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PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Language teachers promote or discourage students' engagement by the ways they define successful language learners. When the successful language learner is one who can pass tests and make good grades, learning about the language is all that is required and success is defined by mastery of rules and forms. When the successful language learner is one who has the ability to use the language to accomplish communication goals, success is defined as making the language one's own. To promote engagement in language learning:

- Encourage students to use the language spontaneously to communicate ideas, feelings, and opinions
- Identify informal out-of-class language learning experiences
- Ask students to evaluate their progress in terms of increases in their functional proficiency. Students' motivation for learning a language increases when they see connections between what they do in the classroom and what they hope to do with the language in the future. Their attention increases when classroom activities are relevant to their other interests.

To make these connections, begin by having students list the ways they may use the language in future. Have them include both the ways they plan to use it and other ways that might arise. Ask them to be as specific as possible. For each way of using language, ask them to list specific communication tasks that they will need to be able to do. Use these purposes and tasks as the basis for task-oriented classroom communication activities. Some lower level students will respond that they don't plan to use the language – that they are taking the course to fulfill a university language requirement. Encourage these students to develop an imaginary scenario for themselves in which they have some reason for using the language. In doing this, some students may think of ways in which they really might use it, and others will come to understand that purpose is an integral part of language learning.

Sample Ways of Using a Language

- When traveling in a country where it is spoken
- To study at a university in a country where it is spoken
- To become knowledgeable about the history and culture of a country where it is spoken
- To provide legal assistance to native speakers who are immigrants to

this country

Another way of making language instruction relevant and interesting to students is to find out what topics they are studying and draw materials for reading and discussion from those fields. However, remember that reading and discussion do not always have to be about serious issues or academic topics. Students enjoy talking about movies and television programs, vacation plans, famous people, and other popular culture topics. Finally, don't be afraid to drop a topic if students' interest begins to fade. Ask them to suggest alternatives. When students know that they have some control over what they do in the language classroom, they take ownership as engaged learners.