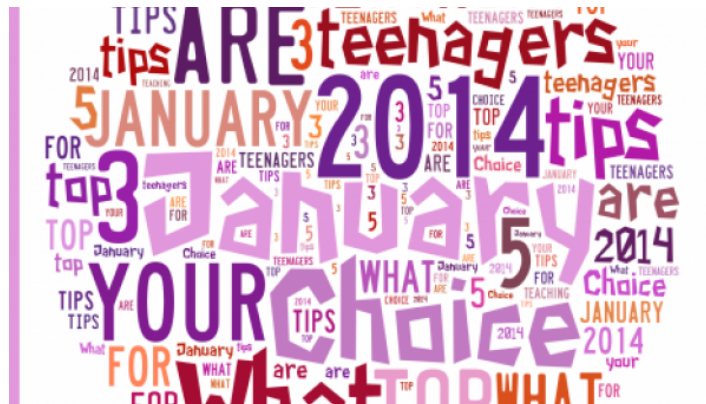


3 techniques for increasing teenage student motivation in the language classroom



'Teenage dreams, so hard to beat.'

If any sentence were to sum up what it means to be a teenager, it would probably be this line from the classic song 'Teenage Kicks' by The Undertones. This is an age at which everything changes. If we were to put all those learners that we teach on a continuum, we would have young learners at one end and adults at the other. While we would all agree that teenagers lie somewhere in the middle of such a scale, it would nonetheless be difficult to place them exactly, regardless of the criterion.

While young learners are so full of zest that most activities are met with bundles of enthusiasm, adult learners are much more focused on meeting their language goals, while also bringing a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience to the language classroom. Teenagers are clearly different, and this is never clearer than when it comes to trying to motivate them.

Although teens can be as knowledgeable and perceptive as their adult counterparts, they are not usually the most talkative of age groups. Naturally, this can leave us as teachers feeling frustrated and discouraged by their perceived lack of interest. Nevertheless, teens aren't that different and by no means unreachable in terms of motivation. As with any other age group, it's simply a case of finding ways to pique interest. With this in mind, here are three strategies that anyone can use to increase teenage student motivation in the language classroom.

2. Make use of pop culture whenever you can

Perhaps the simplest rule of thumb when teaching teens is the need to consider their interests. Teenagers have their finger on the pulse of current events and will like it when this is used as a springboard for classroom activities. If you're not willing to discuss things such as Lady Gaga's latest album, or any of the Twilight books or films, then you are missing a great opportunity to connect with your teen students. However, proceed with caution.

Things you can easily do wrong

- ♦ Don't assume that you can be the one to choose. The chances are, your finger is farther off the pulse than you imagine. Think of all those course book references to pop stars and actors that date very quickly... you get the idea.
- ♦ Don't act as if you enjoy the things they like. If you merely pretend to like so and so's new album, you'll be spotted as a fake immediately: this could negatively affect your relationship with the class, who will assume you're trying too hard!
- ♦ Times change fast. Just because your teens liked something last year doesn't mean this year's classes will have the same response. Pop culture has a short shelf life; think about this when you invest time and energy in making classroom materials.

How to get it right

- ♦ Conduct some kind of survey at the start of a course asking about what the students like. Be honest and say that you will try and incorporate their interests into classes during the course.
- ♦ Allow the students to choose materials based on what they like. Go through this with them before a class when what they've chosen can be related to whatever teaching objective it lends itself to

2. Cater to their skills and exploit their talents

All teens are talented at one thing or another. Indeed, in many cases they will be better than you at a lot of things. Taking the time to get to know a little about your students and discovering what these talents are can bring many rewards to your language classroom. Once again, though, you should tread carefully.

Things you can easily do wrong

- ♦ Finding out that one of your students is a brilliant singer is one thing. Demanding that this person get up in front of class and sing a song in English is something else. Some teens will enjoy the spotlight, whereas for others this will be their worst nightmare come true. Don't pressurize teenagers to showcase what they can do unless they want to do it.
- ♦ Don't just assume that someone in class will be good at doing that one thing that is necessary to complete an activity. Base the way you plan classes and activities around the strengths you know they have.

How to get it right

- ♦ Develop classroom activities that allow for these different skill sets to be utilized naturally. For instance, a poster that displays what students have learned in class

that day is great for getting students who are artistically-inclined to contribute a little bit more than they would normally.

- ♦ Use technology in much the same way: find out who is tech savvy and give them the specific role as 'tech-head' when setting up tasks like PowerPoint presentations, while other learners take on different roles.

3. Utilize video clips in lessons

Videos have always had enormous potential in the language class. Those of us who have been teachers for a while might remember the olden days when it took great effort to wheel in a TV and a VHS or DVD player to the classroom to teach a video lesson based on material that came with the course book. Fortunately, thanks to recent advances in technology, using visual stimuli is much easier - and much more motivating - nowadays. As with the previous points, though, you need to think through what you're doing.

Things you can easily do wrong

- ♦ As with the use of pop culture, don't assume you should be the one to choose the material. One of the things I love about YouTube is that people are always willing to share the good stuff that they find. The chances are your teenage students are going to watch a video clip during break between classes. If and when they ask you to watch, make use of this opportunity to be introduced to a potential classroom resource!
- ♦ One forty-minute lesson block does not equal one forty-minute video clip. Never use lesson length as an absolute indicator of how much of a video clip you will be able to watch, nor the amount of time teenage students will watch before their interest starts to wane.

How to get it right

- ♦ As with their pop culture interests, put the power in their hands. Explain what you will be covering in the upcoming lesson and ask your teens to research YouTube for a short clip on that subject. Trust me: this is homework that doesn't feel like homework.
- ♦ Length, or rather lack of it, is the key. To keep teens focused on the task, choose short interviews, movie trailers, music videos, or how to videos on YouTube.
- ♦ If you can, download the video clip beforehand, so that you're not overly reliant on a constant internet connection.

Summing up □

Motivating teens need not be an impossible task. By incorporating what they like into what we do, we can start to build the bridges we need to connect with them as language learners.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/yearinthelifeof/3-techniques-increasing-teenage-student-motivation-language-classroom>

If you found these suggestions useful, please join me again soon for more ideas on how to keep teens motivated.

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