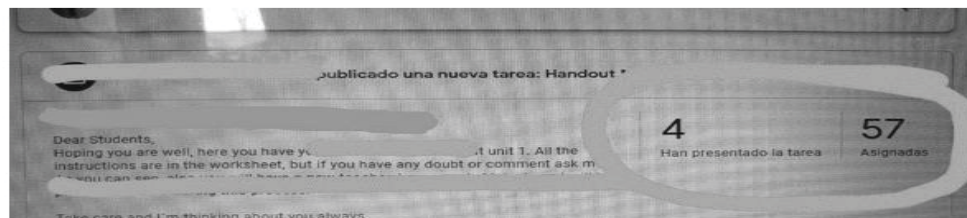
ANSWER: Mostly the whole class, as long as the activity is graded

3. What is your appreciation about your students' attitudes towards online classes?

ANSWER: Was difficult at the beginning but nowadays they participate and do the activities with no problems. They are also getting good grades

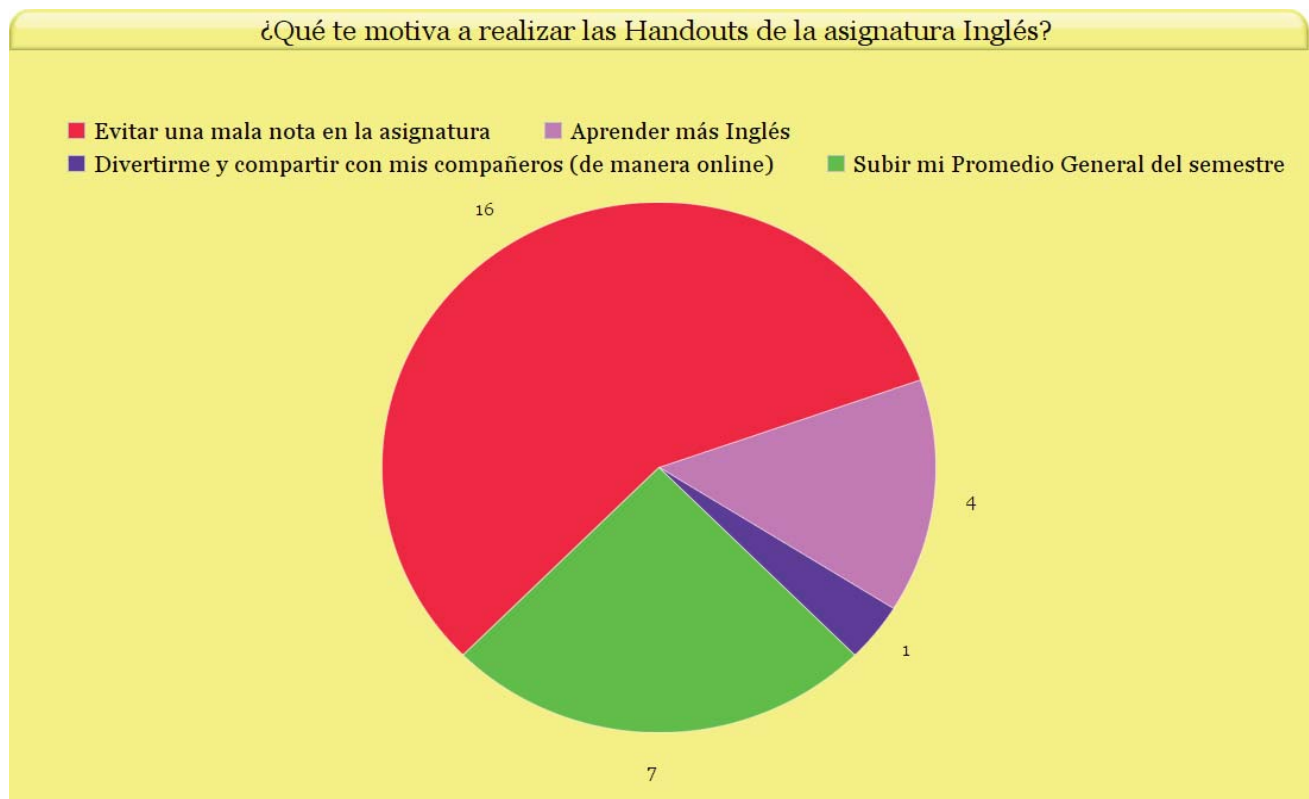## - Annex N°2: "Google classroom" Platform Analysis

First uploaded assignment (here both 12th classes were mixed which is why there are 57 assigned handouts). Only 4 students answered the handout and only 1 was from the target class. This worksheet was not graded.
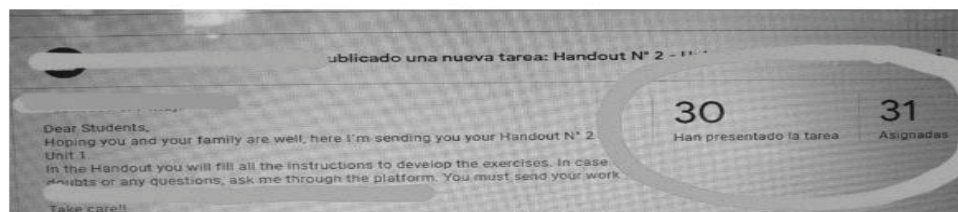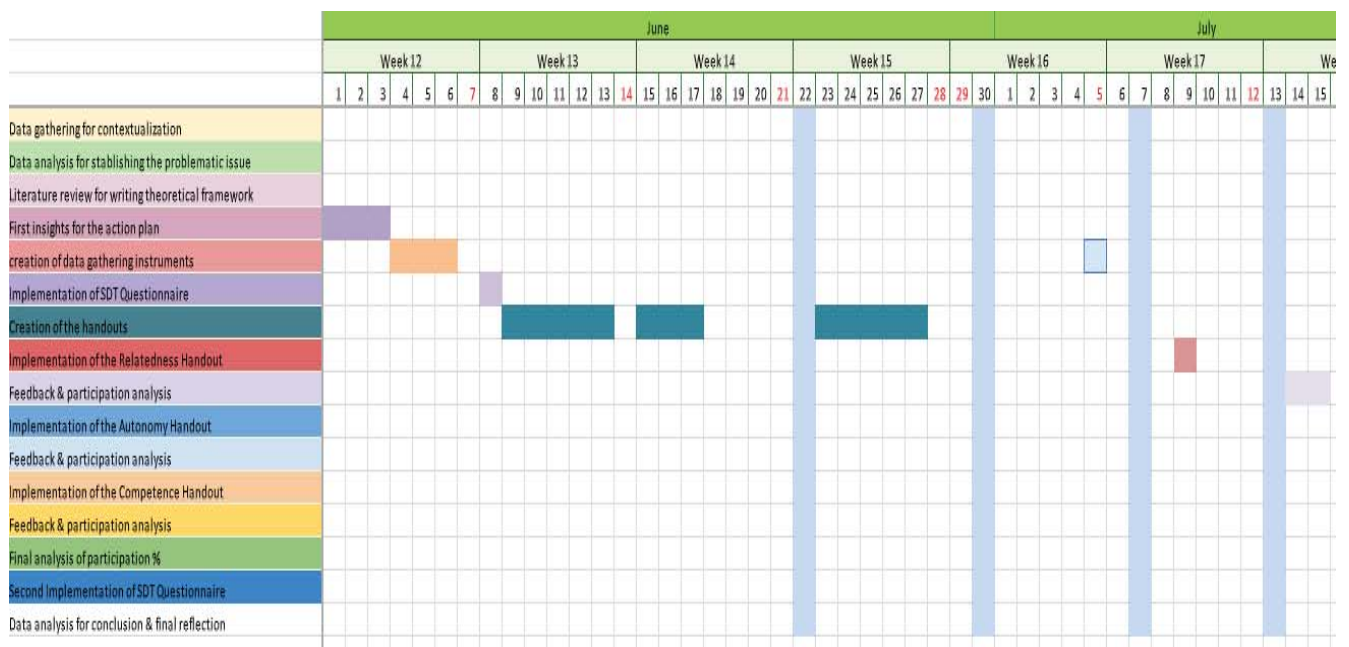

Second uploaded assignment. This handout was aimed only at the targeted 12th grade class. This worksheet was graded.

- Annex N° 3: Survey on Students' Motivation to solve the Handouts

¿Qué te motiva a realizar las Handouts de la asignatura Inglés?

■ Evitar una mala nota en la asignatura   ■ Aprender más Inglés
■ Divertirme y compartir con mis compañeros (de manera online)   ■ Subir mi Promedio General del semestre

- Annex N°4: Gant Chart

- Annex N°5: Handout on "Relatedness" (Material example)

UNIT 1 YOUTH RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: Responsibilities towards Nature

Names: _____Class:_____

MAIN GOAL: To develop reading and writing skills	
SKILLS	**INDICATORS**
READING	A. **To read a short extract about "environmental responsibility" and identify key information** Leer un extracto acerca de la "responsabilidad ambiental" e identificar información clave
WRITING	B. **To use information from the reading, plus general knowledge to answer the questions** Usar la información del extracto, más conocimiento general para responder las preguntas.

Responsibility to preserve the Nature

DISCLAIMER! In this handout you will work IN PAIRS! Choose to work with a classmate that you have in your WhatsApp, Facebook, or Instagram contacts.

MY PARTNER'S NAME: _____

LET'S BEGIN!
Warm up activity

A.   **Watch very carefully this YouTube video called "MAN"**
Mira atentamente este video de YouTube llamado "MAN"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfGMYdalClU

B.   **What is the video about? Discuss and answer this with your partner (write only 1 answer that contains what you think and what your partner thinks).**De qué trata el video? Conversa y responde esta pregunta en conjunto con tu compañero. Escribe solo 1 respuesta que incluya lo que tú piensas y lo que tu compañero piensa.

_____
_____
_____
_____

C. **Share with your partner your <u>thoughts and ideas</u> about the video. Write in the chart 3 of your partner's ideas.**
Thoughts and ideas are what first comes to your mind when watching the video
Comparte con tu compañero tus pensamientos e ideas acerca del video. Escribe en la tabla 3 3 ideas de tu compañero.
Pensamientos e ideas son lo primero que viene a tu mente mientras miras en video

MY PARTNER'S IDEAS
1)
2)
3)

READING ACTIVITY

A. **Read this short text about "Environmental Responsibility" and answer the questions. Make sure you understand the underlined words because there are key for understanding the reading. DO NOT USE THE TRANSLATOR! If you have doubts about words ask your classmates in the "Juanita Fernandez 12thB Class" Facebook group.**
Lee este pequeño texto acerca de la responsabilidad ambiental y responde las preguntas. Asegúrate de entender las palabras subrayadas porque son clave para que puedas entender la lectura. NO USES EL TRADUCTOR! Si tienes dudas acerca de ciertas palabras pregúntale a tus compañeros en el grupo de Facebook "Juanita Fernández 12thB Class!⌨

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The environment around us is not only our home but everything that keeps us alive. From the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, our shelter and more, it helps us to survive. Therefore, <u>caring for the environment</u> and being <u>ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE</u> is something that should be inherent in us, in other words, we have the responsibility to <u>preserve the nature</u> if we want to keep living in this wonderful world.

<u>Environmental responsibility</u> is a term used for companies that are <u>ECO-FRIENDLY</u>, meaning that the fabrication of their products is not harmful with the nature. Today, that concept is being used not only for companies, but also for people that wish to live in a better world by being responsible with the environment.

When I first watched the video called "MAN", I thought; "Of course I don't own a big company to be able to stop its pollution or contamination" so, what can I do to be ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE?...

The United Nations (UN) explains in an article that the youth have the responsibility to be <u>eco-friendly citizens</u> that are <u>aware about the environment</u>. To respect the nature and consume less are the best ways. Not throwing waste on the ground, turning off the light when you leave a room, and using public transportation instead of driving are some of the suggestions that the united nations recommends that we do on a daily basis to help preserve our planet.

A. **Ask your classmate to define these two concepts. Write what you understood from his/hers definition.**

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	ECO-FRIENDLY CITIZENS

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B. Why do you think it is important that we are "environmentally responsible"?

- Answer this question as a comment to the "MAN" video posted in the "Juanita Fernandez 12thB Class" Facebook group.
- Give a "like" to the comment that you think is most similar to your ideas.

C. Write a message (using Messenger, WhatsApp, or Instagram) to your partner with 5 suggestions he/she can do on a daily basis to help preserve our planet. Take a screenshot of the message and paste it here.

FINAL QUESTIONS: LET'S SHARE!

a. Did you enjoy working with a partner? Yes or no, and WHY?
b. How are you feeling during this quarantine?
c. What do you like to do during these "no-school" days?

- Annex N°6: Self-Determination Theory Questionnaire

SELF DETERMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE
Taken and adapted from 'Psychological Need Satisfaction in Exercise Scale' (PNSE)
van Wilson, Rogers, Rodgers, & Wild (2006).

"Este cuestionario fue diseñado para entender tus motivaciones para aprender Inglés y tus sentimientos o emociones relacionados al aprendizaje online". Tu participación no es obligatoria y tus respuestas serán utilizadas de manera anónima en una investigación con fines pedagógicos.

Please read the items very carefully! You can choose from 1 to 4 to indicate the degree to which the statement is true for you:

Autonomy Satisfaction	
1. I felt like what was taught really interested me.	1 2 3 4
2. I felt like the english handouts reflected how I wanted them to be.	1 2 3 4
3. I did the handouts because they were interesting and I wanted to.	1 2 3 4
Relatedness Satisfaction	
4. I felt close and connected to my classmates.	1 2 3 4
5. I experienced a good bond with my classmates.	1 2 3 4
6. I felt that I belonged to the class.	1 2 3 4
Competence Satisfaction	
7. I felt that putting effort, I could solve the handouts well.	1 2 3 4
8. I felt competent to achieve the proposed goals.	1 2 3 4
9. I felt I could successfully complete the exercises and tasks.	1 2 3 4