

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

The teacher's role has changed in recent years. There has been a shift of emphasis from instructional techniques to developing learning techniques. Our role is no longer that of the "sage on the stage". Today our role leans more towards facilitator or "guide on the side". Our role is to increase student motivation and develop the skills or strategies that make a student more competent and to structure the learning environment so that students are able to take ownership of their own learning. Fortunately, many of the strategies that "empower" and "engage" students also lead to increased motivation. The focus here is on the strategies that teachers may use to develop and maintain motivation in school age students.

Motivation and achievement have long been recognized to have a close cause-effect relationship, as of course have ability and achievement. The anticipated relationship is: the higher the ability, the higher the expected achievement levels. However logical this premise might appear to be, it does not always prove to be the case. It is therefore understandable that research into the connection between motivation, ability and achievement has focused on the underachieving gifted student because they are the examples that are most difficult to explain. In fact the term underachievement is often defined as "a student whose ability and performance are significantly discrepant." Consequently, underachieving and unmotivated are often considered synonymous.

Joanne Rand Whitmore's *Giftedness, Conflict and Underachievement* (1980) and Sylvia Rimm's *Underachievement Syndrome* (1986) both deal with this concept in some depth. Ms. Whitmore was a teacher whose research mainly took place between 1967-1979 in her own classroom. Dr. Sylvia Rimm whose experiences as a teacher, clinical psychologist and the parent of 4 children has been the Director of a family clinic for many years. Her knowledge and expertise in identifying many different causes and symptoms of underachievement are based on her clinical experiences. She continues to help parents of underachieving, difficult and/or unmotivated children via television and the internet. She directs the Family Achievement Clinic at the Metro Health Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, and is a clinical professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Her home page may be found at URL: <http://www.sylviarimm.com/>

My experiences as a teacher dealing with underachieving students from time to time have been greatly influenced by these two women. Their insight and books have contributed to my own techniques for dealing with unmotivated students. As have so many of the authors of books relating to the development of critical and creative thinking skills, constructivist philosophy and self directed learning methodologies. However, the ideas listed below are not just culled from the research done by others, they are a list of the techniques that I have used with unmotivated students over a 15 year period and found to be very successfully for gifted students in a pull-out program and in a regular classroom.

Quote:

The main difference between high ability achievers and high ability underachievers is that the achievers have learned the attitudes and strategies that enable them to be successful in a school setting.

Joanne Rand Whitmore, 1980

In my experience... achievement depends on willingness to accept a challenge, take risks, make errors and the belief that one has the control over the outcomes. Achievement is hindered by perfectionism, fear of failure, and the belief that control, credit and/or blame belong to someone else.

P. Theroux Jan 1994

Before trying any of the following strategies **it is important to begin by establishing the idea that treating them differently is not unfair, it is respecting their differences.** Students need to recognize that they are all different and that treating them the same is not always appropriate or effective.

There are many strategies for motivating students. However, any one technique may not be appropriate for all students at the same time nor effective for even one student for extended periods of time.

Motivational strategies need to be applied individually and changed frequently so that they do not become ineffective through over use.

Strategies For Enhancing Motivation

1. Challenge Them

Offer student opportunities to undertake real challenges. Encourage them to take intellectual risks. This gives students an opportunity to discover the relationship between effort and success; between success and motivation, and to develop higher self-concept. If the students do not see the need to make an effort they sometimes will not bother to make one. Even brilliant students are not motivated to achieve if the work is too easy. Gifted behaviours are often not evident until the student is actually being challenged. Most children are excited by a challenge if they have the strategies that they need to succeed. (See strategy # 5)

2. Build on Strengths First

Building on strengths first give students an opportunity to use their talents to achieve success by developing their strengths. While they are engaged in these successful tasks we can help them to learn how to improve other skills (teach to specific needs) in an environment where the child cares about doing a good job.

When the primary focus is on student weaknesses students are spending much of their time being unsuccessful, practicing what they do badly. This lowers self esteem and lowers motivation.

Failure is unmotivating. Success is motivating when students understand why they are succeeding and are able to develop their confidence and competence.

3. Offer Choices

Offering choices develops ownership. When the child makes decisions he or she is more likely to accept ownership & control of the results. This sense of control fosters responsibility. When the control belongs to the teacher so does the ownership. However, always offer choices that are equally acceptable in your eyes.

Negotiate-How can students have input in order to reach the required goals? Can they reach necessary goals their way? When they achieve a non-negotiable goal perhaps they may have input on the follow-up activity. Remember it is not realistic for students of differing abilities to be expected to aim for the same goal using the same method. When children are offered opportunities to make decisions they learn a great deal about the consequences of their choices.

They also learn to value themselves and their own decision-making ability. Where ever it is appropriate, take advantage of the student's talents and interests to motivate them. Choices can be offered in the areas of: Topics, learning Processes (methodologies) and Products. Within any set topic or theme there are usually a variety of sub-topics where students may identify a personal interest. Learning processes can be varied and students can be encouraged to find alternative strategies for solving problems & then they can discuss the merits and disadvantages of each. Permit student the choice of product. There are hundreds of alternatives ways of producing information. For checklists of alternative Topic, Process & Product ideas.

4. Provide a Secure Environment

Permit children to fail without penalty. Learning how to deal with failure is critical for developing motivation and successful learning. Students should learn that they can and must learn from their mistakes. Fear of failure sometimes causes students to deliberately sabotage their own efforts because deliberate failure is easier to accept than the failures to which they fall victim. (No control is equated with being powerless.)

5. Teach Them How to Make Their Tasks More Manageable

Narrowing or broadening the topic to a challenging but manageable size is very important for developing motivation. However, it is not just sufficient for us to just give them manageable activities. Not only is this is an essential problem solving strategy, but it is also an essential life skill. Children need to know how they can make their own activities more manageable. Even the most challenging tasks can be made more manageable by breaking them down into smaller parts and then prioritizing the steps. As each small part is achieved a measure of success is attained. As the successes mount up students begin to recognize their own enthusiasm for learning. (Effort and Struggle during skill development results in Success and Motivation)

6. Use Rewards & Punishment with caution

Although there are appropriate places in education for both rewards and punishment, they are both external factors that can rob students of personal control. Obviously there must be consequences for different kinds of behaviors, and real success needs some kind of recognition or attention.

However, both rewards and punishment can be negative factors in developing intrinsic motivation. Rewards cause students to work for the wrong reasons. Punishment often fosters resentment and lack of co-operation. When rewards are external factors, motivation is also external and it will only apply when monitored externally.

Rewards are most effective when used with lower ability or unmotivated students when the rewards is used for a short time only.

- Never use rewards over a long period.
- Never increase the reward for increased expectations.
- Decrease the rewards as soon as they begin to become effective. Long use only reinforces the external control.

The real reward for good work must eventually become the satisfaction derived from effort and success.

7. Help Students Develop An Internal Locus Of Control

Locus of control is closely related to motivation. Students who feel they have the power to control some events in their lives are more likely to become self motivated than students who see themselves as powerless. If they don't believe they have any power/control over the events in their lives... then everything that goes wrong is someone else's fault, not theirs.

The child who perceives that he or she has no power will either see himself as a victim of chance (and/or other people's power) or as a warrior who needs to gain power to control or manipulate other people in order to avoid being helpless.

Children who have been loved too much, controlled too much, given too much power too early, rescued and/or blamed too often tend to be manipulative. *Almost all unmotivated underachieving children manipulative adults by either active or passive behaviors.*

8. Avoid Power Struggles

Poorly motivated students are often very manipulative. Avoid power struggles whenever possible, and never get into a power struggle unless you have the means to win. Choose your battles. Children who engage in power struggles also need to be offered choices, but the choices must always be limited to the ones that you find acceptable.

9. Use Ambiguity Occasionally

Give children opportunities to learn strategies for dealing with ambiguity and or frustration. Some children are convinced that every question has only one right answer. Help them realize that there is often more than one right method or answer.

If they see all questions as being either right or wrong they will probably see themselves as being good when they are right and bad when they are wrong. This doesn't leave much room for motivation.

Brainstorming with someone else is an excellent strategy for looking for alternative interpretations of and solutions to the problem of ambiguity.

Frustration can be motivating when you have problem solving strategies and you see problems as something to be solved rather than to be avoided.

Unmotivated underachieving students frequently use avoidance rather than an effective strategy when frustrated.

10. Offer Open-ended Activities to Develop Creativity

Give them opportunities and strategies to develop their creativity.

Students perform with higher motivation when their creativity is engaged. Challenge students to construct original & creative products to support their written reports.

11. Teach Students to Evaluate Themselves

Self-evaluation needs to address the questions: "What was done well?" & "How can it be improved?" It is far more powerful for students to recognize the answers to these questions than it is for them to be told the answers.

Student self-evaluation is often difficult for the first few attempts. Students want to achieve a high evaluation but are reluctant to "brag" about their success. It has been my experience that the majority of students lean towards being too hard on themselves, but some students can be unrealistically generous initially. The ability to realistically evaluate one's own performance improves with practice and is both empowering and highly motivating.

12. Attention Seeking Behaviors

Unmotivated students frequently seek adult attention. They can actively demand attention or passively demand attention, and the attention they seek can be either negative or positive attention.

Positive adult attention can be a highly motivating factor but only if it is earned by reasonable effort. It can reinforce poor motivation if it is overdone or given for the wrong reasons. Too much praise makes "no praise" look like an invitation for attention seeking behaviors. The child who is motivated by excessive praise may do very little when the praise is absent.

Negative attention for some children is just as satisfying as positive attention and in fact if they are used to a great deal of negative attention it may be more comfortable because it is so familiar. Difficult as it is, ignoring demanding attention seeking behaviors is sometimes more effective than giving negative attention. However, positive attention should be used to reinforce acceptable behaviors.

Passive students are the most difficult to motivate because they tend to waste their energy trying to get others to feel sorry for them. They refuse to take risks, sometimes sabotaging their own efforts to prove they deserve our pity. It is important to recognize these behaviors and guard against compounding the problem by being too sympathetic. Sympathy only convinces these students that they really do have a problem. It is important to recognize the moment when these students actually make some progress and to give the appropriate attention at that moment. They should receive a positive attention response any time they take a risk or make an effort.

13 Competition

Competition can enhance or reduce motivation depending on how it is used. It is good for some, but it may result in a few winners and many losers.

Unmotivated and or underachieving students often have difficulty dealing with defeat. Until they are ready to cope with defeat it is more productive to encourage students to compete against their own performance rather than with someone else's.

Competing against oneself under controlled conditions means that everyone wins. Use the clock. Time their performance for 1 minute, estimate what can be accomplished in 5 minutes. And challenge them to beat their own record over a longer time span. Gradually increase the time factor and expectations. You can challenge students to compete against their own performance in the quantity and quality of their productivity, within a specific time frame or it can be used to increase on-task behavior or decrease inappropriate behavior. In fact most criteria which can be used to evaluate progress can be used for a student to compete against his/her own previous performance.

The long term goal is to teach children to loose gracefully and use defeat as motivation to improve. (See self-evaluation.) Eventually students must be encouraged to see "failure" as a positive experience. Every loss in competition and every failed attempt is an opportunity to learn what can be improved.

14. Students Need To Understand The Relevance Of All Their School Activities

Students who do not understand the relevance of a school activity are not usually motivated to accomplish it unless they are motivated to please the teacher. (External motivation.) Clearly establish the expected goal and required method. Let the students know the benefits that will be realized.

This is especially important when no choices are being offered.

15. Perfectionism - Is It Good or Bad?

Perfectionism goes beyond trying to do ones best. Perfectionism is getting hung-up on being perfect. Students need to take pride in their work but perfectionists allow their fear of making a mistake to inhibit progress. It can be seen in the child who keeps erasing everything, or keeps starting over making slow progress or not finishing. It can sometimes be seen in the child who procrastinates too much, forgets homework or loses work rather than admit it is not perfect.

These children need to learn that completing work on time is more important than being perfect, attempting is more important than succeeding, and failure is an opportunity to learn. Students need to see us (teachers and parents) making mistakes occasionally. We need to model and demonstrate the process of learning and recovering from our mistakes.

And we, as teachers need to remember that if it can be done perfectly, it is probably too easy. If it is perfect they are probably practicing (rehearsing) previously acquired knowledge or skills and may be learning nothing new at all.

16. Reinforce Required Strategies

One reason students have difficulty sustaining their motivation when working independently is because they either don't understand or don't remember the required strategies. Never assume a student knows how to do something independently unless you see it demonstrated.

Also children can sometimes remember all of the steps within a required strategy and still not understand why they are doing them. Conversely they can understand the strategy but forget the steps or the sequence involved. As Graham Foster has often said: "Just because it's been taught, doesn't mean it's been caught."

The strategy therefore is to make sure that the skills required for an independent task are readily available when a student is expected to apply them. This can be done by oral review, by have students keep a note book on skills and strategies, or by using posters and skill charts on the walls. When a student appears unmotivated to work independently have him/her demonstrate that he knows what to do.

Don't be unduly influenced by their ability to verbalize instructions. Verbalizing instructions means they remember the steps, it does not necessarily mean they know how to do them.

17. Teach A Variety Of Organizational Strategies

Students need to know that there are countless numbers of effective organizational strategies. Initially it may be sufficient to have at least one effective method. However, as teachers we need to remember that non-sequential organization is not necessarily disorganized. Some children are very organized but they may be non-sequential or non-linear in their thought patterns. For these children a linear sequence of steps 1-10 may be inhibiting. They may be confused by what seems to be a logical sequence for a sequential thinker.

A variety of organizational strategies encourages students to build on the strength of their own thinking style, and they will develop an arsenal of strategies to choose from. Eventually they will learn to vary the strategy to suit the requirements of the task.

18. Role Models

Some apparently unmotivated students are not really unmotivated but are motivated to follow an inappropriate model. For example a significant person in their life might be demonstrating the role of "drop-out", "non-academic", "unsuccessful" or the "I didn't need to work because I was so clever or because it is boring" type. These students need a positive role model. Parents should be encouraged to fill this role, or an uncle, aunt, brother, sister or even... the teacher.

Teachers can become role models for students. We can demonstrate being an effective writer, an independent learner, a good loser etc. When time permits it is highly effective to model quality work by rewriting a few of their sentences or brief note facts (jot-notes) and ask them to decide which is better and why.

Peer editing or self evaluation where rubrics and/or specific criteria is applied to the self-evaluation process can also serve to illustrate good work habits and quality work.

19. Differentiate Instruction with Tiered Assignments or Layered Curriculum techniques

Differentiated Instruction is another good way to empower and motivate students. Students are very much aware how ability levels differ in the average classroom. Ask any student who in their class required enrichment or who needs extra help and they can tell you. In my experience they can also easily identify other students performing at the same ability level as themselves. With this awareness comes an understanding that a single classroom activity can simultaneously be too difficult for some students and too easy for others. Once the issue of "what is fair" has been clarified students comfortably adapt to the idea of tiered assignments or Layered curriculum activities. However, it is necessary to make it clear that treating all students the same is not

- Strategies for Differentiated Instruction

20. Scaffolding

Scaffolding relates to the supportive role that a teacher undertakes to ensure success in activities where a student is being challenged. By consistent evaluation of student work teachers can provide just-in-time small group instruction to facilitate students being able to perform effectively at a level above that which they handle independently. It is important to remember that if a student can succeed thoroughly independently then he/she is only practicing something that has already been learned and the student is not being challenged to construct new meaning in the learning process. When encouraging students to stretch and take on greater challenges it is important the the teacher provide the structure and guidance to make the learning successful. Scaffolding for Success

21. Use Computers

Most students are intrigued by computers. Applications such as Word Processors, Desktop Publishing Programs and Authoring programs permit students to revise and edit their work many times without the tedious process of rewriting it over and over. The computer produces a neat and attractive presentation which encourages students to take greater pride in the quality of their work.

Computer Programming in LOGO, Basic or visual Basic provide opportunities to develop excellent problem solving & higher level thinking skills, as well as to develop persistence and tolerance for frustration (essential attitudes for good problem solving.) This is a particularly valuable activity for some high ability students who need an interesting challenge.

Developing quality presentations using authoring software, or presentation software, such as PowerPoint, is also highly motivating for students. It may be necessary to allow the students to experiment with all the sounds, animations, transitions and special effects the first time they use the program. However, we need to guide student in the practice of using special effect in moderation to emphasize only the most important points.

Equally motivating (and not nearly as difficult as some teachers may think) developing web pages to present student work is one of the most highly motivating activities. If Internet access is a concern, Web pages can be run right off a disk for viewing only from within the classroom with a single (possibly portable) computer, or they can be posted on the Internet for all of the world to see.

Developing computer skills frequently motivates students to want to produce high quality work, especially when their work is on view for parents and peers.

Effects of Technology on Classrooms and Students - Increased Motivation and Self Esteem

In her book "The Underachieving Syndrome" Sylvia Rimm defines many causes for underachievement in students. However her strategies for dealing with students who are not motivated to learn are summed up in her twelve laws listed below. These laws are valuable for the development of all students but especially important for poorly motivated students who are underachieving academically.

Rimm's Laws:

1. Children are more likely to be motivated to achieve if they get the same clear and positive message about school effort and expectations from both parents.
2. Children learn appropriate behaviours more easily if they have an effective model.

3. Communication between adults in front of a child dramatically affects children's behaviours and self - perceptions.
4. Overreactions by parents to child's successes or failures leads them to feel either intense pressure to succeed or despair and discouragement in dealing with failure.
5. Children experience more tension worrying about their work than when they are doing it.
6. Children develop self concept through struggle.
7. Deprivation and excess exhibit the same symptoms. (attention, affection, freedom and pressure)
8. Children develop confidence and an internal sense of control if power is given to them in gradually increasing increments as they show maturity and responsibility.
9. Children become oppositional if one adult sides with them against the other parent or a teacher, making them feel more powerful than the other adult.
10. Adults should avoid confrontations with children unless they can be sure of the outcomes.
11. Children become achievers only if they learn to function in competition.
12. Children will continue to achieve if they usually see the relationship between the learning process and its outcome.