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Motivating Students

While observing Carlos, an eighth grade student with special needs I was able to observe and help the student with his lack of motivation. The student bestowed several issues with motivation that affected his ability to be a fully competent student. With the help of the teacher and the information she gave me about the student I was able to help him explore his issues in the educational environment. Carlos has several problems paying attention, finding inner motivation; there were several behavioral issues that Carlos inhibited.

 While working with Carlos I have come to the conclusion that he is in fact a wonderful and bright student. He has received a perfect score in both exams I have witnessed him take. The two assessments he worked on were vocabulary quizzes. While working independently with Carlos and asking him questions, he has very insightful answers. However, the reason Carlos still has poor grades in school is due to the lack of motivation he inhabits. This lack of motivation hinders him from receiving good grades in his homework and assignments. Every time I have been there he has not completed him homework. I would ask him “Why didn’t you do your homework? Did you find it hard? Do you know how to do it?” He would answer saying that he did not find it hard, that he just did not want to do it. I looked at the homework assignments that he missed and I had no doubt that Carlos would be able to complete it.

With much thought I began to figure out what the problem was. I gathered my thoughts and figured out the reasons why he might not have wanted to do the work. First of all, the problem was I did not know how to get him to complete it on his own at home. He needs someone to motivate him and push him to do his work, and it seems like at home he does not have that. Carlos has told me multiple times during class that he does not want to do his work. That he is bored and he does not care about it. When a lesson would be being taught or it was time to complete an assignment in class Carlos would disobey and put his head down or rise out of his seat. He would not give his proposed assignment a chance and simply refused to complete it. After working with Carlos for only a couple hours I began to notice his two largest problems in school are that he is not motivated to complete his work and that he is not interested in it. It is very possible that he is not motivated to do it because he found it boring. He also did not care if he did well or not. When he would receive a zero, it did not seem to upset him at all.

 There were few instances were Carlos seemed to be engaged and attempted participating. One of the instances was on the first day that I worked with him. For the first part of the lesson that I worked with Carlos with the students played a game where they would go into different corners of the room labeled one, two, three, and four after a vocabulary word was read. By standing in corner one they showed that they have never heard the word before and had no idea what it meant. In corner two they had heard the word before, but were not sure what it meant. If the students chose to go to corner three this meant that the students understood the word but, did not feel comfortable using it in their everyday language. In corner four, the students comprehend the word and the word is part of their vocabulary. This activity allowed the students to move around which I think is something that Carlos likes to do. He plays basketball and unfortunately, he likes to get out of his seat during class thus interrupting the classroom. The game was something he participated in; he knew a lot of the vocabulary words. This makes me think that Carlos can learn through physical activity. I think that Carlos is a kinesthetic learner, someone who learns by physical movement.

 Carlos is not only a kinesthetic learner but is also a visual learner. Carlos had a lot of doodles and drawings in his notebooks. When he was given assignments to read, it would be hard to get him to read them, but he would comment about the pictures right away. He seems to really enjoy drawing and visuals. Carlos has stated that he hates to write so being able to draw will get him more motivated, also having visuals will help him learn.

 While working with Carlos, I focused on how I can get him motivated to complete his work. The teacher had told me that Carlos works better with individual attention and that I should try to praise him. This goes along with information I found in the article by Wayne Jennings. Jenning’s states that “Feedback is the breakfast of champions.” Feedback teaches people how to learn from their mistakes and keeps them informed and motivated on what they are doing. “The feedback must be immediate and helpful. Most classrooms give little actual

time to showing students how to improve beyond global test scores and grades. Students need to be coached, given suggestions, receive peer reactions, see and reflect on the results of their efforts in important endeavor” (Jennings, 1). By receiving feedback, I would be giving Carlos the individual attention that his teacher was asking for me to do.

 Based on this, I decided I would try to give Carlos helpful feedback and a lot of positive reinforcement to motivate him to keep doing his work. However, there was some difficulty in this. Carlos did not do a lot of work to give feedback on. When Carlos did do his work, I made sure I praised him for that. Unfortunately, I did not give him as much motivation as I hoped for. When Carlos would do his work or answer a question I would praise him verbally. I would also encourage him as he was working. I think this technique helped a bit the first day when we went through an entire assignment together. Another example of positive feedback was when he received a perfect score on his quiz—the teacher and I praised him afterwards, he smiled which is something I rarely witnessed Carlos do.

When Carlos would attempt to write an answer, that was incorrect, I would make sure I would first find something positive about it and then complement that part before I tried to help him correct what was wrong. If I did not praise him before giving him feedback about what he needed to change it would transpire a negative effect on Carlos and thus hindered him from continuing his work. However, when I praised him and then told him something he should change, he would make the correction right away and continue working.

After attempting to transpire positive reinforcements and immediate and relevant feedback to Carlos I realized that it did help him continue working. However, a big problem was to get Carlos to begin doing his work. If he did not do any work at all, there was no feedback I could give him. The teacher and I both had a hard time getting Carlos to even look at the work that he had to complete. I realized I would have to try something else to get him to start doing his work, and then hopefully with positive reinforcement, Carlos could complete his work.

According to an article written by Kirk, one way to get students in the middle school level motivated to do their work is by giving them choices. “Students can have increased motivation when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process, and that motivation declines when students have no voice in the class structure.” (Kirk, 1) So this is something that I gave a try. There was an assignment in class where the students worked in a group and looked at different articles. Carlos was given an article that was trying to sell kitchen furniture from a store, and a college catalog. After looking at these, he had to decide what purpose the author was writing it for. While looking at the one about furniture, Carlos refused to talk about it and his partner did most of the work. However, I asked Carlos if he would choose a page from the college catalog to look at for the assignment. He said yes and flipped through the pages. He stopped at a page that talked about the sports at the school and had a picture of basketball players. This interested Carlos because he likes basketball. Since Carlos had a choice, and got to choose to do something he is interested in, he finally worked on the assignment. Giving Carlos choices did help motivate him to do his work.

The only time Carlos showed engagement in his work was when he was given a choice. This motivated him to begin and end his assignment. Giving Carlos choices will really help him complete his work. It gives him interest in it which will motivate him to complete it. Unfortunately, Carlos will not always be able to do the things in school that he chooses to do and there will be assignments he will not want to complete; he needs to learn that he will never have choices. For assignments like these, it will still be a struggle to motivate Carlos to complete his work.

 Carlos is a bright student but there are problems with his attitude towards school and his motivation that are keeping him from being a very successful student. Positive reinforcement, feedback, and giving him choices did help him out, but there are still more that has to be done. Carlos still needs a lot of individual attention in order to get work done. If he gets more help to gain some motivation and concern in his education, he will be successful.

References

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Kirk, K. (n.d.). *Motivating students*. Retrieved from http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/affective/motivation.html