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EDU 274
Artifact #9

Write a 3-5 page research paper (not including the bibliography) about motivating poorly motivated or discouraged students. Your paper must be properly cited APA style. At least 5 references should be used. Include a bibliography.

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Student Motivation: Who, Where, What, How?

The problem of student motivation in school is probably as old as compulsory education itself, be it the parents of students in antiquity doing the compelling or present day government requirements for school attendance forcing classroom presence. In general, schools are provided for students, and parents send children off in the right direction every morning, but what arrives at the classroom (if arrives it does) is often not a student ready, willing, motivated, and encouraged to learn, but rather an unmotivated and discouraged student. Students have an approximately one in three probability of dropping out. The dropout rate has prompted a recent article in *Time* (Thornburgh, 2006, pp. 30-40), two segments on the Oprah Winfrey Show (Oprah, 2006), a report sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006), and an article in *The New York Times* (Lewin, 2006). Compulsion does not appear to be compelling on its own.

Who or what can motivate students? Where and how can that be done? Questions abound, but so do potential answers. The answers, or at least their implementations, are not keeping pace with the problems they are supposed to solve. Perhaps they are reasonable answers, but too small in number. This paper will explore are fair portion of them, but not attempt to be exhaustive. It briefly visits the who, where, what and how of motivating students.

Who

Present day American schools educate a very diverse student body with widely differing linguistic, cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds, to name a few. According to the National Center for Education Statistics as reported by Parkay and Stanford (2004, p. 241), 39% of public school students in 2000 were considered to be part of a minority group. This is, of course, a major reason that multicultural education and cultural pluralism and their backlash, cultural literacy, were introduced. On the other hand, the great majority of public school teachers are woman (73%) and white (87%) according to The Digest of Education Statistics 2001 as reported by Ryan and Cooper (2004, p. 66). Lewin (2006) reports that it is just those non-woman and non-white students (i.e., minority boys) who are at greatest danger relative to their counterparts for dropping out.

School districts are eager to hire minority teachers, but still the percentage of minority teachers is decreasing (Ryan & Cooper, p. 401). Minority teachers, especially men, can serve as positive role models demonstrating the value of education and motivating students to stick it out or even excel. Students of a minority teacher should not be inhibited from working hard for fear of being accused of “acting white” (p. 38). Individual teachers, however, can do little to change their ethnicity or gender. Instead, they are encouraged to broaden their experiences through travel to different countries, a different part of town, or a different school and to teach by addressing the diverse strengths of students, providing a variety of experiences, and bridging gaps between students’ lives and school (p. 66). Students can be motivated by teachers who understand where the students come from, that is, their backgrounds and their perspectives.

More and more people from outside the classroom are being incorporated into the education process, in part for their expertise, but also for their contribution to student motivation. Parents are encouraged to participate (Fried, 2001, p. 131; Friend & Bursuck, 2006, p. 340; Parkay & Stanford, p. 266; Ryan & Cooper, p. 29; Thornburgh, p. 40). Newsletters (Rominger, Heisinger, Elkin, 2001, p. 274) sent home are a simple way to involve parents in their children’s education.

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Rather than asking what a child has done in school and having to accept a generic answer, parents can ask specific questions about the astronomy unit and thank their child for updating them with information about the latest discoveries, for example.

Parents have great influence on a child's achievement motivation and whether the child (and therefore student) develops a mastery orientation or helpless orientation (Cook & Cook, 2005, p. 515) toward learning. In the former, success is attributed to hard work and students can improve their ability by working hard, which they are motivated to do since it usually pays off. In the latter, success is attributed to luck, and ability is unchangeable. Learning may amount to waiting for a lucky moment. Teachers need to coordinate with parents and build on their effort to ensure that students work toward mastery and do not fall into the trap of learned helplessness. This danger is especially relevant for at risk students (Friend & Bursuck, p. 254). A similar interaction takes place between parenting and teaching styles. Parental styles can be categorized as authoritarian, authoritative, rejecting/neglecting, and permissive (Cook & Cook, p. 464) with implications for discipline, attribution, and motivation. The more teachers can involve parents, the more likely the former two styles and preferably the authoritative style will take hold and the more likely the student will be motivated to succeed.

Others from outside the classroom include community members, who can serve as volunteer mentors (Parkay & Stanford, p. 149) or simply as a "real" audience for students' work (Fried, p. 53). They can relate what students are learning to what goes on in the real world, which may not be so obvious or believable otherwise. They might even provide to the teacher examples of authentic learning tasks (Parkay & Stanford, p. 328) for future lessons. The businesses and corporations that community members work for can offer scholarships and vocational opportunities. While they are only extrinsic motivations, as exemplified by lists in Parkay & Stanford (p. 51), they are concrete. Another group that should be recruited from the community consists of the dropouts who report, according to the *Time* article (Thornburgh), that they would stick it out if they had a second chance.

Where

A report by Larry Cuban described in (Ryan & Cooper, p. 23) concludes that "the high school of today is remarkably similar to the high school of the 1890s." The high school years are of course the most likely time for a student to drop out. Although they may have tuned into "virtual dropouts" long ago, most states require attendance until at least the age of 16. At that time the choice is often between the academics of school and the big wide world. Alternative high schools and vocational education, suggested by Thornburgh (2006), are two options that fall between the standard choices. Alternative high schools can differ in many ways from their standard counterparts. There are magnet schools that specialize in particular subject areas such as art and science (Parkay & Stanford, p. 123). Some schools offer more structure and discipline, while others offer lower teacher to student ratios. Some have schedules which are more flexible than schools controlled by a bell. Adults would probably find having their work interrupted by (seemingly) arbitrary time limits very discouraging. It puts the school's timeline ahead of the needs of the student, potentially leaving the student unmotivated to play along.

Another change of location is related to community involvement. This time students go out into the community for service learning rather than bringing community members into the school. Service learning can break down the school walls and show students that what they are learning applies in the broader world and makes a difference. It puts students in closer contact with people in need and may acquaint them with neighborhood, governmental (Parkay & Stanford, p.

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122), environmental, or social issues. The chance to have a real impact or make a difference can be very motivating.

Where can also be "at a school in which…" The phrase can be completed in many ways. Children are better motivated at a school in which they feel physically and emotionally safe. Physical safety can be partially ensured with metal detectors and zero tolerance policies. However, much broader programs such as one described by Lantieri and Patti (1996) emphasizing conflict resolution and development of an emotional intelligence can be very effective and teach useful skills besides. Children can be more motivated at a school with a democratic classroom (Parkay & Stanford, p. 330) in which they have a say in the classroom environment, procedures, and even curriculum. Students should even help specify classroom rules and procedures (Rominger, Heisinger, & Elkin, p. 199). By exercising their voices they have assumed a stake in the outcome of their education and have an interest in proving themselves correct. Many disabled students learn more at schools in which mainstreaming or inclusion are practiced, perhaps by way of increased motivation.

What

What students learn in school is an increasingly uniform curriculum (Thornburgh), in part due to No Child Left Behind requirements. To the extent that teachers are able to connect the material to students' lives, they may be the more motivated to learn it (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison p.11). For some students the material is simply uninteresting. In the Gates survey, 88% of dropouts said they had passing grades in high school (p. 3). More respondents said they left school from boredom than with course work difficulties (Thornburgh). Teachers are often advised to have high expectations of their students (Davis, 1993; Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006, p. 129; Parkay & Stanford, p. 289; Wong & Wong, 2004), in part so that any self-fulfilling prophecy is a positive one. Students can be motivated to meet teachers' high expectations, but the process is difficult if students aren't interested in the subject matter. Some texts such as Loewen (1995) suggest changing course content substantially, in part because it is "*[B]or-r-ring*" (p. 12), and recommends that teachers facilitate independent student learning (p. 315). Fried (2001, p. 115) discusses the relationship of students to the material. He makes many suggestions, one of which is to allow students the ability to choose a subject or assignment of interest for concentrated attention and potential grade above an A to make up for less than A work on subjects that are uninteresting to the student. Davis (1993) and Kelly also recommend that students have some control over what is studied.

A different kind of "what" that teachers have at their disposal to motivate students with is reinforcement in the behaviorist sense. Teachers can reward students when they display desired behavior to increase the behavior or punish students for undesired behavior to decrease it (Friend & Bursuck, p. 456). Positive reinforcers can be classified into four types. Social reinforcers involve interactions with teachers, parents, and peers. Activity reinforcers include things like games and extra recess that can be granted to students. Prizes fall under tangible variety, and primary reinforcers may be edible. Negative reinforcement strategies can include differential reinforcement, extinction, removing reinforcers, presentation punishment, and overcorrection. While positive reinforcement is motivational and preferable to negative reinforcement, both are extrinsic. The rewards may soon produce intrinsic motivation (Harris, 1991), however, which is the goal.

Teachers should also address Gardner's multiple intelligences (Cook & Cook, p. 254; Parkay & Stanford, p. 291; Ryan & Cooper, p. 43) in choosing what goes into each lesson. Students with

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low motivation may have concluded that they do not have what it takes, often the linguistic or logical-mathematical intelligence, to succeed in school. They may not realize that the emphasis on these two specific intelligences is not necessarily a given and teachers should experiment with activities that better match students' strengths. Self-esteem formed when students learn from a position of strength can be carried over into other areas where they are weak. Students who find school unchallenging because they are overly proficient in typical school intelligences, might find it more interesting to address the same material from more challenging perspectives.

How

Many different teaching methods can result in increased student motivation; how students are taught can significantly impact on how the same content is received, whether with enthusiasm or disinterest. Teachers have different teaching philosophies. Two broad categories of philosophy are subject- (curriculum- or teacher-) and student- (child- or learner-) centered (Parkay & Stanford, p. 85; Ryan & Cooper, p. 272) philosophies. Despite the standardized, subject-centered curriculum, child-centered teaching methods can be employed. Fried (2001, p. 245), a strong advocate of student-centered learning and a constructivist approach (p. 93), includes an entire chapter entitled "Passionate Teaching and Learning in an Era of Standardization." He includes suggestions like parental involvement and celebration of learning outside the school, which have already been addressed, but also the notion that knowledge is power and of school as a shared enterprise.

Student-centered methods are carefully tuned to the readiness of individuals to learn particular subject material. The material must fall within the zone of proximal development as defined by Vygotsky and described in many teaching texts (Cook & Cook, p. 195; Parkay & Stanford, p. 341; Ryan & Cooper, p. 163). A "more knowledgeable other" such a teacher or cross-age tutor assists by temporarily providing scaffolding to support new skills or knowledge until they have solidified enough that the student can use them independently. Whether a student is ready for the material or can master it in any particular amount of time is determined by the student rather than the timetable of the teacher or curriculum. Although teaching can be forced, it may adversely affect the student's motivation to learn and result in discouragement.

Some students do not learn well individually, but may excel in group learning contexts. Peer-mediated instruction is a term used for a broad range of group activities (Parkay & Stanford, p. 342). Group investigations, peer-tutoring, and cross-age tutoring fall into this category. In group investigations, small numbers of students explore a problem by deciding what roles need to be assumed and taking them on. They act, report, and evaluate the results. Parkay & Stanford (p. 406) cite work by Bempechat, who points out that group work can be noncompetitive and cooperative, lessening the worry students have about their smartness relative to others and allowing them to concentrate on learning. Peer tutors are students in the same class or grade and cross-age tutors are of unlike ages. The authors report that pilot programs pairing older at risk students with younger students have been especially successful (p. 342). In addition, entire cooperative learning programs are defined and ready for deployment. These include Jigsaw Classroom, Numbered Heads Together, and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (Friend & Bursuck, p. 495). Teachers should be certain to explore these possibilities as potential motivators.

Some students may be disinterested in being fairly passive receivers of knowledge, even if they do well retaining it. They may be better motivated with the possibility of finding out for themselves through inquiry or discovery learning (Parkay & Stanford, p. 342). In fact, different

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learning styles have been identified (Ryan & Cooper, p. 44). The typically academic mastery style may discourage students who are not good at it despite being intelligent. The understanding style may be more appropriate for those interested in inquiry or discovery learning. There are also self-expressive and interpersonal styles. Students who believe they just can't learn may need the opportunity to practice these styles and find motivation in any success they have. Teachers should be checking for potential areas of student success (Friend & Bursuck, p. 151) and combating any obstacle (Fried, p. 48).

Assessment is another potential source of discouragement for students. Some simply do not fair well on typical written tests and other product-based evaluations. Students who believe they will not be able to graduate based on test scores are likely to look for other opportunities elsewhere, even though they may still be learning. Alternatives include performance-based assessments and portfolio assessments (Friend & Bursuck, p. 422). Davis (1993) advises that grades, often the outcome of an assessment, be deemphasized in favor of mastery.

Conclusion

This paper has offered no silver bullet. Every method suggested herein has been implemented and practiced somewhere within the United States, save two. The who has never been me and the where has never been my classroom. As I continue with my teacher education program and prepare to enter the classroom, I will remain all too keenly aware of the need to motivate potentially unmotivated students and encourage potentially discouraged ones so that those whom I teach are the subject of more favorable reports in around 2020.

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