

# Developing Your Classroom as a Learning Community

## To Refresh Our Motivation for Students

Zhuoya Wu

School of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology  
Dalian 116023, Liaoning, China  
zhuoyaw@dlut.edu.cn

**Abstract**—Teaching theory and methodology has been studied through College English teaching for years in China. With the further reform of education, there are a variety of new English courses given to newly-equipped students on campus. Which teaching method should be well used in class is challenging in order to get teaching more proficient. From this point, the paper stresses three important agendas based on motivation theory in setting the stage for effective motivation of students after researching various lines of theory.

**Key words:** *motivation; teaching; students; classroom*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, many teachers have tried hard to improve their teaching results. Nowadays, to meet the high demands of helping the students master foreign languages in the changing world, especially, in the new century both inside and outside of the country, making benefits of motivation for students in class is also basic for the sake of teaching. It is certain that motivation is not a new thing for most of the teachers, but to refresh or confirm its function in class will do good for every teacher and for those who are not familiar to the subject.

### II. MOTIVATION CONCERNED

#### A. *What is motivation?*

Motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation direction, intensity, and persistence of behaviour, especially goal-directed behaviour. In the classroom context, the concept of student motivation is used to explain the degree to which students invest attention and effort in various pursuits, (which may or may not be desired by their teachers). Motivation refers to students' subjective experiences, their willingness to engage in lessons and learning activities and their reasons for doing so. (Brophy, 1998).

Most contemporary views on student motivation emphasise its cognitive and goal-oriented features. These concepts represent considerable evolution from earlier views, which were influenced heavily by behavioural theory and research. (Brophy, 1998).

Behaviourists stress reinforcement as the primary mechanism for establishing and maintaining behaviour. They define a reinforcer as anything that increases or maintains the

frequency of behaviour when it is made contingent on performance of that behaviour. E.g. careful work on assignments leading to successful task completion might be reinforced by giving verbal or written praise, awarding high grades, affixing stars or other symbols of excellence, allowing access to some privilege, awarding points that can be exchanged for prizes or applied to a competition and so on. But in explaining how to establish and maintain desired behaviour patterns, behaviourists usually talk about control rather than motivation. Much of the culture of schooling reflects the behavioural view, especially grading and report card systems, conduct codes, and honour rolls and awards ceremonies.

Need Theories were among the first motivational theories to emerge as alternatives to behaviour reinforcement theories. These theories explain behaviours as responses to felt needs. The needs may be either inborn and universal or learned through cultural experience and developed to different degrees in different people.

In the classroom, it implies that students who come to school tired or hungry are unlikely to become engrossed in lessons. Similarly, students who feel anxious or rejected are unlikely to take the intellectual risks involved in seeking to overcome confusion and construct clear understandings, and even less likely to try to be creative when working on assignments. (Maslow, 1962)

#### B. *Some related theories*

The related theories that cannot be ignored are as follows: (1) the Goal Theories: Behaviour reinforcement theories and need theories both pictured people's motivated actions as reactive to pressures, either from extrinsic incentives or from internally felt needs. Then, motivation theories began to acknowledge that in addition to being pushed and pulled in this manner, we are sometimes more proactive in deciding what we want to do and why we want to do it. Thus, come the goal theories. When students adopt learning goals, they focus on trying to learn whatever they need to know in order to complete the task successfully. That is when conditions emphasised by goal theorists are established in classrooms, students are able to focus their energies on learning without becoming distracted by fear of embarrassment or failure or inappropriate. (2) Intrinsic Motivation Theories: The shift in emphasis from motivation as response to felt pressures to motivation as self-determination of goals and self-regulation

of actions is most obvious in theories of intrinsic motivation. Though they include concepts such as needs or drives, theories of intrinsic motivation picture people as pursuing their own agendas — doing what they do because they want to rather than because they need to. (3) Self-Determination Theory: When people are motivated, they intend to accomplish them and undertake goal-oriented action to do so. Especially, social settings promote intrinsic motivation when they satisfy three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. So, students are likely to experience intrinsic motivation in classrooms that support satisfaction of these competences, autonomy and relatedness needs. When such support is lacking, students will feel control rather than that self-determined and their motivation will be primarily extrinsic rather than intrinsic.

However, the goal of achieving sustained intrinsic motivation is not realistic as a basis for planning your all-day, everyday motivational strategies, because learning requires students to try to master a largely imposed curriculum while often being observed by peers and evaluated by teachers.

These concepts apply best when people are freely enjoying in self-chosen activities. Intrinsic motivated learning tends to occur under autonomous and self-determined conditions. Unfortunately, these conditions are difficult to establish in classroom for several reasons.

First, school attendance is compulsory, and curriculum content and learning activities are based on what the society's need. Second, teachers must work with a big class with many students and they can't meet each individual student's need. Therefore, some students may sometimes feel bored or even confused or frustrated. Next, students' work on assignments and performance on tests are graded. Students' attention is focused on meeting demands successfully rather than on any personal benefits that they may drive from learning experiences.

You can provide frequent opportunities for choice and autonomy and you can phrase instructions and feedback in ways that downplay your control over students, but it will remain true that students are required to come to your class to try to master a largely externally imposed curriculum, and that their efforts will be evaluated and graded. Under these conditions, intrinsic motivation will be the exception rather than the rule.

### III. ESTABLISHING YOUR CLASSROOM AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

To create conditions that favour your motivational efforts, you'll need to establish and maintain your classroom as a learning community — a place where students come primarily to learn, and succeed in doing so through collaboration with you and their classmates. You'll need to focus your curriculum on things that worth learning and to develop this content in ways that help students to appreciate its significance and application potential.

The comfortable environment will encourage them to form positive emotional bonds with teachers and a positive attitude toward school, which in turn facilitates their academic motivation and learning.

Various lines of theory and research point to three important agendas for you to accomplish in setting the stage

for effective motivation of students. (1) make yourself and your classroom attractive to students; (2) focus their attention on individual and collaborative learning goals and help them to achieve these goals; (3) teach things that are worth learning, in ways that help students to appreciate their value.

#### A. *Shape teachers' personality and behaviour in the classroom*

To do so, you will need to cultivate and display the attributes of individuals who are effective as models and socializers. These begin with the characteristics that make people well liked: a cheerful disposition, friendliness, emotional maturity, sincerity, and other qualities that indicate good mental health and personal adjustment. Your attempts to socialize students will have positive effects to the extent that the students admire you, value your opinions, and believe that you are sincere in what you say and have their best interests in mind when saying it. Engagement in classroom activities tends to be high when students perceive their teachers as involved with them, but students tend to become disaffected when they don't perceive involvement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

In the process, you will learn a lot about their backgrounds and interests that you can incorporate into your teaching in ways that are compatible with curricular goals. Also, help your students to get to know and appreciate you as a person by sharing some of your background, life experiences, interests and opinions. If you do this appropriately, it will help your students to become more open and genuine in their interactions with you, even while retaining their respect for your authority as the teacher; create an inviting physical environment in your classroom. This includes comfortably furnished and arranged classroom and attractive displays and decorations that relate to the curriculum in the ways that encourage the students to take pride in their accomplishment and appreciate those of their classmates.

#### B. *Focus on some goals socially rather than academically*

Sometimes social goals also can undermine academic goals. In that case, you increase the power of your motivational efforts by attending to your students' social goals as well as their academic goals (Urduan & Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1992). In particular, create a social environment in which everyone feels welcome and learning is accomplished through the collaborative efforts of yourself and your students.

During lessons and times when students are working on assignments, you will need to keep attention focused on learning goals rather than on social goals or other competing agendas. You are likely to get the best results if you help students to frame their learning goals in terms of acquiring the knowledge or skills that you intend to teach. This will encourage students to take more responsibility for managing their own learning by actively setting goals, seeking to construct understandings, persisting in their efforts to overcome confusions, and assessing and reflecting on what they have learned.

### C. *Expect not too much*

Even if you have set the stage by making yourself and your classroom attractive to students and by focusing their attention on individual collaborative learning goals, you can't expect students to sustain much more motivation to learn unless they view the learning as meaningful and worthwhile. Students are not likely to be motivated to learn when engaged in pointless or meaningless activities such as continued practice on skills that have already been mastered thoroughly; memorising lists for no good reason; looking up and copying definitions of terms that are never used in activities or assignments; reading material that is written in such sketchy, technical, or abstract language as to make it essentially meaningless; or working on tasks assigned merely to fill time rather than to accomplish worthwhile learning goals.

## IV. SOME SUPPORTIVE PLANS IN CLASS

### A. *Goal-oriented planning*

Curriculum planning should be guided by major instructional goals, but research on instructional materials and on teachers' planning and teaching suggest that many topics are covered in not enough depth; content exposition often lacks coherence and is cluttered with insertions and illustrations that have little to do with the key ideas that should be developed; skills are taught separately from knowledge content rather than integrated with it; and in general, neither the students' texts nor the questions and activities suggested in the teachers' manuals are structured around powerful ideas connected to important goals (Beck & Mckeown, 1988; Brophy, 1992b; ).

The key to making your students' learning experiences worthwhile is to focus your planning on major instructional goals, phrased in terms of desired student outcomes. These major goals are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and dispositions that you want to develop in your students.

### B. *Adopting instructional materials*

You will not be able to achieve a coherent program of curriculum and instruction simply by following the teaching suggestions that come with your textbooks.

Your instructional materials should be examined in the light of your major instructional goals. Identify what content to ignore and what content to emphasise. Treat the textbook as just one among many potential resources to draw upon in planning and implementing curricula.

### C. *Developing powerful idea in depth*

In recent years, students spend too much time reading, reciting, filling out worksheets, and taking memory tests, and not enough time engaging in sustained discourse about powerful ideas or applying these ideas in authentic activities or most of what they do remember is inert knowledge that they are not able to use in relevant application situations.

In order to enable students to construct meaningful knowledge that they can access and use in their lives outside of school, there needs to be a retreat from breadth of coverage as to allow time to develop the most important content in greater depth.

### D. *Planning and implementing powerful activities and assignments*

The best learning activities and assignments are built around powerful ideas. Students will not necessarily learn anything important from merely carrying out the processes of an activity. The key to the effectiveness of good activities is their cognitive engagement potential --- the degree to which they get students actively thinking about and applying key ideas, preferably with conscious awareness of their learning goals and control of their learning strategies. So, the success of an activity depends not only on the activity itself but on the teacher structuring and the teacher-student discourse that occur before, during and after the time period in which students respond to the activity's demands.

### E. *Emphasising authentic activities*

Be conscious of potential applications when selecting and implementing learning activities. As much as possible, allow your students to learn through engagement in authentic activities. Authentic activities require using what is being learned for accomplishing the very sort of life applications that justify inclusion of this learning in the curriculum in the first place. If it is not possible to engage students in actual life applications that the learning experiences are designed to prepare them for, then at least engage them in realistic simulations of these applications.

When skills must be practised until they become smooth and automatic, most of this practice should occur within whole-task application activities rather than be confined isolated practice of subskills.

### F. *Teaching for understanding*

Students who learn content with understanding not only learn the content itself but appreciate the reasons for learning it and retain it in a form that makes it usable when needed. Clear explanations and modelling from the teacher are important, but so are opportunities, and apply it in problem-solving or decision-making contents.

The activities allow students to process the content actively and make it their own by paraphrasing it into their own words, exploring its relationships to other knowledge and to past experience, appreciating the insights it provides, and identifying its implications for personal decision making or action.

## V. CONCLUSION

With the development of College English and the reform of English language teaching in China, it is clear that from both a practical and theoretical point, motivation still has its great significance in English teaching. Only when "teachers' qualities play a crucial part in encouraging students' intrinsic motivation," can the above motivational attempts be carried fully out, because "successful learners and unsuccessful learners have different learning motivations, and a learner's motivation is important in learning foreign languages..." (Guo, 2011)

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