HOW TO SUSTAIN STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: Motivation, one of the leading problems in education, is an ongoing issue for teachers. Motivation is important because it highly contributes to achievement. Teachers have to be certain that their students are being motivated in order to develop a positive outcome. This article suggests some strategies to sustain students' classroom motivation.

Key Words: Motivation, sustain, ways

There are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation.

(Terrell H. Bell).

In psychology, motivation is a force that energizes and directs behavior toward a goal (Eggen, Kauchak, 1994). Wlodkowski (1986) suggested that motivation describes processes that (a) arouse a desire to investigate behavior, (b) give direction and purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, or (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior. In relation to learning, Crump (1995) stated that the act of motivating could be defined as exciting the mind of the student to receive instruction (Brewer, Burgess 2005). In a word, motivation is an inner state that arouses individual's desire for a goal and maintains their efforts in a certain direction and time (Kong, 2009).

In a learning environment developing motivation is a difficult task for the teacher considering that every student learns differently and every student is diverse in their own ways. But students expect the teacher to guide and encourage them in a constructive manner (Shadlyn, 2004). Teachers' instructional choices can make a positive impact on student motivation. "In the formal world of the classroom, teachers hold an extreme position of power" (Vialle, 2000). Teachers play a vital role in influencing student's motivation. "Effective schools and effective teachers are those who develop goals, beliefs, and attitudes in students that will sustain a long-term involvement and that will contribute to quality involvement in learning" (Ames, 1990).

However, some studies have suggested that teachers have primary responsibility for motivating students to learn. Brophy (1987) suggested that teachers viewed themselves as active socialization agents who were capable of stimulating students' motivation to learn. Wilkenson (1992) stated that a dictionary definition for "teach" was "to cause to know a subject." Wilkenson believed that whereas students were

responsible for learning material in a class, the teacher was responsible for causing the student to know the material. In addition, Wilkenson believed that teachers should judge their success by the success of their students and that the purpose for teachers was to serve students. Additional studies have supported Wilkenson's strong views on the responsibility of the teacher to motivate students to learn. One of the major findings in a study by Small (1996) was that instructors were perceived by students as having the prime responsibility for learners' interest or boredom. McCutcheon (1986) further reported that a survey indicated students believed that out of 51 possible choices, the main reason they missed a class was their negative perceptions of the professor and the course (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

According to Jere Brophy, a leading researcher on student motivation and effective teaching, "Student motivation to learn is an acquired competence developed through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by others (especially parents or teachers)." As Barbara Davis writes in *Tools for Teaching*, "Students respond positively to a well-organized course." Therefore, it is important to be mindful of the fact that how you structure the course and the teaching methodologies you use can greatly affect your students' motivation to learn. By providing students with a basic framework of expectations and guidelines, students often remark that they feel empowered and are better able to shape their semester. Barbara Davis points out that "Research has shown that a teacher's expectations have a powerful effect on a student's performance" (Callahan 2010). As a teacher, tell your students you expect them to be successful in learning. Provide a framework of subgoals for steady progress towards mastery of the requirements (Nadler, Lawler, 1979).

The beliefs teachers themselves have about teaching and learning and the nature of the expectations they hold for students also exert a powerful influence (Raffini, 1993). As Deborah Stipek (1988) notes, "To a very large degree, students expect to learn if their teachers expect them to learn" (Linda, 1994).

If teachers have a responsibility to motivate students to attend class and to learn, it is important for teachers to understand specifically how to motivate students. Brewer and Marmon (2000) and Wilson and Cameron (1996) identified three general areas teachers in training used to evaluate themselves: instruction, relationships, and management. Instruction involved teacher skills and competencies. Relationships concerned the attitudes teachers had toward their students (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

As Barbara McCombs notes, "Motivating learning is largely dependent on helping to bring out and develop students' natural motivations and tendencies to learn rather than 'fixing them' or giving them something they lack."

The following are some strategies by Mekiva Callahan to consider when planning your course and creating lessons which are important in student motivation.

Set the tone early in the semester. Your syllabus should clearly state your learning objectives, course goals, and student expectations for the course. Explicitly communicate to your students what they need to do to be successful in the class and

achieve their personal goals. You want to capitalize on your students' initial curiosity with an enthusiastic introduction of the course. This can easily be done by conducting class surveys or administering diagnostic tests to get a sense of what the students already know or believe about the course. These strategies can be used on first day of class and also when introducing a new topic (Callahan, 2010). Communicate your enthusiasm for your subject. Tell your students how you became interested in your subject and how your research interests developed (Wlodkowski, 1999).

Vary your teaching methods. Instead of the traditional lecture, you can incorporate academic activities that get students to actively participate in the class and allow for more immediate feedback. Incorporating problem-based learning, collaborative learning, experiments, and the use of technology such as clickers, allows for greater student interaction and the opportunity for students to practice newly acquired skills and knowledge. Supplementing your lecture with guest lectures, a panel discussion, or student presentations can break the monotony and minimize passive observation used on first day of class and also when introducing a new topic (Callahan, 2010).

Bonwell and Sutherland (1997) claimed that evidence of the effectiveness of active learning approaches as a way to facilitate learning was too compelling to ignore. Brewer (1997) confirmed this, stating that lectures could be too long, could fail to encourage reflective thinking, provided limited feedback, and were not appropriate for hands-on training. Small (1996) reported that color instruction that incorporated a variety of attention-gaining and maintaining strategies appeared to be the best way to promote interest and prevent boredom (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

Give students options in the classroom. Empower students by giving them a sense of autonomy and helping them develop skills for self-directed learning. Whether it's allowing students to select a research topic or getting their input when designing an evaluative rubric, students' motivation is increased if they feel that they have control of their learning outcomes (Callahan, 2010). Because students will have to be autonomous throughout their adult lives, autonomy is an important thing for students to experience (Hackney, 2010).

The theoretical concept of the need for autonomy has been repeatedly misinterpreted and used synonymously with independence. In accordance with the SDT (Self-determination theory), autonomy has to be considered as a perceived consistency between inner values, what one wants, and the perceived environment. The opposite of autonomy, therefore, is not dependence, but heteronomous control, i.e. an inner conflict between goals and experiences between interests as well as between personal values. Following the SDT, a person is autonomous "when his or her behavior is experienced as willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses the actions in which he or she is engaged and/or the values expressed by them" (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003). This means, it is quite possible that a person is highly dependent (the opposite of independence) on others, yet still perceives him/herself as autonomous in the sense of the SDT. In this case, the reason is that the person experiences the norms and values of societies or groups as congruent with his/her self (Muller, Palekcic, 2005).

Create assignments that are appropriately challenging. It's important to consider your students interests, background knowledge, and abilities when designing coursework. You want to provide students with the opportunity for early success and gradually increase the degree of difficulty with the assignments and exams as the semester progresses. The key is to strike a balance so that every student feels that he/she, with reasonable effort, has the capability to succeed while still being challenged to stretch his/her limits (Callahan, 2010).

The more immediate the response to homework and examinations, the more likely it is to help students reflect not only on their knowledge of the material, but on their learning strategies. And while grades can be highly motivational, it is the commentary on work which assists students most in improving their skills; this means that instructors who mark what is wrong should also suggest specific ways in which students can improve their performance in the future (James, 1998).

Make your lessons relevant. Research suggests that students display greater enthusiasm and interest for a course if they can relate the content and course activities to their daily lives. Relate learning goals to the student's experience. Ask students to state learning objectives in terms of their own life goals (Wlodkowski, Ginsberg, 1995). By connecting the material to real-world experiences or their educational goals, either through examples or in-class activities, you will deepen their understanding of the material and allow the students to see the value of what they are learning (Callahan, 2010). Relevance promotes motivation, that is, helping students to see how skills can be applied in the real world (Linda, 1994).

- What they can do in one subject is relevant to other subjects they study

- What they can do in one lesson is related to what they do in the next or a later lesson

- What they do at school is relevant to their lives now- either in their part time job, at home, or in their hobby

- What they do at school is relevant to their lives further down the track- either at university, in their apprenticeship, or in the job they want when they leave school

- What they do at school is relevant to the world as a whole

- What they do at school develops their thinking and analysis skills which help in other parts of their life- such as at work with friends

- What they do at school gives variety so they can select what subjects to focus on in senior school, at college, or at university

- School develops their people skills and that this is useful beyond their school years

(Martin, 2010)

An instructor can help students become reflective about their interests and knowledge, and ask them to relate or adapt course information to their concerns in their assignments and in the classroom. Nelee Langmuir, instructor in French,

explains that "without relevant students' engagement, new material cannot be learned or mastered. "In her own classes she always invites students to "make the material their own" and she tries to enable them to adapt new material to personal contexts and interests: "Many students take my French classes for every different reasons, and so I try to be aware of their diverse interests and gear my presentations accordingly. Their motivation to learn and ultimate mastery of the language depend largely on their ability (and mine) to try to make the French language their own while studying it" (James, 1998).

Jeremy Harmer has some thoughts on how to sustain motivation in the classroom. According to him, it's a mixture of 5 A's:

Activity – Students need to have a lot of activities. Moving around, role-plays, hands-on experiences.

Agency – Students are more motivated when they are the doers, when they are agents, so give them some power to decide things when you can.

Affect – How they feel. They need to know you care about them, you need to know their names.

Adaptation – Teachers' ability to respond to the unexpected. You have to be flexible when things break down.

Attitude – The teacher's attitude. What are you like when you come into the classroom? It can't be you, it has to be the professional teacher in you

(Harmer, 2008)

"It is effective and functional to apply various and interesting activities with moderate challenge to attract students to arouse their curiosity … Various and interesting activities encourage students involve as much of the time and effort as possible and as well as enhance learning motivation" (Kong, 2009).

A teacher's attitude and personality may influence a student's motivation. "If you admired or had a crush on an elementary school teacher, you were probably eager to learn that teachers' approval by performing well in class. If you disliked or feared a teacher you may have lost all interest in learning and simply endured school until the end of the year" (Shadlyn, 2004). Brewer, DeJonge, and Stout (2001) and Karsenti and Thilbert (1994) suggested that highly structured, well-organized, and outcomes-oriented teachers seemed to maintain student motivation. Though class structure and organization were important, balancing the classroom environment with flexibility and student empowerment could be just as important. Friday (1990) believed that an authoritarian teaching style was less satisfying for students than was a democratic teaching style. Luechauer and Shulman (1992) argued that college business classes that were bureaucratic and teacher-focused created feelings of powerlessness among students. Instead, he recommended a class environment that empowered students to form an open and creative team environment. Hancock (2001) concurs that students achieve more poorly in highly evaluative situations, in which instructors exert

significant control over classroom procedures and competition among students is emphasized. Students who are test anxious are particularly more sensitive to situations that they perceive to be highly evaluative (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

Teven and McCrosky (1996) reported that levels of learning were positively influenced when students perceived their teachers to be caring. Brewer (1997) stated that numerous surveys have shown that the most effective educators have been perceived as caring, enthusiastic, consistent, and impartial when dealing with students. He also referred to the adage, "They won't care what you know 'til they know that you care." Wilkenson (1992) expressed similar views, suggesting that teachers impacted students more by their character and commitment than by their verbal communication. Darr (1996) found that teacher behavior appeared to be the factor that most strongly influenced students' evaluation of instruction. Thayer-Bacon and Bacon (1996) argued that teacher-caring encouraged student growth and learning and created a safe environment for risk-taking. Sass (1989) reported his findings on eight characteristics that encouraged high classroom motivation. The number one characteristic was enthusiasm. Rapport with students was also listed among the top eight characteristics. It appeared that motivation was sometimes related to instructors' personal characteristics, rather than what he or she actually taught. Arnett (2002) found that teachers' out-of-classroom rapport with students was also an important factor in motivating students. Through outside contact with instructors, students may feel that the instructor cares about building a relationship with them on an informal level, which may motivate them to perform better in class (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

Shiang-Kwei and Seungyeon Han suggest six strategies to sustain student motivation.

Choice – "Choice of tasks or activities is viewed as fostering belief in personal control and increasing interest and involvement in learning" (Ames, 1990). Encourage students to make choices and become self-determining. Ask them to identify new interests and challenges as they meet course goals (Deci, Ryan, 1985). Malone and Lepper (1983) suggest that providing explicit choices among alternatives can enhance intrinsic motivation. Schiefele (1991) identified two components of interest: feeling-related and value-related valences. Feeling-related valences are feelings attached to a topic. Value-related valences relate to the importance of the topic to an individual. Value-related valences are associated with "constructing meaning". Feeling-related valences are the degree of enjoyment that an individual has toward a topic or object. If students are allowed to select a task that they personally enjoy doing, their motivation to learn increases (Kwei and Han, 2001). Allowing some student choice enhances intrinsic interest in school tasks, and it teaches self-management skills that are essential for success in higher grades and the workplace. It is impossible for children to develop autonomy and a sense of responsibility if they are always told what to do, and how, and when to do it (Stipek, 1984).

Challenge – "It is important to recognize that student motivation can be maintained if learning goals are challenging but not overwhelming; both course goals

and personal goals must be set at an appropriate level. Students' interest will remain high if the challenge seems realistic and the path to success is made clear to them" (James, 1998). Providing or operating tasks just beyond the skill level of the students is a good approach to challenge learners. In the motivation chapter, the Flow Theory is presented (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985). Teachers should present tasks with challenging in the principle of neither too easy nor too difficult that beyond the student's capacity, because tasks that are too difficult discourage them from trying; tasks that are too easy produce boredom and decreased feelings of competence and self-efficacy (Chundiao, 1990). Students may experience flow if the challenge of assignments matches their skills. Work that is too difficult raises anxiety, whereas tasks that are too easy contribute to boredom; both situations decrease motivation toward learning. In order to ensure that goals remain challenging, teachers should continue giving students the opportunity to provide feedback. Helping students search for more information to improve and revise their tasks plays an integral part in the learning process (Kwei, Han, 2001).

Control - If students are involved in the process of classroom control, they will be more responsible, independent, and self-regulated learners. To share the classroom control with students means involving them in the process of decision-making, organization of content, and choosing team members. However, too many choices may lead to increased anxiety, so providing assistance at appropriate times is essential when the teacher shares the classroom control with students (Kwei, Han, 2001).

Collaboration - Vygotsky (1978) theorized that communication and collaborative group work can enhance individuals' thinking and learning. Students can share learning strategies and perspectives with each other through social interaction. Collaboration seems to work best when students depend on each other to reach a desired goal, when there are rewards for group performance, and when students know how to work together effectively (Driscoll, 1994).

One way to offer variety in the classroom is to use cooperative learning groups. With this approach, the teacher facilitates groups or teams of students working together to solve practical problems. One study found that achievement and motivational gains were significantly higher for students in a cooperative learning classroom in comparison with a traditional lecture classroom (Nichols, Miller, 1993). McGonigal (1994) reported that cooperative groups and a varied teaching approach aimed at maintaining student interest helped increase student motivation and performance in a Spanish class. Richardson, Kring and Davis (1997) found that students with the highest grade point averages preferred professor-assisted discussions over lectures. Based on these findings, it appeared that offering a variety of creative activities, including cooperative groups, instead of teaching solely by lecture, could motivate students. Brewer (1997) offered the following 12 teaching methods in addition to the lecture: small-group discussions, role-playing, case studies, demonstrations, panels, inquiry methods, buzz groups, programmed instruction, directed study, experiments, brainstorming, and questioning (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

Constructed Meaning - Value-related valences are associated with the construction of meaning. If students perceive the value of knowledge, their motivation to learn increases. Setting a meaningful goal for students is an important factor to promote motivation. Students should be given the opportunity to construct meaning in text as well as to build a rationale for the meaningfulness of literacy activities (Turner & Paris, 1995).

Consequences - People enjoy having their work and learning achievement appreciated and recognized by others (Malone & Lepper, 1983). When students are provided channels to display their work, motivation increases. There are various strategies for displaying students' work, such as hanging their posters on the wall, presenting their work at a science fair, publishing their work on web sites, and providing links to other students. There is no "correct" way to complete a project, and students can compare their creativity, integrating articles and presentation ability with other teams. This strategy creates a positive feeling about effort, ownership, achievement, and responsibility (Turner & Paris, 1995). "Praising students' effort may actually convey to them a sense of confidence in their ability" (Ames, 1990).

Instructors can aid in enhancing students' self-efficacy by providing accurate feedback that is specific to the task (Linnenbrink, Pintrich, 2003). For instance, instead of general statements such as "good paper," teachers can point out specific details of the paper that were effective, such as "well-thought-out introduction," or "smooth transitions between paragraphs." Instructors should not provide positive feedback or insincere praise to students when it is not deserved; instead, they should point out areas that need improvement to help students maintain accurate efficacy judgments, according to Linnenbrink and Pintrich. Providing students with challenging tasks that require some extra effort, they suggest, can also boost motivation and help students build skills and develop expertise (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

Matthew Weller suggests some basic principles of motivation exist that are applicable to learning in any situation.

The environment can be used to focus the student's attention on what needs to be learned.

Climate is important because it creates an environment that encourages both achievement and motivation (Richards, Theodore, 1988). Teachers who create warm and accepting yet business-like atmospheres will promote persistent effort and favorable attitudes toward learning. This strategy will be successful in children and in adults. Interesting visual aids, such as booklets, posters, or practice equipment, motivate learners by capturing their attention and curiosity (Weller, 2005). Providing a safe and orderly environment for learning can drift into becoming mere control of students without concern for the development of self-regulation and independent judgment (Maehr, Midgley, 1991).

Incentives motivate learning.

Incentives include privileges and receiving praise from the instructor. The instructor determines an incentive that is likely to motivate an individual at a particular time. In a general learning situation, self-motivation without rewards will not succeed. Students must find satisfaction in learning based on the understanding that the goals are useful to them or, less commonly, based on the pure enjoyment of exploring new things (Weller, 2005).

Internal motivation is longer lasting and more self-directive than is external motivation, which must be repeatedly reinforced by praise or concrete rewards.

Some individuals -- particularly children of certain ages and some adults -- have little capacity for internal motivation and must be guided and reinforced constantly. The use of incentives is based on the principle that learning occurs more effectively when the student experiences feelings of satisfaction. Caution should be exercised in using external rewards when they are not absolutely necessary. Their use may be followed by a decline in internal motivation (Weller, 2005). Related to an emphasis on success is the prescription "try to find something positive to say about a child's work." Reinforcing children's work even if it involves some small aspect of the total effort should be a step in the direction of giving the child more confidence (Ames, 1990).

Learning is most effective when an individual is ready to learn, that is, when one wants to know something.

Sometimes the student's readiness to learn comes with time, and the instructor's role is to encourage its development. If a desired change in behavior is urgent, the instructor may need to supervised directly to ensure that the desired behavior occurs. If a student is not ready to learn, he or she may not be reliable in following instructions and therefore must be supervised and have the instructions repeated again and again (Weller, 2005).

Crump found that excitement, interest, and enthusiasm towards learning were the primary components of motivation (Brewer, Burgess 2005).

Motivation is enhanced by the way in which the instructional material is organized.

In general, the best organized material makes the information meaningful to the individual. One method of organization includes relating new tasks to those already known. Other ways to relay meaning are to determine whether the persons being taught understand the final outcome desired and instruct them to compare and contrast ideas (Weller, 2005). "As time goes on, the learning teacher will have better and better mastery of the material which will almost certainly result in better

teaching". The teacher who does not have strong command of the material will likely leave the students more confused than they were before the lesson or class started (Shadlyn, 2004).

Because learning requires changed in beliefs and behavior, it normally produces a mild level of anxiety.

This is useful in motivating the individual. However, severe anxiety is incapacitating. A high degree of stress is inherent in some educational situations. If anxiety is severe, the individual's perception of what is going on around him or her is limited. Instructors must be able to identify anxiety and understand its effect on learning. They also have a responsibility to avoid causing severe anxiety in learners by setting ambiguous of unrealistically high goals for them (Weller, 2005).

It is important to help each student set goals and to provide informative feedback regarding progress toward the goals.

Setting a goal demonstrates an intention to achieve and activates learning from one day to the next. It also directs the student's activities toward the goal and offers an opportunity to experience success (Weller, 2005).

According to Barbara McCombs, "Research has shown that for students to be optimally motivated to learn they must: believe that they possess the skills and competencies to successfully accomplish these learning goals, see themselves as responsible agents in the definition and accomplishment of personal goals, understand the higher level thinking and self-regulation skills that lead to goal attainment, produce the performance outcomes that signal successful goal attainment.

Both affiliation and approval are strong motivators.

People seek others with whom to compare their abilities, opinions, and emotions. Affiliation can also result in direct anxiety reduction by the social acceptance and the mere presence of others. However, these motivators can also lead to conformity, competition, and other behaviors that may seem as negative (Weller, 2005). McClelland states that affiliation motivation is exhibited in response to a desire for approval in social contexts, for example, in situations where a student receives praise for doing well from family or friends (McClelland, 1985). It is also helpful for educators to reduce the extent to they compare students to each other and to increase the extent to which students are their own benchmark. It is also useful to encourage students to focus on the task, what can be learnt from the mark or feedback they got from the teacher, how their mark or feedback compares with their previous performance, and the best ways to improve next time (Martin, 2010).

Many behaviors result from a combination of motives.

It is recognized that no grand theory of motivation exists. However, motivation is so

necessary for learning that strategies should be planned to organize a continuous and interactive motivational dynamic for maximum effectiveness. The general principles of motivation are interrelated. A single teaching action can use many of them simultaneously (Weller, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Motivation needs to be concerned about by every educator. It may be difficult for teachers to sustain motivation of students. Through positive reinforcement, teachers can sustain students interest. If school leaders expect students to become motivated to learn, they must first sustain their own motivation to create schools where students discover that learning is an exciting and rewarding activity (Renchler, 1992). According to Jere Brophy (1987), a leading researcher on student motivation and effective teaching, "Student motivation to learn is an acquired competence developed through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by others (especially parents or teachers)" (Linda, 1994).

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