

Strategies for teacher motivation

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motivation, self-regulation, belonging, self-efficacy

Many teachers of a foreign language (FL) may face struggles particular to their situations working abroad and become demotivated in their careers. Without easy access to support services, they may be susceptible to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment. This paper outlines processes by which teachers can regain and maintain their motivation by practical steps founded on three principles—managing emotions, joining communities, and boosting efficacy. FL teachers can generate agentive thinking and pathway thinking for their own remotivation, promoting proactive step-taking toward preferred futures for their students, colleagues, and themselves.

外国語教師は外国での勤務という特殊事情に起因する様々な状況から物事への意欲の減退や喪失に直面することがある。支援を容易に受けられない環境下では感情の枯渇、社会からの孤立、達成感の低下に陥りやすくなる。本稿では外国語教師が実践できる意欲の回復と維持方法に関して、感情の制御、コミュニティへの参加、自己認識能力の向上という3原則に基づいて段階ごとに説明する。そして、主体的考え方と方向性を見出す考え方を発達させることで、教師が接する学習者、同僚、そして自分自身が望む将来のあり方へ積極的に前進していく方法を提言する。

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Teacher demotivation

A survey from The National Union of Workers (2004) was conducted on 330 foreign teachers of a foreign language (FL) in Japan. Eighty-seven (26%) were full-time with tenure, many with doctoral degrees; 93 (28%) were limited-term and 150 (45%) part-time, most with MA or BA degrees. Eighty-nine percent of the part-time teachers reported being without salary bonuses, 95% were without research funds, and 51% were without any pension plan. The main sources of dissatisfaction among them all were perceptions of unfavorable discrepancies between them and their Japanese counterparts. These included obligation of annual employment contracts and exclusion from faculty meetings. Furthermore, nearly a quarter of these respondents felt they had been harassed at work for being a foreigner.

Many FL teachers work in insecure and uncertain contexts, as many of us teach overseas, away from our home countries and familiar systems of physical, social, and emotional support; gain employment through part-time and limited-term contracts; hold short-lived work relationships due to a high rate of turnover; and accept high stakes testing goals and rigid curricular policies — down to choice of textbook and page number on which day. These conditions exclude most FL teachers from the decision-making processes that govern their work in the classroom and their professional advancements. Also, academia is known to have chronically toxic cultures that perpetuate acts of incivility from faculty and administrators (Twale & De Luca, 2008). Often deprived of autonomy (control), opportunity to exercise competence, and a forum to express themselves (relatedness), FL teachers can feel devalued, isolated, and helpless, causing job dissatisfaction and demotivation. Similarly

demoralized, their colleagues resign from school and even leave the country, further isolating those they leave behind.

Compared with other professions, teachers across various countries, school contexts, and subject fields exhibit higher levels of psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., Jin, Yeung, Tang, & Low, 2008; Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008). High levels of job dissatisfaction, stress, and burnout can negatively influence motivation, cognition, and job performance (Dai & Sternberg, 2004). For teachers, those who report low levels of motivation tend to perceive their students' motivation levels as low (Gorham & Millete, 1997). Dörnyei (2005) elucidates how substantially teacher motivation influences student motivation and learning achievement. To keep a healthy and productive learning environment for their students, work environment for their colleagues, and career for themselves, it is imperative that teachers maintain motivation.

Teachers living abroad may encounter difficulties particular to their situations, but much relevancy with coping toward success can be found in studies on stress in the workplace and human achievement in general. Founded on principles in fields of psychology, and incorporating what I have learned from my and other teachers' experiences, this paper covers processes and practical steps by which teachers can regain and maintain their motivation.

Strategies for teacher motivation—Three principles

Motivation waxes and wanes as it is dynamic, situational, and psychologically experienced (Dörnyei, 2005). However, chronic drops over the long-term might be indicative of teacher burnout, of which three factors have been identified and investigated regarding their relationships to school context variables—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment (Grayson & Alvarez, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

Experience in any dimension of teacher burnout can be linked to a disparity in any of the three basic psychological needs for well-being—autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Teachers with at-risk conditions can remotivate with three principles—managing

emotions counters emotional exhaustion; joining communities counters depersonalization; and boosting efficacy counters low personal accomplishment. Each principle covers the three basic psychological needs for well-being.

The ability to cultivate and maintain conditions which fulfill these needs is a process called self-regulation (agency), which is used to achieve personal goals in the long-term, and to cope under stressful conditions in the short-term. Skinner and Edge (2002) identified the two key factors that allow people to cope adaptively as they struggle to persist in times of difficulty — a sense of control (autonomy) and social support (relatedness). These two key factors bring enjoyment and hope, which are linked to greater effort, deeper cognitive engagement, and more self-regulated behaviors within the workplace, promoting proactive step-taking toward preferred futures (Dai & Stenberg, 2004).

Managing emotions

Emotional exhaustion is the primary predictor of teacher burnout and it relates directly to negative interactions with students, colleagues, and supervisors (Grayson & Alvarez, 2007). Managing emotions is a coping skill that can lead to improved cognition. It is situated contextually and culturally, and is exercised by a self-regulatory agent. When the agent perceives incongruence either internally or externally between actual and desired outcomes, coping skills are exercised to repair mood (Eich, Kihlstrom, Bower, Forgas, & Niedenthal, 2000).

Your successful emotional management can improve moods and thinking not only for you, but for those you interact with. And at stake might be more than just feelings. It can be a bonding with others and a building of your reputation that lands or loses a job. It can be that one extra reason that gives someone the trust to take a chance and extend you an offer when you least expect it.

Here are the top ten most commonly used emotion regulation strategies in the workplace, according to one study (Diefendorff, Richard, & Yang, 2008), ranked by frequency of use: (1) Seek out individuals who make you feel good, (2) keep yourself busy working on other things, (3) do something enjoyable to improve your mood, (4) try

to solve the problem, (5) find humor in the situation, (6) think about how the other person feels, (7) consider how things could be worse, (8) pretend you are in a good mood, (9) turn your attention to something that doesn't bother you, (10) remind yourself that you cannot control everything.

Ask teachers how they successfully cope. Their stories and encouragement can help you create positive emotions and motivate you to keep learning new ways — telling yourself you can do it; singing songs; smiling; reminding yourself that you are not the only one struggling; getting cardiovascular exercise; appreciating others; making to-do lists and crossing things off at completion; pasting inspirations all over your walls; taking breaks to recharge.

Probably the most critical emotion for enabling well-being in times of distress is hope. Hope generates agentive and pathways thinking, the cognitive processes of believing in the ability to maintain self-control toward achieving your goals, and imagining alternative routes toward them when the way is blocked (Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997). Without hope, individuals neither see nor seek ways around obstacles. And with it they become capable of overcoming obstacles and engaging toward their preferred futures (Carver & Scheirier, 2007).

Joining communities

Depersonalization was found to be the second major contributor to teacher burnout (Grayson & Alvarez, 2007). The sense of social support is crucial for teachers under stressful conditions (Kieschke & Schaarschmidt, 2008; Wilhelm, DeWhurst-Savellis, & Parker, 2000). With joining a community, teachers can find the relatedness that they need to persist and even to maintain well-being. Relevant here is the belonging hypothesis, which is that "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relations" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). We get motivated through socialization.

Our community involvement and interpersonal relationships form the processes of social identities and actions we take in the community. These social identities interrelate with our individual identities; social concepts, attitudes, and behaviors are co-constructed through self concepts, attitudes, and behaviors (Hogg, 2003).

Therefore when choosing a community to join to help reach your goals, first delineate them in relation to your preferred future self identity, and the principles used to determine the importance of your goals. Afterward, you can more effectively evaluate these in relation to the organizational beliefs, image, and practices of the community you seek to join.

Communities can enrich our lives through the interpersonal processes of forming and attaining both personal and mutual goals (Snyder, 1994). Through observing and interacting with others, you learn ways of doing things that you wouldn't have figured alone. You can increase the ability to cultivate pathways for attaining individual goals alongside interrelated goals when enacted through the synergy of a cooperative community. Figure 1 by Snyder (1994) depicts how *me* and *we* goals can resonate and that teachers can assist each other in reaching them. You can do this by volunteering for an academic society or other organization where you can use your competence.



Figure 1. When me and we goals are aligned and resonate (Snyder, 1994, p. 297)

Teachers can collaborate to mentor each other, and model the behaviors and values that lead to professional success (Hooker, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Park, Oliver, Johnson, Graham, & Oppong, 2007). Examples are meeting to talk about classroom problems and solutions, forming reading circles that focus on pedagogy and research, and collaborating on projects. A mutual goal can simply mean enjoying a pleasant day, with daily greetings, respectful language, and polite demeanor contributing

immensely toward a cooperative environment. If you are experiencing the opposite, set a good example and keep working toward it.

Sometimes others do not cooperate. Regardless of the culture and context, bullying and mobbing permeate academia (Twale & De Luca, 2008) and every workplace — numerous studies have consistently shown that such behavior deteriorates the quality of work performance, and the physical and mental health of employees, with costs paid in damage to the organization's reputation, medical fees, legal fees, and human lives (e.g., Namie & Namie, 2009; Porath & Pearson, 2009). Often victims or "targets" do not know what is happening to them until it is too late. Here are specific ways to deal with bullying (garnered from Kohut, 2008; Lubit, 2004): (1) Don't blame yourself, blame the bullies — you just happen to be the target at the time; (2) avoid them — despite appearances, bullies do not have the capacity to empathize or cooperate; (3) avoid provoking them — bullies excel at setting people up, distorting facts, spreading rumors, and manipulating others; (4) document each act and how it made you feel — not only does this help you vent, you can analyze the situation more objectively when you are calmer; (5) don't let them see, hear, or smell your weakness or pain — they feed on it, and their attack escalates; (6) seek friends and allies for support, and for knowing that the school does employ kindhearted people; and (7) cherish your little victories daily.

How well teachers under stress cope seems to have a reciprocating effect on the people around them. As stress increases, teachers become less tolerant and more aggressive. Such behaviors isolate them even more. In one longitudinal study (Wilhelm, et al., 2000), teachers who remained in the profession had two things early in their careers — hope and a professional role model. If you find these lacking in your immediate environment, self-assertively seek a community with supportive role models to share academic interests and goals.

Boosting Efficacy

The third contributing factor to teacher burnout is low personal accomplishment, meaning low self-efficacy, the belief in your abilities to do the job well, and it relates to persistence of an

activity within a specific context (Bandura, 1997). Professional efficacy and classroom efficacy are the two underlying psychological forces that drive teachers toward self-directed professional development that can lead to job satisfaction (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009).

After committing to a long-term goal, divide it into attainable subgoals. With each achievement, you build self-efficacy, impelling persistence, improving your outlook and demeanor, and increasing chances of getting the recognition needed to help take control of your career development. The key is maintaining hope through agentive and pathway thinking with strategies such as those listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Agentive and Pathway Thinking Checklist (excerpted from Snyder, 1994, pp. 239-240, 254)

- Tell yourself that you have chosen the goal, so it is your job to go after it.
- Begin your pursuit of a distant goal by concentration on the first subgoal.
- Practice making different routes to your goals and select the best one.
- Mentally rehearse scripts for what you would do should you encounter a blockage.
- Conclude that you did not use a workable strategy when you do not reach a goal, rather than harshly blaming yourself.
- Think of problems as challenges that arouse you.
- Recall your previous successful goal pursuits, particularly when you are in a jam.
- Enjoy the process of getting to your goals and do not focus only on the final attainment.
- If you need a new skill to reach your goal, learn it.
- Cultivate two-way friendships where you can give and get advice.

Sequential subgoals might lead from creating materials for class, to an article in a journal, to a

textbook series. Your in-class methods development could step from an academic presentation, to curriculum implementation at a school, to a consultation career with institutions internationally. Start where you are. Ask students what went well with class. Ask teachers and administrators about the needs of the institution. Get postgraduate education now. Keeping up with the evolving needs of students, institutions, and society boosts self-efficacy — you know you can do it. Moreover, when you see progress in yourself, others can too. They may champion your endeavors and even assist because they have learned you are a valuable member of the community.

Continuing

Keeping chances open for career fulfillment can be tough but it is a rewarding learning process. It may be a reality that FL teachers face taxing conditions, although nothing so exclusive to them. Study how successful others persisted. What made them earnest? How did they get around brick walls in their paths?

Teachers can practice self-regulatory strategies to maintain the motivation to persist and take themselves to the next stage in their careers. Pathways can form when you vividly imagine them and act — wishful thinking won't work. Managing emotions, joining communities, and boosting efficacy form synergistic actions among interrelated people, goals, and practices, promoting proactive step-taking toward preferred futures among your students, colleagues, and you.

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