

THE MOTIVATION

GAP

Students who are inspired to learn for their own pleasure are at an advantage over those who work for external rewards, argues **Alexandra Mounier** – so how can we help the latter become the former?



Motivation is defined as something that energises, directs and sustains behaviour. It can be considered a driving force that compels an action towards a desired goal. Motivation in education can have several effects on how students behave towards subject matter; it can increase initiation of and persistence in activities, direct a student's behaviour towards certain goals, increase levels of effort, enhance cognitive processing and lead to improved performance. And it can come in two very different forms: **Intrinsic motivation** arises from a desire to learn about a topic due to a learner's inherent interests and for self-fulfilment and pleasure. Students who are intrinsically

motivated are likely to engage willingly in a task without much coercion, as well as work to improve their skills, increasing their capabilities.

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside of the individual – it comes into play when a student is compelled to perform or succeed for the sake of accomplishing a specific result or outcome. This may be some sort of prize, a good grade or peer praise. Competition is an extrinsic motivator because it encourages the performer to win and beat others, not simply enjoy the intrinsic rewards of an activity.

Children are not always internally motivated and sometimes require situated motivation found in the teaching environment created. However, choosing to extrinsically

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reward productive student behaviour can make it difficult for teachers to encourage learners to become self motivated. Consequently, student dependency on extrinsic rewards is one of the greatest detractors from their use in the classroom; it's of benefit to all learners to become intrinsically motivated.

Social psychological research has indicated that extrinsic rewards can lead to over justification – expected external incentives such as prizes decrease a student's own self-initiated motivation to perform a task. Teachers may also find it difficult to determine appropriate rewards and may be concerned that once the reward is removed, all motivation is lost. Externally motivated students may need to be enticed or prodded and only process information superficially in order to meet minimal classroom requirements (Fleming & Gottfried, 2001). There are a number of suggested reasons for this; as students get older, they are told to concentrate on achieving good grades for university admission, graduation and promotion at work. Alternatively, students may also become bored with overly structured and repetitive activities that they could encounter in school.

Students are likely to become intrinsically motivated if they are able to attribute their educational results to factors under their control; if they believe they possess the necessary skills to achieve their desired goal and if they are interested in mastering a topic, not just achieving good grades.

There are several ways teachers can aim to foster intrinsic motivation in students. For example, you could:

■ Help students find personal meaning and value in material.

Teachers should try to create learning activities that are based on topics relevant to students' lives. This may include using pop culture technology such as iPods or YouTube videos to connect the subject with students' interests (Brozo, 2005).

■ Ensure opportunities for student success by assigning tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult. If tasks are too easy, they can promote boredom and/or send the message that a teacher has low expectations of a student. On the other hand, if tasks are too difficult, they may seem unattainable, undermining self-efficacy. Teachers need to set tasks with a level of difficulty that is slightly above students' current ability, gradually raising this 'bar' as learning progresses.

■ Offer choices. An increased sense of autonomy in the learning process can be a great motivator for students. Motivation declines when students are not given a say in class structure. Simply offering a selection of assignment titles can be one such way of doing this.

■ Seek role models. Providing students with a role model may help them to see the relevance in subject matter. In 2003, Darrel J Wiens found that female students were more likely to cite a positive influence with a teacher as a factor for becoming interested in science. Role models are not just limited to teachers; they can be guest speakers, fellow students, other peers or even the right kind of celebrities such as British particle physicist Brian Cox, OBE.

■ Establish a sense of belonging. Human beings have a fundamental need to feel connected to others. Research shows in an academic environment, students who feel that they belong have a higher degree of intrinsic motivation and academic confidence. According to Freeman, Anderman and Jensen (2007), an educator who demonstrates warmth and openness and encourages student participation can help foster a sense of belonging in students.

So how else can teachers encourage extrinsically motivated students to put in the extra effort? The majority of students today have frequent opportunities to use technology in the classroom. With interactive whiteboards for instance,



students can play a much more central role in the direction of the lesson, motivating them to learn. Incorporating multimedia resources can open up a new world of content, facilitating group discussion and creating a more engaging learning environment.

Social constructivism places a great importance on the learner

being actively involved in the education process. Through sharing thoughts and findings with others, students will become better motivated to learn. Social constructivist Bauersfeld (1995) examined the importance of the teacher inhabiting the role of facilitator – seeking to develop active learning in students. A student-centred learning environment allows students a space to work together, sharing and building on their skills. In this setting, students develop the motivation to venture their own ideas instead of relying on the teacher's. Mobile interactive whiteboards promote student-centred, active learning and literally place learning in students' hands. With these devices, students are able to learn independently and think creatively and critically. Mobile interactive whiteboards can be shared amongst small groups, building upon existing team working skills and motivating students to adopt an 'all for one and one for all' attitude so that they feel like a valued team member.

The introduction of portable, hand-held devices such as student response systems in the classroom can also result in an increased interest in learning. This technology cleverly disguises a test as a 'game', motivating students to participate. Moreover, they are not just limited to 'yes' or 'no' answers; many allow for multiple answers or even short text responses for deeper explanations to a question set by the teacher. Taking a diagnostic assessment of a student's understanding of a subject as a lesson progresses allows a teacher to tailor content where necessary and supports students to take an active interest in their academic progression, motivating them to achieve.

Ultimately, intrinsic motivation requires preparation and special attention. Teachers must adopt a variety of approaches to encourage and inspire students. However, intrinsic motivation is ultimately what will sustain them in the long run. It will encourage them to apply what they are studying in real life, help them to become high achievers, and increase the odds that they will continue to learn about a variety of academic subject matters, long after they leave formal education.



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