

DEVELOPING A MOTIVATIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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In this paper, I propose that, by fostering interpersonal relationships in the classroom, we can help to create a productive learning environment and, consequently, enhance the conditions for personal growth in our students. Drawing on theories of motivation and group dynamics, I present a new hierarchical model representing classroom motivation, and describe each of its successive levels in turn. My workshop at the Realizing Autonomy Conference sought to demonstrate the practicability of the model by simulating a classroom with the participants. The paper concludes with a reflection on that experience and a discussion of the relationship between productive group formation and autonomous learning.

本論は教室内の対人関係の育成が生産的な学習環境の構築につながり、結果として学習者一人一人の成長を促すことを訴える。動機付け理論、及びグループダイナミクス理論に基づき、教室におけるモチベーションの新しい階層モデルと各ステップを説明する。2011年に開催のRealizing Autonomy 学会で参加者と一緒に行った模擬クラスワークショップでこのモデルの実用性を探求した。このワークショップを振り返り、生産性の高いグループの構築と自律学習の関係について考察する。

Introduction

A common concern among foreign language teachers in Japan is student motivation. This paper aims to address this concern by introducing a model of motivation that can help us better understand and create conditions for enhancing group performance, student motivation, personal growth, and learning.

Group performance refers to the quantity and quality of classroom interaction. This is an important idea in the context of communicative language teaching, where emphasis is upon developing the learners' communicative skills through participation in authentic communicative tasks (Ehrman & Dörnyei, p. 141, 1998). Motivation, here, refers to the driving force behind human endeavor. Motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 8). By looking at a group's dynamics, we can strengthen the interpersonal relationships and optimize group processes, thus dismantling barriers to communication and freeing up interaction. By looking at individual student needs, we can

appeal to the motivational drives that will both further enhance classroom task performance and, ultimately, lead to personal growth. This paper attempts to blend theories from the fields of group dynamics and motivation to provide a basic, unified model of motivation that applies to teaching and learning in a communicative and collaborative classroom context.

This paper grew out of the workshop titled Developing a Collaborative (and Productive) Learning Environment that was held at the Realizing Autonomy Conference, Nagoya, 2011. In this workshop, I introduced an original model of motivation, and then invited the participants to become students in a mock classroom exercise, enacting the steps towards developing a motivational group environment. As in the workshop, I start by explaining the theories supporting this model, and discussing the significance of its successive levels, along with ideas for practical applications in the classroom. This is followed by an account of the Nagoya workshop and my reflections upon that experience. Finally, I clarify the link between this model and other theories of autonomous learning.

Motivation Theories

The Classroom Motivation Model offers a simple construct that explains classroom motivation and justifies a special focus on the facilitation of a productive group learning environment. It draws mainly from the fields of sports psychology, group psychotherapy, education, and personal teaching experience. The model is also influenced by various motivation and group dynamics theories. First is Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), a subtheory of Self Determination Theory (SDT). By focusing on the social environment of the classroom, CET facilitates intrinsic motivation by supporting the students' innate psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The Classroom Motivation Model also draws from sequential stage theories of group development. As the name suggests, sequential stage group development theories assume that groups move through stages of development. Ehrman and Dornyei (1998) have developed a four-stage model of this theory relating to the second language classroom (see Figure 1). These stages are formation, transition, performing, and dissolution. The formation stage starts when groups first come together and is a period of orientation and ice-breaking. The transition stage is characterized by conflict and resolution, or "storming and norming" (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396), where group members work through conflicts and differences before accepted behavior patterns emerge and the group matures into a unified, organized and cooperative unit. At this stage, the group has developed into a cohesive, performing unit. Dissolution begins when the sequence of developmental stages ends and the group breaks up. Awareness of these stages of group development helps us to predict how a group might behave at any given time in its development. This awareness is also particularly important when developing group performance, because a group will not be able to perform to its potential until it has reached the phase of development that supports it.

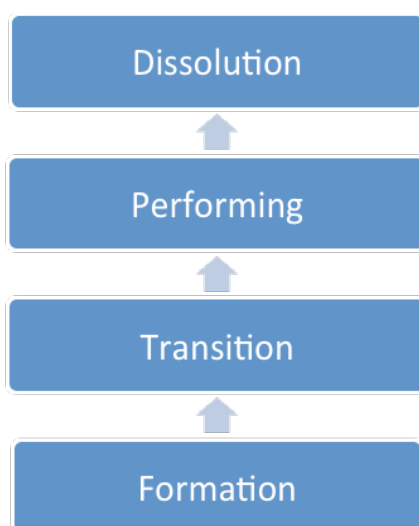


Figure 1. Ehrman and Dörnyei’s Group Development model (based on Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998).

Another motivational theory that underlies the Classroom Motivation Model is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) (see Figure 2). Maslow maintains that we all have varying levels of needs, and that the lower-level needs must be met before we can progress to the next higher level. For example, our most basic needs are physiological. We need things like food, shelter, and sleep, and these needs must be mostly satisfied before we become interested in the next level: safety. The key point that relates to classroom motivation is that higher needs, such as language learning and personal growth, are unlikely to be met if a basic need for security has not been satisfied first.

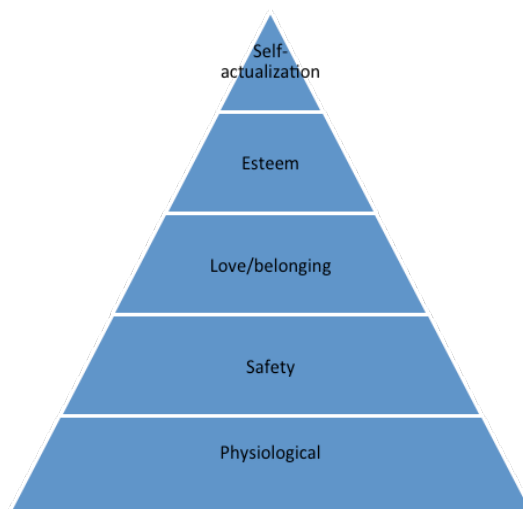


Figure 2. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (based on Maslow, 1943).

The Classroom Motivation Model

The model I introduce here has five levels (see Figure 3). The bottom four levels—structure, trust, cohesion and performance—can be seen as steps leading to group development, while the fifth level represents personal growth. The levels are not mutually exclusive; however, each level is built on the one that precedes it. Performance is the primary aim of the model in the classroom, and the stages leading to performance focus on what the group needs to realize this aim. At the performance stage, which is similar to Erhman and Dörnyei’s (1998) performing stage, the group has matured into a unified, organized, and cooperative unit in action. The group’s interpersonal relationships and group processes have been enhanced, the group has become important to its members, and students are interacting freely and willingly to achieve their group aims. In other words, the quality and quantity of interaction has been optimized and the performance goal has been reached. Once the students have reached the stage where they have matured as a group, and are achieving optimal performance as part of their group, they are ready to progress as individuals to the final stage. Here sits the ultimate goal of personal growth. In the context of a communicative classroom, this ultimate aim provides further potential to extend student performance and maintain motivation. Let’s take a look at the steps in detail.

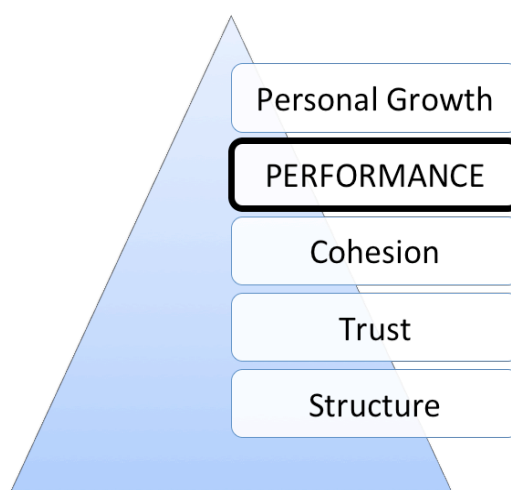


Figure 3. The Classroom Motivation Model.

Structure

The Classroom Motivation Model begins by focusing on structure. Structure refers to both physical and the social structure, and is the basic foundation upon which all progressive levels of the model are built. Physical structure refers to the tangible environment the students study in: the room size, seating arrangements, and lighting, for example. Social structure refers to “the pattern of relationships that emerges among its members” (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 76). Whether we recognize it or not, right from the very first time students are assembled into

a group, a structure begins to develop. During this time, peer relations, status hierarchies, role and norm systems are developing that will prevail for a long time (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 110; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, p. 12, pp. 14-15). Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) emphasize that this is a very important period in a group's life (p. 12). While on the surface things might seem smooth and harmonious during the initial classes, under the surface, plenty of structuring and internal organization is going on (p. 12, pp. 14-15). With a little input in the right places at the right times, the teacher can influence the way that structure develops, and encourage a positive group environment to evolve.

According to MacLennon and Dies (1992), the physical environment of the classroom affects not only the climate and quality of interaction, but also how the group will evolve. In order for students to develop into one cohesive group, they need to look and feel like one group. If there is too much space between students, they can experience feelings of insignificance, emptiness, isolation, and anxiety (p. 22). These feelings can encourage subgroups and cliques to develop, and will result in a fractured group. As Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) suggest, "Physical closeness tends to lead to psychological closeness" (p. 143). Students should not be seated so close together that they feel crowded or confined, but neither should they be seated too far apart (MacLennon & Dies, 1992, p. 22). One practical idea is to provide an organized seating plan. A grid system usually works best. Bring the students in together and give each a designated seat. This immediately alleviates student anxiety over where they should sit. This organization will provide three important elements for developing a group: proximity, contact, and interaction (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, pp. 142-144).

Once the class physically resembles a group, it is time to start working on the social structure. One way to encourage a positive social structure is by working on a set of class rules with the students. Let them know that this is their class, and that they should have their own rules. Give them examples, and then together discuss what kinds of rules they might like for their class. Next, brainstorm the rules on the board, and then, go through a process of negotiation. Negotiation is important because students will likely come up with some untenable ideas. However, through a process of negotiation the teacher and students can come to an agreement that suits both parties. Some common examples of class rules from in my own classes include:

- We can drink in class.
- If we finish our work, we can leave early.
- We must have a class party.

Each of these student-generated class rules contributes to the development of a positive learning environment. The negotiation of a rule to allow drinks in class, for example (a compromise on the usual ban on eating and drinking), helps students personalize the classroom. The decision to leave once the work is done motivates them to work hard and rewards them for doing so. A class party always creates a great opportunity for the teacher to reward the students for their hard work with something they will not only all enjoy, but that

will also contribute to developing a positive group dynamic. A party is also a helpful way to motivate students for a final project or assessment. By encouraging them to work hard towards a major goal, and scheduling a party to celebrate its completion, the two become associated together and the students have something to look forward to, knowing that their hard work is not solely for assessment purposes.

Student-generated class rules also influence the basis of the social structure, and help to establish a norm system. A positive norm system is essential for a good class. As Forsyth (2010) explains, "Norms are a fundamental element of a group's structure, for they provide direction and motivation, organize social interactions, and make other people's responses predictable and meaningful" (p. 145). In this way, the rules help to guide accepted norms of classroom behavior. Consequently, as Cohen (1994) observes, an accepted norm system has the effect of transferring control from the teacher to the students:

Much of the work that teachers usually do is taken care of by the students themselves; the group helps to keep everyone on task; group members assist one another. Instead of the teacher having to control everyone's behavior, the students take charge of themselves and others. (p. 60)

A final advantage to involving students in developing a set of class rules is that these rules help to personalize the class and give the students a sense of ownership and control—in other words, autonomy.

The emphasis on structure may seem somewhat restrictive. However, we can't have freedom without some constraint. Stewart and Irie (2011) point out that "... freedom and constraint are held in direct dialectical relationship to each other, and that this tension between freedom and constraint is particularly salient for teachers who base their classroom practices on the principle of learner autonomy" (p. 14). As they point out, one of the traditional roles of the teacher, and institutions, is to provide structure in order to manage and control the process of learning (p. 15). Of course, there is a need for a balance between freedom and constraint. However, establishing some structure provides the students with a basic stable framework within which they can thrive. Structure in the form of classroom norms, for example, provides the students with an ability to understand what is expected of them, and security comes from that understanding. This, in turn, makes it easier for students to interact freely. Once a structure has been established, then the groundwork will have been laid from which trust can grow.

Trust

As Lencioni (2002) observes, trust lies at the heart of any functioning, cohesive team (p. 195). Trust is the confidence among a group's members that their classmates' intentions are good, and that there is no need to be defensive or careful around them (Lencioni, 2002, p. 195). According to MacLennan and Dies (1992), trust is a willingness to risk self-exposure:

Trust implies expectation. When two people trust each other, they make demands on the other to respond in a particular way. One has confidence in the predictability of the other, and anticipation that the other will respond in terms of what is needed, an expectation that the other will not inflict hurt, and a belief in the other's consistency. (p. 19)

Trust is especially important in a language class. Learning to speak a second language, especially at the lower levels, requires students to constantly risk potential embarrassment. They will avoid interaction if they feel they might lose face and, thus, energy will be wasted on avoiding potentially negative interactions and staying safe. These dysfunctional interactions divert energy and attention away from group tasks (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 2; Lencioni, 2002, p. 196). When students don't trust each other, their resources are focused on simply keeping themselves out of trouble. However, when a group's participants do trust each other, they are more willing to take risks, and they can focus their energy on group tasks.

The first step to developing trust is to encourage interaction. The teacher now needs to implement ways for the students to share information about themselves in order to discover similarities and develop interpersonal attraction. Set up activities that facilitate interaction, such as, "Find-someone-who ..." exercises, random pairing/grouping, and information-exchange activities. We are drawn to people we have something in common with, and feel empathy towards people with whom we share similarities. One important point is to get all of the students in the class mixing with as many other students as possible. If they mix only with those they already feel comfortable with, then there is a danger of cliques developing. Random pairing is important because it encourages students to invest in the whole group, rather than just their friends, since they never know who their next partner will be. When students know that they might be partners with someone in the future, it positively affects how they regard the others in the group (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 143). When a level of trust has developed, and the participants are interacting freely, then it's time to develop the cohesion.

Cohesion

Structure, trust, and cohesion are all closely related. Structure provides the basic proximity, contact, interaction, and security that will facilitate the development of trust. Whereas trust helps the group to function effectively, interpersonal relationships build the cohesion that will power the group's performance. Without first establishing trust, cohesion would never have the opportunity to develop. Cohesion grows out of the confidence to take the risks that trust provides. Lind (1999) describes the relationship between trust and cohesion thus:

... mutual trust must be built between group members before the group can be cohesive. The mutual trust between group members then results in the group members interacting with each other to a greater degree. When a high level of group trust exists, the group members will feel more tightly bound and connected into the group activities. Thus group cohesiveness emerges from group trust. (p. 859)

The cohesion level in this model also draws on the ideas from the field of social psychology. Ryan and Deci (2000) maintain that we have three basic psychological needs that enhance motivation and mental health—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—which, when thwarted, lead to diminished motivation and well-being. The cohesion stage of the model appeals to the need for relatedness by supplying the students with a social context within which they can satisfy this need. Similarly, this stage also relates to Maslow's (1943) love/belonging level of needs, as well as to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Need to Belong Theory, which maintains that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum number of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. This need to belong is considered a fundamental human motivator (p. 497).

To maintain the cohesiveness of the class as a whole, students must be given opportunities to interact with all the other members of the group. Changing partners often, and with a sense of randomness, remains important throughout the course. Cohesion is the glue that binds a group of people together. That glue is made up of all the interpersonal relationships shared throughout the group. The strength of the bonds shared by the participants determines the degree of cohesion of the group. As all these interpersonal relationships are woven throughout the group, binding all the members together, the group starts to resemble a tapestry. If you pull the corner of a tapestry in one direction, the rest will follow. Just like a tapestry, if you encourage a cohesive group to move in one direction, they will move together.

Social structure, trust, and cohesion are all intangible elements. However, you can sense the cohesion in a class that has it. This is the class where students hang around after the bell and look like they don't want to leave. You can also recognize the absence of cohesion in a class that doesn't have it. This is the class where, after the bell has gone, they can't wait to get out the door!

Performance

Once structure, trust, and cohesion have been established, the group has matured. They should now be a unified, organized, and cooperative unit. Up until this point, the focus has been on removing barriers to group performance. Now it is time to focus on motivating the group to optimize performance. Three areas of opportunity for increasing motivation at this level lie in intensifying the interpersonal relationships, working on the group members' social identity, and providing optimal challenge.

Referring again to the model, it is worth noting that Evans and Dion (1991) found group cohesion and performance are positively related. When a group is high in cohesion, the relationships the students have with each other become the source of motivation. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Human Needs again offers some insight into this idea. Once we have progressed up through the levels of physiological needs, safety, and need to belonging, we come to the level of the need for esteem. At this level, we are looking for positive reinforcement, and here is the connection between cohesion and motivation. The strong bonds that the students have developed at the cohesion level will lead the students to seek respect and positive

reinforcement from the classmates with whom they share these bonds, motivating them to try harder, do better, and achieve more.

Another idea for increasing motivation at the performance level is to increase students' identification with the group. Social identity theory suggests that when individuals derive their sense of self and identity from the group, they expend extra effort for their group (Forsyth, 2010, p. 298). Therefore, the more important the group is to them, the harder the students will work because they will not want to let their fellow group members down.

One simple but effective way to increase social identification is to take a group photo. The group photograph establishes each student as part of the group. Combined with a positive group experience, the group photo will reinforce a sense of belonging to a rewarding group, and this helps make the group more important. So, early on in the group's life, take the students outside, or have a class party, and take a group photo of them having fun. Then use that photo on some classroom worksheet, for example, so that they each get a copy of it to keep and look back on.

The third motivational consideration is aiming for optimal challenge. Both the concepts of SDT and *flow* are important here. CET, a subtheory of SDT, emphasizes the psychological need for competence. Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi's (2001) concept of flow also calls for clear proximal goals (p. 90). This means that to activate intrinsic motivation, tasks need to be at a level where the students are neither bored because the task is too easy, nor overloaded because the task is too difficult. What is needed is a Goldilocks factor of optimal challenges that will foster competence. Recounting an interview with Csikszentmihalyi for the *New York Times*, Goleman (1995) relates that Csikszentmihalyi told him:

People seem to concentrate best when the demands on them are a bit greater than usual, and they are able to give more than usual. If there is too little demand on them, people are bored. If there is too much for them to handle, they get anxious. Flow occurs in that delicate zone between boredom and anxiety (p. 92).

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) further relate how people in a "flow" state experience the activity itself as intrinsically rewarding, they lose track of time, their awareness merging with their actions as they become intensely focused on what they are doing at the present moment (p. 90). I believe this concept of flow resonates with the classroom motivation model introduced here.

To increase investment in a relationship, students need to take more risk with regard to trust. As suggested earlier, in the early stages of developing the students' relationships, we might facilitate ways for them to discover similarities they have with each other, because this leads to interpersonal attraction. But to make those bonds grow stronger, they need to share incrementally more intimate information about, for example, their strengths and weaknesses, or their greatest fears. By taking more interpersonal risk, and investing higher levels of trust, the interpersonal bonds grow stronger and the relationships intensify. The stronger the

relationships are, the harder the students will work for each other. Therefore, at this level, we need to include activities that will strengthen those interpersonal relationships.

As for aiming for optimal challenge, this of course relies on the teacher's judgment and autonomy. Teachers can also be challenged by institutional constraints here, for example. However, with adequate course flexibility, a good project that works here is small group poster presentations. Both the ideas of CET and flow also outline a need for feedback on progress (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001, p. 90). Poster presentations offer an opportunity to break the project up into smaller steps that can be achieved more easily. These steps can then be aimed at the appropriate level of challenge. Poster presentation projects also offer an opportunity for students to work towards, and receive, positive reinforcement from both their classmates and the teacher. Each step is rehearsed, and each presentation is given multiple times, allowing students to practice, improve, and impress.

Performance has been the primary aim of the model up to this point. For any course, this is a good initial aim. However, when teachers have adequate autonomy to tailor a course to their students needs, then the ultimate goal of the model—personal growth—offers significant potential to extend performance and maintain motivation.

Personal Growth

Up until this point the focus has been on group needs. However, at the apex of the hierarchy, the focus shifts to the individual. Personal growth sits at the top of the pyramid because, as humanistic psychologists like Maslow and Rogers have pointed out, personal growth is an inherent human need (Dörnyei, 2001, p.8). Once the group has reached the level of performance, personal growth as a higher goal offers the potential to maintain, or extend, motivation.

In the context of a class, keeping students motivated after a major project has been completed can be difficult. A class that has high levels of cohesion may start to focus more on social relationships for interpersonal reinforcement; thus, getting them back on task can be challenging. I had this exact problem with a year-long course I had been teaching for a number years. I seemed to be able to get the students motivated to perform in the first semester, but, in the second semester, it was difficult to get the group refocused and on task. To make matters worse, this particular class was taken in the students' third year and many of the students were preoccupied with job hunting. Their school days were coming to an end and they were thinking a lot more about what they were going to do after they finished school, rather than what they were doing in school.

I thought about where they were in life and how I could tailor the classroom content around something that might hold significance in the next stage of their lives. If I could deliver something that rewarded them in terms of personal growth, then maybe I could reengage them. Following this thought process, and after having some success with using identity and values as content in previous courses, I came up with the idea of writing personal mission statements. Much like a company writes a mission statement that clarifies its identity, its

values, and its goals, we started a project that explored each of these elements in the context of the students' own life. We explored the notion of identity, and the students then used it to clarify their own identities. This helped the students to discover what is important to them, how people relate to them, and who they are. We also explored the notion of values and learnt about how values influence our decisions. The last topic we explored was the importance of goals, and the students set some life goals. Finally, the students drafted and peer edited personal mission statements. Their peers were people they respected, such as their parents, brothers, sisters, teachers, or best friends. I supplied a worksheet prompting peers to comment on specific areas of the students' mission statements. When the students brought their peer feedback to the class, the comments were shared and used to redraft and improve their statements. By the end of the project the students had defined who they were, what was important to them, what they wanted out of life, and all these things (their identity, values, and goals) had been influenced and reinforced by their peers. Throughout the project, they learned a lot about themselves and how others perceived them.

The group dynamic supported the conditions necessary for achieving personal growth. The students had high levels of trust in each other, and their group members' opinions were important to them. These conditions helped the students to remain engaged and motivated in the English class as they reached towards the ultimate level of the Classroom Motivation Model; that of personal growth.

Conference Workshop Experience

The model presented above is a staged approach to developing motivation in the classroom. I have found it an effective basis for managing classes, and the Realizing Autonomy conference provided a timely opportunity to share it with others. Aiming to show how classroom performance can be enhanced, the workshop took a collection of casual acquaintances (the workshop participants) and endeavored to turn them into a cohesive, performing group.

About 20 participants came to the workshop. The first step was to pair everyone up and seat them all in a semicircle. In this way, a basic, physical group structure was initiated and participants started the workshop with proximity, contact and the ability to interact easily. Next, I gave a brief overview of the Classroom Motivation Model and explained that the aim of the workshop was to develop our group in order to reach the Performance stage. We started to build the group's social structure by discussing a few basic rules along the lines of being proactive, encouraging others, and participating equally. The rules helped the participants to understand what was expected of them and created an environment in which trust could grow. Once friendly interpersonal relationships had been established throughout the group, and trust had started to develop, we worked on developing group cohesion and then on intensifying those relationships. We began by sharing non-intrusive information, but, gradually, through a series of trust-building activities, the participants were challenged to share incrementally more personal information as their levels of trust developed. I monitored their responsiveness or

resistance to the activities during this process, and these were used as indicators to determine when the group was ready to advance to the next level of interpersonal risk-taking. In this way, the participants were increasing interpersonal investment, sharing incrementally more personal information, developing their interpersonal relationships, and these all resulted in strengthening the cohesive bonds.

The final task tested the proposition that we can increase performance by developing the group dynamics and combining these with individual motivational drives. The participants were regrouped, given another short task to establish their new subgroup's dynamic, and then were told a story. The story had five characters. Each character had a flaw, and the task for each group was to retell the story, discuss the merits of each character, and, together, place the characters in order from best to worst. The real purpose of the task was to demonstrate how the enhanced interpersonal relationships and group process facilitated reaching the performance level as the participants discussed the story. Throughout the exercise, the relationships were enhanced, the participants were proactive, and communication flowed freely. In the final summary and feedback segment of the workshop, the participants indicated that we had successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of enhancing performance by developing group dynamics.

Reflection

Although somewhat artificial, the workshop simulation seemed to be a success. Building a strongly bonded, highly productive group takes more time than the workshop really allowed. However, the final task suggested that, by focusing on the different steps in succession, building interpersonal relationships and developing the group, we were able to enhance performance. The feedback at the end of the workshop, and informal discussions with participants afterward, reinforced this idea.

On a personal level, the workshop was rewarding for me, too. Discussing personal experiences with participants, both about their classes and about the workshop, helped me to understand how others grapple with the concepts I presented. These discussions gave me confidence in the model as the stages I proposed were generally accepted by the participants.

From Structure to Autonomy

Setting up the conditions in which students can achieve personal growth starts by establishing group structure. On the physical level, this means ensuring group proximity, contact, and the ability to interact freely. Combined with social structure, it assists the establishment of interpersonal trust, and as trust develops throughout the group, it will lead to strong interpersonal relationships. Developing these interpersonal relationships also assists the development of student autonomy. Little (2009) advocates that interdependence and autonomy are basic human needs, and elsewhere states that “learner autonomy, which implies

freedom from the control of others, turns out to be the product of interactive processes that are characterized not by independence but by *interdependence*” (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2002, p. 7, italics author’s own). This point fits in with the Classroom Motivation Model where the focus, in the initial stages, is on developing interpersonal relationships within the group. The model highlights the importance of building group structure as an essential precursor to developing constructive, interdependent relationships in which learners are encouraged to push themselves to excel, and from which they can achieve personal growth. Students cannot operate in the group freely until they feel secure and trust the whole group. Only when the group has structure and trust will they feel relatively free to focus on their learning goals.

When a classroom group becomes cohesive, students act as one group, rather than as a fragmented collection of individuals. At this level of development, the teacher can hand over incrementally more direction of the class to the students. This feeds the students’ need for autonomy, giving them input into their own learning goals and exploiting their own motivations to design and facilitate new activities, allowing them to ultimately reach towards personal growth.

The interpersonal relationships we share in a classroom are one of the most important elements of teaching and learning. Palmer (1998) stated that “teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal—or keep them from learning much at all”, and that “teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions” (p. 7). By developing a positive, supportive learning environment, teachers can free students to focus on their learning goals. Although, perhaps, not all classes may reach the performance level—let alone personal growth—the advantages of developing a strongly bonded, smoothly functioning group will always yield some reward in enhanced performance. We cannot guarantee that all students will learn or grow in our classes, but we can help create a motivating environment in which this is possible.

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