Motivating the person rather than the L2 learner

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Shift in conceptual focus ...

L2 learners
- Abstract bundles of variables
- Generalized and essentialized types of learners

Persons
- Engaged in L2 learning process
- Situated in particular temporal, social, physical contexts
Linking motivation theory and classroom practice

Limited relationship to date

Generalizable theoretical models and pedagogical strategies

Promote a view of motivation as something controlled by teachers

Dealing with general ‘types’ of L2 learners, attitudes, behaviours (and not real ‘people’ in their classrooms)
Motivating the ‘person’ (rather than the L2 learner)

Focus of today’s talk: What this means for classroom practice

A case where theory has lagged behind good practice?

Ushioda (2011): ‘Motivating learners to speak as themselves’
Looking beyond our students’ L2 learner identities

I am feeling bad. My grandfather he die last week and I am ...

No – not die – say died because it’s in the past.

student

(Scrivener 1994: 19)

teacher
Motivating the person: Visualizing a future possible self

Ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self (Dörnyei 2005, 2009)

Visualizing oneself projected into the future

Visualization and mental imagery techniques developed in sports psychology (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, forthcoming)
But ...

- Future can be a long way off
- Risk of elitist and competitive emphasis in borrowing from sports psychology
- Risk of unrealistic illustrious role models
Near peer role models (NPRMs) are peers who are close to our social, professional and/or age level who for some reason we may respect and admire. Many people while growing up have had the experience of watching some student or sibling just a few years older and modeling their behavior on them. It may be that we only respect a characteristic or an ability that they have and not even the whole person. I can remember wanting to play basketball like my brother, wanting to get straight ‘A’s like my sister, and wanting to run as fast as the girl who sat next to me in third grade. I may have never surpassed them but they stimulated a greater participation in life from me. (Murphey 2012: 35)
A near peer role model from my own childhood ...
Possible near peer role models for students learning languages

Murphey 2012:

• Local people who have had interesting experiences learning or using English
• Former students explaining why developing English skills proved valuable for them

Taylor & Marsden 2012:

• Ordinary professional people talking about why learning a foreign language turned out to be a good thing or why they now regret they hadn’t studied a language at school
To sum up so far ...

Motivating the person (rather than the L2 learner) with reference to future self perspectives:

- How our students see themselves in the future and how English fits into this future self-image
- Encounters with ‘ordinary real people’ who provide realistic role models
Motivating the person...

Need also to focus on **current aspects** of self and identity that students bring to L2 learning.

Understanding our students as people with particular needs, interests, histories, experiences, personalities, a life outside the classroom, various social identities.
Effective language teachers have long recognized the importance of motivating the ‘person’ rather than the abstract ‘L2 learner’

maybe **despite** (rather than because of) what the L2 motivation literature has had to say

fundamental principle in learner-centred and humanistic approaches to ELT, and in pedagogies for **autonomy**
Motivation and autonomy

Conceptual interactions: two constructs from different traditions of inquiry, yet with much in common

Practical interactions: (language learner behaviours and classroom pedagogy)
Two traditions of inquiry

Motivation
- Psychometric tradition of psychology
- Positivist cognitive paradigm
- Abstract computational models

Autonomy
- Political and moral philosophy
- Social constructivist paradigm
- Specific contexts of practice and learners
Autonomy theory and practice: a focus on real people (not abstract L2 learners)

(Riley 2003)

- Learners as fully rounded persons, with particular social identities, histories, personalities, situated in particular contexts
- How to enable students to develop and express themselves through the L2, so that ‘what they learn becomes part of what they are’ (Little 2004: 106)
Enabling students to ‘speak as themselves’ (Legenhausen 1999)

Longitudinal study comparing:

- Traditional textbook-based communicative English classrooms in German Gymnasium and comprehensive schools
- Students socialized in an autonomous learning environment in a Danish comprehensive school

Recordings of student pairs doing ‘free conversation practice’ in English ...
German students in traditional communicative classroom

S: How old are you?
A: I’m twelve years old. And you?
S: Eleven.
A: Ehm. Do you live in a house or in a flat?
S: I live in a house in Olfen.
A: I live in a flat in Olfen, too. (..) Ehm, eh.
S: What’s your telephone number?
A: My telephone number is three five seven five, and what’s your tele / telephone number?
S: My telephone number is ehm three two two two two (..)
A: Ah, ah, do you like school?
S: Yes, sometimes.
Danish students in ‘autonomous’ classroom

C: What shall we talk about?
M: I don’t know. What do you think?
C: Ah, we could talk about yesterday.
M: Ok.
C: [What did you?]  
M: [What did you?] (laughing)
M: What did you do?
C: Well, I went home from school, and I write (..) some some
music for my music group.
M: Yeah.
C: We shall play here Friday, after school, we have (..) borrowed 
a a room with drums and guitars, and so (..) we’re going to (..) 
record a tape, with our songs.
M: How many are you in your group?
Connecting life inside and outside the classroom

(Legenhausen 1999)

Whether the L2 classroom is seen as part of or separate from the life surrounding it:

- Major impact on the kinds of target language communication that take place in the classroom
- Major impact on how far those learning the L2 are encouraged to ‘speak as themselves’, or behave as ‘L2 learners’ practising language and communication
‘Speaking as themselves’: impact on motivation?

A study of teacher–student talk in L2 classrooms (Richards 2006)

Typical IRF patterns of talk controlled by teacher:
Initiation – Response – Feedback

Are ‘real’ conversations possible in this setting?
Richards 2006 (following Zimmerman 1998)

situated identities
- doctor/patient
- speaker/audience
- teacher/student
- ...

discourse identities
- story-teller
- listener
- questioner
- ...

transportable identities
- mother of two
- keen tennis player
- avid tango dancer
- ...

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Motivation and transportable identities

When students slip out of their ‘L2 learner identities’ into one of their ‘transportable identities’ (e.g. as football player, model aeroplane expert, science fiction fan):

- Structure of talk changes from teacher-controlled IRF to more open patterns resembling natural conversation
- Students speak more and show high level of personal involvement, effort and investment in the interaction
Implications for teachers ...

to the extent that we as teachers invoke and orient to our students’ own transportable identities in the classroom and engage with them as ‘people’ rather than as simply ‘language learners’

to the extent that we encourage and create opportunities for them to ‘speak as themselves’ and express their own meanings, interests and identities through the L2

the more likely that they will feel motivated to communicate and engage themselves in the process of learning and using the language
But perhaps nothing new?

If we look beyond L2 motivation literature:

- Learner-centred teaching
- Authentic communication
- Personalization
- ...

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Transportable identities: connecting with students’ lives outside class

Transportable identities are ‘transported’ from beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom.

Building continuity between students’ life inside and outside the classroom is especially important where learning English is concerned:

• Given the potential to engage with English informally outside class (through digital and mobile technologies, entertainment and social media, etc.)
Motivational dissonances

Between students’ leisure-time engagement with English outside class, and their sense of boredom or frustration with school English lessons (Ushioda, forthcoming)

Authenticity gap between contexts of English use in popular youth culture (e.g. digital gaming) and contexts of formal English learning in school (Henry, forthcoming)
Students in Romania unable to ‘speak as themselves’ in English lessons

(Taylor, forthcoming)

My idea of a perfect English lesson? I can’t really describe it, because we’ve hardly ever had one. I guess one in which we speak freely, in which we express our views of things. Certainly not a class in which we write exercises on the board!

Generally we don’t get a chance to speak in the English class – maybe we’ll say a word or so in an hour. It’s the teacher who talks, talks, talks, and we just sit there ...
Transportable identities: respecting students’ private worlds

Ethical issues in imposing on students’ personal and social worlds

Risk of encroaching on students’ personal use of digital, mobile and social networking technologies (e.g. Sharples 2006; Stockwell 2008, forthcoming)
Transportable identities: respecting students’ choices

Potential range of transportable identities which students (and teachers) may choose to bring

Richards (2006):
Engaging our identities in the classroom involves an investment of self, which may be

- uncomfortable or threatening
- frustrating or belittling (if we lack sufficient L2 skills to express ourselves as we want)
- private
Motivation and English as an international language

Motivation for learning English may be detached from any deep sense of investment of identity, given that English is an international communication code, not bound by particular cultures, values, contexts or standards (e.g. Block, 2007; Kirkpatrick 2007)
A matter of choice ...

The notion of ‘transportable identities’ raises our awareness as teachers that we should orient ourselves only to those particular aspects of identity that students choose to express and are comfortable expressing in the English classroom.
To conclude ...

Motivating the person (rather than the L2 learner):

- We should seek to engage and orient ourselves to the particular transportable identities that students are motivated to express.
- We should create richly varied opportunities for them to ‘transport’ and integrate different aspects of their identity from outside the classroom into their classroom experience of learning and using English.