

Motivation

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Motivation is a central component of education. In fact, school-based administrators and teachers reported that motivation is one of the most important factors related to student achievement (Education Week Research Center, 2014). Motivation is one of the strongest determiners of academic success (Crotty, 2013). When students are motivated to learn, teachers find that every aspect of the classroom becomes easier and more effective; students are engaging more in their work, behaving appropriately, and learning throughout the day. On the other hand, when students are not motivated to learn, teachers must spend an increased amount of their time and energy trying to get students engaged before learning can occur. Thus, teachers themselves should be strongly motivated to understand the factors that promote student academic engagement.

What is Motivation?

Motivation is defined as “a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior” (Brophy, 1998, p. 3). Motivation is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of behaviors. Collectively, these behaviors describe the degree to which an individual is willing to begin performing a behavior, as well as how long and how hard an individual will work towards a given goal (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). It is not enough for students to choose to engage in educational activities, they must also choose to work hard enough in order to achieve some benefit from the activity.

Goals will differ from student to student; sometimes goals are academic, but often students are motivated to achieve non-academic goals (e.g., getting out of work, talking with friends). One of the goals of education is to set up the classroom environment so that students are more motivated to work and pay attention to their studies than they are to achieve other competing goals. Thus, for the purposes of this brief, motivation will be discussed as motivation to attempt, engage in, and work hard on academic or learning related tasks.

Why is Motivation Important?

No matter how strong a curriculum, it will not lead to student learning if students are not motivated to perform the tasks asked of them by educators. Students who are unmotivated typically do not benefit from better standards, curriculum, or instruction (Usher & Kober, 2012).

Tier 1, 2 or 3 Intervention



Thus, motivation serves a critical function in education. Students who are academically motivated understand material better, are less likely to dropout, and are overall more satisfied with their school experience (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). As one would expect, low motivation has detrimental effects on academic performance, as unmotivated students do not try their best on assignments and tests and are less likely to absorb material (Maehr & Meyer, 1997).

What Motivates Students?

A tremendous volume of literature has been written with the purpose of understanding what motivates people and how to increase academic motivation in students. Indeed, a search for the term “motivation” in the psycINFO database returned over 81,000 peer-reviewed journal articles and books. This underscores the notion that a wide variety of goals and environmental variables can motivate students, and that there are numerous strategies schools can use to increase motivation. Further, the breadth of research on the subject demonstrates that there is no one strategy that motivates all students. While various strategies have been found to be effective at increasing motivation, individual students have different needs, goals, likes, and dislikes, meaning they will all be motivated in different ways.

Intrinsic motivation. However, it can still be concluded that there are two broad categories of motivation. The first is intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual engages in a behavior for internal reasons, particularly for personal pleasure or enjoyment (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). That is, when people perform a behavior for their own reasons, it is deemed to be intrinsically motivating. Educators tend to highly value intrinsic motivation based on the assumption that if students are willing to engage in learning-related work for their own reasons, these behaviors may be more “authentic” and more likely to persist throughout their life. Unfortunately, it can be quite challenging to work with students to develop intrinsic motivation for tasks that are not inherently enjoyable.

To encourage students to have intrinsic motivation, there are four conditions that must emerge (Ginsberg, 2014). Those conditions include establishing inclusion or connectedness, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence. These conditions are elements of a motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (Ginsberg, 2014; See figure top of page 4). It is “based on the understanding that it is part of human nature to be curious, to be active, to initiate thought, to make meaning from experience, and to be effective at what we value. These primary sources of motivation reside in people across all cultures.” When all four motivational frameworks exist within a learning environment, students are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn and typically enjoy learning activities solely for the process of doing it, and they work in concert to enhance intrinsic motivation to learn (Ginsberg, 2014, p. 29).

Extrinsic motivation. The second broad category of motivation is extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation occurs when people want to engage in a behavior due to external reasons, such as rewards, avoiding punishment, or constraints (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002). Although it shouldn’t be considered simple to develop extrinsic motivation, it is easier to produce than intrinsic motivation. Rather than addressing an internal desire, creating extrinsic motivation requires only identifying a reward that an individual will work for and putting a plan in place to deliver the reward for appropriate behavior (Brophy, 1998). However, educators are often reluctant to rely on extrinsic motivators, citing concerns that when the external incentive is removed, the motivation will be removed as well, and the extrinsic motivators are really a form



of bribery (Brophy, 1998). While this is often a valid concern, the careful design of behavior plans to slowly shift from artificial rewards to natural rewards in the environment can help prevent this reversal from happening. Extrinsic motivation can assist students to build skills and obtain knowledge or information that triggers intrinsic motivation to continue the learning process. In addition, extrinsic incentives may be particularly effective for students with emotional, behavioral, or attention needs that may require additional supports to meet academic



and behavioral goals (see the Reinforcement strategy brief for more details).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were originally thought to be opposites: as extrinsic motivation to perform a given task increased, intrinsic motivation to perform that same task decreased (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005). However, more recent research indicates that the two exist independently of one another. That is, an individual can be high in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation at the same time, low in both, or high in one and low in the other (Lepper et al., 2005). In support of this claim are the findings of a large-scale meta-analysis of 40 years of research on motivation, which found that the presence of properly given incentives (e.g., a powerful extrinsic motivator) does not harm intrinsic motivation (Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014). Thus, educators are encouraged to take advantage of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to help students be academically successful.

Increasing Motivation

The first step to increasing motivation is to attempt to create a classroom environment in which learning is enjoyable, rewarding, and

fun. Motivational supports at this level lay the groundwork for any future intervention that is performed. Further, setting up a classroom that naturally encourages high levels of academic motivation will prevent many motivational problems from occurring in the first place. Ultimately, this allows teachers to spend less time prompting students to start or complete their work, and more time delivering effective instruction.

Praise. One common strategy to enhance classroom motivation is to create a positive classroom environment. Teachers should actively seek out examples of on-task academic behavior and praise it. Praise serves as a simple, free, effective external motivator not only for the student being praised, but also for students who observe the praise (Brophy, 1998). Other students who observe and value teacher praise will become more motivated to engage in similar on-task behavior in an effort to receive praise of their own. A positive classroom can be contrasted with a more negative behavior management style, in which prosocial, on-task behavior is frequently ignored while off-task behavior is attended to and frequently punished. This is considered a less effective strategy of behavior management (Miltenberger, 2008).

Providing praise and other rewards for task completion is an important part of increasing motivation. These rewards can consist of privileges, teacher or peer attention, or less frequently, tangible items such as food or a prize. A group contingency reinforcement system in which all students receive rewards if the entire classroom meets a behavior goal (e.g., decreased talking, increased independent seatwork) may also be advantageous in creating a positive and motivating classroom environment (Maag, 2001). Rewards are most effective when given for steps towards mastery of a specific skill such as solving a problem or reading a book. Rewards should typically not be given for minimal effort, unless the goal is to increase the student behavior from a baseline of zero effort. Rewards should be paired with specific feedback, which helps the student to understand why they are being rewarded (Brophy, 1998; see the Strategy Brief on Reinforcement & Positive

Four Conditions of the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching			
Inclusion	Attitude	Competence	Meaning
Through interactions that build respect and connectedness	Through choices and personally relevant curricula	Through authentic ways that show that students are effective	Through learning that challenges and engages students

Adapted from Ginsberg, 2014

Referrals for more details). When administered routinely, but strategically, simple rewards can enhance motivation for most students.

Curriculum. A well-designed curriculum can also serve as a starting point for enhancing motivation for all students in the classroom. Curricula that include assignments and activities that feel relevant to the learner can have a positive effect on motivation (Brophy, 1998). Additionally, the pace and content of the curriculum should be designed to match learners' current skill level whenever possible. When the pace is too fast or the material too difficult, motivation may decrease; whereas, when the material is challenging but attainable, academic achievement and motivation tend to increase (Balfanz, McPartland, & Shaw, 2002).

Self-efficacy. Another strategy to increase motivation is to foster high self-efficacy. Self-efficacy describes the degree to which students feel capable of accomplishing a task (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy is domain-specific. This means that a people can be very confident in their abilities in one area, but at the same time lack confidence in another area. For example, a students may feel very good about their ability to do long division, but may have convinced themselves that they are incapable of multiplying fractions. Self-efficacy is strongly tied to motivation (Pajares, 2006). People who lack confidence in their own ability to complete a task tend to be less motivated to attempt the

task in the first place. After all, if you believe you cannot do it, why try? On the other hand, people who feel good about their abilities are typically more willing to try to solve a problem or complete a task, even when they encounter difficulty.

A number of techniques can be implemented to enhance student self-efficacy. One way to do so is to put students in a situation where they can complete challenging tasks successfully (Schunk & Pajares, 2009). In doing so, students' self-confidence will naturally increase, allowing them to attempt another challenging task that is within their skill range. However, the work given should not be so hard that students cannot complete it successfully, as this may adversely affect confidence and future motivation (Pajares, 2006). Teachers can also reduce the degree to which scores or grades are presented publically to the whole class. Having scores presented to the class can decrease self-efficacy of poorly performing students (i.e., those who may have the highest need for motivation), as they can clearly see that they are not performing well compared to their peers (Pajares, 2006).

Types of learning goals. The type of goals that students hold also impacts motivation. Academic goals can either be mastery goals or performance goals (Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Rolland, 2012). Mastery goals involve a focus on learning the concept at hand or improving a specific

Creating intrinsically motivating and culturally responsive learning environments					
Praise	Curriculum	Self-efficacy	Goals	Choices	Relationships
Through praise and rewards for mastery and appropriate behavior	Through pace and content which feels relevant and matches skill levels	Through authentic ways that show how students are effective	Through learning which challenges and engages students	Through meaningful choices which allow for student interests	Through interactions that build respect and connectedness

Adapted from Ginsberg, 2014

Creating intrinsically motivating and culturally responsive learning environments for students requires the four following conditions be embedded in lesson plans, learning units, and meetings.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Safe and supportive school climate	Relevant choices	Challenging learning that engaged both students and	Evidence of learning in relation to a valued goal

skill, while performance goals involve achieving a particular standard, getting a particular grade, or being better than others (Rolland, 2012). In general, classrooms that encourage mastery goals tend to produce better motivation than classrooms that encourage only performance goals (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). Indeed, having only performance goals have been connected to negative outcomes such as decreased help-seeking and lower self-efficacy (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). Unfortunately, creating a classroom or school environment using only mastery goals may be less possible due to the increasing focus on standardized testing. This is particularly true in middle and high school when grades become more and more salient to students (Maehr & Zusho, 2009). However, teachers are encouraged to make mastery goals explicit with their students as much as possible.

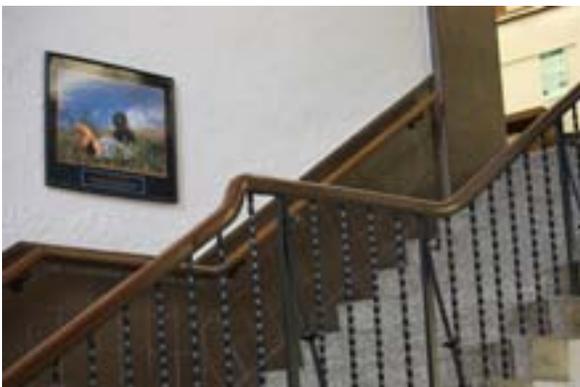
Choices. Finally, giving students choices can enhance motivation. Making choices allows people to feel in control of their life and educational outcomes, and this sense of control can increase intrinsic motivation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Particularly effective are choices that allow students to follow their own interests, such as allowing students to select a topic for a writing assignment or select a book of their choice for a book report (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). The choices given do not necessarily need to be large to have a mean-

ingful effect; small, instructionally irrelevant choices can also increase on-task behavior and motivation, such as allowing students to choose which of two largely identical math worksheets to complete or which of three similar tasks to complete first (Patall et al., 2008).

Relationships. Ellerbrock & Kiefer (2010) reported that trusting, caring, and respectful relationships between students and teachers, which also provide emotional and cognitive support, are crucial for student development. Building a caring relationship includes maintaining a connection and a reciprocated relationship. Such relationships can foster culturally sensitive teaching, create respect, and promote increased motivation.

Conclusion

Motivation is central to education. One of the goals of a successful classroom is to motivate students to complete academic work and engage in activities that will lead to learning. Research on motivation has demonstrated, as might be expected, that students who are highly motivated perform better in school, are less likely to dropout, and overall have a more satisfying and engaging school experience. To assist educators with motivating their students, researchers have also identified a number of different strategies to encourage motivation, whether it is extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation. Many of these strategies, such as building a positive classroom, encouraging mastery goals, and building student self-efficacy, do not require attaining expensive programs or making intensive curriculum modifications. Instead, these strategies rely on teachers who are motivated to create a classroom environment that is engaging and fun, and produces learning that is valued by students.



See Related Briefs:

See the briefs on *Character Education, Parent and Family Involvement, Reinforcement, School climate & Culture, and Student Engagement.*

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