FACT SHEET 5: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This fact sheet provides an annotated bibliography of useful resources related to building confidence in ESL learners.


This short online text provides a useful overview of the importance of affect and attitude in the development of self-esteem in the L2 learner. Building on and expanding Reasoner’s 1982 model of building self-esteem, it includes practical activities that address the concepts of security, identity, belonging, purpose and competence.


This is a great practical teaching resource that presents thirty classroom activities for teaching confidence in classroom settings. The activities are organised around Reasoner’s five-step model of self-esteem and although focusing specifically on young learners, teachers can adapt the many activities included to suit adult AMEP learners.


This article explores how Dörnyei’s ‘Possible Self’ framework was used in an interview study of Taiwanese EFL learners. The study found that teachers play an important role in positively influencing students’ ideal L2 selves, and that by clarifying the personal significance of learning English, learners can become more self-motivated and committed.


This chapter begins with a brief history of L2 learning motivation research and critiques the cognitive/affective dichotomy of aptitude and motivation. It evaluates the separation of cognition and motivation as increasingly out-dated, and proposes instead a dynamic systems approach to understanding learner characteristics in SLA. An interesting aspect of this approach that is highlighted in this chapter relates to understanding the ‘possible self’ that is, L2 learners’ ideas of what they might, would like to, and are afraid of becoming.

In this brief summary, Dörnyei outlines six components of his L2 ‘Motivational Self’ program. These components include: constructing the ‘ideal self’ imagery enhancement, making the ideal self plausible, developing an action plan, activating the ideal self and considering failure. The text gives some practical suggestions for how teachers can use this framework to help to motivate students. In this way, Dörnyei suggests that students will/can envision themselves as effective L2 speakers, acknowledge the social pressure that comes from the learning environment, and have positive learning experiences.


This chapter argues that motivation and confidence in the L2 context can be enhanced through teacher instruction that focuses on group norms and cohesiveness, interpersonal relations, student roles and the teacher’s leadership style. It argues that acceptance and cohesiveness should and can be promoted by helping students learn about each other and invest in group activities. The text focuses on methods that actively nurture motivation and confidence, such as creating learner autonomy and setting specific learner goals.


This is a UK research report that focuses on a range of activities and approaches that help learners build confidence in the classroom. While not exclusive to the ESL context, the report analyses the effectiveness of confidence-building activities for a range of adult learners. Activities included doing drama, speaking up in class and student volunteering. Tutors in the study identified key strategies in confidence building, including demonstrating what learners can do, emphasising achievements, encouraging a positive outlook and removing barriers. They also identified student self-reflection as significant to building confidence.


In this study, Gallagher identifies a relationship between confidence in a second language and willingness to communicate. Focusing on Chinese students living in the UK United Kingdom, the article explores the relationship between willingness to communicate and hassles related to communication difficulties, feelings of isolation and being time- and money-poor. The article is useful in demonstrating a link between perceptions of confidence, proficiency in a second language, and cultural adjustment.

This is an excellent resource book for language teachers and teacher-trainers. Through simple to follow and innovative classroom exercises, it provides a useful link between theories of motivation and classroom practice dedicated to confidence building. The activities cater for learners with different learning styles and at different ages and levels of proficiency.


In this early seminal text, the authors argue that it is important for teachers to recognise that foreign language anxiety has a significant impact on foreign language learning and confidence development in ESL learners. They argue for the need for teachers to be supportive and acknowledge that L2 learners can feel very isolated and helpless. The article provides suggestions for developing confidence. These include relaxation exercises, keeping a journal and making use of specialised counselling services.


This article looks at the issue of transferring learning from the classroom to outside situations and gives an overview of different types of transfer and factors affecting transfer of learning. While it is an academic read, the author provides useful insights into this important topic and discusses implications for classroom practice.


This is a useful source for teachers interested in the ‘Willingness to Communicate’ (WTC) framework which seeks to explain the factors that impact on how and whether learners seek out and engage in communication opportunities. The authors identify the key linguistic, communicative, and psychological variables influencing WTC, and distinguish between stable, long-term factors relating to the individual (e.g. personality traits), the environment (e.g. the relative socioeconomic power and prestige of the learner’s community), and transient, situational influences (e.g. a speaker’s desire to communicate with a specific person). This model gives teachers an approach to understanding why some proficient learners may be reluctant to communicate, whereas other less proficient speakers will ‘have a go’.

This article provides a useful overview of contemporary poststructuralist theories of language, identity and power that offer critical perspectives on second language learning and teaching. The authors discuss the notion of investment in language learning, and also explores the importance of ‘imagined communities’ learners, that is, the communities they with whom they compare themselves and to which they would like to belong. They also explore how identity categories like race, gender and sexuality interact with language learning. The article is useful in demonstrating how the notions of learner investment can foster positive language learning experiences and lead to the development of confidence in language learners.


The authors of this book offer interesting and useful theoretical frameworks for understanding the significance of self-esteem and self-confidence in the L2 context. These frameworks are based on the understanding that affective variables and the emotional state of learners are significant motivational factors in language learning. The individual chapters in this book provide supportive instructions and examples of how teachers can develop confidence in language learners of all ages. Rubio’s opening chapter, in particular, focuses on the role of teachers in helping learners to develop confidence in their language learning.


This article explores the mono-linguist (or native-speaker) ideology that positions L2 learners within a language-race-nationality matrix. Focusing specifically on American college students, the paper demonstrates how this kind of ideology ‘naturalises’ connections between language, national origin and race, and reproduces a hierarchical social order in which white native English speakers retain a privileged position. The article is useful in understanding how binaries between native and non-native speakers of English can have serious implications on learners’ confidence levels and their ability to become competent users of the English language. An awareness of these racial categories can help teachers to challenge unhelpful notions of the ‘logical superiority’ of English, and can be useful for teachers to address ‘common’ narratives about the laziness of immigrants and their reluctance to learn English.

In this article, Tsou proposes that student reticence be addressed through ‘participation instruction’, a form of teaching that makes the teacher’s classroom expectations explicit and provides learners with communication strategies to help them participate in class discussion. The study argues that participation instruction for high level language learners is effective and that conflicts can be reduced by creating a shared understanding of roles and aligning the expectations of teacher and students.


This chapter explores the relationship between reticence and confidence in language learners, arguing that low levels of confidence can lead to learner reticence and impact on levels of classroom participation. The factors that contribute to learner reticence are identified as fear of making mistakes, being evaluated negatively, unrealistic expectations by the teacher and the expectation that slow or shy learners will be neglected. Although based on younger learners in a different context, the chapter provides strategies for addressing the issues of reticence and developing confidence that are relevant for AMEP learners, including the use of peer support and group work in the classroom, and establishing good teacher-student relationships.


This chapter focuses on how the production of stories used to teach young learners can help foster confidence building in the ESL classroom.

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