

QUALITY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS' MOTIVATION: HOW TO MAKE
STUDENTS EAGER TO LEARN

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QUALITY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS' MOTIVATION: HOW TO MAKE
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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of teaching, how to make students eager to learn has been a focused question. This paper is a report on a collection of studies, methods and teaching techniques to help make students eager to learn. In order to enhance the understanding of how teachers motivate students in the classroom, a review of literature on the subject was conducted. One of the major findings of this literature review is that rapport and delivery are of great importance to a teacher. And a quality teacher should comprehensively understand his students and always keep individual differences in mind. In order to improve teaching effectiveness, modern teachers should also grasp many skills of managing classroom activities, such as discussions and group work. Additionally, teachers should also apply creative “tricks” to their job. Namely, they should make full use of whatever teaching resources available. In the conclusions and recommendations chapter, the writer shares his own teaching experiences on how to further motivate students to learn English. The writer points out that interest is the best teacher and ESL teachers should pay close attention to applying student-centered activities and using mother tongue in the class. Lastly, the writer suggests introducing high-tech devices to teaching.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| APPROVAL PAGE..... | i |
| TITLE PAGE..... | ii |
| ABSTRACT..... | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | iv |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem | |
| Definition of Terms | |
| Delimitations of the Research | |
| Method | |
| II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE..... | 3 |
| i. On Teachers | |
| ii. On Students | |
| iii. Classroom Activities | |
| iv. Some Tricks to Effective Learning | |
| III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 14 |
| IV. REFERENCES..... | 18 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the teaching history, how to make students eager to learn has been a focused question. Some student say: “I do want to be good; I do want to be focused in class, but it’s just too hard.”(Time, 2005, p51) One observer (Milligan , 2006) notes: “I’ve found that my students are motivated to learn and do their best when learning is fun. With all of the testing that’s required, we sometimes tend to cut out the fun in order to teach the ever-expanding curriculum. As professionals, we need to reflect on how to teach our curriculum, yet make learning a lot of fun for our students.”(p. 3)

This paper is a report on a collection of studies, methods and teaching techniques to help make students eager to learn. The ideas are categorized and combined with the writers’ own experience to systematize the ways to activate students’ motivation.

Statement of the Problem

The problem, expressed as a question, is as follows:

“What do experts in the field suggest are the useful conditions and teaching techniques to motivate students to learn, especially in EFL or ESL courses?”

Definition of Terms

Quality teachers: Teachers of a high standard, who are responsible, creative, efficient and who

love their students.

Students' motivation: Eagerness and willingness to learn without needing to be told or forced.

Classroom activity: Special classroom arrangement for a specific purpose usually used to improve students' ability.

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over eighty-eight (88) days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with Wilson Databases and Academic Search Elite. Key search topics include: students' motivation, quality teachers, classroom management. .

Method

A brief review of literature on Exploring/Activating students' motivation for learning will be conducted. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

On Teachers

Rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge and credibility are five most critical characteristics of a good instructor (Catt, Miller, and Schallenkamp, 2007). Of these characteristics, rapport and delivery were considered to be of particular interest. Rapport was described as the ability to build relationship based on mutual trust and harmony; delivery was described as the manner in which instructors present and convey class-content materials.

Teachers need to have a strategy to help their students succeed in learning. They should use appropriate examples, be prepared to teach, involve professional practitioners, explain grades clearly and seek advice and suggestions from their colleagues (Catt et al., 2007).

Another author (Harrison 2006) found that oracy is often underplayed and written communication takes a dominant role in the learning experience. Teachers frequently introduce youngsters to ideas through artifacts or videos or demonstrations and then ask the learners to document what they witnessed or they provide textbook exercises or worksheets for learners to complete. The author argues that oracy has a greater role to play than literacy in fostering and establishing learning. This point is very important for teachers to keep in mind.

Effective interaction with students requires effective communication. Good

instructors do not simply assume the communication process has occurred at the end of the class. They ensure it by establishing rapport with their students, by keeping them involved in classroom activities, and by pursuing strategies that will enhance the probability that the desired learning outcomes are achieved (Catt et al., 2007).

Students' comments are also useful for those who want to be quality teachers. One qualitative study on the ideal professor's qualities (Helterbran, 2008), suggests there are several characteristics of a qualified teacher:

1. Student comments related to professorial knowledge and presentation:

Positive Comments:

- Knowledgeable and motivational professor
- Knows his stuff; Puts information on playing field students can understand
- He is so intelligent

Negative Comments:

- Knowledgeable, but not interested in presenting it well
- Very confused. He may have some knowledge but he does not know how to deliver it
- Can't tell what he knows

2. Student comments related to professor's personal qualities:

Positive Comments:

- Wants everyone to succeed
- Passionate about what he does
- Good sense of humor

Negative Comments:

- Demonstrates little to no interest in students
- Extremely rude and judgmental
- Likes to pick people out of the room, question them, and make them feel stupid

3. Student comments related to instructional qualities:

Positive Comments:

- Down to earth and very helpful when you need clarification
- Keeps the class interested; helps as much as possible
- He is reliable, easy to talk to, and makes a comfortable class atmosphere; projects are meaningful

Negative Comments:

- Very poor classroom management
- Never on time for class
- Gives very unclear instructions

Scholars in China also have some perspectives as to the competence of an EFL teacher. In a book titled *Modern Foreign Language Teaching Methodology* (Shu Bai Mei, 2005), the writer lists some aspects of competence of an EFL teacher and then continues to comment that that list includes factors of different kinds: some are specific to English language teaching, while others have more to do with general qualities that might be expected of all teachers. Namely, the factors in the list fall into two categories: subject matter knowledge and action system knowledge. The former refers to the specific information needed by teachers to teach content, and the latter to

information dealing with teaching and learning in general.

On Students

Good teachers help to motivate students. One expert (Bowman 2007), contends that great teachers understand the fundamental differences between motivation and inspiration: motivation is self-centered and inspiration is other-focused. While teaching, the question is not “how can students be motivated?” but rather, “how can educators be deterred from destroying student motivation and morale through their policies and practices?” He emphasize that great teaching is something that one live; it is not something that one does through rewards and incentives. By focusing on the talents, passions, and natural curiosities of one’s students, teachers inspire students to enjoy the world.

Education reforms and media attention focus overwhelmingly on the lower end of the students, preoccupied with students meeting minimum standards. But the top end of the education achievement gap is a chasm According to Harney’s report (2007). Harney introduced several programs such as Minority High Achievement (MHA), Saturday Engineering Enrichment and Discovery (SEED) and Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) with the aim to help high-achieving minorities reach their full potential. The author concluded that when it comes to those supporting programs, one size does not fit all, but all students are capable of reaching their full potential when provided with proper support.

Also, interpersonal relationships do affect student motivation greatly. Two reviewers of research in this area (Anderman and Kaplan’s, 2008), categorized the

research of this aspect into three ways: One way to characterize the growing body of research on social processes and motivation is by noting different, complementary foci in the social domain; Another way to characterize research investigating the interface of social processes and academic motivation is in terms of hypothesized direction of relations between these two domains; A third type of research questions highlights the hypothesized relation of a combination of academic and social processes on other outcomes, such as achievement.

Age is also an important factor affecting college student motivation. For example, in Bye, Pushkar and Conway's quantitative study (2007) on traditional undergraduate (aged 21 and younger) and nontraditional undergraduate (aged 28 and older), nontraditional students reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation for learning than did traditional students. Intrinsic motivation correlated with positive affect more strongly for nontraditional than for traditional students. For all students, interest and age emerged as significant predictors of intrinsic motivation to learn, and both interest and intrinsic motivation significantly predicted positive affect.

Last but not least, as is pointed out in Shu's book (2005), intrinsic motivation is much more powerful than extrinsic motivation. However, one type of extrinsic reward can indeed have an effect on intrinsic motivation: positive feedback that learners perceive as a boost to their feelings of competence and self-determination. But no other externally administered set of rewards has a lasting effect.

Classroom Activities

Teachers are learning to incorporate activities that promote cooperation and civility in school. Cooperation, civility and compassion are new urgency in schools. Words turn kids off. They are not head people. They need concrete activities like games. Smiles and laughter in the classrooms on a more regular basis are the first step (Unmacht, 1999).

One reviewer commenting on classroom activities and motivation (Harrison, 2006) says that teachers should focus on nurturing their interactions with and between students. Fostering dialogue and orchestrating discussion should be at the heart of what teachers do on a daily basis. If you want learning to happen, banish quiet classroom and let the kids talk.

Discussions in the classroom can be of importance. As Henning E., Nielson, Henning C., and Schulz (2008) have pointed out, discussion-based teaching makes social studies classes more interesting, promotes the development of tolerance, increases students' belief that they can have an impact on the political system, and increases the level of civic participation after leaving high school. After eliciting initial student responses to begin the discussion, teachers can choose from many different directions to follow. Ideally, teachers will ask high-level questions that elicit multiple student responses, allow plenty of wait time, and encourage student-to-student interaction. When time becomes short or student interest lags, teachers may also choose to ask more leading questions, focus more information through their own explanations.

Some advocates place great emphasis on group work (Blatchford, Baines, Rubie-Davies, Bassett, and Chowne, 2006). Accordingly the advocates say research shows that peer-based group working can be a productive part of classroom activities, but many teachers use group work while rarely plan or create opportunities for the development and use of interactions within groups. It has been found that teachers in English schools have above all else a strong belief in the value of addressing the individual needs of pupils. This informal pedagogical view can conflict with pressures arising from the curriculum and the classroom context, especially when teachers have large numbers of children in their class. They believe that some teachers may be forced to use more teacher-led and especially whole-class teaching session than they might like. Elsewhere they have suggested that teachers could make more use of group work as a way of facilitating pupil involvement-it offers learning possibilities for pupils not provided by either teacher-led situations or individual work. However, grouping arrangements that currently characterize many classrooms are just as likely to inhibit learning as they are to promote learning. It seems, therefore, that researchers need to rethink current pedagogical theories that seem to favor teacher-led situations and individual work. Group work is underused and underdeveloped and needs to be given a much more central role in educational policy.

At least one author (Kornbluth, 2004) says today's students are the "virtual generation". They use cell phones, play stations, listen to iPods, and communicate with others via internet rather than in person. To draw their attentions, teachers need fresh ways to teach. Classroom activities should be designed much closer to modern

technology and fashion than ever.

Some Tricks to Effective Teaching

In this section several teaching techniques or “tricks” are collected and provided.

1. Put the big rocks in first

Author Greaves (2006) tells a very interesting story:

A lecturer walked in front of his students for the first talk of the year. He took out a bucket and placed large rocks inside until it was full. "Is it full?" he asked. "Yes," came the reply. He then got some gravel and tipped it into the bucket, allowing the gravel to fit into the spaces between the rocks. "Is it full?" he asked. "Yes," came the reply. The professor then got some sand and poured it in. "Is it full?" he asked. "Yes," came the reply. Finally, he got some water and the students watched as it was absorbed by the sand in the seemingly full bucket. (p. 13)

In the story, Greaves (2006) was showing us that the only way to get everything in was to put the big rocks in first. Like every teacher facing the new semester, he finds himself wandering in many different directions, trying out a great number of new ideas. Some stick, others don't. The holiday is a time for him to decide what will be “The big rocks” of his classroom next year, and plan for them.

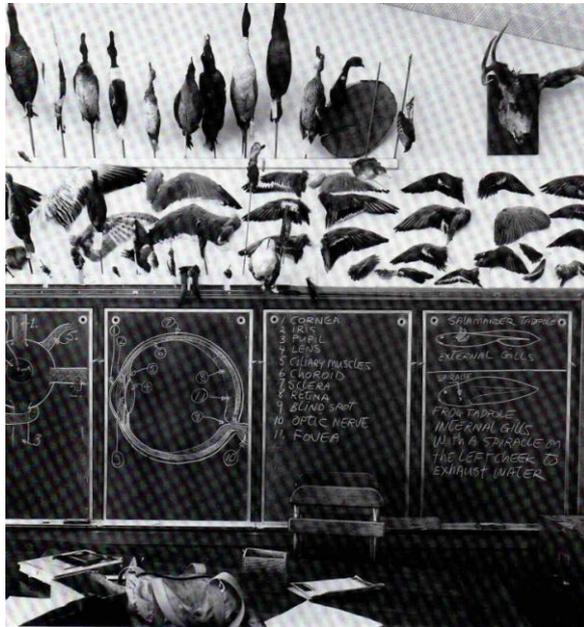
2. TV commercials as authentic teaching materials

Classes using only textbooks appear to be question-and-answer sessions while classes using authentic materials with or without textbooks seem more natural and

communicative. Many textbooks create a climate for socially isolated learning. Teachers need more materials that help students to become thoughtful participants in a socially rich environment for learning and that feature everyday uses of English. TV commercials provide a refreshing alternative to the traditional textbook. It is fairly evident that vivid materials help students not only to communicate in a natural way but also to learn more about the target culture. In addition, they encourage students to become critical thinkers (Erkaya, 2005).

3. Classroom decorations

The science classroom is an expectant stage--an empty arena filled with the possibility of learning (Sciences, 1989).



Moss Landing Elementary School, 7th and 8th grade, Science Room, 1984



Naval Postgraduate School, Metallurgical Classroom, 1983

4 . On-line education

On-line learning is here to stay, and the learning and practical benefits of this mode of instruction are numerous. A qualitative study of the rural community college indicated that the advantages of on-line learning outweigh the disadvantages, both in gravity and number (Hurt, 2008). No one stands to benefit more from the on-line option than the rural community college students who live some distance from the college. However, both on-line teachers and on-line students need to realize that on-line teaching and learning entail many new, and often very different, roles, duties and obligations (Hurt, 2008).

To summarize, the “bucket-filling” story tells that the teachers should be organized and plan teaching beforehand; the “TV commercials” material emphasizes putting not only textbooks but more materials into teaching; the “classroom decoration” pictures show us how to improve the teaching environment and the last technique combines teaching with modern technology. These four “tricks” are not enough for a teacher

who wants to be outstanding. A teacher should be always exploring new methods to enhance his teaching ability.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal aim of teaching is to activate students' motivation for learning. According to the articles I collected, I could find some solutions on how to make students eager to learn.

For a quality teacher, so many qualities are needed, such as rapport, delivery, fairness, knowledge, credibility and so on. Among them, we should pay more attention to rapport and delivery. As language teachers we should keep in mind that oracy is also important while we often focus more on literacy. And sometimes if we take our students' view on how to be a good teacher into consideration, we will find it more profitable than expected.

Furthermore, to understand how the motivation works inside a student is vital, so we need to make a study on the students' talents, passions, and natural curiosities to adjust our teaching strategies. At the same time we should also take the effects of students' academic level, interpersonal relationships and age into consideration.

In a modern classroom, activities are an important element of classroom management. It is beneficial to analyze some studies on classroom activities such as discussions and group work. As teachers, we should make full use of our resources and creativities to activate students' motivation: a well-prepared teaching plan, classroom decoration, TV commercials as teaching material, on-line teaching and so on.

Apart from the literature I collected, I would very much like to share some of my

own teaching experience:

1. Interest

In China, it has often been remarked that: “interest is the best teacher.” I think a student can much more easily achieve academic goals if he is interested in his subject. As to language learning, due to the nature of language, the importance of interest is evident. Unlike any other subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry or even history, politics and literature, language is a communicating tool related to every aspect of life. You can easily find something interesting in language as long as you have hobbies. So, as a language teacher, I always lead my kids to follow their interests to learn English. Last year, several boys always skipped my class watching NBA matches. So I asked them to take down 10 English words on NBA game next time as a compensation for skipping my class. Surprisingly, they handed in more than 50 words on NBA rules, history and devices by browsing the NBA websites other than watching the matches. As a result, they developed an interest in English through NBA game and even one of them gave a speech on it in my class. Of course, they never played truant again.

In my eyes, a language teacher really needs to be more than an expert on grammar, vocabulary, reading or speaking; he must try to be familiar with as many fields as possible; he should always be learning new.

2. Monolingual or Bilingual?

I would like to specify this question: Should I use Chinese in my English class?

And should I allow my students to use Chinese in my English class?

A monolingual class is always preferable, because the students are sitting in my classroom to learn English, not Chinese. But what if the students can't understand every word I say or they can't use English to express themselves correctly? They probably may feel frustrated or boring and consequently lose interest in my class. At this point, a sentence of their mother tongue may break the ice. If Chinese is permitted, the advantages are obvious: better understanding and time-saving. So, as an English teacher, I must use Chinese wisely in the class taking the difficulty level of the material and the language ability of the students into careful consideration.

3. Teacher-centered or Student-centered?

In language class, should the form of classroom management be teacher-centered or student-centered? I may say the answer should be: it depends. It is evident that students are more motivated in a student-centered class. But when introducing some important informative knowledge to students, the teacher tends to be the center of the class. Because teacher can sort out the main points from the material for the students, thus help them grasp the knowledge in a more efficient way. Conversely, if the time has come for students to practice what they had learnt, the center should move to students. In the literature review, I had collected some studies on classroom activities because arranging activities is more than useful in language learning and it is also a good example of student-centered classroom. Consequently, it is advisable to set students free to speak, listen, write, and think in English during different activities.

Finally, one point I want to mention is that students-centered activities are time-consuming. As class sessions are limited, it is preferable to assign enough off-class activities to students. Then the study can be more student-centered.

4. High-tech devices in teaching

Chalk, board and a teaching stick are not enough in a time of modern technology. Modern teachers should be able to use computers, make PPT materials, and apply multiple-media methods to teaching. My point is that kids are likely to accept modern devices easily. If a teacher can introduce high-tech devices to teaching, students are bound to show greater interests in learning. Asking students to listen to English reading materials with ipod (mp3 player) everyday is a better way to improve their listening ability than listen to the radio which can't be replayed or paused at will. Another device I want to mention is PSP (Play Station Portable). Although this SONY's electronic product is meant for entertainment (video games), playing its English game (preferably puzzle-solving games) is also a good way to arouse students' interests of learning as well as enlarge their vocabulary.

Finally, I would like to add one more point from my nine years of teaching: always smile to your students, always keep a sense of humor in the classroom and always show your bright side to your students.

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