Journal of Student Engagement: Education Matters

Volume 2 | Issue 1 Article 6

2012

Intrinsic motivaiton in the classroom

Krystle Valerio
University of Wollongong, kmv321@uow.edu.au

Intrinsic motivaiton in the classroom

Abstract
Motivation plays a significant role in a student's learning and development. It is part of teachers' pedagogy to develop in students the desire for new knowledge and understandings, known as intrinsic motivation. All students are unique; educators, through implementing a variety of motivational techniques, can have considerable influence on students' participation and self-expression. Individual teachers have the capability of making learning empowering, thus allowing the energy of the classroom to be filled with excitement and anticipation. The purpose of this paper is to examine my own understandings of the importance of intrinsic motivation within the classroom, as it applies to pre-service teachers. It is important for pre-service teachers to think about ways to motivate students in the classroom, as part of the process of developing lifelong learners and to develop effective practice.

Journal of Student Engagement: Education matters
2012, 2 (1), 30–35

Intrinsic motivation in the classroom

Krystle Marie Valerio

Bachelor of Primary Education (fourth year), Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Australia

Type or paste abstract here, as specified in the journal's submission guidelines Motivation plays a significant role in a student's learning and development. It is part of teachers' pedagogy to develop in students the desire for new knowledge and understandings, known as intrinsic motivation. All students are unique; educators, through implementing a variety of motivational techniques, can have considerable influence on students' participation and self-expression. Individual teachers have the capability of making learning empowering, thus allowing the energy of the classroom to be filled with excitement and anticipation. The purpose of this paper is to examine my own understandings of the importance of intrinsic motivation within the classroom, as it applies to pre-service teachers. It is important for pre-service teachers to think about ways to motivate students in the classroom, as part of the process of developing lifelong learners and to develop effective practice.

Keywords: intrinsic motivation; supportive learning environment; goal setting; choice; teacher passion

Introduction

Motivation is a fundamental element of students' learning; teachers can assist in increasing and developing motivation for optimal achievement in the classroom. Through the facilitation of a supportive classroom environment, engaging learning experiences, goal setting and teacher enthusiasm, teachers can empower students to find joy and excitement in their learning. The purpose of this paper is to examine my own understandings of the importance of intrinsic motivation in the classroom, as it applies to pre-service teachers. An important component of a pre-service teacher's pedagogy is to examine the ways in which students can become self-motivated learners, appreciating learning for the desire of learning.

Motivation, the "process whereby goal directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2002, p.4), can take either intrinsic or extrinsic forms. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its own sake, for the enjoyment, challenge, interest or natural fulfilment of curiosity (Barry & King, 2000). Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the individual, for example, the offering of incentives for successful task performance such as stickers or point systems (Sternberg & Williams, 2002). Though such incentives play a part in the classroom, incentives such as these should only be used if they are linked to the development of students' competencies, or to enhance intrinsic motivation (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2002).

Extrinsic incentives, if used incorrectly, can send the message that it is ability rather than effort that is best rewarded and acknowledged (Lepper, Iyengar & Corpus, 2005). For instance, students who are learning about sustainable environments could develop plans for a vegetable garden. This would involve the students collaborating with the local community to acquire materials such as seeds, plants and soil, while making long-term goals to sell the produce back to the students and families of the school. Such achievement can be rewarded extrinsically through awards and certificates acknowledging effort. However, even in this instance, extrinsic motivation needs to be structured to enhance intrinsic motivation, through rewarding students for the seeking of new challenges, demonstrating curiosity in learning experiences or completing tasks for the pleasure of new learning (Lepper, Iyengar & Corpus, 2005).

Supportive Learning Environment

The creation of a supportive learning environment can assist in the development of successful learners in the classroom, where students want to learn for the enjoyment of learning, a hub of intrinsic motivation. A supportive environment necessarily involves teachers having high expectations for students' individual learning abilities (Hinde-McLeod & Reynolds, 2007). This entails ensuring learning outcomes fit within a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), meaning that teachers need to provide tasks that are challenging yet, through the mediation of quality support, are achievable.

In a guided reading session, for example, the teacher initially selects texts that learners may find difficult independently but, through quality support and proper scaffolding, the learner is able to successfully read the text. Scaffolding strategies such as questioning techniques can prompt students whilst they are reading (Killen, 2003). Through questioning the teacher and students collaboratively discuss the meaning of the text, with students engaging in reading, summarising, clarifying and predicting, while simultaneously developing cognitive processes and higher-order thinking skills (Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005). Motivation is enhanced as students gain a sense of self-satisfaction as they are able to complete the text and task. Ensuring tasks are neither too difficult nor too easy will reduce learner frustration and allow for self-confidence in the learner (Hammond, 2001).

A supportive learning environment is free from discrimination and based on mutual respect, involving the social support of teachers as well as fellow class members (Hinde-McLeod & Reynolds, 2007). It is often found in classrooms that students are hesitant to participate in classroom discussions, for fear of giving incorrect answers and/or being teased by fellow classmates. Teachers utilising group activities can assist students in the development of social support skills in the classroom (Hinde-McLeod & Reynolds, 2007), through allowing students to understand that is it is 'OK' to make mistakes as that is how new learning takes place. The environment is of utmost importance, as it is here that the majority of knowledge is generated and internalised.

Student choice and goal setting

The amount of choice and control a teacher allows in learning experiences can significantly impact learners' intrinsic motivation, as choice in the classroom makes learning personalised and significant to the learner (Scott, 2010). Allowing students to choose themes or topics enables new knowledge, skills and understandings to be made visible, as well as providing students with a sense of ownership over their work (Scott, 2010). An illustration of student choice was demonstrated on Professional Experience (PEX), when Mrs D, a Stage Two teacher, was working with her students on 'multiculturalism'. Students were given the opportunity to choose a country they were curious about and write a report based on their findings. The teacher worked as a facilitator by assisting in the writing process and ensuring the research task met the assessment criteria. The learning experience elicited significant enthusiasm, with many students researching a country they were connected to, for instance, the birthplace of their parents or ancestors. Tasks such as these can provide teachers with insight into the interests, as well as the individual learning styles, of their students (Scott, 2010). Learning is also made significant, as students gain the incentive to satisfy their own interests and curiosities (Sternberg & Williams, 2002).

Choice can also be implemented in the classroom to allow students to gain experience in goal setting, an important component of motivation (Sternberg & Williams, 2002). Goal setting is a motivating tool for four main reasons:

(1) Focuses attention: some learners find it difficult to organise or finish tasks, goal setting allows learners to pay attention as the goals are clearly defined.

(2) Goals help mobilise resources: provide learners with an awareness of what is required for the accomplishment of tasks.

(3) Goals facilitate persistence: having goals allows for a constant reminder within the learner to where they are versus where they want to be.

(4) Goals facilitate accomplishment: the joy that comes with the accomplishment of goals can motivate learners to continually wish to succeed in all aspects of their life. (Sternberg & Williams, 2002, p.361, discussing the work of Locke & Latham, 1990)

Teachers need to explicitly teach the skill of goal setting to ensure students set realistic and achievable goals for tasks (Campbell, 2008; Szente, 2007). If students are setting goals that are too high or too low, learners may feel a sense of failure and thus become unmotivated to complete tasks (Sternberg & Williams, 2002). Goal setting can be implemented in the classroom through initiating learning tasks where students investigate an issue or topic of choice, however, a key component of these tasks should be that students must set specific goals to be met each week.

Students learning about the global food crisis may create food action ideas for their school to participate in, for example, fundraising ideas to raise money to support a child in a Third World country. Such a task requires students to set and document multiple goals for implementation of the task, as well as presenting ideas and results to stakeholders and school community. Goal setting allows students to develop positive thoughts about their learning abilities (Szente, 2007). As such, it

demonstrates to students the process of learning, always working toward developing new knowledge and improving previous performance (Arthur-Kelly *et al*., 2007).

Engaging learning experiences

Intrinsic motivation can be increased through engaging learning experiences. Teachers need to deliver content in a way that grabs the attention of their students – for example, teachers can utilise members of the school community, have lessons outside of the classroom or have students dress up as certain characters. Engaging students can assist in the struggle against loss of motivation, dislike of subjects and disruption of classroom management (Handley, 2010).

Creative teaching pedagogies, interest-based texts and a variety of quality resources can significantly impact the engagement of students and assist in the making of connections to curriculum content (NSW DET, 2004). 'Rich Tasks' is a creative teaching pedagogy, defined as "culminating performance, demonstration or product that is purposeful and models a life role" (QLD DET, 2001, p.5). The tasks are designed to be assessable and reportable, as they allow for teachers to measure student understanding of outcomes through engagement in activities (Zevenbergen, Walsh & Niesche, 2009).

Rich learning experiences allow students to see the relevance of the content to real-life and -world experiences (Hurst, 2011). Immersing students in such tasks allows for deep understandings of subject matter that is relevant and purposeful (Zevenbergen, Walsh & Niesche, 2009). For a task to be truly rich it must be transdisciplinary, drawing upon a variety of key subject learning areas while keeping intact the integrity of each individual subject (QLD DET, 2001). Such tasks are based on the theoretical underpinnings of theorists such as Vygotsky, Dewey, Freire and Sizer, to provide intellectual, cognitive and developmental depth to students' learning across their years of schooling (QLD DET, 2001).

For example, teachers can implement learning experiences where students get involved in environmental initiatives such as Streamwatch (Sydney Water, 2008), a water-monitoring program. Students engage in gathering data, using methods such as collecting and documenting water samples. The data provides Streamwatch with an early "warning system for pollution and is used as a historical record of how waterways have changed" (Sydney Water, 2008). This activity engages students in a life role, as contributors to environmental sustainability. It is also transdisciplinary, drawing on KLAs such as, Human Society and its Environment (HSIE), Mathematics, Science and English.

Teacher's passion and enthusiasm for learning

A teacher's passion significantly impacts upon the energy of the classroom, enhancing the value of the task and intriguing students into wanting to know more (Metcalf & Game, 2006). Teachers can demonstrate their enthusiasm for learning through various "facial expressions, body language and tone of voice" (Palmer, 2007, p.41). While on PEX, Mrs K, a Kindergarten teacher, would frequently start discussions off with "Boys and girls this is so exciting!" Straight away, silence would fill the classroom and students would anxiously wait to hear the 'exciting' learning experience (Valerio,

2011). Positive energy in a teacher's voice can lead learners to believe that the content has intrinsic value, motivating students into wanting to know more (Palmer, 2007).

A teacher's interest can also become a student's interest. Mrs K had a love of Dr. Seuss books, often beginning her sentences and activities with "We are going to read one of my favourite books …" and incorporating *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss, 2003) in various worksheets, mathematical questions, stickers and wall print. Mrs K's interest slowly became the interest of her learners. Many students would pick up Dr. Seuss books during free time and engage in conversations about the antics in the book with Mrs K and student peers (Valerio, 2011). Such interest can be used as a stepping stone to new learning.

A teacher's passion and enthusiasm for learning is also apparent through the planning and preparation time put into lessons. Teachers who plan lessons catering to students' strengths, prior knowledge and how learners learn best demonstrate their own motivation, by example, to enhance student experiences (Palmer, 2007). On PEX I have often found that creating my own resources intrigues students. Students would ask at the beginning of the day 'What is that for?' or 'What are we going to do with that?' (Valerio, 2011). Having such conversations can add intrinsic value to the topic before the content has even been presented. Passion is "something that moves you" (Metcalf & Game, 2006, p.99); teachers need to 'move' their students to motivate curiosities and develop lifelong learners.

Conclusion

Motivation plays a crucial role in a teacher's pedagogy. As a pre-service teacher it is important to think about the ways students can be intrinsically motivated in the classroom. Teachers can empower and move their students through providing a supportive, quality learning environment, where learning is achievable and supported by both teachers and students. Intrinsic motivation involves teachers providing choice, enabling students to set goals and investigate their interests and curiosities. Through the implementation of Rich Tasks, students are able to connect to the content and engage in learning. Teachers are role models for students; a teacher who exhibits their own passion and enthusiasm for learning will transfer these attributes to the classroom, developing intrinsic students. Motivating students into learning for the desire of learning can open up a world of possibilities. Intrinsic motivation is a fundamental element in students' learning, with teachers having the influence to implement learning experiences that allow students to see knowledge as worthwhile and take ownership over their learning.

References

Arthur-Kelly, M., Lyons, G., Butterfield, N. & Gordon, C. (2007). *Classroom Management: Creating positive learning environments.* South Melbourne: Cengage Learning.

Barry, K. & King, L. (2000). *Beginning Teaching and Beyond* (3rd edn). Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press.

Campbell, C. (2008). 'Promoting self regulation of middle years' students through goal setting in an online journaling system'. Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference, Brisbane, 30 November–4 December.

Hammond, J. (2001). *Scaffolding Teaching and Learning in Language and Literacy Education.* Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.

Handley, R. (2010). 'Teaching that engages students in learning'. *Special Education Perspectives*, 19 (1), 3–5.

Hinde-McLeod, J. & Reynolds, R. (2007). *Quality Teaching for Quality Learning: Planning through reflection.* South Melbourne: Cengage Learning.

Hurst, C. (2011). 'Engagement and connection in mathematical learning'. *Prime Number*, 26 (3), 3–6.

Killen, R. (2003). *Effective Teaching Strategies: Lessons from research and practice* (3rd edn). Katoomba, NSW: Thomson Social Science Press.

Lepper, M.R., Iyengar, S.S. & Corpus, J.H. (2005). 'Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations in the classroom: Age differences and academic correlates'. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97 (2), 184–196.

Locke, E.A. & Latham, G.P. (1990). *A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Metcalf, A. & Game, A. (2006). 'The teacher's enthusiasm'. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 33 (3), 91–106.

NSW DET (New South Wales Department of Education and Training) (2004). *Priority Schools Funding Program: Support sheet #2. Literacy in low socio-economic status (SES) school communities.* Sydney: NSW DET.

Palmer, D. (2007). 'What is the best way to motivate students in science?' *Teaching Science*, 53 (1), 38–42.

QLD DET (Queensland Department of Education and Training) (2001). *New Basics – The why, what, how and when of Rich Tasks.* Brisbane: QLD DET.

Schunk, D., Pintrich, P. & Meece, J. (2002). *Motivation in Education: Theory, research and applications* (3rd edn). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Merrill.

Scott, T. (2010). 'Classes are communities of learning'. *Professional Educator*, 9 (3), 14–16.

Seuss, Dr. (2003). *The Cat in the Hat*. London: HarperCollins.

Sternberg, R.J. & Williams, W.M. (2002). *Educational Psychology*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Sydney Water (2008). Streamwatch (homepage). URL: http://www.streamwatch.org .au/streamwatch/ (accessed 27 January 2012).

Szente, J. (2007). 'Empowering young children for success in school and in life'. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34 (6), 449–453.

Valerio, K. (2011). Professional experience (14 May). Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong.

Vialle, W., Lysaght, P. & Verenikina, I. (2005). *Psychology for Educators.* Southbank, VIC: Thomson Social Science Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zevenbergen, R., Walsh, L. & Niesche, R. (2009). 'Reforming schools: A case study of New Basics in a primary school'. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and practice*, 12 (2), 115–133.