Avoiding Motivation Alienation: AMA and Cikgu's Moves for Classroom Change

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Abstract

Alienation in a classroom may often arise from lack of motivation when learning a language for which learners can see little reason or purpose. In the Malaysian rural setting, this may occur when learners are young, unaware of extrinsic motivational factors or without community support for TESOL classroom norms. A meaningful classroom has to have its own intrinsic motivation. This paper will argue that the way language learning is fostered creates intrinsic motivation. Even in large rural classrooms, interaction, well chosen tasks and greater use of spoken English are tools to counter the sense that 'the aliens have landed'. The presenter will share a framework for avoiding alienation to create learner-centred enjoyment of language acquisition by drawing on ASEAN and Malaysian classroom and teacher training experiences. The nationwide CfBT Malaysian Schools project will be referred to.

Introduction

Many learners in rural Malaysian classrooms may not see any reason to learn English. Motivation, which has been identified as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language may not follow described norms of other second language learning situations, as community support for English language use is minimal and reasons for learning are distant. Young learners often do not have the world knowledge to be motivated in terms of instrumental motivation to learn the target language for purposeful uses outside the class. Instrumental motivation, generally characterised by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language, is motivation dependent on external factors (Gardner 1982). Yet for many learners, the most potent factor is the classroom as the external factors are too distant in time or space. Learners, in particular young learners, in rural Malaysia may not see the relevance of English as an instrument for self actualisation, while the most dominant aspect of English as a tool is often the examination, an aspect we will turn to later.

Other aspects of motivation which have been the subject of a plethora of studies following Gardner's influential work (1982, 1985) describe the role of English as an

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integrative subject whereby learners are motivated by the social and cultural milieu to acquire English for integration. It is thought that learners who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people who speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to understand the culture of the language group (Falk, 1978). The linguistic and social milieu of Malaysia outside the Klang Valley and urban centers make postulation of the integrative role difficult. This paper will argue that aspects of the development of intrinsic interest in learning another language can be a focus of effective classroom language learning.

Motivational models

Examinations play an important role in task selection in classrooms and often students study English to pass examinations. Such motivation is clearly instrumental where English is learned because of external factors. While one cannot deny the effectiveness of instrumental motivation when learners see the 'pay off' such as Indian students preparing for English medium tertiary study (Kachru 1977 cited in Brown 2000) there is evidence that motivation through examination preparation lacks long term benefits in further motivation and communicative language competency (Benson 1991; Dornyei 2001).

It is worthwhile to consider research from Japan where there is considerable investment in what is essentially an English as a Foreign Language environment. Berwick and Ross (1989) found that a group of 90 first year Japanese university students taking a compulsory English course were instrumentally motivated to pass the English entrance examination for the university. Upon gaining entrance the students' interest in English declined. Motivation to study English declined after success in admission to the university and their language skills were weak in spoken English as the examination emphasised discrete grammar skills and vocabulary. Benson (1991) cited in Norris-Holt (2004) noted that university students' motivation to study English was very mixed. He found that on the continuum of motivation for integrative and instrumental reasons, there should be a place for 'personal' motivation. Reasons such as 'pleasure at being able to read English and enjoyment of entertainment of English' were highly rated in his study (Benson 1991:36) and this is before the influence of the Internet. To quote further:

Benson suggests that the students' rejection of instrumental motivation illustrates the view that students do not perceive English as having a vital role to play in their lives. He also makes the point that the rejection of instrumental reasons for the study of English may also indicate that the Japanese language is considered adequate for normal daily verbal exchange. (Norris-Holt 2004: 4).

Parallels with rural Malaysian motivational strategies through examination learning are an interesting area for consideration. It is also worth noting that a needs perception analysis undertaken by CfBT Education Servics with Bentong Education District, Malaysia of 168 teachers found that teachers perceived that learners are motivated not by examinations but by English language songs and games (Hall and Dodson 2003). The need for other approaches which do not focus on instrumental motivation is also

clearly evident with the washback reports of English competency needs at varied levels of usage (Pillay 1998; New Straits Times 16 Nov. 2000; Star 30 May 2003).

Developing Personal Intrinsic Motivation

Given that the classroom is the main setting for English language learning it is worthwhile to examine the context of learning which most impacts on motivating each learner. The classroom is often the only context for English language learning in rural areas apart from television which is usually inaccurately subtitled. Rajaretnam and Nalliah observe that in rural Malaysian schools there is a challenging common pace with urban schools 'irrespective of the students lack of exposure to the language at home or the immediate need to learn the language' so classroom processes are the key source of motivation to learn English (1999: 13).

Motivation in a classroom involves the relationship between the teacher and the learner as most classroom encounters are embedded in the roles and power of the teacher. If motivation is to develop learner's internalized language then one needs to see how teachers create the climate so that learners want to learn and enjoy learning, while in an environment managed by one in a position of respect and power. A simple trichotomy of such power is that of coercive power, reward based power and referent power (Wright 1987; Greene 1998). Coercive power involves punishment. Rewards in a classroom may involve marks, an encouraging word or a dinosaur stamp. Referent power is where individuals appeal to the commitment and interest of others to create intrinsic interest. This is proactive and effective power building and in classroom terms means that authoritative statements, the use of punishment and obvious rewards change to the learners wanting to learn. With more frequent referent power approaches, direct classroom management is superseded by task facilitation. However learners need to integrate valuing doing something with a sense of valued success to create a cycle of self motivation.

Recent suggested approaches to motivation in the classroom draw on self determination and goal theory (Dornyei 1998) and focus on learners' own expectations of learning and success. Clement, et al. (1994) found three processes correlated with achievement in a study of 301 Hungarian 11th grade EFL learners: integrative motivation through an interest in English language books and music, classroom cohesion and thirdly, self-confidence as a language learner. Classroom cohesion or how well a classroom was organised was a strong factor but self confidence was the process most linked to success. The importance of learner self- confidence links to the well researched area of expectancy and success (Wigfied 1994; Dornyei 2001) and there is a direct relationship between learner self confidence and how a teacher sees expression of her power as coercive, rewarding or through referent power building learner success.

Building Learner Success Through Basic Motivational Settings

Central to creating learner success is an understanding of the dynamics of motivation. An adaptation of a taxonomy of motivational process (Dornyei and Otto 1998) will inform a sample of techniques for classroom practice:

- Developing the basic motivational setting
- Generating learner motivation
- Maintaining and protecting motivation
- Encouraging positive self assessment and efficacy

Developing the Basic Motivational Setting

Teacher behaviour is a powerful motivational tool especially in a setting where the teacher has status and is viewed as a powerful person for the time that the caregivers hand over responsibility (Hall and Yuliasri 1995). Much teacher education literature highlights the need to be an effective model for motivation (Randall and Thornton 2001). An issue at stake in a changing linguistic setting such as Malaysia is the levels of confidence in classroom English language usage by all, especially in rural settings (Pillay 1998). Until learners see that a teacher is prepared to invest in using the target language there is little room for the celebration of reliance on technological support.

The motivational and formative influence on students also comes from the enthusiasm which teachers share. All enthusiastic teachers impart a sense of commitment to and interest in the language with non-verbal cues quickly picked up by students (Farrell 2004).

Critical to developing a motivational climate is consideration of the time and energy spent in differing teacher roles. Many teacher roles relate to dealing with external accountability while others focus on the core processes of learning. While this is a complex area, it is still worthwhile to examine some roles as in the following basic model and as teachers to reflect on the proportions of effort we expend. It is worthwhile to consider how much time is spent on the roles in the upper sections of the figure and how much on those roles relating to intrinsic motivation in the lower sections of the figure.

The left side of the table contains primary classroom teacher talk collected by this writer as examples of less than skilled approaches to building motivation.

Generating Learner Motivation

In many classrooms many of the learners may not understand why they are involved in an activity and may be led into an activity through the teachers input as a controller and organiser. It may be the case that an outsider's goal, that is, a goal from the teacher or a goal created by the textbook input is not seen as relevant by learners.

Assessor –grading, marking	That's not even worth a C. 'How to pass the real exam.'
Controller- managing behaviours	'Class be quiet. You need to be quiet to learn.'
Organiser –setting up tasks, organising learning	'Please open the book at page 16 and copy down the story."
Resource –providing information, answering questions	'I will tell you the answer to make it easier."
Supporter - of pair and group peer learning	'Ask your friend if you are not clear.'
Encourager- giving positive feedback **Tutor** –providing individual guidance and pastoral care	'That one is OK you know." 'Got a brain there. Can use or not"

It would benefit learners to see an obtainable goal. This may be through goal setting such as 'today we will learn 5 new words about the family' or 'we will all listen to the story of a boy who was blue. Later I want you to tell me what to you the funniest part of the story is.' Learners are not interested in the form of tasks which come from an organisational perspective such as 'today we will do pages 2 and 3 about the past tense'. There will be more positive responses through seeing success with interesting content. Clearly interesting content which learners enjoy is a fundamental aspect in motivation but beyond the scope of this paper.

Critical to any input is how the process of learning is managed in the classroom. If we are to develop intrinsic learner motivation a key area is how learning is managed. Once teachers gain confidence in using English language in their own classrooms a sense of safety to move beyond the roles of controller and organiser will develop. Exploring pedagogic approaches is one way of using and developing more linguistic confidence. In the year and a half of rural teacher training in the Malaysian Schools English Language Project some of needs captured in an earlier large scale needs analysis are beginning to be addressed (Hall and Dodson 2003). In 32 Districts involved in the nation wide project, teachers are very positive in their course evaluations that using a variety of task types and techniques helps them generate learner motivation. Through exploration of varied techniques teachers and students move from transmission of knowledge modes to greater interactivity.

Maintaining and Protecting Motivation

Increasing learners self confidence is critical to maintaining motivation. Unless intrinsic motivation is sustained and protected when an activity has begun, the natural tendency is to get tired or bored and succumb to an attractive distraction. The learners' attention may wander to other worlds and a sense of alienation can occur. Clearly the teacher with her authoritative role controls and fosters approaches that create a climate of learning

and lets go of some aspects of power to encourage 'fun' in the class room. In an inherently face threatening environment full of power play such as a classroom it is useful to consider positive approaches which purport to help learners self confidence (Dornyei 2001:130).

Teachers can foster the belief that competence is a changeable aspect of development. Favourable self-conceptions of L2 competence can be promoted by providing regular experiences of success. Everyone is more interested in a task if they feel that they make a contribution. A small personal word of encouragement is a powerful tool. Teachers can reduce classroom anxiety by making the learning context less stressful.

In terms of classroom practice, teachers in the CgBT teacher development courses have found that building on success is important for learners. At times the drive to complete the syllabus (Pandian 2004) with an adherence to completing the textbook militates against sustaining learner motivation. Perhaps as teachers report, it is motivating for the learners and teachers to build in more learner talk, varied tasks and to model positive language learning skills, such as sustained silent reading, vocabulary learning in realistic bites, speaking for all in the classroom. It may also be more motivating to focus on attainable skills acquisition rather than rote test preparation. All classroom approaches will however rest on how learners perceive and see their own success in language learning. In fact there may even be a place for greater self- awareness for all, through self assessment.

Encouraging Positive Self Assessment

How learners feel about their accomplishments and the amount of satisfaction they feel after a task influences how teachers approach and develop other tasks. If as has been shown, extrinsic motivation is minimal in rural Malaysian schools, it is important to focus on encouraging positive intrinsic motivation and this can include self evaluation. Learners working with obtainable short term goals while beginning to know their own strengths and areas for future learning helps create a climate of ownership of the learning. Examples of this include a journal programme for SMK students, the use of self reports which this writer has used with 9 year olds, a language diary or a learners log of vocabulary learning.

Conclusion

A meaning full classroom has to have its own intrinsic motivation when little community use of English occurs. As teachers we play a vital role in creating sustaining and building a motivated classroom. While planners and teachers may see the relevance of English as an instrumental tool and may understand instrumental motivation, for most learners it is a distant alien world. Even in large rural classrooms an enjoyable climate of learning through interaction, well chosen tasks and greater use of spoken English are tools to counter the sense that' the aliens have landed.'

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