

MOTIVATING ACADEMIC LEARNING: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

General Strategies:

Communicate high, yet realistic, expectations and convey that you believe the student will attain them. Teachers' beliefs about their students' competencies have been shown to affect student motivation. Let your students know that you believe they are capable of achievement and success.

Provide frequent encouragement. Praise students for what they do correctly and minimize criticisms. Build student confidence in his/her own ability by conveying a sincere belief in the individual's ability to learn effectively, by encouraging students as they are working, and by pointing out specific areas of improvement.

Be sure that all assigned tasks are appropriate for the student, given the student's ability and developmental level.

Remind students that all work is not always easy and effortless. Also remind students that work does not always need to be done absolutely perfectly to demonstrate success. In the beginning, reinforce students simply for coming to class/school.

Challenge students by setting goals for their performance as individuals. Consider grading effort and achievement separately.

Help students set their own goals. They are likely to be more motivated to reach self-made goals than to try to meet expectations that others set for them. Goals should be specific, clear, and attainable. As students work toward their goals, rewards should be delivered rapidly. This helps students recognize progress.

Reduce emphasis on academic and social competition. Fear of failure may cause the student to not want to complete the required number of assignments in a given period of time. Encourage the student not to compare his or her progress to that of others but to set criteria or to an established baseline.

Emphasize the idea of the class as a unit or team through the use of group activities and community related goals. With older children, this may involve such things as allowing students to choose projects.

Encourage student cooperation. Solicit help to pass out, set up, or clean up materials. However, do not force students to participate in activities.

Demonstrate accepting behavior (e.g., willingness to help others, making criticisms constructive and positive, demonstrating confidentiality in personal matters, etc.). Communicate to students that they are worthwhile individuals and that you have an interest in their needs.

Make it pleasant and positive for students to ask questions about things that he/she does not understand. Reinforce the student by assisting, congratulating, praising, etc.

Note the individual's perceptions of his/her own ability. Provide more encouragement for those students who appear to attribute failure to a lack of ability, and use group activities to emphasize positive abilities. Reinforce effort, not ability.

Develop an understanding of your students, assess likes and dislikes, and attempt to relate subjects to student interests.

Take advantage of students' curiosity. Many students have a natural desire to understand how the world around them works. Whenever this curiosity is noticeable, encourage it and help students find whatever information they seek. Help students see the ways that their homework relates to the curiosity that they feel.

Make the necessary environmental changes to prevent students from experiencing stress, frustration, anger, etc. as much as possible. Provide opportunities for acceptable physical activity and positive peer interaction.

Acknowledge and **affirm the student's responsibility** in completing the learning task.

Teaching Strategies:

Begin the day with a success-oriented activity which is likely to be enjoyable for students.

Make the first experience with the subject matter as positive as possible. Describe a unit and ask students to brainstorm the most exciting way to study it. If their first suggestion is not feasible, ask what the next exciting way might be.

Provide active instruction. Explain and demonstrate tasks, allow for practice time, supervise classroom activities, and provide feedback for the task.

Keep lessons interesting. Use humor, examples, analogies, stories, and questions to facilitate the active participation of students in your lectures and demonstrations. Occasionally change the style as well as the content of learning activities. Consider hands-on activities, group work, art projects, games, computer work, or field trips. Provide novel tasks (e.g., dress up as a character being studied, frame lessons as a mystery to be solved, pose perplexing questions).

Arrange learning activities that encourage students to move freely around the room while completing a task. Set aside time each day for this to occur. This promotes self-exploration of the room and its resources while allowing the students to feel more independent as well.

Show the students how to apply their knowledge in real-life problems and situations.

Follow a less desirable task with a highly desirable task, making the completion of the first necessary to perform the second.

Close each lesson with a **positive ending**.

Encourage students to **provide feedback to you** about an exam, project, rule, etc.

Reinforce students for beginning, staying with, and completing assignments.

Periodically evaluate appropriateness of tasks assigned. Ask yourself if the task is too easy, too difficult, and if the length of time scheduled to complete the activity is appropriate.

Teach students how to manage their time until the teacher can provide assistance (e.g., try the problem again, go on to the next problem, wait quietly, etc.).

Interact frequently with the student in order to maintain involvement with class assignments. Ask the student questions and opinions, or stand next to the student.

Make certain that **students have all necessary materials** to perform assignments.

Offer choices. Provide the student with a selection of assignments and require him/her to choose a minimum number from the total number (e.g., present the student with ten academic tasks from which he/she must finish six that day).

Provide students with the opportunity to **perform assignments/activities in a variety of ways** (e.g., on tape, with a calculator, orally, etc.).

Provide students with adequate time to finish an assignment. Decrease the amount of time required as the student demonstrates success. Also consider giving students shorter tasks more frequently.

Provide clearly stated directions in written or verbal form. Make the directions as simple and concrete as possible. Make sure that students can achieve success when following directions.

Provide students with the opportunity to move to a quiet place in the classroom any time that auditory and visual stimuli interfere with his/her ability to function successfully. Also allow students to put an assignment away and return to it at a later time if he/she could be more successful then.

Allow/require students to make corrections after assignments have been checked the first time.

Have students practice an assignment with the teacher, aide, or peer before performing the assignment for a grade.

Working with Individuals:

Have students learn a self-reward contract procedure. For example, a student allows him/herself to watch a TV show or go shopping only when they have achieved criterion performance of a pre-designated academic task. You can also give the student an intangible reward (e.g., praise, smile, etc.) for attempting and completing class assignments.

If a student is having particular difficulty, make sure to investigate health concerns. Determine if the student is receiving proper nutrition and sleep. Investigate general health – is there a reason for the behavior that could be attributed to physical concerns? Also consider drug or alcohol use.

Make sure students having difficulty understand the following: what they are doing wrong (e.g., not turning in assignments) and what the student should be doing (e.g., completing assignments and returning them to school). Help them understand what steps need to be taken to correct the problem. Engage in problem-solving together.

Orchestrate success for the student. Call on the student when you know he/she can answer successfully or inform the student before calling on him/her so that time to formulate an answer is allowed (“John, after Chris answers the next question, I am going to call on you to answer #5”).

Allow natural consequences to occur for failure to turn in homework and classwork (e.g., students who do not finish their homework do not get to engage in more desirable activities).

Take steps to deal with student refusal or disinterest so that the rest of the group will not be exposed to the contagion (e.g., refrain from arguing with the student, place the student at a carrel or other quiet place to work, remove the student from the group or the classroom, etc.).

Do not use homework as punishment. Homework should not be assigned as a consequence of behavior at school. Instead, schedule students’ time at school in order that homework will not be absolutely necessary if he/she takes advantage of the time provided to complete assignments at school.

Maintain consistency in assigning homework (e.g., the same amount or length every day). Make certain that homework provided is designed to provide drill activities rather than introduce new information.

Communicate with parents (notes home, phone calls, etc.) in order to share information regarding the student's progress and so that they may reinforce the student at home for completing assignments at school.

Introduce students to other resource persons who may be of help. Other teachers and librarians can be helpful with homework and other assignments.

Additional Resources:

Mendler, A. (2000). *Motivating students who don't care*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.

Morrone, A. & Pintrich, P. (1997). Achievement motivation. In G.G. Bear, K.M. Minke, & A. Thomas (Eds.), *Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives* (pp.387-396). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Raffinni, J. (1996). *150 ways to increase motivation in the classroom*. Allyn & Bacon.

Tileston, P. (2004). *What every teacher should know about student motivation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

www.engines4ed.org/hyperbook/nodes/NODE-62-pg.html: Motivation in the Classroom.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/motivation/: Motivation in the Classroom.

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