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Social Identity and Language Learning Motivation: Exploring the Connection and Activating Learning

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Immigrant pathways to the language classroom are manifold. Some may have arrived in their new homeland as children and now need additional training to enhance the quality of their language. Others may have come later in life with some rudimentary exposure to their second language, but with an educational degree, a career in their native country and the presence of learning skills and strategies they entail. Still others might have come without much prior schooling and are now building their strength in their second language from the ground up.

Teaching in a large, urban English as a Second Language (ESL) programme in Southern California, I see all these types of students. These learners have mastered enough English to survive, but still come back to school to study, filling up our evening ESL classes after long hours at work, some still in their nursing scrubs and checked restaurant kitchen trousers. What drives them? What makes them commit to the challenges of learning despite, or on top of, the pressures of earning a living, taking care of children and elderly parents, and supporting extended families in their countries of origin? Why are they in my class?

Social context of motivation for language learning

To fully understand the social framework of adult language learning, we have to reach across the disciplinary boundaries into the fields of behavioural and educational psychology as well as sociology.

Research in educational psychology postulates that adults' engagement in learning activities is tied directly to their view of themselves and their place

in the society. Due to important physical and psychological developments in adult life, factors that have direct bearing on adult learning include: possession of reasons for learning, the adult concept of the self, timing of learning experience to life events, need for application of knowledge to real-life situations, and the internal origin of the desire to learn (Knowles, 1990). Motivation, here, is the impulse, the energy that under the right circumstances may translate into an effort to learn. Adult education is fundamentally a choice and, thus, my preferred definition of motivation is: 'the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect' (Keller, 1983: 389).

Adult participation in learning may arise from a variety of reasons originating in their social lives. To identify and classify those reasons, in one well-known research project, an Education Participation Scale (a 40-item interview instrument) was administered to more than 12,000 participants around the world (Bolshier & Collins, 1983). Based on the participants' responses, the researchers proposed six fundamental psychosocial motivational orientations guiding adult participation in educational activities:

- *cognitive interest* (enjoyment of learning for its own sake);
- *community service* (advancement of one's family and community);
- *external expectations* (participation due to a requirement, professional or otherwise);
- *professional advancement* (employment/career-oriented reasons);
- *social contact* (interest in group activities and relationship-building);
- *social stimulation* (education as an escape from boredom or frustration).

From the behavioural psychology standpoint, motivation, like other learning-associated behaviours, is an expression of two general tendencies: to master and to belong (Jones, 1968; MacKeracher, 1989). The tendency to master moves a person to achieve the central, powerful status in his/her social context, to organise it and control his/her actions and interactions within it 'in order to enhance survival and self-esteem' (MacKeracher, 1989: 191). Being informed and skilled reduces the uncertainty of new experiences and assures the individual's identity and integrity. The tendency to belong moves the individual to join a social unit in order to enhance security and the sense of connectedness with others. This sense of connection is desired both at the temporal (past and future) and social levels, as in successful interpersonal relationships and inclusion in activities and membership in self-selected groups.

This notion clearly applies to immigrant language learners, who as newcomers standing outside of the dominant language society have to make an effort to *master* their social situation, in part by acquiring the language that allows them to access power in the L2 society, and to integrate into it, that is, to *belong*.

As seen above, learning is inseparable from the socio-cultural context in which it takes place. Jarvis (1987) and Mezirow (1981) suggested a correlation between the adults' potential to learn and the harmony between them and the environment in which they function. 'When there is disharmony or discontinuity – both subsumed under the idea of *disjuncture* – then people have to seek to adjust (learn), so that harmony can be re-established' (Jarvis, 1987: 79). Learning activity may occur as a proactive, relevant, and meaningful response of the adult to the conflict generated by disjuncture.

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that motivation for learning is not a stable condition. Keller (1983) pointed out the *relevance* of the learning situation as a prerequisite to sustaining motivation over time. Failure in a learning situation dissolves a student's motivation, causing *learned helplessness* (Bandura, 1982; DeCharms, 1984; Weiner, 1984), or *amotivation*. Relating this condition to the adult self, Crookes (2003) asserted that a student who has experienced such failure in language learning would likely attribute it to his/her own shortcomings, rather than to problems with the course content or materials. Relevance extends beyond the learner's goals in the classroom to include the fulfilment sought from the learning process for the psychological needs of achievement, affiliation, and, ultimately, power.

Observing motivation in the language classroom

In the classroom context, motivation is a cyclical, interactive process between the learner and the learning environment. Motivation initiates the student's actions in the class and is influenced by the feedback and behaviours of others in the classroom. 'In directing and coordinating various operations towards an object or goal, motivation transforms a number of separate reactions into significant action' (Julkunen, 2001: 30; see also Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). The interaction between the learner and his or her peers also affects their motivation, in that being in a positive group encourages enthusiasm for learning, while being in a negative group inhibits it (Chang, 2010: 149).

When observed in a classroom, the learner's actions signifying interest and engagement in the learning process can be used as evidence of motivation. A motivated learner, for example, may employ meta-cognitive *learning strategies* that make learning more effective, such as asking for help or practising with a friend (Dörnyei, 2005). Crookes (2003: 129) defines temporal manifestations of motivation as *persistence*, which occurs when a person focuses action on the same thing for an extended period of time.

Recently, qualitative methodologies for motivation research have begun to emerge, employing interviews and observation in the study of language learning motivation (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Song, 2006; Syed, 2001;

Ushioda, 2001). These methods support a vision of language learning motivation as a dynamic, longitudinal process in which the learners' cognitions and beliefs, social context, and the relevance of the curriculum to the learners' interests directly affect involvement in learning. Syed's study, in particular, showed that student motivation is affected by classroom atmosphere, turn-taking practices, teacher-student interaction, and learning activities used in the course, while Song's study of failure in a community college ESL course showed socially derived factors, such as family and job responsibilities, contributing significantly to students' failure in the course.

The socio-educational model of second language acquisition focusing on the integrative/instrumental dichotomy (Gardner and Lambert, 1972) laid the groundwork for contemporary research on language learning motivation and, despite considerable criticism (Au, 1988; Canagarajah, 2006; Peirce, 1995), continues to influence the field. The last 20 years saw a surge of interest in language learning motivation, following Crookes and Schmidt's (1991) article 'Motivation: Reopening the research agenda' in *Language Learning*. Only recently, however, did linguists begin to distinguish between second and foreign language learners in the study of motivation, and to suggest that 'the dynamics involved in learning these two different types of language may be quite different' (Gardner, 2001 in Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001: 11). So far, however, most research done in the field – including an array of important volumes that summarise current research in language learning motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009) – has focused overwhelmingly on foreign, rather than second language learning.

This is quite unfortunate, as ESL students – the bulk of whom are immigrants learning English in an English-speaking (L2) society – find themselves in a very different learning situation from EFL learners, with the social context, realities, and pressures of living in an L2 society directly affecting their motivation and the ways in which language educators can address it. That is to say, an adult immigrant from Mexico will be learning English in Kansas City under vastly different social circumstances than a language student taking an English class in Mexico.

Compared to other adult students, ESL students have an additional challenge in not only learning the language, but also socialising into the L2 society's culture (Florez & Burt, 2001). The ESL programmes, curricula, and teaching styles may sometimes be a difficult fit with the immigrant's cultural experience and expectations. Resistance, failure, and disengagement are not uncommon results of the interaction between an English learner and the educational process. From the academic point of view, L2 proficiency for ESL students does not stop at the language alone, but affects other skills necessary to succeed in the college environment, such as math, reading, writing, and learning skills (Fulks & Alancraig, 2008). Knowing how to address the underlying student

motivation issues is, therefore, crucial to providing quality education to ESL students.

The need for more research into motivational processes within the ESL population is clear, and some studies of L2-learning immigrants in English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States have begun to appear (Bernat, 2004; Noels et al., 1999; Paper, 1990; Reynoso, 2008; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Song, 2006; Waterman, 2008).

Driven by my own interest in adult student motivation – both as a linguist interested in psychological and social factors affecting L2 acquisition, and as a classroom practitioner – I conducted a research project (Igoudin, 2008) that looked into why adult immigrants choose to take an advanced L2 course, and what are the factors that foster or inhibit their desire to learn. Conducted in one semester-length advanced ESL reading course taught by another instructor at a Southern California community college, the project investigated motivational processes among ten adult immigrants who were enrolled. The study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including individual interviews that elicited in-depth descriptive data on student beliefs and attitudes, and an attitude motivation test battery (AMTB), which tested the strength of various components within the participants' motivation for language learning. Interview and survey results were triangulated with 15 hours of classroom observation that highlighted students' motivational behaviours in real-time classroom, and relevant, socio-cultural data, including participant demographics and projected goals, as well as analysis of course documents (syllabus, attendance records, and grades). Some findings from the study are cited throughout the chapter.

Adult ESL pathways to formal language learning in California

The learning landscape an adult immigrant enters in California requires considerable knowledge. While the state's public policy supports the integration of immigrants into the mainstream society, the educational tracks that lead to formal language acquisition are hardly straightforward; they frequently overlap or show gaps, mostly due to the discordant priorities and funding sources of English-teaching programmes.

Historically, adult education schemes have tied the learning of English as a second language to the importance of the immigrant's employment attainment and career development. Note, for example, the central position of employ-ability in the California Department of Education (CDE) definition of ESL in its *Adult Education Handbook for California* (1997): 'education for adults whose inability to speak, read, or write the English language constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment and to function in society' (*AEHC*, 1997: 203).

Since its beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, adult education in California (and in the United States at large) has been divided into two pathways, vocational and academic, 'in recognition of [their] distinctive purposes, ethos, policies, organisation, and forms of provision' (Titmus, 1989: 93). Today, state-sponsored adult ESL education is delivered primarily through a system of adult schools, as well as credit and non-credit programmes at the state's 112 community colleges, the largest college system in the world. While the ESL statistics are hard to separate from remedial English and math in the state's basic skills data (one reason being that many ESL students take remedial math as well), the magnitude of this population is staggering: In the academic year 2006–07 alone, 719,482 students in the California Community College system took at least one basic skills and/or ESL course (*Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges*, 2008: 7).

In a real-life application of such division, ESL educational schemes at community colleges are often separated into two programmes. Vocational ESL programmes primarily offer L2 education at lower levels as part of basic adult education and citizenship preparation. Its courses are usually free and non-credited, funded by local and state budgets, as well as by federal grants. Academic ESL programmes, on the other hand, are geared towards higher levels of language proficiency, in particular to college writing and reading. Language education, here, serves as the first step on the education ladder leading to academic degrees (Associate, Bachelor and graduate) or certificated vocational education. The ESL courses in this track offer college credit, including some that are transferable for university credit. Nor are they free, although many students, particularly in poorer districts (which are also those with higher concentrations of immigrant populations) qualify for financial aid. The funding of these programmes comes primarily from the state.

The system is anything but uniform and is often confusing to the language learner. Whether a particular community college offers credit and/or non-credit ESL classes, their organisation, number, curricular content, and the unit credit they earn vary widely from one district to the next. In some programmes, ESL courses are dual-listed as credit and non-credit, drawing both groups of students. Moreover, since assessment procedures vary between 72 community college districts, placement is district-specific, and transfer between ESL programmes of (and sometimes within) different districts is limited. The point of exit out of ESL and into the mainstream English programmes is also decided by an individual community college district and, sometimes, a particular college within the district as well.

In recent years, the need for more college graduates to sustain California's economy, compounded by unprecedented cuts to the state budget, have led to reconsideration of educational priorities in the state's community college system. Whereas these colleges had traditionally served multiple types of

student populations, the high-school graduate population, college-bound and requiring minimum remediation, appears to be the one favoured by the state policymakers. As a result, funding for adult education and non-credit ESL programmes has been significantly reduced, and the remaining ESL programmes (as well as the colleges at large) are under pressure to produce data that shows student persistence, programme completion, and increased transfer rates to four-year colleges and universities (*SSTF*, 2012: 7–9).

Viewed as a remedial service, college ESL has been under unprecedented attack. A recent legislative proposal grouped ESL with remedial English and math and called for 'a clear strategy [...] to move students from educational basic skills to career and college readiness' (*SSTF*, 2011: 44), leaving it in the hands of the state government to determine where these programmes should be placed (p. 46), and opening the door to cutting credit ESL courses at the college level. After considerable protests from the students, faculty, and unions throughout the state (see, for instance, *ASCCC*, 2011), this recommendation was removed, for the time being, from the final reform proposal, but the overall political climate remains unfriendly to ESL.

Into this complex language education landscape steps an immigrant learner with his/her own multifaceted set of needs, desires, and aspirations.

Student self-concept in second-language acquisition

> Who am I?
> Why am I taking this class?
> Why do I need to be here?
> Who will I be after I finish this course?

These questions are at the centre of the adult students' engagement in a learning process and are often mirrored by the teachers' wondering:

> Why are they in my class?
> They seem to want to learn the language, but why aren't they interested?
> Why do they take it all so personally?

As we will learn in this chapter, answering these questions, which are rarely made explicit, is crucial to understanding student motivation and success in the language classroom. Furthermore, what we know about our students' ideas of themselves can help us activate important motivational processes within them.

Origin of motivation and the self

Self-concepts are 'individuals' mental images of themselves' (Reeve, 1997: 240). In ongoing interaction with others, humans receive feedback which

they process in relation to their view of their selves. Often this communicative loop concerns language skills, a sensitive issue with the second language learner. Consider these observations made in class by my students:

- Yesterday, I had to repeat my words twice at work because my customers could not understand my accent.
- Today I had to ask my nephew to help me write a letter to the landlord because my writing skills are limited.
- My neighbour only says hello to me, but talks more to my wife because her English is better.

While the recollection of each experience may be lost, the experiences themselves solidify, over time, into conclusions people have about themselves. For example, an adult relates these generalisations to the important aspects of his or her life: academic competence, intellectual ability, friendships, romantic relationships, and moral conduct (Harter, 1990). Studies show that once an acceptable view of oneself in a particular domain is established, the self is very resistant to contradictory information that challenges it (Markus, 1983). The contradiction produces emotional tension and the motivational energy to resolve it.

Let's look more closely at how the processes within the self generate motivation. According to Reeve (1997), the self produces motivational energy in two ways:

1. To direct the individual to behave in the ways that ensure the positive relationship between the self-view and the social feedback it receives. The contradictory feedback, for example, a person's generalisation that his or her particular language skill is inadequate, will motivate the adult to restore the harmony.
2. To achieve a different, or desired self-concept. In a similar vein, Ushioda & Dörnyei (2009) reconceptualised language learning motivation as a part of an internally driven move from the current, deficient self-concept to the *ideal self* whose desirable attributes include second language proficiency.

It should be noted that while we can sense a motivational potential in these contexts, it may not necessarily lead to the act of engagement in learning, which depends on other factors and circumstances.

My study (Igoudin, 2008) shed light on one particular place in which the social context and motivation for language learning intersected. Prompted by the question, 'Has anything happened in your personal life that sparked your interest in studying English?', participants often produced narratives illustrating how their motivation originated in specific instances of disjuncture

between their L2 proficiency and the needs arising from the social context of their lives. Here, again, motivation moves an individual to restore harmony between the self and his/her environment. Let us consider the following excerpts from the interviews with five out of ten study participants.

In the first example, Tomas, who had completed his university education and worked as an engineer in Mexico, wanted to recapture his academic success in the United States: 'If I want to get a master's degree, I need English. If I want to keep studying here, I need to speak good English to understand and write and listen'. His English language proficiency, however, stood in the way of his achieving his goal.

Another student, Lucia, felt isolated in her social circle. Her friends spoke fluent English and had to switch to Spanish when addressing her. The sense of separation and embarrassment motivated her to resume her English studies:

> Lucia: I've been meeting people; they are from Central America or South America. They are here living probably 15–20 years already, so they speak English very well. So, one of them, we are friends, but sometimes I feel like we cannot be together, we cannot be friends because I'm not at the level she is. Sometimes, that push me down, really down, because I feel like we are the same age, we love each other, but I feel like, I have a big, big difference because she speak English very well and Spanish, and I don't. [...] That happened, like, 6 months ago that I decided to come to college. I had started already another school, I finished 3 years and then I stopped.
>
> Interviewer: Why did you start again?
>
> Lucia: Because of her and other friends. Sometimes when I go out with her and her friends, all of them speak English. and she has to sometime translate to me something, and I feel embarrassed, so embarrassed.

Poor job prospects in her native El Salvador led Blanca to planning an education and a career in the United States. English was an integral step on her way to achieving that goal:

> Blanca: In my country, there are many professionals, many engineers and many people that have their careers, but they can't find any jobs. So I said, what are you going to study here? If one day I have my degrees, where am I going to work? So I said, I better go another place to study and then maybe find a better job.
>
> Interviewer: How would you describe your reasons for learning English?
>
> Blanca: Because I'm in a different country, not in my country, I have to learn English.

Anabel's poor English skills were detrimental to her career growth. To her, learning the language and moving up the employment ladder has since gone hand in hand:

> Anabel: First thing I want to know the language, everything that is English – all the pronunciation, I want it get better because my work. I get this right, speak with everybody, and I want to be able to understand, sometimes I don't understand some words. That is why I'm here and I want to get my degree, administrative assistant. [...] I'm moving up because my English and my school.
> Interviewer: Because your English is better?
> Anabel: Yes, because before I start in the warehouse and then I jumped to the QC [quality control], then went to the clerk, and now I'm revenue auditor.

Chibith, a Cambodian who was born in the United States and grew up bilingual, also felt a disconnect when assessing her command of English. Fluent orally, Chibith was nonetheless unsatisfied with her communicative, writing, reading, and listening skills. At the time of the study, she was attending her fourth ESL class and preparing to transfer into the mainstream English curriculum. Her gains in language education proved to her that she could fill the gaps.

> I have a problem communicating. Now that I'm in class and learning, I have a better communication style. [...] I have listening problems too, like retaining information. I always have to ask people 2–3 times what they say for me to know what they're saying. I got better reading too. Before I had to read the text 2–3 times to understand the information. Now I read it one time and understand the whole thing. And with writing – I used to hate writing. But ever since I took my ESL 56 class in the summer, I think I have a better writing style and I enjoy it.

Social identity and language learning

The interview excerpts above highlight specific instances of misalignment between an individual's language proficiency and his/her social environment, which eventually led towards language learning. Further exploration revealed the student's *social identity* – a person's definition of his or her 'meaning in the world' and value to others (Eckert, 2000) – to be an important factor shaping his/her motivation. Both identity formation and learning originate and develop in interaction with the learner's social context, but also with each other, making their relationship a shared, dialogical process (Ligorio, 2010).

Recent studies have exposed additional links between language learning and the learners' changing perspectives of themselves in a new language

environment. Applying Pierre Bourdieu's socio-economical paradigm (1991) to language learning, Peirce (1995: 17) introduced the concept of *investment* in learning a dominant language as a means to 'acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources [and] increase the value of [the learners'] cultural capital'. Two recent qualitative studies, of six Dominican and four Cambodian adult students (Reynoso, 2008; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002, respectively), confirmed the interconnectedness of the social and cultural identities, on one hand, and the investment and persistence in taking adult ESL courses on the other. Meanwhile, Sfard and Prusak (2005) suggested language learning itself to be the closing of a gap between the learners' actual and designated, or desired, identities.

Similarly, a strong correlation emerged in my 2008 study between a participant's inclusion of L2 culture in their social identity and high integrative content in their motivation for language learning. Indeed I found it difficult to separate the study of the participants' integrative motives from the study of their changing identity. Advanced language learning clearly served a dual purpose to these students: as a means to improve mastery of a language (which is what the educators are traditionally concerned with), and as a transitional step on the path towards achieving their social goals, including integration into L2 society and attainment of a desired, integrative identity.

The interviews, in particular, highlighted the relationship between the 'designated identity' (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) or the 'ideal L2 self' (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009) – an internal perception of one's anticipated self as a speaker of L2 – and language learning as a path towards it.

For example, Tomas who said he wanted to talk as if he 'were like an American', produced a high score (83 per cent) in his attitudes towards the L2 speakers and culture and the highest overall score for the (integrative) section of the survey (91 per cent). He also showed 2:1 weighting of integrative versus instrumental motives. This is how he explained it:

> Tomas: I like English, the language, and I like to read most of the articles in the magazines, everything. And I like to meet people, I like to understand them, I like to learn, but good English … I'd like to talk like if I were like an American.
>
> Interviewer: That makes sense. But do you have reasons like you want to get a job?
>
> Tomas: Yeah, but if I speak good English, of course, I will get a job.

Likewise, Lucia, who scored high (84 per cent) on the integrative motives overall, showed a strong pull towards the new culture. She wanted to function actively in it, certainly not as an outsider, saying: 'I want to be part of this culture. If you don't learn English, it's like I'm not here. It's not just about work,

it's not just about school, I wanna be part of this culture, and without English it is not gonna happen'.

On the other hand, Chibith, concerned with retaining her Cambodian identity, scored only 60 per cent in her integrative orientation. Her attitude was in no way negative, and she appreciated the benefits language proficiency would bring her, yet she was keen on keeping an equilibrium between her 'Americanised' and Cambodian selves. The fact that she was born in the United States was a likely factor in her identity struggle.

> I'd like to be seen as Cambodian. [...] All these new generations coming up, they don't understand, they don't know who they are. And that thing pisses me off, you know? All they know how to speak is English, and they should, because ... They forget themselves, and I don't want to be like them. So I'm trying to learn English, at the same time, remember my own culture and who I am. [...] I want to advance as far as I can and try to be Americanized, and, at the same time, know who I am, and what culture my parents came from.

As socially constructed identities change, balancing first and second language identities becomes more complicated. The surveyed students' socio-cultural context of learning was markedly bilingual. Though it was possible for most study participants, as Spanish speakers residing in greater Los Angeles, to function entirely in their native language, the cumulative picture which emerged from the surveys and interviews showed that most students commonly used both languages off-campus while use of their native languages was limited primarily to their family networks.

Furthermore, the subjects' desired workplace language environments have shown the move from bilingual to English-only. Of the eight employed students, four worked in bilingual environments. Two were employed in English-only and two in Spanish-only workplaces. At the same time, six projected their long-term careers in English-only environments and three others in bilingual workplaces. In one such example, the young, entrepreneurial Daniel sought both integration in the English-speaking culture and respect for his roots. There is a tinge of stigma about his perception of Spanish speakers, something he clearly wants to overcome:

> Daniel: Actually, you speak like everybody thinks [you are] like. If you speak Spanish, it's gonna be like, 'Oh, you're Mexican or something.' So I'm in America, so I have to speak a little bit of English. And speaking English, just like the teacher say, changes yourself. So if you start speaking English, you start understanding Americans living here, you get into the culture.

Interviewer: How do you want to be seen?

Daniel: I'd like to be seen like…a Mexican who made it in America! [laughs]

A brief theoretical analysis

Adult second language learning is inherently a voluntary process, in particular, at the more advanced, post-survival stages of language acquisition. Set in a social context, thus, adult learning is not simply a process of passive acquisition of knowledge, but also one of externalisation of experience. The desire to be in the classroom may originate within the adults' vision of who they are and who they want to be. Psychologically, the student is continuously engaged in defining and redefining his or her self, relating it to the society at large, and discovering, developing, and fulfilling personal potential.

Applying these generalisations to the adult immigrant experience, it seems likely that fundamental life changes brought about by immersion in a society communicating in an unfamiliar language, compounded by the necessity to function in it, may cause disjuncture in these adults' lives and prompt them to seek language education in order to adjust to these changes. Some immigrants may seek language education immediately upon arrival, whereas for others the language disjuncture may occur later in their lives when higher levels of language proficiency (i.e., beyond the survival skills) may be desired. Deficiency of knowledge combined with an evolved self-concept set in a specific socio-cultural milieu may then generate a new need – a need to learn.

Applying the understanding of motivation to pedagogical practice

The purpose of the previous sections of this chapter has been to briefly outline the multifaceted interaction between the student's self and the social context in which adult ESL learning takes place. The following section is dedicated to turning this *applicable* (that is relevant to the classroom practice) knowledge into *actionable* knowledge (Argyris & Schön, 1974), in this case, sound strategies for working with student motivation based on the scholarship above. In
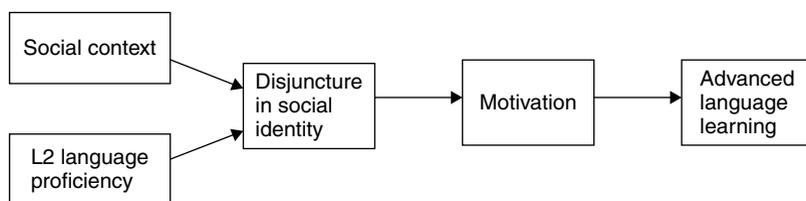

Figure 11.1   Socially situated model of adult language learning motivation

both practical and theoretical terms, our goal is to use the power of student motivation to foster second language learning through both:

1. changing our classroom practices as teachers;
2. changing our students' beliefs and behaviours that affect their learning.

Supporting this idea, a recent study of language teachers' use of motivational strategies in the classroom linked such practices with the increased levels of student motivation and the improvement in the observable classroom behaviours, such as higher participation, volunteering, and attentiveness in class (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

With so much already known about adult motivation for language learning, how can we intervene pedagogically to address its complexities in a way that is both logical and effective?

Core values in motivating the adult self

Understanding the processes within our students' selves is a good first step towards engaging adult students in learning. Applying this knowledge to teaching practices, we should capitalise on those motivational techniques that positively reaffirm adults' ideas of their selves and help them restore harmony through learning. To do so, I propose the following core values that should guide our teaching strategies and actions:

• respect
• fairness
• responsibility

Respect

Adult students expect to be treated with respect and, in turn, offer respect to their instructors. A rude, condescending, or paternalising treatment in a voluntary learning situation will, at least, decrease adults' motivation to learn and, at worst, make them abandon language learning altogether.

How can we signal respect to our students? First of all, we can do this by assuming that the instructor is an integral part of the group of adults participating in the learning process, even if our roles in it are different. It is sometimes easy to forget that the instructor functions within, not above, the social milieu of the adult classroom. Sharing some information about us – and, in particular, about how our backgrounds led to teaching language – will communicate to students their worth as an equal audience while not undermining our authority.

Meanwhile, making an effort to learn about our students will signal interest in their backgrounds as well. 'English language learners' abilities, experiences,

and expectations can affect learning. Get to know their backgrounds and goals as well as proficiency levels and skill needs' (Florez & Burt, 2001). This can be done, for example, as part of a first-day writing diagnostic or through initial introductions in an oral skills class.

Furthermore, an encounter between unfamiliar adults usually begins with formal greetings and small talk which establish the friendly, mutually respectful atmosphere for the subsequent communication. While we cannot always greet our students individually, we can certainly welcome students as a group at the beginning of any class session. Povlacs (1987) also suggests personalising it on the crucial first day of class by greeting students at the classroom door.

Much research has been done on the importance of the use of names in the learning process. ESL students' names, however, can be often hard to pronounce to a native English speaker. Asking a student informally about the correct way to say his or her name, and apologising in advance for mispronouncing it, can defuse a potentially demotivating situation.

During the course, it is also important to use the name preferred by the student, be that his or her native, English, middle, married, maiden, or double name, or a nickname. I once had a student in a writing course who liked to be called '89', a nickname referring to his birth year. While it generated a few laughs at first, after a while '89' was just another name in the class, but using it showed my respect for his unconventional name choice. Finally, once a student's name is learned, other students should be encouraged to learn it and use it as well.

Fairness

Few things can signal lack of respect to an adult student as being treated unfairly or unequally. Perceived preferential treatment communicates a variation in the value of the adult students in the eyes of the teacher. 'If teachers are unfair, they will be negative factor [in student motivation],' wrote one of my students. 'ESL students will feel dispirited and leave ESL class' (Igoudin, 2009).

Additionally, adjusting grading or other class expectations to the individual student's needs or abilities actually erodes the instructor's authority and makes the students take him or her less seriously, lessening their enthusiasm for the class itself. On the other hand, instructors who are clear and consistent in their classroom policies send the message of respecting their students and having a firm control over the course of the class. Measured by the same standard, students are led to believe that their problems in the class are caused by their own deficiencies in their learning, not by the instructor's subjective opinion of them.

Classroom equity (Armstrong, 2009) can be further supported by the following course management strategies that emphasise transparency:

- Posting class policies such as grading, absences, late work, testing procedures, and general decorum in the syllabus. Equally essential is to adhere to these policies later.
- Including grading criteria into the task description, for example, in an essay or a presentation assignment.
- Using content management software which provides ongoing student access to current grades, or printing out and distributing to students their grades throughout the course, to take the mystery out of the final grade.

Responsibility

Who is responsible for student learning? The simple answer is students. But while the responsibility is ultimately the students' own, there is quite a lot we can do to support their efforts. On a larger scale, we need to work consciously to change the teaching paradigm to one that increases the learner's independence, rather than reliance on the teacher, both in and out class. The more adult learners are involved in a course, the more they see themselves as being in control. According to Hallberg and Hallberg (2011), a strong sense of responsibility is a top factor for student success in college. A learner-centred course helps students to take more control of their education by engaging them in the following types of learning (Doyle, 2008):

- first-hand learning;
- collaborative learning;
- practising;
- reflecting and self-evaluating;
- teaching of others;
- developing skills for lifelong learning;
- developing meta-cognitive skills.

Assigning students from different L1 backgrounds to work together – for example on a group presentation for a speaking class – will require them to use L2 to mediate the desired communicative meaning, apply L2-specific standards of politeness, and practise the L2 vocabulary – knowledge and skills that will come in handy in future academic subject classes and work situations.

This learner-driven shift in student behaviours and learning activities may clash with the students' anticipation of how they should learn and act in the classroom. This contradiction is culture-based in that ESL students and

teachers may perceive the appropriateness of classroom behaviours in the context of their native cultures:

> If the American adult ideal is to be self-reliant, at ease in expressing and defending personal opinions, and interested in personal advancement, teachers will expect to provide instruction addressed to these goals and may unconsciously attribute these same goals to their students. (McGroarty, 1993: 1)

The first step to helping students adjust to learner-centred teaching is *to explain* why this approach is the best possible way to not only acquire language in interactive, deeper ways, but also to enhance academic success. Adults need to know why they are asked to do a task, especially when they are expected to do more. The explanation could include references to available research and evidence of peer success in learner-based settings, or examples from past classes.

Another way to motivate the student's sense of responsibility is to use a *self-assessment* which engages students in reflection on their involvement with the learning process. Quick and efficient, such assessment can be completed at the beginning of a course and be followed by a class discussion. *The Basic Skills Handbook* (Fulks & Alancraig, 2008), which focuses on teaching practices that promote student success, offers an interesting example of such assessment developed at Crafton Hills College in California. The assessment rubric statements cited below are designed to highlight behaviours and attitudes that lead to college success:

Responsibility

- I realise that ultimately, I am responsible for my own success in college.
- I make decisions and take timely action to advance my own educational goals.
- When I make mistakes or bad choices, I take time to learn from these experiences.

Motivation

- I am determined to graduate from college and be successful. I have personally important reasons to succeed.
- I am motivated to do my best in classes, and I have strategies that work for me.
- My desire to be successful helps me to overcome any obstacles I encounter.

A similar 'college success' self-assessment given to ESL (and other students) at Cypress College uses a five-point Likert scale to engage the student in

the evaluation of their college study effort, goals, and practices (Hallberg & Hallberg, 2011). This 100-statement self-survey, which also can be completed online, includes statements like: I am the one who drives myself, and I try to be very involved in my school/college activities.

Emphasising continuous assessment and monitoring of student motivation, *On Course*, written by Skip Downing, a fellow U.S. community college instructor, has been a bestseller with community college faculty and counsellors alike. Now in its sixth edition, *On Course* (2010) takes a direct approach to student motivation, appealing to students' instrumental motives and focussing on hands-on activities designed to boost student motivation throughout a course.

Putting these ideas into practice, the adult ESL education programme at Santa Barbara City College began to offer a special 'student success' course in which ESL students practise goal-setting, study skills, learning strategies, and time management, and learn about peer success and role models. In addition, students are encouraged to sign contracts committing to attending the ESL class they are enrolling in. These new approaches, along with curriculum changes, are believed to be the reason for the 18 per cent improvement in retention and 14 per cent improvement in attendance (Lavigne & Bailey, 2008).

Nobody rises to low expectations. Rising to high expectations, however, communicates to students the educator's belief in their potential, regardless of their backgrounds, and refocuses the expectation on their effort:

> The first factor that affects a student's motivation in ESL is that the class is too easy. If a student thinks a class is too easy, they would not study hard. As a result, for them not studying hard, they might fail a test because they take it for granted that the test would be too easy and think they don't need to study for it. (Hyun, a student, in Igoudin, 2009)

The 2007 Community College Survey of Student Engagement, which surveyed more than 330,000 community college students in the United States and Canada, identified *setting and communicating high expectations* among several strategies that motivate students in educational settings (*CCSSE*, 2007). With high expectations, the study found, students who need developmental education (which includes English language learners) 'start to believe, some of them for the first time, that they are capable of college-level work' (*CCSSE*, 2007: 3).

High expectations are meant for both the students and the teachers: while we expect students to maximise their own effort in class, including their attendance, completion of assignments, preparation, and participation, students expect us to offer an academically rigorous curriculum, demand high-level understanding and skills, maintain high grading standards, and be available to help students outside of class (*CCSSE*, 2008).

Summary of motivational strategies

1. Review course content for the opportunities to include or expand learner-centred teaching techniques.
2. Where possible, include the teaching of skills and strategies that support the student's responsibility, such as goal-setting and time management into ESL curriculum.
3. Explain why student-centred learning is important, especially if some students in class resist it.
4. Support fairness and transparency in grading and other policies by including them in the syllabus and course assignments.
5. Introduce yourself to your students and explain the reasons how and why you decided to become a language teacher.
6. Make an effort to learn about your students in writing or orally.
7. Learn the proper pronunciation of students' first names and use them throughout the course.
8. Set high academic expectations for the course and be passionate about students' achieving them.
9. Keep students apprised of their progress throughout the course.
10. Use self-assessment to encourage students to evaluate their responsibility for learning.

Engagement priorities

Implications of social identity for language learning motivation are plentiful. Acquisition of a second language can arise as a need, and later be developed, abandoned, or ignored – all in relation to the processes within the student's self-concept. From the tension within the self rises the motivational energy which may ultimately direct and shape the resulting behaviour. Appropriate pedagogical interventions, including those listed in this chapter, can support the second language students' desire to learn and turn their motivational energy into effort and accomplishment. Still, just as many areas remain open to exploration. Among these are:

1. Much research on motivation is tied to task, course, and/or programme completion, and overall student success. Can it be that this viewpoint of motivation is driven primarily by the needs of the educational system itself, rather than the learner's?
2. Individual success seems to be at the core of current motivational research. How much of what we know of motivation is derived from the cultural, specifically, Western point of view?

3. The social scene upon which the learner acts does not end at the class-room door. How can the social context of the classroom itself affect student motivation?

4. Going back to the student's reporting her feeling of embarrassment as part of her drive to take L2 classes (Lucia in Igoudin, 2008), what is the role of emotive factors in student motivation?

5. It is not uncommon for ESL students to change or discover their career interests while taking ESL courses. How does student motivation evolve in response to the evolution of the learner's goals during the learning process?

6. Few ESL students, especially at advanced levels, take only ESL courses. How does engagement in non-ESL curriculum affect their motivation for language learning?

Suggested further reading

Downing, S. (2010). *On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life* (Sixth Edition). Orlando, FL: Houghton Mifflin.

The author engages student motivation hands-on to solve challenges in academic courses. Though his largely instrumental approach may not work for all language learning populations, the book, supported by professional workshops, has been very influential in U.S. academia. For more information and an extensive database of student success strategies, visit www.oncourseworkshop.com.

Florez, M. and Burt, M. (2001). *Beginning to Work with Adult English Language Learners: Some Considerations.* Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics (CAELA). Available at: http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/beginQA.html [Accessed 08/30/12].

The Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA), affiliated with the U.S. Department of Education, presents an easily accessible digest of ideas and strategies that apply relevant adult psychology research to effective second language instruction.

Reeve, J. (2008). *Understanding Motivation and Emotion* (Fifth Edition). Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.

This comprehensive textbook goes deep into the psychological underpinnings of human motivation and relates it to the environment and culture.

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