

Academic Underachievement: Understanding and Implications for Educators

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify positive techniques and strategies for educators when working with students who lack motivation academically. Mendler (2000) reported more educators are frustrated with students who expect success, but are unwilling to work for it. He also reported that students are missing the idea that it is their responsibility to learn information, practice material, and attend class to be successful. There are many reasons why students underachieve and contributors can include and are not limited to parental expectations, social problems, difficulties in the home or educational setting, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and low self-esteem. According to Stevenson and Zigler (1993), motivation is considered the basic ingredient to learning and every child is born with an intrinsic motivation to learn and understand the world around them. Although children are born with this, it unfortunately can diminish over time due to reactions or perceptions of others and life experiences.

This literature review provided an understanding of students' positive and negative attitudes or beliefs of behaviors that may cause lack of motivation. The majority of studies reviewed concerned lack of motivation and specific causes for it.

Critical analysis of the literature review revealed primary sources of motivation and where it comes from. More importantly, the psychological needs of students usually determine their needs to perform or not perform in the educational setting.

Those students who choose to participate in their educational activities may have these needs fulfilled and those who do not may be affected academically and motivationally.

Implications and future research offers techniques and strategies for educators when trying to motivate those students who just do not seem to care. Techniques are suggested to enable not only the student, but the educator as well. Not giving up on these students is the best strategy, but can be the most challenging for educators who work with them day in and day out. The ongoing challenge for educators is to find ways to reconnect their students to education and to not give up them. Educators are so very important and have an enormous influence in the everyday lives of students and it is with this we need to be reminded of the differences we can make no matter how frustrating and daunting it can be.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Almost a third of a youth's life is spent in school. Apart from the family, school is the most important influence to youth, shaping friendships, successes, and failures. It is a time of growth and development, a time for change, a time to struggle with dependence and independence, and a time to make mistakes and grow from them (Fenwick & Smith, 1994).

Every child needs affection, the feeling of belonging and being wanted, respect as an individual, a favorable setting for growth, development of security, freedom from excessive domination, discipline, and support to allow an active imagination to develop (Torrance & Strom, 1965).

According to the web-site Resiliency in Action (2007),

Resiliency is stated to having the ability to spring back from and successfully adapt to adversity. Increasing research from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and sociology shows that most people—including young people—can bounce back from risks, stress, crises, and trauma and still experience life success (p.2)

Underachievement is complex and challenging and is a never-ending issue facing parents and educators yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Why do students underachieve, give up on school, and lack motivation?

There are many reasons why students underachieve and contributors can include parental expectations, social problems, difficulties in the home or educational setting, learning disabilities, behavioral problems, low self-esteem, and the list can go on and on.

Motivation is considered the basic ingredient to learning. According to Stevenson and Zigler (1993), every child is born with an intrinsic motivation to learn and understand the world around them, an aspect of development that Robert White (1959) referred to as competence motivation. This type of motivation helps explain people's interest in their environment and their ability to persist in learning difficult things. Although children are born with this, it unfortunately can diminish over time due to reactions or perceptions of others and life experiences (Stevenson & Zigler, 1993).

Significant influences on underachievement can relate to school policies, leadership, organization, climate, parent attitudes, circumstances in the home and elsewhere, and social and cultural factors (Griffen, 1988). As educators, we need to have balance about the amount of power we have and our affect on student motivation. Too often educators blame themselves for the lack of commitment and motivation of individual students. Students are motivated or they are not and educators continue to battle the questions surrounding underachievement, which can wear down even the most resilient human beings.

Lack of academic motivation and underachievement continues to be a concern for students and has become widespread in communities and states across the country. All students have the desire to be successful in school, some just simply don't know how (Heacox, 1991).

According to About Underachieving-Teens.com (2001), to motivate adolescents and encourage students to learn, parents are to honor different learning styles and help students discover their own unique abilities by giving them appropriate tools for successful achievement, including the following: show respect for your child's

individuality, set small, attainable goals at first, motivate the teen by finding creative ways to approach academics, give positive feedback for performance and constructive criticism to help motivate them further, create positive opportunities to improve achievement by being spontaneous and creative, find ways to stimulate a gifted but bored child, have siblings cooperate in supporting each other in studying and doing homework, find what interests your child and work from there, and lastly, allow them to investigate and discover his or her interests

By offering unconditional support to students' increases self-esteem as well as a belief that the world is a good place in which to live. Having the will to mold the school system to the needs of individual students is a powerful act of faith in human nature that could have a positive effect on both parties.

The first step in creating change starts at the personal and social level. Families and school systems should be willing to draw a bigger circle of acceptance around the underachieving teen. If so, important changes could begin immediately. Unconditional acceptance by educators and parents that relate to emotional, material, and spiritual needs will enhance the student's well-being and how he or she may perceive the outside world as it pertains to his or her and feel self worth in doing such, therefore leading to the desire to succeed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to review findings on academic underachievement and empowering youth to personal excellence. In addition, the psychological needs youth require will be explored. We are fortunate to be in a country where education is something every child can experience. Unfortunately, not every child views education as

this opportunity and goes through their education experience failing, which leads to negative feelings about themselves, which then leads to continued failure. For this reason, educators and parents must consider continual strategies and techniques to reach these students. By doing such, students may find their educational experiences to be rewarding, helping them to become productive, caring, and well-balanced.

Research Question

The questions researched were: a) where does motivation come from? b) why do youth underachieve academically when the ability to achieve is present? c) what factors contribute to their psychological and academic needs? d) how can strategies and techniques help enhance student performance? e) and why is it important to empower underachievers?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Underachievement- A child who is stuck developmentally is a child who has the capability to do well academically, but displays no motivation and works far below his or her potential. Underachievement is an emotion-based problem that applies to patterns of behavior that occur both inside and outside of school. They understand what they need to do intellectually, but their attitude is “so what?” They blame lousy teachers, overbearing parents, and irrelevant work for their lack of motivation. Underachievers may want to do well, but by the time the child is a teenager, the child has resigned to detachment and the sentiment of “I do not care.” As this continues, the teenager becomes an adult, which then the lack of

motivation becomes a habit pattern making it harder for the adult to change (Spevak & Karnich, 2001).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

So many capable youth underachieve in school. These are children who have not figured out how to learn productively or those who choose not to make a concentrated effort in school. These are youth who resist achieving academically, wasting talent and potential as the end result.

This chapter will include perceptions of adolescent development, principles of achievement, and possible profiles of underachievers. Each will address on why they play a role in the motivation of students.

Lawrence J. Greene (2004), stated that children are born with an insatiable desire to learn and assimilate information about the world they are living in and each is programmed genetically to develop new skills and abilities. As children start their first day of kindergarten most are excited, wide-eyed, and eager to begin their new world of learning in the education setting. Unfortunately, as times goes by, for some the excitement, eagerness, and willingness to learn fizzles out. Youth develop maladaptive behaviors and attitudes to the very thing they were so eager to do. They can find it difficult to function in the classroom, not having the ability to figure out how to use their own capabilities by acquiring the tools it takes for academic success. As the years pass and counterproductive attitudes and behaviors have become entrenched, their self-confidence is shredded piece by piece. Self-sabotaging behavior is embedded and the cycle of underachievement begins. Children do not know how to learn, and what is even worse, they do not want to even make the attempt to do so. School becomes something they have to do and everything from it is viewed as negative.

Children who do poorly in school and feel inadequate develop ways to defend themselves psychologically and self-protecting behaviors become their instinct for natural survival in the academic world. All the excuses for the lack of motivation become common byproducts of the struggling learners' constant battle to keep his or her head above water. Some examples of this include frustration, learning phobias, negative expectations, emotional scarring, resistance to learning, and diminished self-confidence. These learners may not even be aware of these feelings, but the underlying emotions nonetheless play an instrumental role in shaping attitudes and behaviors (Greene, 2004).

Adolescent Development

During adolescence, individuals try to establish their personal identity, define themselves in terms of who they are, and in terms of what they want to become. This can be a complex task. Adolescents undergo psychosocial crisis when determining their own identities (Zigler & Stevenson, 1993).

An expert on adolescent development, Jay Giedd (2006), was one of the first psychologists to use advanced technology to document "the adolescent brain is not a finished product." He collected data by scanning and analyzing brain activity and found the growth of thousands of teens, contrary to the widely accepted idea that a person's brain has finished developing by the age of six that a young person's brain continues to grow and change throughout childhood and well into adolescence. Giedd was also able to ascertain that an adolescent's frontal lobe, or the area of the brain that helps a person make good decisions, act rationally, and resist impulses, is the last area of the brain to stabilize. This helps explain why teens often use poor judgment, are impulsive, have mood swings and how they really are a work in progress (Giedd, cited in Gorman, 2006).

Another perspective by Erik Erikson (1993), a psychosocial theorist, viewed their personal identities and functions of psychosocial crisis by calling this a period of “identity vs. role confusion” (p.547).

According to Erikson (1993), having a sense of identity is as important and fundamental to human existence as food, security, and sexual satisfaction. Individuals, whether adolescents or adults, must have a sense of who they are – what their strengths and weaknesses are, beliefs, and what they want to do in life. Adolescents draw from the experiences they have had in the past and the kinds of identifications that have been formed during infancy and childhood creates their sense of identity that relates to the people around them (Erikson, cited in Zigler & Stevenson, 1993).

“Toward a Multimodal Theory of Academic Achievement,” written by John and Helen Krause, viewed ways researchers have worked together studying underachievement and concluded that those who have researched underachievement should focus on specific factors and causes, and to view the problem in a broader perspective by not looking at underachievement as a single phenomenon, but coming from several (Krause & Krause, cited in Griffen, 1988).

Their views on academic underachievement is viewed as a complex interaction between deficits in academic skills, such as reading and mathematics, deficient self-control skills, and interfering affective factors (Krause & Krause, cited in Griffen, 1988).

Principles of Achievement

How youth perform at school can be the result of many things, and quite possibly including the school itself. Family, school, friends, personality, everything and everyone may play a role in academics and sometimes can be influenced by the following factors: Physical and long term illness: if students miss school for a specific amount of time, he or she may fall behind with his or her studies. When the student returns, there may be a lack of energy and concentration and if a long-term illness persists, serious academic consequences could follow (Mandel & Marcus, 1995).

Poor nutrition also contributes to underachievement. A study has shown the benefits of having breakfast gives the student the ability to think clearly. A student who is lacking essential vitamins or minerals, taking in a steady intake of junk food, and isn't eating enough will be affected academically (Mandel & Marcus 1995).

Emotional factors conflicts with family, friends, siblings, or teachers can contribute to achievement as well. Marital problems in a family will often contribute to underachievement. Illnesses, accidents affecting anyone close, a death in the family or with a friend, family violence, as alcohol- or drug-related problems may all play a role. The more length and impact, the greater the chances school performance will be affected negatively (Mandel & Marcus, 1995).

Mental or emotional factors and learning disabilities also contribute to underachievement and affect learning. Youth with these types of deficits often do well in courses that do not involve their disability, but poorly in subjects that are affected by it. Sometimes students aren't ever identified as having a learning disability. Those with

moderate or severe disabilities usually are identified by grade 5 or 6 and milder forms often not until high school or later (Mandel & Marcus, 1995).

Intelligence contributes to a person's grade point average and academic ability, but family, school, friends, cultural, and personality have a greater influence on a student's potential. Just because children of high intelligence does not mean he or she will do well academically. All underachievers take different journeys involving lack of motivation. When reacting to major problems within their family, responding to difficulties with peers, and conflicts with one-self all respond differently. This may help gain understanding to why students underachieve academically.

Profiles of Underachievers

Up From Under-Achievement (Heacox, 1991), is a book describing a step-by-step program that deals with underachievement and promoting student success. Descriptions were used not to label students, but rather to enhance a better understanding of behaviors when confronted with students who underachieve. These consisting of: the rebel, the conformist, the stress learner, the struggling student, the victim, the distracted learner, the bored learner, the complacent learner, and the single sided learner.

"The Rebel"- the relevance of classroom activities and assignments don't seem to be of importance to the rebel. They refuse to believe there is a connection between school and the outside world and have a general attitude of "I don't need this." Visions of the future are unrealistic, especially when it comes to occupations. These students also tend to be in turmoil with the adults in their life, and to keep control, they refuse to comply with the adults in their life (Heacox, 1991).

“The Conformist”- can do well in school, but decides it is not worth it. These types of students may have found if they do well, they get rewards of doing more work for their efforts and by not doing well they won't have to do more. They feel pressure from peers, they want to blend with them and not stand out (Heacox, 1991).

“The Stressed Learner”- also known as the perfectionist. A student's rise and fall is dependant on academic performance. When things are good, students feel great and when things aren't so good, he or she may feel awful. Over time this may be wearing on the student, he or she may stop trying to achieve out of fear for making mistakes (Heacox, 1991).

“The Struggling Student”- the one who got through elementary school with little effort and did well, but hit the wall when academics became more demanding requiring more study skills. Never really having to study, these students perceive they are unsuccessful. They do not know the basics of learning, managing time, and organizing assignments. Learning disabilities may be an issue, but this student falls in the gray area of services, not being able to receive special assistance in the school. Over time, the student begins to look below average in his or her potential to learn (Heacox, 1991).

“The Victim”- these are students who are unwilling to accept responsibility for lack of success in the school setting. They use every excuse in the book as for why work isn't done or done in a timely manner. This is a student who may have been given too much power at an early age, watching everyone else do the work and not taking responsibility for it (Heacox, 1991).

“The Distracted Learner”- is the student who has concerns or problems outside of the academic setting that affect school performance. Some factors of this could include

transitions in the family, victimization of verbal or physical abuse, problems with friends, or chemical abuse within the family. Stress and anxiety becomes a prominent factor in the student's life. Distraction of time outside of school causes this type of learner to not do well in school. Perhaps the student is involved in too many extracurricular activities or has a job? There simply may not be enough hours in the day for this type of student to perform the additional task of school work. As this type of student gets older his or her friendships and other personal relationships often take precedence over school. The distracted learner's personal choices seem far more important than any assignment given in the classroom setting. Problems with chemical dependency, mental illness, or sexual identity make school work irrelevant to the distracter learner.

"The Bored Student"- is the one who is truly gifted and talented academically and needs more challenging activities in the academic setting due to advanced skills and abilities. These are the type of students who wait for years for curriculum to catch up to their learning needs and by then the student has formed work habits and patterns that are lazy. Others in this category may say they are bored, but when actually they are afraid of failure. They may decide the work is too hard and choose to stay uninvolved. Whenever there is a bored student, there is a need to look carefully to the underlying cause of refrain.

"The Complacent Learner"- is the student who is content with school and how learning is going for him or her. This student is comfortable in his or her skin and doesn't seem to have any academic difficulties. However, the adults around him or her believe the student could do better in school. At a young age the student is satisfied, although the adult's goals become unrealistic for the child. As the child gets older, he or

she may resist when ideas are forced on him or her, but either way the achievement pattern remains the same. In time he or she may decide to buckle down if something of interest comes along.

“The Single-Sided Achiever”- the student who has decided only certain classes are worth his or her time and energy. One or two subjects may be of interest to this student and these are the ones that warrant his or her time. This student chooses to achieve in some classes and underachieve in others.

Teachers and parents can strongly influence a student’s motivation or lack of motivation. Motivation is an individual’s need or desire to achieve a particular goal and it is something that comes from within. This can be promoted and supported by adults for those learners who seem to be lacking in this area. Student success and failure depend on teachers, parents, and the student. When these partnerships form with the school and home, positive change is more likely to occur for the underachiever.

Chapter III: Critical Analysis

This chapter will include primary sources of intrinsic motivation, fundamental psychological needs for students, a perceptual view of student behavior, and goals for education.

Intrinsic motivating behaviors are those where one has the desire to master challenges to match their capabilities. The desire to seek and conquer challenges being the core of all intrinsically motivating activities is fueled by the need to feel competent and autonomous. Unfortunately, this can be manipulated and influenced by others, defeating one's own sense of self-determination and setting the stage for students to reject academic education because they find it impossible to meet their psychological needs (Raffini, 1993).

The examination of the literature by this researcher revealed primary sources of intrinsic motivation and the examination of fundamental psychological needs of students including the students' needs for positive self worth, autonomy, competence, and group relatedness. Each has significance on the student by influencing his or her motivation to learn in the classroom.

Primary Sources of Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation, a model for "motivational embellishment" is derived from the Malone and Lepper (1987) taxonomy. They believe teachers' understanding is from four primary sources challenge, curiosity, control, and fantasy. Each makes classroom lessons more intrinsically interesting for the student (Raffini, 1993).

The ability to encourage various skill levels of students is a task that is an optimal struggle for educators since each student functions at different learning level. A teacher's

goal is to find ways to structure activities that reflect the initial skill levels of each student and to readily adjust to changes in the skill level that occur as the student continues to work with a given activity. This is where students will forego challenging activities to enable success by selecting activities they know they can accomplish easily.

A second source of intrinsic motivation is found to be a student's sense of curiosity, when a student's activity meshes with his/her individual level of experiences. If experiences are too disparate, activities will likely be discounted and if too similar, they will be neglected. A teacher's goal is to find ways to spark the attention of individual students, provoking curiosity.

Having a sense of control over behavior or environments Lepper and Hoddell (1989) believed to be a third potential source of intrinsic motivation. Activities and environments that foster students' feelings of self-determination and autonomy will likely stimulate their intrinsic interests, whereas, activities and environments that undermine a students' sense of control have detrimental effects on motivation.

Lastly, establishment of activities and environments that encourage students to draw upon and expand upon their imagination and fantasy contribute to intrinsic motivation. This allows a student to experience rewards and satisfactions not available to them in real life (Raffini, 1993).

Fundamental Psychological Needs for Students

While some students may choose not to achieve academically trying to understand the factors involved may be useful. Each student has fundamental psychological needs and underachievement can be linked to these needs not being met.

Raffini (1993) found that students' needs for positive self-worth, autonomy, competence and group relatedness significantly influence motivation to learn in the classroom.

Maslow's hierarchy (cited in Raffini, 1993) of human needs is a theory to the foundation of psychological needs. Maslow believed individuals are driven to satisfy both their basic needs and their meta-needs, or growth needs. He organized these two need systems into a hierarchy where satisfaction of basic needs generally takes precedence over satisfaction of growth needs. The elimination of deficiencies provides the foundation to his theory. This theory gives understanding to students and learning. Unless students have adequately satisfied their biological needs for food, water, sleep, and temperature regulation, it is unlikely that they will become interested in the everyday rituals of the classroom (cited in Raffini, 1993).

The need for safety and security, another component to Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs, relates to students feeling safe from both physical and psychological harm before they can focus their attentions on the required in the classroom. Both dysfunctional families and dysfunctional classrooms can create a threat to the safety and security of many students. Often if a student has a parent who resorts to physical violence or emotional abuse or when a teacher resorts to hollering, ridiculing, or threatening, a student may withdraw into one-self or act out behaviorally. Regardless of the source, a lack of safety in a student's living or learning environment can take away the energy that might be channeled toward personal growth and academic learning. A need for love and belonging is another need of Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs. To avoid the feeling of being isolated or alone, one must develop reciprocal relationships, and he or she must be able to identify as being a member of a larger group. This sense of

belonging and caring is often threatened in classrooms where students are forced to compete against each other or where peers reject others who look or act differently. The last of the needs is the need for self-esteem, known as holding a positive view of one-self. As students go through countless experiences with significant others whose actions and reactions teach them who they are and whether or not they are worthwhile and valued as a human being their personal esteem is developed (Raffini, 1993). When the four needs from Maslow's hierarchy are satisfied, students are free to focus their energies on meeting their personal growth needs. According to Maslow, these needs include both the desire to acquire cognitive knowledge and truth and the urge to appreciate aesthetic beauty and symmetry.

Self-actualization stands at the top of Maslow's hierarchy, which is referring to an individual's intrinsic drive to meet his or her full potential. Having a belief in one's own worth, he or she can get involved in a lifelong process of striving to reach and understand all that exists in the world experiences around them (Raffini, 1993).

A Perceptual View of Student Behavior

Students behave according to his or her personal views of the world at any given moment and to understand another's behavior, one may try to see the world through his or her eyes. Much of individual behaviors come from past experiences, which continue to change, and can make learning possible or a daunting experience. By helping students examine the broader implications of their behaviors, they can help weigh alternatives to their actions before they experience consequences. Perceptions change from moment to moment and those that relate to one's sense of identity command the greatest attention which significantly influence behaviors. Individuals (students) strive to behave in ways

that are consistent with the views they hold of themselves. A student who believes he or she is no good in school behaves in such a manner to reinforce the perception and vice versa.

The need for self-worth is something all people yearn for and behavior is a way this is enhanced to validate this perception. When this perception is threatened people try to protect it. This tendency can be known as the "self-worth motive" as described by Martin Covington (p.15). His theory was based on the assumption that all people have a need to seek experiences that generate feelings of success, accomplishment, and self esteem, and to avoid experiences that generate feelings of failure, worthlessness, and social disapproval (Raffini, 1993).

Soon after children begin school they discover that their personal worth is largely dependent on the accomplishments they show in the classroom. Because of this understanding, self worth and school achievement becomes the foundation to why many students choose apathy and noninvolvement in school.

Covington's (1984) theory indicates there are three factors that have a direct influence on an individual's sense of self-worth: performance, ability, and effort, all being responsible for the negative or positive impacts of self-worth.

Another theory by Deci and Ryan (1985b) proposed that human motivation is based on the proposition that all individuals seek a quality of human functioning that has, at its core, the desire to determine for one-self behaviors one would like to enhance. It is the belief that all human beings have an innate need to feel autonomous having power over our own lives. When orders given in a classroom such as: be quiet and sit down. Some students recognize the purpose of the commands and choose to conform, while

others do not and bristle as the thought of being controlled by another and assert their desire for autonomy by showing resistance.

The need for self-determination, Deci and Ryan (1985b) believe, in where individuals need to feel successful in their attempts to understand and master their environments. When doing so, people behave in ways that allow them to feel capable and effective. Students do not choose ignorance over competence. They often try to protect their sense of self-worth and choose apathy over involvement. By taking a step back, they believe they will minimize threats to their self-worth (Raffini, 1983).

The need to feel you belong and relate to others is a psychological need of all human beings. When students feel more connected to their schoolmates, teachers, and parents, he or she feel better will become more engaged in their learning than when they feel isolated or alienated from their social surroundings (Raffini, 1983).

Goals for Education

According to *The Daily Howler* (2006), “No Child Left Behind” demands that schools improve their performance on statewide tests every year and schools are to improve their performance each and every year. In America, no child should be left behind. Every child should be educated to his or her full potential, but as America enters the 21st century full of hope and promise, it seems too many of our neediest students are being left behind.

Since the development of the No Child Left Behind legislation, the nation is analyzing its effects. As reported in a web-article by redorbit (2008), educators are discovering that the plan is flawed, developmentally inappropriate, under funded, and leaving more students, teachers, and schools behind than ever before. Despite this,

educators still have the responsibility to teach all students and make an effort to motivate the unmotivated because to give up will cause even more problems in the end.

Chapter V: Implications and Future Research

In the review of the literature, common themes were evident as to why students underachieve. There is an abundance of research that supports the labels to these students' aiding an understanding to the specific behaviors and tendencies that occur when the student are unmotivated. Since research has provided these labels, one needs to look at specific efforts educators can provide to finding tools and strategies to increase motivation. There are many things that educators can do to promote these efforts and one may question why bother to put the energy into these when it is students who do not seem to care and have lost interest in the academic realm. By not making the effort and giving up on these students, greater problems will occur.

When one thinks of tools and strategies for educators, the list can go on and on. Many learning tools and activities are available for the educators that are proven effective when motivating students. Educators may not find the perfect solution for producing the perfectly motivated student. What works for one may not work for the next. This causes a complex challenge for those involved, but by having so many specific processes for educators, a framework can be provided. They can then utilize strategies and tools that will work best for the individual. Perhaps some of the tools and strategies provided can enhance student motivation.

How Educators Can Help

As discussed in the book, *Motivating Students Who Don't Care* (Mendler, 2000), educators can use five key processes for guidance when using tools and strategies to inspire unmotivated students. The techniques included were: emphasizing effort, creating hope, respecting power, building relationships, and expressing enthusiasm. The book

offered curriculum guidance with specific methods that can help motivate students who do not care.

The Need for Encouragement

Educators are encouraged to let those students know who are unmotivated that their efforts put forth are important. When a student is successful his or her general believe is that his or her effort is the key factor in his or her success. When a student does not believe in this they have no reason to work harder in the educational environment. Classroom techniques can be put in place to help with the emphasis on the relationship between effort and achievement.

By building on mistakes or partially correct answers, these can be used to increase learning. Educators can use these to their advantage as part of their curriculum process. Instead of using mistakes as an indication of failure, they can be used as a learning tool to enhance student learning.

Allowing students the opportunity to redo, retake, and revise their work enables the relationship showing improvement is important to the educator therefore enhancing the importance of working to ones capacity. Expectations and responsibilities should be thoroughly communicated by the teacher.

When evaluating students' performance, educators could choose the opportunity to give students not only a grade for the work done, but a grade for achievement and effort as well.

Putting efforts in writing expectations with the student encourages commitment. Examples of this could include: contracts, written reasons to academic obligations, and written goals (Mendler, 2000).

Setting goals with the student by finding the right level of curriculum for him or her can be a challenge. If the student who is unmotivated has curriculum that is too easy there will be no meaning for. If it is too hard then he or she, who is already unmotivated, may feel a sense of frustration and give up.

Showing how education is essential can be a benefit to an underachiever's life. It is proposed to be the most conventional technique as stated in *Motivating Students Who Don't Care* (Mendler, 2000). Making a connection with the student to how education is related to everyday life can help the student. An example of this could include emphasizing curriculum to an area of interest such as curriculum in English to reading books as a hobby. When doing this, educators should remember how time is viewed by youth, trying to keep in mind what is important to the student so it has meaning. Efforts should be geared towards how it will benefit the student's interests and lifestyle (Mendler, 2000).

Setting goals can be very motivating for any student especially those who are unmotivated. Six specific steps are given in *Motivating Students Who Don't Care* (Mendler, 2000). These are encouraged for the unmotivated student to: 1) decide on a goal that you want to reach, 2) decide on a plan to attain this goal and what steps should be taken and the order to which it should be followed, 3) decide on a reward which will be given to the student when the goal is achieved, 4) check the plan with a teacher, parent, or trusted friend, 5) take each goal one at a time, and lastly, 6) when a goal is achieved celebrate with the reward. These goals should be measurable and attainable to the student and should be worked through by the student with guidance from an educator (Mendler, 2000).

Making it difficult to fail and putting emphasis on success, educators have the ability to create hope for the unmotivated and motivated students. Maintaining high expectations yet acknowledging mistakes is a learning tool to empower the student. Allowing for those mistakes to be a learning tool enhances the student's ability and encourages the student not to give up, therefore creating an atmosphere of success (Mendler, 2000).

An endless task of an educator should be the idea of communicating to the student the value of education and achievement. An educator could influence the student with tokens of appreciation. Things such as verbal validation and written positive comments can be helpful. A student who feels he or she is valued in the educational system continually, over time, can embrace the value of his or her education and achievement.

The Need for Power and Control

As an educator, a frustrating task can be to stay personally connected with a student who lacks motivation and just does not seem to care. One may feel like a failure and rejected as a teacher. It is important this type of thinking does not get in the way of teaching and to keep such thoughts out of the way by not taking it personal. Remaining professional for the student encourages the personal connection to inspire motivation. Finding a way to look at the positives of the situation allows for encouragement.

Educators are encouraged to give their students a significant role in the planning of classroom rules. Of course, the teacher is still the leader, but such a process empowers the students. Some options to do this could include the development of rules that will benefit the student to be successful in the classroom. Another would be for each student

to develop rules with each other, and lastly incorporate the value of learning by encouraging each student to identify specifics to such (Mendler, 2000).

Building Relationships

Having positive relationships with students definitely is a good motivator. Learning can be dull and not fun at times especially for younger youth. This age group has a harder time looking at the big picture especially those students who lack motivation. When educators formulate trust with their students and show genuine respect positive results become more prominent.

Letting students know they are valued is motivating. Even when a student is choosing to be self destructive with bad grades and lacking motivation as an educator it is necessary to overcome their inner frustrations. It may be challenging, but by offering unconditional encouragement it may enable the relationship which will hopefully empower the student to making positive choices behaviorally and academically. When a student knows they are important and valued their choices to reject education may become more difficult. Some examples an educator may use in empowerment may be by being open to a student's feedback and working with him or her on tasks inside and outside the classroom. As stated in *Motivating Students Who Don't Care* (p.49) some suggestions were used and one was to use written questions by the teacher to the student these consisting as such: 1. What Can I do to be a better teacher for you? 2. How can I help you be successful? 3. Two things I say or do that you think I should continue doing are? 4. Two things I say or do that you wish I would do less of are? When using such statements with a student they should be used in a context of confidence and by asking a student for their input an educator is showing they value what a student think. This can

be very motivating for all students, especially those who are unmotivated (Mendler, 2000).

A second suggestion for empowerment is the use of a note in the classroom or outside which would be sent to the home of the student containing positive statements of a behavior or task completed academically. This type of communication from an educator lets a student know he or she is appreciated and can go a long way towards motivation and change.

Another suggestion included genuine compliments of a student's strengths. When feedback is provided it is encouraged to be honest and not sugar coated and by doing such educators may enable development of healthy self-esteem. When corrective feedback is used students may be more accepting again encouraging motivation. This book encourages this to be done daily and offered examples when doing so, one such as calling a student at home when he or she is not home leaving a message on the answering machine. This will take little time and it almost a guarantee the student will hear this on his or her answering machine (Mendler, 2000).

Using a two minute intervention was a fourth method mentioned educators could use when empowering students and building positive relationships. To increase effectiveness for educators, it may help to invest two minutes a day for ten consecutive days. Contact initiated can be about anything within the educational context and the focus should only be positive. This enhances the relationship between the teacher and student. Challenges to this for the educator maybe in finding time that is uninterrupted, but when a teacher is creative it is definitely possible. Times could include in the classroom when other students are working in groups, a trip to his or her locker between

classes, or during recess and lunchtime. Inviting a student to have lunch with you can be a very effective way to communicate and change (Mendler, 2000).

Offering kind strategies and techniques may also empower students academically and motivationally. Some suggestions again mentioned in *Motivating Students Who Do Not Care* involved building a kindness train, displaying pictures of one self, and sharing stories of the educator to the students from when the teacher was a student. Building a kindness train is a technique teacher can encourage for the classroom. This involves having the students write adjective words of kindness and putting such on three by five index cards. Each card then represents a boxcar of a train. When a student is noticed doing something kind, a word is written on the index card. The train is started at the beginning of the year with one index card. Others are added as acts of kindness are noticed by the teacher. When students are older this can be adapted to compliments and strengths. Instead of using a train theme, encourage students to share compliment with each other. Both suggestions may create a supporting climate in the classroom. Another technique teachers may use when building relationships with students is the use of personal pictures displayed in the classroom. The pictures could be of the teacher when he or she was the same age of the students or they could be of others who have meaning to the teacher. This usually can be used to connect with the students. The teacher can do this by asking the students who they think is in the pictures, especially the picture of the teacher when he or she was of the same age of the students (Mendler, 2000).

The use of personal stories is yet another strategy educators can use when trying to reach students. Informing students of who you are encourages the opportunity to show

students the teachers are human. This definitely is encouraged when a student is struggling and if the teacher has had similar struggles when he or she was younger. This may encourage trust and students may really appreciate the gesture. Another time may be when a student is finding the subject matter to be worthless. The teacher may take the time to share a story of how he or she thought it was useless when he or she was younger, but now puts the class to everyday use in his or her life.

When an educator expects results and success the outcome is usually present. When working with youth the same philosophy may apply. When this is done with optimism and enthusiasm the efforts applied become even stronger. Most people want to be around others who are positive rather than negative. Positive energy feeds off of one another. The way a teacher conveys communication may have a direct effect how the student interprets the message received. All students are affected differently, but those who are unmotivated it is encourage communication from the teacher is in a positive and enthusiastic manner. When an unmotivated student feels this with the teacher the student may be more eager to perform classroom tasks (Mendler, 2000).

Teachers can do this by letting students know they love being a teacher. All the more reason teachers need to have passion for what they do. This is a message that should be conveyed all the time. Not only is this encouraged to be done, but teachers should also let the student know he or she is valued as well. This can be done by verbally stating such or acknowledging appreciation to them. An example of this could be done the summarization of a lesson such as acknowledging personal impressions and verbalizing them to the student or class.

Also, when a student knows you love what you do as a teacher this may encourage motivation as well. While building relationships is important and can be motivating, this alone may not be enough. To add fuel to the relationship it is encourage the teacher shows passion and joy when teaching. This again will create a motivating environment and it may excel motivation for the student. Youth enjoy being around others who are happy and when a teacher is committed displaying such it may encourage the student to want to be around more. Those who are unmotivated may even become more motivated (Mendler, 2000)!

Not only are teachers encouraged to be enthusiastic, but to be lifelong learners as well. When teachers use the same materials year after year it is apparent to the student and can become boring. If a student is feeling this is boring one would think it is boring for the teacher as well. Education is about taking chances and putting oneself out there. When teachers continue to do such, they as well are showing the student they are life long learners who continue to take chances enabling the mind. Teachers can be perceived as role models, so when this is present it may encourage students.

When teaching lessons to students in the classroom use humor! Any person enjoys a good joke. Students especially need to have this in their day to day routine. It may even encourage the unmotivated student to attend class. Other ways of sparking interest for students could be the use of music. This could be used as students enter the room or during as a background filter. Music can be very relaxing and motivating. Yet another way to reach students could be the use of events. These could be in the form that relates to the subject matter being taught or it could pertain to natural disasters. Natural disasters created by mother-nature create interest. Math equations, sporting events, food

are also ways teachers can incorporate other means of teaching methods in the classroom. A math equation could be used to start out the class period. Many people enjoy sports perhaps a teacher could integrate a sports figure when teaching. Food can be used to teach about different subject areas this allows the students to learn, prepare and eat all at the same time.

Throughout this chapter different strategies and techniques were talked of for educators when working with students who are unmotivated. There are several reasons why students are unmotivated and the findings in *Motivating Students Who Do Not Care* may support educators to finding creative ways when working with such. These students can be very frustrating, but the key to remember is there is a motive behind the behavior. Every student deserves a chance even when he or she may not seem to want this it is our job to keep trying so every student has the chance to succeed.

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