

## Introduction

In order to offer a brief introduction to this book, we would like to start out by answering five key questions: (1) Why write a book about vision in language education? (2) Why focus on both learners and teachers in the same book? (3) What is the point of mixing the terms 'vision' and 'motivation'? (4) What is this book intended to offer? (5) Who are we, the authors, and how have we come to write this book?

### Why write a book about vision in language education?

There is a straightforward answer to this question: because vision matters a lot. This has been recognised by many for a long time (see e.g. Levin 2000; van der Helm 2009); for example, in one of the best-known biblical proverbs that talks about prophetic vision, we are told, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (Proverbs 29:18), and John Dewey, the eminent American philosopher and educational reformer (1859–1952), stated as early as 1897 in his famous *My Pedagogic Creed* that the central issue in education is vision-building, or as he termed it, *image-formation*:

I believe that the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it.

I believe that if nine-tenths of the energy at present directed towards making the child learn certain things, were spent in seeing to it that the child was forming proper images, the work of instruction would be indefinitely facilitated.

I believe that much of the time and attention now given to the preparation and presentation of lessons might be more wisely and profitably expended in training the child's power of imagery and in seeing to it that he was continually forming definite, vivid, and growing images of the various subjects with which he comes in contact in his experience.

(Dewey 1897: 79–80)

In keeping with his view, we have come to believe that vision is one of the single most important factors within the domain of language learning: where there is a vision, there is a way. The main objective of this book is therefore to explain what exactly is involved in the vision to learn a foreign/second language (L2), where the significance of this vision lies and in what ways it can be generated and nurtured consciously by the teacher. When we talk about motivating learners in the following chapters, we do not necessarily mean providing them with entertainment and laughter (although those can often, but not always, be very welcome ingredients of the classroom learning process). Instead, what we mean by *motivating* in this book is to help students to 'see' themselves as potentially competent L2 users, to become excited about the value of knowing a foreign language in their own lives and, subsequently, to take action. This action will sometimes be genuinely enjoyable and seemingly effortless, as witnessed by students who are absorbed in watching a gripping foreign language movie, browsing foreign language websites or competing with other teams in a classroom language quiz. At other times, however, the going may get tougher, and even though such low points are inevitable in any sustained activity, too many learners abandon the study of an L2 as a result of their diminishing motivation. Along with the researchers, practitioners and materials writers whose work we will cite and discuss in this book, we believe that such demotivation is not inevitable, as many people are ready to invest effort in difficult tasks when they have a clear vision of where the process can take them. This vision is what our book is about.

### Illustration: The power of vision: 'I have a dream!'

On 28 August 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr gave a speech in Washington DC about racial equality and an end to discrimination. This speech has been seen as a defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement. At the end of the speech, he departed from his prepared text and finished with describing an extended vision of a brighter future, punctuated with eight occurrences of the now legendary phrase, 'I have a dream ...':

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' ...

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character ...

The power of this vision has been evidenced by history.

## Why focus on both learners and teachers in the same book?

The answer to this question has to do with how classrooms work. We are interested in transforming classrooms into learning environments that truly facilitate the study of foreign languages. Such a transformation of classroom practice has to begin with the teachers, because they are the people in the best position to shape classroom life. As evidenced by so many inspiring examples around the world, teachers *can* become transformational leaders, and the engine of this transformational drive is the teacher's vision for change and improvement. The good news about this vision is that it is highly contagious: it has the potential to infect the students and generate an attractive vision for language learning in them. Therefore, the rationale for combining the topics of teacher and student motivation in one book is actually quite simple: the two are inextricably linked because the former is needed for the latter to blossom.

## What is the point of mixing the terms 'vision' and 'motivation'?

This is an important question, and in fact we could even go one step further and ask: should a vision-based approach replace previous motivational frameworks?<sup>1</sup> The answer is no. The plurality of motivational constructs has to do with the multi-faceted nature of human behaviour and with the various levels of abstraction that we can approach it from. The undeniable fact is that the range of potential motives that can affect human behaviour is vast: people might decide to do something for as diverse reasons as physical needs, financial benefits, moral or faith convictions, cognitive curiosity or because they fancy someone who already does it – the list is virtually endless. Various motivation theories highlight different clusters of these motives in order to explain certain specific behavioural domains under focus, such as, for example, voting, mating, learning or working behaviours. Zoltán's earlier book in the Cambridge Language Teaching Library series – *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom* (Dörnyei 2001) – surveyed a wide selection of diverse motives that are relevant to sustained learning behaviours in foreign language classes, and the approach offered in the current book does not replace or invalidate the motivational strategies presented there.

<sup>1</sup>For an overview of different approaches to understanding motivation in language education, see Dörnyei (2001, 2014) and Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011).

So, what is the point in shifting the attention to vision? The reason for doing so is that we understand 'vision' to be one of the highest-order motivational forces, one that is particularly fitting to explain the long-term, and often lifelong, process of mastering a second language. While the day-to-day realities of one's L2 learning experience are the function of multiple factors related to diverse aspects of the learning environment or the learner's personal life, the concept of vision offers a useful, broad lens to focus on the bigger picture, the overall persistence that is necessary to lead one to ultimate language attainment. In other words, while individuals pursue languages for a variety of purposes, and an equally wide array of reasons keep their motivation alive, the vision of who they would like to become as second language users seems to be one of the most reliable predictors of their long-term intended effort.

In sum, we are firm believers in the ultimate motivational potential of vision, and therefore in the following chapters we shall explore how this vision can be generated and under what conditions it can work best. If it is true that vision can have a substantial impact on motivation and action – and a massive body of research from across a wide range of scientific disciplines suggests that it can – then why not explore this potential in our language classrooms?

### What is this book intended to offer?

We hope to provide an accessible discussion that avoids too much jargon and that is not theorising for its own sake but rather serves practical purposes. We have found in our own experience that when teachers genuinely care for student learning, they need some solid framework to understand the key parameters of their professional work in order to make the most of it. The analysis of vision lends itself to this purpose: the nine chapters of this book are intended to present a firm foundation which those teachers wishing to establish a motivational practice in their language classes can build upon. The theoretical principles will be accompanied by a wide range of illustrations from research practice, interviews, anecdotes and celebrity quotes in order to bring the topic alive; we hope to be persuasive and engaging enough to generate real zeal and conviction in our readers so that their excitement, in turn, can be transmitted to their students. This book, then, is a platform to present our own vision about the subject and a call to readers to join us in our visionary journey towards making language learning more engaging and rewarding for our learners.

In our discussion of the pedagogic implications of vision, we will present a number of ideas for classroom activities, with the caveat that this

is not a 'recipe book' whose main aim is to provide teaching resources. Instead, as stated above, our chief objective is to offer insights, clarity and explanation about a fascinating subject in the hope that this will enrich our classroom colleagues' creative work with their students. Thus, we genuinely agree with the well-known social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1952: 169), who concluded: 'There is nothing more practical than a good theory.' (Practical resources concerning vision in language education can be found in two recipe books: Arnold, Puchta and Rinvulcri 2007 and Hadfield and Dörnyei 2013.)

### Who are we and how have we come to write this book?

Interestingly, we both come from Central Europe and were born only a few hours' drive away from each other – Zoltán in Hungary, Maggie in Slovakia – but it wasn't until we were both in England that we met, when Maggie started her PhD studies at the School of English, Nottingham University, where Zoltán was teaching. Zoltán began his career as a language teacher and teacher trainer in Budapest, and moved to Nottingham, where his wife comes from, at the end of the 1990s. By that time he had more or less turned into a full-time researcher of L2 applied linguistics, with his main specialisation area being the motivational background of second language acquisition. He was interested in undertaking Maggie's supervision because she shared his belief in the capacity of good scholarship to make tangible differences in the actual practice of real classrooms, and as part of the first phase of Maggie's PhD research, we launched an innovative in-service teacher-training course in Slovakia. As will be explained in more detail in Part III, this course was a mixed success. On the one hand, the participants – teachers working in various sectors of the Slovakian educational system – loved it and engaged with it meaningfully, covering a lot of ground and producing excellent course evaluation feedback. On the other hand, however, Maggie's subsequent research revealed very little evidence that the participants would try to incorporate the newly learnt knowledge and skills in their actual teaching practice. This puzzling experience led to a major turn in Maggie's PhD research in order to understand the anatomy of teacher-training failure, and the outcome of this work has been summarised in her recent book, *Teacher Development in Action: Understanding Language Teachers' Conceptual Change* (Kubanyiova 2012).

Interestingly, the original idea for this book was not related to this book at all: it concerned our preparing together the second edition of Zoltán's *Motivational Strategies* book (Dörnyei 2001). Yet, it soon

became clear that we were both interested in more than merely updating an existing collection of motivational techniques: we wanted to explore our more general ideas about transforming language teaching practice by generating a constructive vision of change. At this point we also realised that our research interests – Zoltán focusing primarily on students, Maggie on teachers – were conveniently complementary, which suggested the structure of this book. Accordingly, we rewrote our original book proposal for Cambridge University Press, and to our delight, the editors of the Cambridge Language Teaching Library series – Jane Walsh, Anna Linthe and Jo Garbutt – embraced the project right from the beginning.