

Student Motivation-Five key elements



Education

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ABSTRACT

Motivation is probably the most important factor that educators can target in order to improve learning. Numerous cross-disciplinary theories have been postulated to explain motivation. While each of these theories has some truth, no single theory seems to adequately explain all human motivation. The fact is that human beings in general and students in particular are complex creatures with complex needs and desires. With regard to students, very little if any, learning can occur unless students are motivated on a consistent basis. The five key elements impacting student motivation are: student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment. What is the best way to motivate students? The short answer is that all of the strategies enumerated in this paper can be used...as often as possible. Educators could start just by choosing and trying three new possibilities for enriching student motivation. Or, more importantly, educators could watch themselves and their own behaviors to become self-aware of new understandings about motivation.

INTRODUCTION

The educational equivalent to "location, location, location" is likely to be "motivation, motivation, motivation," for motivation is probably the most important factor that educators can target in order to improve learning (Olson, 1997). Motivation is defined as the act or process of motivating; the condition of being motivating; a motivating force, stimulus, or influence; incentive; drive; something (such as a need or desire) that causes a person or student to act (Merriam-Webster, 1997); and the expenditure of effort to accomplish results (DuBrin, 2008). Numerous cross-disciplinary theories have been postulated to explain motivation. Each of these theories has some truth but no single theory seems to adequately explain all human motivation. The fact is human beings in general and students in particular are complex creatures with complex needs and desires. Students are not purely physical, economic, political, or psychological beings. H.W. Beecher said, "God made man to go by motives, and he will not go without them anymore than a boat without steam, or a balloon without gas. Find out what motivates man, touch that button to turn the key that makes men achieve." (Helmlinger, 1997) Student motivation is an essential element that is necessary for quality education. The teacher must be well trained, must focus and monitor the educational process, be dedicated and responsive to his or her students, and be inspirational. The content must be accurate, timely, stimulating, and pertinent to the student's current and future needs. The method or process must be inventive, encouraging, interesting, beneficial, and provide tools that can be applied to the student's real life. The environment needs to be accessible, safe, positive, personalized as much as possible, and empowering. Motivation is optimized when students are exposed to a large number of these motivating experiences and variables on a regular basis. That is, students ideally should have many sources of motivation in their learning experience in each class. (Palmer, 2007; Debnath, 2005; D'Souza and Maheshwari, 2010)

ELEMENT 1: STUDENT

"You cannot push anyone up the ladder unless he is willing to climb himself." - Robert Schuller

The student's role in education is crucial and should go beyond the traditional view of student as customer or recipient of knowledge. In addition to the roles of buyer and recipient, "students are the raw materials for education and the primary products of educational transformations; and most important, students are key members of the labor force involved in creating education" (Lengnick-Hall and Sanders, 1997). Also, the increasing diversity of individual differences among students can be seen in time management, learning styles, maturity, demographics, experiential background, cultural orientation, and interests. As such, Senge et al. (1994) suggest that teachers should be "producers of environments that allow students to learn as much as possible" or that schools should become learning habitats

wherein relationships are fostered between people, students develop their own individual instruction plan, and a variety of investigating system options replace the passive receipt of information. Student motivation is enhanced when following factors pertinent to students are present:

1. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
2. Various individual and social factors.
3. Hierarchy of needs.
4. Perceived well-being.
5. Purposeful connection with work.
6. Public speaking competence.
7. Study time and study habits.
8. Lecture attendance.
9. Comprehensive, long-range educational plan.

ELEMENT 2: TEACHER

"...the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."
- Mark Twain

Students display more motivational benefits from teachers they like over teachers they dislike (Montalvo, 1998). However, education is much more than a personality contest. The role of teachers seems to be shifting from preprogrammed knowledge dispensers to instead managers of student learning and the learning environment. Therefore, teachers must be empowered to exercise professional judgment in the classroom to attain clearly expressed goals. Also, teachers should be provided with training to support them in this expanded role including more time for peer interaction to share views on what is effective. Overall, teachers should do unto the students as they would want done unto themselves. The following suggestions are offered regarding element 2 or teacher contributions to student motivation:

1. Subject knowledge and motivational level.
 2. Teacher skills.
 3. Teacher qualifications.
 4. Test giving
 5. Scientific management and human relations
- Use inventive teaching techniques,
 - Encourage your students to embrace technology,
 - Make learning both interesting and entertaining,
 - Require significant effort both inside and outside the classroom,
 - Convey a real sense of caring to the students,
 - Make each student feel special,
 - Help students outside of the classroom and at odd hours,
 - Teach them how to use information to make proper decisions for real life,
 - Students need to know you are approachable,
 - Motivate them to achieve at their maximum level,

- Instill a fire in your students,
 - Create a classroom environment where students are passionate about learning,
 - Go beyond the confines of the academic setting,
 - Discuss contemporary topics,
 - Share personal relevant experience,
 - Capture the interest of your students,
 - Be devoted to your students,
 - Learn students individual needs and respond appropriately,
 - Develop specialized assignments and schedules when needed,
 - Provide tools for their careers,
 - Promote practical work experience,
 - Foster relationships with local area professionals, and
 - Each semester ask the students to write down what future students should do in order to be successful in the course and put some of these on the next term's syllabus.
6. Conscious of small details.
 7. Reach out to students.
 8. Know your students and build on their strengths.
 9. Value and build relationship.
 10. Relational turning points.
 11. Enthusiasm.

ELEMENT 3: CONTENT

"What the mind of man conceives and he believes, he can achieve." - Napoleon Hill

At the least, content must be accurate and timely. However, content also should be relevant and useful to the student in his or her life. Olson (1997) notes that student motivation depends on the extent to which the teacher is able to satisfy the student's need for feeling in control of their learning, feeling competent, and feeling connected to others. As such, content also must be included to satisfy each of these student needs. Following are some suggestions for element 3 or content contributions that will build student motivation. That is, content needs to be developed and improved with awareness of the factors listed below:

1. Students experience success and achievement.
2. Student ownership.
3. Student choices.
4. Build competency.
5. Creativity and critical thinking.
6. Students feel connected.
7. Novelty.
8. Timely and relevant to real life.
9. Variety.
10. Technology and information from the Internet such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and phone apps.

ELEMENT 4: METHOD/PROCESS

"If you tell me I will listen. If you show me I will see. If you let me experience, I will learn." - Lao-Tzu

The method or process is the way in which content is presented, that is, the approach used for instruction. Two basic approaches for supporting and cultivating motivation in the classroom are (1) creating a classroom structure and institutional method that provides the environment for optimal motivation, engagement, and learning; and (2) helping the student to develop tools that will enable him or her to be self-regulated. (Alderman, 1999) Some specific ideas or tips for improving element 4 or the method/process contributions to student motivation are:

1. Incentives.
2. Experiential learning or self-learning.
3. Mutual goals or objectives.
4. Verbal conformity.
5. Flexible and stimulating just-in-time training and interactivity.
6. Different types of framing.
7. Objective criteria.
8. Encouragement and praise.
9. Casework.

10. Guided discussion.
11. Reinforcement strategies.
12. Positive social interactions.
13. Storytelling.
14. Enhanced lecture.
15. Collaborative quiz.

ELEMENT 5: ENVIRONMENT

"To stay motivated you must fight self-doubt, poor discipline, fear, and any other ghost" - Dr. Zonnya

Environment is the fifth key element of student motivation. UNESCO International Commission chaired by Jacques Delors has stressed the role of family and society in motivation of the students. The UNESCO Commission is of the opinion that education cannot be thought of in isolation from the social and familiar environment of the child. The environment must be available and accessible. Thereafter, that environment must be of a quality or caliber that contributes to the motivation of the students. For example, if an environment is not safe, it is difficult and maybe even unwise to put all of your attention on learning. On the other hand, an environment of openness and freedom to learn from our mistakes can foster motivation to learn. Also, the environment can be physical as well as mental, emotional, and even spiritual in some regard. Suggestions for creating an environment conducive to student motivation are as follow:

1. Create an effective environment: According to Rumsey (1998), when creating an effective environment, educators need to consider the following:
 - a. Overall approach to material presentation and development,
 - b. Examples coming before and after detailed discussions of the concepts,
 - c. The use of engaging classroom activities,
 - d. In-depth discussions or simulations,
 - e. The use of good business or organizational problems rather than contrived examples,
 - f. The use of real-life exercises throughout that are varied in scope and field of application,
 - g. Using applications relevant to students' everyday experiences or to their chosen career fields,
 - h. Creating situations in which the students perceive themselves as academically productive,
 - i. Motivating by example and by encouraging student discovery,
 - j. Developing positive attitudes, and
 - k. Encouraging critical thinking (e.g., what do you mean, why, what if, what works/does not work, and how would you etc).
2. Individual and learning system design differences.
3. Include the study of self-information.
4. Engagement and considering student and teacher opinions.
5. Teamwork.
6. Structures.
7. Distance and online learning.
8. Emotionally literate environment.

CONCLUSION

What is the best way to motivate students? The short answer is that all of these strategies can be used, as often as possible. Understanding student motivation is much like a group of blind men discovering for the first time what an elephant is like. One man holds the tail and says that an elephant is like a broom. Another holds a leg and says that an elephant is like a tree trunk. Others say an elephant is like a big pillow, a big hose, or a spear. Each blind man has an accurate portrayal from his specific vantage point but not the whole picture. This also seems to be the case regarding student motivation. Each of the writers or theorists has another valuable aspect that contributes to the understanding of student motivation. However, no theory seems to be complete in and of itself. As such, maybe the best way to gain some new understandings about motivation is to hold all of these theories simultaneously in mind, much like a giant puzzle,

and see where there is good understanding and where there are gaps. These new ideas then could be translated into the classroom, using those specific items that are effective and useful in each instructor's unique classroom situation. At the very least, it seems that motivation in the classroom is a function of five components: student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment. Aspects of any of these five components could contribute to and/or hinder motivation. Maybe educators could

start just by choosing and trying three new possibilities for enriching student motivation. Or, more importantly, educators could watch themselves and their own behavior to become self-aware of new understandings about motivation. One should remember that "motivation is when dreams put on work clothes." (Robinson in Friedman, 1999).

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