

The Role of Teachers in Motivating Students To Learn

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Abstract

Many factors motivate students' to learn. These factors may be intrinsic or extrinsic. This article discusses the role of the teacher in students' motivation to learn. The literature on learning and motivation reveals the ways that teachers can increase students' motivation to learn. While students may have an innate desire to learn, the external support provided by the teacher has a significant impact on students' learning. The teacher's role in motivation includes, but is not limited to, creating an environment conducive to learning. The teacher's role in encouraging support of students' autonomy, relevance, and relatedness of the material increases motivation to learn. Additionally, the teacher's ability to develop students' competence, interest in subject taught, and perception of self-efficacy are all important factors that influence students' motivation to learn. This article, however, does not attempt to answer the extent to which these factors increase students' motivation to learn.

Motivation increases students' learning (Theobald, 2006). Students' learning can increase because of their own innate desires to perform or accomplish a task; however, students' learning may be affected by external factors such as rewards or incentives (Bain, 2004; Theobald, 2006). Students' learning is not entirely dependent on their own motivation. Teachers' play a vital role in increasing students' learning through motivational support (Schuitema, Peetsma, & Oort, 2016; Theobald, 2006; Thoonen, Slegers, Peetsma, & Oort, 2011). Teachers can increase students' motivation to learn by support of students' autonomy, relevance, relatedness, competence, teachers' interests in the subject, and self-efficacy (Ferlazzo, 2015; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015; Schuitema et al., 2016; Zhang, Solmon, & Gu, 2012). Though motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic, it is important for teacher to create an environment that motivates students' learning.

Motivation is perceived to have several meanings. Motivation is conceptualised as an innate desire that drives individuals to participate in an activity because of the satisfaction derived from it (Theobald, 2006). Another view of motivation suggests it is goal-directed learning, which stimulates and guides individuals toward a particular direction (Alexenoamen, 2009). As students are motivated to learn, they are more likely to achieve the goals set for them, either by themselves or by the teacher (Theobald, 2006). Motivation, while it may have several definitions, influences students' learning.

Students' motivation to learn is derived from various sources, either intrinsic or extrinsic (Theobald, 2006; Zhang, 2014). On one hand, students are motivated to learn naturally because of their own interest and enjoyment in the subject or task, which gives deep meaning to what they learned and the effects on their lives (Bain, 2004; Zhang, 2014). On the other hand, some students learn best because of a tangible reward or the value that is attached to the outcome of learning (Biggs, 1999; Bain, 2004; Zhang, 2014). Students who are intrinsically motivated tend to perform better on the given tasks and are keener to achieve success (Theobald, 2006; Biggs, 1999; Zhang, 2014). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation increases students' drive to learn.

Teachers play a vital role in creating an environment that supports students' learning. They often do this through their support for students' autonomy (Schuitema et al., 2016). Teachers enable students to identify with self, personal interests, and values by supporting their freedom of choice (Ferlazzo, 2015). By supporting students' choices and interests, teachers help students develop personal interest, involvement, and ownership of their work, which aid in motivation (Schuitema et al.; Stearns, 2013). Teachers also help students to learn by increasing their responsibility and participation in their own learning through letting them create their own goals and objectives (Theobald, 2006). Research conducted on the nature of the relationship between students' perception of social support and autonomy support from their teachers, and

self-regulated learning and achievement, showed a significant correlation between the students' perception of their teachers' autonomy support and self-regulated learning (Schuitema et al., 2016). Teachers who help their students to become authors of their lives, take ownership and develop personal interest in their own work stimulate students' motivation, and increase their drive to learn.

Connecting to the personal world of students is another way that teachers support their students' learning (Thoonen et al., 2011). Teachers connect learning to the personal world of their students by making learning tasks more relevant through relating instructions to students' experiences (Ferland, 2015; Thoonen et al., 2011). Students who understand the relevance for learning a particular concept, and what that learning implies for their everyday living, will generate interest (Theobald, 2006). A study explored the use of four classroom practices – process-oriented instruction, differentiation, connecting to students' world (relevance), and cooperative learning – in order to determine their relationship to students' motivation (Thoonen et al., 2011). The findings revealed that connecting to the personal world (relevance) of students had a positive outcome on students' motivation (Thoonen et al., 2011). Students need to see the links between what they do in class and how meaningful it is to their lives (Martin, Hodges-Kulinna, & Cothran, 2002). For example, students could write reflections about the effect of course materials on their lives (Ferland, 2015). Students are more likely motivated to learn when what is learned has meaning and importance to their lives.

Teachers who build positive relationships with their students are more likely to influence their drive to learn (Ferland, 2015). Building trust in a relationship takes time. Teachers should take time to know their students and their interests (Theobald, 2006). To achieve this trust, teachers should be open minded and occasionally share their own stories of success, struggles, failures, and achievement (Bain, 2004). Satisfaction of individuals' basic need for relationship promotes intrinsic behaviour that can lead to students' motivation to learn (Schuitema et al., 2016). Building relationship with students can be difficult; however, being positive and encouraging can contribute to students' intrinsic motivation (Ferland, 2015; Theobald, 2006). Research conducted into the relationship between students' perception of social support and autonomy support from their teachers, and self-regulated learning and achievement, concluded that the students' learning, performance in school, and social and emotional well-being were all affected by the relationship with their teachers (Schuitema et al.). The early establishment of a willingness to work with students one on one can build the nature of the teacher-student relationship (Stearns, 2013). Teachers' positive, caring, and trusting relationships with their students can instigate students to learn.

Teachers motivate their students to learn by providing them with positive feedback, in order to develop competence. Providing feedback enables students to gain control over their own learning and a sense of belief about their abilities (Bain, 2004; Ferland, 2015). Teachers who provide feedback to students about their efforts give them the idea that through hard work, they can achieve tasks and do well (Theobald, 2006; Ferland, 2015). Developing students' competence maybe achieved in several ways. The most common strategies include providing written or verbal praise, identifying fewer errors, recognizing students' strengths, and focusing on what is positive about their work (Bain, 2004; Theobald, 2006). Research findings on the role of teachers' support in predicting students' motivation and achievement outcomes in physical education showed that perceived teacher competence support, such as positive feedback, positively predicted students' expectancy-related beliefs about their abilities to perform tasks proficiently (Zhang et al., 2012). Students will be motivated to learn when teachers recognize their efforts for accomplishing the tasks.

The level of teachers' interest in their teaching affects students' motivation to learn. Teachers who are energetic and enthusiastic about their subject or task generally attach positive feelings and importance to how they teach (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015; Zhang, 2014). Students observe what their teachers do in class and how they act. A teacher who displays

interest and positive feelings about a subject can reflect those positive feelings toward students, thus increasing their motivation to learn the subject (Theobald, 2006). Students' motivation to learn maybe affected by the teachers' outlook, interests, and enthusiasm in their subject (Zhang, 2014). Zhang's (2014) study examined the effects of teacher enthusiasm on student engagement and motivation to learn, by asking 165 college students to participate in a survey. The survey required students to rate their perception of the enthusiasm of the teacher; provide a self-assessment of their behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement; and rate their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn. The results showed that teacher enthusiasm had a significant effect on students' engagement; in addition, the teacher enthusiasm was an effective predictor of students' intrinsic motivation. Students' motivation to learn maybe enhanced through the teachers' interests in their subject, the level of enthusiasm, and energy they display while teaching.

Teachers' beliefs in their abilities to reach unmotivated students can increase students' motivation to learn. Teachers' beliefs in their abilities to use effective teaching strategies, classroom management, and engage students in participation can enable students' learning (Bain, 2004; Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015). Thoonen et al.'s (2011) study conducted on teachers' perceived self-efficacy, in addition to four classroom practices, showed that teachers' sense of self-efficacy had a positive effect on students' motivation and on their own teaching. Though the teachers' ability to hone their teaching skills and techniques is important to self-efficacy, attention should focus on the students' learning by stimulating dialogue, giving clear instructions, and giving thorough explanations (Bain, 2004). Some teachers engage students in bantering, which enables them to ask questions, reflect and maintain active participation in the topic. In another study, Sugita & Takeuchi (2012) examined the efficacy of a teacher's motivational strategies to determine whether they had any effects on students' learning English as a foreign language. The students' degree of motivation and their proficiency in English were evaluated at the beginning of data collection. The results showed that 7 of the 17 motivational strategies had a positive influence on students' motivation. Teachers' belief in their craft, pedagogical skills, and effective classroom management enhance students' motivation to learn.

In summary, students' learning is influenced by motivation. Though students are born with the natural ability to learn, much is dependent on the teachers' involvement. Sometimes, students' energy, drive, and enthusiasm for a subject or task may wane and therefore require continued reinforcement through external support. Teachers, who are responsible for creating a supportive environment that facilitates and increases students' learning, often provide this external support. The teachers' role in facilitating students' motivation is perceived through their support for developing students' autonomy, relevance, relatedness, competence, teachers' interests, and teachers' self-efficacy about teaching their subject. Though students' motivation to learn can be intrinsic or extrinsic, the role of the teacher in supporting their learning and creating the right environment will further enhance their motivation to learn.

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Davion Johnson is a first year international graduate student pursuing an M.Ed. degree in guidance and counselling. Prior to migrating, he was the principal of an inner city high school in Jamaica. His family includes his wife and two children ages four and six. He enjoys going to the movies, cooking, having family together, and spending time at the beach.