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TITLE:

Igniting the Fire Within: Motivating Learners in the EFL Classroom

SPEAKER: Clare Heaney

PRESENTATION TYPE: WORKSHOP



Abstract

Motivation is widely recognised as a key determinant of success in SLA, yet sustaining learner engagement in the EFL classroom remains a persistent challenge for teachers working with diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. This workshop explores the nature of learner motivation and examines practical strategies for fostering sustained engagement across a range of EFL contexts.

Drawing on established theories of motivation in language learning, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and self-determination theory, the session encourages participants to reflect on their own teaching practices and learner profiles. The workshop integrates research-informed principles with hands-on activities, demonstrating how task design, goal setting, feedback, autonomy, and relevance can be leveraged to enhance motivation at all proficiency levels.

Participants will engage in collaborative discussion and experiential tasks aimed at adapting motivational strategies to their specific teaching contexts. By the end of the workshop, teachers will have developed a toolkit of practical, adaptable techniques designed to create a supportive, engaging learning environment and to empower learners to take ownership of their language development.

Bio

Clare Heaney obtained a Bachelor's degree in French, German, and English Literature from Queen's University Belfast in 1994. She subsequently completed a Master's degree in English Language Teaching and was awarded the Cambridge Certificate in Teaching English to Adults (CELTA), an internationally recognised professional qualification.

Her early professional experience includes one and a half years of teaching English in France, where she developed expertise in second-language pedagogy within an international context. Following her return to Northern Ireland, she contributed to a range of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) initiatives in Belfast, working with linguistically and culturally diverse learner populations.

In 2006, Clare Heaney joined the North West Academy of English, a British Council-accredited language institution based in Derry. She was appointed Director of Studies in 2011, a position in which she holds responsibility for academic leadership, curriculum design, quality assurance, and the professional development of teaching staff.

Clare has extensive teaching experience across all proficiency levels with learners ranging in age from 8 to 65+. Her areas of specialisation include English for examination preparation—specifically IELTS, Trinity, and Cambridge assessments—as well as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), encompassing disciplines such as hospitality, tourism, retail, and medical English. Her work reflects a strong commitment to pedagogical rigour, learner-centred instruction, and academic excellence in language education.