Cooperation with Sarah Mercer (University of Graz, Austria):

*Thanks to Sarah for selected slides I have adapted

The problem
(in pictures)

That is:

Competing demands on the students’ attention!
Competing demands

In today’s globalised, digital age...
... young people are bombarded with information...
... through multiple channels...
... and the pace of social life has been intensified...
... by the social media...
... in an unprecedented manner.

Engagement

• In general:
  ‘Engagement’ concerns active participation and involvement in certain behaviours.

• In education:
  ‘Student engagement’ concerns involvement in school-related activities and academic tasks.

Engagement

• In educational psychology:
  ‘engagement’ has been hailed as the core of the education enterprise.

• Engagement is:
  “the holy grail of learning”
  “one of the hottest research topics in the field of educational psychology”
  (Sinatra, Heddy & Lombardi, 2015, p. 1)

In language education:

The significance of student engagement is even greater.

In order to acquire L2 communicative competence, students need to be actively involved in the learning process.

Why “engagement” rather than “motivation”?
Benefits of using the notion of ‘engagement’

In the fast-paced reality of the 21st century, even high motivation can be cancelled out by various distractions.

However:

If a student is ‘engaged’, this means that he/she is not only motivated, but that his/her motivational drive has succeeded in cutting through the multitude of distractions and alternatives.

In other words:

Engagement = Motivation + Implementation

• Motivation is necessary for ‘preparing the deal’, but engagement is indispensable for ‘sealing the deal’.
• Engagement ensures that students are brought on board!

Problem!

2015 US Gallup survey

• On student engagement
• Among 900,000 students
• In over 3,300 schools

2015 US Gallup survey

Of the 900,000 students:
• only 30% were engaged
• 20% were not engaged
• 23% were actively disengaged
• negative decline: by Grade 11, 20% were disengaged!
The main challenge for educators in the 21st century

- To create learner willingness to engage
- To trigger active engagement
- To keep them engaged

How?

Proposed Model of Student Engagement
(Mercer & Dörnyei, in preparation)

Antecedents: Facilitative conditions

- School and classroom culture
- Learner-teacher relationship
- The learner’s mindset

Active student engagement

“Engagement is the active verb between the curriculum and actual learning.”

(Skinner & Pfeiffer, 2011, p. 15)

Active student engagement

Engaging with...

- ... some aspects of school life and the learning process

Active student engagement

Engaging with...

- ... the school context
- ... the foreign language
- ... the syllabus and the teaching materials
- ... the learning tasks
- ... one’s peers
- ... the teacher
Engaging with...

... the school context
- fostering a sense of belonging to the school community
- creating a feeling of ownership of the environment
- adopting school norms/discipline policies
- developing general academic confidence

... the foreign language (L2)
- conveying the need and relevance of the L2
- developing L2 learner identities
- linking to each other ‘the L2 and a school subject’ and ‘the L2 and the beyond the school’
- creating a vision of oneself as a successful L2 learner/user

Engaging with...

... the school context
... the foreign language
... the syllabus and the teaching materials
... the learning tasks
- raising curiosity and interest
- matching the syllabus to the students' needs
- enrolling the learners in building their own syllabus
- personalising the teaching materials

... the syllabus and the teaching materials
... the learning tasks
- utilising the principles of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and engaging design
- applying project/problem-based learning
- involving students in goal-setting and progress checks
- harnessing the power of technology

Engaging with...

... the school context
... the foreign language
... the syllabus and the teaching materials
... the learning tasks
... one's peers
- applying relevant areas of group dynamics/classroom management
- facilitating meaningful interpersonal encounters and social acceptance
- promoting group cohesiveness
- establishing norms of cooperation and tolerance

... the teacher
- generating student-teacher rapport
- utilising insights from leadership models (e.g., transformative leadership)
- creating opportunities to get to know each other
- managing trouble-shooting and conflict-resolution
Background

Nottingham has one of the worst education systems in the UK – in 2013, it was the 144th out of 151 local education authorities.

Redhill Academy was the first secondary school in Nottinghamshire to gain the highest UK rating for the quality of teaching (in 2008) and has maintained it ever since.

The last appraisal stated that “teaching is outstanding” and that “during the inspection the teaching observed was consistently effective in capturing students’ interest and engagement.”

Background

By now, the Redhill Academy has developed into a Trust consisting of eight affiliated secondary schools, each adopting Redhill’s values and system.

In February 2018, the Redhill Academy Trust was included in the UK Department of Education’s list of the ten most effective academy trusts in England.

The Pledge System at Redhill

In order to develop the “ethos” of the school and to “raise expectations around the importance of engagement from everyone”, the school has introduced a programme called ‘Pledges’.

“Our Pledges will further engage students in opportunities and events that take place in the Academy.”

The Ten Pledges

1. To successfully participate in residential trips, representing the academy’s ethos, values and code of conduct at all times.
2. To represent the academy in sports or to contribute to Academy Performing Arts events.
3. To read a range of novels every year and complete a book review for at least one per term.
4. To participate in at least three different assemblies or contribute to organising a Tutor activity or event.
5. To organise or actively participate in at least three fundraising events.
6. To represent the academy in ten different events; tutors to record events in Passport.
7. To take part in community projects.
8. To participate in activities that support others within the academy; e.g. mentoring, coaching, induction, options or paired reading.
9. To attend cultural or sports events outside of school.
10. Individual Pledge; to be set by the Tutor with student.


Four important aspects of the Pledge System

1. Staff dedicate time to convey the importance of the Pledges and to help students in identifying opportunities to achieve their Pledges.
2. Each student has their own individual Pledge Passport.
3. The Pledges are displayed on posters throughout the school.
4. Students’ Pledge achievements are regularly celebrated at school events.
Three lessons from Redhill

1. At Redhill, they went beyond merely providing a motivating and facilitative learning environment – the Pledge system ensured that the **students were actively brought on board**.

2. The Pledges were **officially endorsed** by public displays in the school and by staff time focusing on them.

3. The momentum was **maintained** by setting Pledge goals, keeping Pledge records in the students’ own Pledge Passports and regularly celebrating Pledge achievements.

Three conclusions

1. Engaging language learners in the fast pace of the 21st century is a **formidable challenge**.

2. However, there are several **productive routes** to achieving student engagement.

3. The good news is that students tend to **respond positively** when they sense that teachers reach out to them in an engaging manner.

Thank you for your engagement!

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