

How to enhance children's motivation for learning English

Junko Matsuzaki Carreira reflects on environmental factors that help to ensure that young learners remain engaged.

It is very important for children to have *intrinsic motivation*, referring to 'motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake' (Pintrich and Schunk: 2002: 245). How can children be more intrinsically motivated in learning English? How can teachers create an intrinsically motivating climate in English lessons for children? Based on psychological theory, this article discusses how we can improve children's intrinsic motivation and then applies this to an English as a foreign language situation.

How can children be more intrinsically motivated in learning English?

A first potential to improve motivation is to stress meaningful aspects of learning tasks (Pintrich and Schunk op. cit.). They say that authentic tasks that have meaning in the real world should be stressed in the classroom. When it comes to English lessons, it is important to connect the activities that are done in the classroom to communication in the real world. Children should be given some opportunities to use English with foreigners, especially foreign children of a similar age. Learning English embedded in meaningful and natural contexts may enhance children's intrinsic motivation.

A second potential to improve motivation is to encourage pupils to have clear and specific goals in the classroom. As has been said above, flow experience usually happens when there are clear goals one can reach (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde 1993). Clear and specific goals promote self-efficacy, referring to an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform a specific action, and motivation better than vague general goals such as 'Do your best' (Pintrich and Schunk op. cit.). They also say that proximal or close-at-hand goals enhance self-efficacy and motivation better than distant goals, because individuals can judge progress toward the former. It is essential to provide clear and concrete goals to pupils in each English lesson. When they achieve the goals each time, they may be able to feel a sense of mastery.

A third approach for improving motivation involves promoting perceptions of autonomy. Ryan, Connell and Deci (1985) say that there might be a shift from extrinsic control to self-regulation under certain conditions. Children who are not initially motivated to perform can be gradually motivated. Further, intrinsic motivation derives from students feeling a sense of control over their learning environments and activities (Lepper and Hodell 1989). It is important to create an autonomous climate in the classroom. One of the ways to enhance perception of autonomy is to provide opportunities for pupils to control and choose different activities within a range of activities that fit into the curriculum.

Paul (2003) suggests a child-centered lesson, based on a humanistic and constructive approach. A humanistic approach, including that of Carl Rogers, emphasizes the importance of the inner thoughts and feelings of learners (Paul op. cit.). The teacher is a facilitator who encourages

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learners to learn something naturally. Constructivists such as Jean Piaget, George Kelly, and Lev Vygotsky, 'focus on the child as an individual trying to make sense of the world in which she finds herself' (Paul op.cit.:173). Constructivist approaches see a child as an active learner. In order to enhance English ability, children need to repeat patterns a number of times, but this should be done in a meaningful way, not in a dry classroom drill.

Fourth, it is important to provide activities that are challenging but reasonable in terms of children's capabilities. Some researchers (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi 1975) have suggested that pupils should be given activities that are difficult and challenging, but not outside the range of competence. Activities involving diversity tend to facilitate an interest in learning because individual differences are respected. In English lessons, the teacher should provide eclectic activities including games that all the children in the classroom can join and individualized learning such as computer-assisted instruction.

Conclusion

Motivation may be influenced by various external factors including education, teachers, parents, peers, and classroom, which can enhance or lower children's motivation. In other words, it is possible to enhance children's motivation by creating an appropriate environment and using proper teaching methods and materials. By stressing meaningful aspects of learning tasks, encouraging pupils to have clear and specific goals, promoting perceptions of autonomy, and giving activities that are challenging but within their competence, children might be more intrinsically motivated to learn English.

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