

# Using self-assessment to maintain motivation in a dynamic classroom environment

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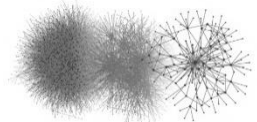
## Abstract:

In this presentation I outline how and why I have established a self-assessment system in which students give themselves a score for class participation, worth 30% of their overall grade for the semester. I explain how my experience of teaching an EFL speaking skills course for the English literature department of a Japanese university has led me to initiate and further develop this method of assessment. By expanding learners' locus of control I hoped to help them maintain motivation, and in this presentation I attempt to specifically show how abstract concepts like autonomy and motivation have a tangible place in

the everyday dynamics of the language classroom. This paper presents the narrative of an ongoing Exploratory Practice inquiry which I have been engaged with for over three years. Data come from pedagogically generated sources and teaching journals, with the aim of the research being to improve the quality of classroom life. I approach motivation from a complex dynamics systems perspective, looking at the interactions and processes that define it. I attempt to bridge the complex dynamics of motivation with actual teaching practices and classroom based practitioner research.

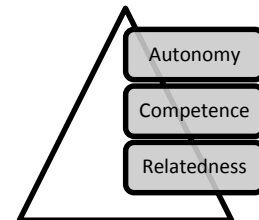
## Chaos/Complexity

Recent scholars have been viewing both language and the process of acquiring a language from the perspective of complex systems theory or chaos theory (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Kramsch, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Menezes, 2013). Motivation is also been examined from this perspective, as motivation is dependent upon many other variables and is a *dynamic process* (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015). How can such 'complex' theories be relevant to the language classroom?



## Autonomy and Motivation

*Self-Determination Theory* (Deci, Kasser, & Ryan, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985) posits that learners are more likely to be motivated and show engagement in the learning process if they have a degree of *autonomy* - meant as self-volition in this context; *competence* - they believe they are able to succeed in the task; and *relatedness* - here meaning the social relations between people or "feeling close and connected to other individuals" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 25).



The importance of autonomy in L2 motivation is also a key theme in much of Ushioda's work (2007, 2011b) and is very much an embedded principle in her *person in-context relational* view of motivation (2011a; 2009) which encourages us to view learners as people "with particular social identities, [within] the unfolding cultural context of activity" (2009, p. 215). Simply put, my basic rationale for introducing self-assessment in my teaching was that by fostering learner autonomy or increasing my learner's 'capacity for control' (Benson, 2013) I hoped to engage them more in the learning process. This was a strategy to help my learners maintain motivation, not just over the course but in language learning generally as a long-term endeavour. One way I felt I could foster autonomy was by encouraging reflection, and the most obvious way to do this seemed to be self-assessment.

## Self-Assessment

In education, self-report has been shown by Hattie (2008) as “one of the greatest influences on student achievement” (p. 31). In this study, Hattie synthesized 800 meta-analyses, effectively reviewing thousands of studies relating to student achievement in order to identify the major contributors. Self-report grades were found to have the highest effect size of all the 138 other impact factors identified.



## Exploratory Practice

The data I present come from on-going Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009) inquiry on using self-assessment, see Pinner (2015).

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