

Wonderland

Motivate to Educate

By Maria Jose Lobo

Educate to motivate or motivate to educate? Should we educate children in order to motivate them? Or should we motivate children in order to educate them? It seems to me that, when motivating children, we are paving the way for their education. Of course this applies not just to the teaching of English as a foreign language but to teaching in general.

A lot has been said about the importance of motivating learners in order to achieve good results in class. Easy to say. Probably not so easy to attain. In the case of English one thing is clear: young learners are very motivated towards English when they come to our classes for the first time. It is the teacher's responsibility to make that motivation grow. But how does motivation happen? What helps the teacher to motivate learners? There are many complex factors that intervene in the process of increasing children's motivation in class.

We will concentrate here on the teacher as motivator of young learners and on the materials used in the classroom

1 The motivating teacher

When dealing with young learners, the teacher becomes the key motivating factor that can make education and motivation be very closely linked. The younger the children are the more relevant the figure of their teacher is at all levels. Here are some of the features that will identify the motivating teacher:

The motivating teacher:

- Likes his/her job. He/she
 - is ready to help the children grow personally
 - cares for children's personal circumstances
 - knows the children's psychology
 - is patient
 - tries to be fair in all situations
 - caters for different needs, abilities and capabilities
- Is friendly. He/she
 - creates a good atmosphere in the classroom
 - has a sense of humour
 - is open to children's suggestions
- Is positive. He/she
 - sees the "+" side of situations
 - tries to find a solution/alternative to difficult situations
- Makes his/her explanations easy to follow and understand. He/she

- uses language that is accessible to pupils
 - uses all kinds of materials and resources to make input
 - comprehensible to children
 - speaks in a clear voice
 - is organised
- Has a good knowledge
 - of English
 - of useful materials for the class
 - of school life
 - of cultural issues
 - Presents attractive topics and activities which are
 - adequate to the children's interests
 - challenging but accessible
 - Is a "normal person". He/she
 - has feelings and shares them
 - accepts positive criticism
 - Considers discipline and mutual respect a "must" in his/her class!

2 The materials

The materials used in class will play an essential role in increasing children's motivation. Whatever materials we choose for a particular lesson, project, teaching unit, term or school year, those materials must be varied, attractive, interesting, accessible, challenging, encouraging, surprising and, ideally, they must lead the children to achieve some kind of outcome. Only by accomplishing all these requisites will materials be motivating and therefore successful in a class of young learners.

Besides, in order to be both educational and motivating, materials must foster creativity and imagination, they must cater for different needs, abilities and capabilities, they must help to develop general learning skills as well as social skills, and they must present good models of behaviour.

We could say that ANY materials can be used successfully in class as long as they are carefully chosen and used with a clear purpose. Among the most successful materials and activities with young learners we should mention: TPR activities, stories, games, songs, chants, rhymes and poems, puppets, arts and crafts, computers, magic, drama activities, puzzles and problem solving activities, and any other material that at a certain stage can make the learning of English a motivating memorable experience.

It is desirable that the materials used in the EFL class are presented in the form of teaching units in class, not as isolated activities. Within a teaching unit, the activities and materials mentioned above must be nicely linked and one activity must lead into the next so softly that children will not even notice.

To sum up, learning English at an early age must always be a joyful, memorable, motivating experience for the children in which the teacher becomes a key motivating element that makes education and motivation be very closely linked.

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