

Teaching and Learning: Motivating Learners¹

Margaret Reaves, Rigo Chaparro, J. C. Bunch, and Carla B. Jagger²

Introduction

All students, all individuals, have different learning styles. Their interests and motivations adapt as they mature and recognize their interests. Educators must be aware of the continuum of motivation and appropriately provide opportunities for student engagement, learning, and growth. Motivation is paramount to the success of students, of all individuals. Educators must be aware of appropriate ways to motivate their students.

Motivation

Motivation is a process that drives individuals forward to complete tasks, to accomplish goals, and simply to move (Pintrich, 2003). Motivation can be divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is personal and is derived from individual goals and perceptions. Intrinsic motivation is important for the success of an individual. Individuals must work toward goals and complete tasks without the continual promise of reward. Extrinsic motivation is fueled by the potential for reward at the completion of a task or when a goal is met. While each is separate, individuals who are fueled by both types of motivation are successful (Ryan & Desi, 2000).

The opposite of motivation is amotivation. Amotivation occurs when individuals feel no motivation to complete a task or reach a goal (Ryan & Desi, 2000). This is becoming more common among students, and thus the discussion of how to effectively motivate learners is paramount in the success of students.

Teaching and Learning Styles

Learning styles are comprised of individuals' cognitive and psychological perceptions and how they react and learn with different learning environments (Curry, 1981). Teaching is expansive and is universal in all professions. Individual teachers have varying teaching styles. Teaching styles can range from lecture-based to hands-on collaborative thinking. Incorporation of varying teaching styles and methods into classroom instruction is paramount for successful teaching of material (Nilson, 2010).

Ways to Motivate Learners

When motivating learners, it is important to explain the objectives of the lesson or the task at hand so that all students understand. It is important that the student is clear on the expectations and objectives of the lesson. Once the objectives have been stated, it is important for the educator to show excitement and interest in the lesson. If the teacher is not motivated, it will be difficult for the students to be motivated. Expectations of students should be high, but attainable. It is important to track the progress of the students and set "checkpoints," or small periodical goals throughout the lesson or activity that they are to complete. However, the most valuable way to motivate learners is to make it relevant and to help them understand the simple question: "Why?" Students must understand the purpose of the lesson and why it is valuable for them to learn as an individual.

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2. Isabella Damiani, graduate assistant; Andrew Thoron, associate professor; and J. C. Bunch, assistant professor; Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Examples of Ways to Motivate Learners (Nilson, 2010)

- Give students responsibility and hold them accountable.
- Ensure you are using differentiated instruction when necessary.
- Get to know your students/be available.
- Allow students freedom to help develop their assignments.
- Be a role model for student engagement.

Considerations

Many considerations must be made when motivating learners. The home life of a student could impact their ability to succeed; they may be limited to things outside of their control. Many students struggle with challenges such as low social economic status (SES), family structure, mental illnesses, or physical and mental disabilities (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). These potential roadblocks could be the cause if a student is not as engaged as they are expected to be. However, these struggles often go unrecognized. Physical limitations must be accounted for when evaluating a student's engagement. If a student is low SES, located within a food desert, or simply does not have access to proper nutrition, it will be difficult for them to focus and be motivated in the classroom. If a student has a disability that prevents them from understanding or participating in the lesson completely, adjustments to the lesson can provide an equal opportunity for these students to learn and be successful in the classroom. Recognizing students who are struggling and offering them assistance is critical for their success. Resources for educators include other teachers, school counselors, and parents. These individuals can help assist the teacher in understanding and helping the student's shortcomings.

Conclusion

Motivation is what drives individuals to move towards a task or towards a goal. The opposite of motivation is amotivation. When engaging students, educators must strive to recognize signs of amotivation among their students and be aware of ways to combat it. Students have multiple learning styles, and it is important to consider this variety. Additionally, teachers have a variety of teaching styles that impact their ability to motivate learners. To truly motivate students, they must know why the material matters, how it will impact them, and why they should care.

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