

Motivation to Learn

Motivation to learn is the drive that stimulates students to want to learn and to put effort into their learning. Effort is a necessary component in learning, because it takes effort to focus one's attention and persevere until a task is complete. There are many factors that affect student motivation; the most influential factors include how students perceive their own successes and failures, the nature of the tasks teachers ask students to perform, the incentives teachers offer for learning, the learning environment of the classroom, and the teacher's conduct and attitude about learning.

Students' perceptions of their successes and failures will strengthen or weaken their motivation. I want my students to be motivated to learn, so I will seek to change those perceptions that weaken motivation. To accomplish this, I will first assess what my students' perceptions are. I will distribute a questionnaire with questions that will help students think about their past successes and failures and the reasons why they succeeded or failed. Students' responses will tell me what each student thinks is the cause of his or her success or failure.

Students will attribute their successes or failures to one of four possible causes, which include innate ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Effort is the only cause that students can control. Ability and task difficulty are relevant issues, but when students lack motivation, their perceptions of these factors are often inaccurate. Students can only determine their true abilities and the actual level of difficulty of tasks they perform when they put effort into learning the skills and knowledge necessary to do the tasks.

My goal is for my students to understand the connection between their effort in learning and their subsequent successes and failures at school. I will teach them about what motivates them to learn and try to change how they think about effort and its relationship to success or failure. I will help them to set goals so they can take more responsibility for their learning and "own" it. Students who set goals are more likely to plan their learning and to follow through with that plan. As a result, they retain more information and increase their potential for success. The goals may be simple at first and will become more elaborate and complex as students begin to see their effort as the cause for their success.

The nature of the tasks I ask students to perform will also strengthen or weaken their motivation. I want my students to be motivated to learn because they see value in learning and because they enjoy learning. If students are uncomfortable with or otherwise dislike a particular task that I ask them to perform, their motivation to complete it will decrease. Each student has a preferred learning style and comes to the classroom with a unique set of abilities, talents, experiences, and conditioning. Therefore, I will maximize each student's motivation by maximizing their interest in what I ask them to do. I will

differentiate tasks and provide students with choices and variety in how they perform the tasks I give them. When students are interested in a task, they will be more motivated to complete it.

I will also make sure to teach students the content knowledge and skills, problem-solving skills, and learning strategies they need to complete the tasks I give them. Students often blame their failures on the difficulty of a task rather than on the effort they put into it. However, sometimes this is an accurate claim. If I do not teach them the knowledge and skills that they need to perform a task, the task will be too difficult.

The incentives I offer will serve to increase motivation. In addition to the intrinsic incentives of helping students set goals and providing students with choices and variety in their tasks, I will also offer extrinsic rewards. My incentive program promotes effort in learning by rewarding small steps and progress toward the successful completion of a task or the fulfillment of a goal. As students incrementally succeed at each step, they increase their chances of final success. When they succeed in the final task, students will see the connection between their success and the effort they exerted each step of the way.

The learning environment can affect student motivation by either encouraging or discouraging participation. I want my students to feel comfortable participating in my classroom. Therefore, I will create a pleasant atmosphere, encourage students to take risks, and give all students a chance to participate. To create a pleasant atmosphere, I will respect my students, treat them fairly, and be polite toward them. I will enforce my classroom rules, especially the rules requiring students to respect each other. To encourage students to take risks, I will praise and reward them for their effort and not just for being correct. To give all students a chance to participate, I will give them time to think through a problem. I will not always call on the first student who has the answer because that will likely be one of two or three of the same students. I will call on students randomly so each student has a chance to participate.

My conduct and attitude about learning will also affect my students' motivation to learn. I will model learning to show students what learning looks like. I will admit and accept when I am wrong. I will look up answers to students' questions if I do not know or remember the answer. I will show enthusiasm for what I am teaching and smile often, because enthusiasm and happiness are contagious. I will illustrate the content's importance and usefulness to make it personally applicable to each student. Students will be much more interested in learning something when they can see how they will use it. I will create lessons that are fun and sometimes funny. Laughter is the best antidote to boredom.