

APPI | MultiWay

Award

Global Understanding – strategies for the classroom

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No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe;
every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*...

John Donne

The power within languages is unlimited. To some extent, languages are like keys. They help you to unlock doors towards new opportunities to learn and communicate, thereby feeding your curiosity and will to know more about the world, which, in itself, is an additional chance to evolve and to improve one's attitude towards life.

Languages offer you the possibility to go further. English has become the key that so many people so willingly have been looking for to open doors to a freer life, and to a more creative and happier future. In this sense, English is comparable to a passport either to a different life elsewhere or to a broader understanding of a world beyond one's geographical boundaries. Like keys and passports, languages are tools that enable people to shape their own destiny.

As a global language, English is indispensable to understand and be understood, to know and be known, to give and take. In a world where distances have been drastically shortened by means of the Internet, being able to realise how relevant English can be in one's life at the present time or in the future means having a further motivation to learn it, i.e. a motivation that goes beyond the effort to learn the lexis and grammar to express oneself meaningfully in a classroom.

Having a purpose to learn English can be the key to do it keenly and successfully. Quite different is learning it because the only reason to do it is the fact that it is a compulsory subject just like any other school subject. This might turn out to be insufficient to really stimulate and engage students in a long-lasting learning process. Thus, helping our learners to find their own purpose to learn English will surely enhance their motivation, and it will make the difference in their final results.

Critical thinking plays an important role in this context. Through it, students can be led to think about the importance of English nowadays, pointing out reasons that might explain why so many different people all over the world want to learn or improve it, i.e. reasons that may range from travelling, working abroad, taking a degree, doing business, to emailing friends. Being able to identify oneself with any appropriate

motivation is a good starting point to help students find a purpose to learn and improve their knowledge of English.

Using L1 role models with whom students might identify with can be an interesting strategy to be explored in search of a purpose to maintain students' levels of motivation high enough to keep them focused on doing their best. Thus, students can be invited to do project work in order to find out the stories of well-known Portuguese people, for whom English has made a difference in their lives and careers. This approach aims to show students that there are Portuguese citizens who can be a good source of inspiration for them. In fact, their example has shown that, although they are very good at what they do, English has been an important ally, without which their lives and even the world might have been different. Here are some examples of areas and names that might be included on a list to be presented to the students: Sport (Cristiano Ronaldo, José Mourinho, Carlos Queiroz); Fashion (Sara Sampaio); Cinema (Joaquim de Almeida, Diogo Morgado, Daniela Ruah); Art (Vhils); Journalism (Márcia Rodrigues); Cookery (Henrique Sá Pessoa); Music (Mariza); Politics (António Guterres, Durão Barroso); Science (António Damásio); Business (António Horta Osório).

Project work allows students to do research work, for which the Internet is definitely an excellent source of information. Project work offers students the opportunity to work together, thereby stimulating communication and respect for those who are different, helping to define strategies to solve problems and to overcome conflicts, and contributing to a greater cohesion in the relationship among peers. Being able to work as part of a group requires skills that will turn out to be essential in the long run when students become professionals. Through project work, students will learn a lot from each other, and together it will be easier to go further.

Oral presentations are memorable moments of giving and taking. Sharing information in a formal way engages students in doing their best. In the case of L1 role models, presenting true facts about the life of well-known Portuguese citizens can stimulate one's interest and curiosity towards a relevant topic used to help students set themselves personal goals. While listening to their mates, students are given the chance to perceive what it is like to be able to follow a presentation and to understand the message in a foreign language. For those who are giving their oral presentation, the perception of their mates' attention and interest works as an important feedback that will feed their sense of achievement and therefore their self-confidence as speakers of a foreign language.

Debating ideas and opinions is a classroom strategy that involves a lot of interaction, discipline and respect. It can take place after oral presentations, so as to lead students to discuss important issues related to the work that has been developed. Debating ideas in depth brings more awareness and maturity, helping to consolidate points of view. In the case presented here, students can be asked to discuss questions like:

- How important has English been in the life of these famous Portuguese people?
- If they didn't know anything about English, how different might their careers have been?
- How can these people's lives be an inspiration to you?
- Do you have friends or relatives for whom English has been like a passport to something important?
- As Portuguese students, do you believe that English can make a difference in your life? How?
- As Portuguese citizens, do you also feel like citizens of the world? Why?

Helping students to find a purpose to learn English aims to raise their awareness of the fact that English is more than a subject they study at a local school, i.e. it is a global language with such power that can contribute to important changes in people's lives.

Global understanding is a concept that requires creativity to be dealt with by teachers in their classrooms. The way teachers approach it determines how students will be able to realise that the local and the global, the personal and the collective are the two sides of the same coin. Being able to grasp the global dimension of a language like English means having a good motivation to join a vast community of millions of people who communicate, discuss issues, and find solutions, united by the same language around the same planet.

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