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Introduction

The challenge of motivation

A passion for knowledge and learning is what draws many of us into teaching. So it can sometimes be frustrating when our students don't share this enthusiasm, especially since their futures may depend on it. Our response to this frustration helps define us as teachers. Some of us may want to confront our students about their apparent apathy. Others may feel resigned to giving help only to those who seem to want it. A more challenging approach is to recognize that there is passion and energy lurking in the classroom and attempt to draw it out through our teaching. This takes a degree of faith and optimism, and the willingness to explore the many factors that lie behind motivation.

Central to our understanding of motivation is the idea of **reward**. By 'reward' we don't mean something given to us, like a prize; rather we mean the sense of pleasure or satisfaction we get from an event, an activity, or a situation. Motivation occurs when we *anticipate* this kind of reward. Our brains release the chemical dopamine, increasing our energy levels and commitment to a task or activity. If reward is actually gained from an activity, anticipation will increase further still when we confront it again.

Though motivation seems straightforward in theory, it becomes far from simple to grasp in practice, especially when we consider a long, complex process like learning. As the focus of our thoughts shifts between tasks and situations, conflicting thoughts and emotions will compete for attention, affecting our levels of motivation. The outcomes of this battle can sometimes be surprising. For example, the desire to avoid a little displeasure in the short term (e.g. putting off exam revision) will often have a greater effect than the prospect of larger long-term rewards (like getting good results). And the desire to see others rewarded (or go unrewarded) can also motivate us regardless of the outcome for ourselves. We must also understand the many little ways in which we can feel rewarded from one moment to the next, from the simple pleasure of moving our bodies freely, to the act of relating to another human.

It is important to recognize that there are limits to how far teachers can affect motivation, particularly in the case of language learning. A great deal of progress will depend on practice done outside of class over a long time, for example. What is more, although the costs of language learning (effort, embarrassment, frustration, etc.) have to be paid out several hours a week, the pleasure of interacting confidently with users of English may not be available for some time, especially in a **first language (L1)** context. But some language teachers do inspire students, and we can certainly increase the likelihood that motivation will develop. That's where this book comes in.

How this book is organized

Part 1 considers how we can increase students' anticipation of reward when they contemplate learning the English language, wherever they are. We'll explore the aspects of language learning they are likely to find rewarding, so the idea of learning English might appeal more (Chapter 1). We'll also look at how a focus on the future can increase positive thinking (Chapter 2), and how the acquisition process (Chapter 3) and engaging in positive learning behaviours (Chapter 4) can be made more rewarding.

In Part 2 we'll consider how we can create a more rewarding environment in the classroom so that students develop greater commitment to their courses. We'll start by considering our own behaviour as teachers (Chapter 5) and move on to explore the learning environment (Chapter 6), learner roles and responsibilities (Chapter 7), the materials we use (Chapter 8), and the way we design tasks (Chapter 9).

Finally, Part 3 considers how we can respond to background factors which can have an impact on students' motivation to learn. First, we'll address individual differences, such as gender and social roles, age, personality, and special educational needs, and see how these personal factors affect how far we anticipate reward in language learning (Chapter 10). The focus will then be broadened to look at family, culture, and learning backgrounds (Chapter 11). In the last chapter, we'll return to perhaps the most important factor, the teacher, and ask how we can inspire ourselves to motivate others (Chapter 12).

The earlier chapters in each Part address the factors that affect motivation more broadly. Subsequent chapters then deal with more specific issues. Readers may therefore find that the context provided in earlier chapters is useful when reading later ones and may benefit from reading chapters in the order in which they've been presented. However, each chapter can be read on its own, and the chapter headings are designed to guide the reader towards aspects of teaching practice that are most relevant.

The main text of the book highlights the factors behind motivation that are specific to each chapter topic, and outlines motivational pedagogic approaches that relate to them. *Try this* activities provide specific ideas and techniques that you can try immediately, while *Getting it right* sections give procedural tips to help deal with situations where motivation may be especially at risk. The *Why this works* sections at the end of each chapter provide a more academic rationale for the approaches recommended in the main text, and a starting point for further exploration of issues affecting motivation. In addition, the *Glossary* provides explanatory notes on words that appear in bold throughout the main text, and the *Useful websites* section lists online resources for extending or developing activities discussed in the book.

Target audience

The ideas in this book are designed to suit learners from the last years of primary school to early adulthood. But all contexts vary, and the ideas are designed to provide a selection rather than a programme of action. I hope to inspire you to experiment, find solutions that work for you, and stay motivated!

Part 1 The individual learner

1 A love of language learning?

Timothy Doner is a teenage hyperpolyglot, a lover of language learning. Having learnt Hebrew and Arabic at the age of just 13, he has gone on to become fluent in over 20 languages. As the motivation to learn languages comes from Timothy himself, we might describe it as **intrinsic motivation**.

It's fair to say that Timothy Doner's enthusiasm is not shared by many young people: modern languages are often rated among the least popular of school subjects. Students love the idea of being able to speak foreign languages but, unlike Timothy, they often fail to anticipate a sense of **reward** when they think about the process of learning them. On the contrary, they may expect a great deal of frustration. If we are to make English intrinsically motivating, we need to compensate for any negative feelings our students might have about it by emphasizing the aspects of language learning that are most likely to create a sense of gain and pleasure. Of course, individuals differ in what they find rewarding, so we might start by finding out what our students find pleasurable about using English.

Try this ☞ **A pleasure survey**

Write on the board *What is fun about English?* Invite students to think of specific things they enjoy doing in English. Write some of your own ideas to help, e.g. *watching NFL (American football) on TV, singing Justin Bieber tracks on my karaoke machine*, etc. Print images related to their ideas, such as book covers or photos of sports stars, and create a wall display.

The pleasure of learning

Regardless of individual preferences, all learners are likely to find certain aspects of language learning particularly rewarding. When we learn a language, we not only gain an understanding of a wide range of written and spoken language forms but also an understanding of texts, from books to conversations. For many learners, these **cognitive** gains bring a keen sense of reward.

Understanding our world

The desire to understand the language that surrounds us is a strong source of motivation. From the youngest age, we are driven to make sense of the words people around us are using. Learning a **second language (L2)** can seem less relevant in a **first language (L1)** environment, but English has become part of

people's lives all over the world, and there are opportunities to explore the English around us wherever we are.

Of course, this does not mean exposing students to as much English as possible. Lack of understanding can cause displeasure, and reading or listening in L2 may create negative associations if the student believes they have understood little. Instead, we must draw attention to the English in our environment selectively.

Try this ☞ **Language collection**

Ask students to find objects around their homes which bear English words. They could choose packaging with English labelling (*Store in a cool, dark place.*), clothing with slogans in English (*Live the life you love!*), and so on. Ask students to research what they mean, bring them into class, and teach their peers the meaning.

Understanding texts

Carefully exposing students to new vocabulary is particularly enjoyable: all learners feel little bursts of pleasure when the meaning of a sentence suddenly becomes clear. In fact, recent research has shown that understanding new words in context produces a similar reaction in our brains to eating good food, so we should encourage students to discover new vocabulary in every lesson. However, the sense that students have of gaining understanding of the world around them may be less great when new words come from coursebooks, even if graded texts do reduce the risk of failed understanding, so it is important to connect new vocabulary to the real world.

Try this ☞ **Word of the day**

Start lessons with a word of the day that has a topical relevance. For example, you could write on the board *performance* on the day of the school concert, or the word *soaking* on a wet day. Ask students to guess why you've chosen it.

Try this ☞ **Web connections**

We can make words from coursebooks seem more relevant by quickly searching for them online. When students query a new word in their coursebooks that can be represented visually (e.g. *escape*), enter the word into a search engine and click on the 'images' tab. Check the images are appropriate, then ask students to choose the picture that expresses the meaning of the word in the coursebook most clearly. To help them understand how useful a word is, click on the main results tab and have them record the word in their notebooks with a star rating that indicates how many search results it gets.

2bn+ (*****)

1bn–2bn (****)

500m–1bn (***)

250m–500m (**)

Interest in language

One of the difficulties language teachers face is that their subject is often considered a tool to help describe or express ideas, like a paintbrush would be to an artist, rather than something to be learnt for its own sake. As lovers of language ourselves, we know that language can be a rich source of interest and discovery, and where possible we need to draw students into this world. We can do this by drawing attention to features of language beyond simple meanings, such as how we express politeness through language or how intonation can be used to add a further layer of meaning. As we do this, we can develop interest by asking students whether the features of English they encounter are also present in their L1.

Try this ☞ **Reacting to words**

When students have read a text, ask them to choose a word or two that they like, as if they are selecting chocolates. They may select a word because it has a nice sound, is used in an interesting way, or seems similar to a word in their L1. Respond enthusiastically to their ideas and make selections of your own.

Try this ☞ **Explore politeness**

Ask students to rewrite dialogue from the coursebook so that it has a similar meaning but is no longer polite. For example:

Good morning, can I help you? → What do you want?

Yes, I'd like some orange juice, please. → Give me some orange juice.

Sorry. There is apple juice, but no orange juice. → There isn't any orange juice. Have apple juice.

Ask them to perform the dialogue with a flat intonation to reflect the written changes they've made to the dialogue. Then see if they can put the politeness back in. Finally, discuss which version is closest to the way they talk in their L1 at home, school, or in a shop.

Try this ☞ **Comic onomatopoeia**

Ask students to bring in any L1 comic books they have and to find onomatopoeic words (words which sound like the thing they describe, e.g. *zoom, boom, crash, woof*). Write the English translations on the board and have students match them to their L1 equivalent. Alternatively, find some L2 comics online (by doing an image search for *comics*) and ask students to translate the onomatopoeic words into their L1. Now ask students to produce a simple comic strip of their own using onomatopoeia in each frame.

✓ *Getting it right* | **Sharing understanding**

Students will get more pleasure from new understanding if they can share it. Allow each student to choose different words to look up and then share what they mean with each other.

Again, students will gain added pleasure if they can display newly acquired knowledge to other students. Posters are a particularly effective way of doing this.

Try this ☞   **Word posters**

Show students the poster in Figure 1.1 and explain that *nice* is an overused word, or a 'cliché'. On the board, write some words you think are overused, such as *fine, cool, happy, big, OK, said, awesome, pretty,* or invite students to suggest some. Have them choose an overused word, look it up in a thesaurus (e.g. www.oxforddictionaries. com/thesaurus), and choose ten or more synonyms. Ask them to produce their own word posters for homework and decorate the classroom with them.

FIGURE 1.1   *Word poster for synonyms*

Pleasure in language

In addition to bringing cognitive gains, working with language can bring great pleasure on an emotional level, especially when we do it with others.

Sharing emotion

A great source of pleasure is the sharing of emotion, for example fear when watching a horror film together, or fun when we share a joke. If we can make using language a source of emotion, we may be able to make language

learning seem more rewarding. We might try to provoke emotional reactions through play scripts, speeches, poems, and short stories, but there are also simpler ways that busy teachers can do this, from humorous language drills to simple games.

Try this ☞ **Emotion drills**

Drill words and phrases in a way that communicates their meaning. Have students say *noisy* loudly, *hungry* weakly, or *crazy* in a silly way. Then have students say the words in an opposite way, saying *crazy* in a sensible tone, for example.

Try this ☞ **Group storytelling**

After you've studied a set of vocabulary, divide students into groups of three. Provide them with the first sentence of a story. For example, if the vocabulary set is about furniture, start with *One day, Paolo was sitting on the sofa. Suddenly … .* Instruct the group to continue telling the story, taking turns to add a sentence with a new piece of target vocabulary.

Try this ☞ **Word association**

As a warmer or filler activity, have two students (A and B) sit opposite each other, with a third acting as the referee. Student A thinks of a word, then student B thinks of a word associated with it, and so on in turn. The referee decides whether the associations are strong enough.

Special effects

Pronunciation activities are another rich source of pleasure, as they create a series of what we might consider 'special effects' of language, including rhyming and rhythm, that students tend to enjoy. Teachers of younger learners are no doubt familiar with chants, rhyming poems, and tongue twisters, but we can also create similar 'special effects' when teaching older learners.

Try this ☞ **Backchaining**

When teaching new vocabulary, reveal words backwards. Say the last sound and ask students to repeat it. Then add the preceding sound. Continue until the whole word has been said. Then ask students to repeat the exercise quickly without you saying the sounds. This will produce a series of rhyming effects. Using longer words like lesson subjects is particularly fun.

/i/ /dʒi/ /ədʒi/ /lədʒi/ /ɒlədʒi/ /aɪˈɒlədʒi/ /baɪˈɒlədʒi/ (biology)

The effect will be greater if students backchain at speed, as this will create a fun tongue-twister. Finally, ask students to write down the word, checking for the correct spelling.

Try this ☞ **Repeating to a metronome**

On the board, write some short questions of three to six syllables and some responses of the same length that you'd like students to practise. For each question/response, put a marking over the first syllable and the one that carries the main stress (shown as a high vertical mark in the following examples).

ˈWhat's your ˈname?   ˈMy name's ˈJulie.

ˈWhere are you ˈfrom?   ˈI'm from ˈFrance.

ˈWhat are you ˈinto?   ˈI'm into ˈdancing.

Set a metronome (search online for *metronome*) to a slow tempo and ask students to say the exchanges to the rhythm. Allow it to be comically slow to begin with. Divide the class into two groups so one half 'converses' with the other. Gradually increase the speed of the metronome.

Mastery

Part of the fun of doing these kinds of drills is the challenge for students of getting their lips and tongue around the sounds. Managing to do this – which we might call **mastery** – is itself a source of pleasure. Learners of music or art have the opportunity to rehearse and practise their skills to the point where they feel they've mastered them, but learners of a second language rarely enjoy similar opportunities in an L1 context, because there are fewer opportunities to practise communication. Preparing to perform chunks of texts will give learners the sense of mastery.

Try this ☞ **Language performance**

After students have engaged with a listening dialogue, divide them into groups and invite each group to select a task from a set of 'performance' cards based on the dialogue script. For example:

- rap it
- perform it in the style of a silent movie (mouth words and mime)
- say numbers in place of words (to focus on stress and intonation)
- read it with an L1 accent
- read it with an exaggerated L2 accent
- personalize it by changing key words
- act it out in a certain way (e.g. using angry or affectionate voices)
- perform it with slides/special effects.

Students can select another card if they don't like their first one. Invite them to rehearse the dialogues and then perform them. Make sure that students applaud one another's performances, as mastery of a text will be all the more pleasurable if others acknowledge their achievement.

✓ *Getting it right*   **Recording performances**

Encourage students to record their performances of poems, songs, and other texts, and upload them to the school website or blog. This will gives friends and family members the opportunity to praise students.

The senses

Another advantage of the word poster (see page 15) is that this format creates great visual impact. Young people today are used to vibrant screens and moving images, and online text is often either richly illustrated or presented in kinetic typography (animated text). Text on white pages can look comparatively dull, but homework sheets can easily be made more

stimulating with different fonts and backgrounds, and within the classroom we can use colour, design, and even animated text to bring language to life.

Try this ☞ **Word art**

Create a graffiti wall in the classroom by covering a section of the wall with paper. Allow students to write up favourite phrases or words they have learnt (e.g. from song lyrics), encouraging them to communicate meaning through visual effects as they do so. Younger learners may enjoy doing bubble writing, whereas older ones may be able to imitate graffiti styles (see Figure 1.2). Alternatively, encourage students to record vocabulary or copy out poems on word processing software, using different fonts and text sizes. Ask them to explain their selections.

FIGURE 1.2   *Examples of bubble writing and graffiti writing*

Try this ☞ **Media-rich instructions**

If you have an interactive whiteboard, present instructions to the class (e.g. *Take out your homework, please.*) using the 'tickertape' function so that they move across the top of the screen, or copy them into a 'word cloud' maker (e.g. www.wordle.net) so that they appear as beautiful word clouds.

Associations

Languages also bring learners pleasure (or displeasure) through the associations they create, and these often relate to the cultures that use certain languages. The more positive the associations learners have with a culture, the more pleasure they'll get from using its language. Many attribute the recent popularity of Spanish as a foreign language, for example, to the current popularity of Latin American culture. It is clearly very difficult to control the associations students may have formed with a language, but we can do our best to encourage them to engage with other cultures.

Try this ☞ **Cultural engagement**

If you come across a cultural reference in the students' coursebook, encourage them to research it further online. For example, they could find out what a person mentioned in one of their coursebook texts is doing now (check they are real people first), or they could add new details to a description of a place or a festival they have read about.

The English language is no longer just associated with national cultures but is also gaining exciting new associations with vibrant online communities, for example of gamers or music fans. Encouraging students to get involved with online communities could also help them develop positive associations with English. A student who gets 500 'likes' from English speakers for a blogpost they've written is likely to consider learning English very rewarding.

However, it is vital that teachers are aware that the greater exposure students have online, the greater their risk of internet abuse. In fact, teachers can't actively encourage students to share files on public forums because most file-sharing websites (e.g. YouTube) won't allow them to have an account until they are 18 (13 with permission from a parent/carer). Yet asking older students only to use intranets or closely monitored virtual learning environments won't help to increase their motivation.

One way of dealing with this dilemma is to give older students confidence to engage with online communities safely, and to teach them how to produce great content so that they will have positive experiences of online communities when they're ready to join them.

✓ *Getting it right*

E-safety

Ensure students have proper e-safety training before uploading content to any online environment. Areas you could cover include the 'Grandma rule' (don't post what you wouldn't want Grandma to see), reporting and blocking abusive users, using 'restricted mode' (with filters), disabling and removing the 'comments' function, responding to personal messages cautiously, and using 'private' and 'unlisted' options when posting videos.

Try this ☞

Video tutorials

Ask students to produce a video tutorial related to lessons. It could be about how to illustrate their lesson notes, or how to learn a new word so they will never forget it. Get students to edit their videos with an app on their mobile devices (if they are allowed to use them in class) such as iMovie (for iOS) or VideoShowLab (for Android). They could speed them up so that they are fun to watch, and add a music track using VideoFX or a similar app.
Help them to record a short introduction, e.g. *Hi, guys. My name's ... and I'm going to show you how to ... . I hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to 'like' it!*
Have students upload their videos to the school's internal file-sharing system, and review each other's videos.

Why this works ▦▶

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation has been discussed since the 1970s and is considered the most effective form of motivation, since it results in long-lasting and self-sustaining effort. In a language-learning setting, the term can also be used to describe students' willingness to engage with any activities without a reward being offered. In this chapter, however, we have discussed a part of intrinsic motivation that is particularly elusive, namely an interest in foreign languages itself. This aspect of intrinsic motivation is even more valuable because it may motivate students to engage with language study when they leave the classroom.