Tools to Support

Work Area 3

Integrate Local and Research Knowledge into Professional Development and Learning

Tools to Support Work Area 3:

Integrate Local and Research Knowledge into Professional Development and Learning

Work Area 3 offers an activity and resources that guides the integration of local and research knowledge into the implementation of a youth development approach.

Key Questions When Working on This Area:

- How will you introduce research-based content and principles to teachers and other staff?
- How will you facilitate the integration of research-based content with teachers' local knowledge?
- What structures will you use to support on-going reflection, research-based conversations, and sharing of lessons learned across contexts?

Key Questions To Reflect on Your Progress in This Area:

- What evidence is there of staff application of academic research knowledge to their practice?
- What evidence is there of staff application of local research to their practice?
- What conditions supported staff members' change in practice?

Activities

- A Workshop Template for Integrating Research and Local Knowledge: A workshop guide that helps participants to apply research to their unique contexts and teaching styles.

Resources

- Weaving Outside Ideas Into Our School: An effective practice brief and observation tool that provides guidelines for selecting and assessing research, putting research into practice and conducting an observation of another school
- Building Supportive Relationships as a Foundation for Learning: An effective practice brief that defines supportive relationships and their importance to youth outcomes, as well as specific strategies research and practice-based relationship-building strategies for educators.
- Motivation to Learn: Igniting a Love of Learning in All Students: An effective practice brief that defines motivation and provides specific research-based motivational strategies
- Motivation Menu of Sample Strategies: A summary document of the research and examples of research-based strategies connected to different motivational strategies. This document is a more concise presentation of the content included in the Building Supportive Relationships as a Foundation for Learning and Motivation to Learn effective practice briefs.

A Workshop Template for Integrating Research and Local Knowledge

How can we apply research knowledge to our unique context?

PURPOSE:

This activity applies research to unique contexts and teaching styles

AUDIENCE:

School staff (particularly teachers, after-school staff, and administrators)

TIME:

1 hour 45 minutes - 3 hours

OUTCOME(S):

As a result of this activity, participants will have:

- An action plan of research-based strategies we can apply in our school setting

MATERIALS:

- A slide or chart of the school vision
- Speaker background/bio
- Speaker presentation
- Applying External Research to Our School activity directions for each small group
- Flip charts and markers for each group
- A timer

OTHER PREPARATION:

When bringing in outside speakers, have a discussion with them prior to the workshop to help them understand your school's broader vision, your process, the workshop participants, your desired workshop outcomes and the speaker's role in the proposed workshop process. Come to agreement on the core content/areas of research that will be presented and the length of time the speaker will have to present. Ask to review their presentation and provide feedback based on how the content fits with participants' needs and prior knowledge. This tool can guide a conversation with the presenter.

INTRODUCTION: (15-20 MINUTES)

1. Remind participants of the broader vision toward which you are working, and identify progress the group has made so far.
2. Explain how the speaker's research fits into the broader vision and addresses specific areas of youth development on which staff are working.
3. *Key frame*: Every school setting is unique and, therefore, outside ideas and strategies must be adapted to these settings. It is critical to understand the underlying principles of a particular approach, but the application of these principles might look different in different settings. Given this, the purpose of the workshop is to understand youth development research findings and then reflect on the application of these principles to your unique school setting.

ACTIVITY: (1 HOUR TO 1 HOUR 30 MINUTES DEPENDING ON THE LENGTH OF THE SPEAKER'S PRESENTATION)

1. Introduce the speaker and have them present their research findings.
2. Ask participants to do the Applying Research to Our School activity in small groups.

CLOSING: (30-60 MINUTES DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF GROUPS PRESENTING)

1. Ask each group to present their action plan (three to five minutes) and receive feedback on their plan from the visiting speaker based on research knowledge (two to three minutes).
2. Summarize key themes from different groups, and whole-school policies that might be applied.
3. Identify specific actions school administrators agree to take on for whole-school action plans, areas where staff need additional help and a specific time when staff will check in on their individual action plans and lessons learned.

Facilitator Tips

We recommend about 30 minutes for the speaker's presentation and at least 30 minutes for the activity. When we did this activity, participants wanted more than 30 minutes, but were able to do it in 30 minutes.

We also recommend using a timer for the share-outs if time is tight to ensure that every group has equal time to present and receive feedback.

It is critical to follow up with school members on the applications of their action plans, as once back in the realities of the school setting it is easy to fall back into old habits and forget lessons learned in the workshop. Even just a few minutes at the start of a staff meeting in which small groups share reflections of actions taken since a workshop can help remind staff of lessons learned and move them toward action.

Applying External Research to Our School Facilitator Directions

What would a school that promotes a growth mindset look like?

PART I. A SCHOOL THAT APPLIES EXTERNAL RESEARCH:

Using Brainstorm Protocol (15 minutes)

PURPOSE:

To get as many ideas out as possible from all group members without positive or negative judgment or critique

PROTOCOL:

- During open brainstorming, group members call out their ideas as they think of them with one person recording responses on chart paper.
- Other group members refrain from making positive or negative comments about participant contributions.
- Outrageous ideas are welcomed as they may lead to innovative thinking.
- The group continues to brainstorm until time is up or until the group has nothing more to add.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Have your team's recorder record any/all ideas team members have about assumptions/beliefs aligned with the presented research on chart paper. The chart below provides sample prompts that can be used to get the group started.
2. Brainstorm messages, practices and policies that would be aligned with these assumptions and beliefs.

Assumptions and Beliefs	Messages	Practices/Policies
In a school that applies the presented research principles, what would school members assume or believe about : • Young people • How young people learn • What motivates young people to learn	Given these assumptions and beliefs, what would school members say to youth or to each other?	What policies/practices that are aligned with those assumptions/ beliefs would be in place? Examples to think about: • What kind of feedback would students receive on their learning? On their behavior? • What would homework/grading policies look like? • What would discipline policies look like? • How would staff treat each other?

WORK AREA 3

PART II. A PLAN FOR ACTION:

Using Round Robin Protocol (15 minutes)

PURPOSE:

To allow all participants the opportunity to participate

PROTOCOL:

- Pose a question for response.
- Each participant has the opportunity to answer the question or pass.
- Other participants listen without comment or interruption.
- Those who passed are offered a second opportunity to answer at the end if they wish, but are not required to participate.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Ask each group member to look at the team's brainstorm and to consider from their role at the school:
   - What could they take and implement on Monday?
   - What would they need/want more support or help with in order to implement?
2. Have your group recorder record these ideas on a chart. (A sample template is provided below.)
3. Decide who will report this plan to the larger group. (Each group will have three to five minutes to present followed by a few minutes of specific feedback from the speaker.)

What We Can Start Implementing Monday...	What We Need More Help With or Have Questions About...

Weaving Outside Ideas Into Our School

Matt S. Giani and Christina M. O'Guinn

INTRODUCTION

As educators, we face the constant challenge of meeting the rapidly changing needs of our students as we welcome new generations into our schools who live in a different world than the one in which we grew up and who face different challenges than the students we saw just a few years ago. Given this, one of our biggest challenges is to build a school that can adapt to these changes to help every student reach their full potential. Peter Senge, in his highly influential book "The Learning Organization," describes the types of organizations able to succeed in a fast-paced, dynamic world as: "[Places] where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 2006, p. 1).

In order to create settings where today's students can thrive, it's crucial for our school community to be innovative and adaptable. Building our school into a learning community in which we are in constant conversation about what is working or not working for our students based on evidence, we are taking the first step in building a common understanding and consistent implementation of effective practices across our school.

However, to truly operate as a learning organization and generate creative solutions to the challenges we face, it is crucial to also seek outside ideas and think critically about ways to apply those ideas to our unique contexts. When we rely on internal ideas alone, we tend to fall back into the same routines and solutions that may not always address the current, unique needs of the populations we serve. We also tend to forget why we do the things the way we do (which may no longer be applicable) and may never realize that there are other more efficient or effective ways of achieving our goals.

Outside ideas can come from many sources including research, observations of other schools, and attending conferences or professional development workshops. The following provides guidelines and tools for critically gathering, interpreting, and integrating new outside ideas into your school.

HOW CAN RESEARCH BE HELPFUL TO OUR SCHOOL?

Research can be thought of as the systematic and scientific exploration of relationships. For example, what is the relationship between the classroom environment and student engagement or between after-school activities/engagement and academic achievement? Researchers have come up with a variety of ways to study these relationships, and the work done by researchers has yielded innumerable intriguing and beneficial insights to the world of education.

The key benefit of research is the idea of systematic exploration. We often make judgments and decisions based on gut feelings, intuitions, or impressions of situations, but the goal of research is to produce strong and objective evidence that things operate in a given way. Through research, we get closer to understanding what is truly happening in the world and get further from misconceptions and incorrect assumptions. However, research is not flawless, so there are a number of cautions that need to be considered when reviewing research. Below are a few guidelines on seeking out and understanding research.

Selecting Research

There is no perfect process for discovering research that addresses your schools' unique challenges. However, the following techniques are general guidelines that can help you in finding research most appropriate and valuable to your particular situation.

- *Research Search Engines*: While much research online has to be purchased, there are a number of search engines that connect us with articles that are free to download. The most common are Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com) and the Educational Resources Information Center or "ERIC" (www.eric.ed.gov). Not all of the articles are free, but after a diligent search you will probably be able to find some free articles relating to your topic of interest. If an article is only available by purchase, you may still be able to glean some ideas from the free abstract/brief summary that can inform your future searches.

- *University Syllabi*: Another way to find research that university faculty feel is current and valuable is to look for online syllabi, many of which contain lists of course readings. You can either search for the syllabus in Google by putting in the name of the university, "syllabus," and the topic of interest to you, or in some instances you can go to the university's website and find the page that contains all of the syllabi posted by professors. You might seek out university teaching departments, in particular, which will likely include school practice-focused research articles.
- *Key Terms*: One difficulty in looking for research is discovering the terminology that researchers are using to describe certain concepts or trends. As in any field, certain words and phrases may have very specific connotations, and it may be difficult to know which terms are relevant to your particular question until you begin to investigate. For example, when searching for research on motivation you will likely stumble across similar research related to engagement, locus of control studies, or self-determination theory, all of which are related to motivation but approach it from different angles. If specific terms come up repeatedly in your search, they may be ideas that are prevailing in the research community.
- *Institutions and Organizations*: Sometimes you can turn to specific institutions doing research of interest to you. Most research comes out of three types of institutions: governmental, academic, or non-profit organizations. Some governmental education agencies produce their own research, and others focus more on collecting and summarizing research produced by others. For example, the California Department of Education has a website devoted to research related to youth development. Universities such as Stanford, Columbia University Teachers College, Vanderbilt, and Northwestern often have institutes or centers on campus that produce educational research. Non-profit organizations like EdSource, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), RAND and SRI produce research as well.

  The following are links to a few organizations that produce research or research-based publications specifically on youth development:

  - John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University: http://jgc.stanford.edu/
  - Coalition for Community Schools: http://www.communityschools.org/
  - The Harvard Family Research Project: http://www.hfrp.org/
  - Chapin Hall: http://www.chapinhall.org/
  - Developmental Studies Center: http://www.devstu.org/home.html
  - WestEd: http://www.wested.org/cs/we/print/docs/we/home.htm
  - American Youth Policy Forum: http://www.aypf.org
  - California Department of Education: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/yd/
  - United States Department of Agriculture: Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service: http://www.csrees.usda.gov
  - The Forum for Youth Investment: http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/
- *Journals:* You can also look to specific journals for research. One of the benefits of journals is the fact that they often serve as disseminators of the most recent and creative approaches to education. While governmental agencies often take a more conservative approach and wait for substantial evidence to accumulate before promoting certain ideas, journals seek out research that, by definition, is new and fresh in some way. Some well-known and reputable general education journals include the American Educational Research Journal, the Teachers College Record, and the journal of School Effectiveness and School Improvement. Additionally, journals on specific topics within education also exist, such as the Journal of Research in Science Teaching and the Research in the Teaching of English journal. For one list of education journals and their rankings based on the number of citations, visit www.edu.salford.ac.uk/her/documents/JournalsWOK.rtf.

Assessing Research

Once you've selected your research, it's also important to assess the quality and applicability of the studies to your particular question. The following are some additional strategies that may help in the evaluation of research once it has been found:

- *Sample*: In almost all research articles, there will be a section that describes the subjects of the research. Was it second grade students in a language arts class? African-American adolescents? Seventh grade algebra students on free-and-reduced lunch? While this may seem trivial, the sample is an extremely important element of research because findings generated from research with one group will not necessarily apply to another group. If researchers found that small-group instruction was effective in increasing achievement of high-school students, that does not necessarily mean that it will be effective for middle school students. When looking for ideas about a specific population (seventh grade English-Language Learners, for example), you will want to find research that has been conducted on populations similar in terms of gender, race, socioeconomic status, achievement levels, and other factors. If you cannot find studies that have examined the exact population of interest, you can still look at key findings in other settings and/or with other populations and consider how that might inform your own practice. However, you will want to be aware of population differences and how this could affect the ability to repeat these results.

- *Sample Size:* While the individuals in the study affect the ability to generalize to particular populations, the size of the sample affects whether or not the results can be generalized at all. For example, if researchers want to know if the use of new technology in the classroom will facilitate learning in a study conducted with only a few people, it would be difficult to see whether or not the effects are caused by the technology or just happened by chance. With larger samples, the probability of getting a result by chance becomes smaller. However, this issue pertains more to studies with quantitative or numerical data and analysis rather than qualitative research. There is value in understanding what researchers have found in their studies of large populations. There is also value in understanding the nuances of more qualitative studies that often focus on a much smaller number of participants. The large samples remind us of patterns, trends, and the "big picture," while the smaller (even case study) samples remind us of the complex nuances present in any social phenomenon such as teaching, learning, and human development. As teachers, it is important for us to consult both—the forest and the trees—without getting lost in and/or over-responding to either one.

- *Mediating Variables*: Unfortunately, researchers often make conclusions about the relationship between two things without thinking critically of other possible explanations for the findings. For example, researchers conduct a study to assess the effectiveness of a new math curriculum, and they find that students that used the new curriculum performed better than students who used the old curriculum. From this, they conclude that the new curriculum is more effective. But what are some other possible explanations? What if the researchers selected the most qualified teachers to introduce this new curriculum, because they thought it was too challenging for inexperienced teachers? What if the students were told that this new curriculum was "more effective" and the results were nothing more than a placebo effect? Whenever you're reading research, it is important to consider other possible explanations for the findings in order to prevent false conclusions.

- *Correlation vs. Causation*: This point is similar to the previous one, but it is directed more at the language that researchers use to explain their techniques and the warranted conclusions that can be drawn from those techniques. In many studies, in fact most research studies, the researchers will look at the correlation between two variables, such as income and student achievement or race and self-esteem. This correlation is usually indicated by an "r" and some number between -1 and 1, with -1 indicating a strong negative relationship between the two variables and 1 indicating a strong positive relationship between them. Researchers may in fact discover a relationship between these two variables, but it is important to note that correlation is not causation. For example, parental education level has been shown to be correlated with student achievement, but this does not mean that parental education causes student achievement to increase. What causes the increase in student achievement could be more time spent with the child, more encouragement to excel in academics, higher expectations of the student, or a number of other phenomena. If researchers report a strong correlation between two variables, therefore, it is important to not conclude that one thing is causing the other or vice versa. This is another place where qualitative research can be helpful—revealing what is happening behind these numbers.

- *Statistical Significance vs. Practical Significance*: Quite often in research you will come across a term called "statistical significance." This term refers to a statistical process that helps researchers conclude whether their findings reflect the actual relationship between the variables or whether this relationship happened by chance. For example, let's imagine that the group of students in the classroom with the new math curriculum scored five points better than the other group of students on the benchmark exam. Could the students have just scored better by chance? A "statistically significant" finding is one where the researchers are quite sure their finding did not happen by chance. Because of this, researchers will often get very excited about statistically significant findings and report them constantly throughout the article. However, just because a finding is statistically significant does not mean that it is practically significant. In the above example, let's say a new Student Achievement Test (SAT) preparation course results in increased student SAT scores by five points, and the researchers conclude that this is statistically significant. Is it practically significant? If the new SAT preparation course was extremely costly, would it be worth it for an increase of only five points? Even when researchers report statistical significance, it is important to ask yourself whether or not the finding has much practical importance. There is also the case where findings may be statistically insignificant, but because the "subject" is a human being, the finding may not have practical significance. Again, as teachers, we need to be clear about what the research says and what it means for our practice.

- *Replication*: One of the most crucial aspects of research is the idea of replication, or doing the study over and over and over again. In any single piece of research, any number of factors could have interfered with the results and caused the researchers to draw false conclusions. This makes it extremely important for studies to be conducted a number of times, and only when the results are found fairly consistently across studies can one conclude that the relationship is really there. Because of this, it is helpful to frame the findings of one study as "suggesting" X rather than "proving" X. This is also why it is important to seek multiple studies or literature reviews that summarize research trends and patterns, particularly when you are using research as a basis for making major school changes.

Putting Research into Practice

While discovering and analyzing research may be an intellectually stimulating endeavor in and of itself, keep in mind that the end-game of research is to improve practice. Because of this, when reading research it is helpful to always be thinking about what these ideas would look like in practice, and what the effects of these practices might be. Ingenious ideas can be lost in implementation, and as the old saying goes, "The devil is in the details."

There are a few additional strategies that may help you to effectively apply research to practice. First, it is important to have a solid understanding of the research results. Group study can help with this, for although we may be careful and critical, when we read research on our own we, as human beings, automatically translate information in ways that are familiar to us. It is, therefore, very helpful to check our understanding through conversation with others who have read the same research. Indeed, as we build a school community, it is important that we engage in a school-wide dialogue about effective practices based on research and evaluation of our practices so that we can come to a common understanding of the effective practices that work best in our unique contexts with our unique populations. Group study and discussions will also help you to implement these practices consistently across your school. Some questions that can guide this conversation are:

- What did you notice in the research that pertains to our question?
- What evidence supports this finding?
- How well would this finding apply to our school/population?
- Do others share this interpretation? Why or why not?

Furthermore, as you implement any new policy or practice, it is important to be clear about the goals of this implementation and to have a plan for how you will carry out this practice and assess its effectiveness. An implementation plan includes clear steps for implementing the new practice(s), and it includes a plan for understanding if and how these new practices have the intended impact on student learning and/or experience. Therefore, before implementation of any new practice begins, it is important to identify indicators of progress. What will we see and hear if we are moving in the right direction? When, realistically, would we begin to see these indicators? How will we collect this information? How will we use this information to inform our practice—to help us modify and/or strengthen our implementation plan?

HOW CAN SCHOOL OBSERVATIONS INFORM OUR SCHOOL?

Research is one source of outside ideas. Another possible method of discovering creative and useful thoughts on school improvement is through school or classroom observations. Observers can see exactly how theories and research are put into practice and can even see the effects of those practices in real time. However, just as with research there are some cautions that are important to consider before beginning observations. Below are some guidelines for conducting fruitful observations.

Pre-Observation Preparation

First, you will want to select a place for your observation. Since you are likely doing this to try to identify practices or policies that you or your school might adapt to your own school environment, you will likely want to select a classroom or school that you believe is doing well in the particular area you are seeking to improve. You might find other schools by talking to community partners who work with other schools, professional education organizations that serve your region, or through contacts at other districts.

Observations will often be the most fruitful when you, as observers, come in with specific questions and know what to look for. Observations need to be focused and specific, so the next step is to engage in thorough pre-observation planning that will likely result in informative conclusions. Before any observation, it may help to address the following questions:

1. What is the youth development question we are trying to answer in our small group/whole school?
2. What kinds of practices or policies could we observe in a classroom/school that will help us answer our question? (e.g., behavioral norms, discipline policies, homework policies, instructional practices)
3. What kinds of interactions do we need/want to observe to answer our question? (e.g., teacher-to-teacher, administrator to teacher, teacher to student, student to student, etc.)
4. Which school contexts do we need/want to observe to answer our question? (e.g., classroom, after-school, staff room, school yard, office, etc.)
5. What questions do we have about these contexts/interactions?
6. How will the answers inform our inquiry question? Are all our questions relevant? What do we need to change to better inform our inquiry question?

Observation

As you observe, ask yourself what evidence you see of positive youth outcomes, particularly in your target area of youth development. What interactions that you observe between students and staff members align with your vision for your school? What is the general tone of the school? What evidence do you have of this?

Then ask yourself what you notice about the practices and policies in each context that might lead to these positive youth outcomes. Are there discipline, homework, or other school policies in place that might contribute? What instructional practices, norms of behavior, or underlying assumptions and beliefs do you notice? You may need to ask specific questions of your host(s) to find out about specific practices and policies you observe. To assist in your observations, we've included some observation forms at the end of this document that might assist you during your observation.

Post-Observation Debriefing

The importance of individual reflection and group debriefing immediately after an observation cannot be overemphasized. No matter how strong your impressions during the observation may be and how confident you are that your observations will stick with you, they will probably begin to fade within twenty-four hours.

Individual reflection soon after the observation can help you connect the dots of your observations and develop a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics in the school, but group debriefing can be even more valuable. Everyone goes into an observation with their own personal lenses, so everyone will likely come out with different impressions, interpretations, and ideas about what they just saw. By bringing these different interpretations together, the group compiles a broader and fuller understanding. Following are some guidelines for productive group debriefing.

1. Give each group member five to ten minutes to read over their own observation notes (if they all participated in the observation) or copied notes of those who conducted the observation. As members read over these notes, they can think about sharing:
    - One thing that really stands out or strikes you in terms of evidence of positive youth outcomes particularly as they relate to your small group/whole-school question
    - Two policies or practices that you could see doing in your own context or school that fit with your small group/whole-school question
2. Have each person share these observations while someone charts these ideas, noting where common responses come up with check marks by these items for additional responses.
3. As a group, discuss the following questions, which may help you to further narrow policies or practices that might be particularly useful to your school setting. You may want to use symbols to mark each practice with a characteristic associated with each of the following questions as indicated.
    - Are there any practices that align with other data we've collected either at our own school or in the research? (Draw a triangle by practices aligned with other data.)
    - Which practices seem to have the greatest impact on the youth outcomes we want for our students? How can you tell? (Draw a star by practices with greatest impact.)
    - Which practices would be the most practical (because of time/money or other requirements) to implement? (Label the most practical practices with a P.)
4. Decide as a group if there are specific practices/policies that individuals feel they can commit to trying out in their individual contexts before a given timeframe such as the next small group or staff meeting. Alternatively, the group can decide if there is one practice or policy that the entire group wants to begin implementing school-wide.
5. Ask the group to decide how they will assess these practices/policies to determine their effectiveness.

WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF UNDERSTANDING

No matter where you go to seek outside ideas, it is important to weave them into your collective understanding of effective practices for your school through constant discussion with your colleagues. Renowned educator and author Parker Palmer defines truth as "an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted by passion and discipline."

We can only know what is true in terms of effective practices that work in our school settings by engaging in enduring, on-going conversations as a whole-school community with the passion of caring about our students and with discipline of using evidence to support our current understanding of effectiveness. As learners, this understanding is like a tapestry that we weave together. We all contribute new threads of knowledge to the tapestry. We may also remove threads as we gain new insights or understandings, so our tapestry is constantly changing and adapting as we continue to learn and adapt to the needs of our students.

Observation Notes

The question we are trying to answer with this observation is:_____

To help answer this question, it would be helpful to observe:

Who: Which school staff members/ interactions do we need to observe to answer our question?	**What**: What kinds of practices or policies do we need to observe that will help us answer our question?	**Where**: In which school contexts might we observe these interactions, practices and polices? (e.g., classroom, staff room, etc.)

What is the context? (classroom, school yard, etc.)	**Questions we have about this context?** What I wonder…	**Notes on positive youth outcomes:** What I notice… What I hear…	**Notes on practices and policies:** What I notice… What I hear…

What is the context? (classroom, school yard, etc.)	**Questions we have about this context?** What I wonder…	**Notes on positive youth outcomes:** What I notice… What I hear…	**Notes on practices and policies:** What I notice… What I hear…

Observation Notes Example

To help answer this question, it would be helpful to observe:

Who: Which school staff members/ interactions do we need to observe to answer our question?	**What**: What kinds of practices or policies do we need to observe that will help us answer our question?	**Where**: In which school contexts might we observe these interactions, practices and polices? (e.g., classroom, staff room, etc.)
• Teachers and students • School leaders and students • Students and students	• Instructional practices • Norms of behavior (particularly between staff and students)	• Classroom • After -school program

Observations

Context	**Questions we have about this context?** What I wonder…	**Notes on positive youth outcomes:** What I notice… What I hear…	**Notes on practices and policies:** What I notice… What I hear…
Example: After-school program	What makes students want to be here? What motivates students to do their homework?	I notice/hear that… • 75% of student population participates in after-school programs (per CS coordinator) • Students seem very happy in their program activities and eager to show us what they are doing/learning • Students tease Community School Coordinator affectionately and he reciprocates • Students are mostly on task doing their homework, but are distracted by our visit. The teacher jokes with them a bit and then refocuses them on their work.	I notice/hear that… • The principal took the time to lead this observation • Both the principal and community school coordinator know the names and passions of every student we meet and encouraged them to teach us or perform for us • The Community School Coordinator said that it is their goal to get every student into an after-school activity to keep them out of gangs, and they work with students individually to match their passions with an activity • Students say they come to homework help voluntarily, because they want to do well in school and can get help from teachers there
Hallway			• The halls are very clean and have a lot of student work and positive, inspirational sayings on the walls

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Building Supportive Relationships As A Foundation for Learning

Matt S. Giani and Christina M. O'Guinn

INTRODUCTION

As educators, we have all experienced the power of connecting with students. We've enjoyed learning who they are, to what they aspire, and have felt some pride in supporting their journeys. We've noticed that strong relationships with students motivate students to learn, prevent and diffuse disruptive behavior and give us more energy and capacity in our work. While we may long for this connection with every student, it is a rare educator who achieves this. Still, we often wonder what it is about those connections we do achieve that allowed that to be possible so that we might experience those connections with more students. Indeed, both research and practice show us that an understanding and intentional application of the core principles behind supportive relationships can allow us to experience successful connections with more of our students. Furthermore, by strengthening connections with all school members (students, parents, all staff, and administrators), we can build a nurturing environment in which all members feel known, cared about, appreciated and capable.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS?

Researchers describe supportive adult-youth relationships as caring and supportive of autonomy while holding high, fair expectations. These are largely measured from students' perceptions of their relationships with adults and what seems to be most important to them as follows:

Caring and Respect: In supportive relationships, students feel that adults know them, care how they do in school, are friendly and warm and spend time with them. They feel heard and respected, even when they have failed to follow a rule or agreement. Rather than chastising, embarrassing, yelling at, or patronizing a student, adults speak privately to the student, focus on the behavior not the person, seek to understand the reasons behind the behavior and help to guide the student in making amends and seeing other ways they could act differently in the future. At the heart of this concept is the need to understand and diffuse power differences between adults and youth, between levels in the school power structure and between differences in class and race. Indeed, when educators come from different socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds than students, these relationships are marked by greater power differences and higher levels of distrust. Caring and respect of students helps to bridge these differences and communicates to students that they are valuable, capable and worthy of being heard.

Autonomy: Autonomy is an important element of supportive relationships, especially for middle school students. While treating students with respect is a necessary element of supportive relationships, it is insufficient if students are not also given the ability to make their own decisions. Providing students with authentic choices and a voice in their learning or learning environment prepares them to take hold of their own lives in the future and garners further respect between students and teachers.

Structure and Support: Because our students are not yet adults, they still need the structure and support to be able to use their autonomy wisely. By setting high, realistic expectations, we communicate to students that we believe they are capable. To help students achieve these expectations, it is our job to clearly and consistently communicate these expectations and to provide supports and scaffolding to help them achieve them. Support can include frequent and immediate positive feedback, explicit instruction and modeling of a new skill, guided reflection on progress, asking students what they need to help them achieve, or just listening without judgment.

The above list is not exhaustive, but rather serves as the basic foundation of supportive relationships. In the following sections we will provide specific strategies educators can use to strengthen these elements of their relationships with students. But first, we will review why supportive relationships are indeed crucial to supporting student success.

WHY ARE SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS IMPORTANT TO YOUTH OUTCOMES?

You may be asking yourself, "So what? Why are relationships important to youth and, most importantly, how do supportive relationships relate to students' academic outcomes?" While supportive relationships are important to the development of youths' social skills, a great deal of research has also shown that strong, supportive relationships between teachers and students have a positive effect on students' academic outcomes such as better grades and higher graduation rates. Below is a brief review of some of the potential impacts of developing supportive relationships with your students.

In a number of studies, students' feelings of belonging and closeness with their teacher have been shown to be related to positive academic outcomes, such as working harder in school, spending more time on homework and receiving better grades (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Students who perceive their relationships with their teacher as close and supportive have more confidence in their academic ability, which in turn leads to more engagement with school (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). In addition, research has shown that student-teacher relationships can reduce behavior such as aggression and defiance of authority important to establishing a high level learning environment. In other words, when students are treated as if they are capable and competent enough to perform at a high level, they believe it, and this belief gives them the confidence and motivation to try harder and perform better (Murray & Greenberg, 2000). All of these effects of supportive relationships eventually lead to better academic outcomes.

Supportive relationships can be particularly important when there is a mismatch between the social, emotional, and academic skills or cultural background that students arrive with and the expectations and culture of the school. All students require caring, support, encouragement, safety, scaffolding, and explicit instruction to learn the skills and important social norms necessary for successfully navigating structures and norms established by the majority culture.

Alternatively, conflict and dependency between students and teachers have been found to lead to more negative student attitudes towards school, less academic engagement, and poorer academic outcomes for students (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Positive relationships, therefore, are a key ingredient in students' feelings of belongingness and adjustment to school, their confidence and motivation, critical life-skill development, and their overall academic performance.

WHAT CAN I DO TO BUILD SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY STUDENTS?

While we have discussed supportive relationships in an abstract way, you may still be asking yourself precisely what you can do to build supportive relationships with your students.

Know that your student relationships matter. The first step is to know and believe that your relationships matter and will make a difference. We know from research that teachers' beliefs about their own ability to affect student outcomes are strongly correlated to student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). When teachers believe that they are powerless to change their students' beliefs, attitudes, behavior, or academic performance, they are much less likely to do so. But when teachers believe that they can have a profound effect on their students, they have a much greater likelihood of making a positive impact on students. Researchers call these attitudes and beliefs "teacher efficacy," or the degree to which teachers believe they can affect outcomes/impact (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

When we are not experiencing a lot of success with students, our teacher efficacy declines. We recognize it in ourselves and others, when we begin to blame others: "These students are lazy. They don't want to learn. Their parents aren't disciplining them and don't care about their education. The administrators aren't doing enough to discipline students." What we are really saying is, "I feel like I've done all I know how to do, and nothing works, so I feel that I cannot make a difference." The reality for many of us is that the methods we used that were/are effective with some students don't necessarily work with all students, and so we have to be willing to try different strategies until we find ones that will work with all students. This can take a lot of creativity and courage, but when teachers begin to ask themselves, "What can I do to reach every student?" and begin to seek and try new ideas of strategies from others, they are on the path to increasing their efficacy and, in turn, student achievement.

Believe in your students. Just as your belief in your own ability to impact students is critical to your success, so is their belief in themselves, which you can influence. Self-fulfilling prophecy is very powerful. We recognize it when we hear a student say, "What's the point in trying. I'm just going to drop out anyway." If a student truly believes s/he can be successful, s/he tends to be highly motivated to learn. We have tremendous influence on these beliefs, for students can sense what we believe about them by the things we say and do.

Research has extensively shown that if teachers believe that students are "low achievers," "unmotivated" or "bad kids," even if previously the students were well-behaved and successful students, the students will begin to exhibit more behavior problems and perform worse in school (Brophy & Good, 1974). Alternatively, students are more likely to succeed if teachers perceive of them as smart and capable, even if they struggled in school previously (Ibid).

Make your belief in and care for students intentional and transparent. Believing is just the beginning. We also have to communicate this belief to our students through our words and deeds, letting them know that we believe in them, care about them and know they can succeed. In other words, even if we believe that we truly care for students, our beliefs will be ineffective if students do not perceive that we care for them (Wentzel, 1997). The only way to know if young people perceive us as caring is to ask them. This could occur through surveys, one-on-one or in a focus group in which adults can ask students if they feel adults in the school care about them, how they know an adult cares, or what adults can do to help students feel cared for.

Below are some examples of actions that researchers and practitioners have found helpful in building supportive relationships with students.

- **Smile to set the tone**: This may seem self-evident, but a smile can be a powerful signal of your mood and attitude towards your students. Non-verbal signals, like smiling, have even been found to be more influential in positively changing student behavior than words alone (Kazdin & Klock, 1973). Even when you don't feel like smiling, a smile can set the tone and shift your own mood.
- **Make caring eye contact**[1]: When students are misbehaving or off-task, teachers often slip into the dreaded "teacher-stare" in an attempt to scare the student straight. While your eyes can communicate your disapproval, they can also communicate your care and concern. Try and make caring eye contact with all your students, but especially those you suspect to be struggling.
- **Stay calm**: To be sure, this is often not an easy task. If our students are being disruptive or disobedient, aren't performing as well as we know they can, or if we are just having a bad day, it is easy for us to lose our composure in the classroom. But even when students require discipline, doing so in a calm and tempered manner, while still being stern and forceful, shows students that we respect them even if we disapprove of their behavior.
- **Listen and show youth they've been heard**: Youth at this age often don't feel that they are heard or appreciated causing them to feel disconnected and disengaged with school. Ask students questions, not just about class material but about their opinions on life and things that they see around them. Show students that you've listened to them by restating their ideas and explicitly connecting their interests and input to instruction or to decisions made that they informed. Students feel empowered when they are taken seriously as knowledgeable and valuable participants in conversation (Hudson-Ross, Cleary & Casey, 1993), which motivates them to take ownership of their educational experience (Colsant, 1995; Sanon, Baxter, Fortune & Opotow, 2001).
- **Notice their strengths and provide encouragement**: Of course, school is not easy for all students and many of them will struggle from time to time and will need encouragement to persist through challenges. Keep your expectations for these students high and remember to tell them that you know they can succeed if they continue to work hard. Look for and recognize their efforts, their progress and their positive behaviors.
- **Provide support**: If students continue to struggle behaviorally or academically, work with them individually, help them to set personal near-term goals and check in on their progress regularly. This will show the student that you are invested in and care about their success, and will also allow you to build personal relationships with your students.

  While the above practices have been found to be successful in research studies, there is also anecdotal evidence from practitioners and what we hear from students themselves that certain actions help educators connect with students. Below are some examples.

- **Use humor**: This is an age where kids are very social and develop a strong sense of humor. They are often laughing at everything. Rather than get angry at students' goofiness, adults can laugh with youth as appropriate and build humor into instruction. However, certain forms of humor widely used among youth, such as insults and sarcasm, can be damaging to youth. Sarcasm, in particular, can lead to many misunderstandings, as some cultures do not have sarcasm, so students take comments literally and can feel insulted. Adults need to model and enforce appropriate humor particularly and avoid humor performed at the expense of other individuals or groups.

[1] Eye contact should be used only when culturally appropriate. In some cultures, eye contact is considered disrespectful.

- **Share your own stories**: Youth are interested in you and who you are as a person other than a teacher or principal or staff member. They tend to share more of themselves when you do too, and they consistently tell us that they enjoy seeing you outside your normal role—having fun or sharing your passions. You are a role model, and they are watching you very closely, even though it may not seem like it. This is particularly important for students from different backgrounds than yourself—as things you reveal about yourself may help them to see similarities with you, and if you share your weaknesses/struggles, it will help them to realize that they can also overcome their own challenges. Let your students know what school was like for you, what you learned from your education and share other personal narratives that might be of interest to your students. It is also important to introduce students to role models of similar background to their own who have overcome significant challenges.
- **Listen and adjust**: Young people communicate very clearly what's going on with them. It's just not always done in a way adults might perceive as polite and doesn't always fit with our plan for the day, so we tend to ignore their feedback. To the degree we can listen and respond, we will better meet the needs of young people, form stronger connections with youth and experience more success and joy in our work with students. Youth often say what they are thinking (e.g. "This is boring," "I'm hungry," "I don't understand why we have to learn this.") They also show us what they are thinking with their body language or actions (e.g., squirming in their chair indicating that they have been sitting too long and need to move around, socializing with a neighbor or talking out in class indicating that they may need to process what they are learning through talking, not working or paying attention indicating they are not engaged or don't understand.) Oftentimes, when students act out and criticize the lesson or us, they are really telling us that they are frustrated or are unsure they can be successful. It's critical that we don't take their comments personally, but rather try to get at what is behind the message and help them to be more aware of what they are really feeling.

While it can be hard to respond to all these signals all the time, even quietly acknowledging to individuals that you notice they are struggling and you appreciate them hanging in with you can help, particularly if you show you are responsive other times. Some ways that you might adjust to these signals might include:

- **Building in physical movement:** Middle school youth are growing, and they need to be active. It is hard to sit all day, so even just having stretch breaks or activities that allow them to move around can help channel this energy and prevent frustration.
- **Allowing for social interaction:** Young adolescents are extremely social and need to talk. Research shows that conversation is an important way of processing new information, making connections and creating deeper understanding of content. This need for young people to talk can be leveraged by intentionally building in protocols such as "Think, Pair, Share," timed conversations or collaborative learning.
- **Practice active listening with youth:** When adults show that they are listening, youth will often shift from fighting you to working with you even when you can't grant their every wish. This is particularly effective when done one-on-one. When a youth complains, questions an activity or even starts to act inappropriately, try pulling him or her aside and asking from a place of genuine care and curiosity with the intent of understanding the messages behind his or her signals and how you can help. For example:
    - "I heard you say you were bored and I noticed you making inappropriate noises. Can you tell me what's going on? Is this activity too easy for you? Do you need more help with it? Do you need to move around a bit? What will help you to focus?"
    - You can show compassion and then share your perspective in the same respectful manner. "I hear you saying that you're struggling with this skill and you don't understand why you need to learn it. I can understand why you would be frustrated, and based on what you've told me, it sounds like I need to break down this skill a little more for you and explain why the skill is important. Does that sound right? Will that help?"
    - Finally, you can help improve respectful but open communication in future and work with youth to take more responsibility for their own learning by saying something like, "Thank you for telling me what you need. This shows that you are taking responsibility for your own learning and helps me to help you. I'm always available to you at lunch if you need to come get additional help."

- **Ask students what helps them connect with adults:** Practitioners have observed that just having a one-on-one conversation or surveying students, results in stronger relationships with students, because it communicates that you care about them and value their opinion. This is even more powerful when you show students how their input resulted in change. Adolescents who are part of an organization called What Kids Can Do (2005) have also released numerous publications to help adults better understand, listen to, and work with youth. In many ways, the words of youth are the most powerful, so we include some of their recommendations in their own words, which reiterate many of the strategies already described:
    - "We might act like we hate you, but we care what you say and do." (p. 1)
    - "We know what you really care about, because we watch what you say and do." (p. 1)
    - "If you push us too hard we might break, so give us room to figure things out." (p. 15)
    - "Your opinions really matter to us, but we have to decide things for ourselves."(p. 42)
    - "When you listen to me, show me you respect me by paying attention and not judging me." (p. 70)
    - "We already feel bad enough about our mistakes—don't make us feel worse." (p. 70)
    - "If you want us to do better, praise what we do well already." (p. 70)
    - "Respect what's important to us, and we'll respect what's important to you." (p. 70)
    - "When you tell us your problems and mistakes, it's easier to trust you with ours."(p. 87)
    - "If you treat us like we're little kids, we'll act that way—so don't." (p. 104)
    - "We'll cooperate with you better, if you can relax a little." (p. 104)
    - "If we don't agree, let's work out a compromise." (p. 104)
    - "If we see that you respect us, we'll accept your help." (p. 104)
    - "We need to take risks, so help us find ones that won't hurt us."(p. 104)
    - "We love doing things with you that puts us on an equal footing." (p. 139)
    - "We want to learn your skills, and we could teach you ours." (p. 139)
    - "We'll never forget the time you make to do something just with us." (p. 139)

WHAT IF MY STUDENTS DON'T SEEM INTERESTED IN CONNECTING?

While we have discussed some evidence showing the importance of positive student-teacher relationships and reviewed some promising practices related to building these relationships, a lingering doubt may still remain: What if my students just aren't interested in connecting? This concern is legitimate. Indeed, some studies have found that students begin to report stronger relationships with their peers and weaker relationships with adults during the transition to middle school (Linch & Ciccheti, 1997). Middle school students in general need more independence as they grow older and many place a higher value on peer opinions than adult opinions. Furthermore, students may have had bad experiences with past teachers, may feel unappreciated by adults, or may even be going through difficulties unrelated to your school environment that cause them to be disengaged. Additionally, we as educators must fill a difficult role in the lives of students. We are both allies and enforcers of discipline, supporters and restrictors of student behavior.

Yet while middle school students are more independent than elementary students, they still need support, care, and encouragement from their teachers in order to properly adjust to their new school environment and succeed academically. It's important to always keep the door open to all students for several reasons. First, while some students may seem unwilling to connect, most students not only desire but need supportive relationships with adults in order to succeed in school, and while they may not show it outwardly your opinion matters to them a great deal and can make a difference in how they perceive themselves during this formative time. Second, through patience, dedication, and unwavering support on the part of the teacher, even students that initially seem reluctant to open up and connect with their teachers can turn around, as many studies have shown. Third, even if students don't openly show their appreciation or how much your opinion of them matters, they do show us that our support matters by putting more effort into their work. Finally, we sometimes gauge the strength of our relationships with students by how often students confide in us or how much of their personal lives they share with us. While this may be a sign of a strong relationship, we should also be aware that students have a need for privacy just as we do. We should strive to be open and approachable without trying to force students to share information that they may be uncomfortable with sharing. In other words, supportive relationships with each student do not all look the same; we must listen and respond to the individual needs of each student.

DO ADULT RELATIONSHIPS AFFECT RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH?

Thus far we have only discussed student-teacher relationships as being important for youth outcomes, but adult relationships also have a strong impact on students. We often believe that what students don't see can't hurt them, or that our interactions with our colleagues have marginal, if any, impact on our students, but as former principal and current Harvard professor of education Roland S. Barth notes, "The success of a school… depends above all on the quality of interactions between teacher and teacher, and teacher and administrator" (Barth, 1990).

Barth stresses the importance of adults modeling the types of relationships that should be established between all members of the school community. Foremost in importance among these adult relationships, he argues, is that between the principal and the teachers. "If the teacher-principal relationship can be characterized as helpful, supportive, trusting, revealing of craft knowledge, so too will others," but if "teacher-principal interactions are suspicious, guarded, distant, adversarial, acrimonious, or judgmental, we are likely to see these traits pervade the school," (Ibid) and the effect will even reach our students.

Similarly, relational trust between all adult school members was found to be critical to school change success in Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider's study of twelve Chicago elementary schools engaged in school change efforts in the late 1980s. In this study Bryk and Schneider found that high levels of relational trust between principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders was linked to demonstrated gains in student achievement, while schools with low levels of relational trust saw virtually no improvement in reading or math test scores (Bryk 2002, pp 123-4). Indeed, even in schools that lacked resources for their school improvement efforts still saw gains in student test scores if relational trust was high. Bryk and Schneider theorize that this trust is crucial, because all adult members depend on each other in order to achieve success, and the nature of school success relies heavily on cooperative efforts around local problem solving. Furthermore, trust allows school members to feel safe to take risks, share their practices, challenge each other's thinking, overcome fears of data, work through conflict, and try new approaches in their school.

Indeed, the success of school improvement efforts relies heavily upon the relationships teachers have with each other. Barth argues that "the relationships among adults in schools…allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement" (Ibid). If we as educators reach out to each other, share our practices with one another, and offer support and guidance to collaboratively find strategies to reach all of our students, we can create the type of safe and nurturing environment needed to ensure our students' success.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN ADULTS

- *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni
- *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith and Mark Reiter
- *Difficult Conversations* by Douglas Stone et al.
- *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott
- *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson et al.

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Motivation to Learn: Igniting a Love of Learning in All Students

Matt S. Giani and Christina M. O'Guinn

INTRODUCTION

How many times have we as educators wondered why a particular student or group of students does not seem to be engaged in school? These students may not complete their school work or participate in class. They may put little effort into the work they do, complain about the work, or skip class altogether. On the other hand, we may have other students who work independently, stick with a task through challenges they face until they have mastered it, and who delight in taking on new challenges. We may ask ourselves, "What is going on with these individual students?" and "How can I ignite the wonder of learning in all of my students?"

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MOTIVATION?

Motivation is directly tied to our focus on the whole child, for motivation consists of the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social forces that drive our desire for and commitment toward reaching a particular goal even when challenges arise. We are never unmotivated. We are simply more motivated toward certain goals at different times depending on our needs, interests, and our beliefs about our ability to be successful in achieving a particular goal. This means that motivation changes and evolves and can be influenced by the environments in which we find ourselves and by the people in those environments.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MOTIVATION TO LEARN?

When we talk about motivation in schools, we are generally talking about whether students are motivated to learn. Researchers measure "motivation to learn" by the degree to which students are committed to thinking through problems and working through challenges to master a concept or gain a new skill. This goes beyond student enjoyment of an activity, as students must persist through obstacles.

We witness some of these obstacles when we try to spark the motivation to learn in students whose biological, emotional, or social needs are not fully met or in those students who believe that they cannot be successful because of the discouraging messages they have received in the past. We also know from research that as youth reach adolescence, it becomes more difficult to accept personal shortcomings or limitations and to persist through challenges, so motivation to learn tends to decline in middle school years. Yet applying lessons learned from research can help to set up an environment that has the greatest potential of igniting the desire to learn in every student.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION?

Intrinsic motivation is the natural curiosity and desire to learn that we are all born with. We experience intrinsic motivation when we find ourselves seeking answers to a question that intrigues us or pushing ourselves to work hard to master a skill. Extrinsic motivation is when we work for an external reward or to avoid an external punishment provided by someone else.

Many of us grew up during an era where it was believed that the best way to motivate young people was through the use of extrinsic rewards and consequences. These practices came from a focus on reinforcing human behavior and were based on experiments done with animals in which animal behaviors could be increased by rewarding treats. Subsequently, many parents and educators have relied heavily on the use of extrinsic rewards such as gold stars, money, parties, praise, or other external incentives. When students are extrinsically motivated, they participate because they expect a desirable outcome like a reward or avoidance of punishment.

More recently, researchers have realized that people do not just passively respond to their environment and began looking at how our thoughts and beliefs influence our behavior. Researchers have found that intrinsic beliefs in our ability to be successful influence our level of motivation. Researchers also have found that people have an innate desire to learn for the sake of learning and that this intrinsic desire is connected to our engagement in learning new concepts or skills

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION VERSUS EXTRINSIC REWARDS?

Research shows that working on a task for intrinsic reasons rather than extrinsic influences is not only more enjoyable for the participant, but it also facilitates learning and achievement. Learning and intrinsic motivation are also mutually reinforcing; intrinsic motivation facilitates learning, and when students acquire new skills and observe their own growth, they feel more successful and their intrinsic desire to learn increases. Furthermore, when we are intrinsically motivated, we tend to:

- Prefer challenges that increase our learning over easy work that does not enhance our skills/knowledge;
- Be motivated by our own curiosity rather than to please others or to earn good grades
- Work independently and take responsibility for our learning rather than rely on others
- Use an internal gauge to inform our personal success or failure instead of relying on external criteria or comparisons with others (Stipek, 2001)

In fact, external rewards have been shown to actually decrease interest, motivation, and performance—particularly when an individual is already intrinsically motivated to perform a task and when the reward is continuous. Individuals who are rewarded for doing a task shift their interest to the reward instead of focusing on their desire to learn. They also do not perform as well on the task as those who are intrinsically motivated to complete the task.

Extrinsic rewards have been shown to be effective when used with students who were not intrinsically motivated, but only when rewards were given initially followed by increasingly longer periods of time in which no rewards were given to reinforce effort and persistence. Extrinsic rewards must be given immediately following the success, as people in general and middle school students in particular are not motivated by rewards that are too far in the future. Researchers have also found that extrinsic praise or positive reinforcement of behaviors such as effort or persistence rather than fixed traits such as intelligence can increase behaviors associated with motivation.

Most of us have used external rewards at one time or another because it can result in short-term improvement in student behavior. However, if our goal is to build life-long, independent learners, it is important to be aware of the dangers of extrinsic rewards and punishments, and to use them sparingly and carefully as a means to build intrinsic motivation in only those individual students who may need it. Indeed, instilling intrinsic motivation is a longer process that may use some external rewards but really focuses on self-improvement and helps students to shift from doing something for a reward or for a teacher or parent to doing something for themselves.

WHAT CAN I DO TO IGNITE THE INTERNAL DESIRE TO LEARN IN MY STUDENTS?

Research in both laboratory and classroom environments has identified effective practices that can be used to motivate students to learn. These practices are based on the basic assumptions that all students are capable of learning and that students are motivated to learn when they:

- Believe they can be successful
- See value in learning the material presented
- Feel supported and safe to make mistakes

Increasing students' expectations that they will be successful: None of us is likely to put in much effort if we believe the effort will not result in success. We can help students to believe that they will be successful by:

- **Scaffolding instruction**: When educators break instruction down into steps or short-term learning goals and provide clear directions and adequate support to complete each step, reaching a larger goal feels doable for students. For example, a large report can be broken down into smaller steps of choosing a topic, researching, outlining, drafting each paragraph/section, and rewriting a final draft. Reviewing pre-requisite concepts at the beginning of a new lesson also helps all students to be successful.
- **Focusing on strengths**: It is normal for middle school students to feel a lot of self-doubt. Identifying and reinforcing their strengths can help to build confidence important to persisting through challenges.

Helping students to see the value in learning the instructional material: We tend to put more effort into a task that interests us or that we find useful, especially when mastering a particular skill or concept that is challenging. Educators can increase student motivation by tying instruction to students' experiences, giving students choices in topics or types of projects they do, or by providing a variety of active and real-world instructional activities. Teachers can help to draw connections between themes in the curriculum and students' own experiences or current-day events and can help students to see how certain skills will be useful to them in their long-term goals. In supporting adolescents to improve their decision-making and leadership skills, it is particularly important to give youth opportunities to make choices about their work and to express their opinions and personal connections to the content they are studying. Finally, when students are engaged in authentic projects like writing their own stories, interviewing community members, or applying math and science skills in an engineering design challenge, they are much more likely to be interested in the task, to retain the concepts learned and to transfer the ideas they learn to tasks in the future.

Creating a supportive learning environment: Educators can create a supportive learning environment by:

- Focusing on the goal of learning rather than achievement: When educators focus on the goal of learning and improving over time rather than on the goal of performing well quickly or on the first attempt, students are more likely to be motivated to learn. In a supportive learning environment, grades reflect effort and progress toward learning goals and students are given clear evaluation criteria and specific, private feedback on what they accomplished well and what needs improvement.
- Emphasizing effort rather than intelligence: Students who believe that intelligence is an innate and static trait will naturally not be as motivated if they perceive of themselves as intellectually inferior. Convince students that there is no such thing as "smart" or "dumb" people but rather hard workers and not-so-hard workers and provide role models who have shown effort and persistence through challenges. Show students that our brains are always changing and growing and hard work will result in success. Also, when educators allow students to revise their work, they reward effort and encourage students to achieve deep learning rather than memorization of facts. For example, allowing a student to rewrite a term paper or redo a set of math problems after the teacher's feedback can help the student improve their work and feel like their effort contributes to a better grade.
- Focus on personal improvement rather than relative success: A practice which inevitably leads to some students feeling inferior is comparing students to one another. Try switching the paradigm from relative success or failure to personal improvement; not how students compare to others, but how they compare to their previous selves. Show students their own growth and they will begin to believe in their own learning and see that effort does equal results. Educators can also minimize competition and comparisons between students by featuring all student work on the walls of the classroom, rather than a select few, which can send the message that only a few can be successful and cause others to lose interest in putting forth effort.
- Encourage risk-taking and experimentation: When learning is the primary goal, students are encouraged to ask questions, experiment, and take risks in their attempts to approach and grapple with the material. Educators can do this by inviting students to express opinions and insights. "Mistakes" or incorrect answers can be reframed as valuable opportunities for learning and growth by asking students why they think they got a particular result or what they might do differently next time, rather than making students feel embarrassed for getting the wrong answer.
- Show care for all students: Particularly during adolescence, youth are motivated when they have social connections, feel accepted, and feel they belong. Research with middle school students has shown that students' perceptions of their teachers as "caring" predicted motivation, as well as social and academic achievement, even when prior motivation was controlled for. In other words, students performed better socially and academically when they felt cared for by their teachers, even when past experiences with school had reduced their motivation or they had previously struggled academically. The love and care of the teacher, as perceived by the students, was more influential in predicting future success for the students than their previous motivation. This study reinforces the point that teachers' attitudes and beliefs can have a profound effect on students. However, it is not the amount of care that teachers have per se, but how much care the students perceive teachers have. Our care for our students will only have an effect on student performance if they feel that care.

HOW DO I SHOW MY STUDENTS THAT I TRULY CARE?

Focusing on effort, learning, and individual progress while acting on youth input and providing authentic choices as described above help contribute to supportive relationships with youth. The following strategies are additional approaches that convey care—when done with sincerity.

Make caring eye contact[2] and communicate caring and supportive messages: Young people respond to eye contact that is direct, sincere, caring, and encouraging, and they respond to sincere compassion. Young people also learn to internalize messages that encourage behaviors of persistence and effort associated with motivation.

Connect with students as individuals and encourage youth input: Students are more motivated when they feel that their teachers know who they are as individuals. Students feel respected when teachers make an effort to learn about their interests, beliefs, or opinions, take them seriously, and act on them. Research also shows that student persistence through difficult transitions such as to middle school or through adolescence in general can increase when students are told that the self doubts they are experiencing are normal.

Be passionate about your work: Your passion is infectious. If students perceive you as being highly motivated, this will not only rub off on the students as a norm of behavior and work ethic, it will also make it clear and known to the students that you truly care about them and their learning.

Be authoritative: Many studies, specifically in regards to parenting styles, have shown that authoritativeness increases academic performance, social competence, self esteem, and good behavior. Authoritativeness is defined as a combination of being demanding and responsive. Responsiveness in this context refers to the extent to which one is attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to a child's special needs and wants. Demanding refers to the standards set for the young person's behavior and the degree to which youth are held accountable for their actions. A lack of high behavioral standards in a young person's life often leads to problematic behavior in the future, and a lack of responsiveness stifles children and leads them to have lower self-esteem and social skills. A balance of both is ideal.

Use intrinsic motivation techniques to hold youth accountable: By shifting the locus of control from the adult to the youth, youth build communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills crucial for their development into independent adults. They also learn that they have control over their decisions, feel capable of handling problems, and learn to take responsibility for their actions. We can help youth to develop these skills and capabilities by engaging youth in dialogue about their behavior, rather than directing their behavior. The following is an example of what this could look like in practice:

- Check out assumptions with the youth about what led to the behavior or concern. Ask them for their perspectives on a particular issue or situation and how they want to deal with the situation before sharing your own perspectives and concerns.
- Allow youth to try their own strategies and reflect on what they learned and how they might apply those lessons in the future.
- Show appreciation for effort and ask youth what they learned or what progress they see themselves making.

HOW DO THESE TECHNIQUES APPLY TO ADULTS?

The above strategies also apply to adults. Just like youth, intrinsically motivated adults often perform better than extrinsically motivated adults and are more satisfied in their work. Extrinsic rewards and pressures such as directives, deadlines, and high pressure evaluations have been shown to decrease intrinsic motivation in adults. Adults who feel effective, supported, safe to take risks or try new things, and who see the value of their work are more intrinsically motivated in their work. For most school staff, this intrinsic motivation comes from our desire to connect with and make a difference for our young people. It is when we feel we are not effective at our work with young people and become frustrated that we find we are less engaged in our work and do not perform as well. In order to sustain the energy required to meet the demands of the school environment, it becomes even more crucial for us as school staff to tap into our passions for helping youth and to support one another as a community in achieving this vision.

[2] Eye contact should be used only when culturally appropriate. In some cultures, eye contact is considered disrespectful.

While similar motivation principles apply to both youth and adults, research reveals a few specific characteristics that lead to intrinsically motivated adults:

Competence: Just as youth need to feel they can be successful, adults need to feel competent in their work. When we feel competent and capable at what we do we are more motivated to perform that task even without extrinsic rewards.

Autonomy: Giving adults voice, choice, and opportunities for self-direction and self-evaluation are related to intrinsic motivation. Environments that promote risk-taking and experimentation, as opposed to compliance to specific procedures and protocols, lead to greater feelings of autonomy and increased motivation.

Internalization: When adults feel ownership over the goals of the organization and see them as their own goals rather than imposed goals, this increases their feelings of autonomy and motivation. Adults who feel they have a voice in the vision or goals of their organization or how that vision is reached tend to internalize those goals as their own, and thus direct their own behavior intrinsically.

Educators also tend to feel more energized and motivated in their work if they are able to build more intrinsic motivation in students, as students will expend their own energy to push themselves, rather than educators feeling they have to extrinsically push students. Therefore, many educators find their own motivation and energy levels increase when they take the time up front to build relationships and a supportive, safe environment with students and explicitly teach, encourage, and support high expectations and develop individualized learning goals and plans with students.

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Motivation Menu of Sample Strategies

Motivation in the Classroom

Students' beliefs about themselves in general and their academic potential in particular, are critical precursors to educational success and staying on course for high school graduation. During the middle school years, students' motivation and sense of personal competence often declines (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). This decline is especially troubling for low-income students and language minorities who are more likely to have underachieved during their elementary years (Brooks-Gunn & Aber, 1997). Teacher behaviors of clarity, lesson variety, enthusiasm, task orientation, and lack of strong criticism are features of an environment linked to student motivation (Oakes, 1985).

CONFIDENCE IN ACADEMIC POTENTIAL SAMPLE STRATEGIES

Growth Mindset Strategies (Emphasize effort rather than intelligence):

- Convince students that there is no such thing as "smart" or "dumb" people, but rather hard workers and not-so-hard workers
- Provide role models who have shown effort/persistence through challenges
- Show students that our brains are always changing and growing and hard work will result in success
- Reward effort and encourage students to achieve deep learning by allowing students to revise their work (e.g., rewrite a term paper after the teacher's feedback to improve their grade)

Individualize Instruction

- Individualized learning goals on specific skills/concepts (rather than performance goals focused on grades, etc.)
- Help individuals see their own progress as a result of effort
- Differentiate the same task for different levels
- Scaffold instruction
- Provide support for each step
- Give students clear evaluation criteria and specific, private feedback on what they accomplished well and what needs improvement

Hold high expectations

- Communicate that all students are capable of achieving
- Help students to set and see progress around individual learning goals
- Provide supports/encouraging feedback around achieving these goals

CHALLENGED TO LEARN SAMPLE STRATEGIES

Develop Life Skills:

- Give students opportunities to develop important life skills (e.g., critical thinking, communication, cooperation, problem solving, creativity, etc.)
- Give students open-ended, real-life projects connected to their interests/passions or current events
- Engage students in leadership and teaching opportunities in the classroom, school, and community

Goal Setting Around Student's Interests:

- Work with students to set realistic but challenging short-term and long-term individual learning goals on specific skills/concepts (rather than performance goals focused on grades or other external evaluation)
- Connect instruction to students' interests and passions and long-term goals
- Tap into students' natural curiosity about the world by allowing them to explore their own questions around a topic or unit

LEARNING FOR THE SAKE OF LEARNING SAMPLE STRATEGIES

Make instruction relevant

Connect curriculum to students':

- Interests
- Cultural background
- Long-term goals
- Current-day events
- Prior knowledge/experiences

Help students to see how certain skills will be useful to them in their long-term goals

Give students choice and voice

- Give students choices in topics or types of projects they do
- Provide a variety of active and real-world instructional activities
- Ask for and use student input in defining instructional activities/classroom environment
- Ask students questions, not just about class material but about their opinions on life
- Give students authentic choices and input into their learning and the learning environment
- Show students that you've listened to them by restating their ideas and explicitly connecting their interests and input to instruction or to decisions made that they informed

Supporting Research:

Students who believe that intelligence is an innate and static trait will naturally not be as motivated if they perceive of themselves as intellectually inferior (Dweck, 1986).

Although middle school students may act like they do not care what adults think, noticing and encouraging young adolescents' strengths and avoiding strong criticism builds self confidence during this critical transition time and has been linked to student motivation to learn (Oakes, 1985).

Research shows that working on a task for intrinsic reasons rather than extrinsic influences is not only more enjoyable for the participant, but it also facilitates learning and achievement. Learning and intrinsic motivation are also mutually reinforcing; intrinsic motivation facilitates learning, and when students acquire new skills and observe their own growth, they feel more successful and their intrinsic desire to learn increases. When we are intrinsically motivated, we tend to:

- Prefer challenges that increase our learning over easy work that does not enhance our skills/knowledge
- Be motivated by our own curiosity rather than to please others or to earn good grades;
- Work independently and take responsibility for our learning rather than rely on others; and
- Use an internal gauge to inform our personal success or failure instead of relying on external criteria or comparisons with others (Stipek, 2001).

In fact, external rewards have been shown to actually decrease interest, motivation, and performance, particularly when an individual is already intrinsically motivated to perform a task and when the reward is continuous. Individuals who are rewarded for doing a task shift their interest to the reward instead of focusing on their desire to learn. They also do not perform as well on the task as those who are intrinsically motivated to complete the task (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Additionally, students are more likely to be intrigued by problems that are realistic and challenging. In particular, their interest can be piqued when the skills they are developing will have real-world significance (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Motivation through a Caring Classroom Community

(Student-Student Relationships)

Adolescence is a time when young people place great value on the opinion of their peers, and how students interact with one another can affect students' sense of safety, care, and belonging. A comprehensive study of secondary classrooms found that "more learning took place in classes with a greater degree of intimacy among all classroom participants and an accompanying lack of cliquishness and friction among them. Also important in student learning were a lack of perceived teacher favoritism and the existence of a generally democratic atmosphere" (Walberg & Anderson, 1972 in Oakes, 1985).

FEELING OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN CLASS AND PROMOTION OF MUTUAL RESPECT SAMPLE STRATEGIES

Use Structures/Processes that Build Community:

- Involve all students in forming classroom agreements to meet the individual learning needs of all students
- Engage all students in taking collective responsibility for maintaining these agreements and helping all students to feel safe and supported in learning
- Use strategies that allow all students' to participate equitably in class discussions (Think/Pair/Share, Go-Round, etc.)
- Use cooperative learning and buddies to allow students to share ideas and help each other
- Hold class meetings to discuss and problem solve class issues as a whole class
- Use conflict resolution processes to resolve conflict between individuals

Build Unity Between Different Groups:

- Teach students listening techniques and validate different experiences and perspectives
- Celebrate diversity
- Engage students in courageous conversations when students make negative comments about other groups
- Unify students around common values/struggles (like those of adolescence)
- Give students opportunities to work in heterogeneous groups and emphasize supporting each other
- Use protocols to bring out the voices of those not heard (Think/Pair/Share, Round Robin, etc.)

Growth Mindset Techniques (Focus on personal improvement rather than relative success by minimizing competition and comparisons between students):

- Focus on personal improvement—not how students compare to others, but how they compare to their previous selves, so students see that effort does equal results
- Feature all student work on the walls of the classroom

Growth Mindset Technique—Encourage risk taking and experimentation:

- Encourage students to ask questions, experiment, and take risks as they grapple with the material
- Invite students to express opinions and insights
- Reframe "mistakes" or incorrect answers as valuable opportunities for learning and growth by asking students why they think they got a particular result or what they might do differently next time rather than embarrassing students for getting the wrong answer

Provide social-emotional support and guidance:

- Help students to become more aware of their behaviors and how these affect others
- Help them develop strategies for controlling emotions, working through conflict, and repairing relationships

Motivation Through Student-Teacher Relationships

While adolescence is a time when young people may place greater value on their peers opinions than adults, supportive and caring relationships with adults have been linked to positive developmental outcomes and a single supportive relationship with an adult can make a difference during this vulnerable time of identify-forming. Particularly during adolescence, youth are motivated when they have social connections, feel accepted, and feel that they belong. Research with middle school students has shown that students performed better socially and academically when they felt cared for by their teachers, even when past experiences with school had reduced their motivation. However, our care for our students will only have an effect on student performance if they feel that care. (Gambone, 2005; Noddings, 2005 & Wentzel, 1997).

FEELING CARE FROM TEACHERS SAMPLE STRATEGIES

Build Caring and Respectful Relationships:

- Make caring eye contact (when culturally appropriate) and communicate caring and supportive messages
- Connect with students as individuals and encourage youth input into learning/learning environment
- Show understanding/empathy for the struggles of adolescence
- Be passionate about your work
- Use humor
- Share your own stories and who you are as a person outside of your school role
- Be curious about what is behind student behavior, listen without judgment and adjust
- When addressing behavior, be clear that the behavior is the concern, but you still care about them as a person
- Use preventative measures, and punish students only as a last result. Know that every time a student is punished it damages your relationship and trust with that student which will need to be repaired.
- Show concern for students who are not engaged, are unhappy, or are not applying effort, and offer support

Teach, Communicate, and Encourage High Expectations:

- Explicitly teach and model a new skill/behavior expectation and engage students in understanding the purpose behind these expectations
- Remind students of these expectations and provide frequent and immediate positive feedback
- Notice student strengths and provide encouragement
- Provide additional support for those who need it

STUDENT VOICE SAMPLE STRATEGIES

Give Students Choice and Voice:

- Give students choices in topics or types of projects they do within the curriculum
- Provide a variety of active and real-world instructional activities
- Ask for and use student input in defining instructional activities/ classroom environment
- Ask students questions, not just about class material but about their opinions on life
- Give students authentic choices and input into their learning and the learning environment
- Show students that you've listened to them by restating their ideas and explicitly connecting their interests and input to instruction or to decisions made that they informed

Use Intrinsic Motivation Techniques:

- Check out assumptions with the youth about what led to the behavior or concern
- Ask them for their perspectives on how they want to deal with a situation before sharing your own perspectives
- Provide suggestions/constructive feedback rather than direction
- Allow youth to try their own strategies and reflect on what they learned and how they might apply lessons in the future
- Show appreciation for effort and ask youth what they learned or what progress they see themselves making
- Emphasize the choices that students have made or are considering making. "What are your choices?"

Supporting Research:

Students are more motivated when they feel that their teachers know who they are as individuals. Research also shows that student persistence through difficult transitions such as to a middle school or through adolescence in general can increase when students are told that the self doubts they are experiencing are normal. Young people respond to eye contact that is direct, sincere, caring, and encouraging and to sincere compassion. Young people also learn to internalize messages that encourage persistence and effort associated with motivation.

Two longitudinal studies showed that supportive relationships with adults increased students' positive developmental outcomes as adults (productivity, connections to others and navigation) by 100% and decreased poor developmental outcomes by 56%. These studies also showed that unsupportive relationships actually resulted in 50% decrease in good developmental outcomes and 94% increase in poor developmental outcomes. These outcomes are further linked to the level of success students experience as adults in terms of economic self-sufficiency, healthy relationships, and contribution to their communities (Gambone, 2005).

Adolescence is a time when youth need to develop autonomy, need to have a safe environment in which to take risks, and try on increased responsibility. By shifting the locus of control from the adult to the youth, youth build communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills crucial for their development into independent adults. They also learn that they have control over their decisions, feel capable of handling problems, and learn to take responsibility for their actions.

Students feel empowered when they are taken seriously as knowledgeable and valuable participants in conversation (Hudson-Ross, Cleary & Casey, 1993), which motivates them to take ownership of their educational experience (Colsant, 1995; Sanon, Baxter, Fortune & Opotow, 2001).

Adolescents who are part of What Kids Can Do share the following messages for adults (Cushman, 2005):

- "We might act like we hate you, but we care what you say and do." (p. 15)
- "We already feel bad enough about our mistakes—don't make us feel worse." (p. 70)
- "If you want us to do better, praise what we do well already." (p.70)
- "Respect what's important to us, and we'll respect what's important to you." (p. 70)
- "When you tell us your problems and mistakes, it's easier to trust you with ours."(p. 87)
- "If you treat us like we're little kids, we'll act that way—so don't." (p. 104)
- "We'll cooperate with you better, if you can relax a little." (p. 104)
- "If we don't agree, let's work out a compromise." (p. 104)
- "If we see that you respect us, we'll accept your help." (p. 104)
- "We love doing things with you that puts us on an equal footing." (p. 104)
- "We'll never forget the time you make to do something just with us." (p. 139)

Effective strategies for establishing behavioral expectations and for managing problem behavior emphasize directly teaching social behaviors (Colvin, 2004).

Research shows that working on a task for intrinsic reasons rather than extrinsic influences is not only more enjoyable for the participant, but it also facilitates learning and achievement. Learning and intrinsic motivation are also mutually reinforcing; intrinsic motivation facilitates learning, and when students acquire new skills and observe their own growth, they feel more successful and their intrinsic desire to learn increases. When we are intrinsically motivated, we tend to:

- Prefer challenges that increase our learning over easy work that does not enhance our skills/knowledge
- Be motivated by our own curiosity rather than to please others or to earn good grades
- Work independently and take responsibility for our learning rather than rely on others
- Use an internal gauge to inform our personal success or failure instead of relying on external criteria or comparisons with others (Stipek, 2001).

In fact, external rewards have been shown to actually decrease interest, motivation, and performance, particularly when an individual is already intrinsically motivated to perform a task and when the reward is continuous. Individuals who are rewarded for doing a task shift their interest to the reward instead of focusing on their desire to learn. They also do not perform as well on the task as those who are intrinsically motivated to complete the task (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

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