

MOTIVATION: It's All About Me

Students who see value in work and experience success are more likely to be motivated

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Do you teach students who are intrinsically motivated? Intrinsic motivation comes from within. It's the sense of working toward something simply because we want to or because we see value in the accomplishment, and it is relatively easy to know when a student is intrinsically motivated.

However, in schools, often we focus much of our time and attention on extrinsic rewards such as points and prizes because they are so much easier and they do motivate many students, particularly for the short term. Intrinsic motivation seems to be harder for us. After all, how do you motivate someone to be self-motivated? There are two key elements to intrinsic motivation: value and success. If we tap into students' perceptions of value and feelings of success, we can help them be more motivated.

Seeing the Value of Learning

First, students are more motivated when they see the value of learning. When students ask, "Why do we need

to learn this?" they are looking for value. There are several ways to help students see the value of specific learning. In an English class, you might ask students to research authors or poets. As a part of the project, ask students to identify commonalities between themselves and their subject. As one student commented, "I had to work hard, but it was fun to find out how I was similar to Emily Dickinson!"

A science teacher in the South asked her students to "cloud watch" so they could predict weather fronts. Her students were excited, because they learned how to predict a possible snowstorm. In that region, snow meant a day off school, so students loved learning to figure out when it was likely to snow.

A third way to incorporate value is to ask students to interview family members.

If you are talking about a recent historical event, they can ask different people what they remember about it. Or, if you are discussing school rules, they can talk to their family members about school rules when the adults were students. Both ideas help students connect the learning to their own personal situations.

Success Motivates

Students also are more motivated when they experience success. This can happen when they make connections, know the answer to a question or understand new knowledge. It's important to build opportunities for success into lessons.

For example, before students give an oral presentation in class, give them opportunities to share with some of

their classmates first. Students gain confidence if the peer responses are appropriate; if they are not, their peers can help them fix the problem before a classroom response is given.

You even can do this with simple answers to questions you ask. Ask stu-

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dents to turn to a partner and answer the question you asked. As you walk around and monitor the class, pre-select some of your reluctant students to share, by saying to them, "Wow, you are exactly right! I want you to share that with everyone, so I'll be calling on you in a few minutes." Then, when you ask them to share with the class, they are confident they are correct.

Self-reflection is another way that students can experience success. Students have an opportunity to reflect on their progress and can share this progress with the classroom teacher in a non-threatening environment. For example, use feedback cards (see box on next page). At the end of class, ask students to complete the card about the lesson. Then, at the start of your lesson the next day, use the anonymous feedback forms to review learning. One of the benefits of this is that Jonathan

Ways I am Like Langston Hughes

We are both guys.
We are both African-American.
We have both been to Mexico.
He graduated from college and I will too!

Ways I am Different from Langston Hughes

He's dead and I'm not.
He was really old and I'm young.
He has been to Europe and I have not.
His parents were divorced, my parents are married.
He has a street named for him, and I do not.



Sample Feedback Card

Today, I understood _____

I wish I knew _____

I also want to tell you _____

learns the information, but isn't embarrassed that everyone in class knows that he doesn't understand. Through careful guidance, students will learn to think about their own learning on a regular basis.

Teachers also should help students celebrate their success. For students who are struggling, even small successes should be celebrated in the classroom. One teacher created a "Student Progress" bulletin board. She decorated it with butterflies and each student in the class was able to post work they had done. The only criterion was that the work should be something the student was proud of. The weekly process of changing the board required students to focus on what they were doing well.

Applications for Working with Adults

Understanding the aspects of intrinsic motivation also is applicable for working with adults. Consider attempting to communicate with distraught parents. It's helpful to remember that they also are viewing events through the lenses of value and success. For example, their concern over a son or daughter's low grade may be compounded by their concern over a loss of a college scholarship. Or, they may view the grade as a reflection of their parental ability. As one parent said, "I thought I had helped my son get ready for the test. I don't know what I did wrong."

In these cases, it's important to recognize their concerns and address them. Tell them, "One low grade does not necessarily impact the overall grade. If your son continues to work

hard, he can improve for the grading period. I know that you are helping your son, and you are doing a good job. Sometimes, you can do your best and students still make a poor grade. At home, please continue to reinforce and check homework, encourage reading and follow-up with me regularly."

Success Provides Opportunities for Further Successes

Students who see value in work and experience success are more likely to be motivated. There are simple ways you can build these aspects into your daily instruction. Then, as you and your students experience success, you will be motivated to try other techniques that will increase student and parent motivation and provide opportunities for success.

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