Using Self-Visualization and Goal-Setting Activities to Increase Willingness to Communicate

Eliza Lizdas
Berry College

Abstract
One obstacle many English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers face is getting all students to participate and speak in English in the classroom. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is therefore a relevant topic, as it is the probability of initiating communication, given both the choice and opportunity to do so. Some of the many factors that play into WTC are how students view themselves as learners of English, the kind of learners they hope to be, and what goals they set for themselves. This teaching techniques piece describes a five-week intervention utilizing goal-setting and self-visualization activities in an adult ESL class to increase students' WTC and provides suggestions for adoption in other contexts.

Keywords
Willingness to communicate (WTC), self-visualization, goal-setting, confidence, motivation, ESL

Introduction
Willingness to communicate (WTC) is the probability of initiating communication, given the choice and opportunity to do so (MacIntyre, 2007). WTC is a complex construct to study, as it involves factors such as motivation, classroom setting, and students' self-perception as learners of English. Students with higher levels of motivation are more likely to communicate in their second language (L2). Teachers can also greatly impact students' motivation (Fen Ng & Kiat Ng, 2015). Teachers can, for example, increase motivation in the classroom by creating a positive learning environment, implementing student goal-setting, and promoting positive self-evaluation (Fen Ng & Kiat Ng, 2015). All of this, in turn, can improve learner attitude and confidence. The way students view themselves as learners of English and the kind of learner they hope to become, meaning their vision of their future self (e.g., as an effective and capable user of English) also affect WTC. Students who establish a strong self-image as competent users of English are more likely to communicate in the target language inside and outside the classroom (Lee & Lee, 2020). Enhancing learners' vision of their ideal L2 self increases students' confidence and motivation to learn (Magid & Chan, 2012). Goal-setting and self-visualization activities have led to significant increases in WTC and motivation when implemented in an ESL class (Al-Murtadha, 2018).

The goal of this teaching technique was to increase ESL students' WTC by implementing a five-week intervention program including self-visualization and goal-setting activities. This technique combined aspects of previous studies (e.g., Al-Murtadha, 2018; Magid & Chan, 2012) that looked at the impact of self-visualization and goal-setting activities on WTC to evaluate their effectiveness in the success of ESL students. These activities included guided visualization, scripted imagery, and creating specific goals and action plans.

Elizad Lizdas, Undergraduate Student, Berry College, Mount Berry, GA; email
ellie.lizdas@vikings.berry.edu.

Description of the Intervention

Prior to starting the intervention, students completed a demographic form to collect preliminary information. One class session was video recorded, and the teacher completed an observation scheme to evaluate students' participation during whole group discussions and activities. The criteria for the observation scheme (adapted from Cao, 2014) are listed below.

1. The student responds to a question asked by the teacher about vocabulary.
2. The student responds to a question asked by the teacher about language form/grammar.
3. The student volunteers to participate in a class activity.
4. The student volunteers an answer without being prompted/asked by the teacher.
5. The student reads a question/text off the board.

For five weeks, the intervention activities were implemented once a week for 20-30 minutes during regular class time. All students participated in the intervention.

Based on the observation scheme, four students were selected to participate in semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the teacher-- two students with low class participation, and two with high class participation. Levels of participation were defined by the number of times they participated in whole group discussions, as measured by the observation scheme. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to gather more information on students' desire to participate in class and what obstacles they faced regarding participation. Students were asked questions about their desire to participate in class, in situations in which it was easy for them to participate in group discussions, and what obstacles they faced in participating. Students reported that they wanted to participate in class more often, but that they were uncomfortable speaking in front of a group because they were nervous that they would make a mistake or that others would not be able to understand them.

Week One

In week one of the intervention, students completed a general visualization activity (based on Sun, 2019, see below). Students were instructed to close their eyes and then the instructor read the numbered steps aloud.

1. Close your eyes and begin slowing your breath to a calming, relaxing rhythm.
2. Visualize a place where you feel content and calm. This might be somewhere you've visited or an imagined scene of somewhere you'd like to go.
3. Use your five senses to add as much detail to your image. What do you hear? Can you smell relaxing fragrances, such as trees, blooming flowers, or something cooking? Are you warm or cool? Can you feel the air on your skin? Is the sky bright, dark, stormy, full of stars?
4. Imagine yourself moving forward, feeling calmer and more peaceful as you enter your vision more deeply.
5. Continue breathing slowly as you look around the scene you've created, fully experiencing it with all of your senses.
6. With each inhale, imagine peace and harmony entering your body. Visualize exhaustion, tension, and distress leaving your body as you exhale.

After the guided visualization activity, students listened to success stories of other English learners. One of the classroom volunteers who recently moved to the United States and learned English shared her story, including her successes and challenges learning English. In the last and main activity, students created a list of their strengths and weaknesses as English learners.

Week Two

In week two, students described and pictured themselves as future L2 learners, speakers, workers, etc. through guided and scripted imagery (see below). Students first closed their eyes and listened to a scripted imagery activity about the perfect job interview (from Magid & Chan, 2012).

> Close your eyes and imagine that today is the day of a very important job interview in a large, famous, international company that you have been dreaming of working in for a long time. This job could be in any part of the world where you would like to live. You have prepared very well for the interview and as you get dressed, you are feeling really confident that you will do well. As you look at yourself in the mirror, you are happy with how professional and mature you look. You arrive at the company a few minutes before the interview and are feeling very calm as you wait to be called into the boss's office. When you step into his or her office, you can see that the boss is impressed by your business-like appearance, your friendly, confident smile and your firm handshake. He or she asks you to sit down and starts to ask you questions. Although some of the questions are quite difficult, you are able to use your excellent English to answer all of them extremely well. You can see that the boss is pleased and very satisfied with all of your answers. The boss is also impressed by your fluency, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation in English. You show him or her that you have so much knowledge, so many skills and are highly qualified for this job of your dreams. As the interview ends, there is no doubt in your mind that you will get this job. Stay with this feeling of complete confidence as you open your eyes and come back to this room.

After listening and reflecting on the scripted imagery, students spent time reflecting on a positive and successful experience they had using English in the past. Students wrote down notes about their experience and then described it to a peer.

Week Three

In week three, students discussed broadly their goals as future learners/speakers of English. For example, they were prompted with questions such as:

> "Do you want to be more confident speaking English?"
> "Do you want to engage in more conversation in English?"
> "Do you want to speak more fluently in English?"

Students then made a list of any obstacles they might face in reaching these goals and shared these lists with each other, then with the teacher.

Week Four

In week four, students reflected on how they could reach their broad goals from the previous week by setting SMART goals (Doran, 1981), which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and

time-based. Students were taught a brief lesson on SMART goals, were given some examples (see below), and then they each wrote down three goals - one for the semester, for the next year, and for the next five years.

> *SMART Goal Examples*
> This semester: I will watch a TV show in English for one hour a week for the next two months.
> Next year: I will finish reading 3 books in English within the next year.
> Next five years: I will be able to speak English fluently and be confident communicating with others in English.

The purpose of writing three SMART goals was to create specific, concrete goals that students would be more likely to achieve, especially because they would be completed outside of the classroom.

Week Five
In week five, students revisited the SMART goals they created the previous week. They discussed their progress since the previous week and how realistic their goals were. They also discussed whether they enjoyed the intervention activities, their effectiveness on students' WTC, and whether students planned to do similar goal-setting activities in the future. The discussion took place in pairs, then as a whole class.

Outcomes
At the outset of the intervention, students exhibited hesitancy towards engaging in the activities, reflecting a common apprehension among English language learners regarding speaking and participation. Many expressed concerns about making mistakes and felt uneasy speaking in front of their peers. During the initial stages, students found it challenging to identify their strengths, likely due to their unfamiliarity with such introspective exercises.

However, as the intervention progressed, a noticeable shift occurred in the classroom dynamics. Over subsequent weeks, their receptiveness to the activities grew, along with an increasing willingness to participate in the class. Students began to vocalize their appreciation for the exercises, acknowledging their newfound ability to reflect on their language learning journey. In post-intervention semi-structured interviews, this sentiment was echoed, with students attributing their enhanced confidence and reduced anxiety toward speaking English to the intervention activities.

Conclusion
This teaching technique was done in an adult ESL class, but it can be adapted for any age or skill level by modifying the language and the topic of the activities. The activities in the intervention were targeted for students with an intermediate-advanced proficiency level as they are conducted completely in English, which required students to reflect on their English language learning journey in their L2. Activities could be modified for more novice L2 learners by conducting parts in the students' L1. This teaching technique requires little preparation, and although this intervention was implemented over five weeks for twenty minutes each week, it can be shortened or lengthened based on the students' specific needs. These activities could be implemented, for example, for a few minutes at the beginning of class as a warm-up.

The teaching technique was adopted in an adult ESL class with the goal of increasing student WTC and participation. The idea was that by completing activities to help students reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and create goals, they would understand the need for speaking in the target language, gain confidence in the target language, and therefore speak more frequently in class. Students responded positively to these activities, as described in the section above, and there is potential for these activities to increase the confidence and WTC of English language learners across contexts.

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