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## Motivation success and failure

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## Motivation success and failure

### Abstract

My research question for this paper is: how can teachers identify the different types of unmotivated students as well as motivated students in the classroom? Moreover, what strategies could be used to motivate those unmotivated students in order to make them become successful life long learners?

# Motivation Success and Failure

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## Chapter I

“The goal of education is not to stuff children’s heads with dates and formulas, but to prepare them to be useful and productive citizens.” (Friedman, 2005)

### Introduction

Scurrying of feet, pushing and shoving and the day begins. As the students settle in their desks, I put my best game face on. Smiling, I announce the new project that the students and I will be undertaking, a poetry unit. I have been priming the pump for this unit over the last nine weeks. I spent time getting to know the lives of my students, their likes and dislikes and even passions. I feel that I know the things about each of them that make for great poetry: love, hate, ambitions, beliefs about life, sorrows of lost friends and family members, favorite sports and even pets. The students and I would talk at great length about whatever was on their minds and in their hearts. I would share my passions with them as well, so I felt that they were ready to listen, read, write, and perform poetry.

I glance around the room, taking a breath; I begin to read a poem, looking over the top of the book as I read. Much to my dismay, I see the scene that I had been dreading: the back left corner of the room is giving me the glazed donut hole eyes, the back right is looking wishfully out the window hoping for an alien abduction and part of the front and middle of the room are staring deadpan ahead. Only a small percentage of the students are enjoying the reading. That small percent is smiling, nodding and leaning forward, and tracking my movements around the room. Generally, they are doing the things that motivated students are supposed to do. The

problem is this group is the minority, the “A” students who like English and have told me that they like poetry. I stop reading and ask a student to begin from the place that I left off. Of course, he has no idea where I was and the flow of instruction for the “A” students is now also lost. The first day of the poetry unit is sinking miserably into the abyss, along with my hopes of a great poetry experience!

### **Statement of the Problem**

I have taught ten years as a Special Education teacher and I have recently been assigned to the ninth grade house project called Smaller Learning Communities for the Waterloo Community School District’s urban high school in Waterloo, Iowa. During the past two years, I have been following my special education roster students to their core classes of English, Geography, Physical Science and Algebra. While traveling to the core classes, I thought that I would be able to work with the general education “bright students” and the identified special needs students to assist them with their assignments, help them organize their work load, teach test taking and work completion strategies. What I have discovered is that the classes with the general education students need as much or more of our attention than the special education students.

It became apparent to me that motivation played a significant role in learning; therefore, my research question for this paper is: how can teachers identify the different types of unmotivated students as well as motivated students in the classroom. Moreover, what strategies could be used to motivate those unmotivated students in order to make them become successful life long learners?

## Significance of the Problem

If students were all motivated to learn when they were in school, the teachers would spend less time on negative behaviors, classroom management, teaching or re-teaching of content which was supposed to have been taught in previous grades. They would also be able to limit research time for new and different ways to teach the same content that was taught to students for the past 25 years. At least half of the students typically in any classroom are considered to be off task or not motivated to begin or to be able to complete any of the work assigned in the regular education classroom.

Motivated students will think critically, solve problems, and work collaboratively, and when faced with a difficult situation, they will initiate and overcome without becoming frustrated. Students control what they are willing to learn. Therefore, teachers must choose what within the curriculum to teach and how they will teach in order to make students choose to learn.

In middle school, concepts become more abstract and more difficult for students to understand “why” they should learn and know the concept. For that reason, middle to high school students are less motivated to learn. However, if the student’s parents place education as a high priority, students will push forward even when the material is seen as boring and unnecessary to learn the concept and curriculum.

Additionally, if the students in our classrooms were motivated to learn, the teachers would be able to give positive attention to students who ask questions and provide assistance for those who need redirection in the pursuit of content rather than

spending valuable time trying to motivate students to start, complete and finish their work. Teachers could attend seminars about new strategies and research the teaching of content rather than new strategies on modifying behaviors and curriculum for low achieving students. All regular education and special education teachers could follow the scope and sequence developed by the Department of Education, the state board of education of Iowa, and the Waterloo Community School District standards and benchmarks for teaching its core content and elective course work.

Therefore, that is my goal: to understand what motivates students to be successful and to discover what strategies I can employ to assist unmotivated students to become more successful.

### **Definitions**

External Motivation - is motivation provided by an external source to promote the beginning or completion of the product. It could be in the form of edible re-enforcers, stickers, or other items coveted by the receiver of the reinforcement.

Internal Motivation - is motivation by the person's desire to begin or complete the task assigned.

Learned Helplessness - is when there is no perceived association between responding and environmental outcomes.

Underachievement - is a discrepancy between ability and performance that persists over time. It can occur at any level of intelligence. (Rathvon, 1996)

- Underachiever - is a student who does less than one is capable of doing.
- Achiever - is a student who plans, executes and completes a task.
- Performance goals - measure innate ability.
- Learning goals - emphasize mastery of new skills.
- Incremental theory - states that a person's skills and knowledge, effort and motivation are able to increase and improve.
- Entity theory - states that a person's inherent capacity or potential for intelligence is fixed from birth. (Dweck, 2000)
- Motivation to Learn - can be conceptualized either as a general trait or as a situation specific state. (Brophy, 1987)
- Trait of motivation - is an enduring disposition to strive for content knowledge and skill mastery in learning situations. (Brophy, 1987)
- State of motivation - to learn exists when student engagement in a particular activity is guided by the intention of acquiring the knowledge of mastering the skill that the activity is designed to teach. (Brophy, 1987)
- Learning - refers to the information-processing sense making and comprehension or mastery advances that occur during the acquisition of knowledge or skill.
- Performance - refers to the demonstration of such knowledge or skill after it has been acquired.
- Mastery Oriented Learning - is when the student learns the task at the 80% or better level.

## **Summary**

Motivation is a key factor in the success of any student whether elementary, middle or high school level. Teachers as well as students struggle with the problem of motivation. As students progress from the lower education levels, the concepts increasingly become harder, challenging them more and sometimes causing students to become frustrated with their work. This can lead them to doubt their own ability to be successful and possibly cause them to regress, becoming underachievers who are only motivated to find a way out of the situation.

## **Organization of the Paper**

Chapter one introduces the topic of discussion: motivation and how it will affect the student's of my classroom's success or failure. Chapter two will examine the characteristics and identified profiles of underachievers within a classroom. Chapter three will contrast from chapter two by looking at the characteristics of the achievers, their self theories and beliefs of student's skills and ability. Chapter four examines the reasons for lack of motivation and offers strategies for improving their motivation to become successful. Chapter five attempts to utilize the identification process for my urban classroom and then apply various strategies to assist the students in their search for what motivates them which allows them to be successful in the formal classroom.

## **Chapter II**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the characteristics and profiles of underachievers. We will first focus on the four described developmental types of underachievers as developed by the Applied Research Institute (2007); secondly, chapter two will include the nine different profiles of underachievers for identification by teachers in their own classrooms as researched and labeled by Heacox (1991). Although these lists contrast in number of types and labels for each type, they are similar in that they both describe unmotivated and underachieving students.

### **Overview of Underachievers**

Underachievers are divided into four basic developmental types: the distant, the passive, the dependent, and the defiant. Although there are four types, they are not mutually exclusive. Students will move back and forth based on influences from peers, parents and their own self-theory. The unmotivated student will cycle through the stages and then get stuck in one or more of them. Students will start a stage, react to that stage, learn from a stage and then integrate and move on to the next concept and begin the staging processing all over again. Both motivated and unmotivated students will go through them. However, motivated students will go through them briefly and then move on. Underachievers have become stuck in a stage cycle but they are not aware of the cycle or how they could rectify the situation. Also, their behavior will sometimes vary greatly from subject to subject. The underachiever's emotional level is greater than their chronological age and greater than their intellectual level. In

addition to the types of underachievers, profiles of underachievers have been developed for identification of students' behaviors by teachers, parents, and administrators. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the structure of the four different types of underachievers. Those four types of underachievers will subsequently become more defined by Heacox's (1991) nine different profiles that will assist with the identification and characterization of the underachievers in a typical school class room.

### **Four types of underachievers:**

#### **Distant Underachiever**

The first of the four types of underachievers are the Distant Underachiever. The Distant Underachievers have specific issues; they lack personal trust, they are developmentally distant emotionally and are at an earlier stage of emotional development. They establish patterns of difficulties at a younger age. They may have experienced a significant loss, such as a death of a parent, friend, or pet causing them to fail to establish mutual trust, and therefore, distance themselves from others as a form of protection. Distant Underachievers tend to focus on solitary pursuits such as: art, reading, studying alone or technology. Any change in their lives is seen as a threat to the system and will be avoided. Distant Underachievers are emotionally immature; they may be lonely, distrustful or have intense fear of personal abandonment. Additionally, they are focused on themselves and they have low frustration tolerance. The low frustration level causes them to be impulsive and behave erratically without consideration for the consequences of their behavior. All this fails to allow them to express themselves in a productive manner. Distant Underachievers seek immediate

gratification for work completed or attempted. They do not understand the concept of sacrificing now to meet the goals of getting good grades. The Distant Underachievers' attitudes lead to adults who tend to become socially isolated. People who have school problems and society issues tend to develop premature job transitions or short term employment, and superficial personal relationships. (Heacox, 1991)

Therefore, teachers need to be sensitive when dealing with a Distant Underachiever's personal trust and emotional development issues. Distant Underachievers may exhibit anxiety about any change in the classroom management or schedule, not trust new people or protocols; they may become fearful and will withdraw. Teachers should always follow through with any exchange with a Distant Underachiever as consistency about following the rules is key. Teachers should slowly draw them into class discussions, allowing them to be on the fringe until they become comfortable. Teachers might talk about their own personal relationships; additionally, they may talk about relationships in non-personal terms with Distant Underachievers, always remembering that they are primarily fearful of being hurt.

### **Passive Underachievers**

The second of the four types of underachievers is the Passive Underachiever. Passive Underachievers are the people pleasers. They tend to focus on gaining acceptance and approval of others without the consideration of their own needs. Their strong desire to meet and please the desires of others is their main focus and is the key to finding self worth and identity. Their fear of disapproval is the issue. Passive Underachievers are stuck at a higher level than the Distant Underachievers, but are

still considered part of the early developmental level. All children go through this stage as well; they desire to please their parents, teachers, and other adults in authority. They are seeking to gain approval for themselves by gaining others' approval.

“Anxiety is no longer a cue for constructive action it becomes overbearing.”(Shore, 2001) To that end, Passive Underachievers may freeze, blank out, confuse directions, respond incorrectly or do erratic work making them appear to be underachievers. Any of these could cause them to feel guilty, rejected and unhappy with themselves. In school, Passive Underachievers become compulsive or obsessive often unable to finish tasks by spending too much time getting ready to work; therefore, the task is never completed. They may also waste time correcting work or redoing work because things never seem to be good enough. They have focused too much on the details and will miss the big picture. Passive Underachievers are the teacher's favorite type of underachievers, as they frequently volunteer and will complete assignments in minute detail; however, their work will not show much original thought and will often repeat the views of others, limiting the chance of not having a perfect paper. Passive Underachievers sense of self is underdeveloped so if they are unable to meet the expectations of others, they will avoid responsibilities, fearing failure and become overtly anxious. Passive Underachievers must learn that perfection is not the goal, yet consistent effort is the goal.

### **Dependent Underachiever**

The third of the four types of underachievers is the Dependent Underachiever. Dependent Underachievers are the most common type of

underachievers, they postpone the responsibility associated with independence or let others postpone independence for them. They want others to experience their emotions, solve conflicts and take their responsibility for their education away from them. In school, the Dependent Underachiever will fail to prioritize assigned work, show little interest in core subjects, and their goals change or may disappear completely. They may have problems choosing areas of study and may never earn a diploma. Often, their effort is inconsistent and they may act indifferent when confronted about it; “who cares” will be their response. They will generally blame circumstances and others if the level of performance is not at the level that is appropriate for their ability. Usually, the parents and teachers of a Dependent Underachiever seem more concerned about their success than the student. Parents will bail them out when they are up against a deadline and do not appear to be able to finish an assignment on time or even at all. The child will become angry if questioned by the parent or teacher as to why they are just now beginning an assignment when it was assigned with a reasonable amount of time for completion. Missing, lost or unfinished assignments are normal for the Dependent Underachiever. This behavior will usually begin in high school. As an adult, a Dependent Underachiever tends to be more irresponsible and forgetful than their peers and will take the path of least resistance.

### **Defiant Underachiever**

The last of the four types of underachievers is the Defiant Underachiever. A Defiant Underachiever’s behavior usually will begin in their adolescent years. They are insecure about their sense of self and are caught between being independent and

dependent. Conflict with this underachiever will result in distance, defensiveness and oppositional behavior between the two parties. Defiant Underachievers will develop frustration when they are unable to achieve personal goals easily. They hesitate to start an assignment when they realize failure is a real possibility; also, they will flaunt false independence causing the student to become oppositional about the task being assigned. Defiant Underachievers are uneasy with adults and becoming a mature person. They lack responsibility, and do not follow through or keep their commitments. Their cynical attitude limits relationships and puts off authority figures. As they become adults, they will often become job hoppers and sneer at the responsible people in their lives. They will also try to project their feelings onto other people within their circle.

When dealing with Defiant Underachievers, teachers should remain calm, provide guidance and consequences for rule and procedure infractions and ignore the “Leave me alone,” stance of the student. Consistency, at school and at home, is the key to keeping a Defiant Underachiever following a schedule and rules. Allowing Defiant Underachievers to choose how to complete assigned tasks gives them flexibility and choice gains ownership in the completed product.

The four types of underachievers are useful for categorizing students who are working below their ability. However, more than one profile may be included within a single type. The following section of this chapter provides a discussion of an additional nine types of underachievers and the characteristics that will help identify them.

## Profiles of Underachievers

In addition to the structure of the four types of underachievers are (Heacox, 1991) nine specific profiles of underachievers. These profiles of underachievers are sub-divided into the categories under each of the four general types. Within the nine profiles of underachievers are the Conformist, the Struggling Student, the Single Sided Student, the Stressed Learner, the Bored Student, the Complacent Student, the Victim, the Distracted Learner and the Rebel. Within the Distant Underachiever are the profiles of the Conformist, Struggling Student, and the Single Sided Student. The Passive Underachiever includes the profiles of the Stressed Learner and Bored Student. The Dependent Underachiever includes the characteristics of the Complacent and Victim. The Defiant Underachiever has the characteristics of the Distracted Learner and Rebel. “Teachers and parents may recognize students that they are concerned about: students will realize that their problems are not unique and they are not alone (Heacox, 1991).

The following three profiles from Heacox, the Conformist, the Single Sided, and the Struggling all have similarities with the Distant Underachiever type as described by Shore (2001). The Conformist has decided that doing well in school is just not worth it. They may have found out that completing work early only got them more work. These students may choose to do less to blend in with the class, rather than risk the label of a nerd. If they are athletic, they would rather be known as a “jock” rather than a “brain”. This student is more comfortable when adults don’t expect too much from him. Usually, the conformist conceals their abilities and opts for mediocrity.

The Single Sided Achiever has decided that only certain subjects are worth investing their time in, other subjects are viewed as boring and they will avoid attending to these tasks. These students are rigid in their opinions about school and will achieve high scores in only one or two subject areas of their own choosing.

The Struggling Students in junior high or high school may have been the bright students in elementary who were able to slide by without learning much. At the beginning of high school, they may hit a wall in which the content may require study skills they have not developed. These students will benefit from study skills, interventions and assistance in re-mediating or coping with the deficits. Without this, the Struggling student's self esteem is lowered and also the expectation about ability and performance is lowered.

In similar fashion, the characteristics of Passive Underachievers form the framework (Applied Motivation, 2007) for the Stressed Learner and the Bored Student from Heacox. Heacox's classification of underachievers the Stressed Learners are known as the perfectionists; their self esteem rises and falls depending on their most recent academic performance. Over time, this desire to be perfect may paralyze their performance out of fear that they may make a mistake. The Stressed Learners may be less productive than possible since too much time is being spent on revising their work, or they may not turn in an assignment because they think it may not be good enough.

The Bored Student may be the one who truly needs more challenging activities due to their advanced skills and abilities. This student may have begun school ahead of the rest of their class and have simply been waiting for them to catch

up. However, in that time period, they have become sloppy with their work, learning skills and patterns. Some other students may claim to be bored, but they may really be afraid of failure. The teacher should look into the reasons for boredom to determine if it is a true need for more challenging work or a fear of failure.

In the same manner as the Dependent Underachievers, the Victim and the Complacent Learners from Heacox are compared. The Victims are reluctant to accept responsibility for their lack of school success. They may have adults in their lives such as special education teachers or parents taking responsibilities for their work, rather than the student who should be taking care of it themselves. The Victim has everyone working for them in plans of action, yet they take no action themselves.

The Complacent Learners seem okay with school and friendships. However, the adults in their life believe that they could and should be doing better. In time, these students may share the beliefs of the adults, and which will help them improve their performance.

Comparable to the characteristics of Defiant Underachievers, the Distracted Learner and the Rebel from Heacox's classifications fit together. The Distracted Learners are the individuals with personal problems or concerns that affect their school performance. In high school, friendships and other personal relationships often take precedence over school matters. The Distracted Learners may be in the process of formulating personal decisions, judgments and values that seem far more important than school. The Distracted Learner may have problems with personal relationships, drugs, depression, eating disorders and conflicting sexual values.

Rebels don't see the relevance of classroom activities and assignments. They refuse to see the connection to the "real world" and have the general "I don't need this" attitude. There may be a power struggle going on in the lives of these students and adults. The Rebel controls the situation by refusing to comply with adult wishes. Parents may take away privileges, limit freedom or punish in some form. However, the Rebel retains power by simply not producing in school.

### **Summary**

Understanding the different types of underachieving students, what motivates and stimulates them, and recognizing the profiles of these students will make the teacher's job of providing motivating, engaging, and "real world" curriculum easier. Using a hierarchy of types and scaffolding the profiles of underachievers within that constructs a useful schema that will allow teachers to reach those students who have placed themselves out of reach for the regular educational experience. In the following chapter, theories of self beliefs and attitudes will be discussed and how they affect the progress and product developed by the student.

## **Chapter III**

### **Introduction**

In chapter two the characteristics of underachieving students was examined. In chapter three the characteristics of achievers will be discussed. Characteristics of achievers look very different from underachievers. Achievers, as well as under-achievers, have self theories that rule their attitudes and beliefs about themselves which will affect their motivation for activities, educational and life skills. Teachers who work to create a positive environment will provide students with work in which the student sees value, and that allow them to be successful.

### **Characteristics of Achievers**

Achievers who are successful in the classroom will have more of the eight characteristics described below when compared with the Underachievers from the previous chapter. These characteristics clearly illustrate why these students will be more successful. Achievers who strive for a goal and believe that they are able to achieve that goal will be more self-disciplined to complete a task and have pride in the accomplishment.

The characteristics are:

1. Achievers are goal driven.
2. Achievers are positive thinkers.
3. Achievers are confident.
4. Achievers are resilient.
5. Achievers have self-discipline.

6. Achievers have pride.
7. Achievers are proficient.
8. Achievers are risk takers.

### **Self Theories**

The attitudes and personal beliefs of achieving students as compared to non-achievers is distinct. It was the purpose of (Dweck, 2000) research to make sense of the psychology of achievers vs. non achievers. Dweck's research has developed four beliefs about ability, success, praise and confidence.

### **Beliefs**

The first belief is that students with high ability are more likely to display mastery orientated qualities. These students are the most worried about failure and will most likely question their own ability when they are challenged. The second belief is that success in school directly fosters mastery orientated qualities. These students are not energized to seek out more challenging tasks. The third belief is that praise, particularly praising a student's intelligence, encourages mastery orientated qualities. This type of praise often leads to fear of failure, students who avoid risks doubt themselves when they fail and many will cope poorly with performance setbacks. The fourth is a belief that students' confidence in their intelligence is the key to mastery oriented qualities. Finally, many confident students do not want their intelligence tested for fear of poor performance.

"The Entity Theory states that a student's intelligence is a fixed trait, i.e., only a limited amount of intelligence can be changed." In contrast, the Incremental Theory, states that people's intelligence is not fixed. Incremental Theory states

intelligence is portrayed as something that can be increased through one's efforts (Bandura and Dweck, 1985). Students with an incremental view feel smart while engaging fully to master new tasks.

Effort and learning make incremental students feel good about their intelligence. Easy tasks, which waste their time, are viewed with disdain rather than raising their self-esteem. Self-esteem is not something we give to people by praising their intelligence. It is something we equip them with by teaching them to value learning over their appearance of smartness, to relish a challenge and to use errors as routes to mastery.

Achievement goals are different in each of the theories. Helplessness and mastery-oriented students have two different goals in achievement situations. The first goal is a performance goal; it is about winning positive judgments for competence and avoiding negative ones. The second goal is of increasing competence. It reflects a desire to learn new skills, master new tasks or understand new things with a general desire to get smarter. Students want to be validated for their skills and accomplishments. Students who are willing to engage in difficult tasks and who don't care about looking smart are considered to have learning goals. Students who were motivated to look smart or not appear dumb are classified as performance goal driven. Researchers have found that students who take a learning goal stance toward school work tend to use deeper, more effective learning strategies and to apply what they have learned more effectively. (Ames & Archer, 1988; Graham & Golan, 1991; Pentrich & Garcia, 1991) Students with learning goals were much more mastery-oriented in their approach to challenging new problems. However, students with

performance goals were distracted by the novelty. Thus, they spent too much time worrying about their own ability to solve problems and not enough time solving them (Croeser, Midgley and Urdan, 1996). Through the research of Carol Dweck, two different theories have emerged. The first of Dweck's theories, Entity Theory, states that intelligence is fixed and concrete, these students prefer performance goals. The second theory, Incremental Theory, focuses on idea of malleable intelligence where students can get smarter, and teachers' should promote learning goals. Generally, it is possible to determine how students feel or assess themselves by the way they will agree or disagree with statements such as:

"I like schoolwork that I'll learn from even if I make a lot of mistakes."

"It's much more important to me to learn new things in my classes than it is to get the best grades."

"I like schoolwork best when it makes me think hard."

Students agreeing with the above three statements are Incremental Theorists. In contrast to Incremental theorists are Entity theorists who are more likely to agree with these statements about intelligence:

"Your intelligence is something about you that you can't change very much."

"You can learn new things but you can't really change your basic intelligence."

"You have a certain amount of intelligence and you can't really do much to change it."(Dweck, 2000 p.33, 61)

Those students who agree with the last three statements are Entity Theorists.

The majority of incremental theorists (about 60%) choose learning goals over performance goals linked with entity theory. Carol Dweck stated, “When students have an Incremental Theory of intelligence, they don’t have to feel they’re already high in ability in order to take on challenging learning tasks in a vigorous way.” (Dweck, 2000) Her findings show that the students’ level of confidence was not nearly as important as their theory of intelligence in helping them meet and conquer a task. Those who held an Entity Theory were significantly more likely to say that they would doubt their intelligence if they received poor grades. In contrast, students with an Incremental Theory were significantly more likely to think that maybe their strategies for study or test taking should be revised or that their effort should be increased. Students who adhere to Incremental Theory beliefs earned higher grades in junior high and high school than those with Entity Theory. Once the student comprehends their own self theory, either Incremental or Entity, they will be better suited to apply this knowledge to achieve their own educational goals. In the next section, we will discuss the different types of strategies that explain what motivates underachievers to become motivated.

### **Expectancy x Value Theory**

Feather’s, (1982), concept of *expectancy x value theory*, proposes that the effort people will expend on a task is a product of the degree to which they expect to be able to perform the task successfully if they apply themselves, and the degree to which they value participation in the task itself or the benefits or rewards that successful task completion will bring to them. This theory assumes that no effort will be invested in a task if either factor is missing entirely, no matter how much of the

other factor may be present. People do not invest effort on tasks that do not lead to valued outcomes even if they know they can perform the tasks successfully. They do not invest effort on even highly valued tasks if they are convinced that they cannot succeed no matter how hard they try. The *expectancy x value* theory of motivation implies that in order to motivate students to learn teachers must both help them to appreciate the value of academic activities as well as make sure that they can achieve success on these activities if they apply reasonable effort.

The *expectancy x value* theory is divided into four parts each with strategies to assist the teacher to help motivate the students. The first section lists the preconditions necessary for motivation. The second set includes strategies that involve establishing and maintaining motivation. The third area includes additional strategies that enhance the subjective value students place on school tasks. Finally, strategies are subdivided into those that involve offering extrinsic incentives and take advantage of intrinsic motivation to learn.

Preconditions for motivation include supportive environment, appropriate level of challenge, meaningful learning objectives, and moderation for optimal use. The supportive environment is used to motivate students learning by providing a chaos free and kid-friendly environment. It also includes encouraging students, patiently supporting their efforts of learning without fear of taking risks, or answering incorrectly. The appropriate level of challenge to should not be too hard but should be challenging enough to allow the student to feel value in completing the task when they apply reasonable effort. Meaningful learning objectives teach some knowledge or skill, learning either in its own right or as a step toward a higher objective.

Moderation is important in teaching; too much of any one strategy will become tiresome and ineffective.

### **Goal Setting**

The second set of strategies used to motivate for success includes teaching goal setting, helping students to recognize the linkage between effort and outcome, and remedial socialization (Dweck, 2000). Dweck has shown that effort and persistence are greater in individuals who set goals of moderate difficulty level and who hold the Incremental Theory of self learning. A program for success can be accomplished by beginning instruction at the student's current level and moving in small steps toward the assigned goals. Teaching goal setting, performance appraisal and self reinforcement skills will help students commit themselves to goals that are small and doable, specific to the task, challenging but not too hard or easy and that provide immediate feedback by using previous performance.

Teachers should help students to recognize linkages between effort and outcome. Using these strategies, teachers need to portray effort as an investment in knowledge and skill development. Remedial socialization with frustrated students may include performance contracts that emphasize mastery learning principles, such as additional instruction, supervised practice opportunities, and the ability to make up tests to allow struggling students to overcome initial poor scores. Next in this chapter will be a discussion about what purposeful class work looks like, how to make predictions concerning implementation, and completion and assessment of the product.

## Purposeful Class Work

Friedman has identified four procedures or steps to making class work purposeful. Step one is to diagnose the problem or define it, current problem or situation for these students. Teachers should state the desired goal, acknowledging the constraints or variables. They should also understand and acknowledge the students' personal and physical capabilities and, if applicable, the financial limits to the project. Step two concerns predicting the solutions. The students will need to identify similar problems and solutions, conduct research to find procedures that may be unfamiliar, or create a procedure when research is non-productive to the task being studied. Step three is to implement the plan by applying the procedure specified in the plan. Then teachers should estimate and obtain needed resources for completion of the plan. Step four is to assess success by describing the outcome and ask the question, does it match the goal? Students need to remember that success the first time is rare. Thomas Edison didn't invent the light bulb on the first try; what he did was assess his failures and adjust the procedure, refine it and try the cycle again.

Self directed problem solving, the Socratic Method of learning, involves asking questions to guide students to search for the answers. A simple self questioning format to be taught to students is the inquiry or problem solving strategy. The students should be taught to ask themselves these questions when working on the problem assigned to them by the teacher.

1. What is my goal? What am I seeking to achieve?
2. Are there any constraints?
3. Can I recall a procedure I've used in the past to accomplish a similar goal?

4. Can I find procedures in the library or on the Internet that have been used to achieve similar goals?

5. Which of the procedures do I have the resources and ability to execute?

6. Of the procedures I have learned, which is the most likely to succeed?

When all of these questions are answered, a plan will be understandable, practical, efficient and effective. When students problem solve by their own procedures, students learn self control. Control of self and environment is a motivational strategy which gives power to the student. Students with self control and self discipline and proficiency in problem solving procedures grow into innovative adults. "A person can create a new procedure to achieve a known goal, use an existing procedure to create a new goal, or if the person is extremely gifted and persistent, create a new procedure to achieve a new goal" (Friedman, 2005).

### **Extrinsic Rewards**

Finally, strategies that motivate by supplying extrinsic incentives offer rewards for good or improved performance may include: material rewards, activity rewards and special privileges: symbolic rewards, such as honor rolls and displays of good work: praise and social rewards including positive attention from teachers and peer's, and lastly, teacher rewards in the form of opportunities to go places or do things with the teacher. The teacher should offer and deliver rewards in ways that call attention to developing knowledge and skills rather than in ways that encourage students to focus just on the rewards.

Teachers should:

- Structure appropriate competitions as either individual or team opportunities to win. Extrinsic incentives and competition are more effective for stimulating intensity of effort than for inducing thoughtfulness or quality of performance. It is best used for practice of concepts not performances.
- Adapt tasks to the students' interests whenever possible and include novelty or variety elements to continue interest.
- Allow choices or autonomous decisions with the students being able to choose the way to demonstrate competency.
- Provide opportunities for students to respond actively or to manipulate an object.
- Allow students to create finished products.
- Include fantasy or simulation elements such as role playing and drama.
- Incorporate game like features into exercises; test yourself quizzes, puzzles or brain teasers include higher level objectives and divergent questions and provide opportunities to interact with peers.

### **Other Strategies**

Three general strategies for stimulating student motivation to learn include: modeling interest in learning and motivation to learn by the teacher to the students, communicate desirable expectations and attributions about the student's motivation to learn, explaining to the students that it is expected that they be curious about the

concept, and minimize students performance anxiety during learning activities stating that it is a chance for the students to master a concept rather than for the teacher to judge them while they are trying out the skill or learning experience.

Strategies will provide a supportive environment for students learning other specific activities. Teachers should: project intensity-pacing of materials to emphasize their importance, project enthusiasm sharing the value placed on the topic, induce task interest or appreciation by connecting the assignment to the student's own interests in the topic, induce curiosity or suspense by having the students investigate an idea or concept, induce dissonance or cognitive conflict by showing the unexpected aspects and having the students solve the mystery of why, or make abstract content more concrete or familiar through the telling of a time when this has happened to someone close to you. It induces students to generate their own motivation to learn by taking an inventory of the students' interests, state learning objectives and provide advance organizers preparing them to get more out of media and reading assignments. Finally, teachers need to model task related thinking and problem solving, by doing a think aloud involving of a real life situation in front of the students, stating the pro and cons of solutions, and inviting the students to assist with ideas.

Not only are the different strategies important to the students' motivation but also to how they will handle pressure and its effects. The next section will explain how unmotivated students deal with pressure in contrast to how motivated students cope with the same type of pressure.

## Pressure and Its Effects

Matters that require effort produce stress. The different types of stress or pressure are relative to one's own history of how it is addressed. The mix of emotions includes an unwillingness to commit to responsibility, feeling overwhelmed, feeling imposed upon, feeling rushed to action, or feeling constrained by circumstances.

“When unmotivated students feel pressure, their response is usually an over reliance on defense mechanisms” (Pressure, 2007). These mechanisms include: procrastination, detachment, minimization projection, denial repression, manipulation, avoidance, and magical thinking. Rather than acting to change their circumstances through mature responsible action, they avoid progressing toward an effective outcome.

Unmotivated students protect themselves from the discomforts of pressure. They are developmentally immature; they have low self esteem and self confidence, an excessive fear of failure and fear of the unknown. Fear produces two responses, fight or flight. Unmotivated students often will take the flight or escape response, rather than the “I must stand and engage and take charge of the issue.”

Helping Unmotivated students to take charge and choose mature responses to handling pressure will take time and is a slow process for both the teacher and the students. Mature responses take a commitment by both parties. Teachers should model mature responses to the students by explaining feelings of the pressure experience. Modeling the steps taken to resolve the pressure, and discussing the pros and cons of choices offered, allows students to see that it is occasionally acceptable to

change tactics in midstream if the issue demands it, engaging in a discussion of the emotions that are attached to the pressure. After the resolution of the issue, the resulting responses are relief, pride in accomplishment, reduction of negative feeling, joy in a job well done and feelings of productivity and control of emotional responses.

Students need incentives to learn. One of the most effective motivation strategies is to appeal explicitly to their desire to control their lives. "Learning to control processes and outcomes is more than a means to an end; it's an end in itself" (Friedman, 2005). The control motive teaches six important strategies: it teaches the students self-control; the ability to manage their own lives; it makes the student, and later the adult, responsible for their own choices; it teaches consequences and outcomes; and it provides life long learning skills. Teachers should explain to students how the instruction they are given increases control of their lives. Knowledge is power if students know how to apply it. As students learn how to improve control over what they learn, teachers help them to identify the goals and plan a procedure for attaining those goals, through purposeful behavior. Purposeful behavior is aimed at specific outcomes and based on learning rather than instinct. Purposeful behavior is based on prediction rather than the impulse of the moment or hindsight and selected by the student. When students behave purposefully, they afford change in their favor. Students will find tasks relevant, enjoyable, and empowering. Not only is it necessary for class work to be interesting to motivate the student to complete the assignment, it needs to have a purpose.

### Summary

Theories of motivation include the ideas that, effort and learning determine that students who have an incremental intelligence will persevere to learn and excel at a task even when pressure is applied to their lives. Students who are given work at a level that is achievable and is valued by them will find purpose in that task and extend effort to completion of the task. Teachers who recognize the attitudes and beliefs students hold will provide purposeful class work and demonstrate strategies that work to accomplish purposeful class work.

## **Chapter IV**

“The unmotivated student actually is highly motivated when it comes to school work—he’s motivated to avoid it” (Shore, 2005).

### **Introduction**

In Chapter three the student’s who are achievers were examined, noting their characteristics and self theories and beliefs which promote motivation and success in the classroom. The purpose of chapter four is to distinguish between motivated and unmotivated students, by helping the students to assess why they are unmotivated and to change them into motivated students by making them aware of their own beliefs about achievement and abilities. Also discussed in this chapter are short and long term motivation and Shore’s nine reasons that students are choosing not to work in the classroom; a discussion of Rims’ twelve laws which discuss attitudes and values; and the possible ways that a teacher could change the amount of effort and motivation that a student is willing to expend to become successful.

### **Reasons for lack of Motivation**

Motivation is the key to success, and to being successful in life beginning with school. There are two main types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic.

When working with unmotivated students, teachers face two challenges. The first is to change their thinking so that they come to believe that if effort is put forth, they can be successful with academic tasks. The second is to figure out what does motivate them to identify the settings, situations, and conditions to which they respond and that can be used to foster their interest in learning. (Shore, 2005)

Shore states nine reasons for unmotivated students to not put forth effort in the classroom. They include:

1. Lack of relevance: some unmotivated students don't see the importance of completing school work.
2. Fear of failure: unmotivated students may feel that it is safer to not try, rather than to fail and then risk embarrassment for the failure.
3. Peer concern: unmotivated students do not want to appear "un-cool" to their friends, so they determine that school is un-cool and therefore, should not be attended.
4. Learning Problems: unmotivated students exhibit problems such as reading comprehension and fluency which may not allow students the ability to keep pace with other students, making them appear "slow" and causing them to lose face among their peers.
5. Lack of challenge: some students become apathetic, stating that the task is not challenging enough and therefore is not worth the students' time or attention.
6. Need for attention: students want the teacher's attention and if they are unable to acquire that attention by doing the work, then they resort to playing the helpless role to acquire it. Even negative attention is better than no attention at all.
7. Emotional distress: similar to the desire for attention, the unmotivated student will complain of anxiety, depression, or confusion to achieve the attention of the teacher.

8. Low expectations: unmotivated students may have had mixed messages about their ability from their parents, even between their parents. One parent may have encouraged them while the other may have allowed them to work below their true ability. Unmotivated students may have received messages of low expectations from their teachers and administrators.
9. Expression of anger: unmotivated students could demonstrate through rebellion of the expectations of the parents and or teachers.

### **Twelve Laws**

In addition, to Shores nine reasons for lack of motivation in the classroom Rimm describes the difference between short term and long term motivation, short term lack of motivation is seen in unmotivated students who are simply having a bad day or who are unmotivated in only one subject area. Long term lack of motivation occurs more severely, for a longer time, and is usually ongoing and is harder to change. Rimm discusses the family and children in a household and how they impact each other in terms of motivation or lack of motivation in the informal as well as the formal educational setting. Children begin their education at home; therefore, they begin to formulate their opinions and attitudes by the interactions between the parent and child. The purposes of Rimm's twelve laws are to define the unmotivated students' emotions and attitudes about their own ability in regard to the family dynamics as well as to the teacher in the classroom.

1. Children are more likely to be motivated to achieve if they get the same message about school from both parents. Parents who differ in opinion about their children's ability will either push them to excel beyond their ability or

excuse them prematurely for lack of ability. Children can sense the difference of opinion between parents and will use it to achieve their goal rather than that of the parent or teacher, possibly getting out of work because they believe that it is too hard so they can not do it.

2. Children learn appropriate behaviors more easily if they have an effective model. Children who witness adults working through a problem and possibly doing self talk aloud in the presence of the child will understand how to approach a new problem and become successful solving it.
3. Communication between adults in front of a child dramatically affects children's behaviors and self-perceptions.
4. Overreactions by parents to successes or failures lead students to feel both intense pressure to succeed or despair and discouragement in dealing with failure.
5. Children experience more stress and tension worrying about their work than when they are doing it.
6. Children develop their own self concept through their struggle.
7. Deprivation and excess exhibit the same symptoms and can be confusing.  
(attention, affection, freedom and pressure)
8. Children develop confidence and an internal sense of control if power is given to them in gradually increasing increments as they show maturity and responsibility.

9. Children become oppositional if one parent sides with them against the other parent or teacher, making them feel more powerful than the other adult in the discussion.
10. Adults should avoid confrontations with children unless they can be sure of the outcomes. Teachers should never argue with students, some students will falsely believe that this will give them the power to refuse to do assigned work, especially if the teacher fails to produce an argument that the students feel justifies the task asked of them.
11. Children become achievers only if they learn to function in competition. Our world is a continuous competition for success, man vs. man, man vs. machine, man vs. society.
12. Children will continue to achieve if they usually see the relationship between the learning process and its outcome.

Equally important to understanding how the children have developed their attitudes and self beliefs are being able to correctly change false beliefs of students in the classroom. In the meantime as we are moving from the informal classroom and parents into the formal classroom and teacher, the seven steps of change could allow the teacher a map for stopping the cycle of unsatisfactory work by unmotivated students encouraging them to be as successful as possible.

### **Seven Steps for Change**

Students who are unmotivated need to be taught what they are able to do to change their beliefs, attitudes and to stop the cycle of unsatisfactory and unmotivated

behaviors. Shore gives us seven steps that teachers can do to change student's beliefs, attitudes and the cycle of unmotivated behaviors. Unmotivated students need to become energized and focused to attend and then complete the task assigned. These students need to stop the cycle of failure. Shore recommends these seven steps for breaking the downward spiral. In addition to Shore's recommendations, Rimm defines seven additional strategies that may improve motivation for work completion.

*Interrupt the cycle of failure.*

1. Failure is non-motivating to students causing them to lower their self esteem about their school work. Teachers should provide students with work which they will be successful at and build their confidence.

Unmotivated students are often demoralized students who need positive academic experiences in their own classes. Work assigned to them should be at their ability level and that they are able to complete successfully.

Building on their strengths, the assignments or tests should be structured with easier, more concrete answers and then moves to more difficult, less concrete answers,

*Offer a choice of assignments to the unmotivated student.*

2. When choice is given, students will take ownership of the task. Choices should first be approved by the teacher and then offered to the students. All students should be required to complete a certain amount of the essential or core curriculum to satisfy state and district standards and benchmarks for that class. Differentiating instruction with tiered assignments or layered curriculum techniques empower the unmotivated

students to take control of their own learning. Offering open-ended activities to develop creativity will challenge students to construct original and creative products such as dioramas, diagrams, models of areas of study to support their written reports or instead of them. Teachers should avoid power struggles; unmotivated students can be manipulative. Thus, teachers should only offer alternatives which are acceptable to the teacher and meet the curriculum assigned by the district.

*Incorporate the students' interests into the lesson.*

3. Giving an interest inventory to the students prior to the beginning of a new unit or assignment or at the beginning of the semester would allow the teacher to tailor the assignments to the interest of the students. Scaffolding concerns the supportive role that a teacher undertakes to ensure success in activities where a student is being challenged. Teachers can teach to the moment a skill or strategy that will assist students in completion of the task. In addition, discussions with the students provide insights into the students' interests, beliefs and values, as well as other activities that they may be involved in outside of the school hours.

*Students need to understand the relevance of all their school activities.*

4. Students, who do not see relevance in their assignments, will not be motivated to begin or complete them. Teachers should clearly establish the expected goal and required method, and relate lessons to real life. Unmotivated students often want to know "why are we doing this" or will complain "I'll never use this after I get out of school." Whatever the

assignment, it is important to show how it is related to the real world of work and when it might be used. Teachers should give real life examples whenever possible. They can also ask a community member' to come into the classroom and speak about how they use the content in their own jobs, thus answering the question "why are we doing this?" Having a person from the community into the classroom also gives the community a window into what we as teachers are doing with their resources.

*Break tasks into manageable steps.*

5. Unmotivated students will put forth only a little effort because they are nervous, scared and overwhelmed by the assignment. Teachers should use chunking to alleviate stress of large assignments by breaking it into manageable pieces which the students feel better able to handle. Each chunk should be graded and then returned to the student allowing editing and revision before the next part of the assignment is given. Teaching in depth is more important than meeting a deadline, quality vs. quantity of assignment completion. Each consecutive chunk of the assignment should be increased in size during the year as previous tasks are mastered.

*Expand the teaching style to spark interest.*

6. Teachers should expand their own teaching style to include all the modalities of learning as described by Howard Gardner, (1999): visual, auditory, kinetic, tactical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, and mathematical. Teachers should use as many of the modalities as possible to provide the student different opportunities to learn such as hands on,

lab, discussion, art, drama or diagram. Teaching a variety of organizational strategies will encourage the students to build on their own strengths. Having a variety of options will give the students a tool box to go to as new or more challenging tasks are assigned. Unmotivated students are often not motivated to follow the positive role model; instead, they may be following an inappropriate model such as a peer who plans to drop out, a relative who has “made it” without school, or who is claiming that they didn’t need to work because it was boring, all of which are poor choices and need to be exchanged with a positive role model. Positive role models can be parents, relatives, peers and even a teacher. Teachers may demonstrate within the course of the day how to be an effective writer, listener, good loser, and independent learner by sharing with the student’s situations in their personal lives. Classroom teachers need to reinforce required strategies for any assigned task by never assuming that a student knows how to do the assignment until it is demonstrated by them. Some students can remember the steps required within a strategy but not understand why they are doing the steps, for example, solving algebra problems. When students seem unmotivated to work, teachers should have them demonstrate the steps and explain why they are doing each step. This strategy is useful to reinforce the steps to completion of the task by the students independently.

*Focus on the students’ individual progress.*

7. Teachers should focus on the individual progress of students rather than on their performance in relation to peers. Teachers who compare two unlike students may cause the unmotivated student to become discouraged and shut down completely on the task being assigned. It would be best to focus on the performance over time, beginning, and middle and then end of a semester. This would allow the student to see growth, seeing positive worth in the work already completed. Teachers need to teach students how to make their tasks more manageable by modeling how to break a challenging task into smaller manageable steps which will improve the ability to start, continue, and complete a challenging assignment. As each step is completed, a measure of success is experienced by the students and is therefore a motivational move in the right direction.

Teachers that apply to their classroom the strategies described above will assist the students with the change in their cycle of failure but also in a change in their own ability, attitude and motivation. Brophy (1987) believes that teachers are not merely reactors to whatever the students bring to your classroom, but are active socialization agents capable of stimulating the general development of student motivation to learn and its activation in particular situations. Teachers must work within the formal setting of education to find ways to motivate students to do the work that the school board and the department of education prescribe. Therefore, strategies for motivation of students to learn to apply not only to their performance on tests or assignment, but also to information processing activities such as paying

attention to lessons, reading for understanding and paraphrasing ideas. Teachers must encourage the work prior to the test situation to increase the motivation for the test.

### **Limited Use Strategies**

Rimm (1986) recommends that teachers limit the use of certain strategies for the most effective value for motivation. In contrast, these strategies should be used with caution; these strategies may be very effective for only a short time, but then may lose their effectiveness. They include: Rewards and Punishment, Ambiguity, Self Assessment. Other behaviors which will limit performance and motivation are Perfectionism and Attention Seeking Behaviors.

#### *Use rewards and punishment with caution.*

1. Both rewards and punishments can be a negative factor when developing intrinsic motivation. Rewards cause students to work for the wrong reasons. Punishments often foster resentment and lack of co-operation. As external motivators, rewards are most effective when used with lower ability or unmotivated students when the reward is used for a short time only. Teachers should never increase the reward for increased expectations and should begin decreasing the reward as soon as it proves to be ineffective. The real reward for good work must be the satisfaction of the effort and success itself.

#### *Use ambiguity occasionally.*

2. Some students feel that there is only one correct answer, method or strategy; these students are only motivated when they have the correct answer. Unmotivated, underachieving students frequently use avoidance rather than an effective strategy when frustrated by ambiguity.

*Teach students to evaluate themselves.*

3. Self-evaluation needs to address the questions: What was done well? How can it be improved? Use of a rubric in grading can be helpful when having students evaluate themselves.

*Perfectionism*

4. Perfectionism is the need to feel everything has been completed and no error is present. Students are sometimes unable to move forward to a goal, perhaps due to erasing and starting over. It can be demonstrated in a student who forgets homework, procrastinates or loses the work rather than take a risk of the assignment not being perfect. These students need to be reassured that turning in an assignment on time is more important than the star that will be awarded for a perfect paper. Teachers should consider that if a task can be done perfectly, it is probably too easy. Students are most likely rehearsing a task already learned and it is only practice rather than new learning.

*Attention seeking behaviors.*

5. Unmotivated students want the teacher's attention. Attention is viewed as positive; however, attention for negative reasons can reinforce poor motivation.

**Summary**

This chapter identified the different types of unmotivated students and the twelve laws of students' emotional attitudes derived from the home environment and family concerning their ability to process and produce in the school setting. Unmotivated

students need to be encouraged to attend to the task, complete that task and then turn it in to the teacher for grading. In this chapter recommendations for changing unmotivated students into motivated students as well as strategies that teachers could use to improve the level of motivation of students. In the following chapter, the theories, behaviors and strategies which could improve the motivation of students and assist them with learning in my urban high school classroom will be discussed.

## **Chapter V**

### **Introduction**

Upon review of the current research on motivation of students in the classroom, I determined that I would adapt and utilize this research to improve the motivation of my urban classroom. Like any complex concept, teachers will find that there are layers and levels of motivation within the typical classroom and the students who are assigned to their roster. I chose to evaluate the layers and levels of my students' motivation and then to address assets and detriments of the students and the physical environment of my classroom and the level of motivation of my students. I diagnosed the reasons for the students who are motivated as well as unmotivated and then applied the completed research to provide strategies to improve motivation for school and completion of assigned tasks which will improve the students' grades.

### **Physical Environment**

Classroom environment is important to show the students that teachers take pride in themselves and value content as well as students. The physical environment will effect the students' motivation and ability to learn; the heat or cooling will affect the ability to concentrate on the content, also the size and type of seating must be in good repair and of an appropriate size for the students who are assigned to the classroom. Finally, the number and arrangement of the desks must be considered in conjunction to the size of the classroom.

I was assigned to a new room this fall and I was excited about the idea. I would be allowed to create the perfect learning environment for my students. My list of repairs were long, but I felt that it was worth the effort to show the students that I was proud to be working in the school district and happy to be teaching my favorite

subject, reading. My list included: new shades since there was none at the windows, plus the large windows looked out onto a courtyard of broken down heater vents and a brick wall of the other side of the courtyard. I would need covering for the old bulletin boards and knobs for the cupboards along the north wall. I wanted tables and matching chairs rather than small, old fashioned desks and a reading nook for individualized reading.

I purchased iron-on shade interfacing and fabric with the Americana theme for the new shades for the windows and bulletin boards. I made new roller shades to block out the unsightly view and shade the hot sun and glare from the windows. I covered the bulletin boards with coordinating fabrics and purchased and installed matching white porcelain knobs on the old cupboards. I added two bean bag chairs and the room began to look cheery and inviting.

The heating and cooling system within a large older urban school is often lacking. My classroom is an example of this. In the fall, my room was 89-99 degrees daily and no breeze, so fans ran daily, the students were expected to attend to the lessons but their motivation was only to get out to of the room and escape the heat. Later in the year, the opposite was true as well; the windows did not fit correctly allowing cold air to penetrate and heating this room was a challenge, the heater blower and boiler were not working correctly, so my room was very cold, (50-61 degrees daily). The students needed to wear coats, hats and mittens to attend class; this also limited the motivation of the students as well as the teacher. As the basic survival needs of love, food and shelter must be met in order to allow people the ability to be motivated to learn, motivation was a serious concern.

The desks are from the 1940's and are small in size; my students are larger and do not fit well. I requested tables and chairs and was awarded two tables and a variety of chairs. After some searching, I found eight matching padded black chairs and three matching gold cafeteria tables. The program has three distinct rotations so the room is divided into three sections. Two tables pushed together with the eight chairs serve as the computer center, the older desks are the individualized reading area, and the last table with the potpourri of leftover chairs is the small group area. The rear of the classroom contains the teacher's desk and computer.

### **Assess the Level of Motivation**

The first three weeks of school were spent getting to know the students and for the students to understand what brought them to me, with the remedial reading program, known as Read 180. The students are general education as well as special education students who have a lower reading level and ability, few reading strategies, but behaviors that make diagnosing a reading deficit hard because of the road blocks put up by the students. I needed to determine who and what were the different types of underachievers that were assigned to my class and their beliefs about themselves. Certainly, I needed to sell them on the fact that with a lot of hard work and effort, they could be successful in scholarly pursuits.

I was assigned a roster of 54 students to start the year. I observed in that roster all of the four types of underachievers: the Distant, the Passive, the Dependent and the Defiant in my classroom. Each of these four types have specific issues and were not exclusive to any one type for the entire time they are in the room, meaning they seem to move into and out of each type as the school year evolved. The Distant

Underachievers in the room have witnessed killings, suicides and experienced the death of a parent, siblings and pets. These kids are emotionally removed from the school experience and fearful of trusting an adult because of emotional abandonment issues. When these kids were asked to write about themselves, I found a lot of pain in the revelations that they would share or they would plainly refuse to write.

One student wrote it is personal, it's my life and you would not believe it if I did write about it. I responded with, perhaps that is true but writing down what has happened sometimes allows you to lift the weight off of your shoulders. Then I returned the paper and waited; finally, he did come and talk to me at a later time and did tell me about the friend who committed suicide in his bedroom. Now he trusts me he is willing to write and he writes with a great sense of humor in his writing.

Passive students are wonderful artists or computer geeks, but are distant with their peers and teachers. Teachers like these kids because they are quiet and do not disrupt the flow of the room. The Passive students are the students that you marked with "a joy to have in class" in the computer grade book. They are the ones who will work hard to achieve your praise, but that perfectionism may get in the way of turning in assignments on time.

One such passive student would refuse to do his vocabulary word assignments until I offered him the choice of doing them on the laptop. He quickly agreed to do the assignment when given this option. While we all meet in small group he would sit protected behind the computer screen typing the same vocabulary words and using the computer dictionary to look them up and then he would create the most interesting

new sentence using the word, which would allow him to produce a perfect looking paper.

The Dependents are the procrastinators of the crew. They will put off today and tomorrow until the work is piled so high that they are overwhelmed. These students' parents are often the "helicopter parents" that email you weekly to check up on their child, making sure that they have turned in their assignments.

I have found that chunking assignments of any length will assist Dependent students. I will assign small parts of the larger assignment then collect each part and give it a grade with feedback. I encourage the students to correct that chunk and then move on to the next segment. Through doing assignments in chunks, students are not allowed to procrastinate for more than one segment at a time causing them to become successful and not feel overwhelmed by the work.

Lastly, the Defiant students are simply negative and refuse to work. Unfortunately, I always have plenty of these kids, working with remedial and special education students. These students have perfected the wall and will shoot down all attempts by the teacher and administration to scale it with the "I don't care and mind your own business" statements. These students are my favorites; I use flexibility of assignment, and choice to allow them to demonstrate to me that they understand the concept and are able to perform on the test.

Occasionally, the four types of students need to be subdivided into other profiles of underachieving students. I have noted three of these types of students within my roster this year as well. The Struggling Student, the Victim, and the Distracted Students are among that group. The Struggling Student is that student who

has done well in elementary but the grades have steadily dropped off in junior high and now in high school this student is behind. As these students are met with harder and more abstract concepts and less concrete content, they find themselves falling behind and struggling with the idea that they are not “smart.” Dweck’s research has shown they will not continue to struggle because they fear looking dumb over all. I arrange for them to be able to practice during my planning time till they feel comfortable about doing the assigned work. The Victim students have had so many adults and a teacher taking the responsibility for their failures in the past, they have learned that if they take no action someone else will come to their aid. I break down their assignments into chunks and then give them immediate feedback before they move on to the next section of the assignment. Finally, the Distracted Student is always prevalent in the ninth grade because the social element of the classroom is the most important curriculum to the students. These students in my room are concerned about friends, court dates, community service requirements, drugs, depression, boyfriends and girlfriends. While all of these concerns are important, this leaves little time in the students’ mind or in their schedule for homework or even for schoolwork. By providing self talk and modeling problem solving techniques about social issues that concern me the students witness an adult processing an issue and learn how to handle them without yelling, fighting or giving up and walking away.

Prior to doing this research, I would wonder why my students seemed so preoccupied by other things rather than what I considered most important, their schoolwork and grades. I did not consider the reasons for the lack of motivation; I would simply say that these students lack motivation to learn, their grades would

reflect their inability to produce a product for me to give a numerical grade. I would try to find a topic or strategy that seemed to spark the interest in the curriculum. Now I have a better understanding of what they are concerned with and what more I am able to do to change their focus to skills, effort and motivation for school.

### **Diagnose the Lack of Motivation**

The lack of motivation leads me to the research of Carol Dweck's self theories, four truths about ability, success, praise and confidence. She found that students who are high in ability will most likely be the most worried about failure she labeled these students as having entity theory. Entity theorists believe that either they are smart or they are not. Incremental theorists believe they have the ability to be successful with hard work and persistence will gain the knowledge that they are being taught.

My classroom has a mixture of both. The Entity Theorists were scheduled into my classroom but believed that they were incorrectly placed in the course, because Read 180 is for "dumb kids who can't read" or "it's a special ed room" or "the blue room" and they are too smart to be placed here. The Incremental Theorists saw the program as an opportunity to improve their reading scores and ability, so that they could be more successful in school.

Although both groups need to know when they are successful, praise can backfire when it is given to the students for their intelligence. This leads to a fear of failure and allows the students to avoid any task that makes them not appear smart. Praise for effort allows the students to take a risk and show their ability on performance assessments and daily assignments. Praise for intelligence is a common

mistake teachers make mainly because we want the student to feel as if they can be successful hopefully building their self confidence. Self confidence will not be increased by hollow praise, but by effort and learning and by the completion of an assignment.

Teachers should not only react to the students in the classroom, but should take an active role in finding ways to stimulate student motivation about learning, effort and lessons that lead up to the final assessments administered to the students by the teacher. Feather's theory of expectancy x value shows teachers how to motivate students by teaching them the value of academic activities and then supports them so that they are able to achieve it. Four parts of this theory are: first are preconditions of the student from the home environment and the beliefs that their parents have instilled in them. Second, is preparing the environment to allow students to feel the value that the teacher and administration place on the learning objectives. Third, is motivating the students by providing them incremental steps to make them be successful. Teaching the students individualized goal setting at a level that is obtainable allows them to compare themselves against their own best effort rather than against their peers. Fourth, providing strategies that uses extrinsic as well as intrinsic incentives as rewards for good or improved effort by a student allows a sense of accomplishment.

### **Applying Needed Strategies**

Incremental steps are always how I find the best results for motivation of my students. Read 180 and special education exemplifies this strategy; special education breaks down large tasks and offers plenty of mid assignment check in and feedback for the students' work that is being completed. Read 180 has three levels of

incremental step assignments and reporting. It also has a large group and small group component, computer software and individualized reading component all of which offer immediate or almost immediate feedback for the student's work. My students who believe that they have a choice and that they can control the learning process are more motivated to attempt the work.

Strategies that provide the use of extrinsic motivators are useful but must be modified often and changed to provide a novel approach keeping the re-enforcers positive and useful. I use different types of re-enforcers to keep the interest alive, I have used edible re-enforcers to focus the student's attention during tests, because my informal research proves that hungry students are not motivated test taking students; they are students who are only motivated to get something to eat. I also use teacher time as a motivator; I use my planning period to talk with students and to promote sustained effort for the class assignments and individualized tutoring for written assignments.

### **Strategies to Solve the Lack of Motivation**

During the research phase of this paper, I discovered a couple of different lists of strategies to assist me with my problematic students. Some of these strategies I had read about and some of them I had used, but some were new to me and I have subsequently tried a few of them in my classroom.

Choice: I prefer to allow the students a choice for demonstrating their learning, but differentiated instruction offers more variety. When doing vocabulary I have allowed my tech

kids to use the computer rather than handwriting sentences and definitions.

#### Differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction is used in my classroom, by layering the curriculum using the three different teaching approaches, large and small group and individualized instruction on the computer and personal choice of reading. I always give the students opportunities to share their likes and dislikes in the form of discussion during large group, using the Talking Heads strategy where no one idea is correct, I employ interest inventories so that I provide curriculum which interests my students because it taps into activities that they enjoy outside of my classroom door.

#### Goal Setting

The Read 180 program has a built in component for goal setting. It assesses the students' performance and then sets the level of intensity for their reading. I am able to increase the skill level if I find the level preset by the program to be too high or low. I will conference with the students and assist them with setting goals. I question them about their future goals: do they intend to go to college, get a job or what they see themselves doing in the future and together we determine what changes need to be made (Dweck, 2000).

Risk taking behaviors	I encourage the students to take positive risks in the classroom. I support their risk taking by asking questions that are at their level or slightly above. Also, I assist them up by telling them who I will be calling on in the future, so that students who needs more time to process will have that time and the risk of going blank will be limited or eliminated altogether (Feather, 1982).
Meaningful learning	Students are taught real world lessons. The lessons are about current events and are of high interest to the high school student. Many of the workshops are expository writings and are information based. Lessons that are not text based are current interest topics which can be found in a recent newspaper or on a news magazine show. In addition, the poetry and literature is of high interest and varying levels as well as about current events such as: the terrorist's attack, 911, wars, banning music or books, killer plagues, survivors and gangs and racial violence.
Purposeful reading	Each workshop has a section that applies reading to functional literacy. This section allows the students to see the purpose in reading such as: being able to determine a career path, reading and comprehending business correspondence, reading then filling out

medical forms and insurance forms, reading and comprehending legal and contract letters. These are real world applications, important skills that students need to be taught in order to be successful and productive citizens after high school.

Extrinsic motivators

I will occasionally use edible motivators in the classrooms, I try to hook whatever the treat may be, to the curriculum, using this for a motivator so that the students will hopefully increase their performance on a task assigned. This motivation strategy should be limited (Rimm, 1986).

Control Motive

Two of the control motives I teach are: student self control and being in control and responsible for their own choices and the consequences that follow their decisions. Knowledge is power. Students want to have power and if they feel powerful they are more motivated to learn (Friedman, 2005).

I should expand my teaching styles to utilize other and more varied learning styles more often in the classroom. I do use many of Gardner's learning styles: visual, auditory, interpersonal, intrapersonal and tactical, but I could look for more ways to incorporate the remaining few: kinetic, musical and mathematical. I need to improve the utilization of the avoidance of power struggles, allowing the defiant students to

make a choice that I and the district are comfortable with rather than entering into a power struggle with them.

### **Conclusion**

Motivation is a multifaceted concept. It includes intrinsic and extrinsic theories, physical environment, and personal ability beliefs, assigning purposeful class work, being able to take risks and to be goal driven. Additional instruction by the teachers, in the levels and types of motivation, could lead to the use of a variety of learning strategies. The use of those strategies could help motivate the unmotivated students and to validate the motivated students. When students are motivated to learn, they are successful students. Successful teachers understand and use the theories of motivation effectively.

At the beginning of my teaching career, I developed a strong sense of preconditions for motivation. These strategies came easily to me because they mirrored my need to assist others, encouraging them to strive for the best within themselves and for them to achieve to their highest ability, as well as for me to be flexible with the curriculum. All of these conditions make for a successful teacher.

In the middle of my teaching career, my present status, I am striving to move into the strategies of motivation that include teaching personal goal setting and affirmations, linkages between students effort and outcome. This step for me is difficult in that it no longer gives me the right to step in and "fix it" when students are unable or unwilling to step up to the task. It is the student's right to choose to fail. In the writing of this sentence, it gives me pause for consideration; however, ultimately

if all the strategies fail, it is no longer my responsibility if the student is unmotivated to put forth effort for task completion.

Moving forward toward the end of my teaching career, I will utilize the descriptions and characteristics of this research to identify the different types of unmotivated students which will enable me to provide them appropriate strategies that may change their outlook on their own future of learning. The strategies encompassed within this thesis will provide readers a variety of choices to apply toward future classrooms. Unmotivated students are able to change using the described strategies to become motivated and successful students.

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