

## 20 Motivating learners

### A Warm-up

- 1 Look at the list of factors that may influence a learner's attitude to their language learning. Divide the list into two groups. Compare ideas with a partner. What criteria did you use to divide the factors?

Factors that may influence a learner's attitude to their language learning:

- The learner finds the material interesting.
  - The learner knows that a good level of English will benefit their career.
  - The learner really likes English literature and wants to read it in the original language.
  - The teacher praises and encourages learners.
  - The learner likes socialising with the other members of the class.
  - The learner feels the lessons are useful.
- 2 Work in groups. Think about a learner from one of your teaching practice classes who appears 'highly motivated'.
    - 1 How is this motivation demonstrated?
    - 2 Can you suggest reasons for their level of motivation?

### B Things teachers can influence

- 1 Work in pairs. Discuss the following questions.
  - 1 Do you think the teacher should set targets that are easy to achieve, difficult to achieve, or somewhere in-between?
  - 2 Do you think learners respond best to having a set routine in lessons, a routine which is occasionally broken, or lots and lots of variety?
  - 3 Do you think learners respond better to cooperative or to competitive games?
  - 4 Do you think that all learners can be motivated using the same strategies?
- 2 Read the text and decide how the authors would answer the questions in activity B1.

#### Motivation in the classroom setting

In a teacher's mind, motivated students are usually those who participate actively in the class, express interest in the subject matter and study a great deal. Teachers can easily recognise characteristics such as these. They also have more opportunity to influence these characteristics than students' reasons for studying the second language or their attitudes towards the language and its speakers. If we can make our classrooms places where the students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, we can make a positive contribution to the students' motivation to learn.

Although little research has been done to investigate how pedagogy interacts with motivation in second language classrooms, considerable work has been done within the field of educational psychology.

In a review of this work Graham Crookes and Richard Schmidt (1991)<sup>1</sup> point to several areas where educational research has reported increased levels of motivation for students in relation to pedagogical practices. Included among these are:

**Motivating students into the lesson** At the opening stages of lessons (and within transitions), it has been observed that remarks teachers make about forthcoming activities can lead to higher levels of interest on the part of the students.

**Varying the activities, tasks and materials** Students are reassured by the existence of classroom routines which they can depend on. However, lessons which always consist of the same routines, patterns and formats have been shown to lead to a decrease in attention and an increase in boredom. Varying the activities, tasks and materials can help to avoid this and increase students' interest levels.

**Using co-operative rather than competitive goals** Co-operative learning activities are those in which students must work together in order to complete a task or solve a problem. These techniques have been found to increase the self-confidence of students, including weaker ones, because every participant in a co-operative task has an important role to play. Knowing that their team-mates are counting on them can increase students' motivation.

Clearly, cultural and age differences will determine the most appropriate way for teachers to motivate students. In some classrooms, students may thrive on competitive interaction, while in others, co-operative activities will be more successful.

<sup>1</sup> Crookes, G. & Schmidt, R. (1991) 'Motivation: Reopening the research agenda' *Language Learning* 41/4:469-512

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- 3 Read the text again and answer the questions.
  - 1 Can a teacher influence a learner's motives for learning a language?
  - 2 Are the points made based on ELT research or more general educational studies?
  - 3 Are the points applicable to an ELT classroom?
  - 4 What two factors do the authors identify as impacting on how teachers could try to motivate learners?
  - 5 Think back to a recent teaching practice session.
    - Were learners 'motivated into the lesson'?
    - Were activities, tasks and materials varied?
    - Were tasks largely cooperative or competitive?

## Ways of influencing motivation

Read the following comments made by learners and teachers and answer the questions.

- 1 Which things that are mentioned could you realistically do in teaching practice on this course?
- 2 Which things do you think you could do if you had your own class for a fairly long period of time?
- 3 Which things will influence motivation for a short period of time (during one lesson)?
- 4 Which things will influence motivation over a longer period of time?

## B Classroom teaching

### Learners' views

- a Fan Kong: I don't like it when I do a bit of homework and then don't get it back for a long time. It really annoys me. I think teachers should **give work back quickly**.
- b Erica: I remember when I was thinking my English would never get better and my teacher always told me it would and always said how well I was doing. It made me feel better – I think teachers should **encourage students** as much as they can – it's really important.
- c Lewis: One of the lessons I like best is when the teacher tells us to choose a reading from the internet – anything we like. And then we write some questions and give them to another student and they answer them. It's fun for **students to choose the material** sometimes.
- d Sonham: I think it is really important for the teachers to give us **tests** sometimes. It makes me look back at work we've done before and makes me realise how much I have learned.
- e Suzanna: I remember a course where all the lessons were too easy for me – it was terrible – I didn't learn anything. But my friend, he said he went to a class and told me it was too difficult and he stopped going. It's important that teachers **make it the right level**.

### Teachers' views

- a Jason: I sometimes get learners to make posters and things and it's always nice if you **put work on the walls** so everyone can see it. I even do it with essays and things sometimes because at least then there is some sort of readership and audience created.
- b Bhupendra: I think it's important to **set objectives** for students – make sure they know what's expected of them. Sometimes I give them a list of things that I think they should be able to do by the end of term or something like that – make a simple telephone call in English – that kind of thing – and get them to tick them off as they think they achieve them.
- c Lucy: I set objectives, but I speak to each learner individually – after every ten hours or so of lessons – and discuss what they want to achieve and how they will do it. **Personalised, achievable objectives** really help to motivate learners, I think.
- d Paige: I often **ask learners about what they want to do** – and also what sort of lessons they like. This way it's much easier to meet their needs and that always makes them more motivated.

e Naomi:

We use a coursebook quite a lot but it can get a little repetitive so every few lessons I try to do something very different. We have a project, like make a class newspaper, or I record some adverts and do some worksheets to go with them or something like that. **Variety** is so important, I think.

## D Adapting material

One factor that may influence motivation in the classroom is the intrinsic interest generated by the material. Activities do not always need to be adapted but a teacher may sometimes choose to try to make an activity more interesting.

- 1 Read the following exercise and the teacher's explanation of how and why he adapted it.
  - 1 What has the teacher done to make the activity more motivating?
  - 2 Can you think of any other ways of adapting the original material?

### Complete the sentences. Use one word only.

- 1 He's not very good ..... singing.
- 2 Did you pay ..... those sweets?
- 3 You should apologise ..... her immediately.
- 4 When I get the answer wrong the teacher always shouts ..... me.
- 5 Who do you agree ..... ? Me or Bob?
- 6 I must be in love. I think ..... her all the time.
- 7 Did you know that Paula is afraid ..... mice?
- 8 Don't worry. Just explain ..... Mary how you feel.

*'It was a useful enough exercise but we had done quite a lot of gap filling stuff just before and I thought it would be good to change the pace of the lesson a bit. Instead, I just wrote the words 'good', 'pay', 'apologise' and so on out several times on little bits of paper and put them in a bag. The students then had to take two or three of the words and write true sentences about themselves using the words.' I'm afraid of dogs', 'I sometimes don't agree with my boss' - that kind of thing. They then compared what they had written.'*

- 2 Suggest ways to make the following task more motivating.

**Choose a person you have read about, or learned about, in your coursebook. Describe the character to your classmate. Can they guess who it is?**

- 3 Work in pairs. Think of an activity you have done in your teaching practice lessons that could have been made more interesting. How could it have been adapted?