

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS' INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

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In my work with other faculty members on teaching and learning, many issues arise. One that is discussed repeatedly is the concern that students focus too much on grades and not enough on learning. In part, the issue here is one of extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation. Many students seem extrinsically motivated. They are motivated by, and rewarded for their academic efforts with, points, grades, degrees, and jobs. Many instructors want students to be motivated also by the love of learning, knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and positive feelings about themselves. By definition, we can not force or require intrinsic motivation. But, are there strategies we, as instructors, can use to help keep the focus on learning and to support intrinsic motivation? Below, I briefly discuss nine general strategies. Of course, the appropriateness and usefulness of these strategies depends on the particular student, the teaching and learning context, and your comfort and skill in using the strategy.

It is the First Day of Class, Do You Know Where Your Students 'Are'? Knowing what background your students bring to class and starting the course at an appropriate level can increase students' success and, thus, positive feelings they have about your subject matter. I have found the use of non-graded pre- and post- tests to be a useful strategy for obtaining such information. In addition, giving a post-test and showing students how much they have learned (the difference in their pre- and post-test scores) is, even without a grade, rewarding to many students.

Confront the Monster. You may wish to spend some time openly discussing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the value of learning with your students. I suggest using a two-sided persuasion strategy. Explicitly acknowledge the importance of grades, and then discuss why learning in and of itself is also important. If you can manage it, I recommend using a bit of humor here. Finally, share the experiences and stories of successful, intrinsically motivated students in your classes.

Fate Does Not Rule Here. Encourage internal attributions and high self-efficacy for academic tasks. Students need to know and, thus, need to experience that what they do in terms of studying and assignments will make a difference in their learning and success. To avoid learned helplessness and to encourage self-efficacy for your subject matter, set students up for success. This does NOT mean you have to "dummy down" your course, it does mean you build scaffolds (e.g., review and provide feedback on multiple drafts of papers, break complex material or assignments in to smaller parts, model the process you expect students to follow, help organize study groups, etc.). It also means providing prompt and detailed qualitative feedback on performance, and openly discussing causal attributions for success or lack of success on specific assignments in your class.

Gladly We Teach and Learn. Help students understand how they learn most effectively. Offer opportunities for reflection on learning in your course. You might have students keep a learning

log for the semester or write brief, reflective paragraphs about how/what they learned from a given assignment. Consider requiring students to keep a portfolio of all their work for your class that they can analyze at the end of the term. Take a little time in class when you and your students can share learning strategies that have worked.

All For One and One For All. Encourage the formation of a cohesive learning community in your class. Use ice-breaking activities. Use small group learning and have students name their groups. Take turns bringing food to share. Include tasks that require interdependent work by students for successful completion. Model for students how peers can help each other to learn. Convey the importance of everyone's contribution to the learning that takes place in your class. Both inside and outside the classroom you, and your students, should create a safe (yet challenging), stimulating, and relevant teaching-learning environment. Find out what interests your students and use that information in class examples and assignments. Negotiate guidelines or norms for meaningful but appropriate classroom discussion. Think about how your course could impact your students' future lives.

Variety is the Spice of Life. Always remember the diversity of students in your classes. They vary by gender, race/ethnicity, age, skill level, learning style, social class, country of origin...). Vary your presentation formats, assignments, and assessment techniques. In this way, you appeal to the strengths of all learners and yet also challenge all learners to develop new strengths. Draw on the wealth of diverse knowledge and experiences your students bring to your class.

I Did it My Way. Give students some control and choice. Let them select among different assignments that meet the same learning objectives. Offer them input in to the final version of the syllabus or drafts of assignments or exam questions. Discuss and negotiate appropriate grading criteria. Incorporate components of individual learning contracts in your courses. Help foster the belief that students are responsible (though you will meet them halfway) for their learning.

How Many Points Do I Need to get an 'A'? Rethink your grading scheme. Forget trying to push your grades in to a normal distribution. Forget the use of arbitrary cutoffs (e.g., 90% or 450 out of 500 points = an A). Use more global grading schemes, grading rubrics, performance grading, and criterion/mastery grading. Consider whether and when self or peer evaluation might be useful. To encourage students to think about studying and learning in terms other than grades, quit assigning grades to every thing your students do! For example, engage students in non-graded group work or in-class writing. Ask them to find out something about a class topic just for the sake of discovery. Encourage non-graded discussion using computer technology.

Practice What You Preach. Be a good role model. Don't overemphasize grades in your language to students. Structure your requirements and evaluation such that grading (assessment and feedback) directly promotes learning. Demonstrate that you are intrinsically motivated to continue your own learning. Talk about examples from your past or current academic life. Enlist students in the formative evaluation of your work as a teacher.