

The Interaction between Extrinsic and Intrinsic Environment for Language Learning

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Abstract

A harmonious environment is a crucial factor for students' language learning and their learning achievement will benefit a lot from it. Most of time, the environment we talk about refers to the extrinsic environment, which may set a limit to the study in this field. But this paper divides the environment into two parts: 1) extrinsic environment—the relationship between teachers and students and 2) intrinsic environment—students' intrinsic motivation and autonomy in learning process. This paper elucidates the importance of both extrinsic and intrinsic environment for language learning in the narrow sense. In fact, the three factors mentioned above connect tightly and any one can function to influence the other two. For students, the nearest extrinsic environment is the teacher-student relationship, which can also be identified as a teaching strategy. It is necessary for teachers to choose an appropriate strategy that will activate students' learning interest and motivation as well as positively influence their intrinsic learning device

Keywords: Teacher-student Relationship, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Environment, Autonomy

Teacher-student relationship is a special interrelationship. It is created in teaching process between teacher and student and contains their positions and attitudes toward each other. It is a special social relationship. Many experts agree that there are three kinds of relationship between teacher and student. First is the hierarchical one; the second is called intemperate one; the last one and also the ideal one is democratic relationship.

The first sort of relationship emphasizes teachers' centered position in teaching. It views teachers as authority in class, identified with roles like parent, instructor, manager, leader, controller, or even doctor who can "cure" the ignorance of the students. Teachers are the real controller in classroom. What he or she said is the rule that every student must follow. Students, in this circumstance, are slaves sometimes. A number of researchers have examined the role that controlling environments (e.g., teachers and structured classroom settings) play in autonomy and learning (Flink, Boggiano, & Barrett, 1990; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Miserandino, 1996; Ryan, Connell, & Grolnick, 1992).

These studies suggest that controlling environments reduce a sense of personal autonomy and intrinsic motivation and result in decreased learning and poorer attitudes about school (Enzle & Anderson, 1993; Weinert & Helmke, 1995). Other researchers have examined the role that perceived control (i.e., self-judgments of personal competence or autonomy) plays in intrinsic motivation (Boggiano, Main, & Katz, 1988; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Williams & Deci, 1996). These studies indicate that greater perceived autonomy results in higher levels of intrinsic motivation and enjoyment (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999), but especially when the desire for control is high (Law, Logan, & Baron, 1994). Other studies report that greater student autonomy leads to more positive emotions (Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993) and a greater willingness to stay in school (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Intrinsic Motivation, or engaging in a task for its enjoyment value, is one of the most powerful forms of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1987). It is associated with enhanced performance, improved conceptual and creative thinking, superior memory recall, positive effect, subsequent willingness to engage in other tasks, and better psychological and physical health compared with other forms of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1992).

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Unfortunately, this powerful energy often goes untapped, either through non optimal task characteristics or through situational constraints that interfere with task involvement. In the second type of relationship, teachers give students much more freedom. They agree with students whatever they do. It seems that students are the masters of learning. The truth is the opposite, and the reality is teachers do not take their responsibilities at all.

The democratic relationship between teacher and students is an ideal one. It is based on understanding and love. Teachers are assumed as new roles as consultant, adviser, idea person, helper, communicator, guide, and facilitator and so on. They do not teach all the time, but they guide students to learn. Students are treated as equal as teachers are. They can point out teachers' mistakes without being punished. Teachers and students are more like friends. Both of them can learn something from each other. Dewey (1938) emphasized that student interest and curiosity should only be the beginning, that it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the learning experience into productive avenues. He noted that the teacher's role is to "select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1938). The Foxfire teacher views state or locally mandated curricular goals and objectives as the minimum standards for the academic focus of student work. These goals and objectives are shared with students, so that students and the teacher can collaborate on ways to incorporate students' needs and interests. The teacher, however, continues to take a broad view of the structure of the subject matter and guides the process with a firm hand.

A good relationship between teacher and students can pave the way for effective teaching and learning. English teachers have to stimulate students' learning interest so as to help them make progress in learning. According to the research, the relationship between teacher and students can influence students' performance in learning directly. A friendly relationship can accelerate students working hard. In English teaching and learning, a relaxed but ordered relationship makes students willing to learn. It is easy for them to concentrate themselves on English. At the same time, English teachers can enjoy teaching. They will be much more responsible. However, tense relationship makes students and teachers do not trust each other. Both teachers and students cannot participate teaching activity well.

Relationship between teacher and student is based on both sides. Teachers, for their special position in teaching, play an important role in creating the new relationship. Firstly, they should understand students deeply so as to sharing the same thing with them. Only in this way, can teachers find students' deep thoughts and give them help if necessary. Understanding students means a lot, teachers should understand their interests, their personalities, their learning attitudes and so on. This information can be got if teachers really want to do. Secondly, they should realize that students are human beings, who have their own characteristics. As the real master of learning, they play an active role in learning. Teachers should respect their students in order to be respected. They must treat every student fairly. Thirdly, they have to improve themselves first. Then their learned knowledge serious learning attitude charming personality can influence students greatly.

Students also should take responsibilities in creating the ideal teacher-student relationship. Firstly, they must be aware that teachers work for all students. Besides knowledge, they can learn more form their teachers. Then they must understand their teachers, too. It is their teachers who go along with them in their way of learning. Without the help form teachers, they may not get good achievement. Kamii's (1985) consideration deals with autonomy in children's peer relations. She instructed teachers to "encourage the exchange and coordination of points of view among peers". Youniss and Damon (1992) pointed out that an autonomous person "would feel both responsible to justify his or her position to another person and would, reciprocally, listen to the other person's views".

Another way in which students exercise autonomy in relation to their own learning is by selecting their own assignments. As a class, we negotiate a set of parameters defining the number of each type of assignment (individual or group projects) that will be required of each class member. From that point, each student works within those parameters to write a proposal explaining which assignments will be completed throughout the semester. Assignments are placed in a separate section of the journal. In the proposal the student defends how the assignments selected will help her to meet the objectives of the course. This process allows students to make decisions about their learning guided by their interests. Some choose a group project, while others do not. Kamii's (1985) another consideration deals with autonomy in relation to learning. She advocated encouraging "children to think in their own ways (rather than to recite "right" answers) and to engage in activities with intrinsic motivation".

As one of the assignments, students keep a reflective journal in which they are encouraged to make connections between what they think about the readings, class discussions and their direct experiences with preschool children in their laboratory placement. This is a formidable task for students who have never been encouraged to think on their own. They are asked to develop their own questions about the content and try to find answers to those questions. In traditional English teaching, both teachers and students get used to the routine teaching model: students are containers, who are waiting to be fed, while teacher's function as resource of knowledge. This kind of teaching is very harmful.

As the old saying goes: you can bring the horse to water, but you cannot make him drink. So does English learning. Students should aware that they have to know how to learn themselves, or they will be abandoned by the society. Students' autonomous study mostly means that the students are the masters of learning. They are the active English learners. Autonomous students are defined as those who: 1) understand the purpose of their learning programmer; 2) explicitly accept responsibility for their learning; 3) share in setting of the learning goals; 4) have insight into their learning style and strategies; 5) have a tolerant and outgoing approach to the English.

From the definition above we can conclude that an autonomous student first should be willing to take responsibility for his or her own learn, then he or she should be conscious of or aware of the learning process involved and learning strategies needed, finally he should have the ability to monitor and evaluate his learning result and effectiveness. It seems that students can learn everything themselves if they get the ability of autonomous study. In fact autonomous study does not reject teachers. They are still the guides of the whole learning process. They set their students in the road, helping them to develop confidence in their own learning. They are waiting on the sidelines, ready to encourage and assist.

It is the requirement of the future society for students study autonomously. Because what they learn at school is limited. There are many things they should study after school. But at that time, there is no teacher for them. In that case, they have to depend on themselves. For English teachers, they can not learn for their students, but they are the important participants of the process of students' development and also the good helpers for the students.

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