Sensitivity, Motivation and Autonomy

In the language classroom, it is of utmost importance to keep students motivated towards their own autonomy while also keeping in mind what their preferred learning styles are as well as their expectations of the classroom environment.

Identifying and Drawing upon Motivation

Motivation lies at the crux of all forms of teaching and learning across all fields of study. Motivation is the force that drives the students to take a given course, and when it comes to language pedagogy, it is the teacher's job to identify what that motivation is and keep that motivation at the core of each lesson he or she teaches. Generally speaking, motivation relates to the practicality of skills; students will always identify more with a skill that they can see a use for rather than a skill that has no apparent use to them. Awareness-raising activities and top-down approach-informed activities are always a must at the beginning of my own lessons because they give students a reason to engage in the content before they are even exposed to the target language. A teacher must maintain this motivation by ensuring that students engage with one another as they are learning; keeping students involved in one another's learning will keep students interested not only in learning the target language, but also ensuring that their classmates are learning it as well. This concept of motivation via group dynamics is treated by Dörnyei (2014) as he explains how things like having students within a group cooperate with one another to achieve a common goal can motivate those student to not only help one another, but to make one another's learning experiences more meaningful.

Facilitating Learner Autonomy

Ensuring that students are motivated and engaged in an activity is directly related to the ultimate development of learner autonomy. Within research on autonomy and motivation in

education, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) cited in Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, (1991) has been extensively explored by researchers. This theory is concerned with promoting interest in learning and instilling confidence in students' own abilities as individuals. Autonomy is related to the application of lesson content outside of the classroom; it is the act of using the target language taught in a lesson in situations that are not related to anything classroom-based, but rather to the personal and specialized situations of each of the students. In teaching the receptive skills (i.e. reading and listening), autonomy-based instruction can take the form of strategy-based teaching. In his book on strategy-based instruction in language teaching, Mendelsohn (1994) brings up the fact that we all listen to different things in different ways. Therefore, raising students' awareness of how to apply certain strategies in listening and reading and allowing them to choose which strategies work best for them gives students the opportunity to take charge of their development in these receptive skill areas. In teaching the productive skills (i.e. writing and speaking), having culminating, autonomy-based activities at the end of lessons is essential because it reinforces that initial motivation that was drawn out at the beginning of the lesson. The incorporation of autonomy activities within a lesson will make the content more meaningful and accessible to the students, in addition to more memorable.

Flexibility with Individual Learning Styles, Cultural Backgrounds and Personalities

Throughout the lesson from motivation to autonomy, I intend to also keep in mind the students' own personalities, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds in relation to the appropriateness of the course and curriculum as well as of my execution (teaching style) of the lesson.

A person's cultural values can influence his or her preferred learning and/or teaching

styles. If one were to come from a culture that favors certain teaching styles over others, then his or her learning style would be more likely to parallel what they are used to, as opposed to something new and unfamiliar. Thus, as a language teacher I must be aware of how one's own cultural biases influence an instructor's teaching styles and/or a students' learning styles. Since most language courses are taught across cultural contexts, the teacher may have differing cultural values from the students. In order to negotiate this difference, the teacher must be willing to implement an integrated approach with regards to her or his teaching style. Canagarajah (2002) emphasizes the importance of having teachers and students become more reflective and critically conscious of the strategies that they find useful in the classroom. This way, the teacher is more likely to reach her or his students in some way that is familiar to them.

With respect to individual differences between students, I draw upon Christison's (1996) description of Gardner's (1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences when I think of ways to reach these students with different strengths. The idea behind multiple of intelligences is that intelligence is not a single overarching concept that only the privileged few can enjoy; individuals have at least seven different intelligences. As a teacher I would like to draw upon these different intelligences in order to appeal to each student's own unique abilities, thus giving them the sense that they have control over their learning, which will bring them closer to be being autonomous learners.

Therefore, I wish to emphasize that as a teacher I will implement a student-centered approach to teaching which includes the flexibility necessary in order to maintain rapport with the students and keep the classroom a "safe" learning environment for the students where they will be able to feel comfortable, but also challenged.

References

Canagarajah, S. A. (2002). Globalization, methods, and practice in periphery classrooms. In D. Block, &
D. Cameron (Eds.), *Globalization and language teaching* (pp. 134-150). New York: Routledge.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New
York: Plenum.

Dörnyei, Z. (2014). Motivation in second language learning. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M. A.
Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed., pp. 518-531). Boston:
National Geographic Learning.

Mendelsohn, D. J. (1994). *Learning to listen: A strategy-based approach for the second-language learner.*
San Diego, CA: Dominie Press.