High School
Instructional Specialists

Bringing clarity to Educational issues

STUDENT MOTIVATION

CONTROL
COMPETENCE
COMMUNITY
LEVEL OF CONCERN
SUCCESS
KNOWLEDGE OF RESULTS
INTEREST
FEELING TONE

HIGH SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL SPECIALISTS
PEORIA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Source: Tileston, Donna Walker. *What Every Teacher Should Know About Student Motivation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press: 2004.

Quinn. Pat. *Getting All Students to Put forth Effort*: www. Betterteachingonline.com.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

We all want to belong somewhere. What we believe our status to be in those groups – whether at home, with peers, or within a certain club or organization – determines our sense of acceptance. Learned helplessness is a condition that over time affects motivation. It is based on an experience in which the student felt he or she had no control. Learned helplessness can be overcome by building into our lessons opportunities for success and by teaching students basic emotional intelligence strategies, such as goal setting. Build lessons and projects around student interests and provide explicit feedback often.

Stress causes the brain to trigger a reaction of defensiveness or a sense of helplessness. Under such conditions, the brain may go into a "survival" mode in which it becomes less capable of planning, pattern-detection, judgment skills, receiving information, creativity, classifying data, problem-solving and other higher-order skills. Threats that students face include threats of bodily harm and threats based on what we do or do not know about learning. For instance, when students do not understand the directions for doing a task, it is an intellectual threat. They fear failure because of what they do not know. Students feel threatened when their ideas are attacked, they receive derogative comments, they are given little or no feedback, or they are not provided with enough direction to complete a task. Self-efficacy is an important part of the students' safety needs. Fear is reduced when the students know they can be successful based on past experience. Unfortunately, much of the self-talk that reveals how they feel about their ability to be successful is not spoken aloud. Teachers who cruise the room, talk to students, and constantly provide feedback to students are more likely to identify and stop threats in his/her own classroom.

In order for students to be successful, they need specific directions, adequate opportunities to practice learning, and specific feedback for improvement. They also need to know before tackling an assignment what the expectations of the teacher are. No assignment should be given to students without a rubric or matrix telling them exactly what is expected. Students can do more work at a quality level if they know what qualifies as quality.

The teacher needs to be aware of both the emotional and physical atmosphere in the classroom. Students fear being made to look foolish in front of their peers. Anything that causes them to feel inadequate, silly, stupid, hurt, or embarrassed will be an emotional threat. A positive emotional climate in the classroom includes a student feeling acceptance by the teacher, acceptance by peers, a sense of order, clarity of tasks, and resources for success. Students should feel both emotional and physically safe in the classroom. For instance, do not offer a system of rewards that will embarrass individual students. If the class is going to receive a party for reading a certain number of books and only one person does not meet goal, do not have the party and exclude that student. Instead, offer a class party to the entire class for meeting the class goal. Encourage everyone to contribute to the team effort. Feedback should be specific, positive, and constructive. Be careful not to single out a student for something that should be said one-on-one and out of the hearing of others.

When researching students from the urban poor and with certain ethnic groups, it has been found that these students learn through context better than they do by simply listening to a lecture or to general rules about how to do something. Most of what they have learned prior to combing to school has been in the context of experience, and thus they equate learning with the context of how or when it was learned. Teachers need to be aware of the contextualization of what they say and do and their affect on the feelings toward the content. Students of poverty feel they have very little control on their environment and will equate what they learn with how they learned it.

Rewards are those incentives that students know they can receive if they do certain things. A celebration, on the other hand, is spontaneous and occurs when students achieve their goals without expecting an extrinsic reward. Using a balance of each can encourage students when that little extra is needed. It is important to be consistent and only give rewards or celebrations when they are earned.

VARIABLES OF MOTIVATION

From Essential Elements of Instruction:

Level of Concern: The factors that influence level of concern are accountability, time, and proximity. Students are encouraged to be on task if the activity has accountability built in it. "Will this be graded?" "Will this be on the test?" Accountability can add importance to the task. Time affects whether or not the student will start the activity. If there is too short of time and the student feels that there is little chance of successful completion, then the student won't even attempt the task. If there is too much time, however, students believe they have the choice "Should I spend time chatting with my friends and take the assignment home or should I start it now and have to take it home anyway?" Monitor the students' progress. Be careful that the students are not working too slowly to avoid the next activity. At times, it is necessary to stop the activity before the last few students are done. Your proximity is probably one of the best motivators. Students want to be accepted by the teacher and tend to keep on task when you are standing next to them. They can also sense the importance that you place on the task if you are willing to be next to them while they are completing it. Keep moving throughout the room, monitoring and assisting students.

Success: Students need to feel that they are making progress. Progress can be measured if a student is faster, more accurate, and able to demonstrate new learning. Diagnose what they already know and start at the right level of difficulty. Have them try one step at a time. Tell them what they will be able to do by the end of the lesson. It helps to model and label what you expect them to do. Students feel there is a better chance of success if they work in pairs or groups. The more success a student feels the more successful the students will be in the future.

Knowledge of Results: Immediate and specific feedback helps students know what they need to do to be successful. They are more likely to stay focused if they know they are doing the activity correctly. Students need think time to process information. Pacing is an extremely important skill to learn. The new content must move at a fast enough pace that it does not become boring, but slow enough that that students have time to absorb the information, connect it to previous knowledge, manipulate it, look at the fine details and draw some sort of generalization about the information, and know it well enough to put it to use in a new situation. Say, model, do type lessons are easier to pace than others. You and the students know immediately whether or not they know the concept, especially if you have partners check each other's work.

Interest: Strategies for creating interest include making it novel, appealing to the senses, and making it relevant. At times it is helpful to remember that students at the high school level may not have matured to the degree necessary to open their minds to new things. Their interest focus may be rather narrow. Making the information important to them because it is something they will need in the near future or because it is information that they will need to move on to the next step is very helpful.

Feeling Tone: Whether the feeling tone is positive, negative, or neutral, the person who has the most control is the teacher. The personal approach of the teacher creates the climate. The teacher possesses the power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. Be an instrument of inspiration. Words have power – use them wisely.

MOTIVATION TIPS

1. Provide activities that help students to know one another.
2. Set as a class rule that we must respect each other.
3. Assign students to study groups. The person doing the talking is doing the learning.
4. Monitor student's ability to work with others and provide feedback on their groups' work.
5. Ask students to self-evaluate how they are progressing.
6. Ask students to self-evaluate how well their group works together.
7. Construct questions so that they provide opportunities for students to be successful. Provide wait time that is consistent from student to student.
8. Respect students' individual differences by bringing in a wide variety of materials that show different cultures, both males and females in meaningful occupations, and handicapped students as important parts of society.
9. Use a questionnaire to determine students' interests and strengths. Take into account students' interests in planning lessons.
10. Arrange the room according to the purpose of the lesson.
11. Have a set routine for turning in homework, restroom breaks, and how to get teacher's attention when there are questions and concerns.
12. Be consistent in enforcing rules.
13. Give students the objectives or essential questions in writing. Provide a method for students to check their progress toward meeting the state standards.
14. Keep the classroom visually appealing with appropriate material on the walls, including examples of student work.
15. Use music from time to time when it is appropriate to the learning, for celebrations, and sometimes for entering and leaving the classroom.
16. Allow students to drink water in the classroom.
17. Provide opportunities for students to give the teacher feedback on the learning and on the general atmosphere in the classroom. Use written feedback instruments.
18. Give students rubric or grading matrix that shows expectations for assignments.
19. Teach what you test. Test what you teach.
20. Help students stay focused on goals.