Motivation

Do your students want to come to school? Do they see the value that not only attending school offers, but also what their academic success offers to them and their future? We all want our kids to have an internal desire to come to school and do well. When our students have a sense of autonomous motivation, teachers no longer need to rely on methods to control motivation. This helps with classroom management, but, more importantly, it helps students become resilient. They can overcome obstacles in life and in school because they see how it benefits them, and they have something to strive for.

Autonomous Motivation

What are some things that can be done school-wide and in classrooms to help students gain an autonomous sense of motivation?

Student Experts / Student-Taught Mini-Lessons

will not only help keep your students engaged, but they will also help keep them motivated. When a teacher notices that a certain student is mastering a topic or skill, why not have that student teach a mini-lesson to the class? In some subject areas, it can also be effective to have students who are mastering a skill be a “student expert” who other students can go to for a peer-conference or a peer-edit during independent work time. Rotating student experts and student teachers can help motivate students to strive towards becoming an expert or student teacher.

Posting Grades can be an effective method of triggering a sense of motivation and competitiveness. This should only be done with student ID number—never with student names. Posting grades or progress regularly can allow students to self-monitor their academic standing—something many students rarely do.

SMART Goals have students set Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant and Time-Based goals at periodic times in the year. This activity can give students focus and motivation, especially if they are asked to check in and self-monitor their progress on at least a quarterly basis.

Lesson Rationales should be posted on a teacher’s whiteboard, along with the agenda, objectives, homework, etc. When students understand what the “real world” purpose is for lessons, they will have more motivation and take more of a stake in their learning.

Controlled Motivation

Although our goal should be to create autonomous motivation in our students, some forms of rewarding positive behavior may contribute towards an overall sense of positive school climate—which can lead to autonomous motivation.

Quarterly Awards Ceremonies can be used to recognize students who have made school-related achievements (i.e. perfect attendance, Honor Roll, Student of the Week/Month, etc). Recognition awards don’t always need to be based on academics; rather, some schools identify a trait or characteristic to look for (i.e. empathy, or perseverance) and celebrate these achievements as well. This shows students that positive recognition can follow hard work.

Randomized Teacher Questioning is a simple strategy where a teacher uses a means of randomizing the students they call on in class to answer questions. Many teachers use popsicle sticks, for instance, with students’ names written on them. They then draw a stick when asking the class questions. This gives students some motivation to stay engaged during lessons.

“No Opt Out” is a strategy from Doug Lemov’s Teach Like a Champion. The strategy builds students’ engagement and motivation through a teacher call-and-response method that does not allow for an “I don’t know” response. If a student responds to a teacher question with “I don’t know,” the teacher calls on another student to answer the question. The student who did not answer is then asked to repeat the correct response.

Student-Earned Dress-Down Days or Spirit Days Offering students the chance to earn dress down days can give them something specific to work towards. Dress-down days could take the form of School Spirit Days where students are given the option of wearing School-Related clothes instead of school-mandated uniforms.