Beyond Language Aptitude: Using Group Work to increase Intrinsic Motivation in the L2 Classroom

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One search on the internet for "language aptitude and motivation in SLA (second language acquisition)" results in over 8,000 hits. If so much research in second language acquisition has been completed and subsequently published, one wonders what two language teachers, MAJ Bagley, a Category II language teacher, and MAJ Palin, a Category I language teacher, at the United States Military Academy have to offer with their findings. The purpose of our research was two-fold. We wanted to examine how the use of group activities within the classroom affected cadets' attitudes and affective states, whether these increased their desire to learn the L2 or degree of effort in learning the L2, specifically researching what type of group activities increased student motivation. Our goal was to prove that small group work that was grammar-, culture-, and vocabulary-oriented, increased intrinsic motivation. Secondly, we wanted to identify reliable indicators of future performance in the L2 (Category I and II languages). Our goal was to prove that a student's Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) score was the best indicator of future performance in the Category I or II language classroom. If this were true, educators could use MLAT scores to develop a pedagogical plan (prior to a semester's start) that would best address the needs of those students who may struggle. Addressing their needs early in the semester would prevent students with low language aptitude and perhaps low motivation from feeling overwhelmed by the gap between expected aptitude for learning of the L2 and their actual proficiency in the L2.

The initial idea for this research project originated with a discussion MAJ Bagley had with Dr. Johannes Vazulik, Director of Curriculum and Professor of German, Department of Foreign Languages, United States Military Academy. He mentioned that for several years he had been comparing cadets’ performance in the second language (L2) classroom with their Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) scores, SAT scores, and GPA, and had discovered no clear indicator linking cadets’ past performance and how well they would perform in a Category III or IV language classroom. The Defense Language Institute divides the world’s languages into four categories, based on their difficulty level for a native English
speaker. In theory, category I languages such as Spanish are the easiest to learn, while category IV languages such as Arabic are the most difficult to master. The academy teaches eight languages that span the four categories:

- Category I: Spanish, French, and Portuguese
- Category II: German
- Category III: Persian, Russian
- Category IV: Chinese, Arabic

Dr. Vazulik mentioned he had not explored Category I or II languages. Due to Dr. Vazulik's findings, MAJ Bagley and MAJ Palin consciously avoided predictions of language aptitude in their sections. Students were not grouped in accordance with MLAT scores, GPA, SAT scores, etc. Instead, the groups were student-selected throughout the entire semester. Varying methods such as mid-term assessments, muddiest point papers, minute papers, and daily observations were used to assess increases in students' intrinsic motivation. Additionally, we gathered data such as MLAT scores, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, GPA, and time spent dedicated to learning the L2 throughout the semester. We used these data points to compare with the students' final grades of the course to determine if the MLAT was indeed the most reliable indicator of a student's performance in the Cat I or II L2 classroom.

II. Cadets’ Motivation to learn the L2

Without the knowledge of a predictor of performance in the L2 classroom, we concentrated on the importance of increasing motivation to learn the L2 through the use of group work. We first looked at how to define the different ways our cadets were motivated. In Dr. Rod Ellis’ book “Second Language Acquisition,” he reviews the four kinds of motivation that have been identified in second language acquisition:

- Instrumental motivation – the L2 learner sees a practical application to the mastery of the L2.
- Integrative motivation – the L2 learner has an interest in the people and culture of the target-language.

Resultative motivation – the L2 learner’s initial success learning the L2 increases the learner’s desire to learn the L2.

Intrinsic motivation – refers to the L2 learner that does not hold a distinct attitude (positive or negative) towards learning the L2. Instead, the learner’s motivation increases or decreases depending on the extent to which the learner feels personally involved in the learning activities.

Motivation for learning an L2 is a complex topic. Students’ motivation can fall into several different types of motivation and their level of motivation can vary widely depending on the learning context, task, competing demands (whether academic, personal, or professional), and health of the learner (sleep-deprived, ill, etc). We chose to analyze the tendency of group work in the second language classroom to increase student’s intrinsic motivation towards learning German or Spanish vocabulary and mastering the grammar of the target language. These group activities should increase a student’s desire to remain speaking the L2 (not slip back into the familiar L1) during vocabulary based group activities as well as provide students a forum to ask questions about grammar topics that they may not ask in a larger group setting.

a. Initial Motivation Levels of Students

At the beginning of the semester, we determined that our students’ motivation spanned the four types of motivation. Both MAJ Palin and MAJ Bagley taught intermediate level language classes and, therefore, had sections with a similar composition of students (i.e. Sophomores that had placed into LX361, Juniors that were beginning their 3rd semester of a language requirement and had taken LX203 and LX204, and Seniors who were double language majors taking their 3rd and 4th semesters of their second language).

Completion of LX362 (or equivalent language proficiency) is the minimum language requirement for application to USMA’s Semester Abroad Program (SAP) in German and Spanish. With nearly 150 cadets a year going abroad for one semester, many cadets as early as first semester plebe (freshman) year learn about the program and aspire to one day participate. Therefore, in the LX361 classroom,
many of our students shared with us immediately that they were interested in applying for the program. They knew that if accepted into the SAP, they would soon be immersed in the language and culture, and were, therefore, highly motivated to perform well in the L2.

At the beginning of the semester, we gave an eight statement 5-point Leichardt Scale survey to all of our sections (five total). This survey asked students to select “strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree” to the following eight statements (see appendix A):

1. Knowing a foreign language is important in today’s society.
2. Knowing a foreign language is important in developing relationships with other nations.
3. Studying a foreign language is a priority for me in my studies at West Point.
4. Knowing a foreign language will help me in my Army career.
5. I feel that cultural awareness is important.
6. I feel that cultural awareness is an integral part of leadership.
7. I feel that learning a foreign language increases my cultural awareness.
8. Acquiring the skills necessary to learn a foreign language is an important as learning a foreign language.

This survey highlighted four areas in which students indicated they were not as instrumentally motivated as we assumed they would be.

**b. Instrumentally motivated students**

Only 43% of the students strongly agreed with the statement that knowing a foreign language is important in today’s society. We would assume that if this same question were posed to students of a first world nation who did not speak English as their first language, for example students at the German Armed Forces University of Munich, the number of “strongly agree” answers would dramatically increase. This is in line with the joke: "What do you call a person who only speaks one language?"

Answer: "An American." The incredible size and strength of the United States often gives Americans the impression that knowing one language suffices and becoming bi- or monolingual is not necessary. Smaller countries, for example, who border other countries and whose economy depends on the import and export of goods understand the importance of language learning. During MAJ Bagley's year spent
studying at the University of Mainz, she never met a student that did not speak English. Most spoke an additional language, such as French, Polish, Portuguese, Italian, or Spanish as well.

Only 22% of students strongly agreed that studying a foreign language is a priority at West Point. Although this questionnaire was anonymous, we assumed that those students that answered “strongly agreed” were either languages majors, intended to soon declare themselves a language major, or were interested in participating in the SAP. Another useful discovery was only one-third of our students strongly agreed that knowing a foreign language would help in their Army career. With the cadets’ knowledge that it is highly likely they will deploy to a foreign country, work with an indigenous population, fight and possibly interrogate terrorists, and work alongside foreign militaries, as well as potentially be stationed in a foreign country, it makes one wonder how 100% of the students would not answer "strongly agree" to the statement that knowing a foreign language would help in one’s Army career. One explanation could be that they would be more instrumentally motivated to learn an L2 if that language were Persian or Arabic, languages that would most help a Soldier deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq respectively. However, the survey didn’t specifically ask about the language (German or Spanish) they were studying; instead it generically inquired about “a foreign language.” One can only assume that cadets know and have heard about linguist support while deployed and feel that having an interpreter is adequate to communicate in order to accomplish the mission. LTC Mark Gagnon, Associate Dean for International Intellectual Development and Academy Professor of German, returned from Iraq in January 2010 after spending one year as the theater linguist manager. He indicated that there was a systemic problem in our Army (even after over eight years of combat deployments) that was rooted in foreign languages. He stated that most Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) deploy into theater with little idea about what their linguistic requirements will be and make little to no coordination for their linguist support. The resolution of this problem may lie in our abilities to increase the instrumental and
integrative motivation of our future officers to learn a second language and understand the importance of cultural competency.

Finally, only 16% of students strongly agreed that acquiring the skills necessary to learn a foreign language is as important as learning a foreign language. In fact, 17% of the students were neutral or disagreed with the statement. This confirms that the majority of our students was not instrumentally motivated to learn a L2 and did not see a practical application of the language learning strategies gained in their L2 classroom to future language classrooms (which potentially could be an area of operation).

**c. Integratively motivated students**

We noted varying degrees of integrative motivation throughout our classes, from absolutely zero integrative motivation to a high level of integrative motivation. After lesson 1 introductions and reviewing student biographies, MAJ Palin and MAJ Bagley both discovered that many students were integratively motivated; they had a sincere interest in the people and culture of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Puerto Rico, Mexico, or countries of Latin and South America. We had students who shared with us that they had lived abroad as an Army brat or as a child of missionaries. Several cadets’ mothers and grandparents were German and they indicated they wanted to learn German to be able to speak with that side of their family. Several cadets’ ancestors spoke German and Spanish (as their last names also sometimes indicated) and, therefore, were motivated to learn the language, as well as the culture. Finally, we both had the occasional student who was learning the language to impress the opposite sex. For example, one cadet’s girlfriend speaks fluent German, and he wanted the ability to speak German with her.

On the contrary, we also saw many with severely low levels of integrative motivation due to USMA’s requirement to take two to four semesters of a foreign language. Although the student may have chosen German or Spanish as their first choice language, if given the option of whether or not to take a foreign language, many would forego the opportunity which was discovered during individual one
on one talks with the students and group discussions about the importance of language learning.
Therefore, many Cadets first display little to no interest in the people and culture of the countries’ of the target languages. Additionally, MAJ Bagley and MAJ Palin were often confronted with comments from Cadets regarding the end of their foreign language requirements. On several occasions Cadets were overheard rejoicing about their last graded event in the foreign language classroom.

We concluded that due to a number of our students displaying low levels of integrative motivation, a positive result of our small group work could also be an increase in integrative motivation as students develop cultural knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity. This additional benefit of group work would aid in accomplishing our goal of developing future officers who can effectively operate in different cultural contexts.

d. Resultatively motivated students

This type of motivation occurred least frequently in our classrooms. Students who were resultatively motivated were almost exclusively language majors or those desiring to be a language major. They believed they were “talented” at learning the L2 and, therefore, gained self-confidence in the L2 classroom. This self-confidence fueled their motivation and desire in the classroom. Often times, however, throughout the semester, we noticed that a student’s initial success may also negatively affect students. For example, a student that was doing extremely well at 6-week and 10-week grades, might have consciously chosen to decrease motivation in the L2 classroom, but increased their motivation in another subject, knowing that a lower grade on a graded event would have minimal impact on the 15-week grade (i.e. dropping from an A to an A-). Of the 23 students who had an A+, A, or A- at 10-week grades, 10 students (approximately 43% of students) lowered their grade one step (A+ to A, A to A-, or A- to B+) (see appendix B).
e. Intrinsically motivated students

Of the four types of motivation, intrinsic motivation was the only type of motivation that we felt could be increased at some point during each class hour regardless of what the type of learning objective (grammar, vocabulary, culture, history, etc.) and this increase in intrinsic motivation could also result in a spill-over effect into the other types of motivation to increase efforts in learning the L2. We decided to focus on group work to increase intrinsic motivation after reading Michael Long and Patricia Porter's article "Group Work, Interlanguage Talk, and Second Language Acquisition." Long and Porter point out five pedagogical arguments for the use of group work in second language learning.2

Argument 1. Group work increases language practice opportunities. Rather than the teacher speaking one on one with a student while everyone else listens or the teacher lecturing, group work increases the total individual practice time available to each student.

Argument 2. Group work improves the quality of student talk. Students working in a small group are not rushed to answer questions as they often are when put on the spot by the teacher. Instead, students are able to think through what they would like to say.

Argument 3. Group work helps individualize instruction. Each group member may be experiencing a different struggle while learning the L2. Group work allows members to ask each other specific questions, which they may not ask in the full class setting.

Argument 4. Group work promotes a positive affective climate. Many students experience considerable stress when called upon. The student feels he/she must respond accurately and quickly. The group offers this type of student a more supportive atmosphere to speak the L2. The student also may not view other students as a judge and feel the need to produce a polished product.

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Argument 5. Group work motivates learners. Students are more involved at a personal level and the more positive affective climate leads to increased motivation. Students feel less inhibited and freer to make mistakes in a small group than in the teacher-led class.

Intrinsic motivation is by far the most difficult to measure because even within a 55-minute period of instruction a learner’s intrinsic motivation may decrease or increase depending on the approaches or techniques applied in the L2 classroom. Additionally, evaluating feedback through the use of muddiest point papers, minute papers, and mid-term surveys may be difficult because comments may be skewed based on the activity fresh in the student’s memory. However, typically intrinsically motivated student behavior would be students who make every effort to remain speaking in the target language. For example, instead of translating a word directly into English, attempts to find a synonym in the target language or describe the word in the target language. Another example is a student who did not fully understand a certain grammar point and during the group work was able to further his understanding to a point that he is now willing to answer a question on the topic in the teacher-led setting.

III. Group Work and Second Language Acquisition (German & Spanish)

The use of group work in classroom second language learning has long been supported by sound pedagogical arguments. Recently, however, a psycholinguistic rationale for group work has emerged from second language acquisition research between non-native speakers, or interlanguage talk. Provided careful attention is paid to the structure of tasks students work on together, the negotiation work possible in group activity makes it an attractive alternative to the teacher-led, “lockstep” mode and a viable classroom substitute for individual conversations with native speakers.

Our goal in increasing motivation in the L2 classroom was to focus on students’ enjoyment in the classroom and desire to come to the class because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and ability level. We wanted to create an atmosphere of support, not an atmosphere of anxiety. Therefore, we immediately excluded research on increasing the number of graded events, introducing

3 Ibid.
pop-quizzes, or randomly grading assigned homework. Instead, we concentrated, following Graham Crookes and Richard Schmidt, on co-operative learning activities rather than competitive ones.⁴ These were activities in which students had to work together in order to complete the task at-hand or to solve a problem. Crookes and Schmidt found that these techniques increased the self-confidence of students, including weaker ones, because every participant in a co-operating task plays an important role.

The question then became what type of co-operative learning activity best met the goal of increasing intrinsic motivation? MAJ Bagley divided her group activities into two different categories: grammar based and vocabulary based (see Appendix C for Daily Observations). Groups always consisted of two to four students and were not assigned, but student picked.

**a. MAJ Bagley’s Grammar Based Group Activities**

The grammar group activities consisted of three different types: handouts designed by MAJ Bagley to review grammar points already learned, exercises out of the book, and board work (a short exercise designed by MAJ Bagley). The group exercises with handouts sometimes covered multiple grammar topics (before a major graded event) or just covered one grammar topic that had been recently taught as review.

After reviewing multiple muddiest point and minute papers, as well as MAJ Bagley’s daily observations and the mid-term course assessment, it was clear that the group grammar exercises did not seem to increase intrinsic motivation. Students almost never remained in the target language during the exercises. Students tended to work alone on the handouts or subdivided further into partners. Often, members of the groups would have different answers, an obvious indicator that group members were not talking to each other. When MAJ Bagley did hear speaking, the speaking was never in the target language. MAJ Shoshannah Jenni and Dr. Vazulik confirmed this in their classroom observations.

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of MAJ Bagley’s group work (see Appendices L & M). MAJ Bagley did observe three small positives with the group grammar work: (1) students could be seen taking notes on the handouts, (2) students asked MAJ Bagley questions when they didn’t understand, and (3) students were using their books to help them figure out the answer (often students do not complete their homework and do not know where to find the grammar topic in the book). MAJ Bagley also observed that students immediately became overly serious when completing the exercises resulting in a tense atmosphere in the classroom and an increase in students' affective filters. Although students seemed to not enjoy the handouts that covered a wider range of grammar topics (i.e. review for WPR), comments from their minute papers suggested students appreciated the review and had a better understanding of how to go about studying for the test. Therefore, students’ comments suggest that these handouts increase their instrumental motivation. Students were able to see the practical application of this knowledge. If the students mastered the concepts discussed during the group work, the students would see the results on the upcoming graded event.

Partner work from the book with students remaining seated had similar results as the handouts, but because the exercises were normally completed immediately following a grammar lesson, the book grammar exercises did not even, at a minimum, increase students’ instrumental motivation. The lone grammar group exercise that truly seemed to increase intrinsic motivation was board work. When students took boards in pairs, the classroom atmosphere immediately relaxed and lightened. Although this was admittedly took more effort on the instructor's part to provide students' feedback and at the same time maintain a disciplined classroom environment. MAJ Bagley circumvented this by not always making a circle around the room (instead criss-crossing the room and, therefore, never leaving any group "out of sight, out of mind" too long). After conducting this exercise numerous times throughout the semester, MAJ Bagley noticed that students enjoyed receiving a challenging task (i.e. write four sentences in the conversational past that tells me what you did last weekend. Use a minimum of one
subordinating conjunction, one coordinating conjunction, and the genitive case once). This type of task
gave the students the latitude to express themselves, yet was structured enough to reinforce grammar
points that were being taught or reviewed. It also gave the often sleep-deprived students a chance to
stand-up and move around. As MAJ Bagley circled the room spending one-on-one time with groups,
students often overheard what was being said to their neighboring group and self-corrected without the
teacher’s aid. MAJ Bagley also witnessed groups of stronger students helping their neighbors and
explaining grammar points in such ways that she never could. For example, in German, there are two
major forms of the past tense, one for the written past tense and one for the spoken past tense.
Students often have a hard time remembering which one is which. MAJ Bagley overheard one student
telling another group: "The *Perfekt* is the long one." The *Perfekt*, or conversational past, is indeed a
longer form than the *Imperfekt*, or written past tense; however, that particular explanation of the
*Perfekt* would have never crossed MAJ Bagley's mind. The task also gave the students a sense of
accomplishment; they relayed some type of story (often times with humor) something to the teacher
and she understood (such as the ongoing saga of Cadet Cook's milk cow named "Buttercup"). Prior to
erasing boards, students were often seen writing down their sentences in their notebooks. Student
Feedback from the mid-term course assessment confirmed that students do feel that board work is an
essential part of their foreign language learning. The irony to the situation is that the preparation time
for a board work exercise is dramatically less than the preparation time for handouts and the board
work is what students consistently claimed was essential to their learning on the mid-term course
assessment.

b. MAJ Bagley's Vocabulary Based Group Activities

MAJ Bagley began the semester introducing vocabulary (or theme based work, i.e. vocabulary
based on profession) the exact same way she had done the previous year, through exercises in the book
and then reviewing answers to the exercises, an activity that immediately seems to be met with glazed
eyes. Several lessons into the semester she decided to slightly modify a technique she had learned at the Goethe Institut in Berlin. She divided the class into groups of three to four Cadets. Each group received three to four 3x5 index cards with a new vocabulary word written on one side. She challenged the group to define or describe the words in the target language. She first modeled the German word “das Messer.” She explained that instead of looking up the translation and immediately saying "knife," the student should instead (in the L2) explain perhaps that you need a "Messer" to cut steak or that it is impossible to eat soup with a "Messer." It was emphasized that the goal was for students to remain in the target language. After 2-3 minutes, MAJ Bagley shuffled the index cards and each group received a new set of vocabulary.

The first time this exercises was completed, the exercise proved to be very difficult because this had never been demanded of the students. In fact, MAJ Thomas Lampersberger, instructor at the Austrian Military Academy and MAJ Bagley's counterpart for the Semester Abroad Program, mentioned to MAJ Bagley that even our three USMA SAP cadets in Austria struggled with this exact activity. Instead of attempting to describe a word they did not know in the target language, the cadets seemed to immediately say the English equivalent, knowing that the Austrian cadets and military faculty at the academy speak English fluently and would understand. MAJ Bagley noticed that some students immediately embraced the task and came up with some very creative answers. These students seemed to be the sophomores that had placed into Intermediate German and German Majors.

The final step of the exercise was to gather the index cards together and do the exercise once more as an entire class. MAJ Bagley would call on a student to describe the word. The first time this exercise was completed, this proved to be very difficult for the students. She repeated over and over again the words "auf Deutsch, bitte" or "in German, please." She refused to give the definition in English, but sought various ways to describe the word in German using vocabulary they should already have been familiar with. She noticed this really seemed to frustrate some students and would see them
leaning over to their neighbors and asking for the word in English. Two students in particular seemed to understand, but then asked over and over again for verification in English. "Frau Major, the word means "knife" correct?"

Throughout the semester, MAJ Bagley did a variation of this activity several times. The variation that seemed to increase intrinsic motivation the most was the variation that took the longest to complete. Students started off in groups, except each Cadet individually received an index card. Cadets were given several minutes to discuss the word with their groups and receive help from their group members. MAJ Bagley also made sure to help each group as necessary. MAJ Bagley then asked the class to stand-up and to mingle. Each Cadet was required to tell a minimum of 10 Cadets what the word meant. Following the mingling, MAJ Bagley asked all Cadets to return to their groups and passed out a handout that had all the vocabulary words printed on it. She then gathered all the 3x5 cards and once again made Cadets describe each word. Cadets then had an opportunity to take notes on the handout (and write the English definition, if necessary).

As the semester progressed, MAJ Bagley had numerous students comment (personally, in the mid-term assessment, and minute papers) to her that they enjoyed describing German words in German and that they really liked the "index card thing." The number of times the words "in German, please" were uttered also dramatically reduced towards the end of the semester. Students automatically began defining or describing words in the target language. Students also found it humorous when one student did define a vocabulary word in English and MAJ Bagley answered in German with "thank you. I speak English fluently and know you do as well. Now German, please." Not only did this increase intrinsic motivation in students, it also increased resultative motivation in students. MAJ Bagley witnessed students who successfully defined a word and received positive reinforcement for their definition gain more and more confidence as the semester continued. Although the exercise at first seemed to increase students' affective filters, repetition of the exercise ultimately led to a decrease in their affective filter.
c. MAJ Palin’s Culture Based Reading Group Activity

MAJ Palin’s culture based activity consisted of dividing the class into groups of four Cadets. Each group was then assigned a cultural reading in the target language out of the text and assigned questions to answer following the reading. Upon completion of the reading and answering the questions the groups then had to present their answers to the rest of the class in the target language.

The groups first negotiated how to divide the reading up among themselves and they began reading sections to one another. The initial negotiation of dividing the reading was accomplished in English. Out of the group, one Cadet would read a portion of the text while the others followed along. They would then switch duties and another Cadet would read aloud as the others followed along in the book. Comments about this activity included Cadets’ satisfaction in reducing the amount of stress of reading aloud since the groups were small thus minimizing their affective filter. Since there were other groups in the room reading aloud, they felt as if the attention on any particular reader was significantly reduced. Others commented that it was good to hear others (outside of the instructor) speak in the target language because it broadened their ability to understand different accents. Most Cadets also praised the activity stating that it gave them confidence knowing that others were having the same pronunciation challenges (see Appendix J).

After the reading was complete it was then up to the Cadets to complete the questions about the reading. MAJ Palin noticed several Cadets taking notes in their texts about the meaning of the story in English. This portion of the activity was completed to a great extent individually. MAJ Palin gave no specific guidance as to how to answer the questions. The minority of the groups actually answered the questions as a group in a group-think process.

In his first class MAJ Palin allowed the Cadets to select the spokesman for the group to present their answers to the class. Most of the presenters from the groups were Cadets with the highest scores in the course. This gave them the opportunity to show the class what they know and also allowed the
underachievers the ability to continue the exercise "under the radar". During the second class MAJ Palin selected the Cadets who maintained a variety of scores in the course. He found that even though the most proficient Cadets in the group were not presenting the other Cadets were a very supportive audience. Most often when a Cadet was presenting and became stuck on a word, there came a whisper from a classmate giving him the correct word or pronunciation. Comments about this portion of the activity varied from Cadets wishing they had the confidence to volunteer for the presentation to Cadets learning more from others' mistakes than from what they actually read or answered themselves.

This culture-based group activity increased Cadets' intrinsic motivation. The Cadets felt as though they were responsible for their own learning. MAJ Palin gave them three tasks and gave them little guidance. It was up to the Cadets as to how they should accomplish the tasks. As a side benefit, through our use of culture in the classroom there was a significant increase in the Cadets' integrative motivation. Several of the Cadets mentioned, that after reading the information about Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, that they wanted to travel to these countries with the Department of Foreign Languages in the future. The Cadets went as far as to say that if they were not funded for trips with DFL, that they would travel to these countries on their own to experience the culture and to practice the target language.

IV. Unintentional Discovery of a Source of Intrinsic Motivation in the Classroom

At the beginning and end of each class, MAJ Bagley spends 3-5 minutes simply speaking with the cadets in German. She often tends to incorporate vocabulary words into the questions she asks cadets or grammar points, but the idea is simply to encourage cadets to speak in the L2. This was frequently a source of laughter, when something the cadets said lead to a “don't say this” situation, MAJ Bagley sharing a story of how she made an embarrassing mistake in the language, or a male cadet accidentally saying he was spending the weekend with his “girlfriend” when he meant “friends” or with his “boyfriend” when he meant “girlfriend.” These discussions allowed MAJ Bagley to discuss her students'
personal lives. It was amazing to learn what a cadet will share in a L2 that he wouldn’t dare share in his mother tongue.

As MAJ Bagley collected comments from the mid-term course assessment, approximately 40% of the students’ answers to the question “What is the instructor doing in this section that is most effective in helping you learn?” had some reference to these communication exercises at the beginning and end of class. Yet, this activity, on average, only represented 6-10 minutes of every 55 minute class. She attributed this success to four things. First, students’ expectations were managed. They knew to expect the exercise and overtime their anxiety to speak in the L2 decreased and their willingness to communicate in the L2 increased. MAJ Bagley even had one student on his way out of the classroom comment that his friend was disappointed because he had waited all class to be asked what he was doing for the weekend (apparently, he had just entered into a new relationship with a Canadian college student and was excited to share the news). Second, the exercise was not graded. Students had no fear that a failure would be immediately reflected in their course grade. Instead, they took away only their sense of accomplishment that they were understood. Third, MAJ Bagley ensured she called on each student several times a week so that the exercise addressed everyone’s fear of communicating in the L2. MAJ Bagley also related several stories of how she overcame her fears of speaking German and often related humorous stories (i.e. How an American Exchange student studying at the University of Mainz stopped her to ask her directions assuming she was German. The student started off in German, but lost confidence and quickly transitioned to English. Understanding exactly how the student was feeling, MAJ Bagley smiled at the student and gave her directions in English. The student thanked her seemingly relieved that the directions were in English and then commented on how her English was really great. MAJ Bagley, who was at a confidence low just beginning classes at the University of Mainz, actually was flattered at the compliment). The fourth and final reason is that the exercise is not impersonal. The exercise requires continual eye contact with the language learner and a friendly smile. Instead of a red
pen for corrections, corrections are made orally by repeating with corrections or rephrasing what the language learner. To ensure that the language learner perceived the correction, MAJ Bagley often asked a follow-up question. The exercise involved "real communication" about a topic that matters to them and about which the teacher does not know about.

After the discovery was made, MAJ Bagley found that these exercises were in keeping with Zoltán Dörnyei and Kata Csizér’s Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners⁵:

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks concretely / Model the task for the student.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increases the learner’s linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learners’ goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

MAJ Palin incorporated a similar type of question and answer period at the end of each of his lessons. While the beginning of the class was spent warming up reviewing the material from the previous class to help the class find the Spanish vocabulary, accent and confidence, the end of the period was spent asking each other questions in the target language. MAJ Palin would end the official portion of the class and ask everyone to close their text books and notes. He would identify one individual that would have to ask either MAJ Palin or a classmate a question in the target language. The first question and answer period was like pulling teeth. Cadets were shy and did not want to engage the instructor or another Cadet. It was only after three or four attendances that the group began to relax and take pleasure in asking questions in the target language. Initially, the questions were directed towards other Cadets, but after a month or so MAJ Palin began answering questions for the group. MAJ

Palin actually saw the class break out of their shell in less than one month with the use of this exercise. The reception of the exercise is evident in the mid-term course assessment and also follows the Ten Commandments developed by Dörnyei and Csizér. Comments from his class taken from the mid-term course assessment indicate that the Cadets are comfortable with the scope, pace and difficulty of his closing activity. When asked the question, “What is the instructor doing in this section that is most effective in helping you learn?” the Cadets responded with; 1) Being a lively, fun teacher who is passionate about Spanish 2) He is very interactive (i.e. he provided an environment in which what cadets said actually mattered) and 3) He is very enthusiastic and helpful. These comments relate directly to the Commandments regarding the atmosphere of the classroom and setting the example with his own behavior. Additionally, the comments portray a classroom in which MAJ Palin is developing a good relationship with his learners.

Although MAJ Bagley and MAJ Palin did not end their lessons with a group activity aimed at increasing motivation (such as those group activities within the main part of the hour), the interaction between the teacher and the student in a relaxed atmosphere while speaking the L2 decreased the affective filter significantly enough to increase intrinsic motivation for learning the L2. In the future, we would like to further study the degree to which a teacher can establish a relaxed environment in the classroom to reduce a student’s affective filter. The relaxed environment would negate the “audience effect” and would offer the same results of increasing intrinsic motivation as group work.

V. Indicators of a Good Language Learner in the Category I & II Language Classroom

After gathering the data from our research we decided to identify possible indicators of good language learners. Our initial indicator was performance on the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT). Additional indicators that we discussed and plotted were Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) - Math, SAT -
Verbal, and the Cadet's Average Percentage Scholastic Cumulative (APSC) at West Point. Each of these indicators was compared to the Cadets' final grade in the L2 course with surprising results.

The SAT - Math indicator has a positive correlation to the Cadets' final grade. It is therefore possible to say that the better the SAT - Math score, the better the Cadet will perform in the L2 classroom.

![Graph showing the relationship between Final Grade and SAT Math](image1)

\[ y = 0.055x + 51.813 \]

The SAT - Verbal indicator also has a positive correlation to the Cadet's final grade. Again, it is possible to say that the better the SAT - Verbal score, the better the Cadet will perform in the L2 classroom on the achievement tests.

![Graph showing the relationship between Final Grade and SAT Verbal](image2)

\[ y = 0.0465x + 57.436 \]
By virtue of the name, the MLAT should be the best indicator of potential for Cadets in the L2 classroom. After correlating the MLAT with the Cadets' final grade, it is possible to see a positive correlation, but not to the extent that we would expect. There is a positive correlation so we can say that the better the Cadet scores on the MLAT the more likely they are to score better in the L2 classroom.

The most accurate indicator for performance in the L2 classroom is Cadet APSC. APSC is calculated every semester for the Cadets in our research. We did not take into account whether or not the APSC was a 2-semester APSC or 4-semester APSC.
Lastly, we plotted final grades versus time spent outside of the classroom to see if the Cadets' motivation had an effect on their final grade. Surprisingly, the Cadets who scored the worst were spending the most time outside of the classroom preparing for the class. This allows us to draw the conclusion that the indicators mentioned above are true indicators of language aptitude and the amount of time preparing outside of the class has little bearing on how a Cadet will perform in an L2 classroom. (Article, Does Hard Work Help Students to 'Make the Grade')
VI. Conclusion

The greatest source of intrinsic motivation within MAJ Bagley’s and MAJ Palin’s classrooms was an activity based in speaking in the target language and gave students the perception that they were acquiring or using a valuable skill that could be replicated if they had a conversation with a native speaker or visited a country where the target language was spoken. The exercise does not necessarily have to be a group exercise (as explained in the part IV), however, what is imperative is that students are in a non-hostile, non-graded, relaxed atmosphere where humor is welcomed and mistakes are okay. Therefore, educators, in order to maximize the intrinsic motivation of their students, should prioritize speaking exercises, specifically group exercises that reduce students' affective filter. Many successful L2 learners can verify that some of their most proud moments while learning the L2 did not come in the form of understanding a grammar concept or reading a certain passage, but came from successfully having a one-one-one conversation with a native language speaker. Additionally, MAJ Bagley and MAJ Palin discovered that a student's APSC provides the most reliable indicator of student performance in the Category I & II language classroom, although there are positive correlations between MLAT scores and final grades, as well as SAT scores and final grades. As William Rau and Ann Durand indicated in their 2000 study, MAJ Bagley and MAJ Palin also concluded that the number of hours dedicated to their courses does not provide a reliable indicator of a student's performance.

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6 For example, MAJ Bagley recalls the first time she had enough nerve to answer a friend's phone call and proceeded to successfully have a three minute conversation about going to a movie that evening. MAJ Palin recalls the first time he got off the airplane in San Jose, Costa Rica during his graduate school and had to function completely in Spanish. He was faced with a survival scenario and was able to communicate his needs and have a friendly conversation with the cab driver on the way to his hotel.
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