



How to Motivate Children in the Classroom

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About The Author

Rachael was inspired by her young children as a parent helper in one of the schools in Melbourne, Australia. This ebook is written based on her global training work as a Professional Facilitator in the corporate world as well as hands on experience as a parent helper to develop strategies that result in positively motivated students in the classroom and/or students in the corporate seminar room.

Introduction

What is motivation? It has been described in many ways, but the most basic understanding of motivation (especially where it concerns education) is that it is a two part experience.

The first part involves the level of interest within any individual regarding the task they are seeking to accomplish, and the second part involves the external influences that have a power over the individual's level of effort.

The terms used to describe these types are "intrinsic" for the former and "extrinsic" for the latter.

Because motivation is applied in so many different areas of life, it is impossible to say which type yields the best overall results for any individual. Where motivation and education or learning come into contact, however, most agree that the finest results are those that come primarily from intrinsic motivation.



Naturally, many students are happy to work for some sort of award or recognition (which is the purest form of extrinsic motivation) but, if the finest mental, academic, and even social or behavioral skills are to develop, they must be the result of intrinsic motivation on the part of the individual.

This means a student must have an inherent interest in learning and succeeding for their own pleasure or satisfaction and not for a tangible prize or payoff/reward. This sort of intrinsic motivation is something that must be supported, nurtured and encouraged by individuals that are a significant part of the students' lives such as teachers, classroom volunteers, and parents.

How should such individuals motivate a student?

It must begin in the earliest years of the formal educational process, when mentoring has its strongest effects. When a student comes into contact with a teacher who engages them on a personal level and in a respectful and intelligent way, it sets the stage for a life of personal success.

This is due to the motivation and optimism created within the student by the encouraging atmosphere, and also through their personal experiences of true success.

This ebook analyzes the profound need for teachers to create a good rapport between themselves and their students, and will also provide detailed explanations of how to implement beneficial motivational programs.



It also covers how teachers, parents and classroom volunteers can all provide the kinds of moral support, encouragement and assistance that lead to intrinsic motivation for the rest of the student's life.

Who should read this book?

- Teachers who want to enhance their current teaching and coaching techniques in school.
- Parents who want to learn and support the teachers to positively motivate their children at school and at home.

1 The Student-Teacher Rapport

Children are usually only five or six years old when they enter into a full-time educational career.

Whether parents and teachers believe it or not, many children feel overwhelmed by this transitional period.

Some may display poor behaviors in the classroom, on the playground, or at home in response to the turmoil and others might not show any of the upset that they are experiencing.

It is a teacher's job to develop a good connection with each of their new young students and to help them to view learning as a positive experience.

Once a truly positive and mutually respectful rapport has been created, the teacher will be able to motivate each student to the largest extent possible.

Naturally, there may be some student-teacher relationships that contain some antagonism due to disruptive or combative behaviors, excess energy or even some learning disabilities. This is something that the teacher must work to identify and overcome quickly in order to truly understand the individual and find out the best ways to help them develop powerful intrinsic motivation.

Understanding the Welcoming Factor



This approach to developing a positive relationship with a student can be referred to by many terms, but we will call it the "welcoming factor" in this ebook.

Generally, there are two ways that the welcoming factor influences student outcome:

When a teacher is liked by the student, they receive the child's respect. Most experienced teachers and classroom helpers understand that

students are best motivated by people (their teachers and parent helpers) rather than concepts or programs.

This translates to intrinsic motivation because the student wants to engage directly with their teacher to take in the subject matter which is being covered in the classroom and various discussions. Simply put, *"If the teacher likes this stuff, and I like the teacher, then I want to really learn all about it too."*

Bonding with each student traditionally encourages even the most disruptive or combative children to recognize that they like their teacher. This makes it difficult for them to continue being antagonistic in any way and instead forces them to redirect their energies to the classroom discussions and tasks.

Because the development of the bond requires the teacher to reach out to their



student in an unconditional and non-judgmental way, the student is intrinsically motivated to channel once problematic behaviors into far more productive ones. Simply put, *"My teacher really listens to me even though I may have acted badly or not done so well with some of my work, so I know that paying attention to him/her is a good thing to do."*

There are many ways that a teacher can create the welcoming factor in their classroom each and every day. This could be through:

- ✓ Greeting students individually.
- ✓ Making sure to have physical contact with each one through a pat on the back, a reassuring hand on their arm or shoulder, or even a hug.
- ✓ Active listening on the part of the teacher.

It is important to create a welcoming classroom experience.

Developing the Welcoming Factor

The first connections a child makes at school will tend to influence how they feel about the entire educational experience. It is important that the teacher instantly

create a welcoming and mutually respectful environment in order for student-teacher rapport to begin to develop.

How can this welcoming factor be created?

As stated earlier, it all begins very early.

One good approach can take place on the very first day of school where the teacher could require that each child officially greet them at the start of each school day.

They can be given a choice between three different ways to deliver their greeting:

- 1)** They can simply look the teacher in the eye and say hello.
- 2)** They can use a formal handshake.
- 3)** They can enjoy a very casual and informal "high-five" with their teacher.

What would this exchange do?

First, it provides a formal opening to each school day and is as a convenient way to settle down the students.

Next, it allows the child to choose a different way to respectfully speak to their teacher, and also allows them to see that their teacher is accepting of them regardless of the approach selected.



Finally, it allows the teacher to understand each child a bit more through their choices.

For example, a bolder and more confident child will probably opt for the high-five right away, while a shy or reluctant student might simply opt for the spoken greeting.

Such a system can work to gauge the student's mood and progress where their confidence is concerned. It will also allow the teacher to measure if they are succeeding at establishing a welcoming and positive rapport with each student.

Should this be something that is fostered through extrinsic motivational tactics?

For example, should each student receive something for delivering the daily greeting?

Most teachers would say no to that because the pleasure of connecting with their teacher and sharing a moment of communication should be the reward. If the student is only saying hello to get a sticker or some sort of classroom currency then the motivation is not beneficial to the development of the student-teacher rapport.

There are many ways that a teacher can welcome students into their classrooms.

It is important for all students to feel a sense of belonging and a connection to their teacher. As the old saying goes, "Students don't care what you know until they first know that you care."

By connecting with each individual on a daily basis, even if it is through something as simple as a daily greeting, the teacher is staying connected to the student and demonstrating that each of them matters a great deal.

The Invitational Teacher



Many educational experts talk about teaching styles and attitudes. They usually use words such as "invitational" and "disinvitational" to show how the teacher is approaching their relationship with each student.

Interestingly enough, a teacher can be intentionally or unintentionally one or the other. They might be unintentionally inviting by unconsciously providing positive words and praise when a student does well, or they may be intentionally disinviting by using judgmental words and phrases when speaking directly to a student.

For instance, the teacher who says, "Could you please just do the assigned work once in a while?" is intentionally disinviting to the student because the phrase is dripping with judgment and negativity. It is laying out the idea that the student is a constant source of disappointment and a failure.

On the other hand, the teacher who responds to the student who fails to do the assigned work with, "Well, you can do it if you really try" is being intentionally

inviting by establishing that they believe in the student and that they expect them to try.

The Effects of the Teacher's Attitude

To develop the welcoming factor to its strongest degree, a teacher must understand what attitude they are using with each individual. Only then can they know with absolute certainty that they are truly inviting their students into the classroom and the learning environment, and giving them that powerful sense of connection that leads to self-motivational behaviors.



An invitational teacher is telling the student that they are important, interesting and significant, regardless of the class size, the individual's personal capabilities or limitations, and the status of other students in the same class. Such a teacher is making the learning experience fun and rewarding for all involved because they are letting each student know that they can achieve their goals if they just try.

While a supportive student-teacher relationship may appear as extrinsic motivation, i.e. the student is working hard to please the teacher that they respect – it is also simultaneously intrinsic motivation too. The student is actually engaging in the learning process because of its meaning to him/her, and not about what they might receive from the teacher. They may not understand or perceive that they are developing a large measure of self-respect and personal satisfaction from successful learning, but that is the payoff for their hard work and developing motivation.

The student can commit to such a high degree of effort and challenge because they receive constant reinforcement and encouragement from their teacher.

An invitational teacher who works to develop a good rapport with each student is often seen by the student as "having their back". This means that they are well aware of the support which their teacher is happy to offer and with which they cannot truly fail at any learning or educational endeavor.

This is the true nature of optimism, which is covered in the next chapter.

2 Teaching Optimism

Some behavioral scientists point to "instinctual optimism" as the reason people strive from their earliest years to master the world around them.

For example, the two-year old who continues to make sounds with the belief that one day they will be understood, or the four year-old who stares at the words in their favorite book knowing that they will one day read and understand them.

This sort of optimism, so clearly tied to learning, is vitally important for intrinsic



motivation. This is a self-reinforcing sort of motivation that says "if you try, you will eventually achieve your goals".

Unfortunately, most academic systems and institutions use rewards, competition and even punishment that can all dampen or defeat optimism.

While it is not a bad thing that grades, punishments, competitions, and rewards exist in the world of academia, there must also be a balance between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards.

A student whose instinctual optimism has been jarred by their experiences early on in their education might begin to feel that they are being pushed to improve, do better or compete instead of attending school for the joy and promises of learning.

This is a death knell to self-reinforcement, which can lead to the destruction of intrinsic motivation.

For example, the student who shows an early love of mathematics might struggle with a concept, receive some poor grades or condescending words from a teacher, and see themselves as a failure.

This, in turn, might lead them to avoid challenges in math and cease being motivated by their enthusiasm towards the subject.

It is a worrisome sign that their motivation is suffering when children begin to fear challenges in the educational process.

A teacher, classroom volunteer or parent who notes such a thing must immediately step up to reinforce optimism and encourage the child to view challenges in healthier terms.

Saving Instinctual Optimism and Intrinsic Motivation

How can a teacher help a student to be both intrinsically motivated and optimistic?

There are many ways that the teacher can help to create the conditions in which a student begins to motivate themselves, or regains such feelings.

It begins with teaching them to be as optimistic as possible.

Failure is Temporary

Something that many students encounter early in the learning process is a sense of failure. It may be simply answering a question wrong, behaving badly in the classroom, or it might even be the result of some sort of learning disability.

But, a student must never be permitted to see a single failure or difficulty as a permanent status.

For example, a child who is having trouble with basic addition might get the solutions for two or three equations in a row incorrect and say "I can't do math!"

When they express this, they reinforce the concept that a single challenge translates to total failure in their mind.

This is the complete opposite of optimism. It is also a signal that the student needs their teacher to provide them with opportunities for regaining or strengthening intrinsic motivation and belief in themselves.

Understanding Optimism

True optimism will allow the child to view any failure as temporary, totally non-personal and very specific. This is the reason that encouraging an optimistic outlook must be a major focus of a child's teachers and parents, especially if the student is struggling.

To do this, mentors and teachers must reframe the student's perceptions of failure into something more reinforcing and beneficial.

They must shape their own verbal responses and answers to any such events, scenarios, feelings or situations in completely non-judgmental ways.

They should aim at expressing to the child that:

- ✓ Their difficulties are temporary.
- ✓ Success is something which comes from hard work.
- ✓ The child has strengths that will help them get the answers they need.

It is important to remember that optimism is something that touches on a child's entire life. They will be emotionally healthier, academically stronger and even more physically confident if they understand that they will succeed through their efforts.

Shaping Optimistic Thinking

How exactly does the teacher assist a student through a moment of failure or difficulty?

It begins with some sort of assessment of the event coupled with a reinforcement of the idea that success is a long-term effort that can only come from hard work and patience. This is a universal approach to life's challenges, and the technique will still apply whether the student is having difficulty with a particular concept or even with classroom behaviors.

Naturally, each issue requires an individual assessment, but it also requires that the student-teacher rapport already exists and that the teacher has a clear understanding of the student's academic strengths and personal interests.

This is obligatory for the support of optimistic thinking because it turns the student's focus towards the realities of failures in the face of their individual potential.

Simply put, it forces the student to view any failures or disappointments in far less dramatic terms, because it reduces them to specific incidents that can be addressed in an engaging and interesting way.

It wraps challenges in fun and excitement and creates a positive and optimistic view on education.

Specifically, the teacher should reframe the student's perception of a frustrating event. Discussing the issue with them, using non-judgmental terms or remarks, is the first step.

For instance, a teacher should never assess a failure by jumping into the "where you went wrong" approach.

Instead, a more constructive tactic might be for the teacher to "admit" to mistakes or failures of their own where the particular subject is concerned. "I had a hard time with writing too" or some other statement can take the fear of failure away.

A child will not feel criticized or condemned for a failure if their mentor owns up to facing some of the same challenges as well.

The student and teacher can then discuss a way to work on the problem/failure. This will give the child a sense of autonomy and self-determination because they are taking "ownership" of their struggle and taking steps (with lots of support) to overcome it.

Additionally, the student is not told what to do about their failure, but asked to help in finding a solution and work on it independently. This helps them to feel good about the learning process, which strengthens intrinsic motivation.

But, it also helps to sustain their optimism about education as well.



By making the issue very specific, the teacher helps to depersonalize the failure and allows the student to bypass the sense that the issue is going to be a long-term one.

For example, the student who is having difficulty with subtraction is not "bad at math," but is instead simply "working on their subtraction."

Help the student to identify the precise reasons for a failure. Once the student and teacher have looked at the specific issue and the teacher has reframed the matter into a less harmful or counterproductive event, it must be further analyzed.

The reason for the student's failure or disappointment must be identified and converted into something that continues to make it less of a personal issue and more of a learning experience.

Once the cause and effect have been identified, the student will react positively instead of taking their failure to heart.

A good way to do this is to simply ask the student for input in a constructive way. For example, "What would you do differently next time?" or "What grade do you want to get on the next assignment?"

Allowing the student to set some goals and conduct a bit of problem-solving is letting them know that any failure can be immediately overcome through ongoing work.

Such an experience with their teacher, especially one that is low-key, comfortable and free of fear will allow the student to avoid any anxiety around the issue and simply learn through their mistakes.

Some teachers will actually allow students an opportunity to correct mistakes to improve their results. For instance, if the student had a low score on a spelling test, the teacher might encourage the student to work with them to correct their mistakes and then offer an improved grade. This is a good way to promote optimistic feelings in the face of educational challenges. It is also a good example of "problem-based learning" which is covered in a subsequent chapter.

Teach the student to see problems, challenges or failures as temporary setbacks.

We have already mentioned that a teacher must always strive to convey to their students that problems or failures are not a permanent condition or issue. This will be a vitally important lesson throughout the lives of the students who take the message to heart. It will let them know that they can achieve their goals if they continue to keep trying.

Unfortunately, this is not always as simple or easy a lesson as it might sound.

The educational environment, as stated earlier, is not always about the reinforcement of intrinsic motivation and it often reduces optimism too.

This is because there is usually a high level of competition with a focus on rewards and the challenge to always do better.

It is not often possible for an individual student's personal strengths to be identified and nurtured.

It is important that their teacher emphasizes that they have succeeded elsewhere in their academic career when they encounter moments of difficulty or failure, and will be able to do so with this, or any other subject, too.

For example, the first grade student who is having some difficulty with writing, but who excels with reading, can be gently reminded of their competence in that particular area.

This focus on the positive will become a catalyst for the child's self-motivation. They will want to feel as good about their writing as they do about their reading and continue to work towards that level of achievement.

It is significant to remember that the teacher's focus during such times must always be on fostering optimism and creating opportunities for intrinsic motivation. This means that the child's willingness to engage in new challenges can be used as a measure for such goals.

When such phrases as "I can't" or "I don't know" become repetitive, it is a warning sign that some sort of damage has been done to the child's natural optimism, and that stronger tactics will be necessary.

This might involve:

- 1)** One-on-one work with the student
- 2)** The development of class materials geared to meeting their needs
- 3)** Organized planning with parents
- 4)** Solutions for Damaged Optimism

Some examples of solutions to struggles with optimism and some motivational problems include:

Walk and Talk Sessions

These can be ten to fifteen minute intervals in which the student can take a short stroll with their teacher and discuss anything they want EXCEPT schoolwork. This allows the student to actually tell the teacher the best ways to engage their interests in the classroom environment, and might also reveal any underlying causes for difficulties with learning or behavior.

More importantly, such an exchange shows the student that their teacher has a personal interest in them as a person and not just their grades, their work or their behavior.

This creates a great deal of support that will encourage and stimulate the student to take on new challenges because their teacher is really interested in their success.

Target Behaviors and Skills

A student often needs some strongly identified goals in order to achieve the best results. Communicating expectations doesn't have to be a case of the teacher telling the student exactly what to do. It can be a way for the teacher to teach the child how to experience success.

For example, it is not uncommon for a young student who has completed their homework assignments to fail to turn them in. While this can often be a simple case of poor organizational skills, it can also be a sign that their primary goal was to complete the work in order to obtain some reward and that it was not completed in order to turn it in for a good grade.

This is something that frequently occurs with students who are offered purely extrinsic motivational rewards.

Instead of just giving them time watching TV, a favorite snack or an hour with a video game once their homework is complete, their parents and teacher should also work with the student to find a resolution to the entire issue.

This solution will need to still include the original reward, but it must also provide a way for the student to understand the immense satisfaction they will feel once they turn in their work.

Providing the student with the means of enjoying success in their work and/or behavior is a way to subconsciously attach optimism to all of their endeavors.

Other targeting behaviors and skills often include such things as:

- ✓ Hand raising
- ✓ Active listening
- ✓ Sitting in assigned seating

- ✓ Helping fellow students

Modeling

In order for a student to remain motivated and interested in their studies or in improving their classroom behaviors, it is important to provide them with role models.



You might even allow them to help others. Students, particularly elementary level ones, who participate in helping others, tend to experience a level of satisfaction and increased motivation far outside of the norm.

Students with certain learning problems might be asked to read to younger students; they might participate in cooperative learning during which time they are paired with other students who may not have the same particular academic strengths; or they might be assigned certain tasks that allow them to channel energy in a positive manner, such as bringing a daily report to the school office.

Asking them to follow or serve as role models and help others, gives them the opportunity to directly experience the immediate results of their efforts. This can improve their optimistic attitude by allowing them to see that their hard work really does pay off.

Pose reasonable challenges. Though we often hear that "success breeds success", it is not always the case.

Many teachers will also seek to motivate their students and help them overcome any sense of failure through class activities that are specifically geared to allow them to excel. These can be creative or flexible opportunities, but reasonable challenges should be posed to the student, which will then foster their eagerness to engage in even more challenging work.

For example, a teacher might present a student with a worksheet containing ten questions, but tell the student that they can select just eight questions to answer.

However, the ones they select must be those they think will help them learn the most.

This encourages the student to consider the possibilities and take some control over their learning. Quite often, such an approach leads to extraordinarily high-quality work because the student takes pride in their decisions. This is a moment when the old "success breeds success" standard has a universal application.

Naturally, it is much easier to work towards the improvement of a student's motivation and optimism when there is pre-existing knowledge about them. This comes from the early development of the student-teacher rapport.

It also comes from knowing specifically what interests the student has. These "passion points" are wonderful tools for inspiring and motivating a student like never before. We will take an in-depth look in the next chapter at the value and use of passion points, a student's interests, and some helpful and beneficial extrinsic rewards systems.

3 Taking an Interest

In the previous chapter, we discussed a few approaches that might be used to boost a student's motivational levels and improve their optimistic spirit. These would often result in the teacher also getting to know a bit about the student in question.

For instance, they might find things that the student liked to discuss in order to gear some classroom materials or discussion towards their preferred subject matter. This is of particular significance if a student tends to lose interest, or fidgets from excess energy, as it can instantly redirect their attention to the classroom and their peers.

Some of the approaches require the teacher to give one-on-one time with a student, but there are also other ways that a teacher can get to know their students without spending ten or fifteen minutes in conversation with each and every one individually.

These usually include class discussions, assignments and projects that address the individual interests of each student. For instance, "My Favorite Book" or "What I Did This Summer" can be ideal approaches to getting valuable details in a subtle way.

Why should a teacher gather information from students about their specific interests?

Once a teacher knows the specific "passion points" that will grab and hold a student's attention or interest, they can get them really motivated.

While the teacher will always strive to introduce each new subject or concept with genuine enthusiasm that is meant to spill over on their students, adding an extra "boost", such as choosing a personally meaningful topic, can help in measurable ways.

Our Favorites and Our Experiences

Teachers of younger students can easily gear discussions and class work about "favorites". They can ask students to draw favorite animals, talk about their favorite things to eat or to do, and encourage them to share with their teacher and their peers interesting things about their lives.

It shouldn't end with the students, however. A teacher who wants to engage their class should display enthusiasm about such a process as well.

For example, a teacher who wants to discuss animals will be able to ask students to share their favorite animals with the class, but they should model the process for them by being the first to explain which animals they like, and why. This should be something always done with true enthusiasm and excitement that will encourage students to also reveal their passions too.

Of course, not all subjects are going to be as joyful as "favorites". When teachers must deal with such issues as behaviors and attitudes, it helps if they share times when they dealt with them as well.

For example, when the word or issue of jealousy is being learned, the teacher can talk about a point in their early life when they experienced jealousy, i.e. "my older brother had a beautiful red bike that I really wanted, but was too small to safely ride, and I was very jealous about that bike."

Such a reasonable disclosure will inspire students to understand the concept, relate it to their own experiences, and also firm up the student-teacher rapport because it helps the student respect their teacher as a person.

While this is not a way to learn about the students' passion points, it is a way to understand the individual in a much clearer way, which is remarkably beneficial if motivational issues should arise.

The Benefits of the Details

Once a teacher begins to gather information, they will be able to show targeted interest in each student by discussing their passion points with them on a regular basis. This, in turn, leads to a great deal of interest and motivation from the student.

Naturally, not all students will need to discuss things in the context of what is of specific interest to them, but it never hurts to incorporate any opportunities for combining personal interest with classroom learning.

Additionally, a teacher who actively listens to their students is modeling the appropriate response to sharing such information as passion points, feelings and

thoughts. They are looking at the student, encouraging them through questions and comments and showing them how to be a good listener.

This can also be a good way to deliver instant feedback to students, which is also a vital component where motivation is concerned.

Feedback must be positive, constructive, and yet also challenge the child to think even farther.

For example, the student who has expressed that their favorite animals are elephants might be asked if they know where elephants live or if there is more than one kind of elephant in the wild. This stimulates them to think more about the subject that is of specific interest to them. It can also be used as a way to discuss such broader topics as animal species, geography or even anatomy.

Details provide an enormous amount of valuable material that can be put to work in developing motivational strategies for each student.

Incorporating their Interests into Class Work

It is at this point that we can begin to address the millions of subtle and creative ways in which teachers can incorporate all of their students' interests and passion points into the class work and assignments they must tackle.

As just stated above, a topic as simple as "favorite animal" can become an easy springboard into discussions around regular classroom assignments and study subjects. It is very easy when a teacher is working in the elementary levels to link such widely varied subjects together in many different ways. But, it never hurts to explain to the students exactly how the subject matter will be of benefit to them as well.

For instance, a talk about favorite animals that is intended to lead into geography, will demonstrate to the students just how important it is to know about your surroundings.

The intrinsic motivation is the underlying issue because the students are not being rewarded with any tangible items. Instead, they are learning the value of the knowledge their teacher is inviting them to discover.

Because the discussion is introduced through the passion points (favorite animals), the students are also being given some control over the outcome.



How is that? Not all animals inhabit the same continents or countries, and students will each be able to learn a bit about a different area due to their choices.

When topics overlap and students are able to find interconnections in their studies, such as geography, biology (animals) etc, they encounter a powerful motivational experience, an intellectual challenge.

That is the fundamental reason why it is good to find out the details and try hard to create materials and lessons that incorporate potential passion points.

General and Specific Applications

It is important to note that, up until this point, the discussion around passion points has been very general.

For instance, the "favorites" are an easy way for the teacher to take in information about each student's personal interests on a broad scale and also stimulate the entire class in a single swoop.

What about using the details to support and encourage a single student?

It is impossible to gear the teaching materials for an entire class of distinct individuals to meet the needs of a single student, so it must always be the goal to use passion points as constructively as possible in lesson and action plans.

All students have natural aptitudes and optimism, and their personal interests will often reveal them.

A teacher should create a detailed file or notes for each student which they review often in advance of upcoming subjects and lessons. This will help them to then encourage the individual student because they already know when there is an interest or connection to the subject matter.

This is not to say that students should be put on the spot or forced to participate but, if a teacher is able to make the work relevant or meaningful to the student, this becomes an intrinsic motivation that will drive the student to a higher level of achievement.

While it is clear that an enormous range of possibilities exist for teachers to reach out and inspire their students through such multi-layered action plans, they will still need to think about some sort of rewards system too.

The lessons that utilize passion points to create motivation must have the appropriate level of challenge for each individual student, and the teacher must establish clear cut and realistic goals for them.

The student should not simply be encouraged to get the highest scores on any tests or quizzes, but should work to improve their knowledge.

This is often where any extrinsic rewards can be put to fantastic use.

Incorporating Extrinsic Rewards

Teachers should strive to avoid creating competition among students, but they can always encourage kids to challenge themselves. When students meet the challenges, they should enjoy the fruits of their labor, which is primarily increased knowledge.

But, they can also look forward to some overt incentive too. This should be something of a "stock" nature, and many teachers create a token economy or classroom currency that allows the student to frequently earn objects or items for certain target skills or behaviors and for subject mastery over a specific time period. They can then exchange them for rewards.

Of course, a class that is full of distinct individuals with varied levels of abilities requires that any sort of token economy or classroom currency be extremely simple and straightforward.

The payments should be for extremely specific and distinct behaviors and skills, and the rewards should be selected to appeal to everyone involved.

For example, discussions focused around passion points can often lead to children forgetting to raise their hands or wait for their turn. The classroom currency should be geared, in part, towards nurturing those courteous behaviors.

How would this work? For our example, we will use a first grade classroom that has



a "ticket currency." This is in the form of inexpensive tickets that can be purchased in bulk at any office supplies store, and where a student is rewarded a single ticket for each target behavior.

Let's say that the teacher has a very clear list of target behaviors for each classroom activity, and that they remind the students before beginning the activity that everyone who remembers

to raise their hands, wait their turn and follows instructions gets their ticket at the end, etc.

While this might require careful observation from the teacher, it is a fantastic way to encourage courtesy during times of open discussion and also allows the teacher to measure if any of the students are struggling with target behaviors for their age group. (A classroom volunteer can be a great help during such activities.)

Tickets can then be issued in a way that prevents upset or embarrassment, such as a collection of wall pockets into which the teacher drops the tickets at the end of the school day.

Students should be allowed to monitor their ticket status. If they feel that they want to discuss the receipt of half of a ticket for a failure to raise their hand, this should be possible in a non-confrontational or frightening way.

At the end of the week, the students are allowed to cash in their currency for specific items or even opportunities. In our sample classroom, the teacher offers students the chance to "save up" tickets and trade them in at a later date for the chance to work as a teacher's assistant for a day.

Alternately, there is also a nice array of pencils, erasers, stickers and supplies that the tickets can "buy" as well.

Target Behaviors and Passion Points

When a teacher combines materials and discussions geared to address the passion points of students with an overt incentive, the results can be extremely beneficial.

The key is to reward the specific skills and behaviors, and to allow the intrinsic motivation about learning to guide the actual educational process.

In the example above, the students were not rewarded for subject mastery, but instead were rewarded for mastering specific and targeted skills or behaviors.

As the school year passes, the teacher can increase the skill set or add to the list of expected behaviors to continually challenge students to meet goals. In this way, the students are not competing to be the best at answering questions, but to answer them in a way that is respectful of all others involved.

This is a wonderful way to keep educational motivation high without any sort of extrinsic motivation impacting results.

Of course, a teacher who understands motivation and their own teaching style; works to create a sense of true optimism in each student and figures out passion points in order to gear studies and materials accordingly, will still need to meet the varying needs of their classroom as a whole.

There is never a "one size fits all" answer to education, although a large number of systems strive to shape their programs to such a format.

Classes of all sizes often force a teacher to come up with some creative approaches to helping students get motivated.

The next chapter addresses the fundamentals of "problem based learning" and how it is a good way to create a custom approach for an entire class of students.

4 Problem Based Learning

Earlier in this ebook, we looked at the idea of autonomy in the educational process.

We discussed how students quite often like to feel some sort of control and personal responsibility around their learning, and to also be allowed to make some fundamental decisions about it.

We also looked at optimism and how it allows children to seek out ever increasing challenges to master.

These issues are directly linked to a student's improved mastery of subject matter, and can work for children of all ages.

When a teacher is searching for a custom approach to the learning process and they hope to provide their students with the opportunity for autonomy and new challenges, the "problem based learning" model is often a good solution.

How does the problem based learning model work?

In the modern model of problem based learning (PBL), the roles of student and teacher are slightly reversed and the student assumes a larger share of responsibility for the learning process.

This, in turn, leads to much greater feelings of motivation, accomplishment and optimism about their abilities.

Instead of turning to the teacher for all of their answers and information, the student is asked to find a large amount of them on their own, with guidance and support from the teacher and classroom helpers always available.

This generally leads to the development of self-reliance and self-motivation, which both boost the optimistic spirit of the student.

The PBL Model

A standard model of problem based learning would be:

- 1) An exploration of the issues
- 2) Review of what is known
- 3) Formal discussion of the problem
- 4) Development of the possible solutions

- 5) Planning the actions
- 6) Doing the research
- 7) Stating the answer
- 8) Review with teacher/mentor

This is not a "stock" or standard outline, but covers the basic premise that teachers use to design PBL projects.

It is significant that all PBL learning is designed to work in the same way that adults in the workplace must function. The system is geared toward individual success in the group environment, but is also directed at creating successful results through cooperative efforts.

While this may seem overly complicated for young children to use, it is actually a very common approach in modern classrooms.

PBL at the Earliest Stages

How could this work with younger students?

While the step-by-step explanation of the process looks complex, it is fundamentally very simple and frequently used in all class room levels, including preschool.

It is often the format of choice because:

- ✓ It can be used in a number of ways to get the required work completed without just using the typical textbooks, lectures or exams.
- ✓ It serves as an alternative to traditional class work.
- ✓ It can be used as a means for extra credit.
- ✓ It can easily spare a student who is struggling with their school work from being held back.
- ✓ It makes the entire experience beneficial by "keeping it real" and using tasks that will be put to use throughout the remaining educational career and well into adult life.

We will take a look at the process and how it could apply even to an elementary classroom.

Then, we will discuss the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph.

A Sample PBL Program

An elementary PBL model is something that will usually require several weeks to complete, and would be connected to the various parts of the classroom curriculum.

A good example would look something like this:

An exploration of the issues: How can you attract butterflies to your garden? As a final result of the class work, students will be asked to design a garden and write a few sentences about it, explaining their decisions.

Review of what is known: Students would work in collaborative teams to discuss what they know about butterflies, with their teacher or classroom helper as a mediator. These discussions would be supplemented with some basic materials that will guide the students' later research.

Formal discussion of the problem: The discussions can then focus on finding the answers that the students will need. What sort of issues should be investigated?

Development of the possible solutions: This PBL is modeled as an assignment that focuses on science, reading, writing and target behaviors such as listening and speaking. Students will need to be guided into the areas which are appropriate to the focus of the work such as "the life cycle of the butterfly" or "what else likes the same foods as butterflies?"

They might also be taught about proper library behaviors and other relevant side-topics.

Planning the actions: The students must now tackle the questions they have developed. The mediator can guide them into breaking down the work into manageable tasks that can be equally shared or assigned to particular individuals. Naturally, the daily and weekly classroom work would be directly connected to each phase of the project action plan.

Doing the research: The students can then be directed to look through books and use school resources to find out about garden plants, butterfly foods, houses and varieties of butterflies that live in their area.



This is a time for such wonderful things as field trips, an introduction to computer work (such as a basic web searching) and collaborative group work too.

Because this is something that will probably take up some weeks to complete, the teacher can have guest speakers, regular library trips and all

kinds of associated classroom materials around the various issues connected to the butterfly project.

Stating the answer: When the assignments are near completion, the students might have the opportunity to display their work, raise some butterflies or even plant a garden which can be shared with their schoolmates.

Review with teacher/mentor: This can be in the form of a presentation done to their class and teacher.

There is a huge amount of room in this program or project to incorporate every area of study and skill acquisition.

Students can learn to behave courteously and cooperatively with their peers while they study science, literature, computers and maths through this PBL model.

While a broad range of subjects and knowledge is highly desirable, the point of using the PBL format is to motivate the student on an individual basis. By choosing a self-directed and self-motivated approach to the work, the teacher will allow the very best of every student to shine through, regardless of their history or traditional behaviors.

Understanding the Benefits of PBL

As mentioned in an earlier paragraph, the PBL model is often used for a wide range of age groups because it:

- Can get the required work completed without using just the usual textbooks, lectures or exams
- Serves as an alternative to traditional work
- Can be used as a means for extra credit
- Can easily spare a student who is struggling with their school work
- Makes the entire experience beneficial by "keeping it real"
- Uses tasks that will be put to use throughout the remaining educational career and well into adult life.

How can PBL do all of these things?

It is helpful to realize that students are not all working at the same level at any given time. This can often result in some students being very successful and others not getting the amount of direction or interaction that they need.

Rather than handing out the same worksheets and delivering the same classroom discussion to a single group, the PBL model is far more creative and is one of the fairest teaching models available.

It removes students and teachers from the repetitiveness of the "sit and learn" model and poses some challenges that require the student to find their own solutions instead.

With its subtle role changes between the teacher and student, the PBL model creates the need for more self-directed learning, real-life problem solving and team or group participation.

Regardless of a student's individual abilities, desires, interests and level of motivation, they will be able to reach goals because they are in charge of finding the answers.

PBL and the Individual

Can the PBL model be used to help just one individual student find their motivation?

The system has a large number of factors that make it of significant value to groups and individual students.

When considering how to use any sort of problem based learning for an individual, however, the teacher must decide if the expectations for the program are appropriate.

Someone with true learning disabilities may not be able to benefit from the use of a PBL if it is not a functional part of the individual education program.

If a PBL is appropriate, however, it will perform the same possible functions for the individual as it would for an entire classroom.

Working Outside of the Typical Route

Sitting and watching a film, listening to a teacher read aloud, doing worksheets and reading independently from books are all part of a standard classroom experience. These activities, however, don't always inspire all students equally.

The PBL model allows the student to apply all kinds of useful study and research skills and to learn a huge assortment of new ones in order to find the answer to the problems they encounter.

A teacher could use the PBL model with individuals to address everything from behavioral issues to learning difficulties because it will easily motivate the student to meet the challenges presented.

It is a more practical and active way to take in knowledge because it is easier to tie in with real world experiences that the student is familiar with.

For example, instead of a teacher asking the student to explain why they did not do their work, they could ask the student for help with designing a system that will allow them to complete assignments in the future.

This converts the "why can't you do the assigned work just once?" issue into a "what sort of system can we use to make sure you get your work done?" instead.

Alternative to Traditional Work

Just as regular classroom experiences might not inspire all students equally, not all homework or class work will either.

This means that the usual "provide the answers" or "fill in the blanks" sort of work done after a class which is designed to show that the student has studied a specific subject can be replaced by the development of problem solving through the application of learned skills and information.

For example, rather than giving students a spelling test, the PBL option would instead offer a word jumble from which the students must pull their most recent vocabulary words.

Used as Extra Credit

Because the classroom and educational process must never be one in which fear or criticism exists, the PBL plan can be used to help a student improve their grades.

This can be done in several ways, but should incorporate the listed methods for improving motivation and stimulating optimism.

For example, if a student is struggling with a specific concept and has just received an assignment full of red marks and corrections, they should have the opportunity to improve upon this performance.

The PBL model would allow them to figure out how they would answer things differently, or how they would approach the problem if they had a second opportunity.

The teacher can ask the student to demonstrate how the incorrect answers might be amended, and then receive better grades for each issue they address.

Prevent a Student from Being Held Back

Students are kept back a grade when they fail to pass tests and submit assigned work which meets the established criteria for advancement.

If a child is struggling with their work and suffering from fear of failure, they might not be able to clearly show that they have mastered certain skill sets and knowledge.

The PBL approach offers a simple way for a teacher to help a student establish that they do understand the issues that seem to be a challenge.

For example, if the issue involves reading comprehension and the student has an interest in vehicles, the teacher could develop a specific project that allows the student to demonstrate their abilities with such things as comparisons of charts and data, descriptive language, attentive listening, following directions and locating information.

They might ask them to solve the problem of "Which of two cars to buy" in order to understand if the student has mastered the skills in question.

Keep Learning "Real"

Any modern PBL program uses an enormous range of real world resources and experiences. This is something of benefit for individuals and groups alike.

There are different experiences and requirements involved in problem solving. A student is going to face specifically individualized challenges whether they are working in a team or independently.

They might need to work with a librarian to conduct a computer or web-based search, they could get to visit a museum, laboratory, or other facility related to the subject matter and they will usually have to cooperate with several people or in a group.



These are all experiences that will occur repeatedly through their lives and can really help to motivate a student to play an active role in their world.

5 Conclusions

Even though we expect children to be easy to understand, they can be very mysterious. This is a particular problem in the educational environment where it is very helpful to have a deep understanding of them as individuals.

If teachers, classroom volunteers or helpers and parents want to motivate their children to the greatest extent possible, they have to help them discover the benefits of behaving and participating in an optimistic spirit. This is one in which they know their efforts will eventually "pay off" and they will reach their goals.

In this ebook, we have looked at this in terms of several key approaches, including:

- Establishing a positive first connection through a "welcoming factor". This is one in which a very positive and productive student-teacher rapport during the earliest educational experience is of great importance because the teacher can then develop a respectful relationship with each individual student. The teacher can then "invite" them to experience educational success through their positive words and actions.

A teacher accomplishes this by:

- Assessing their own teaching attitude, getting to know the students and figuring out how best to motivate them on a personal and intrinsic level.
- Developing the student-teacher bond to ensure students understand that their teacher cares about them as a person and not just as a grade.
- Making sure that their students experience an "invitational" teacher who lets them know that they are important and interesting regardless of their limitations, successes or personal capabilities. This allows them to feel truly optimistic about their education, which leads to intrinsic motivation.
- Listening actively to a student and incorporating a way of connecting with them individually on a daily basis. This might be through an approving look, a pat on the back or an established way of greeting the teacher every school day (for instance, allowing the student to select one of three ways to say hello; verbally, through a handshake or through a high-five). This gives the teacher a chance to interact in a reassuring and reinforcing manner.

Teaching optimism is a way of encouraging students to enjoy academic challenges and face their educational careers without fear of failure. This is done by focusing on the development of intrinsic motivations rather than on a system of rewards and punishments.

This is best accomplished by:

- Demonstrating that any failure or disappointment is a temporary setback and never a permanent condition.
- Helping students to view failures as non-personal and specific issues that can be addressed and overcome through thought, patience and effort.
- Assessing the problems or challenges and reframing them as something that is not rare or unique. This can be best achieved by the sharing of the teacher's personal struggles with related issues as it also allows the student to see that criticism is never going to occur.
- Working with the student to develop an action plan that will overcome the challenge as self-directed learning is intrinsically motivated.
- Identifying the reason for the failure or challenge and allowing the student to view the issue as an educational experience rather than any sort of permanent failure.
- Emphasizing that the student has their own particular academic strengths and that their work will lead to the development of other skills and proficiencies.

Use several proven approaches to overcoming damage to optimism and intrinsic motivation, including:

- One on one "Walk and Talk" sessions in which academic aims and class work are not discussed. Instead, the student simply chats with their teacher about other interesting subjects. This allows the teacher to get a clearer understanding of the student and to also identify why certain behavioral or educational issues may be occurring.
- Clearly expressing the target behaviors and skills that the student must aim for in a non-confrontational manner such as asking them to help in the development of an action plan.

- Modeling behaviors that include the student serving in the capacity of a helpful volunteer or role model. This will demonstrate to them that extrinsic motivation is not the only way to receive rewards and that helping others by redirecting specific behaviors can lead to personal success.
- Posing reasonable challenges that allow the student to build up their capabilities upon previous successes. This is done by increasing the complexity of target behaviors as a students' performance improves.
- Creating an environment that is non-threatening and totally free of fear.
- Providing autonomy and allowing the work to be relevant to the student's interests.

Identify the "passion points" in order to really find ways of hooking the student's attention, and maintaining it.

This can be done through many different approaches, including:

- The teacher asking directly about students' interests or experiences and then taking time to share their own. This must be done with a level of enthusiasm that will be contagious to students.
- Using passion points to craft materials and projects intended to help motivate students.
- Modeling active listening and delivering instant feedback as a way of further stimulating motivation and optimism in the classroom environment.
- Using passion points for class wide issues and also for one-on-one projects or programs.
- Incorporating extrinsic rewards as a companion to development of motivation through passion points.

For example, a classroom could have an easily earned "currency" such as tickets, buttons or tokens. These are received for a demonstration of behavior or skill mastery. This is not a competitive rewards system, but one that allows a student to earn their wages through the performance of clearly explained behaviors.

This currency can then be exchanged for material goods or even for opportunities to be of help in the classroom.

Such a program would be easily applied to a wide variety of unique individuals, and encourage all to strive for the acknowledgement of their hard work in meeting the target behaviors, while also being very enthusiastic about discussions and materials dealing with their passion points.

This system would make it easy to eliminate any potential for threats or punishments and also eliminate competition where academic achievements are concerned.

This would nurture intrinsic motivation and still allow the pleasure of an occasional reward too.

Incorporate "problem based learning" into the curriculum as a way of introducing some



autonomy and challenges into the learning experience. This could be done for a period of time, such as a lengthy group project, or it could occur over a short time as a way of allowing a single student to demonstrate subject mastery, such as test correction opportunities.

PBL programs are traditionally used for several reasons, including:

- They ask the student to assume responsibility for acquiring information and knowledge.
- They lead to much greater self-motivation, accomplishment and optimism.
- They ask the individual to achieve success with self-directed learning, real-life problem solving and group participation. These are things often pointed out as life skills but which are also beneficial educational skills.
- They offer a way of completing work far outside of the traditional route of books, study and examinations.
- They are a good alternative to standard homework assignments.
- They present the chance for beneficial extra credit work.
- They allow a student to demonstrate skill or informational mastery, particularly if they are at risk for being held back.
- They put real world experiences to use in an educational platform.

- They can work equally well for groups and individuals, and can be applied to every grade level.

The use of these many steps could eventually bring out the very best in each student regardless of their individual academic record or their anticipated classroom behaviors.

When a teacher is enthusiastic about their work and creates a welcoming atmosphere in which students feel safe and stimulated, they tend to achieve more.

A teacher can always ask their students to guide their efforts by questioning them about their "favorite" things about the class or if they would change anything. This will only encourage them to take an even more active interest in the discussion and recognize that their success is the teacher's ultimate goal.

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