Enhancing Intrinsic Motivation and Parenting to Help Underachieving Students to Perform Well in School.

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Abstract: This article shares some of the research findings on how intrinsic motivation can be enhanced in areas of self-regulated learning, self-efficacy, locus of control, self –concept, self-esteem, self –worth, cooperative versus competitive learning, moderate risk taking, and the effect of effort and praise. In other words, children who are parented with patience, understanding , affection, and respect will help them to become the best they can be and to accomplish their goals with self- motivation. An array of recommendations from research finds is summed up towards the end of this article. This is thought to be useful and applicable to our context. However, they are by no means the answer to the predicament of the status of achievement in school.

Introduction

The examination oriented nature of schooling in Malaysia has made students engage more time preparing themselves towards passing it. This has enormous implications on their future. Although this linkage appeared to be very important, yet the examination results thus far showed quite a low performance especially among primary school children. Fortunately, performance is better in secondary schools. Observations suggest that students do not seem to be motivated to learn more or to make use of what they already learn.

Definition of terms

The term underachievement is generally used to describe academic performances well below the expectations raised by results of an intelligent test (Blishen, 1969:783). In some cases the IQ score may be lower on the second testing but in other circumstances it will probably be personality factor which cannot be adequately measured by an IQ test, such as low level of aspiration, maladjustment or poor motivation are serving to depress the child's actual performance. In this sense, the knowledge that a child is under-achieving can be a valuable diagnostic tool for teachers and can lead them to pay more attention to the child's motivation and personal adjustment in school, as well as any problems in his life at home. For the purpose of this article, it is the low level of aspiration and lack of motivation that often become pertinent among underachievers in our context.

Johnson and Johnson (1985:260) put intrinsic motivation as motivation that is inherent in the activity and its perceived meaning. Learning for the joy of it, to benefit others, and as a result of personally meaningful feedback are intrinsic to learning activities. Deci and Ryan (1985: 32) relate a psychological definition to intrinsic .Motivation as based in the innate, organism needs for competence and self determination. It energizes a wide variety of behaviors and psychological processes for which the primary rewards are the experience of affectation and autonomy. They further add that emotions are integrally related to intrinsic motivation whereby the emotion of interest plays an important directive role in intrinsically motivated behavior. People naturally approach activities that interest them. An interest is to a large extent, a function of optimal challenge, although there are other factors that also influence people's developing interests. When people are intrinsically motivated, they experience interest and enjoyment, they feel competent and self-determining, they perceive the locus of causality for their behavior to be internal.

For the purpose of this article, intrinsic motivation to learn is for the classroom context. It must reflect many of the aspects of personal responsibility as identified by Weiner (1979:269) which include such factors as obtaining accomplishments through one's own effort, delaying gratification for valued rewards, a gradual loss of self-consciousness or reduction in fear of failure, and a growing sense of personal control or awareness of one's own ability to influence events. It also involves aspects of competence, for example, demonstrating an ability to learn appropriate academic materials in the classroom environment, starting work promptly and finishing it and using the kind of manoeuvres that are useful aids to learn for instance, removing perturbing stimuli and self-talk (Meichenbaum , 1977). Actually, intrinsically motivated behavior perceived locus of causality whereby a person does it for internal rewards such as interest and mastery.

Relation to the state –of-art in schools

The current trend towards prescribed learning, standardized curricula and specified achievement goals are quite independent of classroom or children deographies. In addition the curriculum have built in criteria upon which children and teachers are being evaluated. In such environment, it is clear that children are asked to learn much that is not currently intrinsically motivating them.

According to Deci and Ryan (1982a, cited in Deci and Ryan, 1985), the hard fact of school is that it is move than just the context in which the child's innate curiosity and intrinsic motivation develop, it is also the milieu in which children are being trained to conform with the social fabric, to learn what adults have determined they need to know, and to behave according to external standards and adult values. Because most of these lessons are ones that do not come spontaneously or naturally to the child, school is also a significant

socializing agency, armed with a battery of extrinsic incentives and controls to accomplish the tasks. Through a system of rewards, supports and punishment, a child learns in school what to attend to, what to know, how to behave, and what to value.

Sometimes the students belief in themselves that they are always failing persists, According to Fincham, Hokoda and Sandars (1989) it is not surprising that student's expectations about themselves as academic achievers decline during elementary years, and once children decide that they cannot do well in school, their beliefs tend to persists., therefore undermining future academic achievement.

In addition, teachers are losing their enthusiasm for teaching. Initially they are excited and motivated to teach, to challenge and motivate the children in their classrooms. External pressures of standardized curricula and other manifestations of a culture obsessed with achievement have the negative impact on their own interest and effectiveness in the classroom milieu.

Enhancing intrinsic motivation through :

1 Self-regulated learning

The idea of self-regulated learning can be used to give new meaning to a well-worked expression familiar to every educators, that is, where is a will, there is a way. Bout corno and Rohrkemper (1985) hold that self-regulated learners have a way to approach complex classroom tasks that influences their will to engage in those task. If low achievers can make it automatic way to begin and to proceed, and if their trails are partly successful, they should be less likely to fail to try in schools. Task initiation, that is, being willing to attempt a task is the first step in the important chain of motivated behavior. Initiation increases the chance of success, which in turn, increases the likelihood of intensity and persistence through appropriate feedback. Well, according to William James (1890, cited in corno and Rohrkemper, 1985:68) is "attention with effort", that is volitional striving. And student who displays self-regulated learning, by definition has a will.

2 Self –efficacy

Schunk (1989:14) refers self-efficacy for learning student's beliefs about their capabilities to apply effectively the knowledge and skills they already posses and thereby learn new cognitive skills. In general, successes raise self-efficacy and failures lower it, although when strong sense of self-efficacy is developed, an occasional failure may not have much effect, Feedback attributed to effort is a persuasive source of self-efficacy information. When someone is told that one can achieve results through hard work, it can motivate one to do so because such information conveys that one posses the necessary capability to perform well. Providing effort feedback for task success can support student's perceptions of their success and lead to further increases in self –efficacy and skills.

3 Locus of control

Locus of control (Rotter,1966,cited in Brewin and Shapiro,1984) refers to whether people believe that outcomes are controllable , that is whether outcomes are believed to be contingent on one's behavior. Locus of control is concerned with what controls a person's outcomes.

Rotters distinguishes internal and external control on the basis of people's belief about the relationship between behavior and outcomes. Internal control refers to belief in behavior outcome dependence, that is, people expect that if they behave in certain way, they will be able to obtain the desired outcomes. The control of reinforcements is said to be internal to the person because, although the contingencies demanded are set by outside agents, the person believes that he or she can reliably attain the reinforcements by doing what the contingencies require. External control, refers to the belief in behavior outcomes independence, that is people expect that outcomes are delivered by fate, luck or the unpredictable whims of some outside agent, so there is no way that they can reliably attain the outcomes. The control of reinforcements is external.

4 Self-concept

Self-concept is best defined as the sum total of an individual's mental and physical characteristics and his or her evaluation of them (Lawrence, 1987:1). It has three aspects namely cognitive, affective and behavioral. Self-concept is the individual's awareness of one's own identity. In fact self-concept is a big term because subsumed beneath the self are the three aspects which are self-imag, that is, what the person is, the ideal self (what the person would like to be) and self-esteem.

5 S elf-esteem

Self-esteem (Lawrence, 1987:4) refers to the individual's evaluation of the discrepancy between self-image and the ideal self. A student with high self-esteem is likely to be confident in social situations and in tackling scholastic work and will have retained a natural curiosity for learning and will be eager and enthusiastic when presented with new challenge. However, a student with low self-esteem will lack confidence and his ability to succeed and consequently try to avoid situations which are seen as potentially humiliating. Many researches indicate a positive correlation between self-esteem and scholastic achievement 1970;Burns,!979), West, Fish and Stevens, 1980 cited in Lawrence, 1987). Examples of experiments conducted by Lawrence,1987) suggest that self esteem is greatly enhanced and there is improvement of reading among children who were retarded readers through counseling alone, followed by remedial reading with counseling, then remedial reading only and finally, ordinary class teaching. This shows counseling enhances pupil's self-esteem.

6 Self-worth

Self –worth is related to one's self esteem. It is a feeling of worth or unworthiness in specific situations. According to Beery (1975, cited in

Craske,1988) , self worth theory is based on the notion that much of a student's behavior is designed to maintain a self-concept of high ability. Hence, it is important to avoid failure whenever possible since failure carries an implication of low ability. When failure is unavoidable, low ability interferences can be deflected by ascribing it to stable, external factors for instant task difficulty or to unstable elements like bad luck or insufficient effort. However, application of effort under situations of possible failure is risky. If the student tries hard yet fails then suspicion of low ability increases. Therefore, a student can use strategy of reducing or withdrawing effort after a failure experience to prevent further damage to his sense of self-worth.

7 Cooperative learning

According to Johnson-Johnson's (1985) analysis, school is much too competitive and individualistic and much less co-operative, hence they suggest co-operative learning rather than competitive learning. There are some striking advantages of co-operative learning, for example, it increase intrinsic motivation, learning is more fun and personally meaningful, there are high expectations for success among cooperative learners, the mutual benefits of co-operation increase incentives to learn, there is high epistemic motivation which is a high interest in the topic being studied and there is high task persistence.

Although the most able students may be motivated in competitive and individualistically oriented classrooms, these classrooms are likely to reduce the academic motivation of most students compared with what is possible in cooperative learning environment (Johnson and Johnson, 1985; Nicholls, 1989; Ames, 1984; Dweck, 1986). In support of co-operative learning, a review of vast studies that evaluate effectives of cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning environments shows that cooperative learning environments produce better learning than competitive or individualistic learning environment (Johnson et.al.,1981).

8 Moderate risk-taking

Many students are afraid to try because of fear they have in failing. This is counterproductive, for learning inevitably involves some mistakes. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that risk taking is motivating, with greater academic effort expended by risk takers than by non-risk takers and there is greater achievement by risk-takers compared with non-risk takers (Clifford, 1991).

9 Effort

Both parents and children honour mutual, collective obligation to one another and to their relative. They strive to accomplish respect, co-operation and harmony within the family. This is evident in the time spent on homework. Homework dominates household activities during weeknights. It is believed that a great deal of learning goes on in term of skills , habits, attitudes, expectations and the subject content at homework times. Thus the familial setting appears to make children feel at home in school and consequently perform well in school.

Furthermore, the "love of learning" is rated by both parents and children for their academic success. This sentiment is supported by the fact that children experience intrinsic gratification when they successfully work a problem through to completion. A gain of pleasure of intellectual growth based on new knowledge and ideas coupled with enhanced competency and mastery is taken as highly satisfying. Also, children felt a sense of accomplishment on seeing their younger siblings learn from their own effort at teaching, that is, learning and imparting knowledge are perceived as pleasurable experiences.

In addition, a sense of effort is more important than ability. Of course, a sense of familial efficacy proves critical contrary to personal efficacy. A strong familial efficacy is justified by the fact that children learning and academic success is reinforced by a very strong parental and the whole family support and commitment. The family values emphasize on education, achievement, hardwork, perseverance and pride. Both parents and children strive to attain respect, cooperation and harmony within the family.

10 Praise

Bandura (1986, cited in Presley and McCormick, 1995) suggest that contingent praise should increase student's perceptions that they are capable of performing academic tasks, that is, enhancing their self-efficacy. However, effective praise is difficult to give (Brophy, 1981, cited in Presley and McCormick,1995). He suggests how praise can be delivered in the classroom to reap positive effects. Effective praise is delivered contingent on desirable students behaviors, that is, following their desirable behavior. The teacher needs to make clear what the student did that was praiseworthy, focusing attention on student behaviors leading to the praise, for example, students are told they are competent and giving reasons about what they have done is valuable. Praise ought to be sincere reflecting that the teacher is sensitive to the student's accomplishment. In addition, there is an implication that the students can be successful in the future if they exert appropriate effort.

Recommendations on how to motivate students

Some of the recommendations to enhance intrinsic motivations among students which emerge from the diverse array of research findings reviewed according to Covington (1992:160-170) and which are interestingly applicable to our situation can be summed as follows:

i. Inherently engaging assignments, that is, engaging tasks with characteristics that promote a sense of playful involvement and personal commitment which Malone (1981a,1981,cited in Covington,1992) suggests could involve (a) Manageable challenges, (b) arousing curiosity and (c) arousing fantasy. This is particularly useful to apply in the context of pupils in our primary schools.

ii. Provision of sufficient reinforces whereby once teachers arrange assignments in ways that encourage intrinsic involvement, they must reward students for setting meaningful goals, for asking questions leading to new ways of thinking, and for satisfying their curiosity. This implies a modifications in the rules of learning

which must satisfy two basic objectives which are, the economics of scarcity and learning as a conditioned reinforce, that, is rewards must be arranged so that the act of learning itself becomes a sought-after goal.

iii. Enhancing effort-outcome belief, that is, gaining a sense of personal control over events involving the strengthening of effort-outcome attribution relationship.

iv. Strengthening an effort-worth linkage. These (3^{rd} and 4^{th}) recommendations are specifically pertinent when there is concerted effort made to enhance creativity and innovativeness among the students themselves.

v. Promoting positive beliefs about ability in which case teachers must actively promote theories of abilities that are conducive to sustain motivation. The ability beliefs include (a) ability as capacity, (b) ability as attributions and (c) ability as strategy.

vi. Improving teacher-student relations, that is by promoting a condition of motivational equity with a change in the rules of the game of learning so that power is shared by both teachers and students. In the end teachers could teach more and students have more freedom to learn of their own. This ought to be applicable to both our primary and secondary school situations whereby teachers and students working on mutual benefit shall be able to improve results.

vii. Accept your child as they are. Remember that it is not your child's fault for being what they are. Equally it is not your fault (For example, Bad parenting). Understand all this at all times.

viii. Creates calm environment which is the most conducive in keeping relationships close and children under control.

ix. Communication is such an enormous aspects of life that most of the time parents take it for granted. Sometimes they forget some of the fundamentals:

- Gain and hold eye contact.
- Use warm. But decisive words
- State simply what you want and give instructions.
- Make steps very clear
- (of course) Don't mumble, nag, shout , debate and don't……

xii. Be a positive parents in dealing with the children school's work. Boost good behavior and achievement, reward excellence. Use praise , attention and privileges to reinforce positive behavior. This will help in building a positive self esteem.

Additional to the above, further strategies can be employed to enhance academic motivation in the classroom as well as the parental effectiveness plays a very important role for students to perform well in school. Many tactics for enhancing motivation have been validated in various types of research (Brophy, 1986, 1987, cited in Presley and McCormick, 1995). Our teachers could carry out the following suggestions as some specific means to promote motivation among students:

- Model interest in learning where teachers should let students know they like learning and find academic activities rewarding and generally satisfying.
- Communicating to students that there is plenty of reasons to be enthusiastic about what is going on in school, that is, presenting a message that the students will find learning materials interesting.

- Presenting what goes on in school as learning experiences, rather than tests, that is , classroom as low anxiety places. Using Nicholls's (1989) term of making classroom more task-orientation rather than ego-orientation.
- Making abstract materials more personal, concrete and familiar. For many reasons, students are more motivated to learn with familiar and concrete content than abstract and remote materials and ideas. An examples is the learning of English Language in the primary school in our context, i.e. when language terms are brought close to everyday materials and experience close to the pupils, it is easier for pupils to learn and then they become more interested, thus more motivated to learn the language (in this case English being alien to them).
- Letting the students know the learning objectives, that is, providing them in advance information about the upcoming.
- Providing informative feedback to students, for example, not being able to complete a mathematical problem provides feedback that understanding of the algorithm may be incomplete.
- Adapting tasks to student interest as much as possible.
- Offering students choices between alternative tasks or alternative ways of learning content.
- Providing novel input as much as possible.
- Designing instructional tasks to allow as much student autonomy as possible and providing tasks where there is opportunity for activity, for example, projects, discussion, role playing and simulations which all can induce students participation.

It is also emphasized that by simply attempting to incorporate these components instruction would do little good without considering other factors like orderly and well managed classrooms, appropriate learning content level, materials taught are worth learning and the teacher's repertoire of motivational devices is extensive enough so as none must be used so frequently that it becomes "old hat" (Brophy,1986,1987, cited in Presley and McCormick,1995).

Conclusion

Learning environments ought to be stimulated free from the pressures of grades, rewards and control emphasizing that instructively motivated learning is preferred and becomes desirable. When the environment for learning become more controlling, students lose intrinsic motivation and self-esteem (Pressley and McCormick, 1995). Intrinsically motivated learning is superior to extrinsically motivated learning , especially learning with respect to conceptual understanding as suggested by several lines of research. Learning material in order to put it to practice can enhance student's intrinsic motivation to learn and improve the quality of their learning.

Parental encouragement and dedication to learning as contributing towards children academic success too. As a parent, use power wisely while demonstrating respect and appreciation for your child's growing need for self-determination and strong self-concept. Of course no parent can, or would want to, keep children from every possibility of failing. Children learn from failure as well

as success. Children who have learned they are capable to accept their mistakes and weakness because they know that overall they are competent. As the old Saying goes. “Nothing teaches like success.”. To let the children enjoy the sweet taste of success, set up an environment where initiative is more likely to lead success than to failure.

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