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Controversial issues as triggers to empower HOTS in EFL settings

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Introduction

This article looks forward to illustrating the contribution that debatable issues could have on the development of learners' HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) within regular language classes. Besides, it will serve as a roadmap for teachers who are willing to adapt this HOTS framework within their current pedagogical practices. By the same fashion, it will provide an account of the students' capacity to deal with real-life problematics when it comes to speak up their own thoughts.

Key concept

HOTS emerged in 1956 as a constituent of the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom's taxonomy). It comprises three skills which are evaluate, analyse and create. In this regard, King, Goodson and Rohani (1998) viewed critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive and creative thinking as representations of Higher Thinking.

Procedure

Needs analysis and preparation workshop

Within the framework of this English lesson, debatable issues constitute the pretext to foster HOTS along with communicative competence. Thus, the EFL scenarios become the setting where language teaching complies with the development of communicative goals along with the empowerment of essential life skills as analysing, evaluating and creating. In this regard, Collins (2014) asserts that "Teachers should not only teach the language and concepts but also tell students what they are doing and why higher-order thinking skills are necessary for them to problem-solve at school and in life" (np). Hence, a needs analysis survey is conducted regarding students' performance in foreign language (English). The main phases are outlined in the following:

1. Provide students with some questions to prompt self-analysis and assessment.
2. Encourage them to share some of their responses to the previous questions.
3. Get students acquainted of HOTS by exemplifying the main stages that will be approached within the teaching practice, as to guide them to deduce everyday activities correlated with them.
4. Students should create a graph similar to the one below and record what actions they are intended to embark on in the English lessons.

Questions for analysis
❖ What explanation do you have for your current speaking English performance?
❖ What is the problem with your speaking English performance?
❖ Why is it important to participate actively and efficiently in speaking activities?
❖ What would you suggest to enhance your speaking in English?
❖ What would you like to be able to do when speaking in English?

Table 1. Suggested questions for students to answer about their English speaking performance.

Lesson implementation

As soon as the self-assessment stage is complete, some other sessions are devoted to engage students in activities intended to the development of HOTS. In this case, the route selected to prompt HOTS, and subsequently high order speaking concerns socially and culturally sensitive issues. Speaking about controversial topics makes students practice their English skills in real-life situations. However, integrating these issues into the regular lesson plans does not immediately contribute to foster HOTS. Thinking skills generally demand long periods and practice to be cultivated and honed. In view of this, the activities displayed as follows are adjusted to the series of indicators or actions aligned which each skill (analysing, evaluating and creating), proposed by Bloom(1956) and his team, and afterward revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

1. Engage students in activities designed to incite analysis and thoughtful responses. Hereafter, some of them are presented and described.
2. After students have pursued activities associated with analysis,

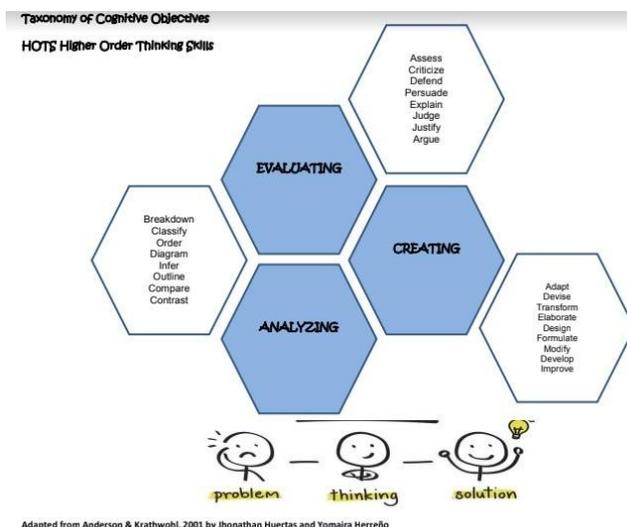


Figure 1. HOTS sample template adapted from Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001 by Herreño, Yomaira.

the next stage is aimed at extending the scope of their communicative and thinking skills. In other words, they are involved in activities related to evaluating. Some of them are displayed in the following table 3.

3. The final stage corresponds to creating. Thus, based on the knowledge they have acquired about the core topic (e.g. right to health), and the skills they have previously practiced, they are expected to work collaboratively and suggest alternatives, divergent opinions, and so forth. A number of proposals are presented in Table 4.

Variations

At this point, it is worth noting that the taxonomy of educational objectives comprises Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) along with HOTS. In this regard, Tikhonova and Kudinova (2015) claim that LOTS are the foundations for more elaborate cognitive processes. Therefore, undertaking a pedagogical venture as the one aforementioned described in this paper implies a prior proficiency in LOTS, it is a prerequisite for implementing the HOTS framework.

A further issue to be considered concerns the sort of topics taught in the lessons. It is worthwhile mentioning that any topics are amenable to be adapted within the HOTS framework. Hence, the HOTS framework may be implemented at all educational levels provided that it is correlated with the English proposed curriculum and learners' interests and needs. In this sense, teachers should become acquainted with the indicators and actions associated with each skill (analysing, evaluating and creating), that is to say, the taxonomy of educational objectives. Thus, the taxonomy should be perceived not as a straitjacket, but as a wealth of opportunities to design and conduct innovative and significant learning and teaching experiences.

Considerations

As teachers, implementing the HOTS framework involves an enormous responsibility and a deeper understanding of inner individual classroom interest as well as social contexts. In other words, some features to be considered include the type of population, beliefs, age and morals.

Another key aspect to take into consideration is the context since, it displays the surrounding reality and the nearby problematics to be discussed within classes as a manner to embed the foreign language learning and HOTS. In consequence, it may emerge an open attitude and respect towards different perspectives and world-interpretations.

Conclusions

The inclusion of current controversial issues as a strategy to foster HOTS within the English classes is a challenging, demanding task for language teachers, who should get acquainted with the dynamics inherent to the taxonomy of cognitive objectives in order to embed it into their lessons. Often, controversial topics may refer to local or regional issues that can be used in the classroom. Thus, an issue does not have to be universal to be controversial. In contrast, local controversial issues might be appropriate for discussion in the classroom and more immediately relevant to students' lives.

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TOPIC	ACTIVITIES
RIGHT TO HEALTH	First stage. Analyzing. 1. Debating an issue. Students read some statements regarding health care and provide their stance. 2. Contrasting. Students read some health facts and contrast them with the reality. Afterwards, they are expected to participate and share their point of view. 3. Explaining. Students are given a set of terms related to health care and services. They should work in groups and devise a strategy or activity to explain them to their classmates

Table 2. Sample activities designed to incite evaluation

Questions for analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ What explanation do you have for your current speaking English performance? ❖ What is the problem with your speaking English performance? ❖ Why is it important to participate actively and efficiently in speaking activities? ❖ What would you suggest to enhance your speaking in English? ❖ What would you like to be able to do when speaking in English?

Table 3. Sample activities designed to foster evaluation.

TOPIC	ACTIVITIES
RIGHT TO HEALTH	Third stage. Creating. 1. Working collaboratively. In groups, students make an oral report of a real case of violation of the right to health. They should analyze and establish the facts, provide the legal procedure to be followed, and give account of the legal grounds (norms, laws, regulations)

Table 4: Suggested activities to promote creation

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