

fully used for the purpose of demonstrating what learners are expected to achieve.

- *Consider and remove potential obstacles to learning.* Wlodkowski (1986) highlights the fact that when students face a learning sequence (whether a specific task or a longer stretch) many will inevitably start thinking about what might interfere with the attainment of the goal. Such intruding factors might be varied in nature: a lack of enough time; other obligations; insufficient resources; disturbance by others, etc. It enhances the learners' expectancy of success if you address these issues in advance, possibly by involving the learners themselves. Even if you cannot offer any immediate solutions, the fact that the students have been reminded of these potential obstructions will give them more time to plan ahead.

Strategy 13

Increase the students' expectancy of success in particular tasks and in learning in general.

More specifically:

- Make sure that they receive sufficient preparation and assistance.
- Make sure they know exactly what success in the task involves.
- Make sure that there are no serious obstacles to success.

3.3 Increasing the learners' goal-orientedness

Educational authorities in many parts of the world are getting into the habit of requiring teachers to specify their teaching goals with an ever-increasing elaborateness. Many of us are often required to spend long hours preparing sizeable documents detailing the general aims and objectives of each course we teach (based on the centrally distributed curricular guidelines), and the specific teaching purpose of each session within these courses (following the official syllabus specifications). However, these goal descriptions are often quite distinct from the goals the students are actually pursuing during those same classes. In fact, research has repeatedly found that in an ordinary class many if not most students do not really understand (or accept) why they are involved in a learning activity. The 'official class goal' (i.e. mastering the course

content) may well not be the class group's only goal and in some cases may not be a group goal at all!

Well said . . .

'It is fundamental to the successful working of a group to have a sense of direction and a common purpose. Defining and agreeing aims is one of the hardest tasks that the group has to undertake together.'

(Jill Hadfield 1992:134)

This potential goal diversity became obvious to me during one of the first adult evening L2 courses I had ever taught. This course was in many ways a most inspiring and successful experience: the group bonded well, the group spirit soared high, there was hardly any student attrition, and we generally had a good time. There was only one 'slight' problem: with the growing maturity of the group there was less and less actual learning taking place in the class. I spent long hours with a psychologist friend, who was at the same time a learner in this group, trying to figure out what was going on. The answer we eventually came up with was that some time during the course of the programme the group shifted its main goal: because personal relations within the group were becoming so very rewarding, social rather than academic goals became the group's main concern. To be fair, this made perfect sense from their point of view; after all, in considering the members' general well-being, to belong to an accepting and supportive community and to acquire a group of new friends is just as important as mastering the English language.

Well said . . .

'Although researchers are not agreed on the precise relationship between individual and group goals, there is general consensus that if any small group is to develop into a mature work group capable of functioning productively, all group members must share the same group goal. Ostensibly, this would not appear to be a problem for English language classes, because in theory all class members have the same goal: the development of proficiency in English. In practice the situation is very different, and language teachers . . . may well need to spend some time establishing broad group goals.'

(Rosemary Senior 1997:5)

My experience of this is not confined to adult education. We must realise that for the average school pupils the 'school' represents primarily a social arena and not the scene of academic work. They are there because they have to rather than because they want to perform tasks, and they are often more interested in issues such as love, personal image or social standing than the mastery of school subjects. In fact, recent research on school motivation has emphasised that the only way to really understand what is going on at the motivational level of classrooms is by looking at the interplay of academic and social motives (cf. Juvonen and Wentzel 1996; Wentzel 1999). What all this implies is that at any given time when you want your students to focus on certain goals you may find some of them pursue other goals in addition or instead. How can we handle this inherent goal diversity? Can the class group's goal-orientedness be consciously increased?

A certain amount of goal conflict and goal ambiguity will, I am afraid, always characterise a class of, say, 30 lively teenagers, but well selected goal-setting strategies can be surprisingly successful in getting learners on task. The most obvious strategy is to initiate a discussion with the students about goals in general. I have found that when participants on a new language course were asked to share openly their *own* personal goals, this usually revealed considerable differences, which in turn led to a fruitful negotiation process with the objective of outlining 'class goals'. You have won half the motivation battle if the class group can agree on a common purpose and sense of direction by taking into account:

- *individual goals* (which may range from having fun to passing the exam or to getting the minimum grade level required for survival);
- *institutional constraints* ('you're here to learn the L2; this is the syllabus for this year');
- *success criteria* (which traditionally have had to do with exams and marks, but other communicative criteria can often be a better incentive, e.g. to be able to understand most of the lyrics of a pop group, or other specific communicative objectives).

The composite group goal can then be displayed on a wall chart. It is important to also mention that the initial effort to establish a 'class goal' will need to be followed up by a recurring review of the original goal(s) in view of the progress made towards them. Such 'goal reviews' can give both the teacher and the learner a chance to evaluate and regain momentum.

How do goals affect performance?

There are four mechanisms by which goals affect the students' performance:

- They direct attention and effort towards goal-relevant activities at the expense of irrelevant or distracting actions.
- They regulate the amount of effort people expend in that people adjust their effort to the difficulty level required by the task.
- They encourage persistence until the goal is accomplished.
- They promote the search for relevant action plans or task strategies.

Finally, because of the inherent interaction of academic and social goals in the classroom, the most motivating activities and experiences for the students are likely to be those that involve the simultaneous pursuit and attainment of both types of goals (Ford 1992). I will come back to this question in Section 4.5 when I discuss the importance of allowing learners to maintain a positive social image in class. Also, there will be more on goals in Section 4.3, which will concentrate on short-term goal-setting procedures.

Strategy 14

Increase your students' goal-orientedness by formulating explicit class goals accepted by them.

More specifically:

- Have the students negotiate their individual goals and outline a common purpose, and display the final outcome in public.
- Draw attention from time to time to the class goals and how particular activities help to attain them.
- Keep the class goals achievable by re-negotiating if necessary.

3.4 Making the teaching materials relevant for the learners

The core of the issue that this section addresses has been very succinctly summarised by McCombs and Whisler (1997:38): 'Educators think students do not care, while the students tell us they do care about