Motivation in Adult Language Learners

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For whom and for what purposes?

Knowles’ principles of adult learning

1. Experience as the basis for learning activities
2. Immediate relevance: impact on job or personal life
3. Problem-centered
4. Planned and evaluated by themselves
Who learns better: children or adults?

Adults
- Greater cognitive abilities in how to learn
- Prior experience with other languages
- Mental models
- Motivation

Children - only native accent
Who is an adult?

- 25+ years of age
- Mature prefrontal cortex
- Able “to make responsible decisions on a regular basis with consideration of their consequences for the welfare of others as well as oneself “ (Wlodkowski, p. 2)
- Great number of experiences
The mature brain
Adults: Self-directed learners

Adults are motivated to learn subjects that relate their personal goals

- “Disorienting dilemma” -- a problem to be solved
- Solution based on usefulness to job or personal needs
- Present or future needs
Adults: Self-directed learners

- Pragmatic motivation
- American values of individualism and utility (Wlodkowski, p. 1)
What learners are we concerned about?

- Adults whose goal is to fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20
- Need to learn L2 or L3
- Various contexts
  - Married? Single? Young children?
  - Empty nest?
What learners are we concerned about?

Various experiences:
- Novice learner vs. experienced learner
- Prior success vs. prior failure
- Personality: individualist vs. team player
- Prior experiences abroad
- And more...
For what purposes?

- Academic -- to teach the Bible or another subject
- Everyday survival -- functional purposes
- Evangelism
- Travel
- Business
- Personal enrichment
Discuss with your partner

Consider the missionaries on the field in your organization.

What are their purposes?

Implications for their language learning?
Adult learners are motivated by the need to solve a personal problem related to achieving their goals.

- This is the meaning of self-directed
- Alignment with goals of the mission?
- Alignment with goals of their team?
Role of cognitive processes

- Important drivers of motivation
- Need for achievement: internal (personal) or external (employer)
Role of cognitive processes

Components of motivation

● Concept of the task at hand
● Consequences of task completion
● Perceived ability to succeed at the task

(DeScoll, p. 312)
Adult motivations

- Strong psychological need to be seen as in control
- Learning things they need to cope effectively with the problem
- Usefulness of greater value than intellectual value
- Align with the social norms of the majority society
- Call upon prior knowledge and cultural values
- Idiopathic - specific to the individual (Wlodkowski, p. 1)
Two personal examples

- Recipe
- Transportation
Application to language learning

Missionaries have both internal and external reasons for being motivated

“One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 3:13
Types of goals

1. Long vs. short term goals -- evaluate and motivate to press on
2. Achievement vs. performance (Driscoll, p. 315)
   *Performance* standards not established by the learner, as in classrooms -- demotivating “I’m dumb.” “I can’t do this.”
   *Achievement* standards -- self-directed
3. Challenging, but not impossible (Gass, p. 458)
“I’m dumb” It’s not a matter of intelligence!
Other reasons for temporary setback include:

- Was the task too difficult?
- Was it lack of effort?
- Was it misunderstanding the problem?
- Was it my mood?
- Were the expectations of the other person unrealistic?
- Was there no one to help me work through it?
- Better strategies will lead to success.
Mastery motivation

- Adults need to be included in planning instruction
- Motivation greatest when people set their own goals
- Learning, not grades, is the objective
- Learning results in mastery orientation
- Abilities less important
- Outcomes matter most
Summary

Motivation relative to learner’s expectations about the task

- Motivation greatest when people set their own goals
- Success increases motivation
- Failure should be seen as correctable. Find strategies that will address the causes.
Discuss with your partner:

Which of the learning goals you identified at the beginning of this presentation were addressed in this section?
Aptitude

Definition:
“one’s potential for learning new knowledge or new skills. With regard to language aptitude, it refers to one’s ability to learn another language, “ (Gass, p. 444)
Aptitude

- *aptitude in general* is not related to IQ
- Correlates with the individual’s ability to retain information in working memory (Gass, p. 258)
Aptitude tests

- Phonemic coding ability.
- Grammatical sensitivity.
- Inductive language learning ability.
- Memory and learning.
Aptitude tests

- Greatest correlation is with social class and parents’ education level
- IQ not a determinant
- Aptitude relative to other factors, like motivation
- Learners should set learning goals (mastery orientation)
Discuss with your partner:

Consider each of these aptitudes. In what ways can a person improve their ability to retain information?
# Types of memory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory</th>
<th>Short term (working)</th>
<th>Long term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large capacity</td>
<td>Limited capacity</td>
<td>Unlimited capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains sensory information</td>
<td>Acoustically encoded</td>
<td>Semantically encoded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very brief: ½ sec for visual</td>
<td>Brief storage: up to 30 sec. without rehearsal of information</td>
<td>Storage presumed to be permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 sec for auditory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conscious processing of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Encoding takes place here</strong></td>
<td>Information highly organized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much can your remember?

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Moving information from short to long term

- **Rehearsal** -- repetition
- **Encoding** -- relating incoming information to existing categories
  - Organization
  - Mnemonics
  - Mediation
  - Imagery
  - Note-taking
  - Self-questioning
With your partner

Which of these examples of encoding do you use when you’re trying to learn something new?
You’re not dumb!

You need to apply multiple strategies to the language learning task!
Learning as participation in communities of practice

Learning the linguaculture not a solitary pursuit.

Needed: an arsenal of strategies

Input comes from

- Members of the target language
- Missionary team members learning together
- Coaching via the internet
With your partner

Pick one question:

What have you learned about teams helping each other to learn?

Have you had any experience with online coaching and training?

