IMPACTING MOTIVATION IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Teachers, educational managers and learners must realize that new opportunities are offered by modern on-line communication. A person with basic Internet and Web skills is open to a new world of knowledge, from free Web surfing and self-organized education - through on-line resources and familiarization with Internet culture, its places, sites, search engines etc. - up to a more structured approach.

Keywords: **Student motivation, virtual classroom, on-line communication, on-line teachers.**

INTRODUCTION

Stipek (Stipek, 1988) suggests there are a variety of reasons why individuals may be lacking in motivation and provides a list of specific behaviors associated with high academic achievement. This is an excellent checklist to help students develop the conative component of their lives. In addition teacher efficacy is a powerful input variable related to student achievement (Proctor, 1984).

There are a variety of specific actions that teachers can take to increase motivation on classroom tasks. In general, these fall into the two categories discussed above: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

As a general rule, teachers need to use as much of the intrinsic suggestions as possible while recognizing that not all students will be appropriately motivated by them. The extrinsic suggestions will work, but it must be remembered that they do so only as long as the student is under the control of the teacher. When outside of that control, unless the desired goals and behaviors have been internalized, the learner will cease the desired behaviour and operate according to his or her internal standards or to other external factors.

EXPLANATIONS OF INFLUENCES

In general, explanations regarding the source(s) of motivation can be categorized as either extrinsic (outside the person) or intrinsic (internal to the person). Intrinsic sources and corresponding theories can be further subcategorized as either body/physical, mind/mental (i.e., cognitive, affective, conative) or transpersonal/ spiritual. In current literature, needs are now viewed as dispositions toward action. Action or overt behavior may be initiated by either positive or negative incentives or a combination of both.

WHAT IS STUDENT MOTIVATION?

Student motivation naturally has to do with students' desire to participate in the learning process. But it also concerns the reasons or goals that underlie their involvement or noninvolvement in academic activities. Although students may be equally motivated to perform a task, the sources of their motivation may differ. A student who is intrinsically motivated undertakes an activity "for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes".

An extrinsically motivated student performs "in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself," such as grades, stickers, or teacher approval. The term motivation to learn has a slightly different meaning. It is defined by one author as "the meaningfulness, value, and benefits of academic tasks to the learner – regardless of whether or not they are intrinsically interesting." Other notes that motivation to learn is characterized by long-term, quality involvement in learning and commitment to the process of learning.

The relationship between motivation and performance can be expressed by the equation:

P=M x A, where P refers to performance, M-to motive, and A-to ability.
MOTIVE is thus a driving force. The principle is referred to as "My Own Top Interest Value Expectancy" (Artyushina, Artyushina and Sheypak, 2004).

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.

Finally, it should be said that an enormous gap exists between knowing that learning must be motivated and identifying the specific motivational components of any particular act. Teachers must focus on learning patterns of motivation for an individual or group, with the realization that errors will be common.

THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Nowadays a Web-based course represents a new frontier in the field of Distance Learning (DL) when and if it is not structured only as a simple book-like course that makes use of the Net as its delivery medium. When, in other words, it is not only an on-line book. An on-line book is in fact no big educational revolution, and in some cases a real book is better, even if multimedia and interaction are added.

The new frontier begins only when a Web-based course richly utilizes the communication tools Internet offers. These tools enable collaboration and real human interaction between teachers and learners. Every good teacher knows, in fact, that this human interaction factor is vital for proficient, good and sound learning. So these new technologies permit to reproduce, in an on-line environment, the learning experience we have in a real face-to-face classroom. Hence the name of Virtual Classroom. On our view the Virtual Classroom is the course, and not the Web site, which has only the function of providing learners with all sort of information related to the course itself, related to materials and exercises, to on-line activities scheduling, to how to contact the teacher(s) etc. In the context of this new type of virtual work: discussion, participation, collective educational growth, all assumes new significance and connotations that scientists of many disciplines enthusiastically are trying to probe and analyze.

The Polaris Model of Virtual Classroom

Our Web-based courses, in its Virtual Classroom section, are freely inspired by the Polaris Virtual Classroom model. This Polaris experience is resulting from experimentations carried out in Italy from 1996 and financed by the CNR of Genova and the Italian Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. (Project EDRUS, 2001).

According to the Polaris reference model, these are the main players in a DL Project. Teaching roles: content experts, maximum experts of course knowledge materials, they are responsible of content and of traditional course modules and can be considered the chief teachers, authoritative of course knowledge; tutors, the virtual teachers, assistants to experts or chief teachers, whose role is to adapt the project conceived by experts into the Distant Learning on-line virtual classroom course; their role is also to conduct the on-line course (as facilitators, coordinators, moderators etc.); technology experts, usually tutors more gifted in high tech stuff, i.e. the software and the hardware that allow communication and interaction. As far as the teaching roles are concerned, they can be separated, and often are, as it is natural, but it would of course be of great help if all these teaching skills were present in each member of the team.

Team responsibilities: this team, like any team of traditional teachers, is responsible - as we have said - for defining goals and objectives, for fixing prerequisites, for structuring content, for planning collaborative on-line activities, self-study activities etc. The course team is also responsible for choosing the right educational strategies, for labs, exercises, tests and quizzes etc., for preparing, scheduling and leading on-line discussions, collaborative work, tutorial interventions and so on.

Course Timeline and Scheduling

Course outline and timeline must be very well structured and planned, much more than in a traditional course, because learners can be scattered in a large territory, as is the case of Russia, and organization may imply new tough challenges. A good balance must exist in asynchronous and synchronous activities. These last ones must be precisely scheduled and any variation must be communicated to learners in due time. On-line appointments must be strict but some flexibility is necessary, especially because of possible connection disruptions. A virtual classroom of learners can be mainly of two kinds. A classroom of remote individuals, also called a "telematique" group: here users are distant, scattered and all remote to one another, all with separate Internet access. A classroom made of groups and not of individuals, also called a group-of-groups. This group entities or "collective learners" usually have representatives (one, maximum two, and it could be advisable for financial reasons when learners are many: only one Internet access and computer per group).

Possible Scenarios With Virtual Classrooms

Individuals or groups in different places that can communicate only with the tutor transparent and open communications among all participants in all connected places transparent and open communications limited to groups of participants organized in virtual groups (one workstation per group) or in groups of groups (one workstation per sub-groups or any other possible convenient financial solution)

Defining the Ways of On-line Communication and Activities

As said before, many of following on-line activities and interactions are so similar to those carried out in a real face-to-face instructional environment, that first-time Distance Learning educators will not feel too uncomfortable reading these notes. All these new virtual teachers need is just practice, practice, practice. Plus some additional computer skills, easily manageable; finally, a new attitude towards CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) tools and computers in general.

Generally speaking, new on-line teachers have to learn from their children and from young people this sort of playful creative attitude towards new software, chatting, instant messaging, newsgroups, e-cards and similar stuff. This will let them have a lot of fun, and, most of all will make them good experts in a very short time.

CONCLUSION

A German philosopher F. W. Nietzsche wrote: "A person can withstand any "what" if he has large enough "what for". You can wake yourself to perform miracles if you have only exciting dreams. The best motivation is self-motivation. Some say: "I want somebody comes and direct me to the necessary turn." And what will happen if nobody comes? It is then you will find the best plan of activities. We'd like to make a conclusion, using two quotations by Stephen Lehman: «The best teacher is the one who suggest rather than dogmatizes, and inspires his listener with the wish to teach himself" and "Stronger claims have been made example the linguistic philosophers of education would want to say that unless learning is taking place one can't be said to be teaching". In general these words summarize our views on motivation.

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