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Gamification and Classroom Management in a Group of Fifth Graders

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Abstract

This project was developed with fifth-year students of the Fe y Alegria Luis Amigó Educational Institution. Due to the behaviour of the students in class, where there is evidence of inattention and disorder during classes, we decided to carry out an action research study in order to implement different recreational activities based on gamification. With this we want to improve student restless habits during English class and have an adequate classroom management that contributes in a better way to the learning of the language. To do this, we identified the problem, implemented the proposed actions and, finally, carried out an analysis based on the following sources of information: field diaries (journals), a questionnaire for the cooperating teacher in charge of the group, and an interview with a target group of students. After this analysis, we identified favourable results that demonstrated the positive influence of gamification in the English class to improve classroom management.

Key words: Classroom management, gamification, games, behaviour, participation.

Título en español: La Gamificación y el Manejo de la Clase en un Grupo de Grado Quinto.

Degree Requirement

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Preface

To obtain the Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages at the Language School of the University of Antioquia, students must complete a one-year practicum in an educational institution. During this practicum, students observe a course and take on the role of teacher, and must carry out an action-research project.

During the first semester, a conscious observation is made to identify specific needs that can be addressed by the practicum student. Then we focus on the practical part to put into action the chosen strategies and implement the research project, while collecting data that is finally analysed to reach conclusions that could serve students better in the future

Context

The School and the neighborhood

The Institución Educativa Fé y Alegría Luis Amigó, is a public school located in Moravia, a neighborhood located in the central-eastern area of Medellín. The school offers preschool (single day transition), high school and elementary school (grades one through nine), academic and technical high school (grades ten and eleven), flexible models for over-age students and special integrated school cycles (CLEI - by its acronym in Spanish - in the evening).

Due to its location, the institution has the possibility of accessing services offered by other nearby entities such as the Comfama de Aranjuez Library, the Moravia Health Center, the Maestro Pedro Nel Gómez House Museum, the Moravia Cultural Development Center, the University of Antioquia, the Municipal Planetarium, among others.

Moravia's conformation was due to a process of invasion of a land that functioned from 1979 to 1982 as a garbage dump for the city; displaced families from different towns in Antioquia and other departments such as Córdoba and Chocó settled there. These families initially lived by recycling garbage and later adopted forms of survival based on informal work and scavenging. It currently has a population of more than forty thousand inhabitants. This makes it an overpopulated neighborhood considering its area of 42 hectares.

The school has a two-story building (property of the Municipality of Medellín) with 13 classrooms, a bilingual classroom, library, computer room, teachers' room, natural sciences laboratory, multiple classrooms, cafeteria, stationery store, school store and snacks; 6 offices for the rectory, coordination, secretary's office, pedagogical support service and psychology, and other spaces for storage of sports equipment and maintenance. storage space for sports

equipment and maintenance. It has 2 entrances. However, everything is distributed in a reduced space, as the school is small. It has two floors where everything is distributed.

The class

The group observed is 4° .1, one of two fourth-grade groups in the school; 4° .1 y 4° .2. There are 35 students of which 19 are girls and 16 are boys. Classes are divided into blocks. The first block is from 12:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. and its topic is natural sciences. The second block is from 3:30 to 5:30, and its topic is Humanities (Humanidades), and it is within this topic that the English language is included.

The students

Only one of the parents usually has a job, the levels of formal education are not high in the family, this makes it difficult for many to get help with their homework at home. Some students must live in small spaces with a large number of people, and it means that there are no adequate and quiet spaces to study. The food of the students is basic, in some cases rudimentary. The food they receive at school is more of a kind of snack that does little to contribute to the proper nourishment of the children.

A high percentage of students recognize the presence of gangs and other violent groups in their neighborhoods. Thus, children end up being deprived of adequate recreational spaces limited by the fear of being caught in the middle of neighborhood conflicts.

The cooperating teacher

The teacher of the 4°.1 grade has a Bachelor's degree in primary education at the University of Antioquia. She has been teaching for 16 years, and has worked at the Fe y Alegría Luis Amigó Educational Institution for 8 years. Her first 5 years after graduating she was a teacher in a private school. The skill she worked on the most was reading comprehension through vocabulary learning.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom management is an important aspect of teaching and greatly influences the quality of the concepts taught in the classroom. For this reason, we have proposed to investigate strategies to help us manage behaviour in the classroom with children in the fifth grade at the Fe y Alegría Luis Amigó educational institution. For this, we must first start from the observations made in the fourth-grade classroom, which will finally be the one we will work on when they are in the fifth grade the following semester. All the conclusions and reflections to which we refer are based on the observations made in class and on the conversations with my cooperative teacher.

When I began to observe this fourth-grade class, I could see that there was a problem with the children's behaviour during class. The children had habitual indiscipline behaviours such as getting up from their seats, talking at the wrong time, and aggressiveness and mistreatment among themselves. Every single time when I witnessed some misbehaviour during class, I noticed the only way my cooperative teacher had to deal with it is to yell and scold. Kids obeyed at the very moment because they got scared, and they respect the teacher. If she speaks, they listen and remain silent. And even though children stayed quiet after the teacher raised her voice to them, it lasted only for a few moments. The problem remained there and an instant later some of them (those who tend to misbehave the most) started being restless again. The yelling and scolding strategy to keep them relaxed and untroubled, therefore, must be maintained almost during the whole class, which certainly reduces and affects notoriously the quality of the class, the time dedicated to the topics; English in our particular case, and the learning process in general.

In my observation journal I was able to record several of these situations of indiscipline and the way they were handled by the teacher: "One of the children was talking so much that the teacher threatened to send him to the coordinator's office." That was a very common strategy to scare the students and make them behave. "On several occasions the teacher must raise her voice, scolding them so that the students will let the speaker be heard." This was a very common situation where students speak so loudly that they do not allow the teacher to hear what one of the students was reading. "The teacher must constantly enforce order so that students do not become undisciplined. They usually listen to her almost immediately, and obey her, but it doesn't take long for them to get messy again". Once again, it is evident that the strategy of scolding and raising the voice is effective only momentarily, and this makes it necessary to apply it a lot during the class.

The children who are more restless are relatively few. In our class of thirty-two students, only five or six (including girls and boys equally) are the ones who show the greatest tendency to be restless during class. The other students show interest in the activities that the teacher proposes, but the indiscipline of these five or six students disrupts the smooth running of the class and disturbs the work of the others. These restless students do not pay attention in class; they get up from their seats all the time, wandering around the classroom and harassing other children. This makes the class very difficult and does not allow the topics seen in class to really

have a significant impact. When it was my turn to work with them alone, at first there was a certain degree of quietness and attentiveness on the part of all the students, because of the newness of the situation and the novelty of a different teacher. But as the class progressed the students returned to their usual state of restlessness.

The activities carried out in class for teaching English were mostly individual work such as crossword puzzles, word searches and drawings with text, so that the children could concentrate on doing the activities and then socialize the solution for these in class. This type of activity does not give students the opportunity to work together, to interact with each other and work towards a common goal. Rather, these activities make them anxious because many do not know how to do what is asked of them on their own. During my observations I had the opportunity to ask several children why they did not concentrate on the activity or simply did it so as not to make the teacher angry, to which most of the children who were dispersed answered that they just did not know how to do these activities, that they did not understand, something completely reasonable considering that English is an strange foreign language that is not theirs.

This is why I have proposed to look for strategies that favour class management in class through fun and interesting experiences for children, in order to minimize the spaces in which the students, the children, feel dispersed and become more restless. In my experience as a teacher of children, I have found games to be a great tool to focus the children's attention on a common task while acquiring the knowledge we want to impart to them. But pedagogical games alone did not seem sufficient to deal with the problem of misbehaviour in class. That is where the Gamification, with its elements and applications in the classroom, allows me to visualize a set of strategies that can really serve to mitigate the problem of misbehaviour in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

As stated before, it is visible that misbehavior in class and disruptive actions may affect the quality of the class and the time dedicated to the topics. In this regard, some researchers have found that aggressive and defiant behaviors reduce instructional time, affect student learning, challenge teachers, and work against the full potential for student success (Walker et al., 2004, p. 1). Even if these behaviors might be trivial such as talking out, non-attending, disobedience, not remaining at their desk, and being off-task (Arbuckle & Little 2004, p. 65) they are a challenge to the teacher and a problem that creates an uncomfortable atmosphere in the classroom, not only for the teacher, but the other students that actually want to pay attention to the class contents. This is precisely the reason why we decided to focus the investigation on class management strategies, specifically on Gamification, to lessen these negative effects of disruptive behaviors.

Gamification.

The term Gamification is used to express those aspects of the interactive system that intend to motivate and get end users to become involved, through the utilization of game mechanics and elements (Seaborn and Fels, 2015). These elements include points, rewards, badges, rankings, challenges, progressions, immediate feedback, rules, time, and narratives (Kapp, 2012; Werbach and Hunter, 2012); such elements help to promote player engagement and motivation (Dicheva et al., 2015). In fact, according to Boudadi and Gutiérrez-Colón (2020), gamification creates dynamic environments that promote and support motivation because players can see their progress as they successfully complete game levels and receive rewards for each achievement. When we talk about education, gamification provide us a more interactive, attractive and effective learning experience that can keep students more engaged in their own processes (Figueroa-Flores, 2015). In addition, educational objectives are perceived more as challenges that must be overcome in order to move forward, which keeps motivation constant. In this regard, some studies have shown that the use of gamified activities in online learning environments is student-centered; this provides them with flexible environments; increases productivity, efficiency and motivation; and promotes their active participation (Boyle et al).

Classroom Management

The glossary of educational reform (in http://edglossary.org/classroom-management/), defines classroom management as the "wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, order, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class". In that same line Emmer & Stough (2010) express that classroom management "encompasses both establishing and maintaining order, designing effective instruction, dealing with students as a group, responding to the needs of individual students, and effectively handling the discipline and adjustment of individual students".

In our concrete context and strategy for class management, the idea is to focus on changing the interaction with students and avoid yelling and scolding. We will do so because research studies show that different techniques such as setting clear rules with its limits and using praise and rewards, can reinforce children's appropriate classroom behavior and can reduce disruptive classroom conducts (Sutherland et al., 2008; Van Lier et al. 2005), whereas measures like reprimands, corrections, and commands, can lead to more disruption in children (Nelson & Roberts, 2000).

Research Question

The research question that leads this research project is: *How can the use of* gamification contribute to class management in a 5th graders' group at Institución Educativa Fé y Alegría Luis Amigó?

Objectives

Main Objective:

To describe how the use of gamification contributes to class management in a 5th graders' group in a public school.

Specific Objectives:

- Identify the characteristics of gamification that favor class management.
- Define the strategies that promote class management through gamification.
- Relate gamification, class management and foreign language learning.

Action plan

As mentioned above, the objective of this research was to implement gamification during classes in order to discover its impact in classroom management. For this, we have proposed the following actions, which have been designed based on the specific objectives for the fifth grade in the educational institution. The action plan was built for 16 weeks, from February until the end of May, in consideration of the academic curriculum.

On the one hand, we will plan the classes to meet the course objectives and we will assign each class a playful activity based on gamification. Each theme based on the objectives of the institution for the fifth grade as well as the planned activity based on gamification are described in the action plan table (see appendix). In the table it can be seen that some classes are control sessions, it means that there will be no game based on gamification and instead a master class will be given in the traditional way, like those observed during the practicum observation period. This in order to be able to better contrast the effect of gamification in classroom management.

On the other hand, to evaluate how playful activities based on gamification influenced the classroom management, we used the following tools for data collection: field diaries (journals), a questionnaire, and an interview with a focus group.

Development of actions

It was agreed from the beginning of the practicum period, with the school directors and the cooperating teacher, to have an English class with the group for two hours a week. The class would be given every Monday from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

During the period in which the research was implemented, different strategies offered by gamification were proposed from the theory consulted in order to see which of the ones used served us most effectively for classroom management. During the period, some control sessions were also carried out, which consisted of traditional master classes, with normal activities such as those that were carried out during the period of observation of the practicum. This was done with the aim of being able to compare and contrast classroom management with and without

gamification. A total of three control sessions were put into practice. The gamification strategies used can be divided into two categories:

Gamification strategies for individual work

In these activities, priority is given to individual students' work. Each student works alone and makes his best effort to comply with the rules and objectives of the activity that is carried out. This makes them conscious of their learning process.

Gamification strategies for collaborative work

These activities centre on team work and tend to make it work as a unit. Which means that the work and performance of one affects all the members of the team. This gives them a sense of group responsibility.

Both strategies for individual work and strategies for collaborative work were alternated for each class and during the practice period, depending on the topic that was going to be taught and the activities that best suited that particular topic, as can be seen in the action plan table (appendix).

In the course of the whole practicum period we have made observations in the journal. With this tool we reflected on the most recurrent aspects of the process and the students' progress. In addition, the diaries were used to have a compilation of the reactions of the students to the different activities.

To help us with the analysis of the information in the journals, we used the questionnaire tool at the end of the second semester. The objective of the questionnaire was to know the impressions that the cooperating teacher had in relation to the gamification strategies and the classroom management and focus on those that helped better with student's behavior.

We also made an interview to the students at the end of the semester. It was a focal group of six students, three girls and three boys. The objective was to know their opinions towards the strategies of gamification, how they perceived classroom management and their own English learning process.

Data analysis

This research project followed the action research design. Following Burns (2009) stages, the data was collected with the help of the field diaries (journals), the questionnaire and the interview. In order to answer the research question and the objectives, this information also followed the triangulation and comparison process.

Finally, due to the language level of the participants, and to ensure the understanding of the questions, the questionnaire and interview were made in Spanish. Thus, the comments and replies presented in this report have been translated by the author.

Findings and interpretations

From the analysis of the data, three categories emerged: games and behaviour relation, teacher's role in class, and students' attitude towards the class and learning.

Games and behaviour relation

When gamification was applied in class, the analysis of the data revealed how the students participated more in the activities. There was more interaction between them, but this time not to talk about things different from English topic, but to complete the proposed activities. This was something recurrent throughout the semester, and it was stated in the journal several times. In an extract from the journal we can read: "*In this part of the activity the children participated very actively. Everyone wanted to talk at the same time and since the activity involved active communication between the members of the groups, there was a lot of noise.*" (Journal entry extract, March 13th, 2023). It is evident then how through the gamification of the class it is possible to have a change in the behaviour of the students. Where they were accustomed to the fact that speaking in class was bad and getting up from seats was a lack of discipline, these actions became an interactive part of the class and a way of participating. Indeed, gaming, as a motivating and engaging activity, makes it easier to convince people to break their bad habits and change their behaviour (Bassanelli et al, 2022).

We also found that the students were actively participating in class and, perhaps most importantly, they weren't bothering each other or engaging in pointless arguments. The cooperative teacher also evidenced this situation and stated it in the questionnaire that was made to her: "when the shopping game was held, at the beginning it was difficult for the teacher to get them (the students) organized and to understand what they really had to do. Later, when the activity could be carried out, the students were very enthusiastic, very active, they participated and worked as a team"¹. This shows that gamification helped them to focus on the activities proposed and forget about arguing and bothering each other. Regarding this aspect, Chung and Zakaria (2015) declares that the integration of games in the teaching and learning process showed favourable outcomes where the pupils showed positive changes in their learning behaviour. The children learned how to cooperate, take turns, share materials, and mutually correct their mistakes throughout the process of play.

¹ Cuando se llevó a cabo el juego de la tienda para el docente fue difícil lograr organizarlos y que entendieran lo que realmente debían hacer. Luego, cuando ya se pudo llevar a cabo la actividad, los estudiantes estaban muy entusiasmados, muy activos, participaron y trabajaron en equipo.

Teacher's role in class

This category arises when contrasting what the students perceived that each teacher represented with the notes in the journal. The students see in the cooperative teacher an authority figure who will not hesitate to scold them severely if they misbehave and that has the power to talk to parents and give them negative academic marks. In the interview with the focus group of students, they make this vision of the cooperative teacher clear:

How is the behavior of your classmates in English class compared to other classes? Student a: "Well, the truth is that they are more relaxed in English class, because in the other classes the teacher scolds us more."

Student e: "there are some who screw around a lot and the teacher keeps scolding them in all classes."²

While they see the cooperating teacher as a symbol of authority, they see me, the practicum teacher, as someone with which they can relax more. The problem with this is that when they misbehave it's more difficult for me to control them, because they don't see me as that symbol of authority at school. "Students, the ones who should be paying attention, make a lot of mess talking among themselves. I scold them, but they don't pay much attention" (Journal entry extract, April 17th, 2023). This was especially evident during the control sessions, where no gamification strategy was applied. In these classes it was difficult to get the students to focus on the activities, and since I was not a teacher who scolded them in the same way that the cooperating teacher did, they were less likely to listen to me. But the teacher's role in managing

² ¿Cómo es el comportamiento de tus compañeros en la clase de inglés comparado con otras clases? Estudiante a: Pues la verdad es que sí son más relajados en la clase de inglés, porque en las otras clases la profesora nos regaña más si hacemos desorden.

Estudiante e: hay unos que joden mucho y la profesora los mantiene regañando en todas las clases.

the class must go beyond scolding and yelling to control students' behavior. The good practices of teachers regarding conflicts must result in prevention, intervention, resolution, negotiation, mediation and the ability to transform disruptive situations into positive ones (Barahona, 2020).

The data analysis showed that gamification gives us a tool to mediate the way in which students interact in class with the teacher, with their classmates and with English. According to a student's perspective, *"we pay more attention when we play games in class, that's why I like the class with you"*.³ It is noticeable that using gamification makes the role of the teacher acquire more importance than a simple symbol of authority that must be respected. In words of Chung and Zakaria (2015), "Teachers should play an important role as facilitators and should always provide guidance at the appropriate time and situation. This is because the use of games in the teaching and learning process does not mean that pupils are allowed to play without direction and without the supervision of adults. Playing is an important task in the world of children because they actually learn a lot through playing activities."

Students' attitude towards the class and learning

We might think that when students are participating in activities and the classroom management is appropriate, they are also enjoying the class and have a good disposition to learn. But the reality could be different. This category arose precisely from the perceptions of both the teacher and the students of how they feel with the classes mediated by the activities based on gamification. This help us corroborate that the students were not only enjoying the class, but that they felt that they were learning in the process. Students were asked two questions during the interview that can help us answer this question. The first has to do with the particular way in

³ Ponemos más atención cuando hacemos los juegos en clase, por eso me gusta la clase con usted

which the teacher teaches the class with the help of gamification and the second question was more focused on their perception of learning English through games in class:

- What do you think of the way the teacher teaches the class?
 Student a. "I really like it, you make the class fun."
 Student f. "It's fun and there are always different things".⁴
- Do you think the activities in class have helped you learn English?
 Student b. "The truth is that I pay more attention when we do the games in class."
 Student f. "I did learn things, the parts of the house, food and that ".⁵

The cooperative teacher also gave her opinion in the questionnaire when we asked her if the students of the course stated at any time that they agreed or disagreed with the way in which the teacher in training led the class? She answered, *"Yes, they really liked that they played and that the teacher spoke to them a lot with a foreign accent"*.⁶ It is gratifying to see that the students enjoyed the class and that they feel that they somehow learn by doing it. In effect, gamification makes the concepts taught more meaningful and thus learning becomes more effective. Barahona, 2020, says at this respect: "Moreover, in an educational context, gamification, which has a ludic nature, facilitates the internalization of the concepts in a motivating way which generates a positive experience for the student. It promotes interest in the activities, developing their engagement with their learning and encouraging their spirit of

⁴ ¿Qué piensan de la manera en que el profesor dicta la clase?

Estudiante a. "A mí me gusta mucho, usted da la clase muy divertida."

Estudiante f. "Es divertida y siempre hay cosas diferentes."

⁵ ¿Consideras que las actividades realizadas en la clase te han ayudado aprender inglés? Student b. "La verdad es que pongo más atención cuando hacemos los juegos en clase." Student f. "Yo sí he aprendido cosas, las partes de la casa, la comida y eso ."

⁶ "Sí, les gustaba mucho que jugaban y que el profe les hablaba mucho con acento extranjero"

improvement in order to get good results in the tasks while, at the same time, they are absorbing knowledge in an attractive and entertaining way."

Conclusions

There are many challenges that public education teachers face in the classroom, that is why any tool that can help us in this noble task of teaching others is welcome. Research, studies and any theory that can help us to improve the quality of education become allies in our mission to teach and educate.

In this sense, gamification not only proved to be a valid and useful tool to deal with disciplinary difficulties and classroom management, it also has the property of being an invaluable learning tool for our teaching. The variety of activities and proposals that gamification brings with it make it a tool that is not very monotonous in its application, and this also makes students appreciate it as a fun and attractive means of learning, without getting bored of a recurrent and repetitive methodology.

Likewise, for classroom management it proved to be quite useful. Students are focused on the activities and the interaction among them becomes a useful tool more than a problem. In this way, the possible disorder that can manifest in the classroom, especially in classes with children where hyperactivity and energy levels are high, is replaced by constant interaction and participation. Through gamification students make use of their energy, their curiosity, and their desire to participate in activities that give them a specific role, and not just an activity where everyone repeats the same thing. Through gamification, students acquire an important role in which they can earn points, both individually and for their groups, or in which they can feel important for the specific role that each activity requires. In this way they feel more motivated to participate, to pay attention and, in an indirect and practically involuntary way, to learn the specific topics of the area being addressed, in the specific case of this research, English.

Reflections

There is no doubt that in the future, and through further research of this type, gamification will be a constant tool in the classroom. Each group, school and context will have to adapt it to their particular needs and to the tastes and demands of the students to whom the activity is directed. Its adaptability, its flexibility to be applied in different activities and areas of knowledge, and the positive reception it has had among students, give it a place in the academic environment, where it is well worth using and improving it to benefit from its beneficial characteristics.

This research left me with many pleasant lessons that will mark the way in which I exercise my profession as a teacher from now on. Working with children, the context of public education and the possibility of interacting with all the elements that make up the school, make this experience truly enriching for me. Likewise, I hope that this research will be so for those who read it and find it equally rewarding and useful.

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Appendix

Action plan for Institución educativa Fé y Alegría Luis Amigó, grade 5th -1

practicum (2023)

Date	Торіс	Gaming strategies.
February 13th	Vocabulary reinforcement : The parts of the face and the head in general (hair, eyes, ears) and the way we use some of them (to see, to talk, to hear).	Gain group points. The class is divided into groups and they act as a team for winning points.
February 20th	Vocabulary reinforcement: Food and drinks. Present simple and prepositions "with" and "without.	Up your level. The class is divided into a group. They act as a team whose goal is to level up. Each team starts from level 1.
February 27th	Towards curriculum topics : The parts of the body (head, hands, arms, legs, nose, mouth, eyes). What we can do with each part of the body (smell, eat, talk, think, walk)	No gamification, control session.
March 13th	Vocabulary reinforcement: Parts of the house (living room, bathroom, etc) and things that you find in each one (in the kitchen there is a stove, a refrigerator, etc). Curriculum topics: "There is" and "there are" structures.	Winning stars. Individually, students will do their best to earn recognition stars.
April 10th	Towards curriculum topics: Daily Routines vocabulary (take a shower, have breakfast, etc), present simple with personal subject pronouns like I, she, we. The clock time and the moments of the day (morning, afternoon, etc) Checking knowledge: Formative evaluation activity.	We are theater actors. Students pretend to be at home and do representations of their routines.
April 17th	Curriculum topics: Answer personal questions such as name, age, nationality. The things I do, "my favorite hobby". The things I like to do: play with my friends, read, watch t.v, etc.	No gamification, control session.

	Numbers 10 to 20. Understand personal information provided by my classmates and my teacher.	
April 24th	Curriculum topics: "How much" and "how many" expressions. "There is" and "there are" structures. Countable and noncount nouns. Numbers 20 to 100.	We split the students into small groups of three to create different types of stores where they will sell different products and into groups of two to act as customers. We will have coins for the customers to buy in the stores and they will make a list of products to buy. The first group to finish buying the products on the list wins.
May 8th	Curriculum topics: Different types of clothing. Summer clothes and winter clothes. In our context, clothes for the cold and clothes for the heat. Physical descriptions. Present simple and progressive. Possessive adjectives.	Guess who? Try to guess the classmate they are talking about by their physical description and likes and dislikes. The one who achieves this receives a bonus on his or her grade.
May 29th	Curriculum topics: People from other countries, their cultures: What do they do, what do they like. Other cultures in my own country: similarities and differences. Subject and object pronouns.	True or false? Students must guess whether it is true that a culture likes or dislikes what is mentioned. Those who answer correctly win a candy.