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CAR: A Means for Motivating Students to Read

Reading is an important skill for English language learners in today's world; it supports the development of overall proficiency and provides access to crucial information at work and in school. With English being the dominant language of the Internet, international business, and academia (including science), beginning and advanced students alike face pressures to develop their second language (L2) reading abilities.

The acquisition of reading skills, however, is never easy, and students need consistent practice to become fluent readers. Successful readers have to solve many puzzles, such as learning to recognize unfamiliar letters, words, syntax, and discourse patterns. These challenges can be overcome more easily if students are highly motivated to read. But what can teachers do to motivate students to read in English? Some research on this subject points to successful methods and techniques, such as choosing reading topics that appeal to students, assigning material and tasks at the right level, organizing collaborative work, and offering positive feedback and other incentives for students' efforts. However, in their efforts to motivate students to read, teachers often do not realize that different instructional methods actually promote different types of student motivation. The purpose of this article is to distinguish among these different types of motivation and illustrate how to apply motivation-supportive instructional strategies in the classroom to create a dynamic environment where reading comes alive.

Motivational orientations

When students read in an L2, the experience can easily become overwhelming when students lack vocabulary, grammar, and content knowledge. These frustrating reading experiences can result in decreased motivation to read in the L2—a truly unfortunate consequence considering the importance of reading for most of our students. Nurturing students' motivation to read, therefore, should be an essential part of L2 reading instruction.

The complexity of motivation as a behavioral construct has compelled researchers to identify different types

of motivations and examine how they influence student learning. For example, Self-Determination Theory (SDT)—proposed by Deci, Ryan, and their colleagues (e.g., Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2000)—considers what types of motivation may initiate and sustain interest in learning. Two basic forms of motivation are *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation. Extrinsic motivation is typically driven by factors outside of the learner; extrinsically motivated students read to receive good grades, please the teacher, and outperform their classmates, but not because they find reading interesting or enjoyable. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is free from the influence of external factors such as reward or punishment. Intrinsically motivated students read because they find it interesting or enjoyable; therefore, motivation comes from inside and is self-determined. SDT suggests that the more self-determined students' motivations are, the more likely they are to develop and sustain their learning ability. To enhance self-determined motivation, SDT proposes that teachers support students' psychological needs for competence (C), autonomy (A), and relatedness (R)—the set of principles referred to as "CAR" in this article. Teachers can effectively use these CAR principles to nurture more self-determined readers who rely less on external reinforcement, such as grades, and more on internal motivation, such as curiosity. However, it is important to realize that some forms of extrinsic motivation are more self-determined than others, as the following examples illustrate.

Degrees of self-determination

Imagine that you are an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher at a Japanese college. (It is assumed that for each Japanese EFL student described here, there are almost identical counterparts in other English teaching settings.) You have assigned your students some *New Yorker* magazine articles as optional readings for extra points. Notice how the following students approach the task (see Figure 1).

- Ken reads the articles because he wants the extra points. His motivation is controlled by an external reward and thus is not self-determined.
- Erika reads the articles not so much for the extra points but because she would feel guilty if she did not read the materials assigned by her teacher. Her actions are driven by her internal feelings rather than an external reward; thus, her motivation is slightly more self-determined than Ken's.
- Ichiro and Maya both read the assigned articles because they realize that it is important for them to develop good English reading skills in today's world. Maya, who believes in the need for good reading skills, has more self-determined motivation than Ichiro, who simply accepts the need for good reading skills as a value widely recognized in Japanese society.

Ken, Erika, Ichiro, and Maya are all extrinsically motivated toward the assignment because their motivations are influenced by factors external to the reading activity itself (i.e., extra points, feeling of guilt, and a value imposed by society). Ken's motivation is the least self-determined, while Erika's motivation is not as self-determined as Ichiro's and Maya's. Yoko is different.

- Yoko reads the *New Yorker* articles because she is interested in the latest news and trends in the United States. Yoko's motivation is fully controlled by the self; in other words, she is intrinsically motivated.

Intrinsic motivation—the most self-determined form of motivation—has been found to produce better reading outcomes (Gottfried 1990; Wigfield and Guthrie 1997; Lau and Chan 2003; Wang and Guthrie 2004; Guthrie et al. 2007). A student like Yoko tends to read more than her peers, understand texts better, and use more effective reading strategies.

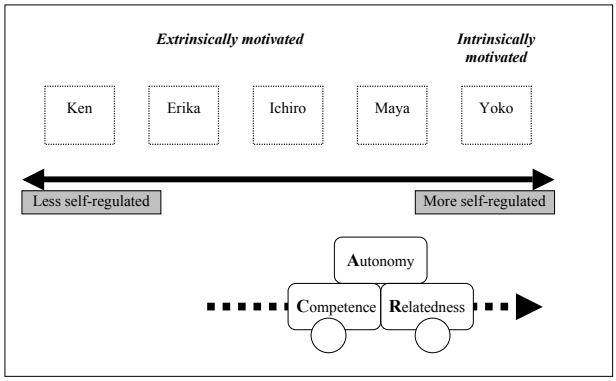

Figure 1. CAR principles develop more self-determined forms of student motivation

Nurturing *self-determined* motivation

Employing teaching practices that enhance students' intrinsic motivation to read is important. Yet, in many English teaching settings, because of individual differences, it is unrealistic to expect all students to be intrinsically motivated. Therefore, in addition to developing students' intrinsic motivation, we should try to shift students' less self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (like Ken's and Erika's) to the more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (like Ichiro's and Maya's) that are closer to intrinsic motivation. The challenge for teachers is how to facilitate this switch in motivational orientation.

According to SDT, teachers can enhance the development of intrinsic motivation and more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation by supporting students' needs for CAR—competence, autonomy, and relatedness (see Figure 1).

1. *Competence*. Competence refers to students' feelings that they are capable of completing L2 reading activities (i.e., "I can do it!"). Competence can be affected by the levels of difficulty of texts and tasks, as well as by teacher feedback. To increase and maintain students' feelings of competence, reading activities must be optimally challenging—not too easy, nor too hard. Also, teacher feedback should help students build confidence in their abilities rather than attribute their success to luck.
2. *Autonomy*. The need for autonomy is satisfied when students feel that they are in control of their own behaviors (i.e., "I decided to do this!"). Autonomy can be influenced by factors such as making choices, receiving rewards, and, again, feedback. When students receive rewards for their reading activities (e.g., extra points), and if the rewards make students feel as if they are under external control, students may lose their intrinsic motivation to read. Even teachers' positive comments—which usually boost motivation—can negatively impact students' intrinsic motivation if they are perceived by students as controlling. So, whereas a comment like "You used great strategies" may increase intrinsic motivation, a slightly different comment, "You used great strategies, *just as I expected*," could, in fact, deteriorate intrinsic motivation.
3. *Relatedness*. The third CAR component, relatedness, refers to students' feelings of being connected with their classmates and teachers (i.e., "I am not alone!"). Students thrive in educational environments in which they feel safe, supported, and cared for. Relatedness is particularly important for students to develop more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation because these types of motivation often involve students' acceptance of communal values. For instance, compared to students who feel isolated, those who feel related to their classroom community find it easier to accept the importance placed on sharing reading materials with classmates.

When CAR principles are met, students are likely to develop the motivational orientations associated with desired reading behaviors. They will read more, understand texts more deeply, and use strategies more effectively. Let us now turn to the means for implementing these principles in our everyday English reading classes.

Applying CAR principles to reading instruction

Several variables must be considered when planning language classes. For example, when applying CAR principles to our own classrooms, we need to take into account the particular conditions of our situation, including learner variables (students' ages, grade levels, and proficiency levels) as well as instructional variables (the type of class, the textbook, and course objectives). The teaching techniques introduced below are easily adaptable and can, therefore, be used in a range of English teaching settings. For ease of discussion, techniques that address each CAR component are introduced separately. Nonetheless, the techniques can easily be combined, allowing teachers to promote more than one CAR component at a time.

Competence

The need for competence is satisfied when students accomplish reading activities that are challenging but not overwhelming, so that students feel that they are capable of completing the reading task. The suggestions dis-

cussed below support feelings of competence.

- Introduce reading assignments in small, simple steps. Breaking down a reading assignment into manageable steps is one way to help students experience success. For example, we can incorporate a pre-reading stage into our lessons where students activate their background knowledge about the topic, preview the passage, and predict the content of the reading.
- Provide visual support to complement texts and aid comprehension, including illustrations, charts, tables, and graphic organizers. Using graphic organizers, for instance, has proven effective for helping students understand text structures (Jiang and Grabe 2007).
- Distribute reading guides to enhance comprehension and interest. Include text summaries (identifying such things as theme, plot, characters), comprehension questions, and prompts for post-reading activities.
- Provide definitions of key vocabulary to reduce the difficulty of the reading. We might also want to teach students how to use dictionaries effectively and efficiently. This can yield a positive long-term effect because students equipped with dictionary-use skills are more likely to sustain their feelings of competence across multiple reading tasks in the future.
- Allow students enough time to finish reading. From a motivational perspective, giving students enough time to finish their reading is highly important. If students constantly run out of time when completing assigned readings, they could easily lose confidence in their reading abilities.
- Give students meaningful opportunities to reread texts. When students have opportunities to reread, they feel that their reading skills have improved. We can design meaningful exercises by asking students to reread texts for different purposes, from different perspectives, or with a different pedagogical focus, such as reading to acquire vocabulary, identify the main idea, or analyze the text's structure.

Autonomy

Students' needs for autonomy are satisfied when they feel that they are in control of their own behavior. Their sense of autonomy can be influenced by opportunities to choose topics and tasks as well as factors such as rewards and feedback. The suggestions that follow support student autonomy.

- Have students choose a topic for additional reading within a thematic unit. When we give students a choice, we need to make sure that the choice is reasonable for our teaching contexts. If our lessons center on specific themes, it makes little sense to allow students to choose whatever topics they would like to read. In such cases, it behooves us to narrow down topics for students to choose from so that their reading activities can be linked to, and support, our overall themes. We must also be aware that having a choice can sometimes make students feel overwhelmed, especially for those unaccustomed to being given choices (Katz and Assor 2007).
- Begin giving choices with small, concrete, and nonthreatening tasks in settings where students are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with making choices of their own. As an illustration, for an after-reading activity, giving students a set of comprehension questions (e.g., five questions) and asking them to answer a subset of those questions (e.g., three questions) might be a good way to introduce choice.
- Arrange programmed Sustained Silent Reading activities where students choose the topic, genre, and level of difficulty of the reading material and simply read for pleasure. This helps students find enjoyment and interest in reading. It is fine if students choose easy readings, as long as they keep reading.
- Avoid giving controlling feedback. Teachers' comments and their communication styles can weaken students' sense of autonomy if perceived as controlling. Comments that could suggest our control over students' behaviors (e.g., "Great, you did exactly what I wanted you to do!") should be avoided. We may also want to stay away from

excessive use of *should* and *must* when giving directions.

- Avoid overemphasizing the importance of rewards. Teachers are not the only source of potential external control over student behaviors. When students are given rewards for their reading activities (e.g., extra points), and if the rewards make students feel as if they are under external control, students can lose their intrinsic motivation to read. Test scores, grades, and other forms of rewards could also be perceived by students as controlling. We should therefore not overemphasize the importance of these external rewards. The key to sustain students' sense of autonomy is to help them feel in control of their own behaviors, rather than feeling that teachers, parents, or peers are controlling them.

Relatedness

Relatedness lets students connect with their classmates and teachers. The following suggestions support feelings of relatedness.

- Incorporate activities that nurture cooperative interactions among students. Group work such as a jigsaw reading can be quite effective for this purpose because it engages students in meaningful interactions with each other. In typical jigsaw reading activities, students are divided into small groups, and each group is assigned different reading material (or a different portion of the same text). After reading, students discuss the material in their groups to become fully familiar with the piece. Then, groups are re-formed so that each new group includes students who have read different materials. In their new groups, students share what they have read with other students. A notable strength of this activity is that it allows students to contribute to discussions (in re-formed groups) as experts on their own piece, which fosters respectful relationships among students.
- Involve students in discussions about main ideas, themes, and strategies for understanding texts to make them feel part of the classroom community. In addition, we can set up pre- and post-reading activities that allow students to work in small groups of perhaps three to five students.
- Have more-advanced readers help less-advanced readers to create feelings of support and collaboration.
- Encourage students to share their work with each other (e.g., answers to comprehension questions, completed graphic organizers, and response papers). This may seem simple, but it could very well promote students' sense of belonging.
- Discourage excessive competition in reading. Competition among students has the potential to prevent them from establishing cooperative relationships with each other. Thus, we need to make sure that the competition that often exists among students remains at a healthy, rather than a disruptive, level.

Combining CAR principles

Each of the three CAR components—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—is a vital part of building reading motivation, just as the body, engine, and tires are vital parts of a car. Yet, it is quite possible to combine techniques to reinforce more than one aspect of CAR at the same time. For example, if we ask students to work in groups while learning to use dictionaries, we develop students' sense of relatedness as well as competence. If we allow students to choose a portion of a text for dictionary practice, we can support students' need for autonomy as well. We can be creative and flexible when implementing CAR, as long as we remember that the principles will not work if any of the three aspects is missing, just as a car will not run if it is missing its body, engine, or tires.

The principles of CAR can be applied to everyday EFL reading instruction to promote intrinsic motivation as well as more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation. The techniques introduced in this article do not require teachers to alter their overall instructional methods or existing reading curricula. The practices of finding ways to give students choices and offering appropriate feedback, for example, can be easily integrated into reading activities already in place. It should be noted that EFL students' motivation to write, listen, and speak in English can also be successfully enhanced through CAR principles. The tech-

nique of breaking an assignment into doable steps, for instance, can be easily utilized across skill areas and will support students' sense of competence in completing other skill activities.

Conclusion

With each and every year, EFL students experience a greater need for improved English reading abilities. To respond to these needs, we teachers need to reconsider our reading pedagogy and move beyond traditional approaches that focus on vocabulary, grammar, and text structure. Strengthening and maintaining student motivation are crucial to reading instruction because reading in an L2 requires a lot time, effort, and perseverance. As teachers, we need to be aware of the links between motivational approaches and reading development; we need to nurture student motivational orientations that are most likely to yield positive results.

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