


2000

Motivating Adolescents to be Active Participants in the Language Learning Process

Kier Merill

The School for International Training

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection

 Part of the [First and Second Language Acquisition Commons](#), and the [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Merill, Kier, "Motivating Adolescents to be Active Participants in the Language Learning Process" (2000). *MA TESOL Collection*. 423. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/423

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

**Motivating Adolescents
to be Active Participants
in the Language Learning Process**

**Kier Merrill
B.A. Cortland College 1994**

DONALD B. WATT LIBRARY
School For International Training
Kipling Road
Brattleboro, VT 05301

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at
the School for International Training,
Brattleboro, Vermont**

June, 2000

This Project by Kier Merrill is accepted in it's present form.

Date: June, 2000

Project Advisor: Jack Merrill

Project Reader: Wendy N. Myers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
CHAPTER	
1.INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.SETTINGTHE TONE.....	4
3.DISCIPLINE.....	15
4.ACTIVITIES.....	25
5.CONCLUSION.....	46

Abstract

Motivating adolescents to be active participants in their own language learning process is a challenge faced by all middle and high school language teachers. This paper provides an overview of one teacher's experiences in the struggle to motivate her own students. It also supplies some useful ideas on activities that work to motivate students both inside and outside the classroom. The appendices include step by step plans to help guide other teachers in carrying out some of the activities with their own classes.

ERIC Descriptors:

Teacher Education
Inservice Teacher Education
Teacher Improvement
Second Language

Chapter One

Introduction

This paper will explore my theories and practices in motivating adolescent learners to be active participants in their own learning process. The information presented herein stems from my own personal knowledge and experiences as a middle and high school language teacher. I have written this paper to share my findings with other language teachers who face the common goal of motivating adolescent students to learn a second language.

I became interested in this topic when I began my first teaching position six years ago. As a student I had always been very interested in learning about other cultures and enjoyed the process of learning to communicate in another language . Therefore I was self motivated and willing to work hard. As a new teacher, I quickly realized that this was not the case for the majority of my students. All of these young people had varied interest levels. Some were thrilled to to be in a language class and enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn to communicate in a second

language. Yet, other students were present only because the state education department regulations said that they had to be. They were not happy to be there, some students were even angry. They felt that they would never use their second language skills and that they were wasting time that could be spent doing something more useful. Thus I began looking for ways to motivate these students to be active participants in their own learning process. I found through discussion that often the hostility towards language learning was based on the fear of not being able to succeed and insecurities of failing in front of their peers, rather than an actual dislike of the subject matter. The other issue that was raised repeatedly was that these students did not see the purpose for learning a second language. They had never needed one in their limited life experiences and could not see the use for one in their future. It was at that point, I decided as an educator that I needed to show these young people that they could succeed and to create circumstances that would demonstrate to them opportunities for second language usage. In the chapters that follow I detail how I have worked to create an environment that engages my adolescent students.

Chapter two of this paper explores the ways in which I work to set a positive tone for language learning both inside and outside of my classroom. I discuss simple steps that I take to maintain my own positive attitude and that enable me to present myself in a positive way to my students. This chapter also looks at ways I engage my students in the

language learning process by sharing my love of the Spanish language and culture with them through hands-on experiences.

Chapter three begins with my first experiences as a new teacher and follows through to my current classroom management strategies. Finding that middle ground between being a friend to the students and being an authority figure can be a very difficult road to travel. This chapter discusses the importance of having clear expectations and consequences that are enforced consistently with all students. Also the importance of communication between parents, students, administrators and teachers are stressed.

The fourth chapter is a compilation of activities that I use within my classroom to make language learning fun. These activities range from songs to games and beyond. Each with a different focus in order to accommodate the different learning styles among my students and give each student a chance to shine.

Finally, in the conclusion I highlight the segments that have been most critical in learning to motivate my students. In the appendices I include be step by step plans for activities I discussed throughout the chapters.

Chapter Two

Setting the Tone

I will be discussing three crucial elements of motivating adolescents to learn a second language in this paper. I begin by exploring factors involved in setting a tone in the classroom that encourages learning.

What is the tone of a classroom? To me the tone is the mood, attitude and physical environment in the room. The teacher is responsible to create an atmosphere in the room that encourages a positive tone. It is critical to set a positive tone in school right from the start. The classroom needs to be an environment where students feel comfortable, safe, free to express, and enjoy themselves. This environment needs to enable them to better participate in the learning process. Feeling threatened in any way physically or emotionally can deter students from concentrating on the course work. A safe comfortable environment motivates students to learn by giving them a sense of security that allows them to take risks.

In order to set a positive tone in my own classroom, I try to share my own love of language learning with my students. I constantly strive to keep my own spirits high and my attitude positive. I plan evening or after school events to encourage cultural understanding. I have even traveled with students to let them immerse themselves in the use of the language and culture first hand. All of these activities help me to build a positive environment. I want my students to see how much I enjoy teaching and language learning. My hope is that my attitude will have a positive impact on their attitudes about learning.

Inside the classroom

I must first work to create a positive tone within my classroom. The way a teacher presents herself to the students is, of course, a very important factor in the tone of a class. I love teaching; I love Spanish, and most importantly, I love kids. My students need to be able to see this without me having to tell them. I try to enter my classroom with a cheerful attitude and a smile on my face each day. I want students to work and learn everyday regardless of whatever else is going on in their lives so these expectations should be reciprocal. This can be a very difficult task because teaching is a stressful job. There is often more work to do than there is time allotted to complete it, not to mention the stresses that personal lives add like family and finances. However, one of the most

important parts of my job is to create enthusiasm for my subject matter. If I fail in this area, all of the peripheral paperwork is moot.

Teacher Presence

There are several steps I take to ensure that I can present myself and my subject in a positive manner. First, I have found that the job is a bit easier if I make sure to take care of myself as well as the kids. In the past I would often find myself spending so much time trying to make things perfect for my students that I forgot to take care of myself. If I have had a good night sleep I am more friendly and helpful in my morning classes. Therefore, whenever possible, I see to it that I get eight hours of sleep. That is the amount I need to feel truly rested in the morning. This may sound silly, but my students deserve a teacher who is attentive and not day dreaming about a mid-day siesta. With a full night's sleep behind me I can focus on the day's presentation and material with cheerfulness and enthusiasm.

Next, I have realized that I need adult contact time during the morning to maintain my focus for the afternoon. Often the only time a teacher spends with other adults during the day is the four minutes between classes. Thus, I always make time to have lunch with my colleagues. A half an hour of relaxing conversation does wonders for stress relief in the middle of a hectic school day. This time may mean leaving something unfinished on my desk, but it is better for my students

to have their quizzes graded a day late than to have a teacher who desperately needs a break trying to teach them. This "down" time gives my brain time to regroup from the demands of my students, and I feel refreshed for the afternoon group.

Lastly, one very simple way to keep myself focused and happy during the day is taking time to get an occasional drink of water and to use the restroom. Strange as it may sound, this should be a priority. I discovered nothing distracts me more from my teaching than needing to go to go to the restroom or having a throat so dry that it actually hurts to talk. These little changes in my daily routine have truly helped me to keep that inviting smile on my face and helped me to keep a more positive attitude throughout the school day. When my students ask me how I always keep a smile on my face, I answer "because I love what I do." I do not share with them the little steps I take to keep myself motivated and loving what I do. These are the secrets of a positive teacher. These simple behaviors are important in keeping me alert, positive, and energized throughout the day. With these I can do my job right and enjoy it.

Realia

Throughout the room I have placed "realia", items I have purchased while abroad. Although they are inside my classroom, they come from the target culture. These items are there for my students to touch, play with, and ask about.

A few examples of the kind of things I display are magazines, prints of famous art work, musical instruments, and empty food containers or wrappers. Sometimes these items can be a distraction, but anything that encourages my students to ask about history or culture is worth the time it takes. Sometimes a little distraction becomes a great cultural discussion. Within these discussions, new topics arise creating teachable moments for new vocabulary and grammatical structures to be presented. The students are motivated by their own curiosity to want to know more. Thus, I am meeting my goal of engaging them in the learning process.

Inside the community

I do not spend my entire life in the classroom and neither do my students, therefore I involve myself in the community to continue and spread enthusiasm for language learning. There are many activities that a language teacher can do inside her own community to set a positive tone for language learning. Exposing students to the target culture can be a bit more difficult for teachers in rural areas that lack diversity than for those who teach in big cities where other cultures are a part of daily life. The following are activities that I incorporate in my rural school to encourage cultural understanding and to show my students that foreign language learning does serve a purpose.

Foreign movie night

All you need is a TV, VCR, a video, and an audience to host a foreign movie night. This gives the students an opportunity to see other cultures in whatever light I choose because I decide on the movie. We are living in the television age, and sadly young people often assume that what they see on TV is a true sampling of other cultures. This is my attempt to counteract the negative stereotypes that students often observe on television. Moreover, kids love to watch movies. I find this is an entertaining way to lure them into learning and a worthwhile discussion about diversity issues after the movie.

In class before movie night, I discuss the type of film they will watch. I also summarize the plot with my students in advance to make the film easier to follow. For my lower level classes, I always use movies about the target culture, but they are presented either in English or with English subtitles. My upper level students do watch videos in the target language. Providing a plot summary and some basic vocabulary as preparation in advance helps these students to better appreciate the film.

Cooking/dinner party

I find that food is always an easy way to win the hearts and attention of my students. Thus, I host an authentic food cooking/dinner

party. I always do it in the evening; it just seems more special that way. I plan the menu, and the students each pay two or three dollars to attend. In addition, I purchase the groceries and have them sorted by recipe.

The school home economics room is the perfect location for this event because there are several small kitchen areas in one big room. I put one group of students in each mini kitchen with a recipe and all the ingredients to prepare an authentic dish. Their job is to prepare that dish for everyone. When all of the recipes are ready to eat, we bring all the food to the candle lit table and enjoy a bit of authentic cuisine together in a very relaxing environment. I find the students enjoy the ambiance of this adult dinner party setting.

Guest speakers

Finally, I try to bring other people into our community to talk to my students. This demonstrates to the students that even if they never leave town, their second language skills can be useful. I invite business people in to talk about how a second language is or can be useful in their fields. For example, a real-estate broker with Hispanic clientele or a representative from a business who deals internationally would be some choices. These people speak to the students about foreign language usage in the real world and then there is a question and answer session. This enables the students to request information in which they are interested.

Exchange student programs

Exchange students are another great resource that can be found in almost any community. The exchange students are often willing and excited to talk about their native country with American peers. This is another great way to counteract stereotypes. There is no better way to learn about a culture than to actually interact with a native citizen. I encourage the exchange student to bring pictures to show. The discussion usually centers around normal daily life and the intercultural similarities and differences. If there are not any exchange students in the school district, talk to the principal or superintendent of schools and contact the local chapter of the Rotary. These contacts will be able to locate exchange students in neighboring districts, who can visit.

In addition to contact with exchange students, I encourage taking this to the next level. This year I brought in a speaker who runs an exchange student program to try to encourage my students to study abroad. Also, I have arranged to bring two exchange students into the homes of my students for the next year. I am very excited to see the impact when they actually know someone from another country.

These easy to plan activities are just a few of the ways a language teacher can influence the communities attitudes toward learning another language. Each helps to enrich the in class lessons on language and bring it alive for the learner.

Outside the community

Again, the language teacher's job is not complete, for another realm beckons the student learners outside the community. Taking students outside the community requires much planning and usually a fair amount of money, but it is a worthwhile and integral part of my total language program. As I stated in the beginning, students need to see that language learning has a purpose and can be fun. Therefore, I take my students out of our small town to experience cultural diversity.

Plays

We take trips to see plays and/or musical performances . There are many companies that offer touring productions that are either in the target language or in a bilingual format. I just watch the mail and the flyers come to me.

This past year my level three class went to see a bilingual production of Don Quixote. The story is a classic Spanish novel written by Miguel de Cervantes. The actual novel is far too long and complicated for my students to read, but the theatrical production was right on their level. It was a perfect introduction to Spanish literature. It was fun, light-hearted and authentic. Often language students are not introduced to literature until the third or fourth year of study. Bilingual productions are

an easy way to give students exposure much earlier. This was also a great way to get my older students interested in reading and discussing more Spanish literature. Starting off with a fun field trip is a great way to put a positive spin on a somewhat difficult reading unit.

Europe trip

The "ultimate" out of the community experience is the Europe trip. Every other year in the summer those students who chose to fund raise throughout the year can travel to Europe with me. We go to England, France and Spain. I plan this trip in coordination with the French teacher and it is a lot of work. However the planning can be made easier by using a student tour company. There are many available throughout the United States. EF Educational Tours and Nacel are a couple I have used in the past. (Often these companies can offer better prices than an individual teacher could get on his or her own by securing a large group rate.) These companies also offer insurance and guided tours making the trip much less stressful for the teacher in charge. In addition to a reduced price these companies often offer, the option of home stays with families instead of lodging in hotels. This provides students with the optimal language and cultural experience. The students return with a clear vision of exactly what they do and do not know. They have also seen through experience that they can survive in the target culture and are inspired to learn to communicate more fluently.

Conclusion

In conclusion, setting a positive tone in the classroom is an essential part of motivating adolescents to participate in language class. A positive attitude and learning environment in combination with enjoyable activities encourages learners to take part in their own learning process. Taking part in such activities in class, in the community and even outside the community helps students and all those who participate realize the purpose for language learning, communication and cultural understanding.

Chapter Three

Discipline

In the previous chapter I discussed how setting a positive tone in the classroom is an important part of motivating adolescents to participate fully in the learning process. Setting a positive tone in my classroom and discipline go hand in hand. Discipline also plays a critical role in my motivational strategies. Having a fair and consistent discipline policy in place helps to create a safe learning environment where students can feel secure. Before writing about discipline I went to the dictionary to find a definition for that word. The primary definition reads that discipline is “ training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement.”

So often discipline is seen or talked about among teachers as a negative part of the job. Yet, it does not have to be a negative experience

at all. Difficult, maybe but not negative. What an honor it should be to be a part of training that brings about moral or mental improvement in our students. Isn't that what all teachers want when they start teaching; to make a difference in the lives of kids? Yet so many are afraid of discipline. I quickly noticed that the definition did not mention punishment. I certainly believe that sometimes punishment can be a result of discipline, but punishment in itself does not constitute discipline. Thus the challenge for teachers is to set up expectations and consistent consequences for students that bring about mental or moral improvement.

My First Experiences

Discipline is setting up clear expectations and consequences for all students and then enforcing them consistently. This was a very tough lesson for me to learn. I had no trouble setting up expectations for my students. I knew what I wanted them to do. My problem was enforcing those expectations with consistent consequences. I wanted to give my students a million chances and I definitely didn't like having to punish anyone. My first year teaching was very frustrating for me. I couldn't understand why my students wouldn't just behave and do what I asked the first time. I was so nice to them. Shouldn't they respect me? The correct answer to that question was "no." My students were not behaving because I

wasn't making them behave. I had sent mixed signals. I laid down the law but, I wasn't consistently enforcing the consequences, good or bad. I soon realized I needed to be their teacher not their friend. One of the hardest aspects of being a new teacher was finding the middle ground between letting the students control me and being a dictator. I saw that neither option was beneficial to the learning process. I began to realize that students do need to feel that they have some control yet at the same time they need to feel safe that they know what is expected of them and that all students will be held to the same standards. In this first year of teaching I gained significant insights. My goal for year two of my teaching experience was to find that middle ground between anarchy and dictatorship.

A New Start

I started the next school year with a new attitude, kind but consistent. I explained my expectations to all of my students. I hung them on the wall and made every student write them in his/her own notebook. I then handed out two typed copies for them to take home and share with their parents. The student and their parent or guardian had to sign one copy of the sheet and turn it back in to me for a homework grade. The other was for the parent to keep. This sheet also included possible consequences and my grading policy. Now, it was up to me to enforce these

expectations and consequences fairly.

I worked very hard that year to teach my students personal responsibility and to show them that there were consequences for each of their actions. If a student did not meet my expectations and broke a rule, I would simply remind them of the rule and the consequence. They knew that meant that they now had to serve that consequence. This policy was fair to everyone. It was the same for every student. The students saw the expectation in black and white and choose to meet it or serve the consequence. I would frequently remind students that they did have a choice and that I would much prefer that they meet the expectation than serve the consequence. It would be more pleasant for both of us. I found this method of classroom management was much less stressful for me as a teacher and took up very little class time once the initial explanation was completed.

My Current Classroom Policy

Over the years, through reflection on my classroom management plan, I have realized that my expectations can be broken down into four basic rules: be respectful, be prepared, be safe and be responsible. So maybe this is a bit of an over simplification, but in reality I think those four rules cover the basic expectations I have for students in my room.

Respect

Being respectful covers a wide range of issues. First the students must be respectful of themselves. Often times it is students who tear themselves down. That is not acceptable in my classroom. I will not allow them to speak negatively about anyone in my presence including themselves.

Next all students must be respectful to each other. They may not name call or make fun of each other. They may not invade each other's personal space or use each other's belongings without permission.

Third, they must respect the teacher in the room, whether it be me or a substitute. This means they must be polite and use expressions of courtesy when appropriate, such as please and thank you. I always explain to my students that I hope they will all grow to like me but, that even if they don't they still must be polite and act respectfully in my room. I find that I often need to remind them that there are positions of authority which demand respect despite likes and dislikes whether or not they like the person who holds the position. This seems to be a social norm lost in this generation of teenagers.

Finally, students in my classroom must respect our environment. Normally this refers to our classroom. They may not write on desks, throw things on the floor or intentionally misuse any item in the room.

Safety

Safety is an important part of the school experience. This is a two-part rule. First, students must be careful not to do anything that would put themselves or others in physical danger. Usually the kinds of issues that arise are throwing markers, tipping back chairs, or just simple carelessness. But this rule could extend to cover bigger issues like weapon possession or physical fighting. The other part of safety ties back to being respectful. I want all of my students to feel that my classroom is a safe environment in which they can express themselves, ask questions, and participate fully in the learning process. Therefore, I feel that it is important that they never tease or make fun at the expense of others. I try to impress upon my students the beauty of diversity within all cultures. This includes differences in learning styles: the method and speed at which information is retained and understood by each person in the class. All of this helps to provide my students with a feeling of physical and emotional security that enables them to concentrate more fully on the subject matter.

Preparation

Being prepared for class is the expectation my students have the most trouble meeting. I'm not really sure of the reason for this. My assumption is that it is because this is the only rule that requires them to

think about class outside of my classroom. In order to be considered prepared for class I require that every student bring a writing utensil, her binder, blank looseleaf paper, the textbook and any class work or homework assigned the day before. All of these items must come to class with her everyday. It's amazing to me the amount of time wasted each day loaning out basic school supplies or sending students back to their lockers if they come without them. Another part of being prepared is being mentally and physically ready to learn. To me this means being seated and quiet when the bell rings. I also ask my students to keep in their minds how little time we actually have together and how important it is to stay on task and use that time wisely. All of the aforementioned expectations lead up to the last, yet biggest, one.

Responsibility

My last expectation, being responsible for ones own actions is not only an important rule in my room, but I believe it is important in life in general. In class this is simply a link back to the other three expectations.

I expect that all students will take responsibility for themselves and their own choices. If they have made good choices they will reap the benefits of those positive actions. If they have chosen not to meet the expectations for this class, they should also accept the consequences that come as a result of those actions. They should not try to blame others or compare their behavior to someone else's.

Every student is an individual who makes his own choices and will be treated as such. Therefore, I never accept the excuse that someone else is responsible for a student's actions. Nor will I lessen the consequences because another student participated in the same inappropriate activity or did it first. Each student is held to the expectations and consequences equally and individually.

This method of discipline or classroom management has worked very well for me. I have just completed my fifth year teaching and now I don't really even have to think about it anymore. My students know my rules, and they will point out when an expectation is not being met. I often don't even need to get involved anymore. They self-discipline and use self-control. Often I simply look at an individual in a way that communicates that something is not right and the student at fault will apologize for breaking a rule and will say something like " I know I have to stay after school". My students tease me about how I can assign a detention without speaking a word.

Administrative support

Another real plus to this method is that the administrator in my building is also aware of the way I manage my classroom. I make sure that she receives a copy of my expectations sheet in the beginning of each new school year . When a situation with behavior does arise that requires administrative involvement, the principal informs the student that she is

aware of my rules and that if he chose not to follow them then he also chose to deal with the consequences. This way we present a united front to the student and we cannot be played against each other, as students will often try to do.

Parental Conflicts

This system has also helped me to avoid conflicts with parents. There are very few questions asked by parents when a student is disciplined in my room. Each parent receives a copy of my class expectations sheet, grading and homework policies, and possible consequences, that are printed on my sheet as well as in the school wide student handbook in the beginning of the school year. If there is a problem where a parent feels that his child was treated unfairly, I encourage the parent to set up an appointment with the principal, the student, and me to discuss the issue further. I bring the copy of my expectations sheet that the parent and student both signed to the meeting with me. This usually clears up any problems, misunderstandings or lapses of memory. Also, having the parent sign the sheet and send it back to me in September gives me assurance and proof that the parent and student are both aware of my expectations. I then also have the parent's signature on file in case there is ever a question of authenticity of a parent's signature on any document

later in the year.

Discipline need not be a negative experience. Thank goodness since it is a necessary part of a teachers job. Once the expectations and consequences are set the teacher's role can be mainly that of a facilitator. Teenagers are quite capable of discerning right from wrong and will, given the guidance they need. Students communicate with each other from one grade level to the next. Thus, if a teacher proves to be firm yet fair one year, the word gets out and promises to make the next a little bit easier. When students feel that they are in an environment where they are safe, comfortable and know what is expected, they are able to focus their attention on their studies. I believe the realization that they are responsible for their own choices and ultimately for their own success works as a great motivator for learners of all ages.

Chapter Four

Playing with language

Language classes need to be enjoyable for adolescent learners. Having fun is a big priority for American teenagers. It is the focus of most of the activities that they participate in. Once a positive tone is set and a clear discipline policy is in force, there needs to be daily hooks to keep the students attention and to encourage them to continue their studies. This is where the activities I discuss in this chapter come into play. If learning a language is considered to be fun, I have won half the battle in getting students to participate in their own learning. I have developed four different types of activities that usually engage my students: games, music, fun with food, and holiday celebrations.

Games

Within my classroom I find that games are a wonderful way to make review sessions enjoyable for all. Reviewing information that has been

covered in class recently can be a daunting task. Practice is a necessary part of language learning. By putting the review in the form of a game there is a new twist on an old topic. It feels like we are doing something new yet really it is just a recycling of old information. Some games are played individually, some in pairs, others in teams. Games can be competitive or completely based on cooperative learning. The issue of competition can be touchy one among educators. Each teacher has to make a responsible decision about competition in her own classroom based on her knowledge of her students. I do feel that it is very important that when competitive games are used in a classroom that they are combined regularly with cooperative activities. Also, the goal of the competition needs to change focuses frequently to accommodate different learning styles and skill levels. The focus may be on grammar or pronunciation one day and on the level of participation the next. Also allowing the answers to be spoken or written can help make some students more comfortable with the activity. It is important to give all students the opportunity to be successful. This is not an easy task, therefore it may be better in some cases to avoid competition all together. To give you a sense of how I use games I've included a detailed outline of two that I often use.

Jeopardy

- Preparing for this activity- This activity is used as a review at the

end of a chapter or unit. It is meant to be a cumulative activity. I do tell the students the day before that we will be playing so that they can study. I always play this game the day before a test.

- ◇ Questions must be created in advance based on the topic being reviewed.
- ◇ Either an overhead transparency of the game board must be prepared in advance or the game board must be drawn on the chalk board before the start of class.
- Materials- Chalk board or overhead projector, transparency and the questions.
- Time requirement- This activity takes about forty minutes to complete.
- Directions-
 - ◇ The first person on the first team picks a category and an amount for the question they will answer.
 - ◇ The teacher then reads the question.
 - ◇ The entire team may discuss the answer but, the student who chooses the category must give the final answer.
 - ◇ If the answer is correct then the team gets the set amount of points and the next member of that team chooses the next question.

- ◇ If the answer is incorrect team two can try to answer correctly, then team two and so on.
 - ◇ The game continues in this way until all the questions on the board have been answered.
 - ◇ At the end the team with the most points wins.
 - ◇ Final Jeopardy can be used as a tie breaker.
 - ◇ Each team decides how many points they wish to wager on the final Jeopardy question. (This question should be a bit harder than the others.)
 - ◇ After the wagers are turned in the question is read.
 - ◇ The whole team discusses the answer and one final written answer is turned in from each team. It is turned in , in writing so that spelling can be considered when both teams have a correct answer.
- Language usage- This activity can be used on many levels. The answers can be one word for the beginning students or full sentence answers with difficult grammatical structures for the more advanced students. It can be used for any vocabulary topic.
 - Follow up- Usually the follow up for this activity is a unit exam but, if this activity shows that students are not prepared for the exam a review of the material may be necessary. This review could be as simple as flash card vocabulary drills or more complex such as doing

role plays to practice a particular grammatical structure.

- My comments- If one team keeps answering the questions correctly, I allow them to go three times in a row, then I move on to the next team. This allows everyone to get a chance to play. I also require a different person to answer each question orally so that everyone has a chance to speak. Finally if any student shows poor sportsmanship I deduct one hundred points from their team score. I use this to remind them that our entire class is a team and that they must show respect to each other. I like this game both because it makes reviewing enjoyable for all involved and also because it teaches the students to work as a team, to help and support each other.

Scrabble

- Preparing for the activity - This activity is used to practice unit vocabulary either before a quiz or as a reinforcer through the year. I tell the students to review the Vocabulary the night before this activity as a homework assignment.
- ◇ Game boards must be created in advance by putting a number from 1-9 in the corner of each box on a piece of graph paper.

- **Materials** - Game boards, scrap paper, writing utensils

- **Time requirement** - This activity can be done in a variety of ways. If the vocabulary to be used is limited then 15 or 20 minutes is enough. If a wide range of vocabulary is available to the students, more time will be needed. Typically I allow about 40 minutes.

- **Directions** -
 - ◇ Split the class into pairs.
 - ◇ Each pair gets one game board. Each player gets a piece of scrap paper.
 - ◇ The first player starts the game by choosing a word to put in the center of the scrabble board. The player then writes the word putting one letter in each box and counts up the numbers in the boxes used to find the score for that word.
 - ◇ After writing the word on the game board the students then lists that word, it's proper definition and the score on the scrap paper. This becomes there score tracking sheet as well as a running list of vocabulary.
 - ◇ The next player repeats this process making sure to connect all words by at least one letter, just as in the real game of scrabble.
 - ◇ When the designated amount of play time is over, check to see that both players have had an equal number of turns and then have the

students add up their scores.

◇ The player with highest score is the winner. If you prefer to avoid competition, the adding up of scores can be eliminated. Often the joy of playing is reward enough.

• Language Usage - This game is created to practice basic vocabulary. I have used it with upper level students by having them speak completely in the target language throughout the game. I also, had them create a sentence to demonstrate the meanings of the words used instead of simply listing a definition.

• Follow up- I usually give a vocabulary quiz as a follow up activity. Everything we do in class utilizes vocabulary therefore no specific follow up activity is essential.

• My comments - I limit my students to writing the words from left to right or top to bottom on the game board. I do not allow backward or diagonal words, but others may wish to, that is up to the discretion of each teacher. I sometimes make word lists available for the students to use but occasionally I make them rely on their own memories as a word bank. This activity is done individually instead of on a team. This encourages the student to think and depend on his or herself and not on other students. Students have to participate

fully in their own learning experience.

Music

Music plays such a big part in the lives of young people, bringing it into the classroom can be a fantastic way to also pull in their attention. Both authentic music from the target culture and music written specifically for the purpose of teaching second language learners can be utilized successfully.

Certainly authentic music is a wonderful tool for teaching language structure, vocabulary and culture. All cultures express themselves through their music. Cultural norms and taboos are expressed as well as slang and idiomatic expressions being used in context. Parts of songs can be pulled out to teach a specific topic or whole pieces played as background music to spark questions and conversations. In the USA there is currently a surge in the popularity of young Hispanic performers. This provides Spanish teachers with a teachable moment that should not be missed.

Several publishing companies have created music specifically for use in the language classroom. Some songs are simply new lyrics set to traditional melodies from the target culture. These lyrics have been written to supplement the vocabulary traditionally taught at each level of study. Sometimes these words are set to other commonly known tunes

from our own culture, so as to enable the students to focus on just the words or grammatical structure with out having to learn a new melody as well. Either way the students are covering the necessary material in a way that is enjoyable. Sometimes I have the students just listen, sometimes they sing or dance and other times they take a turn playing an instrument that I have picked up while traveling within the target culture. I have found that the following two activities draw most students into using music to learn language.

Flash card song jumble

- Preparing for the activity - This activity is used mostly to practice listening skills. I often use it at Christmas time with traditional Spanish carols.
- ◊ Flash cards with the song lyrics must be completed in advance.

- Materials- Flash cards and a location to arrange them that all students can reach and see.

- Time requirement- Depends on the length of the musical piece chosen

- Directions-

- ◇ Either complete this activity with the whole class or have the class break into groups and have each group do the activity.
- ◇ Randomly hand out the lyric cards to the students. Each student should get at least one card to keep her actively involved in the activity.
- ◇ Then play the musical selection. The first time through just have the students listen.
- ◇ Play the selection a second time and have the students try to put the cards in the correct order. You may wish to have all the words on cards or have the lyrics with blank spaces displayed in the room and have only the missing words on the cards. It really depends on the level of the students and the level of difficulty of the music you have chosen to use.
- ◇ It usually takes several times through before all the words are in the correct location.

- Language usage- This activity is mainly to practice listening skills but can be easily turned into a speaking and/or writing task with follow up activities.

- Follow up- Students can...
 - ◇ Sing the song
 - ◇ Write a new verse

- ◇ Study the sentences and grammatical structures therein.
- ◇ Research the history of the song and/or the composer

- My comments - This activity has so many options and possibilities for creativity. I always take my students caroling around the school once they have learned the songs. This is great because it exposes other students not currently in language classes to a bit of the target language and a little piece of culture.

Listen, sing, dance and play (using songs created to teach language)

- Preparing for the activity- This activity is used to practice particular vocabulary and grammatical structures. The Tapes or CDs of songs created to teach language by concentrating on specific vocabulary or grammatical structures can be purchased from a teacher supply company or from most parent/teacher stores.

- Materials- Tape or CD, culturally appropriate musical instruments and an open space for dancing.

- Time requirement- As little or as much time as you wish. I usually plan for about 15 minutes.

- **Directions-**

- ◇ Play the song once through and just have the students listen.
- ◇ Play the song again and have the students list any words that they hear that they understand.
- ◇ Discuss the meaning of the song using the word lists as a guide.
- ◇ Play the song again and have the students sing along.
- ◇ Either the same day or the next, have the students sing along a second time and listen to the instruments that they hear.
- ◇ Pull out the instruments and allow the students to try to play along with the song.
- ◇ If the musical piece is one that lends itself to dancing such as one with a salsa beat or meringue this would be a great opportunity to teach a few traditional dance steps.

- **Language usage-** This activity is based on a particular set of vocabulary and grammatical structures. The main idea is to reinforce and practice that particular piece of the language. With upper level students all of the discussion pieces could be done in the target language.

- **Follow up-** Students can..

- ◇ Write another verse

- ◇ Create a new song based on similar vocabulary.
- ◇ Study the music from the target language and/or the instruments

- My comments- The songs on the teacher made tapes are often new words set to traditional melodies. I find it is important to also present the original version to the students. This activity works great as an ice breaker on a Monday morning or after an extended vacation. It is a fun way to motivate students to jump right back into participating in language learning.

Fun with food

A wonderful way I have found to motivate teenagers is with food. It seems that they are always hungry. When teaching a unit on numbers I give the students jelly beans or M&Ms to count. For other vocabulary units sometimes use the alphabet shaped pretzels or gummy candies to practice spelling. The rule is, the task at hand must be accomplished before any of the treats can be consumed. Certainly authentic food is an important part of any culture. Therefore having the students prepare foods from the target culture can have a double benefit. The students are learning about traditional meals and at the same time can practice vocabulary by using recipes in the target language. By using recipes in a variety of ways you can work with reading, speaking and listening comprehension skills. Since

the students will be eating their own creations they want the recipes to turn out well and taste good. Therefore they are very motivated to fully participate in the activity.

Dinner Party

- Preparing for the activity-
 - ◇ Plan a menu and present the idea to the class.
 - ◇ Collect enough money from each student to cover the cost of the groceries (two or three dollars per student is usually enough).
 - ◇ Shop no more than a day or two before the event to assure that the ingredients will be fresh.
 - ◇ Find a suitable location for the party. I suggest the school home economics room, it provides lots of counter space, multiple stoves and sinks.

- Materials- a location with cooking and dining facilities, recipes, ingredients, tablecloths, candles. Also, paper plates and plastic ware make the clean up much easier.

- Time requirement- However long you need to shop and at least three and a half to four hours the night of the event, for cooking eating and clean up.

- Directions- Break the students up into small groups. Give each group a recipe and all necessary ingredients. (the recipes should be written in amounts to serve the entire group) While the students cook, you answer questions and set the table. When all groups are ready all of the food is brought to the table. Everyone eats and enjoys the time together. When everyone is finished eating the clean up begins.
- Language usage- The recipes can be in the target language and the students can be required to speak in the target language at all times. This can be hard to monitor since the teacher can not listen to everyone in all of the groups at the same time. Therefore I have to rely on the honor system. I find that students are excited about the activity and want to try to use the target language. Also I always have the students give a toast in the target language before eating.
- Follow up- The follow can be a unit on food in the classroom. You also could plan to have the students make the dishes they liked again to sell at lunch time or at a special event to share the culture school wide.
- My comments- It's a good idea to have some of the slicing and dicing

done in advance to save time. Also have a group of students designated for clean up. Otherwise they are all likely to forget about cleaning and leave after they eat.

I suggest having music from the target culture playing, something up beat while cooking and something soft while dining. Flowers on the table do wonders for ambiance and also double as a lovely thank you gift to be left for the home economics teacher who donated his or her room.

Sample Menu

- ◇ Gaspacho- A cold vegetable soup

- ◇ Ensalada de tomates y pepinos- A mixture of tomatoes, cucumbers and olives drizzled with olive oil vinegar and salt.

- ◇ Tortilla Espanola- A family size omelette made with potatoes and onions.

- ◇ Pan con tomates- A baguette smothered in fresh tomatoes, olive oil and a sprinkle of salt.

- ◇ Patatas bravas- Fried cubes of potatoes covered in a red, spicy garlic sauce.

- ◇ Bunuelos- A fried pastry ball filled with a pudding like cream and rolled in confectionery sugar.

Holiday celebrations

For most people the word holiday has a very positive feeling attached to it. Holidays are in general a happy time. Each culture has holiday traditions that are specific to a particular country or region. I have found that my students enjoy discussing the traditional celebrations as well as taking part in them. Each holiday comes complete with it's own set of vocabulary to be discussed and cultural norms to be discovered. The idea of using fun as a motivator for adolescents once again comes into play. Sometimes the "celebration" in my classroom takes the form of having a party complete with food and decorations and other times the students make traditional handicrafts. Either way the students become active participants in a small part of the target culture's holiday traditions and at the same time in their own language learning experience.

Some holiday celebrations have become controversial in the United States, especially in public schools. I have found that if I approach the topic from the standpoint of trying to help the students understand another culture's beliefs and traditions and make clear to the parents and administration that I am not suggesting these traditions are either

morally correct or incorrect, I have not encountered much opposition. I am always very careful to express to my students that these beliefs and traditions are a part of the culture that we are studying and not necessarily of our own culture.

Creating an altar (For the Day of the Dead)

- Preparing for the activity-
 - ◇ Set up a table in an area of the room that will not be in the way if left on display for several days. Then decorate the table with a table cloth, candles and incense.
 - ◇ Inform students that you would like them to bring in something that is special to them. Remind them that this item will be on display for several days. If it something that they can not leave, something valuable or perishable they may make a model of the item to bring in.

- Materials- A large table, a decorative table cloth, candles and incense.

- Time requirement- About two minutes per student in the class.

- Directions-
 - ◇ The teacher asks the students questions in order to get them to

quickly review the custom of setting an altar in Mexican households and what they represent for the day of the dead.

- ◇ Each student takes a turn getting up in front of the class to show the special item she brought in.
- ◇ The student then explains why that item is special to her.
- ◇ Finally she places her item on the table which serves as the class altar.
- Language Usage- This depends on the language level of the students. For beginners I allow the activity to be done completely in English. Upper level students can certainly explain the item in the target language.
- Follow up- As a follow up I invite other classes to come in and see our class altar. Then my students have the opportunity to explain the holiday to their peers thereby reinforcing their own knowledge.
- My comments- The Day of the Dead is right in the beginning of the school year and is a holiday unlike any American celebration. I spend quite a bit of time discussing and decorating for this holiday. I find it catches the students interest quickly and therefore is a great way to kick off a new school year.

Making Christmas shoes

- Preparing for the activity- Make sure there are plenty of materials for all students.
- Materials- Construction paper or card stock, yarn, glue, scissors, crayons or markers.
- Time requirement- about 30 to 40 minutes.
- Directions- Give each student supplies and tell them to create a three dimensional shoe. Encourage them to be creative.
- Language usage- I have the students share materials and ask for what they need in the target language. Beginning level students use just the simple nouns and expressions of courtesy. Upper level students can create more complex questions.
- Follow up- We have a Christmas celebration the day before the students go on winter break. We sing the carols they have learned in class and have an authentic snack. I know Christmas can be a controversial subject in public schools, but I have found, as long as

the celebration is presented as a representation of Hispanic culture, I have not had negative feedback from parents. The night before the celebration I fill the student's shoes with a few little treats from the Santa.

- My comments- I also take my students caroling in other parts of the school building. The other classes enjoy the entertainment and my students have a chance to share a bit of Spanish with their peers.

Each of the topics in this chapter are just pieces of the whole when it comes to motivating adolescents to be active participants in their own learning process. Combining all of these pieces as a part of my classroom instruction allows me to supply my students with a variety of activities. Through these activities I am able to address many different learning styles and create opportunities for all students to be successful.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

As an educator I want my students to succeed. In order to succeed my students need to play an active role in their own language learning process. Adolescence is a time in life when one goes through many changes both physical and emotional. Concentrating on ones studies can be a challenging task. Therefore as a middle school language teacher I feel that it is my responsibility to find ways to draw my students to actively participate in their own language learning experiences.

Setting a positive tone that encourages the study of other languages and cultures inside and outside the classroom is a crucial element in my motivational strategy. I accomplish this goal by keeping my own spirits high and attitude positive. I try to share my own love of the Spanish language and culture with both my students and the community as a whole. Wherever possible I try to expose my students to the target language and create opportunities for them to use their language skills in authentic

settings. In doing this, I am able to show them the purpose for language study, communication.

Having a consistent plan for classroom management is another essential part of engaging my students. It is important for everyone to know what will be expected of them right from the start and to know that those expectations are the same for all. Consequences must be enforced consistently to assure that everyone is treated justly. All students should feel safe in the learning environment. This will allow the learners to be more comfortable when taking the risks that come with learning to communicate in a new language.

Learning a second language is an exciting opportunity and should be an enjoyable experience. Therefore when ever possible I play with the language with my students. We sing, dance, play games and even sometimes have fun with food in my classes. This is not to say that it is always easy. Certainly language learning can be challenging. It takes time, persistence and dedication to master the vocabulary, grammatical structures and cultural implications therein. My goal is to make those challenges less intimidating to my students. Because they enjoy the activities they do not hesitate to participate in them. They in fact become participants in their own learning process.

Afterwards

The group of students that I taught during my first year in my present teaching position are now seniors in high school. In the past this district has not provided a Spanish V, college credit bearing course for seniors to take. A group of students came to me last spring requesting that I create such a course for them. They were concerned because they were planning to take Spanish in College and did not want to go an entire year with any language instruction.

This to me, was the biggest affirmation I could have gotten from my students to show that am am accomplishing my goal. These students were showing the initiative to continue their language study after all of the requirements for graduation had been met. They in fact were so motivated that when the guidance department of the school informed them that the class would not fit into the normal school day due to scheduling conflicts these students made arrangements with me to attend class during non-traditional times, such as, after school and evenings. Not only are these dedicated students active participants in their own learning process, they actually took the initiative to motivate the school district to offer more

opportunities for future students to learn. Spanish V will be added to the course offerings for coming school year. I thank these students for their dedication to language learning and for all their hard work in fighting to expand language instruction opportunities in this district. I wish them luck in their future educational pursuits, one of whom will actually be going to college as a Spanish Education major in the fall.