

COMPILATION: motivation and Modeling Instruction

Date: Tue, 6 Nov 2001
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Have you ever wondered why our students really enjoy learning physics via modeling instruction? Go to the website below and read the article "Understanding the Keys to Motivation to Learn" by Barbara McComb. The parallels between what research shows to increase student motivation to learn and modeling instruction are striking. Perhaps there is another added reason why our students do so well on the FCI. GOOD READ!!

www.mcrel.org/products/noteworthy/noteworthy/barbaram.asp

Date: Tue, 6 Nov 2001
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Subject: Understanding the Keys to Motivation to Learn

Following up on Glenn Wagner's suggestion to visit:
<http://www.mcrel.org/products/noteworthy/noteworthy/barbaram.asp>

"Understanding the Keys to Motivation to Learn"
by Barbara L. McCombs
(an excerpt, copied/pasted from that web site)

Trying to reach students who seem to have lost interest in learning and are displaying no motivation to learn in school, or who are defeated or turned off to school for any number of reasons, is a frustrating and all too common experience for teachers in today's classrooms and schools.

Why is student motivation to learn a problem in too many of our traditional educational systems? In contrast, what is present in those schools where motivation to learn is not a problem?

These questions have intrigued educators and motivation researchers for years, myself included. As both a parent and an educational psychologist, I have watched my two children start out with a boundless love of learning, natural curiosity and motivation to learn and explore their worlds, and an initial excitement about school. I have also watched this excitement and motivation become seriously eroded by the time they reached middle school. What happened to their natural motivation to learn and the motivation of a growing number of our nation's school children?

Exploring these questions, I have discovered some fundamental principles or keys to motivation to learn and to the identification of the instructional policies and practices that can re-inspire students to love school and help them recapture their natural motivation to learn. This article highlights my discoveries and their substantiation in current research. It provides specific guidelines for changes in practice that can help teachers and administrators positively address student problems with motivation to learn--whether they are in traditional teacher or curriculum-centered schools or in the growing number of learner-centered schools. Let's look first at what we know about motivation to

learn; then at the conditions of schooling that can foster rather than actually work to destroy this motivation; and, finally, at what can be done to ameliorate or eliminate the negative conditions.

Understanding Motivation to Learn:

The frustrations that many teachers feel in trying to motivate hard-to-reach students come from the realities of time pressure, the large number of students with learning and emotional needs, heavy accountability demands from administrators and parents, and other stress-producing situations that exist in many of our schools. It is helpful for teachers to know what those studying motivation are discovering about the nature of motivation to learn and the ways it can be developed and enhanced in students. This understanding helps teachers realize that almost everything they do in the classroom has a motivational influence on students—either positive or negative. This includes the way information is presented, the kinds of activities teachers use, the ways teachers interact with students, the amount of choice and control given to students, and the opportunities for students to work alone or in groups. Students react to who teachers are, what they do, and how comfortable they feel in the classroom. In short, this is because motivation is a function of what motivation researchers Deci and Ryan (1991) describe as natural needs for control, competence, and belonging that exist in all of us.

Knowing how to meet individual learner needs for control, competence, and belonging in the classroom is one key to student motivation to learn.

But let's look more deeply at what we know about motivation and, in particular, motivation to learn. When examining the concept of motivation, I have argued that learners of all ages are naturally quite adept at being self-motivated and at directing and managing their own learning on tasks that they perceive as interesting, fun, personally meaningful, or relevant in some way (e.g., McCombs, 1991, 1993, 1994). Typically, that means activities that are engaging or related to implicit or explicit personal goals such as feeling competent, in control, and/or connected to others.

In short, the issue of needing to help students want to learn and self-regulate their learning comes up in those situations in which students (a) are asked to learn something that does not particularly interest them; (b) have little or no control or choice; (c) they lack the personal skills or resources needed to be successful; or (d) lack adequate external supports and resources, including adult help, respect, and encouragement. Since, for too many students, these conditions describe much of their schooling experiences, we need to understand how to develop not only the student skills involved in self-regulation, but also the motivation or will to self-regulate their own learning. To enhance motivation to learn, all the preceding personal and contextual variables involved in schooling must be addressed.

Another key to motivation to learn, then, is being aware—for each learner—of the degree to which learning tasks stimulate and/or are related to student interests, the level of student control and choice that is encouraged, the necessary skill development that is fostered, and the resource and social support that is provided.

To understand how different schooling experiences can influence motivation to learn, it is important to distinguish its qualities in situations or on learning tasks that individuals perceive as interesting, fun, personally meaningful, or relevant versus tasks that are perceived to be boring,

tedious, meaningless, or irrelevant from the individual's perspective. In the first case, motivation to learn is stimulated naturally because the learning tasks are perceived as exciting or personally meaningful. In the second case, motivation to learn must be stimulated from the outside to overcome the lack of intrinsic motivation that is caused by the student perceiving the learning tasks to be boring or not personally meaningful.

An important distinction is whether choice is present and the degree of choice allowed. In many learning situations that are externally imposed, choices are limited to control and management of internal thoughts and feelings; behavioral choices are few. Another important distinction, therefore, is whether motivation is a natural response to the learner's curiosity or whether the learner must exert effort to manage feelings arising from negative thinking about external conditions (e.g., teacher, curriculum, instructional practices).

Motivation to learn needs to be understood as arising from both external supports and internal processes.

In my own work on motivation to learn, the self-determining aspects lie at the center of understanding why some students want to self-regulate their own learning and others do not. ...
