

What Motivation is and Why It is Important in Classroom Situation

Written by shabait Administrator

Friday, 01 October 2010 09:37 - Last Updated Friday, 01 October 2010 09:50



Educators, like Connie Firth, an expert on Educational Communication Technology in the University of Saskatchewan, defined motivation as an internal drive that directs behavior towards some end. The same subject has also been defined by Linda S. Lumsden, as cause for an organism's behavior or the reason that an organism carries out some activity. The following is a mix of points taken from different educators on the same subject: The role of motivation in the teaching-learning process: Human behavior is complex and people are naturally curious. Therefore, instructional designers should meet the challenges of designing instruction assisted by motivation; because it is of paramount importance to student success. Students work longer, harder and with more vigor and intensity when they are motivated than they are not. In other words, motivation helps individuals overcome inertia.

This happens so because in the teaching-learning process, as in other various activities, there should be something that propels their mind or dangles in front to make them more active and vibrant, in classroom teaching, the major task is to nurture student curiosity as a motivation for learning. This is important because curiosity is motivation that is intrinsic to learning. The source of motivation is complex. It can be categorized into external and internal. The latter sustains behavior. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are two types of motivation that affect achievement of students. However, the value of external motivation, for instance, reinforcement, is questioned from those who suggest that once it is withdrawn the behavior stops. Critics go on to say that students must have intrinsic motivation to accomplish the required activities. In intrinsic motivation the "doing" is the main reason for finishing an activity whereas in extrinsic motivation the "value" is placed at the end of an action. Infants and young Children appear to be propelled by curiosity, driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and make sense of their environment.

As one author puts it, "Rarely does one hear parents complain that their pre-school child is 'unmotivated', unfortunately, as children grow, their passion for learning frequently seems to shrink. Learning often becomes associated with drudgery instead of delight. A large number of students-more than one in four-leave schools before graduating. Many more are physically present in the classroom but largely mentally absent; they fail to invest themselves fully in the experience of learning. Awareness of how students' attitudes and beliefs about learning develop and what facilitates learning for its own sake can assist educators in reducing student apathy towards learning. Therefore, the role and importance of motivation is worth looking at in this regard.

What is student Motivation? Student motivation has to do with students' desire participate in the learning process. But it also concerns the reasons or goals that underlie their involvement in

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academic activities. Although students may be equally motivated to perform a task, the source of their motivation may differ. A student who is intrinsically motivated undertakes an activity “for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes”. An extrinsically motivated student performs “in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself” such as grades, stickers, or teacher approval. As stated above, the term motivation to learn has a slightly different meaning. It is defined by some author as “the meaningfulness, value, and benefits of academic tasks to the learner-regardless of whether or not they are intrinsically interesting”.

Others note that motivation to learn is characterized by long-term, quality involvement in learning and commitment to the process of learning. Factors that influence the development of students’ motivation: According to educators, motivation to learn is a competence acquired “through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by parents and teachers. Children’s home environment shapes the initial constellation of attitudes they develop toward learning. When parents nurture their children’s natural curiosity about the world by welcoming their questions, encouraging exploration, and familiarizing them with resources that can enlarge their world, they are giving their children the message that learning is worthwhile and frequently fun and satisfying. When children are raised at home that nurtures a sense of self-worth, competence, autonomy, and self-efficiency, they will be more apt to accept the risks inherent in learning. Conversely, when children do not view themselves as basically competent and able, their freedom to enlarge in academically challenging pursuits and capacity to tolerate and cope with failure are greatly diminished.

Once children start school, they begin forming beliefs about their school-related successes and failures. The source to which children attribute their successes and failures have important implications on how they can approach and cope with learning situations. The beliefs teachers themselves have about teaching and learning and the nature of the expectations they hold for students also exert a powerful influence. As one notable educator remarked, “To a very large degree, students expect to learn if their teachers expect them to learn”. School-wide goals, policies, and procedures also interact with classroom climate and practices affirm or alter students’ increasingly complex learning-related attitudes and beliefs. Developmental changes comprise one more strand of the motivational web as well. For example, although young children tend to maintain high expectations for success even in the face of repeated failure, older students do not. Although younger children tend to see effort as uniformly positive, older children view it as a “double-edged sword”. To them, failure following high effort appears to carry more negative implication-especially for their self-concept of ability-than failure that results from minimal or no effort.

What are advantages of intrinsic motivation? Does it really matter whether students are primarily intrinsically or extrinsically oriented towards learning? A growing body of evidence suggests that it does. When intrinsically motivated, students tend to employ strategies that demand more effort and that enable them to process information more deeply. Students with an intrinsic orientation also tend to prefer tasks that are moderately challenging whereas extrinsically oriented students gravitate toward tasks that are low in degree of difficulty. Extrinsically oriented students are inclined to put forth the minimal amount of effort necessary to get the maximal reward. Although every educational activity cannot, and perhaps should not, be intrinsically motivating, findings suggest that when teachers can capitalize on existing intrinsic

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motivation, there are several potential benefits. How can motivation to learn be fostered in the school setting? Although students' motivational histories accompany them into each new classroom setting, it is essential for teachers to view themselves as "active socializing agents capable of stimulating student motivation to learn".

Classroom climate is important. If students experience the classroom as a caring, supportive place where there is a sense of belonging and everyone is valued and respected they will tend to appreciate more fully in the process of learning. Various task dimensions can also foster motivation to learn. Ideally, tasks should be challenging but achievable. Relevance also promotes motivation, as does "contextualizing" learning, i.e., helping students to see how skills can be applied in the real world. Tasks that involve "moderate amount of discrepancy or incongruity are beneficial because they stimulate students' curiosity", and this is an intrinsic motivator. Extrinsic rewards, on the other hand, should be used with caution, for they have the potential for decreasing existing intrinsic motivation. What takes place in the classroom is critical; but "the classroom is not an island". Depending on their degree of congruence with classroom goals and practices, school wide goals either dilute or enhance classroom efforts. To support motivation to learn, school-level policies and practices should stress "learning, task mastery and effort" rather than relative performance and competition. What can be done to help unmotivated students? A first step is for educators to recognize that even when students use strategies that are ultimately self-defeating (such as withholding effort, cheating, procrastination, and so forth); their goal is actually to protect their sense of self-worth. A process called attribution retraining, which involves modeling, socialization, and practice exercise, is sometimes used with discouraged students. The goals of attribution retraining are to help students to: Concentrate on the tasks rather than becoming distracted by fear of failure; respond to frustration by retracting their steps to find mistake or figuring out alternative ways of approaching a problem instead of giving up; and attribute their failures to insufficient effort, lack of information or reliance on effective strategies rather than to lack of ability. Other potentially useful strategies include: portray effort as investment rather than risk; portray skill development as incremental and domain specific and focus on mastery. Because the potential payoff-having students who value learning for its own sake-is priceless, it is crucial for parents, teachers, and school leaders to devote rekindling students' motivation to learn.

Conclusion: The behaviorists talk about reward and punishment as being the main influence on learning. It is clear that behavior can be focused toward a reward or away from a punishment. Therefore, the involvement or non-involvement of motivation in the classroom situation is more or less a question of a carrot-and-stick approach. This is really a subject of discussion that educators broach to each other on different occasions. The basic question is should the student (the human child) be, like Pavlov's dog, driven/encouraged to a stimulus that dangles in front of him/her?

Source: "Education Horizon", Magazine, Ministry of Education