

Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom

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1.3 Motivational strategies

Motivational strategies are techniques that promote the individual's goal-related behaviour. Because human behaviour is rather complex, there are many diverse ways of promoting it – in fact, almost any influence a person is exposed to might potentially affect his/her behaviour. Motivational strategies refer to those *motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect*.

With respect to the various strategies promoting classroom L2 learning, there are several ways to organise them into separate 'themes'. We could, for example:

- focus on the *internal structure* of a typical language class and cluster the strategies according to the various structural units (e.g. strategies to present new material, give feedback, set up communicative tasks or assign homework).
- design a primarily *trouble-shooting guide* in which some particularly problematic facets of the classroom's motivational life are listed and suggestions are offered on how to handle these (e.g. how to deal with student lethargy; lack of voluntary participation; or anti-learning influences of deviant children).
- focus on *key motivational concepts* – such as intrinsic interest, self-confidence or student autonomy – and use these as the main organising units.
- centre the discussion on the *main types of teacher behaviour* that have motivating effects (e.g. showing a good example and modelling student behaviour; communication and rapport with the students; consciousness raising about self-regulated strategies; or stage managing classroom events).

Although I believe that all these approaches have their merits, I have chosen to follow a fifth approach which focuses on the different phases of the process-oriented model described earlier (cf. Figure 2 in Section 1.1). The model has been specifically developed for educational applications and it offers an important advantage over the other approaches: *comprehensiveness*. When deliberating on the structure of this book, it seemed to me that following through the motivational process from the initial arousal of the motivation to the completion and evaluation of the motivated action is in many ways more logical than making somewhat arbitrary decisions about which central themes the material should be built around.

Key units in this process-oriented organisation include:

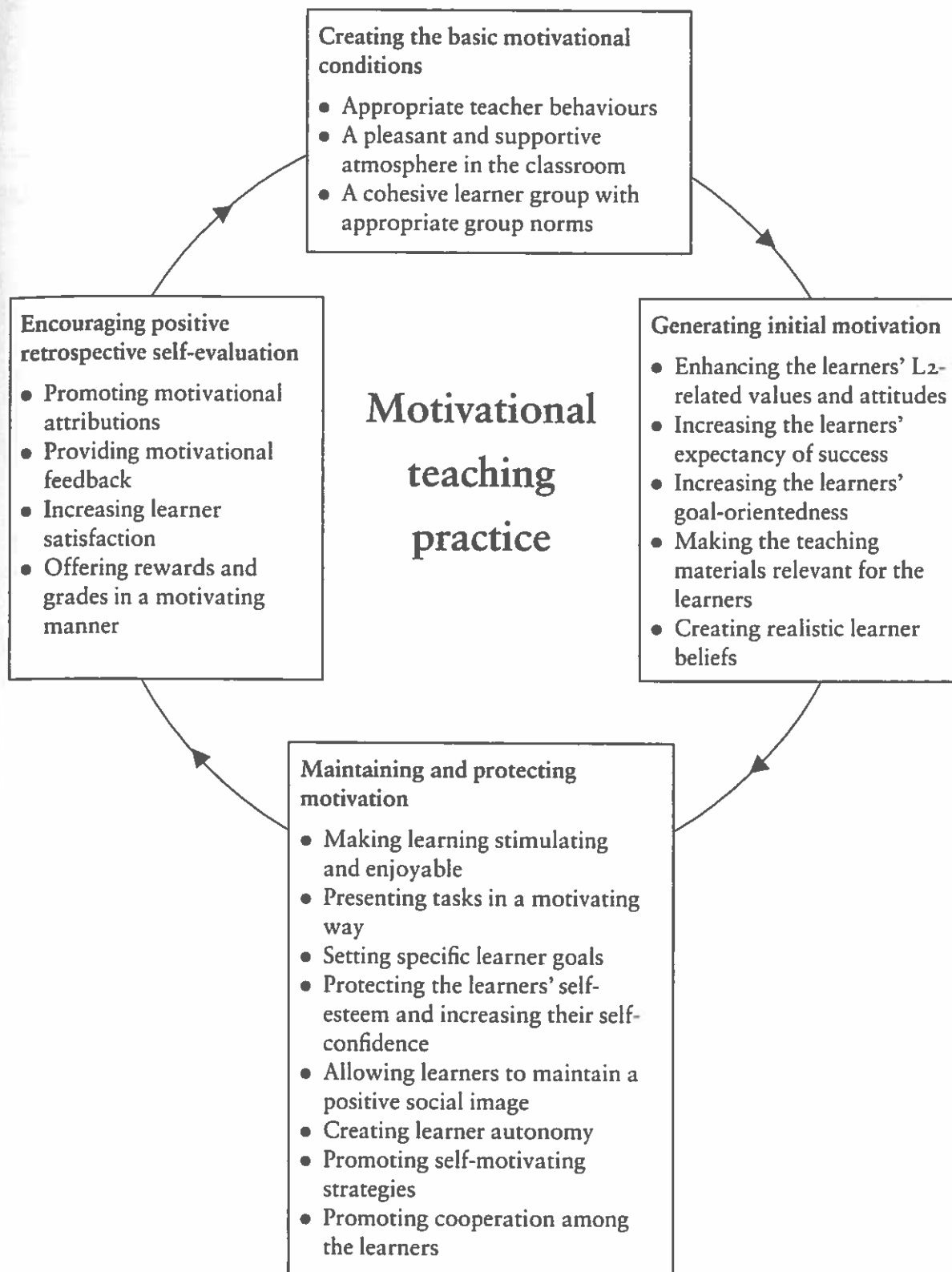


Figure 3 The components of motivational teaching practice in the L2 classroom

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- Creating the basic motivational conditions.
- Generating initial motivation.
- Maintaining and protecting motivation.
- Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation.

These four motivational aspects will be discussed in one chapter each. Figure 3 contains a schematic representation of the system, with details of the sub-areas that will be covered.

Final words: not every strategy works in every context!

Finally, I would like to make a point which cannot be emphasised enough: motivational strategies, even those which are generally the most reliable, are not rock-solid golden rules, but rather suggestions that may work with one teacher or group better than another, and which may work better today than tomorrow. This is particularly true if we consider how varied language learning situations are worldwide. It is unlikely that, say, a group of immigrant mothers studying French in Canada will benefit from exactly the same strategies as primary school learners of English in Hong Kong or university learners of Latin in Sweden. Differences amongst the learners in their culture, age, proficiency level and relationship to the target language may render some strategies completely useless/meaningless, while highlighting others as particularly prominent. Please bear this in mind when you come across something in the book which you think is culturally biased or does not make sense from your perspective. All I can say is that the strategies and techniques described below have been found to work with many teachers and groups before and are therefore worthy of consideration. To turn to McCombs and Pope (1994) again: 'We have seen this approach work, and we are excited about its possibilities. We invite you to explore this perspective with us' (p. vii).