

## Book Review

### *Motivational currents in language learning: Frameworks for focused interventions*

Authors:

Zoltán Dörnyei, Alastair Henry, Christine Muir

Publisher:

Routledge, 2016

ISBN:

978-1-138-77732-3

Pages:

204

The book *Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions* is without doubt a valuable contribution to the study of motivation to learn second or foreign languages, despite the fact that, as the authors themselves admit in the preface, there exists a vast literature on the impact of this individual difference variable. This is because it focuses on the concept of a directed motivational current or a DMC, which is defined as “. . . an intense motivational drive—or surge—which is capable of stimulating and supporting long-term behavior (such as the learning of the L2)” (p. 18). While reminiscent of the notion of flow that was introduced into psychology by Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990), DMCs represent a crucial extension on it by adopting a longer-term perspective on total absorption in a particular activity and recognizing that the process of pursuing an envisaged, highly valued goal involves a series of tasks, some of which may be enjoyable and others rather mundane. The construct offers fresh insights into the study of second language motivation, and it is of paramount

importance on both theoretical and practical grounds because, on the one hand, it integrates for the first time the initial motive for undertaking a specific course of action and subsequent motivated behavior, and, on the other, it provides an impetus for designing and implementing potentially successful motivational interventions in the classroom. It is for this reason alone that the monograph will be an inspiring and thought-provoking read for anyone interested in the role of motivation in learning additional languages.

The book opens with a preface where Zoltán Dörnyei, Alastair Henry and Christine Muir define DMCs, explain how the concept is related to language learning motivation and how it can inform classroom practices, as well as illustrating in very personal terms that “the ultimate confirmation that DMCs are real came from the experience of writing this manuscript” (p. xv). This is followed by nine chapters in which the characteristics of DMCs are described and then an attempt is made to demonstrate how the principles which underlie the concept at the individual level can be applied to the group level to make it relevant to everyday language instruction in the classroom. More specifically, Chapter One, which at the same time constitutes an introduction, contrasts DMCs with the concept of flow and presents stories of three learners that are illustrative of the occurrence of these motivational surges and serve as key points of reference for the discussion in the remainder of the book. In Chapter Two, the authors explain that DMCs represent an extension of the theory of L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2010) and the concept of vision (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014), attribute the emergence of the notion to the traditional separation of motivation and behavior in psychology as well as its reluctance to consider the temporal dimension of motivation, and argue that DMCs can aid our understanding of sustained motivation and provide a blueprint for engendering this type of motivation in learners. Chapter Three focuses on the directness of motivational drives, emphasizing the role of vision, sensory elements, self-concordant, or highly personalized, goals as well as proximal subgoals, stressing that for this to happen two things are indispensable, that is a favorable alignment of some initial conditions (i.e., clear goals, sense of ownership and control, perceived balance of challenges and skills, openness to the DMC experience and the existence of certain motivational preconditions in the classroom) and the occurrence of the right trigger (e.g., an arising opportunity or a reaction to a challenge to the self-image). In Chapter Five, emphasis is shifted to the unique structure of DMCs which ensures that motivation is kept alive over time, a phenomenon that is attributed to the gradual emergence of certain behavioral routines, a sole focus on the goal to be achieved, identification of subgoals that constitute critical progress checks as well as the provision of affirmative feedback, both of which give learners a sense of satisfaction and fuel further effort

along the DMC pathway. In Chapter Six, the point is made that positive emotions are an inherent characteristics of a DMC and that this sense of well-being is the result of eudaimonia, or “a constellation of subjective experiences including feelings of rightness and centeredness in one’s actions, identity, strength of purpose, and competence” (Waterman, 2008, p. 236), and authenticity of what one is doing, which comes from congruence with ideal self-images. Chapter Seven focuses on the final stage of DMCs, where motivation gradually begins to decrease, the performance of tasks or activities starts to require more and more effort and fatigue may set in, which may be accompanied by both positive feelings, reflective of the satisfaction with the achievement of a highly desired goal, and negative feelings, related to the sacrifices made or a sense of loss. The authors argue that what is of critical importance at this stage is support on the part of the teacher which can take the form of raising learners’ awareness of which behavioral routines falling within the scope of a DMC can be beneficially maintained and helping them pursue their goals within the confines of formal instruction. The last two chapters aim to demonstrate how the key principles of DMCs can be successfully capitalized upon in the language classroom where teachers have to deal with groups rather than single individuals. First, in Chapter Eight, the characteristics of DMCs at the individual level are extrapolated to the realities of the language classroom, an argument is made that such group-level DMCs are best manifested in intensive group projects, and key features of successful projects of this kind are outlined. Second, in Chapter Nine, the final part of the book, concrete guidelines are provided for how such intensive projects should be successfully implemented, with a focus on the need to develop a project-based mindset and to ensure the requisite classroom conditions with respect to appropriate classroom dynamics, based on Dörnyei and Murphy (2003), the provision of adequate support structures and facilities (e.g., various resources), the selection of clear and engaging goals, and the formulation of tangible outcomes. The authors also discuss seven frameworks for focused interventions which emphasize different aspects of DMCs, that is *All eyes on the final product*, *Step by step*, *The BIG picture*, *That’s me!*, *Detective work*, *Story sequels*, and *Study abroad*. It should be mentioned that some of the chapters are accompanied by boxes with guidelines for motivational classroom practices, regarding, for instance, promoting long-term motivation or fostering the flow experience.

Zoltán Dörnyei, Alastair Henry and Christine Muir should without doubt be commended for putting together this inspiring monograph and the way in which they have gone about this task for several reasons. First, the book makes a major and indisputably novel contribution to theorizing about the concept of motivation, building and expanding upon the most dominant theories, thus delineating new directions in research on second language learning motivation in general and

motivational dynamics in particular. Second, the authors have done an outstanding job of integrating theory, research and practice, a feat that is truly laudable in light of the fact that few publications of this kind strive and ultimately manage to include concrete pedagogical implications. This is achieved through the provision of multiple real-life examples, many of which are set in the classroom, constant references to three cases of learners introduced at the beginning of the book, the lists of specific guidelines with respect to how DMCs can be initiated and sustained, or how intensive projects can be successfully organized in the classroom. Third, the value of the monograph lies in the fact that it is interdisciplinary, combining insights from the domains of second language acquisition, and cognitive and social psychology, a feature that is clearly worth emulating in other areas as this ensures obtaining greater insights into the issues under investigation. Fourth, and no less importantly, the book is simply highly readable thanks to the comprehensible language used, numerous examples and excerpts taken from the stories of learners from different contexts. As regards the areas in which the book could be improved upon, the only thought that crossed my mind when I got to the end of the last chapter was that something should have been included on the methodology of research into DMCs, both at the individual and group level, since not all readers may be familiar with these issues. While they can refer to the publications cited throughout the volume, it could be argued that an inclusion of a separate chapter dedicated to such considerations would have become a further strength of the book. This shortcoming, though, is a relatively minor one compared to all the undeniable contributions that the book makes to our understanding of the role of motivation in second language learning. Thus, I am confident that the monograph will be of relevance not only to researchers conducting studies on motivation in learning a second or foreign language, somewhat irrespective of the theoretical perspective they embrace, undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students working on their research projects, but also teachers wishing to trigger DMCs in individual students or groups of students they work with. I can only wish that there would be more publications of this kind as our field would surely benefit from such successful attempts to translate theoretical considerations into classroom practice.

Reviewed by

Mirośław Pawlak

Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz, Poland

State University of Applied Sciences, Konin, Poland

*pawlakmi@amu.edu.pl*

## References

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2010). Researching motivation: From integrativeness to the ideal L2 self. In S. Hunston & D. Oakey (Eds.), *Introducing applied linguistics: Concepts and skills* (pp. 74-86). London: Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Kubanyiova, M. (2014). *Motivating learners, motivating teachers. Building vision in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Murphy, T. (2003). *Group dynamics in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Waterman, A. S. (2008). Reconsidering happiness. An eudaimonist's perspective. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 41-79.