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Disaffection and agentic engagement: ‘redesigning’ activities to enable authentic self-expression

Abstract

Demotivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and non-participation (Norton, 2001) characterise negative responses to classroom practice of a generally chronic nature. In this article, focus is directed to negativity that emerges within the context of a particular language developing activity, and which can be understood as a situated response to the activity’s demands. In conceptualizing negative responses at the activity level, disaffection – the negative face of engagement – is a construct of central importance. Drawing on data from a large-scale ethnographic project in secondary English classrooms in Sweden, in this exploratory case study disaffection (Skinner, 2016) is examined in the context of two language developing activities. Analyses reveal that disaffection can transform into active engagement, and that when called upon to perform an inauthentic identity, students can ‘redesign’ activities in ways that enable them to act authentically.

I Introduction

Motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and investment (Norton, 2013) are complementary concepts that seek understanding of the extent of an individual’s commitment to language learning (Darvin, forthcoming). Emerging within different theoretical traditions, and with

diverging epistemological interests, both constructs provide insights into why in certain circumstances individuals might devote resources to activities facilitating language development, whereas in others they might not. In L2 motivation research, the loss of commitment to language learning is framed as *demotivation*. Demotivation derives from external forces that have the effect of diminishing or reducing the inner motivational underpinning for the initiation and carrying out of a learning activity. Thus a learner who in a particular situation or at a particular point in time has lost interest and commitment, and who could be categorized as ‘demotivated’, is also someone who in different circumstances could become motivated again (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Investment, on the other hand, is a primarily sociological construct. In Norton’s theory because the use of the target language (TL) involves the construction and negotiation of identities, the goals and practices of learning processes are framed as functions of relations of power (Darvin, forthcoming). This means that while an individual might be highly motivated to learn the TL, they may be reluctant to invest in the learning practices of a particular classroom if those practices negatively position them as inadequate, incapable or unworthy. In language classrooms failure to invest plays out in what Norton (2001) calls *non-participation*, a concept borrowed from Wenger (1998) and which involves resistance to a negative positioning. In the same way that active participation involves identity work, non-participation explains how the opting-out or active refusal to take part in classroom practices also involves productions of identity and definition of the self.

While demotivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and non-participation (Norton, 2001) provide important insights into reasons why, at a more general level, learners can respond negatively to instructed language learning, they are of less value in providing insights into negative responses that arise within the context of a particular activity. In recent years research has begun to pay closer attention to learners’ situated responses at the activity level,

and the concept of *language learner engagement* is attracting increasing interest (Mercer & Dörnyei, in preparation; Philp and Duchesne, 2016; Svalberg 2009, 2017). Research into engagement in language learning is however still at an early stage. So far, focus has been directed to the positive side of engagement, and understanding of factors and circumstances that promote beneficial interactions *with* language (Svalberg, 2009), and *in* language developing activities (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). However, like motivation and investment, engagement also has a ‘dark’ side. In mainstream educational psychology the construct space of engagement also encompasses the negative dimensions of *disengagement* and *disaffection* (Skinner, 2016). With the aim of contributing to understandings of engagement now developing in SLA, the purpose of this exploratory case study is to shed light on disaffection, and how in certain circumstances it can transform into positive behaviours.

II Literature Review

Engagement in SLA

As in educational psychology, in language learning the concept of engagement has various manifestations. For example, engagement has been used by Ellis (2010) in his conceptualization of learners’ responses to corrective feedback, and his model of engagement has been used in empirical work mapping students’ reactions to teacher corrections (e.g. Han & Hyland, 2015). Taking a broader compass, Svalberg (2009) has developed the ‘engagement with language’ model. In this model, where the learner is an agent and language is the object, the construct encompasses cognitive, affective and social elements. These variously involve the learner’s focused attention (cognition), positive, willing and autonomous disposition (affect), and the initiation of interaction with others (social interaction). Although the model closely resembles conceptualizations of the construct in educational psychology, Svalberg’s notion of engagement stems from Dörnyei’s work on L2 motivation and Norton’s concept of investment. As she explains, in contrast to these

established constructs, engagement differs in being a downstream consequence of the motivational intentions and desires of the individual:

Engagement is clearly related to, but also different from, a number of other notions in the research literature. Its affective-state quality, ‘positive orientation’, is related to motivation ..., while ‘behavioural readiness’, a social-state feature, is perhaps closer to aspects of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995). Both the motivation and investment constructs, however, deal more with the reasons why Engagement does or does not occur than with what Engagement is (Svalberg, 2009, p. 256)

In work now beginning to close the circle, Dörnyei has begun to explore engagement. As he explains, motivation is not automatically manifested in a learning activity, and conceptually is a step removed from engagement (Dörnyei, forthcoming). Drawing on conceptualizations developed in educational psychology (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004), Mercer and Dörnyei (forthcoming) map out the construct domain of engagement in second language learning, and explain the relationship of the construct to conceptualizations of motivation. Unlike motivation, engagement captures ongoing behaviour. Since motivation rarely flows completely unhindered into action, it is the behavioural outworkings of various motivational sources that are captured in the engagement construct.

This is a view shared by Philp and Duchesne (2016), who argue that the engagement construct is closely related to motivation and can be understood as “the visible manifestation or ‘descriptor’ of motivation” (p. 52). Recognising Svalberg’s pioneering work in identifying the complexity of engagement with *language*, but more closely following the work of scholars in educational psychology, where for example Skinner and Pitzer (2012) define engagement as “constructive, enthusiastic, willing, emotionally positive and cognitively focused participation with *learning activities* in school” (p. 22, emphasis added), Philp and

Duchesne (2016) frame engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing separately operating cognitive, social and emotional dimensions, and their interacting influences. Importantly, in addition to cataloguing the factors that across these three dimensions can promote and strengthen engagement, Philp and Duchesne (2016) also identify those that can deactivate and inhibit a learner's engagement. It is to these constraining factors that we now turn.

Disengagement and disaffection

Although full consensus is lacking, the general view in educational psychology is that the construct not only encompasses positive states of engagement, “but also *negative* states or *absence* of engagement” (Skinner, 2016 p. 148). Like major theories of motivation, where target behaviours (action initiation, effort exertion and persistence) and positive emotions (interest, enthusiasm, and enjoyment) each have behavioural and emotional opposites (e.g. passivity, apathy, helplessness and sadness), the conceptualization of engagement also recognizes a spectrum of positively and negatively distributed behaviors and emotions (Skinner, Kindermann, Connell & Wellborn, 2009). At the most negative end of this spectrum is *disengagement*, a state similar to amotivation in Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination. Like amotivation, disengagement implies a total absence of engagement, a total lack of effort, and a complete withdrawal from an ongoing activity (Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009). Marked by passivity and avoidance, it is characteristic of situations of learned helplessness (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993). Often, it is interconnected with emotions such as apathy and dejection. In other cases, although engagement may not be totally lacking, it can be severely hindered or undercut by factors such as coercion, exclusion and boredom (Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer, 2009). This is particularly true in school situations where opportunities for total non-commitment are limited, and where educational and disciplinary regimes demand minimal levels of

compliance. In such situations, as Skinner and her colleagues (2009, p. 496) explain, emotional and cognitive responses can take a less extreme form and involve disaffected behaviours, “namely, passivity, lack of initiation, lack of effort, and giving up”. While disengagement may be the true polar opposite of engagement, Skinner and her colleagues suggest that *disaffection* constitutes a more useful concept, in that it captures a broader range of emotional intensity mapping onto the absence of engagement. When in a learning activity students’ behaviors demonstrate disaffection, they tend to withdraw mentally. Participation becomes ritualistic, attention wanders and they can be perceived by teachers as simply going through the motions of learning. As Skinner and associates (2009) explain, disaffected states of being reflect enervated emotions such as fatigue and boredom, alienated emotions such as frustration and anger, and emotions connected with the experience of coerced participation, such as anxiety.

However, it needs to be noted that compared to the positive aspects of engagement, the negative aspects of disengagement and disaffection are more “widely dispersed over a much broader conceptual space” (Skinner, 2016, p. 148). As Skinner (2016) makes clear, “multiple markers of *disaffection* can be identified”, and that these are the outcome “of different pathways through which students can lose or fail to develop motivation and engagement” (p. 152). In this respect it is interesting to note that in the conceptualization of the sub-domain of emotional engagement, Skinner (2016, p. 151) identifies responses that include experiences of frustration and anger, while for cognitive engagement sub-domain she draws attention to states of mind that reflect opposition and avoidance. These facets of disaffection are interesting because, unlike responses that involve passivity (e.g. disinterest and sadness, apathy, helplessness, and resignation), they connote *productive* emotional work, and *active* stance-taking. In this respect recent work by Reeve and colleagues on agentic engagement

provides important insights into the different behaviors and motivational influences associated with active forms of disaffection.

Agentic Engagement

In papers exploring the relationship between agency and engagement, Reeve (2012) and Reeve and Tseng (2011) argue that the construct needs to recognize students' autonomy and reflexivity, and that emotional experiences and cognitive insights related to the learning process are self-generated. Reviewing a series of longitudinal studies on the effects of changes in student engagement, Reeve (2012) argues that because students are proactive in responding to their psychological needs, and because they actively influence the learning situation, they should be understood not only as the "architects of their own motivation", but also as the "architects of their own course-related behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic engagement" (p. 166).

Arguing that the conceptualization of engagement needs to be expanded in ways that include dimensions that map onto students' constructive contributions to learning situations, and which take account of the ways students actively influence instruction through their own endeavors, Reeve (2012) makes clear that students not only react to learning activities, but also proact upon them. Thus he proposes the construct of *agentic engagement*, which he defines as "students' intentional, proactive, and constructive contribution into the flow of the instruction they receive" (p. 161). As Reeve (2012) explains, agentic engagement involves a process whereby "students proactively try to create, enhance, and personalize the conditions and circumstances under which they learn" (p. 161). As a complement to behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement (Skinner et al., 2009), agentic engagement captures the *intentional* and the *transformational* aspects of students' interactions with learning activities.

While Reeve's work on agentic engagement is valuable in that it adds dynamic and relational perspectives to engagement, the expansion of the construct also has important implications for understandings of disaffection. As Reeve and Tseng (2011) explain, the empirical work underpinning the development of the concept of agentic engagement builds on measures focused on positively-valenced aspects of the engagement construct, and not on the type of negative aspects more generally associated with disaffection. It follows that the incorporation of an agentic element within the engagement construct will also affect the ways in which the construct's negative side is conceptualized. However, as Reeve and Tseng (2011, p. 266) explain, "it is not yet clear just what the opposite (disaffected face) of agentic engagement is". It is this opposite pole to agentic engagement, i.e. agentic disaffection, and the ways in which it can be manifested in agentic behaviours such as autonomy, resistance, subversion, transgression, personalization, transformation and alternative modes of self-expression, that this article attempts to explore.

III Study and Purpose

Language learning is driven by social interaction and involves investments of the self (van Lier, 2013). Constructed around topics intended to be personally meaningful to students (Svalberg, 2017), and promoting interactions with others as a means to "scaffold, mediate and motivate" language development (Duff, 2017, p. 379), in language developing activities students engage in identity-work in spaces where real and imaginary identities are reflected and projected. Compared to learning activities in for example science or mathematics that do not require investments of identity in similar ways, in language developing activities manifestations of disaffection can take different forms.

While engagement has significant potential to inform understandings of language learning (Mercer & Dörnyei, forthcoming; Philip & Duchesne, 2016; Svalberg, 2017), research is only beginning to take place. Although the construct domain of engagement in SLA has

substantial overlap with the construct space of engagement in relation to other subjects (Philp & Duchesne, 2016), there are also aspects that may be specific to language developing activities. Because of “the profound inseparability of identity to language learning processes” (Miller, 2015 p. 463), and the designing-in of spaces for autonomy, negotiation and identity-work, agentic dimensions of the engagement construct are likely to pattern differently in an activity involving language development. Likewise, agentic dimensions of *disaffection* are also likely to differ.

In communicative activities in language classrooms, the performance of identity can often be strategic, students acting in ways that conform to behaviours that teachers anticipate. When this happens, students become involved in what Roth and colleagues (1986) describe as ‘impression management’, where the self is presented in ways intended to invoke a desired response from others. In self-presentation, people move between ‘sincere’ and ‘cynical’ performances (Goffman, 1959). While sincere performances involve acting in a self-authentic manner, in cynical performances people “have a level of self-knowledge that they are putting on a front” (Vannini & Franzese, 2008, p. 1628). Because experiences of self-inauthenticity or ‘frustrated authenticity’ (Vannini & Burgess, 2009), can have a negative emotional load, impression management can become a demanding task. In this sense, the resisting of an undesired or coerced identity, and the assertion of an alternative identity closer to a person’s perception of ‘the real me’, can be understood as stemming from a desire to act authentically (Vannini, 2006).

In contributing to the mapping of the construct space of engagement in SLA, and taking note of observations by Fredricks and McColskey (2012) that research into student engagement would “benefit if researchers spent less time generating slight variations on this construct and spent more time on theory development” (p. 779), the purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine disaffection in language developing activities.

Specifically, it aims to consider whether, like the resistance to alienating practices described by Canagarajah (1999), where observed passivity in the classroom was paralleled by active engagement in an oppositional ‘underlife’ where students created subversive ‘glosses’ in their textbooks (p. 92), disaffection can have agentic and generative qualities.

IV Research Methodology

Engagement is best explored in context-specific research that includes observations of students working with activities in classrooms (Anderman & Patrick, 2012). Because “observational methods can be used to better understand variations in engagement across different contexts and how this variation may relate to affordances within the context” (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012, p. 779), an ethnographic approach provides an appropriate means for examining the evolution of engagement within a particular learning activity. In the current study the data comes from the Motivational Teaching in Swedish Secondary English (MoTiSSE) project, a multiple case study carried out in Sweden to investigate effective motivational practices in teaching English. In the project, research was conducted in the classrooms of 16 English teachers who were identified from a randomly-drawn sample (N=252) as being knowledgeable about students’ out-of-school activities involving English, possessing a professional practice informed by these insights, and having students who were generally motivated. In addition to teacher and student interviews, observations of 258 lessons were made. A description of the recruitment procedures, the main data set, and the ethical issues involved in the research is provided in Henry and Thorsen (2018), and in the online Supplementary Material.

In a multiple case study, individual cases are not generally organized around the research question informing the main project. To some extent, and sometimes entirely, “each case gets organized and studied separately around research questions of its own” (Stake, 2006, p. 9). This is particularly true in situations where typical or average cases may not yield the richest

insights, and where atypical, unusual or deviant cases can deliver more telling understandings of a phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In the MoTiSSE project, we observed innumerable situations where, working with activities that were personally meaningful and provided opportunities for creative self-expression, students demonstrated sustained engagement. Not infrequently, engagement was characterised by flow-like qualities (Shernoff et al., 2016), and in some cases had the characteristics of a directed motivational current (Dörnyei & Muir, in press). However, while the activities designed and used by these teachers generated positive responses among most students most of the time, we also observed situations where students exhibited negative responses. While in other studies we have focused on the types of positive response more broadly representative of the motivation of the students in the [name] project, in the current study it is because negative responses are unusual that they are of value. Taking note of Duff's (2014) observation that cases that "offer contradictory or disconfirming evidence or otherwise seem problematic can be valuable precisely because they reveal the complexity of the phenomenon being studied and the multiple possible interpretations that may exist or the inadequacy of existing theory" (p. 242), the current study focuses on two atypical cases.

These cases were chosen for two reasons. *First*, even in the most objectively motivational settings, for varying reasons certain students may choose to withdraw from an activity that engages their peers. While withdrawal can be both systematic and periodic, and can be a consequence of more general student-internal and environmental factors, it can also be specific to a particular activity (Skinner et al., 2009). In both selected cases, the engagement of the focal students differed from the other students participating in the activity in that they deliberately subverted its intentions. The *second* reason for choosing these cases was that these atypical behaviors occurred within activities that involved social interaction and the

articulation of identities, and which in this sense are generally typical of activities in language classrooms (Thorne, 2005).

The *first* case ('Study Abroad') involves an activity where 9th grade students were asked to imagine that they were applying for a study abroad program where, attending an institution in an English-speaking country, they would gain the opportunity to develop their language skills. Using the Internet, students carried out research into course-providers in different parts of the world. The activity required the production of a keynote slide(s), and a short oral presentation motivating their choice and persuading the institution of their suitability and motivation (Appendix One). The *second* case ('Visting India') occurred in a project where 7th grade students created a blog about an imaginary trip to an English-speaking country and, during lessons, worked together in writing posts about events taking place on different days of the journey (Appendix Two). In both activities, motivational affordances included scope for autonomy, the triggering of imagination, and the use of digital resources to create aesthetically appealing textual artefacts.

For the first case we draw on fieldnotes written by the second author during an observation of a lesson in which groups of students presented their proposals. For the second case, the data comprises fieldnotes written by the first author while observing students working with the blog project, together with extracts from a blog where students wrote posts about an imaginary trip to India.

The data was analyzed using Tracy and Robles (2013) framework of identities in discourse, and focus was directed to the students' identity-work. Identity-work has "two sides" (Tracy & Robles, 2013, p. 26). While one of these sides is other-directed (a person's talk positioning interlocutors in particular roles), the other is self-presentational. Self-presentational identity-work involves processes in interaction where things a person says or does function to construct a picture of who they are, and makes that picture available to other

participants (Tracy & Robles, 2013). Adopting a rhetorical perspective, students' discourse actions were viewed as strategic and reflective of individual agency. Particular focus was directed to interactional identities. Interactional identities are formulated on the fly and refer "to specific roles that people take on in a communicative context with regard to specific other people" (Tracy & Robles, 2013, p. 22). Interactional identities can be formulated at the level of social roles, i.e. as teacher and student. They can also be formulated in the context of a particular social activity, making visible the discourse actions that a person is doing. In examining the data, the question we asked was '*what is the interactional meaning of students' discourse actions, and what identity-work is taking place?*'.

V Analyses

Case 1 Study Abroad

The lesson from which data is extracted was taken up by students' oral presentations. The presentations were made in groups of four. Other than the teacher and the second author, no other person was present. Students were aware that the teacher was assessing communication and presentation skills, and were anxious to find out how they had been assessed. The following extract is from the fieldnotes (which were written in Swedish except the speech in italics, which was in English)ⁱ:

EXCERPT ONE

Next is a group of boys. They sit and speak English with each other before they start the presentations. Joking, they talk about where they would like to go. *I would like to go to Poland.* They all laugh. 'Kurva'ⁱⁱ says one of the boys.

The change [of groups] goes quickly and the first boy begins almost immediately. However he has technical problems with his presentation, but he gets it to work in the end. He talks about how he would like to go to Australia.

The next boy has closely cropped hair and a grey hoodie.

Hello I would like you to know that this keynote was produced in under 15 minutes, but instead of looking at this keynote as incomplete I would like you to look at this as minimalistic.

His opening words mean that both me and T laugh, while at the same time I am thinking that he has the potential to make a really good presentation even if he has only spent 15 minutes preparing it. His English is very good.

My plans for the future is to make something technical or electric. I have chosen Canada because I love the climate. I like very cold weather. However, it is cold only during the winter. I also like the people, they are very polite and you are treated as a human. I also like their freedom, both economically and in their government. The economic freedom means that they have lower taxes than both Sweden and USA. They are also striving for equal rights and they take many refugees. What I plan to do in Canada is sightseeing and of course study which is the main reason for the trip. I would like to get a feel for the country and also challenge myself mentally by practicing the English. I also plan to challenge myself physically by trying to climb mountains. A word of goodbye [inaudible].

He is finished already, and it is the next boy's turn.

Okay, who's next? T asks.

Meanwhile, as he goes and sits down, the boy who has just finished receives applause.

You should not say that you were not prepared, T says. *What you said was really good.*

The next boy talks about the USA.

I chose USA because I want to be a streamer and I want to practice the American accent and not a British accent. I would like to be a streamer so I can earn money without having a real job and do what I like.ⁱⁱⁱ

He then continues by talking about different streamers.

I'm going to skip high school and go straight to streaming, and my backup plan if I don't succeed, I can go to McDonald's and sell hamburgers or in any fast food restaurant. The reason for USA is that I would like to practice my English and there are a lot of fast food restaurants there.

His presentation naturally creates laughter in the group. However, I feel unable to join in their amusement, since for me it is a clear demonstration against the activity, and how the activity positions him. He is quite clearly a gamer, and chooses to respond as a gamer, and not as the activity intended, thus indirectly poking fun at the activity. His presentation is over fairly soon. T does not look amused, nor does she offer any comments, but asks for the next presentation.

The next boy begins his presentation.

I have chosen the country USA and the city San Diego. Why I chose San Diego is because they have a very good football team and famous amusement parks. I like San Diego since it is in California and California is above Mexico, because I want to visit Mexico City. I also like San Diego because LA and San Francisco is close. And also two of the best players in counterstrike is also there, "cloud9 n0thing". Cloud 9 is a team.

I have never heard of either of these players, so I am curious to hear more, but the boy continues with his presentation.

What to do there? He asks rhetorically.

I will probably sign up for cloud9, so I will probably skip the whole school thing and instead play CS and stream.

Again there seems to be an indirect protest against the activity's purpose, which is to give a good account of oneself as a study-oriented student and to persuade the school of his suitability. By now T is fairly irritated about these boys' protests, and how they have done something completely different to what was asked for. She points out to them that it is very difficult to be successful on Youtube, and that they would almost certainly need to have a back-up, that is to say to study.

At the beginning of the sequence the four boys are waiting for their turn to present, joking about where they would like to do the study abroad. Poland is a reference to a school exchange due to take place later in the year and which, given places such as the UK and Spain previously visited by other classes, is not universally popular. The first boy, who is nervous and less proficient than the others, carries out the assignment as intended, following the requirements of the activity by motivating his choice with references to personal interests and ambitions.

The next boy is much more accomplished in his use of English. He begins with an eloquent excuse for why his presentation will be short, asking the teacher to regard it as '*minimalistic*' rather than '*incomplete*'. Like the first boy, he makes clear that his choice is motivated by reasons stipulated in the activity, '*what I plan to do in Canada is sightseeing and of course study which is the main reason for the trip*'. Importantly, even if his assurance that he will '*challenge myself mentally by practicing the English*' is said tongue-in-cheek, and indicates the lack of a genuine need to enroll at a language institute, he plays along with the scenario. In excusing the quality of his preparation, carrying out the activity in accordance

with the stipulations, and ending by underscoring his good intentions, he remains within his interactional role as student.

For the third and the fourth boy the idea of enrolling in a language program also holds little appeal. However, unlike the second boy, they refuse to play along and instead redefine the sojourn as an opportunity to earn money from streaming (uploading videos of online gaming), and to develop language skills in naturalistic environments, such as fast food restaurants (*I'm going to skip high school and go straight to streaming, and my backup plan if I don't succeed, I can go to Mc Donald's and sell hamburgers or in any fast food restaurant / I will probably skip the whole school thing and instead play CS and stream*).

As Tracy and Robles (2013) explain, interactional identities refer to roles that, in a communicative context, people take on with regard to other specific people and are formulated “to make visible the particular discourse actions a person is doing” (p. 22). Unlike the first two boys (and the dozens of other students whose presentations were observed), these boys make use of the designed-in space for identity-work to challenge the assumptions of the activity. Rather than playing-along through a self-performance requiring a high degree of impression management (Roth et al., 1986), the boys' identity-work involves the presentation of an authentic identity. Interactional identities are relationship- and situation-specific (Tracy & Robles, 2013). In talking about how they will ‘skip’ school (and thus subverting the purpose of the activity), a shift occurs in the interactional identities made visible in their discourse; no longer are these two boys interacting as ‘students’ (cf. the boy with the ‘minimalistic’ presentation). Rather, they interact as young people with broader insights into language learning processes and whose personal experiences indicate that skills most socially useful are not necessarily gained within the classroom.

Case 2 Visiting India

The second case comes from a class observed by the first author where, working in groups of four, 7th grade students wrote blog posts about an imaginary journey to an English-speaking country (see also Henry, in review). In the group in focus, two girls who were highly motivated and who exhibited consistently high levels of engagement worked with two boys whose motivation fluctuated, and for whom engagement was periodic. When on the occasions they were not engaged with the activity, the boys would spend periods of time doing unrelated things. In the sequence that follows, the students are discussing the composition of a post. Here the interaction took place in Swedish:

EXCERPT TWO

When I arrive to the space where [the group] are working the girls are very involved in writing the blog, talking through what they want to say, playing with different formulations, talking with intensity. Emil has the upper part of his body slouched over the desk, his face partly hidden by the hood of his hoodie. The girls have found out about elephant-riding and for the day's activity are planning a trip to a wildlife sanctuary where they can ride elephants. They talk about how they are going to write a post describing how the four of them go out for the day to the sanctuary and ride elephants.

But not me because I am sick and am staying here in the hotel. Says Emil.

No you can't be sick! You can't. Not again. Says Nell.

Every time we find something fun to do, you have to be sick and stay in the hotel. You can't! Can't you come with us just this time? Nell says with frustration, but also perhaps a sense of pity too.

Look, says the other girl, seeking a compromise, *You can be sick when we get off. You can be with us on the ride. And then you get sick. And you are sick*

when we got off. That's what I am going to write. That when we got back from the ride and got down from the elephant that you, Emil, began to feel sick. No, says Emil. I am sick and I don't want to come. I don't want to ride an elephant. I am going to write that I am staying in the hotel lying on my bed reading and drinking coke. That's what I am going to write. He sits up and has his phone in his hand, indicating that he can of course post an individual entry.

As the students' discussion indicates, Emil has previously opted-out of work involved in writing posts about group activities, and has instead written individual posts, for example describing how he had remained in the hotel (excerpt three).

EXCERPT THREE

Emil is sick

Hi

I'm in the hotel because i am sick today, so i sitting in the hotel and do nothing. I'm looking for tomorrow. They are out in india for look new things. Tomorrow we are going to an restaurant and eat hot food.

from Emil

28 januari 2016 kl 08:24
0 kommentarer



However, on this occasion the students reach a compromise; Emil becomes ill during the elephant ride, meaning that they all return to the hotel. In practical terms, the compromise enables Emil to disassociate himself from the work writing the blog (excerpt four), meaning that he can write his own shorter (and less carefully formulated) post about the day's events (excerpt five). In this way he has a legitimate reason to spend the remaining time of the lesson doing other things.

EXCEPRT FOUR

Elephant

Hello

Today we have ridden on elephants, it was very fun but we were very nervous because the elephants was very big and looked to be dangerous. Everybody joined in.

We met a Swedish family, they were very kind. It was a mom and her three children. They told us that they have lived here for about two years now and they think it's really nice here.

When we was done with the ride, Emil felt sick and he throw up. So we went back to the hotel as fast as we could.

It was a cool experience.



EXCEPRT FIVE

Coca Cola

Hallo India

Hello today I was joined in and ride on the elephants. But i felt sick and trow up, so I went home and drink coca cola and eat. I was angry that I trow up, but what to do... Tomorrow we will just chill.

From Emil

17 februari 2016 kl 13:02
0 kommentarer

 DELA PÅ FACEBOOK



Like the boys in the previous case who challenge an identity imposed upon them by an activity that positions them in negative and undesired ways, here too identity-work involves resistance to an externally-imposed and inauthentic identity. While the former activity is undergirded by the (implicit) assumptions that the students require extra English tuition, and

that language skills are best acquired in instructed environments, in the blog activity the assumption is that new environments should be explored together as a group, and that these social activities should form the focus of the students' posts.

Blogging is a highly gendered practice, particularly when it involves writing about everyday life (Webb & Temple, 2016). For Emil, whose leisure time interests center around sports, the activity does not resonate in the same way that it does for the girls. Less interested in both the medium and the content of the interaction, Emil uses the space for agency designed into the activity to distance himself from the others. This occurs in the context of the writing taking place in the classroom (by not contributing in the group's work), *and* in the imaginary activities written about in the blog (by describing how he is alone in his hotel room).

Identities are accomplishments, not preexisting facts. It is identity-work that shapes who a person is taken to be by others (Tracy & Robles, 2013). In the context of an activity that has greater meaning for the girls, telling the others that he does not want '*to ride an elephant*', and engineering a compromise that involves the curtailment of an imagined excursion ('*When we was done with the ride Emil felt sick and he throw up. So we went back to the hotel as fast as we could*'), Emil positions himself outside the group. In responding this way, his discourse actions are shaped not by an interactional identity as a co-participant (either in the classroom, or in the imaginary world of the blog), but rather that of an onlooker.

In distancing himself from a social identity that favors collaboration, and which is imposed by the activity, these identity-work moves involve a 'sincere' performing of the self (a sense of belief in one's own performance), rather than one that is 'cynical' (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). By describing '*sitting in the hotel and do nothing*' and how he '*went home and drink coca cola and eat*', Emil resists an inauthentic identity that would require high-level impression management at a time when he is not feeling socially motivated. Rather, in

opting-out, writing his own post, and positioning himself as an onlooker, he acts authentically.

VI Discussion

In the observations carried out in the MoTiSSE project, teaching often centered around activities that provided students with opportunities for creativity and personal expression (Henry, in review; Henry & Thorsen, in press; Henry et al., 2018). Working with these activities, students would frequently demonstrate high levels of engagement, often for sustained periods of time. At the same time, there were also individual students or small groups who would sometimes work without obvious enthusiasm, who did not display attention to things said and done by teachers and classmates, and whose participation was frequently interrupted by competing social activities. In a few cases, students' disaffection took more active forms where, as in the examples here, activities were manipulated in a manner running against the grain of the underpinning assumptions.

Disaffection influences the processes of cognitive selection where students make “motivated decisions about the contexts, activities, and tasks they intend to undertake and those they prefer to avoid or abandon” (Skinner, 2016, p. 155). While disaffection is often manifested in passivity, withdrawal, and the shifting of energy to competing off-task activities, students can also be “actively disengaged” (Skinner, 2016, p. 162). Active disengagement is particularly likely if students are resentful of coercion, if they perceive a threat to their identities, or if they judge practices to be unfair (Skinner, 2016). Although active disengagement, and the disaffected aspects of agentic engagement have been little studied (Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Skinner, 2016), activities carried out in language classrooms are likely to provide fertile ground for productive forms of disaffection (cf. Miller, 2015). Unlike other subjects, where learning activities may primarily trigger cognitive forms of engagement (Skinner, 2016), activities carried out in language classrooms are likely to

additionally engage emotion and feelings. Working with a language developing activity is not simply about the acquisition of forms; equally, it is about developing ways of mediating identities and relationships (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). To some degree, space is always present for the performance of identities, and for investment in different social roles (Kramsch, 2009; Thorne, 2005).

Through the analysis of students' identity-work, the examples of agentic disaffection highlighted in these two cases can be understood as motivated by the desire for personal authenticity. In the 'study abroad' case, disaffection is generated by an activity that imposes an inauthentic identity which positions the boys as 'deficient speakers of English'. While one of the boys in the group plays along, bluffing about the need to 'challenge himself mentally' (and as a consequence gaining approval from the teacher, '*What you said was really good*'), the boys who present at the end are unwilling to carry out impression management of this sort. Instead, in discourse that can be understood as an expression of disaffection with the activity, the boys transform the scenario of enrollment at a language institute into an opportunity for informal learning and participation in a high-prestige community of online game-players (and in so doing provoking a frustrated response from the teacher: 'By now T is fairly irritated She points out to them that it is very difficult to be successful on Youtube'). In the second case, the boy's disaffection is triggered by coerced participation in a discourse practice (blogging) that may lack meaning, and a coerced affability in participating in real and imaginary group activities on occasions when he is not feeling socially inclined. Rather than behaving inauthentically (i.e. by playing along and taking the easier route of simply allowing the girls to write about the group excursion), he demonstrates resistance to an imposed and undesired identity by creating a counter-narrative that enables him to provide an (authentic) reflection of his current lack of enthusiasm. The important thing to note is that in both cases, disaffection has a generative quality. Unprepared to engage in cognitively and

emotionally demanding impression management work, by 're-designing' the activities these boys create opportunities for authentic self-expression. In doing so, disaffection leads to forms of agentic engagement.

VII Conclusion

While empirical studies in L2 motivation have examined the ways in which curriculum and classroom factors (the type and nature of instruction, the classroom relational climate, and the teacher's behaviour, approach and pedagogical practice) can have negative influences on motivation, research employing Norton's (2013) concept of investment has provided important insights into the ways in which confrontations with essentializing, elitist or racist practices can negatively affect students' commitment in language classrooms. While classroom social practices, teacher-student interactions, and teachers' classroom management styles all represent aspects of teachers' professional practice that are critical in shaping students' motivation and investment, an aspect of classroom learning yet to receive similar attention are influences traceable to activity design. Recognising the important work investigating demotivation and non-participation that has already taken place, in this article the aim has been to extend understandings of negative behaviours in language classrooms by shifting the level of analysis to explore situated responses to activities that position students in undesired ways. At this level of enquiry, the concept of disaffection (Skinner, 2016) can offer important insights. In common with activities in other subjects, negative responses to language developing activities can involve forms of disengagement and disaffection that encompass cognitive, emotional and behavioural withdrawal. However, because identities are implicit in language learning/use, and because space for self-expression is characteristic of language developing activities, in language classrooms manifestations of disaffection can take different forms.

As Miller (2015, p. 463) has observed, “most studies seeking to understand resistance explore some form of ‘oppositional behavior’, cases of ‘acting out’ rather than ‘acting toward’”. In choosing to examine cases that are atypical in the context of these particular teachers’ classes, and in the MoTiSSE project as a whole, we have attempted to show how in confrontations with activities requiring impression management and the performance of an inauthentic identity, disaffection can lead to active engagement. In similar ways to the students in Canagarajah’s (1999) study, who in seeking “connections to their cultural and social context” (p. 91), reframed, reinterpreted, and rewrote the content of their textbooks, in the current cases engagement is born out of disaffection and driven by the opportunity to voice an “oppositional attitude” (ibid.). In both cases, disaffection takes an active form and leads to agentic engagement within the constraints of the activity. While like the other students, the boys in the ‘study abroad’ case carry out the presentation according to the instructions (i.e. creating keynote slides which they use in giving the presentation), they remodel the scenario created by the teacher. In the second case, disaffection similarly takes an active form and leads to agentic engagement. Not only does the boy refuse to take part in the group-work that centres round the writing of a group post, his oppositional attitude is also evident in the imaginal world of the blog, where he engineers the curtailment of a group excursion. Working on his own, and creating a counter-narrative, disaffection deriving from enforced sociality within an alien medium (blogging), is transformed into agentic engagement.

For teachers such insights are important. Whether working with self-designed or textbook materials, it is important to afford recognition to students’ agency in interacting with activities and, in particular, their capacity to ‘redesign’ an activity in ways that enable them to act authentically. More important still, teachers need to develop a responsiveness to actions that on the face of things might appear as simply subversive, but, on reflection, can be

understood as involving legitimate forms of identity-work. Disaffection and engagement feed back into the social context of classrooms, dynamically shaping the behaviors of teachers and students (Reeve, 2012). When teachers demonstrate that they are serious about providing scope for personal expression by enabling students to redesign activities in ways that allow authentic participation, disaffection can be reduced and motivation and engagement increased.

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Appendix One

Your Assignment:

Where would you go if you had the opportunity to study English abroad? England? USA? Australia? Or..? In this assignment you are going to find out! For the next couple of weeks you are going to do some research on the topic "Study Abroad" and summarize your findings in a presentation about yourself and which country you would prefer to study in and why.

Follow these steps:

1. Do your research to find out which country and/or city you prefer. You may use the link on google classroom or any other information you might come across on the internet.
2. When you have chosen your country/city, take some notes and make sure that you provide some good arguments to why you want to study in this specific country/city.
3. Start preparing your presentation:
 - It's a good idea to start with yourself, a little something about who you are, interests, favorite subjects and your plans for the next couple of years (which high school you are thinking about to choose and why).
 - After that you move on to the part where you talk about where you would prefer to study abroad. Describe what you have found out about your country/city and perhaps what your plans would be if you actually went.
4. Practice and practice and practice, over and over, until you feel comfortable enough to do your presentation. Do not read from the text - use keywords/pictures to make sure you are able to speak freely.

Appendix Two

<p>WHAT IS A BLOG ?</p>	<p>Like a Diary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What you do and what you see.• What it smells like and how it tastes.• Your feelings and thoughts about it.• Comparisons – between what you are familiar with and what is new to you.• Moby like a smorgasbord with a lot of things you have done and seen that you perhaps would like the readers to enjoy...	<p>What to think of?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write every day.• Make sure you tell which day it is and the date.• Tuesday 12 January.• Don't forget to be thorough concerning your spelling, names of sights (The Statue of Liberty) and VERBS.• Check your facts before writing about it - don't make any guesses.
<p>Where should you check your facts?</p> <p>On the internet of course. BUT - do not use Wikipedia. It's not a safe page... If you still have to use Wikipedia, you need to use another source as well, to make sure you get the facts right. Maybe you have actually been there - then you are the source and we rely on you, right?</p>	<p>What should you blog about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A journey, a fictional trip that you make together with your friends.• To an English speaking country.• The journey will last for a fortnight (fourteen days/two weeks).• You should write at least one blog post every day. Some of them, you write together BUT you will have to write FIVE individual blog posts during these two weeks.• Every blog post has to be signed by the one/the ones who have written it.• You should also post ONE video blog during your journey - and you do this together in your group.	<p>What about sports then...???</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Since you all take an active part in sports, both in school and on your sparetime - moby you feel like including some sort of sports event into your journey... ...and that is just okay!
<p>You should write about...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The journey itself - by...car, bus, boat, train, plane, taxi...• Where you stay - hotel, apartment, caravan, tent, staying at someone's house...• What you do, where you go, sights you visit...• What things cost...• What you can or can not buy...• What you eat and drink...• Animals you see or have an encounter with...• Weather...• Climate...• Religion...• Traditions...• Time differences...	<p>AND make sure you...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talk about it and COMPARE between Sweden and your "new" country.• Similarities?• Differences?	<p>Don't forget...</p> <p>...pictures. Not of everything, but of some of the things you write about.</p> <p>And think about the fact that your readers have not been there, they don't know a thing about what you write about, or what you show in your pictures, so you need to be thorough in your text as well as when you choose pictures.</p> <p>And moby you actually have pictures of your own that you can use.</p>

i The student's presentations were not audio-recorded. However, the slower-than-normal speed of the presentation combined with high speed of the second author's keyboarding mean that the recorded speech is close to verbatim.

ii A derogatory word in Polish equivalent to 'whore' or 'prostitute'.

iii Streaming is live broadcasting online. A streamer is a person who uploads videos of, for example, online gaming on specialist Internet sites.