

Motivation and Affect

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To learn more about observations and strategies related to student motivation and affect, I interviewed Tera Amlin, a Reading Specialist and colleague of mine at Amesville Elementary. One of the things that we discussed was intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. I asked Tera if she has ever used any type of extrinsic motivation in her teaching, such as reward systems. She said that she did at the beginning of her career, but it didn't take her long to realize that it wasn't an effective method. In our school district, we use something called "Lancer Leader Tickets". These are a reward system that is a part of our school-wide PBIS program. When a student demonstrates desired behaviors, such as following directions, treating others kindly, etc., the teachers are supposed to give the students a Lancer Leader Ticket. This past school year it was a topic discussed a lot at my elementary school since not everyone agrees with the method that they are being used. Personally, I do not use the tickets since I want my students to have intrinsic motivation. I want them to make kind choices because they want to be kind, and follow the directions because they want to keep everyone safe and be able to learn. I brought this up with Tera, since we have had previous conversations about both agreeing that the tickets do not have an overall positive impact on the students. As discussed in *Educational Psychology*, "students with higher motivation to learn are more likely to learn and achieve as compared to those with lower motivation". If students are only motivated by physical rewards, their motivation is not going to continue since there can't possibly be a physical reward for everything that they do.

While Tera was talking about what motivates her students, she brought up my nephew since she has been working extensively with him during school and out-of-school tutoring. She explained that what she finds works the best for motivating her students is showing that she believes in them. She does this by giving eye contact and giving them specific feedback. She gives her students specific feedback about strategies that they apply that she has taught to them. She has been working on using motivating statements such as "You can do it" instead of asking them "Can you please do this?". The wording is important because if you are asking a

child if they can do something, they might say and/or believe that they can't. If you tell them that they can, they are more likely to believe it and do it.

I asked Tera if she is able to implement interest-based learning with her students. I know that this can be difficult since sometimes educators are expected to follow specific programs and curricula. She said that she does implement interest-based activities with her students when she is able to. Recently, she used A1 to create a reading passage based on a topic that one of her students was interested in. I thought that this was a very creative idea and a great way to use technology positively in early childhood. This goes along with the second teaching strategy listed in Chapter 10 of *Educational Psychology*, which is "Elicit student interest and curiosity". This goes along with the Interest Theory, which believes that the key to motivating students is finding activities that are aligned with their personal interests. Dispositional interests, or interests that are stable and pre-existing, can be a great way to individualize activities and motivate students, but can be difficult to do for a whole classroom. In a position such as a reading specialist, when you have the opportunity to work with students more frequently in a one-on-one setting, this is a bit more doable.

I asked Tera if she's ever noticed a difference in her students' attitudes after they've taken a test. I was curious if low scores on tests had ever resulted in unmotivated students. She said that she hasn't noticed a big difference, but has noticed that before the state tests the students are hyper-fixated. I would be curious if classroom teachers notice a difference after the tests, or after the test scores come in. In early childhood, the students may not be as aware of their results and might just be glad that the test is over. I think that with older students, this might make a bigger difference in their attitude towards their learning after a test if they did not do well.

Tera's approach to motivating her students makes me think about some of the teaching strategies that were discussed in Chapter 10. Her desire to motivate her students by showing that she believes in them reminds me of strategies one, three, and five. The first teaching strategy focuses on fostering "enthusiasm and a value for learning and teaching". The third

teaching strategy is "respect, responsibility, and equity". Showing her students that they are responsible for their learning by giving feedback about using specific strategies is a great way to motivate children. The fifth teaching strategy is "caring and unconditional positive regard". Her dedication to showing them that she supports them shows that she cares about them and their learning. Her approach also reminds me of the Self-Determination Theory. She creates an autonomy-supporting environment by getting students to engage because they are intrinsically interested, versus just complying to meet external expectations.

Talking with Tera gave me a great insight into ways that educators can help students foster a growth mindset. We want students to want to learn, not because we want to be in control of them and want them to get good grades. We want to focus on the effort that goes into learning so that they can become lifelong learners. We need to give specific feedback to students based on their effort, not their identity. We want them to try hard, to apply themselves, and to be persistent. A statement in Educational Psychology really stuck out to me, which was "Praise should be genuine, not overused, and accessible to all students". This is why reward systems should not be used. We need to use our words carefully and show our students that we really care, just like Tera works hard to do for her students.

Transcript

April: "I am supposed to interview you about your observations and strategies related to student motivation and you are actually the perfect person since you work with so many different ages. So we've been learning about Dr. Carol Dweck and the growth mindset, and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, and things like that. So I was wondering, what motivates your students the most?"

Tera Amlin: "I think that just knowing that they have my attention like eye contact, and praise when they're doing something like just like frequent feedback so even if it's just I'm gonna use Camden as my example since I worked with him most recently but what I've been working on with him is that when I talk to him I make sure that I'm looking at him and have eye contact so that he knows that I'm giving him his full attention and then when he remembers something that I've taught him or applies a handwriting strategy that I've taught him, a spelling strategy, like calling it out and like pointing out 'wow you did that' like being specific. I think that that is more motivating to the students than just like rewards like stickers and things like that.

Tera Amlin: "No like for him to or him or anyone to have that concrete 'what am I doing?' That is like this, she's approving. I was like that's specific description of what he's doing well is helpful."

April: "That makes a lot of sense. So you did say a little bit like you think that works better than sticker systems. Have you used any type of reward system like that before and didn't have a good experience with it or just from your own research you know that that's not very effective?"

Tera Amlin: "Yeah, I mean when I first started teaching I did. I used like unifex cubes and they had a red, yellow, green, blue, and if they were on green or blue at the end of the day, they got a piece of candy or you know a sticker, like I did that like first couple years of teaching, but you know it didn't work. It was pretty predictable that the same kids would, you know, get the stuff every day so it wasn't really doing anything to win over the kids who were struggling. That wasn't motivating to them."

April: "Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Kind of makes me think of our Lancer leader tickets."

Tera Amlin: "Yes, yes."

April: "I am not a fan. Next question, with your position, because I know you work with students one-on-one and you also do small group work. Are you able to create interest-based learning for them or do you have to follow a specific program or curriculum based on what grade they're in?"

Tera Amlin: "Kind of both I mean, there are certain things that I do follow just because of the curriculum that I'm using with them, but sometimes I have had the flexibility to like if we're learning a certain phonics pattern that they need practice with I can I've actually used AI a couple times to create passages about something that I know that they're interested in so that they're at least reading about something but they find interesting while they practice the skill. I haven't done that a ton, but I've done it some. Or finding I have different phonics books in my room that you know some are fiction and some are nonfiction, and kind of trying to meet the kid so that I try to pull what I think that would be more interesting or motivating to them so a little bit, but I do still follow a curriculum just kind of making adaptations here and there".

April: "Yeah, that makes sense. Have you noticed any difference of your students attitudes towards their learning, like if after like the state state test or I mean, I guess it doesn't even have to be the state test, just test scores like when they know like they didn't do well on a test and then they are working with you, have you noticed any difference in their attitude if they didn't score well? Such as not being as motivated to work with you after?"

Tera Amlin: "I don't think I've noticed anything specific. I mean I do know that during those weeks that they are testing they seem hyper focused on that and I hear some negative self talk, but I haven't noticed a ton".

April: "I'm going to kind of backtrack. Sorry these questions didn't make the most sense in order".

Tera Amlin: "OK"

April: "Besides specific feedback about specific strategies and things that they're doing, is there anything else that you think helps foster a growth mindset for your students?"

Tera Amlin: "I think just knowing that I believe in them and when they say 'I can't', I'm trying to rephrase things because sometimes I will ask 'can you do this for me?'. They will say 'no, I can't do that', so I'm trying to not ask him. I'm like 'OK now I want you to', like I'll do it as an example. I'm like 'now I want you to do it' and trying to reframe how I approach getting them to do what I want them to do so that I'm saying it in a way that shows that they can do it and now they try to show me that they can do it".

April: " Thank you. That wording seems pretty crucial. I sometimes have the habit too of asking instead of telling. Well, you have already answered all of my questions. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me."

References

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