

RESEARCH ON STRATEGIES FOR MOTIVATING COLLEGE STUDENTS

Yacoub Aljaffery

Mr., American University of Kuwait, Kuwait, eslteacher1980@gmail.com

Abstract

Motivation as it is defined in dictionary.com is the “internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to a job, role or subject, or to make an effort to attain a goal.” Students may come to class with some intrinsic motivation, but the teacher’s behavior, attitude, and communication with his/her students are powerful factors that can increase students’ motivation. Many teachers claim that motivating students is the most difficult factor teachers face in the classroom. While this may be true, the good news is that there are so many things teachers can do to help increase students’ enthusiasm about learning. In this paper, I am going to discuss some strategies that teachers can use to help improve students’ motivations, based on my teaching experience.

Keywords: Motivation, Teaching Methodologies, College Students

1- MAKE YOUR TEACHING REAL

Teachers can develop lessons that are related, somehow, to students’ lives through the use of new technology, such as iPods and smart phones. Students should feel the meaning of what they are learning. In every lesson, teachers can connect the material to current events, pop music, and social activities. Personally, I try to come up with an activity that is related to students’ everyday lives for every unit we cover. For example, if my unit is about poverty, I will have my students come up with a project to help poor people or orphans, so that they will relate the lesson to the real world around them, resulting in a better understanding of the materials presented in the classroom.

2- GIVE THE STUDENTS SOME FREEDOM

Based on my teaching experience, I have noticed that students perform better when they feel some sense of autonomy in the class structure. Teachers should give their students the opportunity to choose their lab or project partners to make them feel they are not dominated by the curriculum or the teacher.

3- BE A ROLE MODEL

Usually, students look at their teachers as role models and tend to follow their teachers’ footsteps, especially if their teachers are successful in life. So, if teachers can do a project similar to what his/her students are required to do, students will produce better work. For example, my students decided to go and buy food and drinks for the workers in the institution campus where I work after they had seen a video of me helping homeless people in San Francisco. Also, if teachers show some enthusiasm towards the topic they are teaching, students will do the same.

4- USE A SUPPORTIVE TEACHING STYLE

If teachers are extremely tough and do not show some sort of support for their students, students will lose interest in learning, and they might even end up dropping out. Supportive teachers exhibit active listening,

positive feedback, and empathy. A smile is another tool that teachers can use to make students feel safe and comfortable in class.

5- EMPHASIZE EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT BEHAVIOR

In the first week of class, teachers must clarify exactly what they expect from students. Teachers need to explain to their students that they need to have their assignments ready before coming to class. Students should know beforehand that their mere presence in class is not going to do much; rather, participation is an essential factor for success. The knowledge that their grades will go up if they are active in and out of the class will motivate students intrinsically.

6- KNOW YOUR STUDENTS BETTER

Knowing your students' names is not enough. Teachers need to get to know every student as well as possible. If class time does not allow teachers to learn enough about their students, they can come to class ten minutes earlier to chat with them, or set up one-on-one meetings during office hours. Teachers should also encourage students to come to office hours on a regular basis; students need to feel they are welcome to talk to their teachers any time and that a teacher's office door is always open to their students. So, teachers must show some willingness to go beyond the call of duty.

7- CREATE A WELCOMING CLASS ENVIRONMENT

Students need to feel they are safe and welcome inside the classroom. In almost every class, there will be at least one quiet student, often with low self-esteem. It is a crucial component of a teacher's job to help these students to feel safe and encourage them to participate. There are many other activities that can build trust and confidence in students' inner selves. One activity I use in my own classrooms is "sitting in a circle." Sitting in a circle creates some sense of community and the dialogues within these circles usually provide space for intentional and respectful engagement.

8- CHALLENGE YOUR STUDENTS

Throughout my teaching experience, especially in the Middle East, I learned that students everywhere, and specifically in the Middle East like to be challenged. They perform better if the teacher gives them harder work than what they expect. However, students need to know that the teacher is giving them this project because he/she believes in them and that they CAN do it.

9- DISPLAY A SENSE OF HUMOR

Teachers have to work so hard to avoid boring classes, and if students sit in class listening to a lecture for an hour or two, they will be bored and lose focus. In such cases, the teacher is actively de-motivating students. One way to avoid this is to tell jokes or funny stories at the right time during class; this can break up the monotony of a long lecture and refresh the class.

10- USE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Students are usually less motivated if they are asked to read an article that does not interest them. Accordingly, teachers should find materials that somehow relate to students. In my reading and writing class, I use Jack Canfield's book "To Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be," and because the book has many helpful pieces of advice for people to be successful, my students really enjoyed reading it and discussed it in class with great enthusiasm; many even went out and bought the second edition of Canfield's book. Therefore, taking the time to choose the right materials can have a profound impact on students' motivation.

11. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the first thing effective teachers should think about is how to motivate students and build a better, more creative learning environment. If students complain about how boring and useless the class is, teachers need to re-plan their lessons and try to find other teaching methods, rather than blaming students for being unmotivated. The strategies I have discussed are just some of the many ways teachers can create a fun, challenging classroom full of students who are motivated to learn.