FOSTERING STUDENT MOTIVATION:
REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH "I CAN" CHECKLISTS

This week's teaching tip illustrates how to use an objectives-based checklist that asks students to reflect on and assess their progress. Seeing their own progress, meeting objectives, and "ticking items off a list" is intrinsically motivating to most students. Realizing additional work is needed in some areas can help students set clear follow-up goals. Having a plan to meet learning challenges and a sense of being in control of the learning process can increase student motivation. This checklist also uses positive language to talk about the learning process (e.g., "I'm still working on this" which creates a sense of potential, instead of the demotivating phrase "I can't do this").

Teachers can incorporate "I can" self-assessment forms at the end of a unit, after a project, halfway through a term, or at the end of a course. These checklists can be used either on a regular basis (after every unit, monthly, etc.) or occasionally to add variety to assessment processes.

LEVEL

Intermediate and above.
- The example checklist provided with this teaching tip is designed for secondary or adult learners in an upper intermediate class working on a podcasting project about environmental challenges in their community. The concept can be adapted for other contexts by adjusting the curricular content, language complexity, and number of items on the form.

GOALS

Students will:

- Reflect on their learning and assess their progress toward meeting learning objectives.
- Identify areas for improvement and consider strategies and tools to improve knowledge and performance.

ASSOCIATED MOTIVATION FACTORS

Instructional design: ensuring students understand objectives; highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement in assessment practices

Promoting learner autonomy: encouraging students to reflect on their learning and progress toward their goals; encouraging learners to select tools and strategies to meet goals

Teacher behavior and knowledge: using positive language to talk about the learning process

MATERIALS

- Students:
    - Pencils or pens
    - "I can" checklist (example provided)

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PREPARATION

- Using the example as a guide, adapt the "I can" checklist to reflect your learning objectives. You can include objectives related to:
  - Language content
  - Other subject-area knowledge (e.g., science or math) in content-based instruction contexts
  - 21st-century skills such as technology use
  - Interpersonal skills such as working in a team or taking turns
  - Academic skills like taking notes during a lecture or setting/meeting deadlines
  - Critical thinking skills and strategy use

  As you make the checklist, you may need to simplify language used in your lesson plan objectives to make them accessible to students.
- Print or photocopy the checklist (one per student). If printing the checklists isn't possible, create a large checklist to display and let students copy the content onto their own paper.

PROCEDURES

1. Introduce the "I can" checklist and explain how to fill it out:
   - Ask a student volunteer to pass out the forms.
   - Tell/remind students that in addition to receiving feedback from the teacher or their peers, "reflection" (thinking about one's learning journey) and "self-assessment" (rating or evaluating one's own learning) are also important skills to develop. Explain these two terms as needed. Also mention that these processes involve thinking about the learning process (how they learned) and progress (what they learned/are able to do).
   - Review the objectives in the checklist and describe how to complete it. Explain that honestly assessing one's own progress can be difficult, but that they should try not to be too easy or too hard on themselves as they complete the form.
   - Explain the last two items related to (1) things students enjoyed/found interesting about what they learned and (2) selecting tools and strategies to improve their knowledge or performance. For the tool/strategy selection question, consider prompting students to give a few examples of tools and strategies they have previously used or discussed in class.
2. Answer any questions students have about the form. Provide support, as needed, while students fill out the forms.
3. Collect the completed forms. Review them and, if practical, make brief comments to students on the forms. For example, you might add a few words of praise or encouragement related to their self-assessment ratings for some objectives, comment on things students enjoyed/found interesting, or suggest another resource or tool for improvement.
4. After reviewing the forms, return them to students. If you use portfolio assessment or keep collections of student work, these forms make great additions. Encourage students to review their self-assessment forms again toward the end of a course so they can see how far they have progressed!