Classroom vs. Extramural English: Teachers Dealing with Demotivation

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Abstract
The present article explores challenges facing EFL classrooms in Sweden due to new informal out-of-school language learning settings created by the current media landscape. A recent Swedish national evaluation identifies that a problematic situation in secondary school EFL classrooms has emerged. EFL teachers find it difficult to bridge the gap (cf. Olsson 2011) between the English used in school and the English used outside of school, extramural English (Sundqvist 2009). As a consequence, the pupils (aged 13–16) become discouraged and demotivated. Based on experiences from language teaching methodology in-service training programs and a small-scale survey, the article discusses the problem with demotivation, the empowerment of EFL teachers, and the development of teaching practices in order to meet the new challenges. The article argues that the challenges that Swedish EFL teachers currently meet can be viewed as an early indication that similar challenges are likely to emerge also in EFL classrooms elsewhere.

An Awakening Call About English as a Foreign Language

The present article explores challenges facing English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in Sweden due to informal out-of-school learning settings created by the current media landscape. In particular, focus is on EFL teachers’ perceived ability to bridge the gap between the English used in school (school English) and the English used outside of school (extramural English, Sundqvist 2009) in activities such as watching TV or films, chatting, blogging, playing digital games, listening to music, etc. Young people generally engage in extramural English (EE) activities on a voluntary basis, and because they have a genuine interest in something (a specific TV show/singer/digital game, etc.); that is, they do not generally get involved for the purpose of language learning (Sundqvist 2009: 25, see also Olsson 2011). Thus, some main characteristics of EE are when learners are exposed to it (spare time), where (most often in informal contexts), and what register of English it represents (generally informal and/or specialized language).

A recent national evaluation in Sweden identifies a difficult situation in 6th–9th grade EFL classrooms (pupils aged 13–16) (The Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011). Despite what seems to be a golden opportunity for English language learning and teaching, the teachers show few signs of making positive use of their learners’ EE (cf. Olsson 2011). As a consequence, the pupils become discouraged and demotivated. Apparently, they experience what Henry (2013) refers to as an authenticity gap; that is, in comparison to the English the learners meet in school, the English they meet outside is considered authentic. Taking as the point of departure our experiences from in-service training programs for teachers and a small-scale survey, we discuss motivation, demotivation, empowerment of EFL teachers, and the development of teaching practices in order to meet these new challenges.

Clearly, the current media landscape is heavily influenced by English. For instance, disregarding national productions, the great majority of TV programs broadcast in the
Nordic countries are subtitled (not dubbed) and from Anglophone countries (Asp 2011). Also on the Internet, English is the dominant transnational language (Crystal 2006). It is worth pointing out that not only pupils in secondary school are affected, but also primary school (Kuppens 2010; Sylvén and Sundqvist 2012) learners are involved in and exposed to a great deal of EE. This being the case, the situation in Swedish EFL classrooms is most likely an early indication that similar situations may also occur in other comparable countries. Indeed, the problem with demotivated English language learners elsewhere has been highlighted by other researchers. Taylor (2013) relates a similar picture from Romania, and Ushioda (2013a, 2013b) portrays a global trend, reflecting what she describes as motivational dissonances between school and extramural English.

In what follows, we first provide a theoretical background of the role of motivation, demotivation, and the teacher in language learning. After that, we turn our attention to EFL, more specifically to the potential for teaching/learning English today. We then briefly describe a large-scale national governmental investment in in-service training in Sweden: Boost for Teachers. With that as a backdrop, we present the results of a survey among former Boost participants – all language teachers. They took part in a particular course targeting, among other things, the development of skills related to the ability to bridge between English inside and outside school. The article closes with a discussion about ‘bridging the gap’.

**Language Learning Motivation and Demotivation**

Motivation research in the broad field of second language (L2) acquisition has, until recently, been dominated by the work of Gardner. According to him, language learning can be viewed as a unique experience that requires learners to interact with a formal system of knowledge as well as with the cultural practices of language-speakers (Gardner 2001). As pointed out by Henry (2012), over time, Gardner’s studies led to the conclusion that language attitudes were a product of the learner’s identification with the culture and speakers of the target language (TL) community and that the strength of a learner’s identification with the community would be the decisive factor in attitude formation, which, via motivation, would be the strongest determinant of TL learning outcomes. Based on these results, Gardner (1979: 194) developed the concept of integrativeness, defined as the learner’s ‘willingness or ability to identify with other cultural communities’.

Gardner’s theory of integrativeness derives from a parallel drawn with the first language (L1) theory of social identification, as explained by Dörnyei (2009). However, around the time of the new millennium, some researchers (e.g., Dörnyei and Csizér 2002; Lamb 2004; Warden and Lin 2000) began questioning whether it is meaningful to talk in terms of integrative motives when the TL cannot be proximately associated with a specific community of speakers, which thus would be the case with a global language such as English. Responding to this challenge, Dörnyei (2005; Dörnyei 2009) developed a model of L2 motivation with Markus and Nurius’ (1986) theory of possible selves at its core (for an overview of how this was done, see Henry 2012). In Dörnyei’s model, there are three dimensions referred to as an Ideal L2 Self, an Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei 2005). The Ideal L2 Self represents the L2-specific component of the individual’s overall ‘ideal self’. Thus, in a situation where the type of person a learner would like to become speaks an L2, the learner’s Ideal L2 Self would function as a powerful motivator, for instance, by a desire to reduce the discrepancy between actual and ideal selves. In other words, the affective domain accounted for by integrativeness is encompassed by the concept of the Ideal L2 Self. Further, Ryan (2009) has demonstrated that the construct of the Ideal L2 Self has strong and consistent correlations with the emotional identification at the core of
integrativeness. Next, the Ought-to L2 Self is connected with the attributes a learner believes he/she should possess in order to meet social expectations and avoid potentially negative outcomes, for instance, a wish to do well on language tests. Last, the L2 Learning Experience concerns situated ‘executive motives related to the immediate learning environment’ (Dörnyei 2005: 106).

The EFL classroom is one example of an immediate learning environment and a focal point of this article. As mentioned, an imminent problem has been identified related to student demotivation in Sweden as well as elsewhere (cf. Ushioda 2013b). The situation with demotivation is new to EFL teachers and places ‘a premium on the teacher’s skills, understanding and readiness to respond to the challenge’ (Ushioda 2013b: 236).

Demotivation is defined by Dörnyei (2001: 143) as ‘specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action’. In two studies on demotivation (Christophel and Gorham 1995; Gorham and Christophel 1992), the researchers conclude that two-thirds of the reported sources of demotivation were due to the teacher (‘teacher-owned’). Phrased differently, the learners attributed their lack of motivation to teacher actions and responsibilities. Similar findings have been reported in Zhang (2007). Further, Sampson (2012) makes practical use of Dörnyei’s model of L2 selves and provides empirical support for the key function of the teacher in motivating learners with the help of, for example, self-enhancement activities in the classroom. It needs to be mentioned that all four studies above were carried out among college students, that is, learners older than those targeted in the Swedish report. Despite the age difference, we consider the findings highly relevant to our topic. Finally, Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, and Robison (2009) describe how talented young students have become frustrated with school, mainly because of insufficient inspiration (cf. demotivation), and how these youths dropped out or graduated early, seeking more challenging activities in out-of-school contexts, such as in online fan communities and digital games. In the next section, the importance of the teacher as a motivational factor for language learning is further elaborated.

The Teacher as a Motivational Factor in Language Classrooms

Educational research has shown that perceived teacher empowerment is associated with a high degree of professionalism and feelings of autonomy (Pearson and Moomaw 2005) and, further, that the teacher and his/her teaching is a crucial variable in terms of affecting learner achievement (Hattie 2009). Perceived teacher empowerment can also be linked to successful language teaching, even though it would be wrong to assume a direct link between empowered language teachers and increased student language learning. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) make clear that the teacher’s interest in, as well as approach and attitude to the language he/she is teaching, are among the most important factors having an effect on student motivation and, as a consequence, achievement. Another crucial factor is the teacher’s own language competence. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) studied more than 200 teachers of English, who rated their own attitudes and approach to the subject as the most decisive factor impacting students’ motivation. Likewise, in a study of UK students learning German, it was found that the teacher was rated as the single most important motivational factor by all surveyed cohorts (Chambers 1999). In the same vein, Dörnyei (2007) argues that in order for language learning to be successful, it is essential that the classroom provides sufficient inspiration to motivate the learners and that the instructional practices are cognitively adequate.

Again with a focus on language learning, Chambers (1999) argues that teachers are at an immediate disadvantage if their pupils fail to see the relevance of a subject and its classroom
activities. In an attempt to address the current problems as regards the teaching of EFL, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008: 558) propose a pedagogical model – ‘Bridging Activities’ – which is designed ‘to enhance engagement and relevance through the incorporation of students’ digital-vernacular expertise, experience, and curiosity, coupled with instructor guidance’. In their model, they emphasize the fact that teens often perform linguistically structured identities outside school that involve digital mediation in the TL (here English) and that teachers therefore should target awareness of, for instance, Internet-specific genres in formal L2 instruction. A key component of the Bridging Activities approach is that the teaching builds on learners’ (rather than teachers’) selections of Internet or media literacy texts, since this is assumed to enhance learner agency (Thorne and Reinhardt 2008: 566) and, consequently, also their motivation.

In relation to the Swedish context, the national evaluation mentioned above (The Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011) concludes that the teaching of EFL is not up to standards. Despite the fact that Swedish youths have achieved good results in English in international high-stakes evaluations (see, e.g., The Swedish National Agency of Education 2004), the report points to some alarming problems regarding the current situation. For example, there are records of lessons where not a single word was uttered in English, neither by the teacher nor by the learners. Furthermore, inspectors observed that there were unacceptable differences between schools and that there was little variety in teaching practices as well as in adapting instruction to meet individual students’ needs and interests. The report confirms what has been shown in previous studies (Olin-Scheller and Wikström 2010; Olsson 2011; Sundqvist 2009; Sylvén and Sundqvist 2012), namely that many students learn much English extramurally. However, the students’ knowledge of English thanks to out-of-school activities is not fully acknowledged or utilized in the classroom. As a consequence, the students not only become demotivated, they also tend to split up English into two, school English and EE, thereby also expanding the authenticity gap.

Potential EFL Effects of the Current Media Landscape

With this background, it is obvious that EE constitutes a relevant resource for language learning since young people read, write, and communicate around digital texts in the media landscape (Lam 2000; Olin–Scheller and Wikström 2010; Thorne et al. 2009; Yi 2008). While doing so, they use their mother tongue in combination with English as a lingua franca (Olin–Scheller and Wikström 2010; Sundqvist 2009). Their pastime activities are therefore strongly connected with the possible development of language(s) in informal settings (Olsson 2011; Sundqvist 2009). In the new media landscape, young people act as prosumers (both producers and consumers) where collective learning processes and creativity are supported (Black 2008; Olin-Scheller and Wikström 2010). As an example, collaborative authoring of online fan texts offers fans/EFL learners the possibility of exchanging ideas and receiving feedback on their rhetorical and composition skills – a constructive way of co-constructing knowledge (Black 2008; Thorne et al. 2009) in line with sociocultural language learning theory: learning in the Vygotskyan zone of proximal development (Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Lantolf and Thorne 2008).

When it comes to learning languages and developing literacy, research has shown that L2 English language learners (ELLs) in the USA are developing skills as they use new semiotic forms and technological tools to communicate, share information, and negotiate meaning with others (Black 2008). For instance, within a fan community, a person can take on the role of an expert and achieve status among other online peers even though he/she may not yet master the conventions of writing in an L2 (Lam 2000). Similar expert roles may
emerge in online role-playing games such as *World of Warcraft* (Sundqvist 2009). Black (2008: 696) writes:

Using new technologies for collaborative inquiry and content-creation activities also provide options for ELLs to use language and other modes of representation for authentic communication with peers, teachers, and other experts that they may encounter in their research and explorations (e.g., community members, parents, online mentors), thus extending learning outside of the classroom walls. Such activities can provide a forum for the development of new literacies and 21st-century skills for youths who do not have ready access to computers or do not engage in such activities at home and can support ELL youths in developing identities as powerful learners, language users, and as active producers of their own social, cultural, and ideological materials.

We would like to stress yet again that youths who choose to engage in EE activities mainly do so because of a specific interest rather than a deliberate intent to learn English (Sundqvist 2009). They might like *World of Warcraft*, so they spend hours on a quest in order to obtain a sword. Or, they love Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson and, therefore, watch *The Twilight Saga* over and over again.

It is clear that out-of-school contexts and the media have great implications for learning/teaching and this has been highlighted in volumes such as Gee (2004) and Jenkins et al. (2009), both of which confront traditional schooling but also provide suggestions for information and communication technology (ICT) development. In the latter work, participatory culture is highlighted as a vital component of the challenges that schools face. Participatory culture is described as a culture with ‘relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement’ and also ‘strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others’ (Jenkins et al. 2009: 5). In addition, there is an informal mentorship; the most experienced pass along what they know to novices. Members taking part in a participatory culture believe their contributions matter. Another important aspect of participatory culture is that it shifts the focus of learning from an individual expression to community involvement. Social and critical analytic skills are developed through collaboration and networking – competences that are often left out of traditional schooling (Jenkins et al. 2009).

As for the EFL classroom, motivational factors found in out-of-school contexts encourage authentic learner–learner collaboration in a way that differs from the situation generally found in school. Our experiences from numerous meetings with practicing EFL teachers are that many of them express a wish to develop their teaching practices so that they (at least partly) mirror extramural activities. However, the teachers often claim that they lack the necessary skills and tools for doing so.

*Boost for Swedish EFL Teachers*

Sweden and many other countries share similar opportunities with regard to the teaching and learning of English. In the 2000s, research on language teaching emphasized the necessity of raising teacher competence with regard to both subject theory and teaching methodology in order to help improve learners’ goal attainment (cf. Thorne and Reinhardt 2008). One way of achieving this is to offer continuous professional development for teachers, and in 2007, the Swedish Government introduced one such initiative, a training program called Boost for Teachers. Over a period of three years (2007–09), 11,000 teachers from all levels took part in the program, organized as university/tertiary level studies. Participating teachers got to keep 80 per cent of their salary whilst studying either part-time (one school year) or
full-time (one semester). Some courses were tailored especially for the Boost program, but it was also possible to enroll in regular university courses.

The Boost program was evaluated at a central level and the participants were, overall, very positive (The State Council 2010). In particular, the teachers appreciated the fact that they were offered training focused on teaching methodology, something which had only rarely been the case in previously offered training. Partly, thanks to the positive outcomes of the first three-year period, the Swedish government decided to continue with a second Boost, which has been running since the end of the first. The specific goal is that, at the end, at least 30,000 teachers will have taken part in Boost for Teachers (The State Council 2010).

The Survey: EFL Teachers’ Responses to In-service Training Boost Course

We conducted a small survey among EFL teachers involved in a Boost course called Teaching Methodology: Motivation, Means, and Goals (years 2008–11). The course targeted secondary and upper secondary teachers of EFL and modern languages. As described above, all Boost courses were designed to deepen and extend teachers’ pedagogical subject content knowledge, with an indirect ultimate aim of improved goal-fulfillment on the part of the learners. In this particular case, four of the learning objectives stated in the syllabus are relevant, namely that the teachers, upon completion of the course, should be able to (1) involve learners in their language learning process, (2) bridge the gap between learning English (or other languages) outside of school and in school, (3) increase their use of ICT in language teaching, and (4) plan tasks that enhance their learners’ motivation for learning languages.

In 2011, an online questionnaire was emailed to former participants. Fourteen teachers responded (approximately 50%). Considering the fact that we had no way to verify whether the participants still used the email addresses we had access to, the response rate was considered satisfactory. All respondents had long teaching careers; seven had worked more than ten years and the remaining more than twenty. Most of them taught English and some also taught modern languages (French, German, or Spanish). We know that the vast majority had to be females, since only two male teachers had been enrolled over the years. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions and was a mix of closed and open-ended questions; except for four questions that yielded background information, the questions were aimed at probing the extent teaching practices had changed as a consequence of course participation. In what follows, we mainly focus on the changes relating to teacher empowerment and bridging the gap between school English and EE.

All fourteen teachers responded positively when asked whether they had changed their teaching practice as a consequence of the Boost program. Six (43%) claimed to having changed their teaching practice ‘to a large extent’, whereas eight (43%) responded ‘yes, to some extent’, indicating that their knowledge about and approach to teaching had changed markedly. One concrete example was given by a teacher who had begun planning together with colleagues and students. For part of the school year, this teacher and his/her colleagues adopt a thematic approach in which they co-ordinate three subjects/courses in upper secondary school: English, IT, and business economics. The students’ overall task, in all three courses, is to make an oral presentation in English of a fictive company with the help of ICT. In this joint task, the students are supposed to show that they have learned a number of concepts used in business economics. Furthermore, the students should demonstrate that they know how to search, retrieve, evaluate, categorize, and present relevant information about companies from a number of different sources, including the Internet. In the planning of the thematic project, the students and teachers also develop criteria for assessment in all
three courses. This project serves as an example of an empowered EFL teacher going beyond traditional teaching (mainly based on textbooks) by, among other things, deliberately incorporating ICT and EE resources in his/her teaching.

The participants’ further responses showed that, after Boost, they had the students’ experiences as a main point of departure. This teaching strategy is beneficial for motivation, as is pointed out by Ushioda (2013b), who argues that engaging students’ motivation is a key professional challenge and priority in teaching English. Several of the participants now discuss teaching in a concrete way with their students. All make more use of ICT than before, with the great majority using ICT ‘much more’ (11; 79%). Several claim that the Internet has become a continuous feature of their EFL classroom and that the web, a source of EE, is used for much more than just seeking and retrieving information. When asked whether they use other teaching materials than textbooks, half said they do so basically every lesson, six at least one lesson per week, and one at least once per month.

An illustrative example of teaching that had expanded beyond the walls of the classroom was given by a teacher who started using eTwinning (http://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm). Part of the Comenius Programme for lifelong learning, eTwinning is an online portal providing tools for teachers who would like to find partners for exchange/mobility projects and to maintain networks. This particular teacher connected with an Italian EFL teacher and their respective classes met in a joint project: ‘This is your country’. Thanks to eTwinning, an authentic learning setting bearing the trademarks of participatory culture (cf. Jenkins et al. 2009) was created in the two classrooms, where students met and communicated online (orally and in writing) with the help of multimodal tools, thereby most likely invoking students’ thoughts about the Ideal L2 Self. They shared films and pictures and eventually published an online newspaper about one another’s country.

Finally, some questions in the questionnaire dealt specifically with teacher empowerment. In this regard, all but one stated that their self-confidence had been strengthened after participating in the Boost program.

Bridging the Gap

This article has explored the challenges facing today’s EFL classroom with a focus on teachers’ perceived ability to bridge the gap between school English and extramural English, thereby hopefully lowering the number of demotivated students. Clearly, there are some limitations to the study. For instance, it is small-scale and does not empirically investigate the connection between perceived teacher empowerment and learner achievement. Nevertheless, the gap between school and extramural English exists, and it will not diminish over time by itself. However, our results indicate that it can be reduced with the help of trained EFL teachers.

Proactive measures seem to help. When teachers find constructive approaches to the present problematic EFL classroom situation, in Sweden and elsewhere (cf. Taylor 2013), they manage to teach in line with learners’ zones of proximal development (Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Lantolf and Thorne 2008), and by doing so, teachers are likely to help diminish the discrepancy between learners’ actual and ideal selves and invoke learners’ Ideal L2 Self, a powerful motivator for language learning. Then, they also meet the needs of students who have anything from very little to vast experience of communicating, interacting, and learning English through different media and digital devices outside of school. The teachers involved in the Boost program give several examples of empowerment as a result of participation. They report a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, seemingly originating from the fact that they have changed the way they interact with their students. Moreover, they
appear more comfortable in their roles as EFL teachers. This change is partly due to an increased knowledge of how to handle computers in general and the Internet in particular. However, knowledge of, for instance, attitudes, values, and habits that are directly, as well as indirectly, brought on by IT and the new media landscape can probably be regarded as even more important for EFL teachers than hard IT skills. Also, the participating teachers found that bringing the web into the EFL classroom leads to a shift of power: the EFL teacher is no longer the sole expert in the classroom. From a language learning perspective, this shift of power is beneficial (Thorne and Reinhardt 2008).

Trying to change teaching practices is often described as a slow tedious process. However, the present paper shows that a single training course can produce positive as well as enduring results: the EFL teachers seem more self-assured and report having changed their teaching practices, even though it has been up to three years since they finished their course. Some confirm that they feel ‘much more professional’ in meetings with both colleagues and students and their guardians, which we interpret as a sign of empowerment. They make informed decisions about what content to teach and methodological approach to employ.

One teacher states that without the training course, his/her teaching career would probably have been over: ‘It [the Boost program] has really given me the tools to cope with my responsibilities’. If nothing else, this teacher speaks clearly to the importance of allocating resources for in-service training. What has been an awakening call for Swedish government officials and EFL teachers might anticipate a global concern.

Short Biographies

Pia Sundqvist’s research is focused on second language acquisition and education. She has authored papers in these areas for ReCALL, Novitas-ROYAL, and Apples. Furthermore, she has contributed with book chapters in recent publications in the field of informal learning of languages in out-of-school contexts: Beyond the Language Classroom (edited by Benson and Reinders, Palgrave Macmillan 2011) and Digital Games in Language Learning and Teaching (edited by Reinders, Palgrave Macmillan 2012). Her current research involves empirical studies on informal learning of English in second/foreign language settings among primary and secondary school learners. In particular, she is examining the relationship between digital game play and second/foreign vocabulary acquisition. She also does research in the field of language testing and assessment, with a special focus on L2 English oral proficiency. Sundqvist has extensive experience from teaching English, Swedish, and Spanish in secondary and upper-secondary school. Currently, she works as a senior lecturer and researcher at Karlstad University, Sweden, from which she holds an MA in Language Education and a PhD in English. She has also been a graduate student in applied English linguistics at the University of Houston, Texas.

Christina Olin-Scheller is a researcher and teacher at Karlstad University. Her main interest is young people’s reading and writing in a new media landscape in general and she has a special interest in how this landscape challenges traditional ways of regarding literacy. Her thesis, Mellan Dante och Big Brother. En studie om gymnasielevens textvärld (2006), has been followed by other books and articles. Recently published articles in this field are, e.g., ‘‘If it ain't true, then it's just a book.” The reading and teaching of faction literature’ (Journal of Research in Reading, 35:2, 2012) and ‘Literary prosumers. Young people’s reading and writing in a new media landscape’ (Education Inquiry, 1:1, 2010). She has also contributed with book chapters which turn to researchers as well as to teacher educators and teachers, such as in Media Use and Youth. Learning, Knowledge, Exchange and Behaviour (edited by Dunkels, Frånberg and Hälgren, IGI Global, 2011) and Interdisciplinary Approaches to
Twilight. Studies in Fiction, Media, and a Contemporary Cultural Experience (edited by Larsson & Steiner, Nordic Academic Press, 2011). In her present research, Olin-Scheller has a focus on questions dealing with literary and language education at different levels. Currently, she works as an associate professor and lecturer at Educational Work, Karlstad University, Sweden, from which she holds a PhD in Literature.

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Works cited


