Intensive group projects: Directed motivational currents in language classrooms

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In SLA, research on motivation is generally conducted with large samples of learners (in questionnaire-based surveys), or selected individuals (using interview- and/or ethnographic-inspired methodologies). For practitioners, however, the unit of analysis of greatest interest is the group. Drawing on theories of group-level motivation, Dörnyei and colleagues (2016) argue that collective flows of motivational energy can be generated in language learning classrooms when students work with an 'intensive group project' (IGP). An IGP is a learning sequence involving an extended task, that is addressed collectively, that has a common goal, and where students have autonomy to fully engage.

Purpose

Because group-level DMCs have not been empirically investigated, the purpose of this research is to discover (i) whether projects with IGP features can be found in language classrooms, and (ii) whether such projects generate the type of intense motivation described by Dörnyei and colleagues.

Method

A questionnaire containing the open question 'Describe an activity or task that you have carried out with your pupils which you experience has motivated them', was sent to teachers of English in grades 6–9 (n=252) from a randomly-drawn sample of schools in Sweden (n=64). Completed questionnaires containing activity descriptions were obtained from 94 teachers. 9 activities closely fitting the IGP blueprint were identified. These teachers were contacted and interviewed.

Results

All 9 projects generated motivation of an intensity and duration over and above that which the teachers normally experienced among students. This was true not only for those teachers who employed a variety of pedagogical strategies, but also those who frequently worked with projects. Analyses of the salient features of the 9 projects, and teachers’ descriptions of students’ motivation are presented and critically examined.

References


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