

The Litmus Test of Teachers

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Would you like to be the teacher of a class of self-motivated learners? Can you imagine the kind of classroom you would have if all your students were enthusiastic about learning? A classroom where teacher and students are on the same page; where the emphasis is not on discipline, but on learning and character building. A classroom of supportive, motivated and respectful students, who are in school because they enjoy being at school. How can you create a desire in students to learn, so that they can become self-motivated learners, taking responsibility for their own learning instead of being teacher dependent or teacher driven?



Let me suggest that the best way to build a class of self-motivated learners is not by focusing on teaching the curriculum, but by focusing on teaching the student. By being student focused, the teacher will discover students' strengths and weaknesses and gain other insights, which will enable him/her to create a suitable context for learning. As the teacher builds a good relationship with their students, he/she will be able to command more of their attention, thus creating a situation of mutual trust and respect. When students feel valued, safe and accepted, school will become a pleasant experience and they will become motivated learners.

Relationships build confidence in children, thus making them more prone to accept classroom responsibilities and become involved in school activities. In order to promote high academic standards, the teacher needs to create supportive social contexts and develop positive relationships with students. Research demonstrates that students function more effectively when they feel respected and valued, but function poorly when they feel disrespected or marginalized.¹

Teaching is much more than curriculum and test scores. It is about the training of the mind to think, character development, teaching responsibility and stewardship, and giving the student a sense of purpose. When students have a good feeling about who they are, have a relationship with God and know the purpose for which they have been born then they will most likely develop positive attitudes, which will spill over in their learning.

It is especially important to develop good relationships with students who are most at risk academically. Unfortunately, teachers often favour and develop more personal, supportive relationships with high-achieving students. Teachers must make special efforts to show a personal interest in and interact positively with students whom they find most difficult to teach. Marginalized students need to feel accepted and valued. Otherwise, they will remain outside of the mainstream.

Basically, motivation stems from unsatisfied needs. Some people are highly motivated by money, others by power, and others by praise.² Since teachers are not usually in a position to offer students money or power, the focus here will be on praise, relationship building and support. The overall goal

¹Stipek, Deborah. (2006) Relationships Matter. *Educational Leadership*, 64 (1)

² www.ndt-ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/Motivating_Students.htm

is to help students develop into self-motivating learners. Students who can become lifelong learners will be more successful in and out of the classroom. Thus, the ability to create a classroom of self-motivating students might be the litmus test for teachers, if there is one.