

Re-engaging Disconnected Students Online and at School: Focus on Intrinsic Motivation

Getting students involved in their education programs is more than having them participate; it is connecting students with their education, enabling them to influence and affect the program and enabling them to become enwrapped and engrossed in their educational experiences-Wehmeyer & Sands

Engaging students is a constant motivational consideration; re-engaging disconnected students is a major motivational problem. Prior to schools closing, students who were disengaged from instruction were a constant worry, especially with respect to reducing dropout rates. *And reports indicate that during the closure a significant proportion of students who had access did not engage productively in remote instruction.*

As the school year begins, particular attention should be given to practices that engage and re-engage students. Such practices must be designed to sustain students' involvement in instruction. This is essential in minimizing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. It is critical to closing the opportunity and achievement gaps.

Enhancing Intrinsic Motivation is Fundamental to Promoting Engagement and Wellness

Students who are *intrinsically* motivated to learn seek out opportunities and challenges and go beyond requirements. In doing so, they behave, perform, and learn more and learn more deeply than do peers who are extrinsically motivated.

The difference between the two is the degree *behavior is driven by personal needs and reinforcements* (e.g., rewards and punishments). People strive to feel self-

determination, competence, and being related to others. However, the overuse of extrinsic motivators can undermine intrinsic motivation.

A student may disconnect to pursue some preferable or desired activity. Or it may be a protective form of coping to avoid and protest against demands where the student feels unable to perform and/or coerced to participate (e.g., instruction that is too challenging, instruction that limits options, instructors who are over-controlling).

It is suggested to *move away from reward contingencies, deadlines and controlling language*. Move more toward supportive interventions that support the learner's perspective, allows opportunities for self-initiation & choice, provides timely positive feedback, provides a meaningful rationale if choice is constrained, and refrains from the use of pressures and contingencies to motivate.

Providing students with options and involving them in decision making are key facets for addressing the problem of engagement in instruction:

1. expanding the range of curricular and instructional options with focus on enhancing stimulating opportunities
2. enabling student's personal choice and active decision making
3. accommodating a wider range of individual differences to match a student's motivation and capabilities
4. not over-using strategies to control and manipulate the student
5. reaching out and pairing the student with a familiar peer or friend
6. reaching out to learning coaches & support staff, community agencies/centers to increase teaming of efforts (mentoring and/or adults they trust and know)

Overall, re-engagement of students requires a *dialogue with the students* to start to understand why they are disconnected in the first place. Then *formulating a personalized plan for the student* with his/her formal instruction and continuing to *modify the plan when necessary*.

Reframing school learning to *help the student view instruction and those providing the instruction as supportive* and ways to *help the student perceive the outcome and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable*:

1. Valuable in terms of the student's real life needs and experiences and personal benefits
2. Renegotiating involvement and developing new and mutual agreements
3. Reestablishing and/or developing an appropriate working relationship that creates a sense of trust, open communication and provides personal support and direction for the student

Ultimately, here's a way to think about instruction and intrinsic motivation...

Positive intrinsic motivation is a protective factor and plays a key role in developing resiliency. In general, enhancing such motivation involves procedures that can increase positive feelings, thoughts and coping strategies with respect to learning and minimize experiences that increase avoidance motivation

Summarized from UCLA's Psychological Services Department-Community of Practice "Re-engaging Disconnected Students Online and at School: Focus on Intrinsic Motivation"

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/reengage.pdf>

Kimberley Robinson

SUSD School Psychologist

8/18/2020