



eTwinning Project “Photography as a Pedagogical Tool”: a Teaching Approach to Create and Sustain Motivation

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Abstract

School work and learning foreign languages in formal teaching contexts may be regarded by learners both as face-threatening and as irrelevant to their lives. Many start to become reluctant to learn and adopt disruptive behaviour in the classroom or give up studying languages.

“Photography as a pedagogical tool” (P&P) is an eTwinning project aimed to make the learning process more motivating, by reaching out the different learning styles and needs and by engaging students in the learning process in a way that is both appealing and unthreatening.

P&P project took a project-based approach grounded on intercultural interaction to learning languages across different academic subjects by setting up an eTwinning partnership with seven European schools. Students were invited to take their cameras, go out and learn by observing the world around them. Photography was used as a tool for learning through observation and knowledge building in different school subjects like Mathematics, Biology, Geology, Chemistry, History, Foreign Languages, Mother Tongue, Arts, ICT, Music, Physical Education and vocational studies (Marketing, Economics, Restaurant Service. Pupils became more aware of the connections between the learning contents addressed and the reality around them.

P&P eTwinning project took a project-based approach to learning languages across different academic subjects grounded on intercultural interaction by setting up an eTwinning partnership with seven European schools. As a result it had a positive impact in enhancing learners’ motivation to learn and to communicate in the foreign language while developing curiosity and appreciation of other cultures and languages.

Throughout the project, a large cooperation and engagement of the schools involved was fulfilled to develop project activities and produce joint outcomes. While teachers were challenged to integrate ICT in their classroom routine, they became aware of the need to change their teaching methods to create new learning contexts centred on their learners’ needs.

Students were involved in all stages of the project from planning to assessing the impact of the project. As a result, they showed improved social responsibility in school work by participating actively in the collaborative project works and by achieving the tasks assigned to them. They developed competences to learn how to learn (Castells, 2004), to learn to share points of view and to start and maintain friendship across frontiers.

1. Introduction

Motivation has been recognised as one of the key factors that determine achievement and attainment as well as lifelong learning of languages. Studies [1] alighted that unmotivated students perform poorly, are easily distracted, do not participate in class, study little or nothing and show disruptive behaviour. In contrast, motivated students engage actively in the learning process, mobilizing effort, revealing persistence and even enthusiasm in carrying out tasks, developing skills to overcome challenges and difficulties. Research [2] has also shown that lack of motivation increases as students progress in their education when they accumulate experiences of failure which make them doubt their capacity to learn certain subjects. In the context of foreign language learning, poor performance and failure, which is perceived by the learner as a threat to his/her self-esteem, will result in withdrawal of effort and the adoption of avoidance strategies which will affect learning the language.

According to Clément [3], a combination of low anxiety level in foreign language learning context with a self-perceived linguistic competence will positively affect performance and boost students’ motivation to increase effort to communicate and learn the language. Hence, teachers should provide learners with relevant intercultural contact experiences and devise motivational strategies that can effectively enhance their motivational patterns to learn with and about others.



1.1 Motivation as a dynamic process

Motivation is defined by Gardner [4] as a 'combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language' which Dörnyei [5] describes as a dynamic quality which can be increased or decreased over time.

In this perspective, learners' motivation can be modified not only by changes in them, but also by changes in their school learning environment [6]. According to Dörnyei & Kubanyiova [7] teachers must help students to 'see' themselves as potentially competent L2 users, to understand the relevance of learning a foreign language and, subsequently, to take action communicating using the foreign language. If learners' self-perceptions as language learners affect their engagement in language activities in class, likewise it will affect their willingness to participate and their attainment. So, it is crucial to create a positive emotional environment in the classroom which will enhance self-confidence by minimising perceived goal achievement difficulty, L2 anxiety and risk of failure [8].

In formal education, students are not given choices in relation to what they learn and how to learn. When they become aware that they can not avoid the task that they perceive as unachievable, they make little effort and show little persistence in its realisation; their attention in class is poor and the desire to quit increases. Furthermore, even learners who are initially motivated can lose interest as Dörnyei & Ushioda [9] explained. This motivational decline can be partly explained by school classroom environment that is very different from other social contexts in which students live and interact. When we think of classroom, we think of a context where attendance is mandatory, the contents taught are preselected and not always match the needs of the students. It is also the context in which students are guided by instrumental goal of fulfilling the requirements of the school and not to take the advantages of learning it can provide [10].

Many research studies in educational psychology [11] [12] [13] have highlighted the beneficial impact an autonomy-supporting environment has on maintaining motivation. Teachers can foster learning autonomy in different ways, including sharing learning responsibilities, involving their pupils in making decisions regarding classroom materials, and giving them positions of authority by taking a project based learning approach [9].

1.2. The role of eTwinning in creating and sustaining motivation in the language classroom

eTwinning is a free online community which is part of Erasmus that offers a wide range of opportunities for collaboration across Europe and beyond. It facilitates innovative use of technology for collaborative, interdisciplinary production of knowledge and for intercultural. By integrating eTwinning in the classroom, teachers are opening the door to the world cultures and languages giving their pupils the chance to be part of an intercultural learning community.

As eTwinning project is based on the principles of project-based learning, collaborative and cooperative learning and intercultural education, it is expected that it will lead to:

- a change in the teaching process;
- the improvement of school achievement in foreign language and other subjects;
- an increase of pupils and teachers' motivation to use technology creatively;
- an improvement of communicative competence and self-perceived competence in learning foreign language;
- the development of reflective learning and reflective teaching practices.

2. “Photography as a Pedagogical Tool” eTwinning project methodology



Fig. 1: P&P logo

P&P eTwinning project is a multicultural partnership, involving schools from seven different European countries Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, which aims to create a supportive environment for intercultural project-based learning which will reduce anxiety while boosting learners’ perception of communicative competence and self-confidence. P&P eTwinning project promotes teachers’ and pupils’ willingness to experiment and discover how photography and different electronic applications can be creatively used to make learning more attractive and less threatening.

The project methodology comprises a series of motivational strategies based on Dörnyei’s instructional model to promote effective self-regulated learning [5], [8] which consists of four stages as shown above:

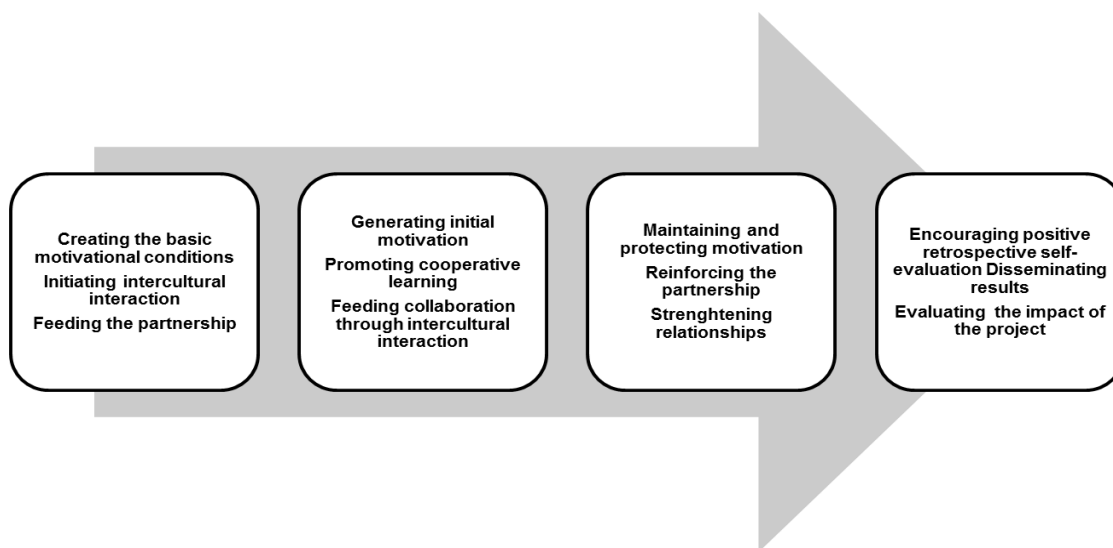


Fig. 2: P&P eTwinning project motivation instructional model for language learning

In the first stage, teachers need to provide a pleasant, supportive and unthreatening learning environment in the classroom to strengthen pupils’ self-confidence. Accordingly, a set of learning strategies were devised to create the basic motivational conditions for language learning, as listed above:

- Face-to-face and online training workshop "Learning and innovating with eTwinning";
- Online and face-to-face teachers’ meetings;
- Presenting the project to the participating classes;



- Involving all participants in the definition of learning objectives and project planning;
- Organising the participants into cooperative eTwinning groups of mixed-ability groups;
- Fostering group identity (choice of nickname and creation of logo for eTwinning groups);
- Preparation and development of eTwinning pedagogical activities.

At this stage, teachers' behaviour is key factor in influencing students' engagement in the project. Showing enthusiasm towards the project can impact learners' motivation [9].

In the second stage, a set of motivational strategies which comprise intercultural contact were implemented to arouse participants' interest. Teachers and pupils learn about eTwinning, the Twinspace and their partners. It is important to guarantee that interaction takes place for introductions and exchange of information about school, town and country before starting the joint activities and the micro project-works.

After this first approach to intercultural interaction, pupils, organised in eTwinning groups, are prepared to decide, collectively, on which topics and which final products they are willing to develop with their partners. Different curriculum-based themes are presented and eTwinning groups are propose sub-topics for their projects. A set of collaborative joint activities and joint micro-project works that imply the use of ICT and photography are carried out by the groups for different curricular areas/ contents. It is crucial, at this point, to sustain students' expectancy of success, by assisting them, giving them time to prepare for tasks, guiding them to achieve the tasks and helping them to overcome any obstacle they may face [9]. Teachers must ensure that their pupils interact as regularly as possible with their partners and respect netiquette rules so as to allow them to transcend their role as learners and develop attitudes of curiosity, respect, openness and empathy toward cultural differences.

Last stage comprehends strategies for encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. Feedback is essential to monitor and assess the impact of the project on the participants' learning motivation and on institutional change of teaching practices. Data must be collected periodically, twice during each school year (in January and June), using a variety of processes in order to promote reflection and monitor the the learning impact and outcomes of the project.

3. The impact of P&P eTwinning project on motivation

The results, we briefly highlight in this section, were collected from participants' comments published on the P&P project's Twinspace and the answers to the students and the teachers' questionnaire for the evaluation of the impact of the project.

Teachers reported that the project methodology allowed them to meet the differing needs of their students, ensuring the support needed to promote success and to enhance their learning potential. Both teachers and learners emphasized increased motivation to learn foreign languages and interact with people from other cultures. Learners revealed an increased social initiative and autonomy in using the foreign language to interact with their project partners and accomplish the collaborative tasks assigned. Participating teachers attributed this improvement to the project based learning approach introduced.

Students indicated that the activities based on the use of photography motivated them to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings and opinions in oral and written form to interact in the foreign language in an appropriate and creative way as they were aware that what they were doing would matter to other European teenagers. Students took responsibility of their own learning by grabbing the opportunity to use internet not only to interact directly with the source information for their project works but also to produce knowledge and share it with their project partners, becoming source of information themselves. By developing this sense of capacity to create knowledge, pupils raised their self-esteem which favoured their willingness to learn and to make effort to communicate in the foreign language.

Teachers emphasize that their students were deeply engaged in their classroom work, as they were striving to find new ways to express their ideas using photography and online applications to produce and present information in a creative and innovative way.

Finally, the majority of the pupils and teachers referred to the intercultural learning outcome of the project which help them overcome some negative preconceived ideas about some of their partners' cultures and languages which they learned to value for their difference.

4. Conclusion

P&P eTwinning project aspired to open up students' minds to diversity and increase their motivation to learn and communicate with other cultures. Additionally, it had an important role in fostering and maintaining learners' motivation by turning online foreign language exchanges into normalised



classroom activities while providing that what they did and what they learned in the classroom was relevant for their lives and their development as social and cultural beings.

Students observed the world around them through the lens of their cameras to make connections between the learning contents addressed in different school subjects and the surrounding reality producing a wide range of original and creative products which are accessible on the Twinspace of the project: <http://new-twinspace.etwinning.net/web/p54616/welcome>

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