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Does an Early Second Language Immersion Experience Impact Student Motivation?

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Does an Early Second Language Immersion Experience Impact Student Motivation?

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Education degree.

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To Dr. Wendy Sherman Heckler

Without you, this would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine how an early immersion second language (L2) school experience might impact students' motivation to learn the target language. The study was conducted in a Spanish Immersion Academy in the Columbus City (Ohio) school district. Students were surveyed about their motivation for learning Spanish. Three K-3 classes were observed and students' engagement in different kinds of instruction was recorded. Teachers were interviewed in an effort to obtain their views on motivating students. The data collected suggest that learning motivation was highly valued by teachers in the school. Teachers generally reported trends in learner motivation that are consistent with the educational psychology literature that young learners are naturally internally motivated, and that motivation becomes more external and complicated as students age. Where teachers did feel a need to motivate their students, positive reinforcement and well-designed instruction were the two most frequently-adopted motivational strategies cited as important by teachers and observed in the classroom lessons.

SECTION ONE

Introduction

As an international graduate student at Otterbein University, I have attempted to

connect my coursework in education with my experiences growing up and teaching in

China. Because I teach English in China, I enrolled in courses offered in Otterbein's

TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program. These courses

focus on strategies for teaching English Language Learners (ELLs), and allowed me to

consider ways in which the English language in particular may present learning

difficulties for my students. China has had an increasingly large population of English

learners since it announced the Open-Up Reform policy 33 years ago. English has been

built into the public school curriculum and has become a mandatory subject as early as

grade one all the way through graduate school for any major. In other words, every

Chinese student pursuing a bachelor's degree in the public school system must spend an

average of no less than 10 years learning this foreign language. Consequently, TESOL

has become a major research interest in China.

However, there are differences between ELLs in China and ELLs in the United

States. For example, ELLs in China do not have an authentic target language speaking

environment to support English learning. ELLs in the United States are exposed to a rich target language environment where they hear and read a great amount of English and frequently are required to use the written and spoken English in their daily lives. This reality explains why English language learning has been so challenging for ELLs in China: they are exposed to limited authentic input resources and encounter mainly non-authentic output-requirements in real life.

Taking the above-mentioned features into consideration, it becomes apparent that ELLs in China share more common with foreign language learners (L2 learners) in the United States. This realization led me to pursue a capstone project that might supplement my knowledge of teaching English to non-native speakers with some understanding of L2 teaching in order to better help my ELLs in China.

Significance of the Study

As mentioned earlier, limited input resources and a lack of authentic output opportunities present difficulties for ELLs in China—it is not easy for students to grasp a language without constantly using it. When learning a language is not reinforced, it easily loses its appeal for learners. As I see it, the challenge for English teachers in China is how to better motivate ELLs and convert a passive English learning process into an active and meaningful one. Thus, the focus of this study falls on L2 learning motivation.

One model of L2 instruction that tries to address this lack of a rich target language environment for L2 learners is the immersion model. In an L2 immersion program, at least 50% of the school day is spent teaching in the target (second) language (Genesee, 2005). The L2 is used to teach other academic subjects, not simply to teach the second language. In an early immersion model, nearly all instruction is given in the second language (L2) in the first few grades (e.g., kindergarten through second grade), after which the native language (L1) is used more frequently until instruction is 50% L2 and 50% L1. Studies have shown that early immersion programs are successful in developing students' L2 fluency (Knell et al., 2007).Because the tendency in China is to expose children to English learning as early as possible, I was interested in considering L2 instruction in early childhood. I have seen English learning in China as a problem of motivation, so I wondered about the relationship between L2 immersion instruction and motivation. On the one hand, immersion instruction solves the problem of providing regular output opportunities for L2 use, which suggests that students in immersion programs would be more motivated to learn the second language than students who just receive targeted instruction in L2. On the other hand, could immersion experiences affect students' motivation in other unexpected ways? For example, would total early immersion in L2 frustrate young students (who are still learning L1) and lead to decreased motivation?

I approached the Columbus Spanish Immersion Academy (CSIA) about participating in this study. CSIA is a K-8 school in which students are expected to become proficient in a foreign language (Spanish) in addition to traditional subject areas (language arts, mathematics, social studies and science). The school follows an early immersion model, where early grades are taught exclusively in the target language and eventually, instruction takes place in equally in L2 and L1. The question guiding my research was: Does an early immersion experience impact students' motivation to learn a second language, and if so, how? Sub-questions I sought to answer were: How important do CSIA teachers feel student motivation is for successful L2 learning? How do they characterize their students' motivation to learn Spanish? What specific instructional techniques do teachers use to motivate their students? How do the students themselves characterize their motivation to learn Spanish?

SECTION TWO

Literature Review

Role of Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

Motivation is a complex and challenging issue facing L2 teachers (Scheidecker &

Freeman, 1999). Many teachers and researchers would agree that motivation is one of the

key issues in successful L2 learning, and knowing how to apply skills to motivate

learners is crucial for success (Dornyei, 2001). Dornyei (2001) reported that regardless of

their language aptitude, 99 per cent of L2 learners who are highly motivated will be able

to master a reasonable working knowledge of the target language. He also noted that

without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot

accomplish the long-term goal of being L2 proficient. Oxford and Shearin (1994)

suggested that motivation is one of the main elements determining success in learning a

second or foreign language. In general, as the inner driving force of an individual toward

the learning of another language, motivation's crucial role in L2 acquisition is hard to

deny.

Motivational Orientation: Integrative Versus Instrumental

Canadian social psychologist Robert Gardner is one of the most relevant researchers on motivation theories in the L2 acquisition field (Dornyei, 2001). According to Gardner (1985), motivation is the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of L2 learning. Gardner also states that a favorable attitude toward L2 learning is necessary for success. In his1985 article, Gardner identified two motivational orientations: integrative and instrumental (as cited in Dornyei, 2001). To Dornyei (2003), the integrative motivation is about interpersonal motivation while the instrumental motivation has a strong practical quality. An L2 learner who has integrative motivation is one who has an openness to, and appreciation of, other cultural groups. The instrumentally motivated person may be motivated to acquire an L2 in order to attain a better job or to achieve academic success.

According to Blemechri and Hummel (1998), whether integrative or instrumental, the orientation is an overarching drive sustaining students' motivation to learn an L2. It seems that an integrative orientation is more valued by educators than an instrumental one, in that interactively motivated learners tend to be more active learners. Gardner and Lambert (1972) concluded that integratively-oriented learners generally want to acquire the L2 in order to converse with, find out about, and perhaps even emulate speakers of the target language (Basista & Hill, 2010). The positive feeling that these learners hold push them to keep learning in a more sustainable way. On the other hand,

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instrumentally-oriented learners are motivated to learn the L2 for pragmatic reasons such as being more competitive in the job market or simply living up to others' expectations or social requirements. The biggest concern about the instrumental orientation is that learning can stop anytime once the pragmatic goals are reached.

Nonetheless**,** there has been some controversy over whether it's true that an integrative orientation outweighs instrumental orientation in L2 acquisition. Gardner and Lambert (1972) concluded that integratively-oriented learners tended to attain higher levels of proficiency in L2 than those with an instrumental orientation. But, this point has been challenged. Brown (2007) stated that in countries such as India, where English has become an international language, L2 can be acquired quite successfully for instrumental purposes alone. It's also true in my homeland, China.

Motivational Orientation: Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic

Besides integrative orientation and instrumental orientation, another quite similar pair of motivational concepts exists in the research literature: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Reward-based teaching practices have been widely discussed by researchers in terms of these two motivational characterizations (Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). In the early education classroom, a reward system is a commonly used method to motivate young learners. A central concern about extrinsically rewarding students is that extrinsic motivation substantially undermines

learners' intrinsic motivation and performance (Deci et al., 2001). To explore the

effectiveness of extrinsic rewards and punishment by teachers, a study was conducted in

a PreK-3 building. The researchers (Moberly, Waddle & Duff, 2005) reported that

although 79% of their survey respondents chose the instructional practices of the teacher

as the most positive influence on child behavior, the large majority admitted that they

regularly use extrinsic rewards as the main source of motivation.

On the other hand, Cameron (2001) concluded that the negative effects of rewards

were limited and easily avoidable. Some other researchers would argue that a well-

designed reward system can also encourage intrinsic motivation if rewards are used

"carefully and thoughtfully" (Shiller & O'Flynn, 2008). In other words, it is possible for

learners to develop out of an external motivation orientation through "internalization." In

the internalization process, learners integrate the original external regulations into their

integral beliefs, and thus gain "internalized motivation," which could be even more stable

and dependable over time than intrinsic motivation (Ormrod, 2012, Chapter 6). This is a

piece of important information for teachers because so much value is placed on the role

of intrinsic motivation in students' learning.

Motivation and Child Development

Researchers studying young children have noted that there are developmental

aspects to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation orientations. Carlton and Winsler (1998)

pointed out that there is an innate need for every newborn to interact with the

environment, which is the newborn's way of learning. The drive for this kind of learning

is based solely within the child and requires no outside rewards for its continuation. Deci

(1975) argued that this is a human's inherent intrinsic motivation. Inherent intrinsic

motivation explains the fact that in early elementary grades, most students are eager and

excited to learn new things. However, this inherent motivation does not necessarily have

a stable nature. In a study of third to eighth grade students conducted by Corpus and her

colleagues (2009), intrinsic motivation was found to be highest among the third graders

and lowest among the eighth graders. This finding confirmed a fairly strong consensus

that intrinsic motivation tends to decline with increasing age.

The unfortunate implication of these findings is that the longer learners stay in the

school the less they appear to be continually intrinsically motivated for learning. What

happens to the intrinsic motivation? Researchers believe that intrinsic motivation is

related to three basic psychological needs of every learner: the need for *competence*,

autonomy and *relatedness* (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). *Competence* means

that learners need to have a faith in themselves that they can effectively deal with what

they are learning (Elliot, & Dweck, 2005a) so that they can experience the joy of

fulfillment. *Autonomy* means that students need to have a say in choosing what and how

they are learning so that they feel in control of themselves and enjoy learning for their

own purposes (Deci, & Moller, 2005). Finally, *relatedness* means that learners need

confidence that they are in the environment where they belong, and that they are

connected, loved and respected (Ormrod, 2012, Chapter 6). Compared to younger

learners, who are eager and excited to learn new things without an expectation of success,

older learners have a stronger awareness of these needs and it is easier for them to be

affected by the lack of one or more of these three basic needs.

In most cases, these three needs of *competence*, *autonomy* and *relatedness* (Deci,

Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991) are interrelated. When one or more of the

psychological needs are affected, intrinsic motivation can fade and possibly be replaced

by extrinsic motivation (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, &Hayenga, 2009). Take poor grades

as an example: when a learner has consistently poor grades in one school subject, the

learner can start to question his subject *competency* and may feel frustrated when

comparing his/her poor marks to peers, which threatens the need of *relatedness*. At this

point the learner's intrinsic motivation gives way to a desire for external reinforcement,

such as encouragement from teachers or attention from parents. This learner may put

more effort into study of the subject, but only for those external reinforcements. Or, the

original intrinsic motivation can simply disappear without being replaced, in which case

the learner may draw back and quit learning. This effect was also noted by Corpus

(2009): poor achievement on regular classroom assessments may minimally contribute to

a shift from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation. In summary, the interchangeable nature of

intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has been theorized in the literature and their

development has a close relationship with children's development.

Second Language (L2) Immersion Learning

Immersion programs were originated in Montreal, Canada. They are programs

created by educators to build both the students' home language (L1) and a second

language (L2) into everyday learning as the media of academic instruction (Genesee,

2005). Genesee (2005) pointed out in his report that immersion programs are a form of

additive bilingual education because they aim for functional proficiency in both the

student's L1 and L2. The distinguishing feature of an immersion program is its more

communicative approach to L2 learning compared to a traditional approach that focuses

on the development of a defined set of language skills (Genesee, 1983).Immersion

programs do not only increase the exposure to the target language L2 but also create a

new communicative context to encourage authentic output purposes for the L2.

Immersion education has received increasing attention since the 1960s as one of

the most effective means of facilitating children's L2 learning. Several studies (Genesee,

1978; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Swain, &Lapkin, 1982) were done to evaluate the

efficiency of the immersion programs in terms of L1 development, L2 development and

academic achievement in various content areas. Many other studies (Alanis, 2008;

Carver-Akers, 2007; &Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010) tried to examine L2

immersion learners' cultural preferences and self-identity in an immersion environment.

Immersion programs have been shown to be successful for developing L2 fluency but not

much research has explored the impact that immersion programs have on students'

learning motivation: Will early immersion affect L2 learners' motivation? Does

providing a rich L2 environment motivate students to learn, or does it frustrate learners

who are still learning to be proficient in the L1? Most of these questions remain

unanswered.

SECTION THREE

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

This study was conducted in the Columbus Spanish Immersion Academy (CSIA).

CSIA is an alternative school in Columbus public school system. Currently it has an

average daily enrollment of 398 students

(http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2010-2011/BUILD/001925.pdf) in grades K-

8, including 51.2% Black/non-Hispanic, 32.8% Hispanic, 7.2% multi-racial and 8.5%

white/non-Hispanic students. All the students in CSIA are enrolled through a lottery

process. In other words, unlike a neighborhood school, where students would attend

based on the geographic proximity of their homes to the school, CSIA students apply to

attend, and applications are selected in a district-wide drawing.

Observations

In order to better understand CSIA student motivation, I wanted to observe some

routine classroom interactions. The participants for this part of study included three

selected teachers with a total of 74 students in their classes: 28 from a kindergarten class,

22 from a first grade class and 24 from a third grade class. The three teachers were

recommended by the principal as outstanding in inspiring students to learn. Letters of consent for adults were given to the participating teachers (See Appendix A), while letters of parental consent were sent home to all the student participants' parents together with a Video/Photo Release Form (See Appendix B & C).

The regular school day at CSIA starts at 8:45 a.m., with a lunch break and recess for grades K-3 from 11:15-12 p.m., an afternoon break from 2:30-2:45 p.m. and school dismissal at 3:25 p.m. The curriculum for kindergarten and for first grade focused primarily on (Spanish) language development and basic mathematical concepts. The third grade curriculum is broken into different subject areas and I chose to observe its Spanish language arts session every day in the afternoon. All classes are instructed in Spanish.

Classroom observation data was gathered over an eight-day period in early 2012. The following was the daily observation schedule:

> - 8:45-9:55 a.m. First grade

> - 10-11:10 a.m. Kindergarten

> - 11:15-12 p.m. lunch & teacher interviews

> - 12-1:30 p.m.   Third grade

First grade. During my observation time, the first grade class was learning letter "J" in Spanish and the addition of numbers smaller than 20. The session from 8:45-9:55 a.m. was organized in a fairly fixed daily routine:

8:45-9:00 a.m.   Students' attendance, lunch count and group morning greeting;

9:00-9:05 a.m.   Everyday quick review: date, weather, number 1-20, months,

seasons, the sound of the weekly letter.

9:05-9:25 a.m.   Quiz: vocabulary & math

9:25-9:30 a.m.   New Vocabulary

9:30-9:45 p.m.   New Story (small book, read-aloud)

Kindergarten. In the kindergarten class, the session normally started with a

focused lesson at 10 a.m., presented by the teacher introducing learning content. It lasted

for about 15 minutes followed by 10-15 minutes of students' seat work, always involving

coloring. Sometimes two sets of such instruction were completed in a one hour session.

At about 11 a.m., students usually started cleaning tables and got in line, waiting to be

taken to the lunch hall. Kindergarteners were learning about occupations, shapes, letters,

and the addition of numbers under 10 during the observation.

Third grade. The sessions observed in the third grade classroom started after the

lunch break and recess. During instruction, the teacher combined either social studies or

science with Spanish language arts. Compared to kindergarten and the first grade classes,

third grade was a more academic environment, and the teacher's well-designed

instruction was a highlight.

Teacher interviews and survey

In order to better understand teachers' perspectives on student motivation, I asked my teacher participants to also engage in an interview conversations with me about their beliefs (see Appendix D for interview questions). In addition to the three teachers whose classes I observed, three other teachers, one from kindergarten, one from first grade and one from fifth grade, volunteered to complete a written survey questionnaire for this study (see Appendix E for questionnaire). The CSIA principal also agreed to share her own views about motivating L2 students on a written questionnaire (see Appendix F).

Student survey

Finally, I wanted to understand what students would say about their own motivation to learn Spanish, so I recruited some CSIA students to participate in a survey (see Appendix G).

The original plan was to survey only the K-3 students in the three classes that I observed so that the data collected could be used to triangulate with my observations of the students' performance in these classes. However, when I presented the student motivation questionnaire to the three teachers, only the third grade teacher thought her students would be able to comprehend the questions and respond to them meaningfully. The two teachers from the first grade and kindergarten classes believed that their students could be surveyed only if an adult could sit down with each student to individually

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administer the questions. However, the daily pace of teaching in these classrooms could not accommodate the amount of time needed for me to survey the 28 kindergarteners and 22 first-graders in this one-on-one manner, so only 19 third-graders completed the student motivation questionnaire.

To supplement the data from the younger students, I came up with the idea of comparing survey results from the third-graders with that of a much older group of students, hoping to see whether I could detect differences in the type of motivation students seemed to display toward their L2 learning, e.g. extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation. I was able to recruit 62 students in the seventh and eighth grade to complete the student motivation questionnaire, as well.

Data Collected & Analysis

Classroom observations

A structured observation form was used to record my observations in the kindergarten, first and second grade classrooms. The form was designed by merging two existing forms used for field observations at Otterbein and designed by Dr. Patty Ryan. There are four parts to the observation form (see Appendix H):

➢ Time: I recorded the time when a teacher's actions shifted from one activity to another happened, e.g. 10:00, 10:07, 10:15, etc.

➢ Teacher's actions: I recorded a description of the teacher's action, e.g.

demonstrating, lecturing, modeling reading, working with students, etc.

➢ Students' responses: I recorded students' responses during the teacher's action described in the last section, e.g. students were quiet and observant while teacher was lecturing; students were coloring their own worksheets while teacher was working with one student or a small group of students.

➢ Interactivity? What kind?: I recorded a description of the interaction between the teacher and students, especially during focused lessons or lecturing, e.g. students had hands-up to ask or answer questions about the content either as individuals or groups. For "What kind?" I indicated into which category the particular interaction fell:

- Positive—a question, comment, or answer related to the educational task

- Neutral—positive but not related to the educational task, e.g., you look nice today, how was your weekend, etc.

- Negative—not related to the educational task and had negative influence on the class progression, e.g. Teacher: you are not helping me teaching here! Student: It's boring.

The observation forms were analyzed for:

➢ how much time out of the whole session the teacher took to present lecture and how much was left for students to be actively doing something rather

than just listening. This helped to get perspective on how much autonomy students were given in the class, which, according to the literature, should contribute to students' intrinsic motivation.

➢ how much interaction occurred during teacher-centered presentation, indicating the extent of student involvement in active learning and the degree of positive interaction. This focused analysis on the teacher-student relationship, which is tied to a student's need for relatedness; at the same time it helped to determine whether or not and how much the student's need for self-competence in the class was met, as both needs contribute to intrinsic motivation.

➢ whether any particular teaching practices being used could arouse obvious positive student engagement or result in reducing student's engagement. These practices might reveal some insight into how students' motivational patterns were changed when different teaching practices occurred, e.g. intrinsic motivation replaced extrinsic motivation or extrinsic motivation was internalized.

The classroom observations undertaken for this study did not require any changes in the original curriculum or any teaching routines. Informal face to face interviews with conveniently selected students about their perceptions of the classroom learning experience were conducted during play time and recorded on the observation sheets.

Teacher interviews and surveys

Face to face interviews concerning student motivation and instructional strategies used in motivating students were conducted with the three recommended teachers whose classrooms were observed in this study. Three additional teachers completed written questionnaires that sought to obtain the same information covered in the interviews. Three questions asked in the interview and on the questionnaire focused on teachers' current perceptions about learning motivation's role in teaching, how much their current students were motivated and the influence that the immersion process seems to have on students' motivation to learn. Another three questions focused on instructional strategies; teachers were asked to share at least one strategy that successfully increased or dramatically decreased their student's motivation, and also to point out the biggest challenges they perceived for young students to learn a foreign language (see Appendix D for teacher interview questions).

A slightly different version of the questionnaire was designed for the principal. In addition to the questions asked of classroom teachers mentioned above, more information about the uniqueness of student body, expectations for teachers and the whole immersion school environment were addressed to the principal.

Written notes were taken during the original interviews and these were later transferred to a Word document. Data were examined for themes and responses were

coded and grouped into categories. All of the teachers' responses to each question were

collected and loaded into the online Wordle program (www.wordle.net). The program

generated a text collage image in which the more frequently a word or phrase was

recorded the bigger the font it was shown in on the text collage (see Appendix I & J for

the Wordle results). Although this does not substitute for analysis, it provides a way to

determine whether frequently-mentioned ideas corresponded to the themes noted in

coding analysis.

Student survey

The questionnaire designed for the survey of CSIA students contained three

sections: demographic information, multiple choice questions and open-ended questions

(see Appendix G). In the demographic information section, students were asked for their

grade level, age, gender, ethnicity/race and the home language. I collected ethnicity/race

and home language items in an attempt to determine how many students can or have to

speak Spanish at home, which may affect their motivation to learn the language. The

three multiple choice questions on the questionnaire were designed to see how passionate

students were about Spanish learning, how much they enjoyed attending CSIA and how

often they communicate in Spanish after school hours. Two open-response questions

asked students their opinion of "the best thing" and "the worst thing" about learning

Spanish. It was hoped that the answers to these questions would provide some insight

into the students' drive to learn.

Twenty-four questionnaires were distributed to the third grade class and 19 were returned; 70 copies were handed out to the seventh and eighth grade classes with 62 copies returned (34 from the seventh grade and 28 from the eighth grade).

The data collected from the demographic and multiple choice sections of the questionnaire were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet for numerical analysis, and the responses to the open-ended questions were typed into a Word document. Data from the multiple choice questions were analyzed for the frequency of response to each choice. As in the teacher surveys, qualitative data was examined for themes and then placed in the Wordle program for another way to consider the frequency of various statements given in the responses.

Validity

Multiple forms of data were collected in order to provide validity to the research process. Teachers' statements about student motivation and instructional practices were compared with data from classroom observations for consistency. Third grade students' reported motivation was also considered in light of the classroom observation data. The principal's responses also served as a comparison point for the teachers' statements about and researchers' observation of student motivation.

SECTION FOUR

Findings

Learning Motivation in an L2 Immersion Setting

This study attempted to determine whether and how an early immersion L2 instructional model might affect young students' motivation. In an effort to answer that question, sub-questions were also researched, including: How important do CSIA teachers feel student motivation is for successful L2 learning? How do they characterize their students' motivation to learn Spanish? What specific instructional techniques do teachers use to motivate their students? How do the students themselves characterize their motivation to learn Spanish?

CSIA teachers' beliefs about student motivation

All the six of the CSIA teachers consulted for this study agreed that learning motivation is important for Spanish learners; five of the six characterized it as extremely important. Interestingly enough, the teacher who said that motivation was "important" (not "extremely" so) has a poster about "Motivation" prominently displayed in her classroom. Four teachers believed that students in their current classes are highly motivated and the other two indicated that their learners are somewhat motivated. It was

noteworthy that the teachers of older students (third and fifth grade) were those who reported lower student motivation; kindergarten and first grade teachers did not feel that their students needed to be motivated to learn in any appreciable way.

There were differences in how the kindergarten and first grade teachers whose classrooms I observed for this study felt about the nature of their students' motivation. The kindergarten teacher, Ms. M, explained that "many students at this age (K) are very enthusiastic learners." She stressed that enthusiasm for learning is one of the natural attributes of kindergarten children. In contrast, rather than contributing her students' motivation to their natures, Ms. G, the first grade teacher I observed, described students' family support as having a tremendous influence in motivating her students to learn. Besides the family's role, the teacher acknowledged some of her students' intrinsic motivation. She said,

> *I have one student who just loves Spanish. She is eager to hear the language and speak the language and it has nothing to do with her family. She simply loves the language. Learning Spanish makes her happy* (Ms. G, interview notes, February 27, 2012).

Ms. B, who teaches third grade, held a different view of her students' learning motivation. She reported having spent time earlier in the year talking with her 24 third graders about motivation. She framed the motivation discussion to her students by asking

the question "Why we are learning Spanish?"; asking them to think about it and sharing

her thoughts with them. Ms. B felt that her students were old enough to comprehend

ideas like "better job opportunities in the future" and "better prepared for ever-changing

world" as reasons to learn Spanish. She thinks her students are somewhat more motivated

now but also feels that motivation is important enough for her to be addressing constantly

in her classroom. Ms. B mentioned in the interview that appropriate challenging

classroom tasks can effectively motivate her students because completing such tasks

brings students a sense of accomplishment. "Students need to be proud of themselves,"

she noted (Ms. B, interview notes, February 24, 2012). The third grade teacher's

comments almost exactly echoed what Ormrod (2012, Chapter 6) mentions in her

educational psychology book: that intrinsic motivation to learn and master school subject

matter declines sometime between grades three and nine. Third grade is typically a

starting point for this decline. The older learners are, the more frequently they are

reminded of the importance of pragmatic achievements such as good grades or college

admission, and "they begin to evaluate school subjects in terms of their relevance to such

[long-term goals], rather than in terms of any intrinsic appeal" (Ormrod, p. 191).

CSIA students' observed and reported motivation

Students who completed the motivation survey were asked "How do you like

learning Spanish so far?" The question is important because as one indicator of intrinsic

motivation, passion for the target language can outweigh other negative emotional

aspects of learning (Gardner, & Lambert, 1972). One hundred percent of third graders' responses (n=19) were positive, as seen in Figure 1. Despite being described by their teacher as being "somewhat motivated," third grade students at least reported enjoying learning the L2.
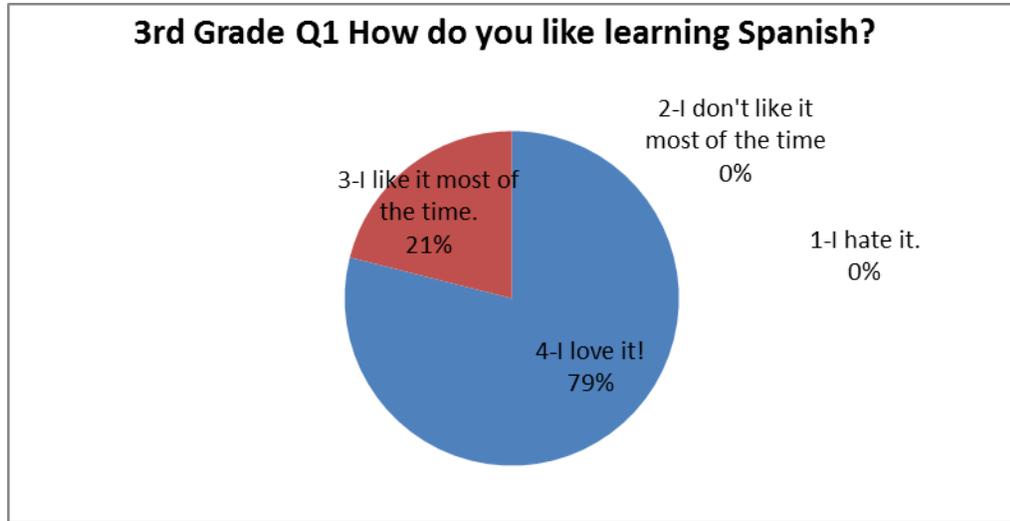
*Figure 1.*Third grade student responses to "How do you like learning Spanish?"

Although they could not formally complete the student questionnaire, students in the kindergarten class did get sent to me by their teacher to talk briefly during their play time. I talked to 12 kindergarteners out of 28 in the class I observed, and 100% of them gave positive answers to the questions "Do you like Spanish?" or "How do you like learning Spanish so far?" as well as "Do you like this school?" or "How much do you like this school?" Although the procedure was not scientific, and young students are known to answer in the way they think an adult wants them to answer, no hesitation or instant negative reactions were detected in my interviews with these students.

Compared to these younger children, the survey results from the seventh and eighth grade classes resulted in quite a different answer distribution, as shown Figures 2 and 3 below.

7th Grade Q1 How do you like learning Spanish?

1-I hate it.
3%

2-I don't like it most of the time
9%

4-I love it!
26%

3-I like it most of the time.
62%
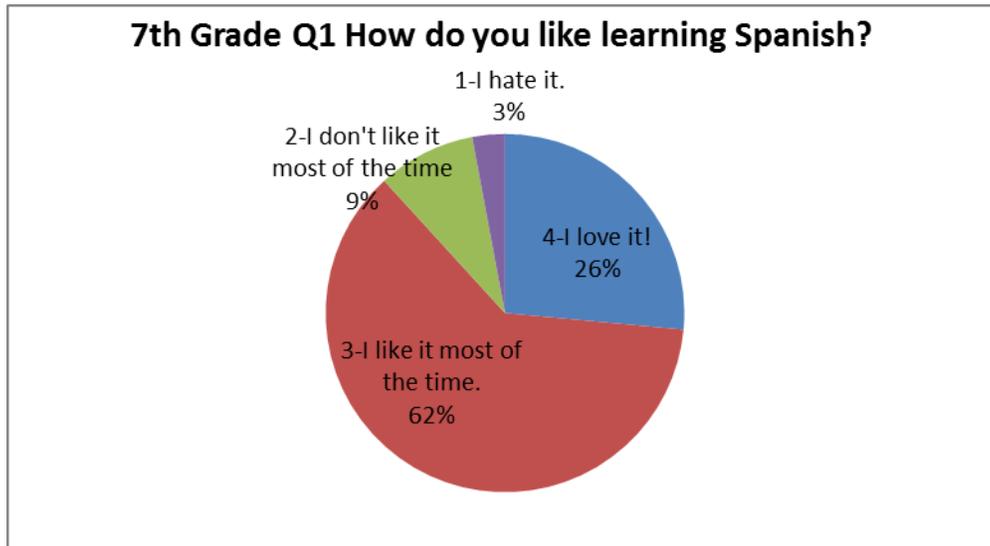
*Figure 2.*Seventh grade student responses to "How do you like learning Spanish?"

The majority of answers given by the older students (n=62) shifted to "I like it most of the time" with "I love it!" as the second major choice. It reminded me of the phenomenon of decreased intrinsic motivation with child development described in the literature review (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, & Hayenga, 2009). The data here suggest that student motivation in an immersion school might follow a pattern similar to those typically seen in a traditional school setting.

8th Grade Q1 How do you like learning Spanish ?

2-I don't like it most of the time 7%

unclear answer 4%

1-I hate it. 0%

4-I love it! 36%

3-I like it most of the time. 53%
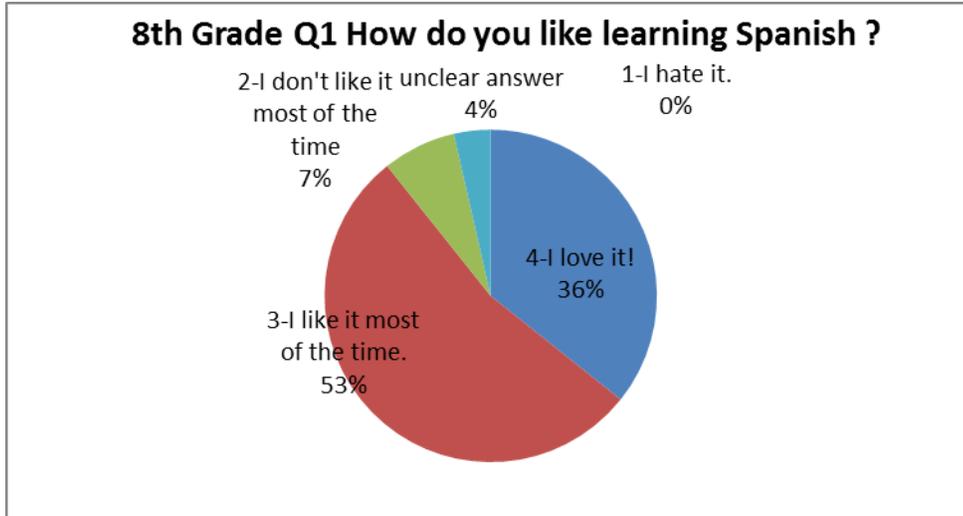
Figure 3. Eighth grade student responses to "How do you like learning Spanish?"

The second question in the student survey could offer some additional insight into

students' intrinsic motivation: "Why do you attend this school?" The majority of third

3rd Grade Q2 Why do you attend this school?

0-other 5%

Invalid 5%

3-I like Spanish 16%

1-My parent want me to 32%

2-It's cool to learn a different language 42%
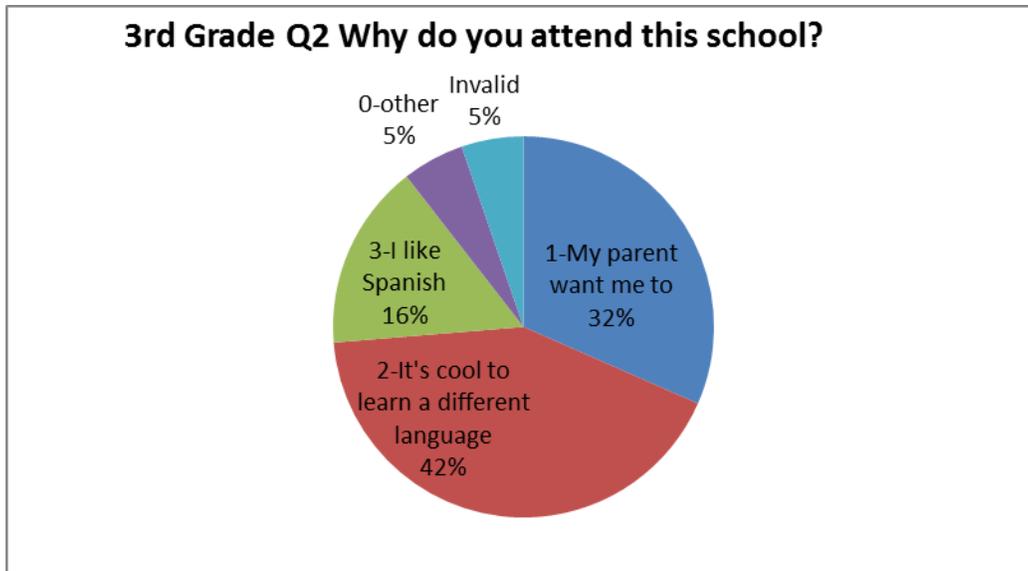
Figure 4. Third grade student responses to "Why do you attend this school?"

graders (42%) chose to respond that they thought it was cool to learn a different language and the second most frequent response (32%) was that their parents wanted them to be in this school, which might be very true considering school's alternative nature (Figure 4). A few students chose the reason as "I like Spanish." One student indicated "other" by explaining that "*I go here because all my older cousins went here and now they are in college. So it's kinda a family school*." And another student did not answer the question, shown on the graph as "Invalid."

7th Grd Q2 Why do you attend this school?

invalid
6%

0=other
18%

3=I like Spanish
15%

1=My parent
wants me to
29%

2=It's cool to
learn a different
language
32%
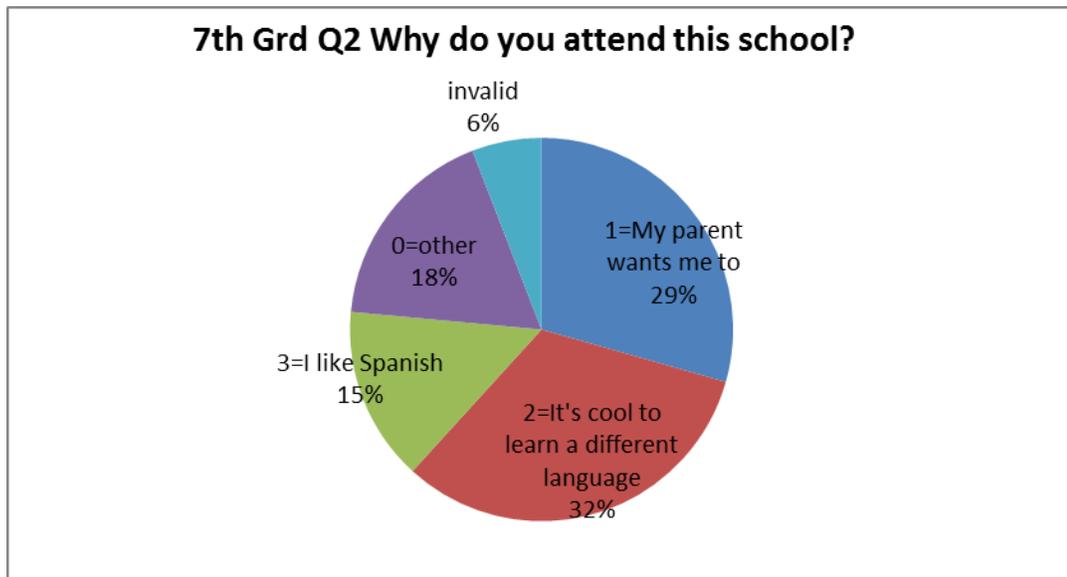
Figure 5. Seventh grade student responses to "Why do you attend this school?"

Again, compared to these younger students, older students provided a slightly different result with a drop among seventh graders in the choice of "It's cool to learn a different language" and a slight increase in "My parent wants me to" (see Figure 5).

However, only 10% of the eighth grade students selected, "It's cool to learn a different language" and "My parents want me to" increased to 61% (see Figure 6). This again echoed the finding in Corpus' (2009) study that found the lowest (intrinsic) motivation was among eighth graders.
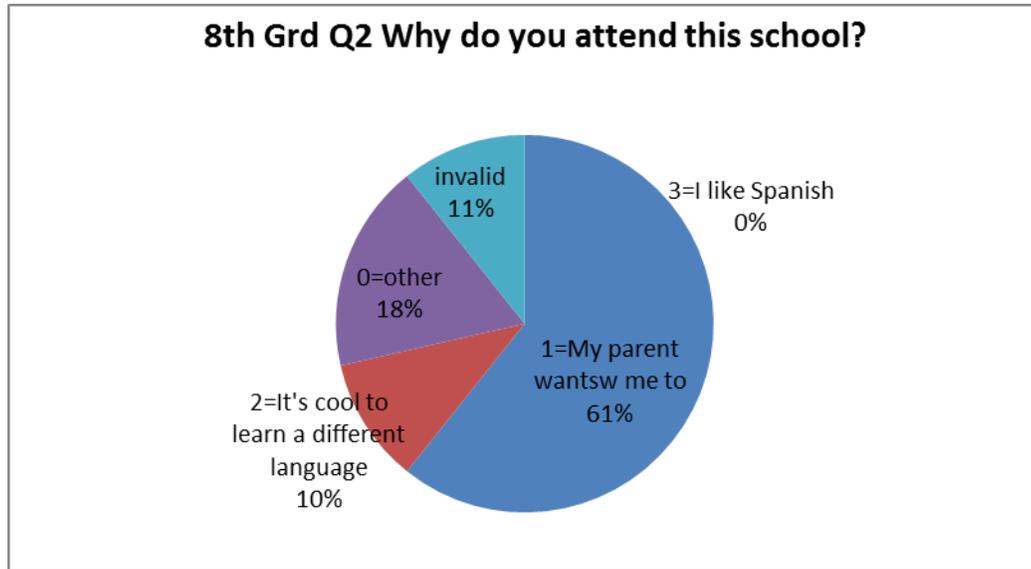
Figure 6. Eighth grade student responses to "Why do you attend this school?"

Lastly, the student questionnaire asked for responses to the open-ended question "What is the best thing about learning to speak Spanish?" The Wordle text collages illustrate the remarkable difference in terms of how learners perceive the benefit of learning Spanish. Third graders' comments indicate that they regard learning language itself as a good thing so that communicating with Spanish speakers can happen (see Figure 7).

The results from seventh and eighth grade students were that "Get a better job" was the most frequently mentioned phrase in response to the question (see Figures 8 and 9). These answers suggest that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation become highly distinguishable and age-related in the response to this question, which reflect the trends discussed previously in the literature review.
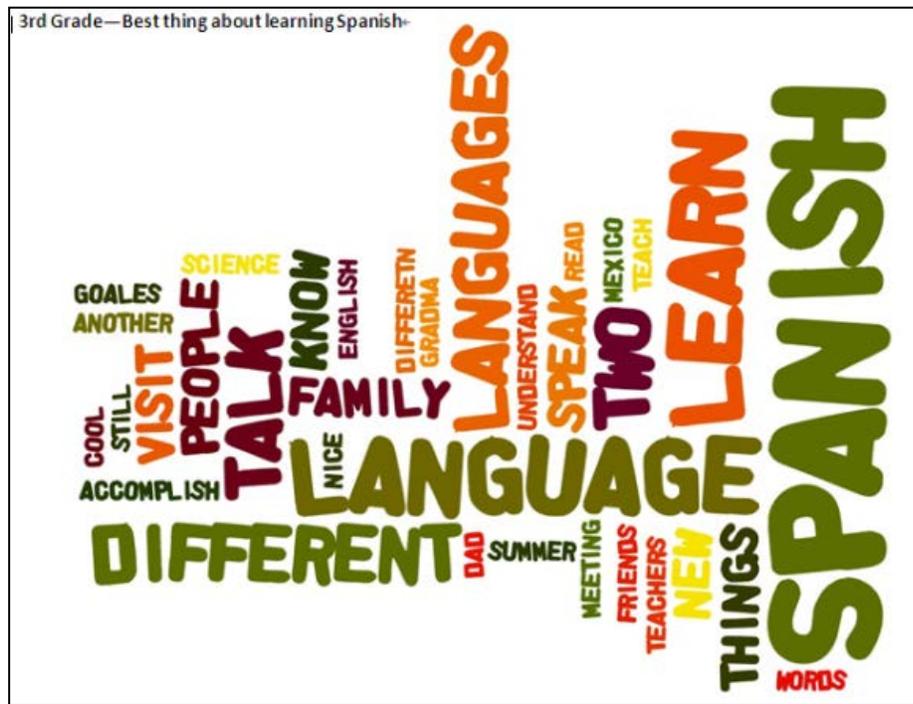
Figure 7. Third grade student responses to "What is the best thing about learning to speak Spanish?"

Although they couldn't be surveyed, the kindergarten and first grade students observed in this study appeared to be consistently highly motivated in classroom interactions. Whenever something new was presented in the kindergarten classroom, it

Figure 8. Seventh grade student responses to "What is the best thing about learning to speak Spanish?"

regularly got the attention of all of the students in the room, whether it was a letter, a picture, a book or an object. Kindergarteners showed their interest and attention by sitting upright, looking towards the new subject, and sometimes talking to their neighbors with obvious excitement. The first graders observed for this study remained nearly 100% involved in any activity going on in the class from the first minute of the morning until lunch time. The students chanted happily, read loudly, took pop quizzes seriously,

performed classroom tasks energetically and got involved in the class whole-heartedly.

My observations of this class convinced me that this was a group of highly motivated

first graders.

Figure 9. Eighth grade student responses to "What is the best thing about

learning to speak Spanish?"

Teachers' Instructional Practices Related to Motivation

The data collected about teachers' instructional practices came from different

procedures: classroom observations and teachers' interviews and questionnaires. In both

interview and questionnaire, teachers were asked to share the instructional techniques

they used to motivate students and to comment on techniques that they felt would

discourage motivation. Many of those techniques could be tied to the theory of learners'

three basic needs (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991) mentioned in previous

literature review.

Hands-on activities that should meet students' need for autonomy were both

recommended by teachers in interviews and observed in the classroom. As I observed

kindergarteners and first graders, their favorite classroom activity appeared to be theme

related coloring where they got to choose whatever color they wanted for their project.

When a coloring session was announced by the teacher, there were always one or two

students who cheered in a whispered voice, "Yeah! Coloring!" The appreciation for

autonomy was also detected in the third grade class when during a Spanish language arts

lesson, students cheered when they were allowed to write a paragraph as "their own

story."

The teachers who were interviewed and surveyed recommended engaging in a

variety of developmentally appropriate instructional practices that should help meet

students' need for competence. Teachers mentioned providing enough "wait time" for

students to answer a question; using material appropriate to students' understanding (first

grade teacher), providing lessons that are challenging and avoiding tasks that students

would find boring (third grade teacher). Another theme that came up was allowing

students to take ownership of classroom knowledge. For example, from the classroom

observations, one popular practice was to grant students who just demonstrated a good

mastery of certain knowledge a chance to come in front of the classroom and lead part of

the activity, e.g. lead vocabulary reading, or ask the next question and appoint another

student to answer. When students were up in front of the class in these cases, they were

observed to be happy and proud of being "outstanding" or "special." All of the

instructional practices mentioned above might contribute more or less to meeting

students' need for competence and therefore to protecting students' intrinsic motivation.

To meet students' need for relatedness, the teachers' use of positive reinforcement

really stood out. Many teachers mentioned issuing positive verbal feedback, praise, and

not withholding positive reinforcement. Conversely, teachers emphasized that

assessments of students should never be overly negative or harsh. The teacher

participants believed that teachers' recognition of students' efforts were important for

protecting students' passion for learning.

Besides the above-mentioned categories, rewarding came up as another popular

overall motivational instructional practice recommended by teachers. Both the

kindergarten teacher and the first grade teacher mentioned issuing stickers and tickets that

students can redeem for toys, while the third grade teacher used computer time for online

learning games during recess as reward for finishing classroom tasks correctly and

efficiently. Rewarding has been a controversial practice as mentioned in the literature

review with a central concerned that that extrinsic motivation substantially undermines

learners' intrinsic motivation and performance (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001).

However, it is difficult to tell in this case whether these reward structures are undermining intrinsic motivation or supporting students' need for relatedness. Classroom observations in this study lasted only for eight days, during which all the observations indicated that students were happy to get these extrinsic rewards.

SECTION FIVE

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to determine how an early immersion second language

(L2) school experience might impact students' motivation to learn the target language. To

address this question, three sub-questions were asked: Will early immersion affect L2

learners' motivation? Does providing a rich L2 environment motivate students to learn,

or does it frustrate learners who are still learning to be proficient in the L1? The findings

of this study suggest that the L2 immersion environment did not seem to make a

difference in the typical developmental pattern we see in student motivation – intrinsic

motivation tends to decline with increasing age and extrinsic motivation may begin to

overtake it as early as the third grade. The CSIA early L2 immersion environment did not

seem to reduce young learners' (kindergarten and first grade) intrinsic motivation in

presenting them with the challenge of learning L2 while they are still learning L1. Just as

all the teachers interviewed believed, the immersion environment in this school appeared

to have a positive influence on students' L2 (Spanish) learning by providing an authentic

communicative learning environment. As the CSIA principal Ms. C described their new

students:

They were curious at first, then just jumped in and picked it up. (Ms. C, interview notes, March 2, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

Several factors limited the findings of this study. The first limitation was time spent collecting data. Eight days was not long enough for in-depth observations to be made of CSIA classrooms. A longer period for making observations would have been helpful for richer analysis of classroom patterns, students' motivational development patterns and the long-term effect of teachers' instructional practices.

A second limitation of the study relates to the difficulty of measuring "motivation." Motivation is an abstract psychological concept. Without using professional evaluation tools, it is hard to be precisely measure and record students' motivation, and I wasn't able to collect much numerical data for statistical analysis.

Related to the difficulty of measuring students' motivation was the setback of not being able to use the pre-designed survey with kindergarteners or first graders. The findings could have been more revealing if the data from 28 kindergarteners and 22 first graders had been collected properly.

Implications for Future Research

More studies of the influence that immersion programs have on the L2 learning motivation would be desirable, especially those focused on how to take the advantage of

the immersion environment to boost K-3 students' intrinsic motivation and promote

motivation "internalization" at higher grade levels in the elementary school.

This capstone project has been a great experience for me in learning how to design,

conduct and report the findings of a study. This knowledge should allow for my lifelong

use of research skills, which I can take back with me to China and with which, I can try

to conduct some more meaningful research in my own classes and with my colleagues. I

look forward to examining questions typical in our teaching setting and eventually

helping to improve L2 (English) instruction throughout my teaching career.

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APPENDIX A

Consent letter for adult teachers

Dear teachers,

I'm a full time graduate student seeking Master of Arts in Education degree at Otterbein University. I'm doing my capstone project with the research topic on elementary-level foreign language learners' learning motivation. As a licensed English teacher in China, I used to teach English as a foreign language to Chinese students. Learning a foreign language without an authentic speaking environment is never easy for students of any level, especially for elementary-level learners, who are not mature enough to guide their learning with pragmatic reasons such as being more competitive in job market. How to motivate young learners and make learning meaningful for elementary-level learners has thus become my interest of research and that's why I would like to observe classrooms in Columbus Spanish Immersion Academy. Classroom observation and oral interviews with classroom teachers and students will be the main data collecting methods.

The Department of Education at Otterbein University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. No demands related to this study will be placed on teachers outside of regular classroom instructional time. Videotapes and audio records from this study willbe used as supplementary to the observation note-taking and may be used in producing pictures or short clips of instructional practices for professional audience; for example, pictures may be used at capstone defense and poster session shown to professors to better illustrate the strategies adopted to motivate students. Teachers will not be identified by full name in any of these material, and to the extent possible, images will be blurred or obscured to protect privacy.

A video release form is attached to this letter. Please sign and return to the classroom teacher. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is complete, please feel free to contact me by phone or mail.

Sincerely,

Fang (Karen) Chen

Education Department

Otterbein University

Westerville, OH 43081

APPENDIX B

Consent letter for parents

Dear Parents,

I'm a full time graduate student seeking Master of Arts in Education degree at Otterbein University. I'm doing my capstone project with the research topic on elementary-level foreign language learners' learning motivation. As a licensed English teacher in China, I used to teach English as a foreign language to Chinese students. Learning a foreign language without an authentic speaking environment is never easy for students of any level, especially for elementary-level learners, who are not mature enough to guide their learning with pragmatic reasons such as being more competitive in job market. How to motivate young learners and make learning meaningful for elementary-level learners has thus become my interest of research and that's why I would like to observe classrooms in Columbus Spanish Immersion Academy. Classroom observation and oral interviews with classroom teachers and students will be the main data collecting methods.

The Department of Education at Otterbein University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. No demands related to this study will be placed on students outside of regular classroom instructional time. Videotapes and audio records from this study willbe used as supplementary to the observation note-taking and may be used in producing pictures or short clips of instructional practices for professional audience; for example, pictures may be used at capstone defense and poster session shown to professors to better illustrate the evidence of students being motivated. Student will not be identified by full name in any of these material, and to the extent possible, images will be blurred or obscured to protect student privacy.

A video release form is attached to this letter. Please sign and return to the classroom teacher. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is complete, please feel free to contact me by phone or mail.

Sincerely,

Fang (Karen) Chen

Education Department

Otterbein University

Westerville, OH 43081

APPENDIX C

Video/Photo release form

Video/Photo release form

As part of this research project I will take photos and make video recordings of classrooms that allow the research observation in Columbus Spanish Immersion Academy. Please indicate what uses of these photos and videotapes you are willing to permit, by putting your initials next to the uses you agree to, and signing the form at the end. This choice is completely up to you. Photos and videotapes will only be used in the ways to which you have agreed. In any use of these records, your child will not be identified by full name. Please sign and return to school upon completion. Thank you for your cooperation!

1. _____ The photos and videotapes can be studied by the researcher for use in the research project.

2. _____ The photos and videotapes can be used for education research publications.

3. _____ The photos and videotapes can be shown at education research conferences or meetings.

4. _____ The photos and videotapes can be shown in classrooms to student teachers for instructional purposes.

5. _____ The photos and videotapes can be shown in public presentations to non-scientific groups.

6. _____ The photos and videotapes can be used on television or the audio portion can be used on radio.

7. _____ The photos and videotapes can be posted to a website.

I have read the above descriptions and give my consent for the use of the photos and videotapes as indicated by my initials above.

Student Name _____

Student Signature: (Date)

 Parent/Guardian Signature: (Date)

APPENDIX D

Interview questions for CSIA teachers

Interview questions for CSIA teachers

1.   In thinking about your daily teaching, how much of a role do you think students' motivation plays in their Spanish learning?

2.   How would you describe your students' Spanish learning motivation?

- Are they somehow **highly motivated** to learn the target language? If so, what do you believe is the main reason?

- Or have you ever detected some students' **unwillingness** in learning the target language? If so, what do you believe is the main reason for this?

3.   How do you think the immersion process affects students' motivation? Does it make them more or less motivated to learn, or does it not affect students' individual motivation?

4.   What about external motivation – how do you try to motivate students who don't seem to be motivated internally to learn Spanish? Would you share one or more instructional strategies you feel has been successful in motivating your students?

5.   Also, would you mind sharing any instructional technique that you ever used or you know someone used before that had a negative impact on students' learning motivation?

6.   As you have observed, what is the biggest challenge for young students to learn a foreign language? Follow up: If this challenge is **not** motivation, how does motivation compare to it as a challenge? OR It motivation is the biggest challenge, what are some other challenges young students face in learning a foreign language?

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire for CSIA teachers

Grade level you are teaching:_____   Date _____

Ethnicity/Race _____   Home Language_____

1.   How long have you been teaching in C.S.I.A?

    a)   1-5 years   c)   10-15 years

    b)   6-10 years   d)   More than 15 years

2.   In thinking about your daily teaching, how much of a role do you think students' motivation plays in their Spanish learning in C.S.I.A?

a)   Extremely important.   c)   somewhat important

b)   important   d)   Not important

Comments:_____

3.   How would you describe your C.S.I.A. students' Spanish learning motivation in general?

a)   They are highly motivated.   c)   They are not much motivated.

b)   They are somewhat motivated.   d)   They are not motivated.

    Reason why you think so_____

4.   According to your observation, how the immersion process affects students' Spanish learning motivation?

a)   It has a positive influence in students' Spanish learning motivation.

b)   It's hard to say whether it has particular influence on students' Spanish learning motivation or not.

c)   It has no influence on students' Spanish learning motivation.

d)   It has a negative influence in student's motivation.

Reason why you think so_____

5.   According to your observation, how the immersion process affects students' Spanish learning motivation?

a)   It has a positive influence in students' Spanish learning motivation.

b)   It's hard to say whether it has particular influence on students' Spanish learning motivation or not.

c)   It has no influence on students' Spanish learning motivation.

d)   It has a negative influence in student's motivation.

Reason why you think so_____

6.   Please list top three factors that help to increase students' foreign language learning motivation:

a)   _____   b) _____   c) _____

Comments:_____

7.   Please list top three factors that can decrease students' foreign language learning motivation:

a)   _____   b) _____   c) _____

 Comments:_____

8.   Please list THREE things that you would NEVER do in the classroom to avoid decreasing their foreign language learning motivation

a)   _____   b) _____   c) _____

Comments: _____

9.   Please list THREE things that you would do as often as possible in the classroom to increase students' foreign language learning motivation:

a)   _____   b) _____   c) _____

Comments_____

APPENDIX F

Interview questions for CSIA principal

Interview questions for CSIA principal

STUDENTS

What can you tell about the students who attend your school, compared with students in other schools in Columbus City? What makes your students unique?

TEACHERS

1. What can you tell me about the teachers at the Spanish Immersion Academy compared with teachers in other schools in the district? Why do teachers want to work here?

2. What's important for you in hiring and keeping teachers – what qualities do you look for? Are these qualities just indicators of good teachers in general, or are the specific to your Immersion context?

ENROLLMENT

1. What are the advantages of your school in regard to attracting parents and students?

2. How would you describe the parent involvement at your school, compared with other schools in the District?

LEARNING STYLE

1. How would you describe students' language learning **motivation** in different grade levels, especially K-3 students?

- Do they feel natural, excited or burdened to study in this school in general?

- Do they know why they are in this school? Is it mostly the parents' will?

2. Is there a general language learning philosophy in the school that impacts the classroom atmosphere? In other words, do you encourage teachers and students to "Relax and teach/learn language in a fun way" or do you encourage more formal, traditional instruction?

3. How do you guarantee a language immersion environment? What if students prefer to use their familiar language? What do faculty do to encourage students' use of the target language?

APPENDIX G

Questionnaire for CSIA students

First Name _____ Date _____

Grade _____ Age ___ Gender M F Ethnicity/Race _____

Language used at home with family _____

1.   How do you like learning Spanish so far?
   a) I love it!
   b) I like it most of the time.
   c) I don't like it most of the time.
   d) I hate it.
2.   Why do you attend this school?
   a) My parent wants me to.
   b) It's cool to learn a different language.
   c) I like Spanish.
   d) Other:_____
3.   Do you speak Spanish after school?
   a) Very often
   b) Sometimes
   c) Almost not
   d) Never
4.   What is the **best** thing about learning to speak Spanish?

5.   What is the **worst** thing about learning to speak Spanish?

APPENDIX H

Guided observation: Time analysis & instructional strategy

Guided observation: Time analysis & instructional strategy

Class_____ Number of Students _____ Teacher _____ Date_____

Time	Teacher's Action	Student's Response	Interactivity? What kind

Time Analysis

Write down the time and what is occurring in the class.. Include what the teacher is doing as well as the students are doing at that moment.

Nature of Interactivity

● If the interaction is of a positive nature (e.g., a question, comment, or answer related to the educational task) put a plus.

● If the interaction is positive or neutral, but not related to the educational task (e.g., you look nice today, how was your weekend, etc.), use a check.

● If the interaction is negative, use a minus.

● Focus on teacher-student interactions, not student-student

APPENDIX I

Wordle results #1

Teacher responses to the question "What instructional practice you'll recommend for promote students' motivation?".

APPENDIX J

Wordle results #2

Teacher responses to the question "What's the biggest challenge for students in term of motivation?".