



MOTIVATION AND THE POWER OF VISION IN EFL LEARNING

GESTIÓN EDUCATIVA / DISEÑO Y
DESARROLLO DE PROGRAMAS

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1. OBJECTIVE

In regard to adult learning, the dimensions of the concept of motivation permeate every step of the process, from the internal reasons to set the objective of acquiring a foreign language, to the specific steps to attain this goal, to the necessary measures to overcome difficulties on the way. While the skills and attitudes to sustain sufficient motivation all along this path may come from very intrinsic determination, the learning experience, and the group dynamics also play a critical role in maintaining adult students' level of enthusiasm and perseverance to succeed. Motivating adult learners depends to a great extent on how much attention teachers' pay to the two aforementioned concepts.

2. GENERAL GUIDELINES

2.1 Introduction

Motivation and learning are intimately related terms in language teaching. Considering the evident connections between the psychological drive and the actual behavior of any individual, Dörnyei (2009) defined motivation as the reasoning or circumstances responsible for “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the action and how hard they are going to pursue it” (p.512). This definition of motivation shows a clear focus on the personal process that students go through in language learning and signals a variety of factors affecting the level of persistence, investment, and resilience to achieve their learning goals.

3. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

3.1 The learning experience

There are 10 strategies and approaches available to teachers whose students are demotivated and who want to focus on their students at an individual level (for a detailed description see Dörnyei, 2014, pg 526 - 527).

- Whet students' appetite for learning
- Increase expectation of success
- Make teaching materials relevant
- Break monotony in learning
- Make the tasks interesting
- Increase learners' self confidence
- Help learners maintain a positive social image
- Create autonomy
- Offer feedback in a motivational, but constructive manner

3.2 Group Dynamics

This component is made of two aspects. The first one has to do with the way relationships are strengthened by linking group members to one another and to the group itself (group cohesiveness), and the second one has to do with “the implicit and explicit rules of conduct that regulate the life of the learner group and that make joint learning possible” (Dörnyei, 2014, pg. 527). This second aspect is called group norms. Promoting

a cohesive classroom climate is possible as long as several factors are included as part of the teacher practices (learning about each other, cooperation towards common goals, teacher as a role model, etc.).

All in all, a wide range of motivation strategies is available for teachers whose students get demotivated. However, teachers tend to rely on intuition when student motivation is affected instead of using some of the strategies that have proven effective in varied learning scenarios. AEP teachers are advised to ask for help in case their students seem to get demotivated.

3.3 Motivational Strategies focusing on the learner's future visión

Understanding. However, due to the newness of this component of our curriculum, we do not consider pertinent to make it a decisive factor to determine whether the student passes or fails the level.

- Encourage transfer of learning. Students need to develop the ability to apply skills, concepts, knowledge, attitudes and/or strategies they develop in one context, situation or application to another. This will also facilitate recycling and reviewing previously learned skills.
- Promote a class atmosphere that facilitates students' expression of their emotions, concerns, insecurities, strengths and weaknesses, best practices as advice for others, etc. Avoid judgement, criticism, comparisons and discrimination.
- Most importantly, we expect our teachers to learn, understand and reflect upon these skills, apply them to their own personal, intellectual and professional development. As a community of practice, we are committed to providing further training opportunities, spaces to discuss, share and learn about these concepts. We expect teacher's feedback and ideas to improve their effective implementation.

3.4 How Global Skills are presented in the Syllabu

A very important notion in recent research on L2 motivation is the one of the learner's self-concept (Dörnyei, 2009), which addresses the fact that learning a language involves much more than acquiring a set of codes to exchange meaning. In this sense, the concept of identity emerges to convey the whole set of mental, emotional and cultural factors that converge in order to create a new self with a new language. The ability that a person has to envision him or herself as an English speaker in the future is central to the theory of motivation proposed by Zoltan Dörnyei in 2009. This approach will serve as a guideline for reflection, curricular development, classroom practices, and assessment in the Adult English Program.

The framework of the motivational self-system consists of three constructs:



The ideal self: This is the image the students make of themselves as potential English language speakers. Whatever the reasons to start our program, learners come with expectations and dreams to be transformed somehow with this experience. Many of them are not able to verbalize these expectations, so it is essential to always provide opportunities for students to reflect upon their deep motivations to be in the classroom, to visualize themselves in the future as effective communicators in the target language.

The ought-to self: It refers to the set of characteristics students need to acquire in order to achieve their goals as language learners. It is essential for students to become aware of the changes they need to make and the habits they need to adopt in order to reach the profile of the expected speaker. Along the same lines, they need to be given the chance to reflect on the consequences of not following this path of action.

The L2 learning experience: This construct relates to the immediate learning environment and all the elements provided contextually to make learning successful. Factors such as the curriculum, the class dynamics, the evaluation system, and evidently, the teacher's leading role constitute motivational elements to maintain the vision of the learner alive.

As can be seen, perceptions on the meaning of motivation for language learners have evolved over time. The conception that the main goal of the English student was to sound native-like has become obsolete in a context in which English is seen more as a lingua franca than as belonging to a particular culture. In the daily class, students are exposed to training in a collection of soft skills when they engage in negotiating meaning, expressing their individuality and sharing their culture in a foreign language. This scenario demands a set of techniques from the teachers to provide the most appropriate environment possible, where students can construct their self-image and feel confident with it.

Transforming vision and motivation into action is not always an easy undertaking. Different aspects may influence the students' ability to bridge the gap between their needs and aspirations and their actual behaviors to accomplish their learning goals. Pedagogically speaking, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) have designed a six-step approach to help learners define their vision and connect it to the appropriate individual actions they need to take to accomplish it:

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Creating the vision: As mentioned above, even though some students may have a clear purpose to start the project of learning a language, for many of them the implications of this venture and the expected outcome are not clear. The first step in the process is helping students dig deeply and with as much detail as possible on the effects that speaking a new language can have on their lives. At this stage, the question "why?" is essential. This objective will be of very much use to maintain the student's enthusiasm alive throughout the learning path.

Suggested classroom practices:

- When starting with a new group, find out as much as possible about students' personal and professional objectives to learn English. Try to explore the beliefs behind those reasons and connect them with the different routines you will set for them. If possible, introduce the concept of English as a lingua franca, or English in a globalized world, where the set of skills that they are expected to develop goes beyond grammar and pronunciation patterns. Students are the owners of their vision, only they can transform it or adapt it through to their own personal journeys. The teacher is a guide, an interpreter and a facilitator of students' success.
- Show students that the Colombo also has a pedagogical vision for them. Share the expected exit profile of students for each block at different moments of the block.
- When you introduce a new task, explain how it will lead to achievement of learning goals in the exit profile.
- Ask straight-forwards questions about students' needs.
- Design an activity in which students visualize themselves in the future according to their needs.
- Use grammar to be reviewed to have them talk about themselves like imitating a job or university interview.
- Use an online survey to find out about students' background and interests.
- Group students according to their interests and learning drives to discuss their objectives.
- Use instruments like the exit profile or SWOT charts to set goals.
- Create a teacher log or cards with students' information and profile. They're to be fed during the cycle with specific data about their performance.
- Help students set their own objectives.
- Design mingling activities for learners to get to know each other and for the teacher to profile them.
- Inquire about students' motives to study English.
- When creating the vision, visual aid is paramount. Include photos, videos, drawings or any other tailored reminders that constantly displays their ideal self.
- Creating the vision involves any type of sensation not just visual stimuli. It could also involve having a growth mindset, experiencing smells or any of the senses.
- Share your English Learning experience with your students in order for them to realize it was also a challenge for you. Additionally, provide anecdotes in relation to your effort as well as the strategies and action plans that you applied.

Strengthening the vision: Often times, students will need support visualizing their future English-speaking self. Teachers then occupy a key position to reinforce that vision with imagery, experiences and reflection moments in class. Vision does not necessarily have to be long term. Students need to be given the image of the expected profile at the end of a task, a course and a block. Clarity in the images the learners are provided with, will hopefully prompt action.

Suggested classroom practices:

- Help learners put their vision down to earth by bringing models of success from former students.
- Increase the possibilities for reflection by planning activities with fellow teachers where students from different classes can share and observe the level of competences they have achieved.

- Bring novelty to the classroom through the Makers Space or the Cultural Activities.
- Introduce the ice cream strategy. A symbol to represent the triadic process students are expected to carry out while they speak (what they want to say, something they know, and something new they want to use)
- Identify students' strengths and weaknesses constantly. Communicate those findings to them effectively and timely
- Take students out of the classroom and even out of the Colombo for them to have new experiences and create new visions of how they can use English.
- Show real models and samples of the task from previous courses so that students feel inspired.
- Share successful cases with learners, invite students in higher levels to talk to beginning students about their experience at the Colombo
- Model tasks and final products.
- Set realistic action plans when giving students feedback
- Have students share ideas about their dream job
- Provide videos from non-native speakers of English from all over the world. Show students the kind of community they have joined and the privileges they can access with the language.

Substantiating the vision: As time passes by, students may feel tired or discouraged with the demands of the learning process. Only if students feel the sense of progression through clear and realistic expectations, will they have the urge to continue. Concrete feedback comes into play at this stage to feed students' perception of the possibility of their vision.

Suggested classroom practices:

- Train students to understand the meaning and the role of feedback in our program. In the AEP feedback can be given orally or in writing; it will come from teachers, peers and from the student her/himself. Start with small exercises of reflection upon very specific criteria. If necessary, use students' L1, especially in the basic blocks to reach clarity of the strengths and areas to work on.
- Set realistic action plans when giving feedback to students
- Let students give a presentation in which they can show each other their progress in regards to the achievement of objectives.
- Use an application or software that you can easily access to remember your students' motivations and ideal self.
- Open moments for students to talk about how they are feeling. Feelings are as important as strategies, action plans and linguistic items.

Transforming vision into action: The possibility of accomplishing a vision is drastically reduced without specific steps to achieve it. This is what regularly happens with most new-year resolutions. Every moment of reflection should be accompanied with concrete action plans to advance in the objective of speaking the language

Suggested classroom practices:

- Make sure every important feedback moment comes accompanied with specific plans of action to work over weak areas.

- Help students identify those techniques and strategies that have worked for them in other aspects and see if they can be transferable. Even though this may seem like a gigantic task, you can classify students in groups according to their profiles a try similar action plans or have them brainstorm one for their own sake.
- Bring awareness constantly of the importance to reflect upon both students' achievements and failures.
- Make sure to explicitly state your impressions of the way the class is making progress, these comments are very much reassuring for learners.
- Have a reflection on strategies used, achievements, and weaknesses; give feedback; and define an action plan.
- Compare current needs and interests with the ones at the beginning of the course and make the necessary adjustments.
- Create a self-check format for students to self-assess and compare their vision with their teacher's vision of their progress.
- Assess and update action plans
- Based on the self-check write a follow-up action plan with concrete deadlines.

Keeping the vision alive: students in our program, for the most part, have other activities and dreams in their lives. While English may or may not be a priority, it is important to bring back the idea of the “self-concept” or the vision that they had when they started with us. Increase the expectancy of success as they advance with their English speaking profile.

Suggested classroom practices:

- Assess the profile of your groups and plan according to their needs and interests. Age groups at the Colombo are distinctively marked from schedule to schedule. This profiling has to do with the amount of homework to assign, the type of activities to bring to class and the means to provide feedback.
- Foster onion ring discussion activities where students themselves serve as testimonies to their peers and motivate each other to continue with their learning.
- Ask students to share their progress and difficulties.
- Ask students to design their own action plans and share them with others being as specific as possible.
- Ask students to reflect upon the way they are feeling and how to overcome frustration.
- Ask students to discuss techniques or strategies they have found useful
- Ask students to provide the teacher with feedback

Counterbalancing the vision

One of the key aspects of this theory is the importance of always making learners aware of the strengths, but also of the areas they need to work on to achieve their personal objectives. The counterpart of the “ideal future self” is the “feared self” that portrays the consequences of not taking the necessary measures to improve or that simply considers the idea of failure. In our Colombian context, failure is not deemed as something positive or that can derive into constructive outcomes; on the contrary, it is common to try to avoid it at all cost. However, to the light of this framework, it is essential to address those cases in which the learner's vision is interrupted by important episodes of failure. In these situations, special intervention is necessary, and the motivation to stay focused on the “future-self vision” becomes more important than ever.

In other cases, lack of discipline or self-regulation becomes the main hindrance to the student's vision. It is in these cases that awareness must be brought to the negative consequences of lack of action towards the vision.

Suggested classroom practices

Even when they have the most positive attitude, underachieving students need to be notified of their difficulties clearly and timely. It is essential to always relate this type of feedback to the results of the process and not to the person itself. This also applies to positive reinforcement of students' results. Often times, as teachers we tend to connect students' outcomes to their personal traits and not to the effort they put into the process. Training students on developing a growth-mindset towards learning involves dealing proactively with not desirable outcomes.

- Give feedback on both achievements and failures / what has been done and what needs to be done.
- Use course checklists for students to self-assess their performance.
- Assess results of action plans.
- Decide on what's next together with the students.
- Share the final profile with specific information from the teacher log.
- Give feedback by comparing tasks so students can see their evolution.
- Discuss the effectiveness of both the learning strategies and the action plans suggested.
- Have a reflection moment on how they see themselves at the end of the cycle and how they expect to continue improving.
- Create a self-check format for students to self-assess and compare their vision with the teacher's vision of their progress
- Print copies of checklists to have students self-assess their process.

3.5 References

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