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ABSTRACT

Students who go to a junior community college because their grade-point deficiencies in secondary schools block entrance to regular 4-year institutions present motivational challenges to educators. Two of the major problems in motivating a college student when his efforts in the educational system have already been largely futile include lack of adequately trained personnel and lack of suitable educational aims. Adequate teacher training would include anatomy and physiology, psychology, elementary reading, diagnostic testing and interpretation, remedial techniques, and a sociological background sufficient to handle students from various types of environments. A problem more important than trained personnel is providing motivation related to suitable aims and goals. Education to be relevant must fit with reality. The culturally deprived student is practically-oriented and not given to abstract ideas. Since he is operating on a sensori-motor level rather than a cognitive level, it would seem that our structured academic system must undergo a change if it is to educate for reality. First we must find out what reality is for our students, and then educate them accordingly. References are included. (BH)

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MOTIVATION: BY WHOM--FOR WHAT?

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Sprechen Sie Deutsch? Verstehen Sie? Wenn Sie es nicht verstehen,  
warum nicht?

Do you speak German? Do you understand? If you do not, Why not?

There are many reasons why you should speak and read German fluently.  
A great amount of the world's worthwhile knowledge has been originally re-  
corded in German. If you aspire to educational sophistication, it is prac-  
tically a requisite that you attain a communicative knowledge of German.

With the motivation I have just given you for acquiring proficiency  
in the use of the German language, I trust that you will wait until I have  
finished this brief discourse before you madly rush out and enroll in the  
nearest beginning German course--if you have not already mastered its intricacies.

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In reality, what inspiration or motivation, if any, have I given you to learn German? Unless you have a specific need to learn German, you probably would not even consider the formal study of the language.

Why can't the language I now possess, suffice? But, if I insist that you must have a thorough knowledge of German if you are to reach the highest pinnacle of achievement of which you are capable, what are some of the questions you would immediately ask?

Why do I need it?

What good is it going to do me, now, or ever? ad infinitum.

The motivation which we attempt to inspire in many of our community college students is as ridiculous, if not more so, as the foregoing example.

This symposium is to deal with "Problems Peculiar to Teaching Reading Improvement in a Junior Community College." As a consequence, these remarks deal specifically with that segment of the community college population who would not be ordinarily admitted to a regular four-year institution because of grade point deficiency in the secondary schools. It is true that classes in reading are provided for the academically-sufficient student to enhance his proficiency and speed in reading. Motivation, per se, is not a problem with this student. He has been instilled with the desire--the motivation--from his parents, his peers, his siblings, etc. Therefore, our concern is with the student who comes to the community college because it is the only place he can go for "higher education."

What is his motivation for continuing a course of action which thus far has proven to be futile insofar as success is concerned?

Does he know or has he even considered what his true motive might be?

How realistic is his appraisal of his potential and/or deficiencies?

If he lacks motivation, who, on what basis, is going to motivate him?

These and innumerable other questions must be answered "if he is to profit from the instruction," which is the criterion California uses for admittance to a community college of anyone 18 years of age or older.

If the instructor is to provide the motivation for this student on some kind of logical basis, how should the instructor be trained? If we are to understand the student, to understand his reading problems, to understand what type of remedial process will best enhance his chance for success, to understand fully the processes of perception and cognition; we must have adequate training in the following:

Anatomy and Physiology (particularly of the eye and brain)

Psychology (not just the introduction to)

Elementary Reading

Diagnostic Testing and Interpretation

Remedial Techniques

A sociological background sufficient to help us understand the culturally deprived, the educationally handicapped, the disadvantaged, etc.

These areas should be among the minimum requirements for certification for teaching reading. Yet we know that very few states come anywhere near these requirements. Usually a degree in English is sufficient to make one an "expert" in reading. As a consequence a great deal of in-service training must be done.

But the other problem that exists is even more paramount than the lack of properly trained personnel. For what do we motivate these students?

Here again we are confronted by many "ifs." If we can ascertain the student's potential, if we can determine rather accurately his socio-economic background, and if we can chart him on a course that will enable him to acquire the skills which he, up to this point, has not acquired, where will we aim him? What will provide him with the motivation to "stick it out"?

Riessman (4, pp.26-30), in The Culturally Deprived Child, gives an excellent portrait of the underprivileged (too lengthy to quote in full) which would be quite apt to describe the educationally handicapped student which we have in the community colleges. The one truly relevant statement (p. 29) is, "The anti-intellectualism of the underprivileged individual is one of his most significant handicaps."

On page 28 Riessman further states, "He is pragmatic and anti-intellectual. It is the end result that counts. What can be seen and felt is more likely to be real and true in his perspective. His practical orientation does not encourage abstract ideas."

Piaget (3, p.11) in The Psychology of Intelligence defines intelligence as, "...intelligence constitutes the state of equilibrium towards which tend all the successive adaptations of a sensori-motor and cognitive nature, as well as all assimilatory and accommodatory interactions between the organism and the environment."

Does an anomaly exist here? If Riessman is correct that the educationally handicapped is primarily interested in the "real" world with little or no value placed on abstractions, are we correctly motivating such a student when we attempt to make him an academician? Likewise, if we accept Piaget's definition of intelligence, is not the capacity for abstraction necessary?

We could quite correctly infer that the greater the capacities for sensori-motor and cognitive assimilations, the greater the intelligence. If the underprivileged operate primarily on a sensori-motor level, should not our motivation for that person be on that level?

The term "relevance" has been repeatedly heard these past years. Does education have relevance? How relevant is this or that course? For the remedial student the question should more aptly be stated as, Does this fit with my reality?

The problem that is extant in our entire educational system is that "reality" for the teachers opposed to "reality" for the educationally handicapped is found on opposite ends of the pole.

Burke (1, p.35) in Permanence and Change states it nicely:

"But the question of motive brings us to the subject of communication, since motives are distinctly linguistic products. We discern situational patterns by means of the particular vocabulary of the cultural group into which we are born. Our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally molded) which select certain relationships as meaningful. These relationships are not realities, they are interpretations of reality--hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is."

What are the possible solutions to these two problems--lack of adequately trained personnel and lack of motivation on the part of the educationally handicapped student?

Teacher training could be the easiest to rectify. The teacher training institutions need to critically evaluate their programs in light of the preparedness of their graduates to enter this field. Reading groups, nationwide, should press for these badly needed changes.

The other problem is more all-encompassing. Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2, pp. 124-25) in Encouraging Children to Learn state, "This question (of being able to guide students into becoming capable and responsible human beings) will be decided, in our opinion, by our ability to change from a punitive, retaliatory, and mistake-centered educational practice to one of encouragement for all those who have failed to find their way toward fulfillment."

This will require a complete change in our thinking about the educational system as a whole. Let's not start every Johnny and every Susie in the first grade with the concept that they are "budding" Ph.D.'s. Let's educate for reality. Let's motivate for reality. Let's be willing to admit that our systematized grade and academic discipline structure does not work for many students.

Let's not continue in the community colleges to subject the failures to more of the same regimentation that has caused them to be failures. Let's find out what reality is for them and educate accordingly. Let's dispel the concept that to be a success you have to have a degree.

How well did I motivate you at the beginning of this talk to take German? The motivation we are giving our students is usually no less ridiculous.

If we can have properly trained teachers and properly motivated students, I would not give a talk entitled "Motivation: By Whom--For What?" but would rephrase it, "Motivation: By Properly Trained Teachers--For Reality."

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