



Focus on Teaching: Supports & Hindrances: A Force-Field Analysis

Focus on Teaching Supports and Hindrances: A Force-Field Analysis

by Andrea Parrella

The following activity guides a group of learners in thinking about the [forces that hinder and help them to achieve their goals](#). For beginning English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students, you might need to explain or demonstrate vocabulary.

Step 1: Ask the learners to think about what it takes for them to continue to pursue their educational goals.

Step 2: Write "Pursuing Educational Goals" at the top of a large sheet of paper on the wall. Then, draw a vertical line down the middle of the paper, and write "+" (plus sign) over the left-hand column and "-" (minus sign) over the right-hand column.

Step 3: Ask the learners to brainstorm all of the things that make it hard for them to stay in the program and continue to pursue their educational goals. As they brainstorm forces, write them, one by one, on the right side of the paper, under the minus sign. Use the question: Who or what gets in the way of (hinders you from) continuing to come to this program?

Step 4: Ask the learners to brainstorm the things that help them to attend class or to continue to pursue their education goals. Write these on the left side of the paper, under the plus sign. Use the question: Who or what helps you (supports you) to continue to stay in this program?

Step 5: Ask the learners to look at the lists and talk about what they see. Are there more negative than positive forces? Where do the forces come from (the class, family, work, etc.)?

Step 6: Give each learner an index card or a blank piece of paper and ask each to write down the answer to this question: What two forces from the list do you most want us to work on in class? Point out that they can take their forces either from the positive "+" force list (forces they would want to work on strengthening), from the negative "-" force list (forces they would want to work on weakening), or from a combination of the two.

Step 7: Have the learners get into pairs and discuss the forces they have written down. They must reduce the number of forces from four (two each) to the two they feel are most important to work on in class. One person in each pair should write the new list of two forces on a piece of paper.

Step 8: Have sets of pairs join to form small groups of four. Each pair shares its list of two items with the other pair. The group of four now has several minutes to come up with a new list of two forces on which all four agree. They write their new list of two forces, which represents their "consensus," on a large piece of paper.

Step 9: Ask a member from each group to post the paper with their two forces written on it, reading the forces aloud as they do so. Then ask the whole class to look at the papers for similarities: Are there any forces that appear on all the lists? If so, write them on a fresh sheet of paper. These represent the consensus of the class.

Step 10: Continue looking for forces that appear on more than one list until all the forces listed on more than one sheet are on the "consensus" list. Ask the class to consider which items still remaining on the original lists are important enough to include on the fresh list. The fresh list represents the forces that the class wants to work on in the coming term.

Step 11: If only two forces are listed on the "consensus" sheet, skip to step 12. If there are more than two forces, have the learners vote for the two forces they see as the highest priority.

Step 12: The class has now determined the two forces that they most want to work on. The next step is to brainstorm the various ways in which you can work together as a class to address these forces by strengthening the positive and weakening the negative.

Continuing the Process: This is just one way you can help learners understand what is helping them achieve their goals and what is hindering them from doing so. You, of course, will be learning at the same time. Try to set aside some time each week to work, as a class, on strengthening the supporting forces and weakening the hindering forces. You and the learners can assess what effect these activities are having. The forces that the learners want to work on may change over time. To capture these changes, repeat the force-field activity with the class or with individuals throughout the semester.

About the Author

Andrea Parrella worked for two years on the NCSALL Learner Persistence Study.