



MOTIVATING THE ADULT LEARNER

Student-Related Factors & Motivation

This lesson explores the ways that students can stand in the way of their own motivation, and ways instructors can help students increase their motivation.

Self Theories

Self theory is a theory of intelligence, and is a student-related factor that impacts motivation. The self-theory says that our beliefs about our own intelligence shape our thoughts and behaviors, and explain why some students are motivated to work harder and other students are quick to give up when faced with challenging tasks.

Entity Theorists:

- Believe that each person has a fixed amount of intelligence
- Believe intelligence is unchangeable, and uncontrollable
- Are more likely to see challenges as though they are simply beyond their limits
- Are more likely to excuse failure on not being “smart”
- Are more likely to give up when they are presented with a challenging task
- Attribute success to the amount of intelligence fate allowed, rather than to the amount of effort used to succeed
- Believe that if something is challenging, it shows that their intelligence is too low to accomplish it
- Are least likely to persist in the face of a challenge.

Incremental Theorists:

- Believe that their intelligence can increase with effort.
- View intelligence as something that can be changed, and that can be changed if they apply themselves.
- Exert more effort in the face of a challenge
- Believe that if they try hard enough they can probably figure things out
- Are tenacious and motivated



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Mastery vs Performance Orientation

Performance Orientation:

- Focus on how the outcome of work will make them appear
- Are more likely to engage in negative self-talk
- Have low motivation to try if they believe they are going to fail

Mastery Orientation:

- More concerned with learning
- Focus more on the process, than the product
- Are less concerned about how they compare to other students
- Are more concerned with how they performed relative to their previous performance
- Focus on getting better, and understanding more
- Are more likely to engage in positive self-talk

Tools for Applying the Theories

“Running notes” are used to document what is going on with the students.

Two-way Journals:

- Students write in them once a week (as little or as much as they want)
- Teacher reads them and writes a response
- The journals can give clues to how students explain successes and failures.

Conversations with Students:

- Talk to them after they complete assignments or assessments and ask them about how they think they did.
- Ask them to share why they think they succeeded or failed. Then you know whether a student attributes their success or failure to internal or external forces.



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Tips for Teachers:

- Help students attribute success or failure to internal forces like effort, intelligence, and ability, rather than allowing them to maintain an external locus of control.
- Ask them about what they thought as they approached a problem to get them to think about strategies that they used.
- Look at the test problems that they got incorrect, and ask how they approached them.
- Listen out for statements that attribute student performance to external forces, and help students see that they do have some control.

When we help students look at their successes and failures more objectively their expectations of what they can accomplish can change, and that leads to increases in motivation.

Practicing Self-Efficacy & Self-Determination Theories

Internal causes of success or failure are more controllable and less stable, because it is up to the student how much time and effort they put into a task.

The best way to impact self-efficacy is to make certain that students are prepared for the tasks they are asked to do. To that end, providing students with strategies and processes can help increase self-efficacy beliefs.

Be very clear about what you expect students to do.

Break assignments down into steps or a checklist so that they have a starting point.

They can check off each task as they go. Those small accomplishments allow students to have little successes to celebrate along the way to achieving the big goal.