CHAPTER 43

CREATING A MOTIVATING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the complex question of what makes a classroom environment motivating. It will be argued that in order to understand the psychological tapestry of classroom life, we need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach and draw on research findings from a number of different areas within the social sciences, such as group dynamics, motivational psychology, educational studies, and second language research. The assumption underlying this chapter is that the motivating character of the learning context can be enhanced through conscious intervention by the language teacher, and accordingly the main facets of the environment will be discussed with such a proactive and practical objective in mind. Key concepts to be addressed include group cohesiveness and interpersonal relations, group norms and student roles, the teacher's leadership styles, and the process of facilitation, as well as the main phases of a proactive, motivational teaching practice within a process-oriented framework.

Researchers analyzing the effectiveness of second language (L2) education usually focus on issues such as the quality and quantity of L2 input, the nature of the language learning tasks, and the teaching methodology applied, as well as various learner traits and strategies. These are undoubtedly central factors in L2 learning, and they significantly determine the effectiveness of the process, particularly in the short run. If, however, we consider learning achievement from a longer-term perspective, other aspects of the classroom experience, such as a motivating classroom climate, will also gain increasing importance. Wlodkowski (1986) points out that although boring lessons can be very unpleasant and sometimes excruciatingly painful, boredom itself does not seem to affect the short-term effectiveness of learning. After all, much of what many of us currently know has been mastered while being exposed to some uninspiring presentation or dull practice sequence. Yet, no one would question that attempts to eliminate boredom from the classroom should be high on every teacher's agenda. Why is that? What is the significance of trying to create a more pleasant classroom environment?

The basic assumption underlying this chapter is that long-term, sustained learning—such as the acquisition of an L2—cannot take place unless the educational context provides, in addition to cognitively adequate instructional practices, sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in the learners. Boring but systematic teaching can be effective in producing, for example, good test results, but rarely does it inspire a lifelong commitment to the subject

matter. This chapter will focus on how to generate this additional inspiration, that is, how to create a motivating classroom environment.

The characteristics of the learning context can be studied from a number of different perspectives. In educational psychology there has been an established line of research focusing on a multidimensional concept describing the psychological climate of the learning context, termed the *classroom environment* (cf. Fraser & Walberg, 1991). Educational researchers have also focused on aspects of classroom management as an antecedent of the overall classroom climate (e.g., Jones & Jones, 2000). Adopting a different perspective to describe classroom reality, social psychologists have looked at the dynamics of the learner group as part of the vivid discipline of group dynamics (e.g., Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001). Motivational psychologists have taken yet another approach by focusing on the motivational teaching practices and strategies employed in the classroom (for example, Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). While all these lines of investigation represent slightly different priorities and research paradigms, in the end they concern the same larger picture and therefore show a considerable overlap. In the following overview, I will synthesize the various approaches by focusing on the different psychological processes that underlie and shape classroom life.

TOWARD A COHESIVE LEARNER GROUP

One of the most salient features of the classroom environment is the quality of the relationships between the class members. The quality of teaching and learning is entirely different depending on whether the classroom is characterized by a climate of trust and support or by a competitive, cutthroat atmosphere. If learners form cliques and subgroups that are hostile to each other and resist any cooperation, the overall climate will be stressful for teachers and students alike, and learning effectiveness is likely to plummet. How do such negative relationship patterns develop? And, once established, how can they be changed? These questions have been studied extensively within the field of group dynamics (for a review, see Forsyth, 1999), and recent work on the topic in the L2 field has produced detailed recommendations on how to develop cohesiveness in the language classroom (e.g., Dörnyei & Malderez, 1999; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998; Senior, 1997, 2002).

Intermember relations within a group are of two basic types: *attraction* and *acceptance*. Attraction involves an initial instinctive appeal, caused by factors such as physical attractiveness, perceived competence, and similarities in attitudes, personality, hobbies, living conditions, etc. An important tenet in group dynamics is that despite their initial impact, these factors are usually of little importance for the group in the long run, and group development can result in strong cohesiveness among members regardless of, or even in spite of, the initial intermember likes and dislikes. In a "healthy group," initial attraction bonds are gradually replaced by a deeper and steadier type of interpersonal relationship, acceptance.

Acceptance involves a feeling toward another person which is non-evaluative in nature, has nothing to do with likes and dislikes, but entails an unconditional positive regard toward the individual (Rogers, 1983), acknowledging the person as a complex human being with many (possibly conflicting) values and imperfections. One of the most important characteristics of a good group is the emergence of a high level of acceptance between members that powerful enough to override even

negative feelings between some. This accepting climate, then, forms the basis of a more general feature of the group, group cohesiveness.

Group cohesiveness refers to the closeness and "we" feeling of a group, that is, the internal gelling force that keeps the group together. In certain groups it can be very strong, which is well illustrated by reunion parties held even several decades after the closure of the group. Cohesiveness is, obviously, built on intermember acceptance, but it also involves two other factors that contribute to the group's internal binding force: the members' commitment to the task/purpose of the group and group pride, the latter referring to the prestige of group membership (cf., elite clubs).

How can we promote acceptance and cohesiveness? There are a variety of methods, and from an L2 teaching perspective, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) list the following main factors:

1. Learning about each other: This is the most crucial and general factor fostering intermember relationships, involving the students' sharing genuine personal information with each other. Acceptance simply does not occur without knowing the other person well enough—enemy images or a lack of tolerance very often stem from insufficient knowledge about the other party.

2. Proximity, contact, and interaction: Proximity refers to the physical distance between people, contact to situations where learners can meet and communicate spontaneously, and interaction to special contact situations in which the behavior of each person influences the others'. These three factors are effective natural gelling agents, which highlight the importance of classroom issues such as the seating plan, small group work, and independent student projects.

3. Difficult admission: This explains why exclusive club membership is usually valued very highly, and the same principle is intuitively acted upon in the various initiation ceremonies for societies, teams, or military groups.

4. Shared group history: The amount of time people have spent together and "Remember when we…" statements usually have a strong bonding effect.

5. The rewarding nature of group activities: Rewards may involve the joy of performing the activities, approval of the goals, success in achieving these goals, and personal benefits (such as grades or prizes).

6. Group legend: Successful groups often create a kind of group mythology that includes giving the group a name, inventing special group characteristics (for example, dress code), and group rituals, as well as creating group mottoes, logos, and other symbols such as flags or coats of arms.

7. Public commitment to the group: Group agreements and contracts as to common goals and rules are types of such public commitment, and wearing school colors or t-shirts is another way of achieving this.

8. Investing in the group: When members spend a considerable amount of time and effort contributing to the group goals, this increases their commitment toward these goals. That is, psychological membership correlates with the actual acts of membership.

9. Extracurricular activities: These represent powerful experiences—indeed, one successful program is often enough to "make" the group, partly becau-

se during such outings students lower their "school filter" and relate to each other as "civilians" rather than students. This positive experience will then prevail in their memory, adding a fresh and real feel to their school relationships.

10. Cooperation toward common goals: Superordinate goals that require the cooperation of everybody to achieve them have been found to be the most effective means of bringing together even openly hostile parties.

11. Intergroup competition (that is, games in which small groups compete with each other within a class): These can be seen as a type of powerful collaboration in which people unite in an effort to win. You may want to group students together who would not normally make friends easily, and mix up the subteams regularly.

12. Defining the group against another: Emphasizing the discrimination between "us" and "them" is a powerful but obviously dangerous aspect of cohesiveness. While stirring up emotions against an outgroup in order to strengthen ingroup ties is definitely to be avoided, it might be OK to occasionally allow students to reflect on how special their class and the time they spend together might be, relative to other groups.

13. Joint hardship and common threat: Strangely enough, going through some difficulty or calamity together (for example, carrying out some tough physical task together or being in a common predicament) has a beneficial group effect.

14. Teacher's role modeling: Friendly and supportive behavior by the teacher is infectious, and students are likely to follow suit.

TOWARD A PRODUCTIVE NORM AND ROLE SYSTEM IN THE CLASSROOM

When people are together, in any function and context, they usually follow certain rules and routines that help to prevent chaos and allow everybody to go about their business as effectively as possible. Some of these rules are general and apply to everybody, in which case we can speak about group norms. Some others, however, are specific to certain people who fulfill specialized functions, in which case they are associated with group roles.

Group Norms

In educational settings we find many classroom norms that are explicitly imposed by the teacher or mandated by the school. However, the majority of the norms that govern our everyday life are not so explicitly formulated, and yet they are there, implicitly. Many of these implicit norms evolve spontaneously and unconsciously during the interactions of the group members, for example, by copying certain behaviors of some influential member or the leader. These behaviors then become solidified into norms, and these "unofficial" norms can actually be more powerful than their official counterparts. The significance of classroom norms, whether official or unofficial in their origin, lies in the fact that they can considerably enhance or decrease students' academic achievement and work morale. In many contemporary classrooms, for example, we come across the norm of mediocrity that

refers to the peer pressure put on students not to excel or else they will be called names such as "nerd", "swot", "brain", and so on.

One norm that is particularly important to language learning situations is the norm of tolerance. The language classroom is an inherently face-threatening environment because learners are required to take continuous risks as they need to communicate using a severely restricted language code. An established norm of tolerance ensures that students will not be embarrassed or criticized if they make a mistake and, more generally, that mistakes are seen and welcomed as a natural part of learning.

How can we make sure that the norms in our classroom promote rather than hinder learning? The key issue is that real group norms are inherently social products, and in order for a norm to be long-lasting and constructive, it needs to be explicitly discussed and accepted as right and proper. Therefore, Dörnyei and Malderez (1997) have proposed that it is beneficial to include an explicit norm-building procedure early in the group's life. They suggest formulating potential norms, justifying their purpose in order to enlist support for them, having them discussed by the whole group, and finally agreeing on a mutually accepted set of class rules, with the consequences for violating them also specified. These class rules can then be displayed on a wall chart.

Our norm-building effort will really pay off when someone breaks the norms, for example, by misbehaving or not doing something expected. It has been observed that the more time we spend setting, negotiating, and modeling the norms, the fewer people will go astray. And when they do, it is usually the group that brings them back in line. Having the group on your side in coping with deviations and maintaining discipline is a major help: members usually bring to bear considerable group pressure on errant members and enforce conformity with the group norms.

Group Roles

Role as a technical term originally comes from sociology and refers to the shared expectation of how an individual should behave. Roles describe the norms that go with a particular position or function, specifying what people are supposed to do. There is a general agreement that roles are of great importance with regard to the life and productivity of the group: if students are cast in the right role, they will become useful members of the team, they will perform necessary and complementary functions, and at the same time they will be satisfied with their self-image and contribution. However, an inappropriate role can lead to personal conflict and will work against the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the group. Thus, a highly performing class group will display a balanced set of complementary and constructive student roles.

Although listing all the possible roles is impossible (partly because some of them are specific to a particular group's unique composition or task), some typical examples include the leader, the organizer, the initiator, the energizer, the harmonizer, the information-seeker, the complainer, the scapegoat, the pessimist, the rebel, the clown, and the outcast. How do these roles emerge? They may evolve naturally, in which case it is to some extent a question of luck whether the emerged roles add up to a balanced and functional tapestry. Alternatively, by their own communications or through using certain teaching structures, teachers might encourage students to explore and assume different roles and adopt the ones that suit

them best for strategies and activities. The most subtle way of encouraging role taking is to notice and reinforce any tentative role attempts on the students' part, and sometimes even to highlight possible roles that a particular marginal learner may assume. Alternatively, teachers can make sure that everybody has something to contribute by assigning specific roles for an activity, such as chair, time-keeper, task-initiator, clarifier, provocateur, synthesizer, checker, and secretary (Cohen, 1994; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Having explicitly marked roles in the lessons has the further advantage that teachers can prepare the students to perform these roles effectively, including providing the specific language routines that typically accompany a role.

TOWARD AN OPTIMAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

Language teachers are by definition group leaders and as such they determine every facet of classroom life. The study of various leadership styles and their impact has a vast literature, but all the different accounts agree on one thing: leadership matters. As Hook and Vass (2000) succinctly put it, "Leadership is the fabled elixir. It can turn failing schools into centers of excellence … It is the process by which you allow your students to become winners" (p. 5).

The study of group leadership goes back to a classic study more than 60 years ago. Working with American children in a summer camp, Lewin and his colleagues (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939) were interested to find out how the participants would react to three very different group leadership styles:

1. *Autocratic* (or *authoritarian*) leadership, which maintains complete control over the group
2. *Democratic* leadership, where the leader tries to share some of the leadership functions with the members by involving them in decision-making about their own functioning
3. *Laissez-faire* leadership, where the teacher performs very little leadership behavior at all

The results were striking. Of the three leadership types, the laissez-faire style produced the least desirable outcomes: the psychological absence of the leader retarded the process of forming a group structure, and consequently the children under this condition were disorganized and frustrated, experienced the most stress, and produced very little work. Autocratic groups were found to be more productive, spending more time on work than democratic ones, but the quality of the products in the democratic groups was judged superior. In addition, it was also observed that whenever the leader left the room, the autocratic groups stopped working whereas the democratic groups carried on. From a group perspective, the most interesting results of the study concerned the comparison of interpersonal relations and group climate in the democratic and autocratic groups. In these respects democratic groups significantly exceeded autocratic groups: the former were characterized by friendlier communication, more group-orientedness, and better member leader relationships, whereas the level of hostility observed in the autocratic groups was 30 times as great as in democratic groups, and aggressiveness was also considerably (eight times) higher in them.

Although leadership studies have moved a long way since this pioneering research, the main conclusion that a democratic leadership style offers the best potential for school learning is still widely endorsed. In educational psychology, therefore, an important research direction has been to operationalize this general style characteristic. Several models for the "democratic" leader/teacher have been offered in the past; the most influential metaphor used in contemporary educational research and methodology is the humanistic notion of the group leader as a *facilitator*.

A Situated Approach to Facilitation

The concept of the teacher as the facilitator highlights the important role the learner is to take in the learning process, while restricting the teacher's role to facilitating learning, that is, providing an appropriate climate and resources to support the student. Thus, the teachers are not so much "drill sergeants" or "lecturers of knowledge" as partners in the learning process. How should they behave to achieve this? It depends largely on the developmental phase of the learner group, that is, on how far the class has progressed toward becoming a mature and cohesive social unit. In *The Complete Facilitator's Handbook*, John Heron (1999) offers a relatively straightforward situated system of operation and control concerning the behavior of facilitators.

Heron (1999) argues that—contrary to beliefs—a good facilitator is not characterized by a "soft touch" or a "free for all" mentality. He distinguishes three different modes of facilitation:

1. *Hierarchical* mode, whereby the facilitator exercises the power to direct the learning process *for* the group, thinking and acting *on behalf of* the group, and making all the major decisions. In this mode, therefore, the facilitator takes full responsibility for designing the syllabus and providing structures for learning.
2. *Cooperative* mode, whereby the facilitator shares the power and responsibilities with the group, prompting members to be more self-directing in the various forms of learning. In this mode the facilitator collaborates with the members in devising the learning process, and outcomes are negotiated.
3. *Autonomous* mode, whereby the facilitator respects the autonomy of the group in finding their own way and exercising their own judgment. The task of the facilitator in this mode is to create the conditions within which students' self-determination can flourish.

Heron has found that the ideal proportion of the three modes changes with the level of development of the group. He distinguishes three stages:

1. At the outset of group development, the optimal mode is predominantly *hierarchical*, offering a clear and straightforward framework within which early development of cooperation and autonomy can safely occur. Participants at this stage may be lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to orientate themselves, and they rely on the leader for guidance. Within the hierarchical mode there should be, however, cooperative exchanges with the teacher and autonomous practice on their own. Also, even in this mode

the students' consent should be sought for the major leader-owned decisions.

2. Later, in the middle phase, more *cooperation* with group members may be appropriate in managing the learning process. The facilitator can negotiate the curriculum with the students and cooperatively guide their learning activities. The students' acquired confidence will allow them to take an increasing part in making the decisions about how their learning should proceed.

3. Finally, when the group has reached maturity and is thus ready for the *autonomous* mode, more power needs to be delegated to the members so that they can achieve full self-direction in their learning. Learning contracts, self-evaluation, and peer assessment may "institutionalize" their independence.

Thus, to synthesize Heron's (1999) system with the Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) study, a group-sensitive teaching practice begins more autocratically to give direction, security, and impetus to the group. Then as the students begin performing, teachers initiate more democratic control of the processes, increasingly relying on the group's self-regulatory resources. When the group further matures and begins to show its initiative, a more autonomy-inviting, almost laissez-faire, leadership style might be the most conducive to encouraging student independence—but of course, this is a well-prepared withdrawal of the scaffolding rather than an abandonment of leadership responsibilities.

ADOPTING A MOTIVATIONAL TEACHING PRACTICE

Although the title of this chapter identifies the motivating aspect of the classroom environment as the focal issue, the term *motivation* has hardly been mentioned in the previous sections. The main reason for this is that so far we have looked at the characteristics of the whole learner group rather than the individual learner. However, the term *motivation* has usually been associated with an individualistic perspective, focusing on the individual's values, attitudes, goals, and intentions. If we want to talk about the motivation of a whole learner group, it is necessary to also use group-level counterparts of the concept, such as group cohesiveness, group norms, and group leadership. After all, these latter factors all play an important role in determining the behavior of the learner group, and therefore they can be seen as valid motivational antecedents. In other words, when we discuss the learning behavior of groups of learners, motivational psychology and group dynamics converge. Having covered the most important group features, the rest of this chapter will draw on findings from more traditionally conceived motivation research.

What makes the classroom climate motivating and how can we increase this characteristic? To start with, let me propose that the motivational character of the classroom is largely a function of the teacher's motivational teaching practice, and is therefore within our explicit control. Therefore, the emphasis in the following analysis will be on proactive and conscious strategies that can be used to promote classroom motivation.

After the initial motivational conditions have been successfully created—that is, the class is characterized by a safe climate, cohesiveness, and a good student-teacher relationship—the motivational teaching practice needs to be established. This

process comprises three phases: (a) generating initial motivation; (b) maintaining and protecting motivation; and (c) encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation.

Generating Initial Motivation

Although many psychologists believe that children are inherently eager to expand their knowledge about the world and, therefore, the learning experience is by definition a source of intrinsic pleasure for them, classroom teachers tend to have perceptions that are in sharp contrast with this idyllic view. Instead of all those keen pupils, all they can often see is rather reluctant youngsters who are totally unaware of the fact that there should be an innate curiosity in them, let alone a desire to learn. And even if we are fortunate to have a class of students with a high degree of academic motivation, we cannot expect all the students to favor the L2 course over all the other subjects they study. Thus, unless we are singularly fortunate with the composition of our class group, student motivation will not be automatically there, and we will need to try to actively generate positive student attitudes toward L2 learning.

There are several facets of creating initial student motivation. Dörnyei (2001a) has divided these into five broad groups:

1. Enhancing the learners' language-related values and attitudes: Our basic value system greatly determines our preferences and approaches to activities. We can distinguish three types of language-related values: (a) *intrinsic value*, related to the interest in and anticipated enjoyment of the actual process of learning; (b) *integrative value*, related to our attitudes toward the L2, its speakers, and the culture it conveys; and (c) *instrumental value*, related to the perceived practical, pragmatic benefits that the mastery of the L2 might bring about.
2. Increasing the learners' expectancy of success: We do things best if we expect to succeed, and, to turn this statement round, we are unlikely to be motivated to aim for something if we feel we will never get there.
3. Increasing the learners' goal-orientedness: In a typical class, too many students do not really understand or accept why they are doing a learning activity. Moreover, the official class goal (that is, mastering the course content) may well not be the class group's only goal and in extreme cases may not be a group goal at all!
4. Making the teaching materials relevant for the learners: The core of this issue has been succinctly summarized by McCombs and Whisler (1997): "Educators think students do not care, while the students tell us they do care about learning but are not getting what they need" (p. 38).
5. Creating realistic learner beliefs: It is a peculiar fact of life that most learners will have certain beliefs about language learning, and most of these beliefs are likely to be (at least partly) incorrect. Such false beliefs can then function like time "bombs" at the beginning of a language course because of the inevitable disappointment that is to follow, or can clash with the course methodology and thus hinder progress.

Once the main aspects of creating initial student motivation have been identified, it is possible to generate or select a variety of specific classroom techniques to promote the particular dimension (for practical ideas, see Brophy, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001a).

Maintaining and Protecting Motivation

It is one thing to initially whet the students' appetite with appropriate motivational techniques, but unless motivation is actively maintained and protected, the natural tendency to lose sight of the goal, to get tired or bored of the activity, and to give way to attractive distractions will result in the initial motivation gradually petering out. Therefore, motivation needs to be actively nurtured. The spectrum of motivational strategies relevant to this phase is rather broad (since ongoing human behavior can be modified in so many different ways), and the following six areas appear to be particularly relevant for classroom application:

- making learning stimulating and enjoyable;
- presenting tasks in a motivating way;
- setting specific learner goals;.
- protecting the learners' self-esteem and increasing their self-confidence;
- creating learner autonomy;
- promoting self-motivating learner strategies.

These motivational dimensions, except for the last one, are more straightforward than the facets of initial motivation described above, and due to space limitations I will not elaborate on them here (for a theoretical and methodological discussion, see Dörnyei, 2001a, 2001b). Self-motivating strategies, however, are a relatively unknown and underutilized area, so let us look at them in more detail.

Self-motivating strategies can be characterized, using Corno's (1993) words, "as a dynamic system of psychological control processes that protect concentration and directed effort in the face of personal and/or environmental distractions, and so aid learning and performance" (p. 16). That is, they involve ways for the learners to motivate themselves and thereby sustain the action when the initial motivation is flagging. These strategies are particularly important in second language learning because due to the longlasting nature of the process, L2 learners need to maintain their commitment and effort over a long period, often in the face of adversity. Let us not forget that failure in language learning is regrettably a very frequent phenomenon worldwide.

Based on the pioneering work of Corno (1993), Corno and Kanfer (1993), and Kuhl (1987), Dörnyei (2001a) has divided self-motivating strategies into five main classes:

- *Commitment control strategies* for helping to preserve or increase the learners' original goal commitment (e.g., keeping in mind favorable expectations or positive incentives and rewards; focusing on what would happen if the original intention failed)
- *Metacognitive control strategies* for monitoring and controlling concentration, and for curtailing unnecessary procrastination (e.g., identifying recur-

ring distractions and developing defensive routines; focusing on the first steps to take when getting down to an activity)
- *Satiation control strategies* for eliminating boredom and adding extra attraction or interest to the task (e.g., adding a twist to the task; using one's fantasy to liven up the task)
- *Emotion control strategies* for managing disruptive emotional states or moods, and for generating emotions that will be conducive to implementing one's intentions (e.g., self-encouragement; using relaxation and meditation techniques)
- *Environmental control strategies* for eliminating negative environmental influences and exploiting positive environmental influences by making the environment an ally in the pursuit of a difficult goal (e.g., eliminating distractions; asking friends to help and not to allow one to do something)

An important part of a motivational teaching practice that has a considerable empowering effect is to raise student awareness of relevant strategies and to remind them at appropriate times of their usefulness.

Encouraging Positive Retrospective Self-Evaluation

A large body of research has shown that the way learners feel about their past accomplishments and the amount of satisfaction they experience after successful task completion will significantly determine how they approach subsequent learning tasks. Strangely enough, the students' appraisal of their past performance depends not only on the absolute, objective level of the success they have achieved but also on how they subjectively interpret their achievement (which is why, for example, we find so many people being regularly dissatisfied despite their high-quality work). However, by using appropriate strategies, teachers can help learners to evaluate their past performance in a more "positive light," take more satisfaction in their successes and progress, and explain their past failures in a constructive way. This latter area is related to the role attributions, which is an issue practicing teachers are usually unfamiliar with even though it has been a central topic in educational psychology.

The term *attribution* has been used in motivational psychology to refer to the explanation people offer about why they were successful or, more importantly, why they failed in the past. Past research had identified a certain hierarchy of the types of attributions people make in terms of their motivating nature. Failure that is ascribed to stable and uncontrollable factors such as low ability has been found to hinder future achievement behavior, whereas failure that is attributed to unstable and controllable factors such as effort is less detrimental in that it can be remedied. Thus, the general recommendation in the literature is to try and promote effort attributions and prevent ability attributions in the students as much as possible. In failure situations, this can be achieved by emphasizing the low effort exerted as being a strong reason for underachievement, and if failure occurs in spite of hard work, we should highlight the inadequacy of the strategies employed.

Finally, no account of classroom motivation would be complete without discussing the controversial but very salient effects of various forms of feedback, rewards, and grades dispensed by the teacher. As these are all forms of external evaluation by authority figures, they have a particularly strong impact on the students' self-appraisal. Feedback has at least three functions:

1. Appropriate motivational feedback can have a gratifying function, that is, by offering praise it can increase learner satisfaction and lift the learning spirit.
2. By communicating trust and encouragement, motivational feedback can promote a positive self-concept and self-confidence in the student.
3. Motivational feedback should be informative, prompting the learner to reflect constructively on areas that need improvement.

However, we should note that one common feature of educational feedback—its controlling and judgmental nature (that is, comparing students against peer achievement or external standards)—is considered very harmful (Good & Brophy, 2002).

While feedback is generally considered a useful motivational tool when applied sensitively, rewards and grades (the latter being a form of rewards) are usually disapproved of by educational psychologists. This is all the more surprising because most teachers feel that rewards are positive things and dispense them liberally for good behavior and praiseworthy efforts or accomplishments. So what's wrong with rewards?

The problem with rewards and with grades in particular is that they are very simplistic devices and they can do a great deal of damage. Rewards in themselves do not increase the inherent value of the learning task or task outcome, and neither do they concern other important learning aspects such as the learning process, the learning environment, or the learner's self-concept. Instead, all they do is simply attach a piece of "carrot or stick" to the task. By doing so, they divert the students' attention away from the real task and the real point of learning. When people start concentrating on the reward rather than on the task itself, they can easily succumb to the "mini-max principle" (Covington & Teel, 1996), whereby they attempt to maximize rewards with a minimum of effort. Indeed, we find that many students become grade driven, if not "grade grubbing," surprisingly early in their school career (Covington, 1999). Also, due to their ultimate importance in every facet of the education system, grades frequently become equated in the minds of school children with a sense of self-worth; that is, they consider themselves only as worthy as their school-related achievements, regardless of their personal characteristics such as being loving, good, or courageous. This is obviously a complex issue (for a more detailed discussion, see Dörnyei, 2001a; Good & Brophy, 2002; Pintrich & Schunk, 2001), but it is clear that we need to be cautious with rewards and grades and should try and rely on other forms of motivational practices as much as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

This overview has demonstrated that the quality of the classroom environment is made up of a number of varied ingredients. And just as in cooking, achieving an optimal, motivating outcome can be done using different combinations of spices: while some chefs rely on paprika and build the recipe around it, others prefer pepper and the herbs that go with it. The situation is exactly the same in developing a motivating teaching practice. As long as we are aware of the vast repertoire of techniques that are at our disposal, it is up to us to choose the specific ones that we will apply, based on the specific needs that arise in our concrete circumstances. There is only one thing we should not attempt: to try and apply all the techniques we

know at the same time. This would be the perfect recipe for teacher burnout. What we need is quality rather than quantity; some of the most motivating teachers often rely on a few well-selected basic techniques.

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