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Keeping Students Motivated

by Summer Stanley



Different types of learners are motivated in different ways too. Students who are “deep learners” enjoy mastering a subject and are intrinsically motivated; “strategic learners” are more motivated by rewards, and may need coaxing to open up their intrinsic interest in a subject; and “surface learners” perform best and learn more intrinsically when assignments build on each other in difficulty, and when students are encouraged to reflect on what they’ve learned.

Keeping a classroom full of students interested and engaged in a topic can often be challenging. Some children are intrinsically motivated, and others are extrinsically motivated. When a student is intrinsically motivated, he or she is legitimately interested in the subject, understands that it is relevant to life and the world, enjoys a sense of accomplishment when he or she masters it, and may even feel “called” to it.

On the other hand, extrinsically motivated students are focused on things like making a certain grade, gaining or losing a scholarship, or getting a reward for reaching a goal.

Both types of motivation have pros and cons. For example, while behavior changes happen more quickly with extrinsic motivation, these changes are longer lasting and more self-sustaining with intrinsic motivation. And while applying extrinsic motivators usually doesn’t require extensive knowledge of individual students, it is important to get to know your students’ interests in order to intrinsically motivate them.

Here are a few ways to motivate students intrinsically and extrinsically in the classroom:



1. Recognize students’ work in class—display good work in the classroom, send positive notes home to parents, and hold weekly awards in your classroom.



2. Set high, yet realistic expectations, and make sure to voice those expectations. Set short-term goals and celebrate when they are achieved.



3. Show your enthusiasm in the subject and use appropriate, concrete, and understandable examples to help students grasp it.



4. Use a variety of teaching methods to cater to all types of learners. For example, journal for 10 minutes, introduce the concept for 15 minutes, discuss/group work for 15 minutes, and hold a Q&A session or guided work time to finish the class.



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5. Let students earn the opportunity to pick their classroom jobs for the next week, like watching the class pet, picking “start of class” music, cleaning whiteboards, etc.



6. Take an audit of your class—ask students what they enjoy doing, what helps them learn, and what they’re excited to do after class, then integrate their ideas into your lessons.



7. Create an incentive program. Students who attend class all week, complete all assignments, and obey all classroom rules can vote on Friday’s activities.



8. Tie in your lessons with everyday life. Students will care more if they identify themselves or their everyday lives in what they’re learning.



9. Set achievable, short-term goals, emphasize improvement, keep self-evaluation forms to fill out and compare throughout the year, or revisit mastered concepts students once struggled with to refresh their confidence.



10. Tie service opportunities, cultural experiences, and extracurricular activities into the curriculum for extra credit or as alternative options on assignments.

Resources:

“How to Motivate Students: Top 12 Ways,” accessed Dec. 1, 2018, from <http://www.teachhub.com/top-12-ways-motivate-students>

“Motivating Students,” accessed Dec. 1, 2018, from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/>

“21 Simple Ideas to Improve Student Motivation,” accessed Dec. 19, 2018, from <https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/21-simple-ideas-to-improvestudent-motivatio/>

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