Gillette, B., (1994). The role of learner goals in L2 success. In J. P. Lantolf & G. Appel (1994), Vygotskian Approaches to Second Language Research. (195-213). Westport, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing.

**Summary:**

Gillete reports on researched to evaluate the differences between effective and ineffective language learners. The study included three effective and three ineffective college level language learners and used multiple data such as evaluations of individual language learning histories, class notes, and journal entries to find characteristics common to each group. The participants were studied over the period of a semester.

According to Vygotsky’s social cultural theory “The initial motive of an activity determines the character of that activity.” (pg. 196) This was used as the theoretical framework for Gillette’s study as she tried to find differences in motives and motivation between the effective and ineffective language learners.

The study revealed the following differences:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ineffective Language Learners** | **Effective Language Learners** |
| Geared towards fulfilling course requirements for credit. | Geared towards learning the language. |
| Had limited experience in the world at large. | Had experiences with other cultures and languages that helped form their opinions of the usefulness of languages. |
| Did not see the reason for learning a L2. | Believed that learning a L2 would have positive affects in their lives. |
| Negative learning experiences were seen as roadblocks to progress and proof of inability to succeed. | Found ways to overcome negative learning experiences and focused on positive experiences. |
| Did the bare minimum of work assigned. | Went above and beyond the work necessary for completion of the assignment. |
| Completed assignments in a rushed manner at the last minute. | Began working on assignments well in advance and worked methodically on them. |
| Preferred activities that emphasized grammar rules and rote memorization and felt intimidated by communicative activities. | Preferred communicative activities. |
| Focused on how difficult it was to get motivated. | Were able to describe effective strategies used for learning. |
| Reported that they “just study.” | Set specific study goals. |
|  | Focused on likely exam topics while studying. |
| All information was seen as new information. | Were able to link old information or learning to new information. |
| Relied heavily on translations. | Were able to inference. |

**Conclusion:**

While it is valuable for L2 teachers to teach their students to use effective learning strategies, it would appear that it is equally necessary for students to be motivated in order to become effective learners. Motivated learners share specific beliefs and behaviors, which could possibly be trained.

**Activity Idea:** Find ways to encourage your students to act and think like effective language learners by giving them opportunities to:

1. Find out about other cultures and languages in the hopes that they can see the usefulness in learning languages.
2. Express the reason/s they are learning the language.
3. Set goals for their learning.
4. Describe strategies that they have found most successful.
5. Report on achievement of goals.

**Further questions:**

Gillette hypothesizes that the lack of development in the interlanguage of ineffective language learners may be due to them only doing enough to fulfill the requirements for assignment completion and not for personal language improvement (pg. 209). This lack of development keeps the ineffective learner in a situation where the coursework is more difficult. I wonder how much auto-comparisons between both types of learners affect the motivation of the ineffective learners. Would the ineffective learners be more motivated if they were not feeling pressured to perform at levels they had not adequately prepared themselves for? After all, there is a cumulative effect of bare minimum vs. more than the required learning that puts the ineffective learner farther and farther behind the motivated learner. This difference between learners could negatively affect the ineffective learners belief in their ability to learn.