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STUDENTS' PROJECTS AS HOME ASSIGNMENT

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One of the most challenging aspects in foreign language teaching/learning is home assignment. A lot of research is devoted mostly to various classroom activities not the extra classroom ones, home assignment in particular. So any task or activity that encourages contemporary students to continue working on their English outside the classroom is to be welcomed.

Language learners must become more involved in managing their own learning. It goes without saying that learning is more effective when learners are active in their learning process, assuming responsibility for their learning and participating in decisions which affect it [1]. There are different ways for students to actively take part and share his/her knowledge with his/her group mates in class. Moreover, students have to be ready/well- prepared with their home assignment and lecturers have to enhance students' interest in it.

We gained valuable teaching experience, working with students of different age and level groups in using home assignment as teaching tools/aids that help students enjoy leaning English at the Linguistic Faculty of the National Technical University of Ukraine "KPI".

If we mean current teaching, we should bear in mind that fundamental to the success of any home assignment is the motivation of students. In order to be as motivating as possible with home assignment lecturers have to clearly state their aims and objectives.

Here are some suggestions that you could try out with your students:

1. Keep the home assignment's content as close as possible to the textbook/program/course /class content.
2. Explicitly explain the tasks of the home assignment.
3. Give just enough home assignment.
4. Give students the choice.
5. Stimulate students to set their own learning schedules and goals.
6. Make the correction learning-centered.
 6. Be democratic with home assignment.
8. Reinforcement by providing answer keys.
9. Balanced approach to the time of giving home assignment.

Thus, we changed some of our attitudes to home assignment and it helped us a lot. When we introduce home assignment (task and correction) as part of the classroom routine, and as a systematic activity, students start to make it a habit. They are more comfortable about home assignment, and they do not seem pressured doing it. Students' interest in home assignment depends on the lecturer's credit to it and on the effort in planning, presenting and working with it. A well-designed home assignment helps students learn, revise, review, improve, test and assess their knowledge and also encourages students to be autonomous.

We would like to share some ideas that have helped us motivate students to do their home assignment. We are introducing *self-directed projects* for lecturers and students to pay extra attention to this peculiar kind of home assignment [2]. Individualizing learning through self-directed projects (as an example of rather challenging home assignment) is a motivation factor because it places extra responsibility on the shoulders of the students. The autonomy component can be present in studying activities to meet short term educational goals and can be

regarded as a complex cyclic process that directs one's own learning/teaching entirely and involves setting goals, thinking, planning, making decisions, reflecting and reviewing. In this case students are constantly taking control of their learning and doing many things outside the classroom. They also actively participate in learning from each other. What is more in self-directed project based learning students work:

- to solve challenging problems that are authentic and often interdisciplinary;
- to learn how to approach a problem;
- to decide what activities to pursue;
- to gather information from a variety of sources;
- to synthesize, analyze and derive knowledge from gathered information;
- to demonstrate and communicate their newly-acquired knowledge.

The course of self-directed projects as a kind of very challenging and meaningful home assignment is worth trying even if the lecturers feel uncomfortable relinquishing their traditional roles as language experts and providers of knowledge.

Although some authors insist on voluntary participation of students in such activities, we practice it not being voluntary, that is, every student in the group completes a self-directed project.

Being entrusted with more demanding and stimulating tasks and activities students are encouraged to choose a project for their home assignment that is interesting to them and thus they usually derive more profit. The idea of choosing a project by the student correlates with our suggestions (see suggestion 4). Since students learn to communicate better if they are presented with language learning stimulating activities we propose the ideas for projects related to future professional interest of the students.

Under the program our students draw up contracts with the lecturer to work independently on different language-enhancing activities outside of class in the form of self-directed projects to complete over the course of one semester. The type of

activity undertaken as well as the amount of time to be expended on the activity is specified in the contract that is kept by the lecturer until the end of the contract period. The guidelines we provide to the students have proved effective in helping them clarify what they want to do and what they can realistically complete within the time limits imposed. In fact, all of the projects prepared by our students involve several skills. Projects do not have to be done by individual students, some pairs or groups of students may complete them. The range of possible projects is quite broad, and many of the student-developed topics are unique.

The projects are intended to be completed by the students outside of class, but the lecturer's support is an important factor in the success of their self-directed learning. The role of a lecturer in promoting autonomous learning becomes that of a guide, organizer, facilitator and resource person.

A lecturer should be prepared to:

- help students at the preparation stage;
- create a partnership;
- identify goals, learning strategies and resources;
- set objectives;
- offer a variety of options for successful performance;
- provide examples of self-projects;
- give students assessment criteria;
- create an atmosphere of openness and trust to promote better performance.

Most students are unlikely to learn everything they need to succeed in a class that meets for only a limited number of hours weekly. Involving students in preparing self-directed projects as home assignment we provide more opportunities for using and interacting in English and help them gain confidence and become independent language learners. In such a way students are engaged in the process of continued learning that even develops better brains. So we suggest brain-compatible teaching

via self-directed projects as a kind of home assignment. Projects have to become one of the main components in any program.

We hope that our general framework and some guidelines for working over projects as a kind of home assignment will act as a catalyst to trigger further ideas for lecturers to focus more on creating challenging and meaningful activities for students in the classroom and outside the classroom.

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USING SOCIAL NETWORK IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Social networks provide rich opportunities to use English in a targeted and purposeful way. All social networks that exist nowadays may be used as powerful means of authentic communication in foreign language teaching. On a par with an ordinary type of social network like Facebook and Bebo a private, closed social network may be created by English teachers for use as a class and represent a new way of teaching English in particular. Creating such a network can be very practical in language teaching and be used as a supplementary means of guiding students in language learning with focus on multiple opportunities for communication in English and closed cooperation and interaction between teachers and their students.