

Exploring Motivation and Goals to Enhance Student Success

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As highly motivated and achievement-oriented professionals, we want our students to experience the satisfaction of self-directed achievement that we enjoy. Motivation research has shown that the most effective motivators for an individual tend to remain constant from childhood into adulthood, representing a motivational profile akin to a personality type or learning style¹. Just as students tend to have preferred methods for learning, they tend to show similar preferences toward certain types of motivation. Therefore, if we learn to recognize those preferences, we can develop a repertoire of motivational techniques to support each student according to their motivational style.

Through the lens of education, the study of motivation presumes that every behavior is motivated² and seeks to account for what drives us toward action and makes us want to persist in the activity⁴. A *motive* represents the drive to satisfy a want, wish, or desire to correct the feeling that something important is missing⁴. The *goal* is usually to achieve a desirable, pleasurable outcome or avoid an undesirable, painful consequence¹, *motivated* by conscious choice, subconscious response, or reflex response. Factors such as instincts, anxieties, or repressions illustrate subconscious influences on behavior⁴.

Locus of control is an essential component of motivation dealing with

an individual's perspective about who or what directs the circumstances in their life². An *internal* locus means that individuals perceive that their choices and actions influence how life unfolds.

In contrast, an *external* locus refers to a perception that *e x t e r n a l*, unrestrained, and perhaps unseen forces determine the course of events in the individual's life. Interestingly, personal perceptions about locus of control can shift in the face of success and failure². For example, we happily attribute accomplishments to *internal* forces like skill, wisdom, or empowerment. On the other hand, we readily blame losses on *external*, random forces that can lead to feelings of helplessness and victimization. Our understanding of locus of control is essential to help students recognize and avoid the coping mechanism of giving up in the face of intellectual challenges.

One misconception about motivation is *the presumption that a student who sleeps during class is unmotivated*².

One explanation for the behavior might be that the student is bored

or frustrated by the subject matter and is motivated to avoid feelings of failure². In a music classroom, we would likely look for interventions to improve the unmotivated student's experience with those activities. The notion of intervention leads us to *extrinsic motivation*, *intrinsic motivation*, *rewards*, and *punishments*.

Extrinsic motivational techniques, such as rewards and punishments, may induce desirable behavior; however, the effect will disappear when the incentive is no longer present². Awards, penalties, and social support are familiar examples of extrinsic methods⁵. *Intrinsic* motivation is a more long-term and beneficial influence on behavior. It encourages the individual

Extrinsic motivational techniques, such as rewards and punishments, may induce desirable behavior; however, the effect will disappear when the incentive is no longer present. Intrinsic motivation is a more long-term and beneficial influence on behavior. It encourages the individual to become more reflective and autonomous in setting goals, resulting in elevated confidence, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction².

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to become more reflective and autonomous in setting goals, resulting in elevated confidence, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction². Interest, talent, curiosity, attitudes, and values affect intrinsic motivation⁵. In terms of implementation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation often have an inverse relationship. In other words, internally motivated children who enjoy learning do not typically need external rewards for engaging in learning opportunities; however, externally motivated children tend to become dependent on praise and external rewards, demonstrating less internal motivation. Theoretically, an *extrinsic* reward system could become an effective motivational technique if unmistakably linked to *intrinsic* motivation factors for the individual².

Rewards and punishments are not useful motivators in the long run because:

1. Rewards may encourage development at first but can become manipulative.
2. Children often perceive praise as a reward, so withheld praise can feel like punishment.
3. The Center for Nonviolent Communication classifies excessive praise as a form of domination².
4. The act of punishment models aggression rather than the desired behavior
5. Punishment tends to become more strongly associated with the punisher than with the unwanted behavior.
6. Punishment often leads to unwanted behavior becoming repressed rather than eliminated

NOTE: Praise must be earned and therefore carries a judgment with it. Encouragement, an alternative to praise, is an acknowledgment offered as a gift that can help build self-esteem².

Motivational Tools

Success is commonly considered the best motivational tool, and three components contribute to the long-term success of achievement motivation efforts². First, the goal must be *appealing* on some level. Second, achieving the goal should require *reasonable effort and commitment*. Third,

just as in internal motivation, there must be a belief that *the goal is likely to be met*. Without addressing all three components, we may compromise the motivational tool's potential for success.

Among motivational tools is the often debated subject of *competition*. As background information, *cooperation* is typical behavior among preschool children, and their first experience with *competition* frequently occurs at school². Arguably, we could characterize the American way of life as cooperative rather than competitive, e.g., rules

for operating motor vehicles. Each driver must trust strangers to drive safely under traffic laws, and the same spirit of cooperation, competence, and enthusiasm is essential to success in a work or classroom environment. Consequently, only those who believe they are likely to prevail as the winner are likely to value competition as a motivator².

Disadvantages of competition in the classroom:

- Can stifle the inclination to cooperate
- Can lead to the perception that an individual's success depends on the failure of others
- Competitive failures can result in embarrassment and loss of confidence

Advantages of an environment encouraging improvement in personal best:

- Can result in higher levels of motivation than when competing with others
- Failures to meet self-imposed goals can help develop persistence and resilience

Sources of motivation in a music classroom include personal achievement in performance and personal fulfillment through leadership in an organization. With many thoughtful options available, a music teacher can discover engaging activities to appeal to any student's motivational profile.

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Motivational Profiles and Strategies

Lavoie² developed a list of motivational styles, including “gregariousness, autonomy, status, inquisitiveness, aggression, power, recognition, and affiliation” (p. 98). Lavoie explained that a teacher who recognizes motivational styles could help students find the motivation to achieve various goals. For example, a student with a gregarious motivation style will be inclined to achieve things that lead to a feeling of belonging. In contrast, a student with the autonomous motivation style will be drawn toward action that leads to a sense of independence. Hence, matching motivational techniques to motivational style can offer tremendous benefits.

Reely⁶ offered specific suggestions for matching student motivational styles with responsibilities within a music organization. For example, a student with a gregarious motivational style could be inspired by interaction with others through planning an event or other project for the group. For students motivated by autonomy, Reely suggested finding important tasks they can accomplish independently, such as composing a piece of music for the group or practicing for a solo performance.

Through Lavoie’s concept of motivational profiles and Reely’s application of those principles to musical classrooms, music teachers have the potential to enhance student motivation and satisfaction levels. Sources of motivation in a music classroom include personal achievement in performance and personal fulfillment through leadership in an organization. With many thoughtful options available, a music teacher can discover engaging activities to appeal to any student’s motivational profile.

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