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Motivating middle level students : strategies to help reach and teach middle level students

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Motivating middle level students : strategies to help reach and teach middle level students

Abstract

This review of literature focused on the strategies educators use for motivating the young adolescent in the middle level classroom.

Anderman and Maehr (1994) found motivation could be improved through a variety of methods by focusing on specific areas: developmental changes, intrinsic versus extrinsic, middle level transformation and classroom practice. Along these same lines, Curwin (2006) found motivation can be enhanced with practices in the middle level classroom through four main areas: (1) welcoming students to school and class, (2) stressing the effort students put forth, (3) increasing homework completion, and (4) turbo charging classroom lessons.

This paper focused on four main topics: student engagement, emphasis on effort, intrinsic and extrinsic rewarding, and the student need to bond at school.

MOTIVATING MIDDLE LEVEL STUDENTS: STRATEGIES TO HELP
REACH AND TEACH MIDDLE LEVEL STUDENTS

A Graduate Literature Review

Submitted to the

Division of Middle Level Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This review of literature focused on the strategies educators use for motivating the young adolescent in the middle level classroom. Motivation as defined by Ford (1992) has three motivational functions: students who are actively engaged toward learning, students who choose a course of action, and the reasons students persist toward goals. Anderman and Maehr (1994); Curwin (2006); and Harter, Whitesell & Kowalski (1992) found that motivation issues are a problem for many young adolescents. They found adolescent motivation fell into three broad categories: receiving too much motivation, not receiving enough motivation, and using motivation towards inappropriate activities.

Anderman and Maehr (1994) found motivation could be improved through a variety of methods by focusing on specific areas: developmental changes, intrinsic versus extrinsic, middle level transformation and classroom practice. Along these same lines, Curwin (2006) found motivation can be enhanced with practices in the middle level classroom through four main areas: (1) welcoming students to school and class, (2) stressing the effort students put forth, (3) increasing homework completion, and (4) turbo charging classroom lessons.

By focusing on the areas, strategies and practices were developed for use in the middle level classroom to help achieve motivation of the young adolescent. This paper focused on four main topics: student engagement, emphasis on effort, intrinsic and extrinsic rewarding, and the student need to bond at school.

In addition, nine activities were included to demonstrate how these four practices were implemented in the author's classroom. Examples include: *Opposite Simon Says* for engagement, *Home Away From Home* for bonding, and *Take Two* for effort.

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MOTIVATING MIDDLE LEVEL STUDENTS: STRATEGIES TO HELP REACH AND TEACH MIDDLE LEVEL STUDENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Most educators would agree student motivation is important when it comes to young adolescents' success in academic classrooms (Anderman & Midgley, 1998). Research shows there has been a decline in students' motivation and academics as they move from the elementary to the middle school setting (Harter, Whitesell & Kowalski, 1992). The same research attributes this decline to the characteristics of the environment in middle school classrooms. Dweck (2006) states, "A young teen may begin to grumble about assignments and teachers" and "complain that he's bored or show signs of being lost in the educational shuffle" (p.1). Educators will not find one method that will work for all middle school students, but there are some general patterns which research shows to work with a wide range of young adolescents (Anderman & Midgley, 1998).

Rationale

In the fall of 2006, I attended a one-day seminar held in Omaha, Nebraska, about successful strategies for motivating students. Richard L. Curwin, Ed.D., presented the information at the seminar. He is known internationally for providing thousands of educators and parents with practical, proven ideas to effectively manage children's behavior. Dr. Curwin is author of *Rediscovering Hope: Our Greatest Teaching Strategies* (1992) and his most recent publication, *Making Good Choices* (2003). Dr. Curwin is also

a co-author of the books *Discipline with Dignity* (1999), *Discipline with Dignity for Challenging Youth* (1999) and *As Tough as Necessary: Countering Violence, Aggression, and Hostility in Our Schools* (1997). His articles have appeared in *Instructor*, *Educational Leadership*, *Parenting*, and *Learning*. Dr. Curwin has presented seminars and workshops throughout the United States and Canada as well as in Japan, Singapore, Israel, Belgium, and Germany (Curwin, 2005).

Dr. Curwin's topic, the motivation of young adolescents, piqued my interest since I have students in my classes who do not want to do much, if anything. Throughout my years of teaching, I have seen and heard too many teachers who have made comments about giving up on students because they just would not do their work. Having heard those comments, I have become even more determined to keep finding, trying, fine-tuning and sharing methods and strategies that work in the classroom. The question that motivated me to do this review of literature has been, "Is there something I, as an educator, could do to increase the level of motivation in my students?" I believed then and continue to believe the answer is, "Yes!"

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to review the literature for studies and ideas about student motivation in the hopes of finding new as well as proven methods to help middle level students in academic classrooms. Not only would the information found be helpful for my own classroom practice, but also my peers with whom I can share these ideas through my example, conversation, and paper would benefit. During common planning times in my building, I will be able to share what I learned through my research. Because all of the staff works with this specific age group, young adolescents, this research would

be of benefit to them and their students. If the school worked as a whole to improve and maintain student motivation, it would be one step closer to create a positive learning environment.

At the time I conducted this research, I taught seventh grade math and often many students were not interested in it, mainly because it was math content. I strived to find ways to get my students engaged in and out of class, but found it hard to reach all students. I wanted to find out more about student engagement, student effort, rewards, and student attachment to school. I knew finding methods to motivate all students might be difficult, but I felt reaching even one more student than I had in the past would be some measure of success. I am always looking for ways to better understand adolescents and to add to my toolbox of teaching strategies and methods.

Because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, there is an increased accountability for student learning, which means differentiating for different student learning styles. This means classroom teachers need more strategies to make school engaging and motivating to all students, even when the content is specified by external entities such as the national government. Vogler (2003) shares how schools can meet state standards in a high-stake testing environment and keep adolescents actively engaged by having an integrated curriculum rather than the traditional disciplinary curriculum.

As an educator I am responsible to teach math, along with other skills, to each student who walks into my classroom. It is sometimes difficult to get students motivated to want to be in charge of their education. I, therefore, have constantly looked to find more strategies and methods to assist me in achieving this in my classroom.

Importance

Psychologist Dweck (2006) believes motivation for young adolescents is more important than the ability to determine success. Dweck states how motivation for young adolescents does drop during the middle school years. Some of the main areas stated to contribute to the loss of motivation are: biological changes, emotional concerns, school environment, social and peer pressures, lack of opportunities, short attention spans, and underdeveloped work ethic. Working with young adolescents and the increased accountability for student learning from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, classroom teachers may want to understand what works to help motivate the students at the middle school level who seem to take a nosedive with motivation towards learning during the adolescent years.

Helping a young adolescent find motivation may be a key component in cutting back on school drop out rates. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2008) shows high school completion rate of 87.8% during 2006 and students not enrolled in school or working was 7.8% during 2007.

Terminology

In order for readers to have a common understanding of the terminology used in this literature review, the following definitions are included:

- *Extrinsic motivation* – Students engaging in activities for reasons outside of themselves such as for praise, material rewards, grades, and/or special privileges (Alderman, 2004).

- *Engagement* – An investment in and effort directed toward learning and understanding skills and knowledge promoted in academics (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992).
- *Intrinsic motivation* – Students engaging in actions for their own sake and without coercion such as satisfaction, interest, learning, and challenge (Alderman, 2004).
- *Motivation* – It has been described as having three psychological functions: energizing or activating behavior, what gets students engaged in or turned off toward learning; 2) directing behavior, why one course of action is chosen over another; and 3) regulating persistence of behavior, why students persist toward goals (Ford, 1992).
- *Self-efficacy* – Belief about one’s capabilities to organize and execute the actions necessary to accomplish a task (Brophy, 2004).
- *Self-regulated learning* – Students’ active participation in their own learning; including regulation of cognitive, motivational, and metacognitive components (Alderman, 2004).

Research Question

Before I could begin my literature review, I had to decide on what types of questions I hoped to answer during my search and readings. I also needed to find out what would help me with my daily teaching practices. I needed to find ways to make school engaging and motivating to all students. The following question is what I chose to help give me direction for the paper:

What stimulates academic motivation in students at the middle level grades?

Summary

Anderman and Midgley (1998) wrap up the main idea of helping to increase motivation in the middle-level classrooms:

Middle school teachers often teach many students over the course of a school day, and for a relatively short period of time. Given such brief contact with so many, it is easy to underestimate the influence that one's teaching practices can have on any one individual. Current moves to implement the middle school philosophy may provide a more facilitative schedule for both teachers and students, but even in a highly structured middle school, teachers can take specific steps to provide a learning environment that will promote the motivation of all students. (p. 5)

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Following a seminar on motivational strategies to help the uninvolved, unmotivated, and disengaged students, I began reading books, magazine articles, and journal articles in the hopes of discovering different thoughts, ideas, and beliefs to help with motivation in the middle level classroom. Through my research, I rediscovered some tried and true strategies as well as came across some new ideas that have received a positive response in classrooms around the country. The fact that the period of early adolescence has many challenging changes, it came as no surprise the need to find new strategies to keep up with these changes and to add to my teaching arsenal in order to assist with the students who walk into the classroom each day.

Topic Selection

When I first considered topics for my research paper, I was heading down the path of researching why it is important to teach vocabulary in math classes. My school district, at the time, was implementing vocabulary strategies to enhance reading comprehension. This was interesting to me and I found a lot of new ideas and beliefs on this topic to use in my math classroom.

During the fall of 2006 I attended a seminar on strategies to help motivate students in the classroom. During the seminar we looked at different ways to motivate the hopeless, uninterested, and uninvolved learners. New ideas I learned while at this seminar included welcoming troubled students into the classroom, ways to turbo charge lessons, energizing ourselves as educators, using evaluation to increase motivation, and methods to increase homework completion. I wanted to find methods to work with my students

who have the “I don’t care” attitude when it comes to school. I wanted all kids to feel successful and I needed to find ways to connect with the variety of students I worked with daily. Following the seminar, I decided motivational techniques for young adolescents would be my new direction, or topic, for my literature review research paper. My research question, which guided my search of the literature, was: What stimulates academic motivation in students at the middle level grades?

Method to Locate Resources

To locate sources, I initially spoke with some special education teachers, a couple of speakers from an in-service our school district had, a few different people at our local AEA office, and school administrators. I asked them to forward or give me ideas of good articles, books, or other materials examining the topic of student motivation at the middle school level. I received a book on middle school practices, a book on strategies to motivate students, another book on ways to increase intrinsic motivation, and a variety of journal articles about the topic of motivation. The reference pages of the books were great leads to many more articles on motivation.

I also browsed through many different search engines on the Internet and also accessed Rod Library online through the University of Northern Iowa website to find more articles and books. Many of my resources came from the bibliographies of books I read on motivation. I conducted searches on databases to find research documents that were relevant to the topic of motivation. Among the keywords used in my searches were: *motivation, motivation strategies, and young adolescents*. One of the first sources I started with was the book *Motivating Students Left Behind* by Curwin (2005), which I received while attending the motivation seminar.

Three other books I found to help me through the writing process were *A Manual for Writers* by Turabian (2007), *Writing Literature Reviews* by Galvan (2006), and *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2001). These books helped take me through the processes of writing a research paper from finding useful sources to writing my final introduction and conclusion.

Method to Select Sources

I initially selected many of my articles based on the resources of the three main books I read. These three books included *Motivation for Achievement* by Alderman (2004), *Motivating Students to Learn* by Brophy (2004), and *Teaching in the Middle School* by Manning and Bucher (2005). The references pages in these three books included many known authors in the area of motivation and early adolescence.

Once a variety of resource selections were made, I needed to use criteria to assist in the process of determining which items were credible to use. The first criteria I looked at was to try to keep most of my resources composed from 2000 to present. While trying to keep current, I found motivational issues to be a topic over the years so I chose to use some older articles as well. The second focus was on the author. I looked to see if the topic was written in the author's area of expertise. Many authors were mentioned throughout my master's program and I looked for those authors as a high priority. From the selected articles and books, I then looked for particular information pertaining to motivational issues of student engagement, student effort, rewards, and the student need to bond at school.

Method to Analyze Sources

Once I had selected the sources I planned to use in this review of literature, I had to analyze and organize my research selections. First I did a scan of each article to get an overview of each one; I needed to make sure the content was what I was looking for and that it involved the period of early adolescence. Then I used color-coded tabs to reference the specific topics of the articles. This allowed me to organize the articles by my topics of student engagement, student effort, rewards, and student needs to bond at school. I also used self-adhesive paper to keep notes about the articles. I looked for definitions of key terms throughout the research selections and noted them with highlights and self-adhesive tabs. Once the research articles had been organized and notes taken, it was time to create an outline for the literature review.

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Obtaining high levels of achievement is of top priority in education. Most of this push is coming from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. One of the main areas is student engagement. Many different methods can motivate students to find this engagement in their learning and this is the main focus of my paper (Chapman, 2003). This review will look at motivation through the issues of student engagement, student effort, intrinsic and extrinsic rewarding, and student attachment to school. It includes what stimulates motivation in students academically at the middle level grades, what schools can do to help with this lack of motivation, what classroom teachers can do to increase motivation, how an advisory program impacts connections/motivation, and if rewards/recognition from teachers impact student motivation.

Engagement

This first section of my literature reviews includes the topic of engagement. The three main areas of focus will be on what engagement is, four goals to help students become engaged, and also what strategies teachers can use in the classroom.

Engagement is an investment in and effort directed toward learning and understanding skills and knowledge promoted in academics (Newmann et al., 1992). Marks (2000) stated, "Engagement is important in school experience because of its logical relationship to achievement and to optimal human development" (p. 155).

Disengaged students generally are easy to pick out in a classroom. These are the students who are just watching the clock tick by waiting for the class period to end. They may have their books closed a number of minutes before the bell rings. These same

students are often tardy to class and it appears not to bother them. They often sit slouched down in their desks and appear to be in another land, tuning out the lesson, looking out the window and possibly even napping during class (Black, 2003). Anderman and Maehr (1994); Curwin (2006); and Harter, Whitesell & Kowalski (1992) state that motivation issues are a problem for many young adolescents. They state how adolescents receive too much motivation, do not receive enough motivation, and use motivation towards inappropriate activities.

Strong, Silver, and Robinson (1995) did research on what students want and what really motivates them. During their research, they found students who are engaged in their work are generally energized by four goals: 1) success; 2) originality; 3) curiosity; and 4) the need for involvement with others, or relationships. Therefore, if teachers can meet these four goals, then students may show a higher level of motivation. Goal theory focuses on the reasons or purposes students perceive while achieving (Ames, 1992; Maehr & Midgley, 1991; Midgley 1993).

Success

Young adolescents need and want work that enables them to reveal their sense of who they are and allows them to improve and become successful individuals (Strong et al., 1995). In a society where success is so highly rated, one must be cautious because it can lead to high motivation, but it can also lead to less motivation. For teachers to allow the goal of success to increase motivation, Strong et al. (1995) believe three conditions need to be met:

1. We must clearly articulate the criteria for success and provide clear, immediate, and constructive feedback.

2. We must show students that the skills they need to be successful are within their grasp by clearly and systematically modeling these skills.
3. We must help them see success as a valuable aspect of their personalities.

(p.9)

Teachers need to be cautious of perfectionist students (Pacht, 1984). Perfectionists can struggle with motivation because they are so consumed with fear of making mistakes. Pacht (1984) says to watch for symptoms of perfectionism: measurement of one's own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment; all-or-nothing evaluations that label anything other than perfection as failure; procrastination in getting started on work that will be judged; and long delays in completing assignments because the work must be perfect from beginning to end. Perfectionist students need to learn everyone makes mistakes.

Teachers need to make sure the definition of success is defined and apparent to students in the classroom. When this has been accomplished, students will know when they have done a successful job and they will know what to do to improve their work. Teachers must show samples of work that has achieved high, average, and low levels of accomplishment. These examples will help with clarity and allow students to recognize what they need to do to achieve their own level of success, even for perfectionist students (Strong et al., 1995; and Pacht, 1984).

Originality

For students to be motivated to find out who they are and who they want to be, these young adolescents need and want work that allows them to express themselves through originality and creativity (Strong et al., 1995). Classroom climate is important for

students to feel comfortable to express their originality. When a classroom is a caring and supporting environment, students tend to participate more in the process of learning (Brophy, 2004). Unfortunately traditional classroom projects are designed around a specific skill rather than self-expression. Probably the number one most damaging thing schools do is view creativity as a form of play, instead of viewing it as seriousness that makes creative work meaningful to each student. Strong et al. (1995) share four ways to help encourage self-expression in young adolescents.

1. Connect creative projects to students' personal ideas and concerns.
2. Expand what counts as an audience.
3. Consider giving students more choice.
4. Use the "abstracting" strategy to help students fully understand a genre and to maintain high standards. (p. 11)

Curiosity

People are naturally inquisitive about a variety of things. Young adolescents are no different. They need and want work that will spark their curiosity and rouse their need for deep understanding (Strong et al., 1995). For a curriculum to spark curiosity in young adolescents, it needs to include the information about a topic that is incomplete or contradictory, and the topic needs to relate to the lives of the students.

One adolescent issue students encounter is independence. Students want to know how they can detach themselves from their parents and other adults (Gerler, Drew, & Mohr, 1990). Strong et al. (1995) give an example on how this topic could get related in the classroom. If the topic of class was the American Revolution, then teachers could

make the connection by having the students answer the question, “When is rebellion justified?”

Another adolescent issue is the need to search for identity. Young adolescents are trying to decide who they want to be and what they want to become (Marcia, 1980). Strong et al. (1995) give an example on how this topic could get connected in the classroom. If in math class the topic was percentages, the teacher could ask students to determine their likes and dislikes and then compute the percentage of their life spent in various activities.

A third issue during the period of young adolescence is relationships and stature. As individuals they are trying to figure how important the opinions of peers and family are to them (Gerler et al., 1990). An example Strong et al. (1995) use to connect this topic is if a teacher was using Jane Austen’s book *Emma*, he/she could ask students to converse how stature and reputation affect Emma’s decisions and your own.

The fourth adolescent issue involves students learning responsibility. Young adolescents are trying to make a decision on what they want to take responsibility for and what responsibility is expected of them (Weldy, 1995). Strong et al. (1995) share an example on how this topic could get related in the classroom through the use of Ecology. To help make the responsibility connection, teachers could ask students to investigate social organizations working to improve the environment in their town, state, and nation.

Involvement

Young adolescents need schoolwork, which will enhance their relationships with people they care about (Strong et al., 1995). Generally, people have a tendency to work hardest when there is a give and take relationship; I value what you have to offer and you

value what I have to offer. Students do not see homework this way; it is a more unbalanced relationship. Students do not feel the teacher is in need of their knowledge. However, if students were to work together on a jigsaw activity where each person's knowledge of a topic is needed for the final project, then the students see this involvement as more balanced and worthy of working on in depth. If teachers can find ways to keep students involved, this will help with the needs of goal theory (Strong et al., 1995).

Skinner and Belmont (1993) say engagement shows children reacting in a positive way towards an activity or task they take pleasure in. Usually this engagement is involved around activities or tasks they are at ease doing and in which they will exert effort. Skinner and Belmont also state how the opposite of engagement is disaffection. Children who are disaffected tend to be more passive and give up easily when a task is more challenging. These children can also appear bored, depressed, anxious, or even angry. Students who have what is referred to as learned helplessness (Brophy, 2004) can apply themselves to some content areas, but not all. If they are faced with a difficult or challenging situation, they tend to get too frustrated and just stop or not want to tackle the problem. They do not believe they can successfully complete the task and choose to become helpless on the particular task (Brophy, 2004).

Developmental factors and students' perceptions about their own abilities play a role in their level of engagement in academics. Developmentally, young adolescents change physically at different rates. Puberty can be early set or not happen until one even enters high school. Mentally, students may develop at different rates as well. Just because an individual is physically developed, it cannot be assumed the mental development is

there. This can be reversed as well. All individuals will develop both mentally and physically at different rates. With young adolescents developing at different rates, this can play a role into how they see themselves fitting in with their peers and affect their levels of self-esteem (Anderman & Midgley, 1998).

The older students become, the less likely they are to take risks and engage themselves in activities they are not sure they will succeed in. Young adolescents take failure following high effort as more negative than failure that results from minimal or no effort at all. Therefore, students' attitudes about their capabilities affect their willingness to engage themselves in academic learning (Anderman & Midgley, 1998). Middle school students' level of engagement is also highly influenced by their peers just as much if not more than by their family and teachers (Mac Iver & Reuman, 1994).

How can we really measure engagement? Chapman (2003) believes the most practical and common way to measure engagement is to get reports from the children. Chapman believes children will tell you if they feel engaged or disaffected in an activity. Having students complete a checklists or use rating scales are other methods one can use to help measure engagement. Teachers, observations, and student work samples can also help measure student engagement.

Suggestions

Whether the decrease in student engagement amongst young adolescents is the result of unmotivated students or of school or teacher practices that fail to sufficiently interest and engage all students, research states that the situation can be corrected (Brooks, Freiburger, & Grotheer, 1998; Anderman & Midgley 1998). Middle school teachers have such short periods of time to have contact with students so it easy to

underestimate how a teacher can influence a student. Schools who are implementing the middle school philosophy may find a schedule, which suits teachers and students to provide a motivating, learning environment. This motivational focus can be accomplished through both in-school activities and homework (Anderman & Midgley 1998).

Anderman and Midgley (1998) suggested a number of methods for teachers to use in helping increase the motivation of young adolescents to learn in an academic setting. The use of extrinsic rewards, which are found to be most effect when the reward is closely related to the task, should be used sparingly. They are found to be most effective when the reward is closely related to the task. If the reward, or prize, is given with minimal effort involved, the reward becomes meaningless to the student (Brooks et al., 1998). Skinner and Belmont (1993) believe that classroom expectations need to be clear and consistent in order to keep motivation high. In presenting extrinsic rewards, helping students understand the criteria of a project is important. Students need to be given examples of what high, average, and low-level work look like. Teachers should also discuss how the task would be evaluated (Strong et al., 1995). Anderman and Midgley (1998) state that evaluation of a student's work needs to be based on the task and not in comparison to other student's work.

Emphasizing Effort

This second part of my literature review focuses on student effort towards creating more motivation. The three main areas for this section will touch on are failure syndrome, homework, and teacher feedback as related to young adolescents.

Mendler (2000) believes that many students who appear to be presenting themselves unfavorably, through their lack of motivation or their inappropriate behavior,

are really trying to cover up their concerns about their inadequate level of academic skills or performance (p. 9). Teachers need to look beyond inappropriate behavior to find the academic skills students are lacking and try to assist them with these skills. Once the skills are obtained, then the level of inappropriate behavior will diminish.

Failure Syndrome

Failure syndrome (Brophy, 2004) is an area students seem to struggle with. These students may not be the low achievers, but they are afraid of failure. Failure syndrome students tend to approach assignments with very low expectations of success and tend to give up at early signs of difficulty (Brophy, 2004). These students generally do not put forth their best effort because they do not want to fail. They would rather stop a task when it becomes difficult.

Students who have what is referred to as learned helplessness can apply themselves to some content areas, but not necessarily all content areas. If they are faced with a difficult or challenging situation, they tend to get too frustrated and just stop or not want to tackle the problem. They do not believe they can successfully complete the task and so choose to become helpless on the particular task (Brophy, 2004).

Failure syndrome students need assistance with trying to regain self-confidence in their academic abilities. They also need help in developing strategies for coping with failure and persisting with problem-solving efforts when they experience difficulties. Some of these strategies revolve around what Ames (1992) has called "cognition retraining". The three approaches Brophy (2004) suggests include attribution retraining, efficacy retraining, and strategy retraining.

Brophy (2004) explains attribution retraining as a strategy which involves bringing about changes in students' tendencies to relate failure to lack of ability rather than to a remedial cause, such as lack of effort. Failure syndrome students need to be taught how to concentrate on the task at hand rather than worry about failing. This takes modeling and practice along with feedback to teach students. Failure syndrome students also need skills to cop with failures by retracing their steps to find their mistake (Brophy, 2004).

As adults we are often telling children it is all right to make mistakes. Mendler (2000) believes students need to be allowed to redo, retake, and revise. It appears the mistake we are making, as adults is not allowing students to fix their mistakes in the classroom. Mendler mentions how teachers need to allow and emphasize effort to their students. Students need to realize it is okay to make mistakes and to learn from them (Mendler, 2000).

The third skill Brophy (2004) shares failure syndrome students need help modeling and practicing is to learn where their failure is coming from. Is the failure due to lack of effort, or insufficient effort, lack of information, or use of ineffective strategies rather than lacking in ability? Attribution retraining, as well as efficacy training and strategy training, requires exposing students to a planned series of experiences, along with modeling, socialization, practice and lots of feedback (Brophy, 2004).

Homework

To get students to do work, one method is to make sure the work they are given is worthy of their effort. Homework that is given needs to be authentic and engaging.

Students need to find more of a reason to do the work other than to avoid getting a zero

on an assignment. One method or approach that many teachers are finding valuable is project-based, or problem-based, assignments because they seem to be very engaging for the students (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006).

Homework really has three areas in which educators need to focus. The three areas include length, clarity, and relevance to students' lives. For the length of the assignment Paulu (1998) established the guideline of no more than two hours of homework per night for students in grades 7-9. Homework needs to be clear and relevant to students' lives and at the same time be challenging and manageable.

Homework has its complications to keep in mind; successful homework can depend a great deal on students' home environment. Not all students go home to a supportive and quiet environment to study in. These students generally have little chance at being successful with home-assigned work (Lenard, 1997). Black (1996) states how homework may contribute to a student's negativity towards school, specifically if homework is a conflict between parents and students, and if homework may involve punishment and/or other consequences at school.

One suggestion to help make homework more engaging and help increase effort is to have specific expectations. Paulu (1998) suggests how both parents and students need these expectations communicated clearly at the beginning of the school year and reinforced throughout the year. Some examples include "What are the penalties for late or incomplete homework?" "What days will homework be collected?" and "How can students and parents contact you if there is a question or problem?" Paulu (1998) also suggests being as consistent as possible throughout the school year.

Paulu (1998) and Patton (1994) both comment on making sure that the purpose of the task is clear to students. Students and even parents are less likely to become frustrated with the task if they understand the reasoning of the assignment. Black (1996) reminds educators to not underestimate the amount of time for students to complete the assignment. This time also needs to include students' time for getting organized and prepared to start the assignment. Also, teachers need to give a variety of different assignments to help prevent the homework from becoming monotonous.

Feedback

Teachers need to ensure they are providing proper feedback to get students to put forth effort on their academic tasks. Schunk (2000) states how feedback can help students if they view the feedback as credible and related to the specific skill or task at hand. Schunk (2000) believes if the feedback is not credible it will not only not motivate the students, but could also be damaging to the students' morale. Schunk (2000) cautioned to not overuse the technique of feedback.

Brophy (2004) states how teachers need to make it clear to failure syndrome students on how they are to work conscientiously and persistently. Students need to make sure they are submitting work that is done completely and correctly, and asking teachers if they need assistance. Teachers need to monitor their work and provide feedback, which includes praising their successes, calling attention to progress, and provide students with a place to publically display their successes (Brophy, 2004).

Attachment

This third section of my literature review pivots around how students need to feel attached to school. Besides explaining student attachment needs, the ideas of positive school environment and advisory programs are discussed.

Needs

Maslow (1962) believes human needs fall into an order of hierarchy and to meet these needs, they need to be met in this order: 1) Physical needs (sleep, thirst); 2) Safety needs (freedom from danger and anxiety); 3) Love needs (acceptance from parents, peers and teachers); 4) Esteem needs (confidence in one's abilities); and 5) Needs for self-actualization (satisfaction of curiosity). Maslow (1962) believes if children come to school tired and/or hungry, they will be less likely to be motivated in school because their needs are not being met in the order of hierarchy. So, teachers need to remember in order to motivate students, teachers/schools may need to address the student's lower needs along with the higher needs which are more closely related with school learning.

Alderman (2004) gives this definition of what attachment is and how it helps connect students to school:

Students are socially bonded to the extent that they have reciprocal social and emotional ties to adults and peers in the school. This attachment is reciprocal: "The school/teacher cares about me and I care about my actions." Therefore, students have a vested interest in meeting expectations of others and abiding by the norms of behavior expected in the school. (p. 203)

Children are more motivated when they feel welcome in school. When students feel welcome at school they believe the school wants them there and values who they are

as an individual (Curwin, 2006). A student's positive belief and identity with school is a form of attachment. Attachment is a very important part in human biological and emotional development. Attachment is needed for one to survive and also to help with adaptive development during one's life cycle (Soares, Lemos, & Almeida, 2005).

Positive Environment

Manning and Bucher (2005) refer to attachment as students feeling they are a part of positive middle school environment. In their book *Teaching in the Middle School*, Manning and Bucher (2005) list a number of phrases they have heard teachers, students, administrators, and staff say. "A positive school environment:

- encourages a sense of collaboration among students and educators."
- emphasizes teamwork and trust."
- has everyone committed to working toward common goals."
- is centered around the learner." (student centered)
- is a safe place where you can feel free to say what you believe and know that other people will listen to you."
- is a place where we all try to work together to make things better. Not just in our classroom but throughout the whole school."
- encourages students to achieve."
- is a place where other people respect what you say."
- helps you teach more than academics. Students feel a commitment toward each other as well as toward the whole school." (p. 203-204)

Curwin (2006) states to motivate young adolescents, school personnel need to make sure the students feel welcome when they are at school. He believes these young

adolescents are more likely to want to learn and perform in their academics when they feel they can connect emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically with school. When students want to come to school, they learn better in the academic setting.

Schools must change to be successful at finding ways to reach the students who are resistant and disconnected learners. Curwin (2006) suggests six main principles to help guide the needed changes in schools. These six principles are:

1. Schools are for all children, not just good ones.
2. Learning something (even a little something) is better than nothing.
3. Any procedure that helps good students get better and bad students get worse has no place in school.
4. Children need to be part of something bigger than themselves.
5. To get better at something, kids need the opportunity to do it.
6. Children are more likely to heal when they offer help than when they receive it. (p. 11-12)

Advisory Programs

One important part of students feeling welcome, or having a sense of attachment at school is through the middle-level teacher advisory programs as stated in *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe* (National Middle School Association, 2003). Beane and Lipka (1987), as cited by the NMSA (2003), explain that teacher advisory programs need to be designed to focus around the affective needs of young adolescents. Some of these needs include how to get along with peers, dealing with developmental issues, both physically and mentally, how to be successful in school, and how to deal with bullying issues. Clark and Clark (1994), as cited by NMSA (2003), believe teacher

advisory programs at the middle level grades need to help with issues of promoting social development, working on academic issues, positive involvement with teachers and peers, providing an adult advocate for each young adolescent, and creating a positive school climate.

Glasser (2005) shares seven caring habits all individuals need to do to others and receive from others. These seven caring habits include supporting, encouraging, accepting, listening, trusting, negotiating differences, and respect. Glasser (2005) also shares habits that can destroy relationships. These destructive habits include criticizing, complaining, blaming, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing. These positive and destructive habits can be discussed, role-played, and practiced through teacher-advisory programs at the middle school level (NMSA, 2003).

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

This fourth section of my literature review visits the topic of rewards to help with motivation. This section will focus on the two main ideas of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation comes from within, and is generally considered more durable and self-enhancing (Kohn, 1993). Kohn explains how intrinsic motivation is too radically individualized for teachers to apply it in the classroom settings because it is a concept that exists for each individual. Extrinsic motivation is described as a student being motivated in academic learning purely for the sake of attaining a reward or for avoiding some type of punishment. Practices that reinforce extrinsic motivation in schools include publicly recognizing students for academic achievements; giving out

stickers, candy, and other rewards; and taking away privileges, such as recess, on the basis of students' academic performance (Brooks et al., 1998).

While any kind of motivation seems preferable to none, there is compelling evidence that students who are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated fare better (Brooks et al., 1998). Some research demonstrates that using extrinsic motivators to engage students in academic learning can both lower achievement and negatively affect student motivation (Dev, 1997). Dev also found that students who are intrinsically motivated come out ahead in a number of areas. Intrinsically motivated students generally earn higher grades and achievement test scores than extrinsically motivated students (Dev, 1997). This is something teachers need to look at due to the NCLB Act of 2001. Kohn (1993) stated that intrinsically motivated students are more likely to be lifelong learners, continue to educate themselves outside the formal school setting long after external motivators such as grades and diplomas are removed.

Sternberg and Lubart (1995, as cited in Strong et al., 1995) argue that the division of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is too simple to reflect the many complex and interrelated factors that influence students' motivation to succeed in school. Sternberg and Lubart point out that many successful people are motivated by both internal and external factors. They also suggest that educators should build on both types of motivation when working to engage students more in their academic learning.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation is based on the three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Knowing these needs, educators can help meet some of these needs by establishing a classroom that supports a sense of membership and opportunity for autonomy.

One way to meet these psychological needs is through cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning means to work towards a common goal in the classroom; this could be done in pairs or small groups (Kohn, 1986). Kohn (1986) states

I do think teachers ought to make time for students to pursue independent work, too, but the more compelling point is that cooperative interaction may simply be the most powerful way to help each child find his own voice, make his own discoveries, devise his own connections to ideas and texts. Talking is not merely a way of conveying existing ideas to others; it is also a way by which we explore ideas, clarify them and make them our own. (p. 211)

Educators can also increase interest by embellishing tasks to make them more attractive through including student control, curiosity and personalization. If this can be done then students will hopefully do the task because they want to, not because they might receive an extrinsic reward (Alderman, 2004). Strong et al. (1995) explain that before educators can use success as a motivational tool, three main conditions need to be met. These conditions include: 1) criteria must be clearly explained and feedback needs to be immediate, clear and constructive; 2) students need to be shown that success is within their reach by explaining and modeling these skills; 3) educators need to help students see how success will be a valuable aspect of their personalities.

Evidence and Ideas

A team of curriculum experts shares five strategies to help motivate reluctant readers. One is to make sure students are provided with high-interest and age-appropriate reading materials. The other strategies Veto (2006) suggests are to allow students to get engaged with reading via online programs, offering students a variety of content to

choose from, making sure each student's needs are focused on, and to have lots of access to print through books, magazines, and newspapers (Veto, 2006).

Brown (2006) suggests six basic strategies to help with motivation of young adolescents. These include 1) teachers need to remind students of their success and build on their hopes, 2) use evaluation techniques which do not shut down hope, 3) create an environment which is warm and accepting and one that promotes favorable attitudes and effort, 4) meet the needs of young adolescents, 5) help build hope in students by providing them with appropriate challenges while giving them adequate time and support, and 6) help students create realistic goals and provide them with feedback.

Bishop and Pflaum (2005) found in their study how young adolescents value active approaches when studying relevant curriculum at their own pace. They believe middle school students need choice, technology, and collaboration included throughout learning opportunities to enhance student engagement. Possibly one of the most important key components to middle level students' motivation is to invite them into the dialogue about learning.

Lee and Smith's (1993) research found that restructuring grades six to eight to follow the theory and practices of the middle school philosophy helped schools be more successful with the academic achievements, motivation, and engagement with the schooling of young adolescents. They also found the schools that encourage and use team teaching showed evidence of higher achievement. Lee and Smith (1993) explain how less ability grouping and a less departmental structure appear to promote social equity in achievement of young adolescents.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this literature review was to look at different ways teachers could make an impact on motivating students in the middle school grades. In this chapter I will share the main ideas and practices based on research that I used.

Anderman and Midgley (1998) wrap up the main idea of helping to increase motivation in the middle-level classrooms:

Middle school teachers often teach many students over the course of a school day, and for a relatively short period of time. Given such brief contact with so many, it is easy to underestimate the influence that one's teaching practices can have on any one individual. Current moves to implement the middle school philosophy may provide a more facilitative schedule for both teachers and students, but even in a highly structured middle school, teachers can take specific steps to provide a learning environment that will promote the motivation of all students. (p. 5)

Four main areas (student engagement, student effort, student attachment, and rewards) were found to answer my research question: What stimulates academic motivation in students at the middle level grades?

Student Engagement

- Skinner and Belmont (2003) say engagement shows children reacting in a positive way towards an activity or task they enjoy.
- Middle school students' level of engagement is also highly influenced by their peers just as much if not more than by their family and teachers (Mac Iver & Reuman, 1994).

- One method or approach that many teachers are finding valuable is project-based, or problem-based, assignments because they seem to be very engaging for the students (Darling-Hammond & Ifill-Lynch, 2006).

Student Effort

- Mendler (2000) believes students need to be allowed to redo, retake, and revise.
- Students need to realize it is okay to make mistakes and to learn from them (Mendler, 2000).
- For the length of the assignment Paulu (1998) established the guideline of no more than two hours of homework per night for students in grades 7-9.
- Schunk (2000) states how feedback can help students if they view the feedback as credible and related to the specific skill or task at hand.

Student Attachment

- When students feel welcome at school they believe the school wants them there and values who they are as an individual (Curwin, 2006).
- Manning and Bucher (2005) refer to attachment as students feeling they are a part of positive middle school environment.
- One important part of students feeling welcome, or having a sense of attachment at school is through the middle-level teacher advisory programs as stated in *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe* (NMSA, 2003).

Rewards

- Kohn (1993) explains how intrinsic motivation is too radically individualized for teachers to apply it in the classroom settings because it is a concept that exists for each individual.
- While any kind of motivation seems preferable to none, there is compelling evidence that students who are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated fare better (Brooks et al., 1998).
- Some research demonstrates that using extrinsic motivators to engage student in academic learning can both lower achievement and negatively affect student motivation (Dev, 1997).
- Kohn stated that intrinsically motivated students are more likely to be lifelong learners, continue to educate themselves outside the formal school setting long after external motivators such as grades and diplomas are removed (1993).

Chapter 5

RESULTS: CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

After my completion of the review of literature on motivating young adolescents, I took ideas on student engagement, emphasis on effort, intrinsic and extrinsic rewarding, and the student need to bond at school and applied them in my classroom. I focused on students who appeared to lack in motivation and are not driven with the love of learning or the love of challenge. Included here are the results of some of my classroom applications.

Engagement

I focus daily on finding ways to keep my students actively engaged in the classroom. Some days it may be as simple as having students do board work or as elaborate as group projects. I have found if I keep students engaged in class, the academic motivation level seems to rise.

Opposite Simon Says

Teaching middle level students math can be a challenge in itself and trying to reach the unmotivated learners adds another obstacle. In order to catch students' attention, I try to both energize many of my lessons and make it more real life, or relevant to them.

Recently I was getting ready to introduce a lesson on multiplicative inverses, or reciprocals. This can be easy for many students, but can also seem boring to many. To liven the day, I played a game of *Opposite Simon Says*. To play this game, I had students stand beside their desk to start the class period. We talked about how to play *Simon Says*, to make sure all students had an understanding of how the game works. Then I explained

to them the “twist” I was adding to the day’s game. Any time I said “*Simon Says*,” do something, they had to do the opposite of what I had said.

Some examples of the game are as follows: *Simon Says* “smile” and many of the students had a sad or frowning look on their faces. *Simon Says* “touch your knee” and many of the students thought the opposite of knee was their elbow, so they touched their elbow. *Simon Says* “look to the South of the room” so students turned and faced the North direction. *Simon Says* “close your right eye” so many of the students closed their left eye. Some were creative and said opposite would be to “open the left eye”. My students really enjoyed this activity and actually got pretty good at it. I was really impressed with the extreme some students took the opposite term.

Playing this opening activity had all of my students engaged and thinking opposites in a non-mathematical sense before I even started my math lesson. This had students wondering where I was going with this game. I love having students anticipating what I will be teaching for the day. Some of my students, I believe, think I might be a little crazy and that is okay. I just enjoy getting them energized and engaged.

When I started teaching the mathematical lesson of reciprocals, my students had a heads up that it was going to have something to do with opposites. They had a connection and were geared up and ready to go. I explained to my students how reciprocals or multiplicative inverses always have a product of one and then explained how to find the reciprocal. When I gave the example of $\frac{2}{3}$ I had a couple of students right away say $\frac{3}{2}$: they were thinking opposites. They were so excited to have known the answer before I even explained the process.

Next, I gave each student a white board and marker. Instead of having the students do the guided practice on paper, I had them write their answers on the white boards. I enjoy doing this so each student gets to be engaged and then I get to see each person's answer to see how things are going before they go to independent work. The students really enjoy the marker boards. The one thing I learned quickly about using them is I tell the students they have one minute to draw. I know they want to so I just allow them to do it and get it out of the way. They smile and take off drawing or doodling.

When students get into independent practice, I allow them to work by themselves for a short bit and then they find a partner to check answers. They really enjoy this. They want to get as far as they can so they can see how they are doing. I do not want them to keep doing something wrong and the students enjoy getting to help each other out. This usually leads to high self esteem when we go to check the assignment. Students are willing to share answers; they feel confident since they have already talked answers over with a partner and have increased self esteem which helps increase motivation.

The learning of reciprocals was made fun, anticipating and successful to most students. This is just one example of how a lesson can be energized to motivate resistant learners.

March Madness WebQuest

Many students, whether they are normally motivated or those who are naturally unmotivated, have a hard time focusing on school during the early spring months. Students are ready for a break and ready to be doing activities outside that are not school related. Who can blame them for this? I, too, have times when I get burnt out and am struggling with cabin fever. To help get through March, I have students do a *March*

Madness WebQuest for math classes. Middle school students, generally, enjoy following the NCAA Basketball Tournament. So I have students do a math project that relates directly to the tournament.

The week of Selection Sunday is when I start the WebQuest. A lot of careful planning goes into the partner grouping of my math students. I try to match up a stronger math skilled student with one who struggles a little more or does not care to do math, this is done intentionally for motivation and success purposes. The project is done in pairs with most of the grade coming from the effort the pair put into the assignment. I do this with all three of my math level classes.

The top group gets no extra help. They have to find all the information on their own per the WebQuest-provided procedures. My average classes get a little more information given to them. One example of this is I have a couple of websites available for them to find the history of each team and the previous NCAA basketball tournament champions. I also provide them with a bracket of the teams. My lowest math group gets the two already mentioned, but I also help take them through each step of the procedures to guide and help during the WebQuest. Usually the lower kids need more help, but they still enjoy the activities.

Most of the students really find themselves getting into this math activity. The NCAA basketball tournament is a big topic of the time period and many of the students follow it anyway. This activity allows for them to do math along with following the tournament. The first part of the activity involves the students calculating the percent of wins for each team in each of the four regions. Then they are to search the NCAA

championship history to find out if the current teams have ever won the championship and if so, how many times and in what years.

The next step is to look at the data they have found so far and from only that information they are to determine who should win the current year's tournament and explain why they chose the team. This allows for a little debate among the pair, but it is great to hear them explain their reasoning.

Then the partners move to a step looking at the elimination process. This allows them to determine the probability of a team winning and how those chances get better with each round of the tournament. To add to the fun, I have each student draw a team and follow them through the tournament. If their team happens to make to the final four, then they have a chance of cutting an assignment in half. If their team happens to be the champion, they can win a free assignment pass. The students really have fun following their team to see if they can win themselves a free assignment pass.

There are a few other parts to the WebQuest, but the main reason of doing this activity is to have students engaged and doing math, which is relevant to them at the time. Having a partner helps take the strain off of those who are not real strong in math. I am amazed at how well the groups of partners work together. They have interesting ways of getting organized and working on the project. This makes for a successful project for all of the students. My math students are engaged and motivated to do well with their partner. Effort is a huge part in the grading of this project.

Together We Can Solve This

One book I enjoy taking mathematical activities from is a book titled *United We Solve* (1996) by Tim Erickson. The activities in the book are designed to help supplement

problem-solving curriculum in mathematics. The different tasks require high standards for student performance, communication, and the understanding of mathematical ideas. All the different activities in Erickson's book are designed for groups. There is a structure provided for students to learn to work together.

The particular problems in this book are a collection of problems designed for the middle school curriculum. There are many ways to solve the problems. It may take students a few times of doing these types of problems before they are comfortable or realize that talking is a requirement of the activities. Usually after a few problems, students start talking more and really getting involved with the activity.

Some huge benefits can be observed of groups doing these types of activities. The biggest one I have seen is interest. Almost all of the students are engaged almost all of the time. Success is another benefit observed. Students in a group can solve harder and larger problems than the individuals can. One has to remember the good old saying of how "More heads put together is better than one." This is so true even in mathematical group settings.

Peer help is great in finding multiple approaches to solve the problems, and they usually explain things well to their peers. Group work also helps reach or get the attention of students so much more effectively than regular old seatwork can. When in groups, students naturally use mathematical vocabulary as they work through the problems. This helps reinforce the meaning of the vocabulary words when communication is used.

There have been students at times I felt were not real strong with their math skills or were a little on the disruptive side, but they managed to surprise me. They made effective contributions to the group. Working together is a skill all can learn. We just

need to take the time in our curriculum to teach it explicitly. Collaboration and communication seem to fall hand and hand. Middle school students generally are at a social stage in their lives, so why not put it to use in a math group activity where they are required to talk?

The way these activities work are quite simple. Each activity is on usually four to six cards, which just need to be cut apart. Each card holds a clue to the problem. To begin each problem, the cards are handed to a group and each member gets one, maybe two if there are more card clues than members. The person it is given to can only view the card. Reading it or telling about it to the other group members is how they are to share the information. This makes each person important to the solution and allows each member to communicate with the other group members.

If a group gets stuck or has a question that no other group member can answer, I will help try to steer that group in a workable direction. Once a group believes they have an answer to the problem, they share their solution and how they arrived at it with me. All cards are collected, and I save them for the next year they get to be used.

What makes this an even more exciting activity is once all the groups have their solutions, I have the groups share with the others. If there are differences in the answers then the debate or sharing of ideas as a large group begins. I have witnessed some awesome discussions when the small groups come back to the large group. Sometimes they can all agree on an answer and other times, not. We focus more on the thought processes and collaboration than the actual answers. Students appear to get engaged and enjoy these types of mathematical activities.

Technology Tools

I have been involved with a group called *Enhancing Education Through Technology* (E2T2) for the past four years. This group was created through grant funding and is lead by our local AEA office. They have shared a lot of different types of mathematical ideas and programs focusing on education to us over these three years. Every single item I have brought back to use with my students has gone over well and helped to motivate the kids in different ways.

Probably one of my favorites, as well as the students, has been using what is called a Classroom Performance System (CPS) or as the students and I refer to it, the “clickers.” This is an interactive system where I can put questions on a computer program and present it to the whole class at one time. It projects like a game or quiz show type but is all individually answered and no one is eliminated. All answers are kept anonymous.

At the beginning of the school year I add all students name into the system by class periods. Each student is assigned a number and that is how the activity stays anonymous to the other students. Each student then takes a hand held remote that is the same as their assigned number. Once I read through the question, students can click on the button of their answer choice. Questions can be true or false and/or multiple-choice styles.

On my computer screen I can tell which “number” has answered and which ones have not yet. When all students have answered the question, the correct answer is revealed. Students get instant feedback. When the correct answer is shown it also reveals how many of the students answered correctly and how many chose the different answers.

What even added more to this activity were the mathematical avenues we can look at. With the click of a button on my computer, we can get look at different types of graphs as to how the question was answered. The program keeps a running percentage of correct answers. The students are competitive without knowing whom they are really competing with.

Two years ago I had one particular incident with the “clickers” which I will probably never forget. It was great. My lower level math class was a group who really just did not want to put forth much effort. So, one day I told them we needed to review and see how the class was doing with a list of vocabulary terms. Oh, they moaned and were not happy about it at all. Well, I started getting out these blue hand held remotes for each of them and their attitudes started shifting more towards curiosity. This group had not yet used the “clickers.” I explained how they were assigned a number and how the whole system worked.

We then started the review. Students were hooting and hollering when the answers were revealed and were really happy if they as a class got over 75% of the class correct. We went through the graphs after a few questions, and this helped them understand even more. When we had finished with the review, I had a student ask, “Can we please do this again and see if we can raise our class percentage of correct answers?” I am sure my jaw probably dropped a little. This is a class that really did not like to do much for work, but to do something again was amazing.

We did do it again, and they did improve as a class. We even made it through the questions a third time. It was a wonderful experience for all involved. I not only found a way to get my students engaged, but they were also motivated to do well on it and do it

more. I have used the CPS “clickers” with a lot of my classes on different topics. I like it because I can go into the reports section of the program and look to see exactly how a particular student did perform and/or how the class did on specific questions. This is a wonderful program to use in a classroom both for students and for teachers.

Student Effort

Trying to get middle school students to put forth effort is sometimes one of the biggest challenges as teachers we can face. Young adolescents have so much other stuff on their minds that often schoolwork is usually at the bottom of their list of things to do. They are more worried about how they are fitting in with their friends, trying to figure out their own identities, and social time is at a maximum level. One key component I focus on in my classroom to help achieve effort is the idea of how we all make mistakes; we just need to learn from them.

Take Two

One way I have found to help get students motivated to do their daily assignments is to give them points for just doing the practice. I do not believe when a student is in the practicing stages of learning about a skill that they should be graded on how well the work is done. Practice is a time to like it is called, practice, and find mistakes and learn from them. To do this, I give students five points each day they come to class with their assignment completed. I feel this is a non-threatening way to get them to practice. It has worked for a majority of my math students.

I try to give my students approximately 30+ minutes to work in class every day. I want students to have time to ask questions as they arise and to check their progress. I have also found this to cut down on the amount of cheating. The students have the time to

get it done in class so they are not racing around in the morning trying to find someone's paper to copy from.

Since setting up my homework of practice to be based on effort, I have seen such an increase in the number of students who do come to class with their work done. Another plus is having students get with a partner or small group to go over the assignment after we have checked it. This allows for students to help each other to figure out what the mistakes were and how to fix it. Students like to help if they got it correct and the door has been open to know it's okay to make mistakes. They know I do not grade on accuracy of their homework.

Another huge factor is since students are doing their work, now assessment scores have been on the rise. It is amazing how if they just do their work, they seem to understand better and can perform at the higher level. Students just need to see the correlation between doing their work usually means better understanding which means higher assessments scores.

I do this same type of effort grading with my lower level math group with a few adaptations. They get seven out of ten points when they turn their assignment in. This puts them with a 70%, an average score for doing the average work of the assignment. Then they can get the other three points once they have the assignment 100% correct. I have many students who turn in the assignment the first time, get it back, correct, and the process continues until it is all correct.

By having the students work to correct the assignment, they begin to learn the value of how asserting effort can pay off. The students not only see it on their daily assignments, but how it overflows in to the assessments. They love seeing good test

grades. I do add one more step with my tests for this group. I give them one chance after they have taken the test to correct the problems they miss. By doing so, students can earn back half points on the ones they correct.

When doing the test corrections, the students can use their math books and math folders to help find assistance; no adult help is allowed at this time. I try to show if maybe they had slowed down or double checked their work before they turned the assessment in, that maybe they could have gotten the full points instead of just half. After the tests are checked the second time, we go through all the questions as a class. Many of my lower level students are showing huge amounts of improvement, and I believe a lot of this has to do with using effort in the grading system. I do not want to hear, "I do not get it, so why try."

Allowing Choices

Giving student choices, I believe, can be a huge motivating factor, especially with middle level age students. They are at the age where they want to be in control and not having people, mainly adults, telling them what to do. I try to give choices in my math classes in a variety of different manners.

One I use on a fairly regular basis is on daily practices. Many times I give the assignment and then tell the students they may choose five they want to skip or not do. The students think this is wonderful. This really does not affect their learning because they are practicing on many other problems. Then when it is time to check the problems I still go over and explain all because students skip different problems of their choice. So, they are still going to at least hear how the problem should have been worked, even if it was one they chose not to do.

When I do hands on activities or activities, which allow students to use their math skills in relevant projects, I sometimes have two or three they can choose from. Some choose an activity based on something that interests them more, or maybe a certain friend or two is choosing the same activity to do. It really does not matter to me, which one the class chooses because my selection of the activities is done in a way where all of the choices show the same math skills, just in a different way.

My favorite time to do choices in math classes is when we get into our section of probability. I guess it may not really be a choice, but a chance, and the students really get excited about this. I have a large foam dice that has the numbers one through six on it. After we have started probability, I tell the students about the “deal” for today. An example of this is if I roll a “one” then there will be an assignment for the day. If I roll a “two” or “six” then they only have to do half the assignment. If I roll a “five” they will have five extra problems to do, and if I roll a “three” or “four” then the assignment stays as normal.

I give students a couple of minutes to discuss this idea with their classmates. We then take a vote to determine if the class will take the chance or not by conducting a simple show of hands. To this day I have not had a class period that has not wanted to take the chance of rolling for their assignment. Not only does this allow for motivation and choice in assignment, but also it helps with the mathematical concept of probability. Students have really had a fun time rolling for their assignment.

There are basic choices my students are given daily, too. These are more choices based on making appropriate choices in a situation. If I have a student who does not want to do his/her work during the work time given in class, I give them a choice to make.

He/she may continue to sit and do nothing and then see me after school to get it done, or they can make the choice to get busy. I tell them I will give them thirty seconds to make the choice, or they will need to call a parent to help them make the choice.

This may sound kind of harsh, but it really works. Students are given a choice and most do make the appropriate one. I have had a few over the years who have not, and they have had to find me after school. When they found out I really did make them stay after school to finish, they usually did not make that choice again. Students need to test the boundaries and many usually will. I just need to make sure I have close and tight boundaries so I do not get pushed too far.

I really enjoy working with middle level students. I am currently about to finish up getting my masters in middle level education. To work with this unique age group one really needs to have a good understanding of young adolescents and what makes them “tick.” I have found many ways to get my students motivated, but there are always new ones that come along that need something different. I believe I will constantly be adding techniques to motivate students and adding to my teacher “toolbox” until the day I retire.

Student Attachment

Personally, creating a welcoming and caring environment is at the top of my list for things to do while at school. I know when I have been in an environment where people have taken the time to get to know me, welcome me, and treat all with respect, I feel safe and comfortable. I believe this is necessary in a classroom to have learning take place by all students.

Setting the Tone

Every morning I try to be in the hallway outside my classroom greeting students and staff as they enter and go by my room. Granted, sometimes things come up like parent phone calls or meetings, but as a whole one can find me greeting those coming in to start their day. The same is true at the end of the day. I like to be in the hall to make sure things run smoothly, but also to wish students an enjoyable afternoon and evening. Even wishing those with special events that day a good luck can be heard in the halls.

If a student has been absent, and I see he/she has returned, I try to make a special point to welcome them back to school and let them know they were missed. Some students have looked at me in surprise that I actually noticed and remembered they were absent.

At the beginning of the school year, it is very important to set the “tone” for the classroom for the year. I take the time to let students know they need to come to class prepared. As we talk about this, I allow students to share with me any thoughts they have that they think being prepared means. I keep a list of each class period on poster board. If any key points I want them to know were missed, then I make sure to bring them into the discussion.

Next, I tell students they need to be to class on time. We go through the same scenario of sharing their thoughts, writing them down and me filling in any gaps. We talk about the importance of being on time and how it not only affects that person, but everyone else in the class. Many students need to know being on time is not just being in the door as the bell rings, but being in their seats ready to go.

The last main “rule” we discuss, to get the right environment in place for the year, is being respectful. This topic usually takes awhile to discuss and has a wide range of ideas or thoughts. I try to make sure the students realize that I want them to be respectful not only toward the adults in my room, but how important it is to show respect to fellow classmates. This brings up such an interesting discussion. Having the different ideas written on poster board allows me to keep them posted and refer back to them when the environment is not running like we all need it to.

One key thing I discuss over and over with the students is bullying. I have a poster, which hangs on my white board right next to the spot where daily assignments are written, stating this is a bully free zone. I do not tolerate bullying and will fight for students who are being bullied. Students know they can come to me if they feel they are being harassed and bullied. A key part of this is having frequent discussions of what bullying can be to different people. I do not go for the phrase “Oh, we were just messing around.” I tell them, we do not mess around like that while at school.

That leads me into the reasoning I try to explain and go over this with all new students each year; students have different ideas of what respect, bullying, and appropriate behavior are and I need all students on the same school expectations. What is allowed to be okay for a student to do at home or other places may be different than what school expectations are. We all just need to be on the same page while at school as to what needs to be done and how. What a better way than to set the tone and go over all the details during the early days of each new school year.

Home Away From Home

One way to facilitate student bonding at school is through teacher/student advisory programs. All teachers in a middle school setting need to be part of the advisory program, which allows for the teacher/student ratio to be smaller; one teacher to about fifteen students is ideal, thus creating a “homey” atmosphere. Middle school children need one adult at school to whom he/she can go to for information and assistance regarding any problem. This can hopefully be met through teacher advisory assignments. This does not in any way take away from a school needing a counselor. They are still very much needed and may help lead some of the discussions in some advisory settings.

One thing we have at our school is teaming, grade-level teams, which allows for teachers to plan together but also for us to discuss student concerns. On a regular basis we are reporting such items as late assignments: these are recorded and kept by the student’s advisor. Then when students are in their home base group environment at the end of the day that teacher knows what that student needs to be doing and can touch base to see what is going on. It is like a “parent” away from home.

We try to do a variety of different activities to assist students in areas such as coping with academic concerns, finding their uniqueness, promoting critical thinking skills, developing listening and understanding skills, building self-esteem and many other topics of concern to middle school students. The activities we have done during teacher advisory time have been huge successes. The one activity I enjoyed watching the students do was an activity where my group got to design a class coat of arms. We chose this activity to help build group identity by developing a personalized coat of arms.

The procedures of the project started with students being divided into six task groups. Each group was to choose a leader and send the leader to visit with me. I explained to the leaders that each group had a task to complete to contribute to the total class project. Each leader drew a task description to take back and work on with their group.

One task was for a group to choose appropriate class colors to put on the design of the coat of arms. The colors needed to somehow be descriptive of this particular advisory group. Task two involved deciding on a mascot to represent the group. Task three was to design a symbol that would represent the class. Task four was to decide on a wish they would like to grant the whole school and choose a symbol to go with the wish. Task five needed to decide on a motto for the class. Task six was to choose three words they hoped people would remember this advisory group for. Each task group had to be prepared to explain the reasoning behind why they chose what they did to the whole group.

After all the explanations were given to the whole group, the putting together of the coat of arms was the next task. The group had to get a plan created on how this coat of arms was going to be put together. I was amazed at how well organized my advisory group was. They had some people creating the shield. The four quadrants of the shield were divided on colored paper and a sheet was given to the different task groups to put their information on. This group of students was so proud of how their coat of arms came together. And, they should have been. I was so proud of the group work, the creative representations of words, and the artwork put into the coat of arms.

We hung the advisory group's coat of arms outside each classroom they were assigned to. I had my group also type an explanation of the reasoning behind the choices

to have posted out on the wall as well. This really added a lot to the meaning of the class coat of arms. This was a great activity to help students feel welcome and a part of a group.

Rewards

The ultimate goal is for my students to use intrinsic rewards as a means toward motivation. In order to achieve this goal, extrinsic rewards can be used to help lead a student to intrinsic rewarding. I try to use a mix of both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in my classes.

Not Giving Up

I guess, one could say, I have adopted a student to work with this school year. One particular boy, I will refer to as “Brian”, was having discipline and other problems in many of his classes. The principal seemed to have it in for him. By that, I mean the principal did not want to work with him; he was ready to just be done with him. The principal was ready to send him to our alternative middle school.

Our school-based interventionist and I believed we had not tried all of the avenues we could with “Brian.” The two of us came up with a plan. The plan was to move “Brian” into my “homeroom” which is the last period of our school day. The reason I was chosen is I did not have the problems with “Brian” that the other teachers seemed to have. “Brian” worked well for me in class, and we always found time to talk with one another. I found him to be a good kid, just one who needed extra guidance and support.

The principal and my fellow teammates decided we would give this a try. We moved “Brian” into my homeroom and moved his locker to outside of my classroom. This was a chance for me to greet him each morning and help him get organized for the

day. He also did not have far to go if he needed to go to his locker during homeroom time. This was going very well for him. "Brian" and I created a nice working relationship and he got a lot done for me; this is an example of attachment.

The problem was still trying to get him to behave and do his work for the other teachers. I met with our behavior specialist, and we thought we would try him on a point sheet. This sheet was to be taken to all of his classes with him. He was to ask each teacher of his work was completed for that particular class and how his classroom behavior was for the day. Then at the end of the day, I would total his points. For each class he got all points awarded, "Brian" received a coupon from me. He got to help set up the ideas of what would be good incentives for him to work toward. I know not all reward systems are good for children, but in this case, it was the thing to do.

"Brian" has a parent who really is not involved in his life. He and his brothers just pretty much run the town when not in school. He does not get much for positive reinforcement. This point sheet was a plus for him. We focused on the positive and then discussed what he could do for the classes in which he did not get the full points. One area we definitely worked on first was homework completion. I was able to assist him and keep him on track with his daily assignments and help keep him organized. This plan was helping to motivate him to do well.

The biggest challenge we have is going over the sheet and discussing what he can do to make each class better. He really wants to do well however, sometimes he will have a bad day. I have tried to explain to him that it is okay to have a bad day every once in awhile. We all have bad days from time to time. That is what makes us appreciate the

days that do go well. We talk a lot about the sheet at the end of the day, and he really enjoys getting his reward cards.

It was set up with little incentives and the biggest one we came up with was lunch with me. To get this reward he had to earn one hundred of the reward cards, and we would go do lunch. When he decided it was time to cash in for the lunch deal, the two of us went and ate lunch at McDonalds. He really enjoyed the praise.

At our school we also have a PRIDE activity which occurs monthly. I am not a huge fan of the program. However, it is basically set up so that students get to participate in an activity for doing what they are already supposed to be doing if they don't get more than a certain number of warnings throughout the month. The boy I am working with just missed February's pride reward by one point. Now, this is a boy who never even came close before during the school year. So to have him miss it by just one point was amazing. I told him he did not make it per the program's "rules" but I still included him in it. I told him he had such a large improvement that I felt he had earned it. "Brian" thanked me with a smile and things continued to go well for him. This is an example of how taking on a child, believing in him, and teaching him how to behave can help motivate an individual.

Final Thoughts

Throughout this review of literature I learned many strategies and have incorporated them in the classroom to help the academic motivation of students. I believe if teachers make a conscience effort to implement strategies to enforce student engagement, student effort, student attachment to school, and rewards, they will see a rise in academic motivation of their students. I plan to share these strategies with my colleagues and collaborate with them on the successes we are experiencing with student motivation in the classroom.

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