

Student Motivation and Good Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In any learning process, roles of teachers and students are vital. The responsibilities of the teacher include structuring the course in a manner that keeps the students motivated. Motivating the students and challenging them to learn are essential in imparting knowledge. The way an instructor keeps the students interested in a topic very much depends on the method he uses to explain the subject matter. The success of a teacher depends on accurate estimation of the academic level of the students and organizing the course on that basis. The paper will also discuss the importance of interactive exchanges between the students and the teacher. The paper also discusses what affects the learning process. How to induce creative behavior in the students and how to make the student motivated to self learn the material are also discussed in this paper.

1. Introduction

The mental state of a student determines how far it can absorb knowledge. The task of a good teacher is to mold the mental state of the student from that of indifference to enthusiasm by his attitude and teaching methodology. A teacher that has motivational effect on students enjoys lifelong respect of his students. Good teaching has the following attributes: instructor's enthusiasm, organization of the course, relevance of the material, appropriate level of difficulty, active involvement of the students, variety, rapport between teacher and students, and use of appropriate, concrete, and understandable examples.

The content of a lecture is akin to a wrapped packet; the students being unaware of the contents. A student not interested in the examining the packet will not attempt to open and examine it unless he finds the packet attractive and tempting. When we say tempting, we mean that the student cannot resist opening and examining the contents. A lecture delivered in class is like a packet. At the beginning of the lecture, the student must be attentive and should remain attentive through the entire lecture. To retain undivided attention of the students, the instructor must be creative in making the lecture interesting. For example, if the terminology in the lecture is somewhat familiar to the student, the student is more likely to remain interested in the lecture. Going back to the analogy of the lecture to the packet, the student is tempted if the lecture material has some familiarity

with his background. Thus, the course contents and its organization help motivate the students in learning the material. Several characteristics define a good course organization; these include but are not limited to the contents, level of difficulty matching the background of the students, challenge neither too hard nor too easy, encouragement, motivation etc. All these characteristics are important, but motivation is fundamental to learning.

Motivation is the first step towards exploring the packet. Motivation and encouragement go hand in hand. The teacher encourages the students to handle the course material. By this, we mean that the level of the subject matter should not be much beyond the capabilities of the students in the class. The enthusiasm of the students generally disappears if the instructor tries to impress the student by his level of knowledge in the subject. Rather than teaching at his level of knowledge, the instructor should come down to the academic level of the student and take them with him to the higher levels of knowledge. Assessment of the academic level of the students at the beginning of semester is important. Inaccurate assessment of the academic level creates a gap between the instructor and the taught.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section discusses the importance of motivation towards learning. Section 3 describes the method to gauge the level of students for effective instructions. Section 4 deals with lesson contents and instructional organization. In Section 5, we describe the importance of encouragement to handle difficult material. Section 6, deals with challenge while Section 7 describes how to develop creative attitude. The paper ends with some conclusions.

2. Motivation

Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability to maintain interest that brought students to his course in the first place. Some students seem naturally enthusiastic about learning but many others need or expect their instructors to inspire, challenge and stimulate them. There is no magic formula for motivating students – many factors affect a student's motivation to work and learn. These factors include interest in the subject matter, perception of its usefulness, desire to achieve, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as patience and persistence.

Not all students need the same values, desires, or wants for motivation. Some students require approvals from their confrere, others need competition, while some need challenges to trigger motivation. It is the duty of the instructor to study the students and determine the trigger mode of each student. It is possible to do if the class size is small. The instructor can encourage his students to be self-motivated and independent learners by giving early and positive feedback. The instructor could take other steps towards increasing motivation of the students. One of them is to make the students to believe that they can do well by providing opportunities to the students by assigning tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult. Helping the students to find personal meanings and values in the material also motivate the students. The open and positive atmosphere in the class helps the students to learn better, that is the students should not feel mental claustrophobia. The instructor can create the class environment that is attractive to students.

3. Gauging the Academic Level

In any class, the students do not have the same intellectual and academic level. At the beginning of the semester, accurate determination of academic level of the students in the class should be one of the main concerns of the instructor. He uses the academic level metric to organize his course and design his instructions. The difficulty level of a lesson, beyond the average student will contribute to indifference among weak students. On the other hand, too low a level will leave the brightest of students disinterested. To keep most of the pupil interested in the class material, it is important to gauge the academic level of the student. In this regard, at the beginning of the semester the teacher should give the students a general aptitude test on the material related to the course. The test should include questions at different levels of difficulty. The median score in the test is indicative of the academic level of the class. The median score of the students is the number of questions correctly solved by 50% of the students. The instructor uses this level to organize his course and structure his lectures.

4. Lesson Content and Instructional Organization

The assessment of the academic level gives the instructor a good measure at which to organize his course and structure the contents of lessons. A good instructional organization play important role in motivating the students and making teaching enjoyable and fun. The structure of the lecture should include introduction to the new topic, background to the topic, importance of the topic with regard to the course and applications in everyday life. The lesson should also include interactive session, which should include questions from the instructor as well as from the students. The instructor should also ask the students to analyze the lessons with regard to what part of the lesson motivated them more or contributed to a loss of interest.

An enthusiastic teacher with a genuine interest in imparting education to students and what they learn takes into consideration the strengths and interests of the students while structuring his instructions so that these remain interesting to students. A successful instructor takes the students into confidence when determining the lecture contents. He gradually increases the level of difficulty. To keep the interest of the student alive in the course, it is better to vary the teaching methods e.g. role playing, brainstorming, discussions and debates. Presentations of case studies are also important in making teaching more effective. In this age of Information Technology, inclusion of animations and use of audiovisual presentations go a long way in making the course interesting. Group discussions are also important in critical thinking and brainstorming.

In addition to number of recommended actions, from several others the instructor should refrain. For example, too much emphasis on grades is not conducive to good teaching. In this case, the students usually find short cuts to higher grades by opting for easier courses and bypassing courses that require mental toughness and harder work but are more useful from the point of view of education. The instructor should avoid making demeaning remarks to students who have not done well in quizzes or major mid-term tests. In addition, the instructor should be specific when giving negative feedback to the students.

5. Encouragement

A student, expected to learn new material, needs encouragement to handle the material. It is natural that some students feel intimidated by new material particularly if it is full of abstractions and is difficult comprehend. The role of teacher in this case is to instill enough curiosity in the students so that they maintain interest in handling the material. The student is like a little child who never climbed stairs is standing at the bottom of stairs and is fearful of taking up the challenge of climbing the stairs. The child needs encouragement, which prompts him to attempt climbing the stairs. An adult experienced in stair climbing can provide encouragement by holding little boy's finger and patiently taking him up the stairs a step at a time. As they reach the middle of stairs, the adult feels confident that the child is now sufficiently motivated to try climbing the stairs independently.

In the class, the situation of a student facing new material is similar to the little boy at the bottom of stairs. The teacher encourages the students by gradually increasing the difficulty of the subject matter. At a certain stage, the students are encouraged to try studying independently. The important lesson drawn from the above example is that the students are encouraged in the learning process by personal touch. Sometimes it is also helpful if the instructor narrates his personal experience in handling difficult material and the way he figured out to get out of the situation.

In addition to personal touch, other methods exist that promote courage in the students to handle difficult material. For example, giving the students a feeling that they are valued members of a learning community will inspire the students to do even better. The instructor should help the students set achievable goals for themselves and tell them what they need to do to succeed in his course.

6. Challenge

Students when challenged make additional efforts to learn better. Challenges help to stretch minds, which is an important aspect of learning. Even small challenge could trigger the mind stretching provided the challenge is not too hard. In choosing challenge, one should keep balance between level of difficulty and interest of students. It should not be too trivial for the students to lose interest or too difficult to entice the students to attempt. The teacher could combine encouragement with challenge. One interesting aspect of challenge is to present them with a convoluted statement of an easy problem. In other words, the problem may not be too difficult to solve but the language and the statement should be such that it confuses the students. The presence of confusion presents the student an excellent opportunity to think how to get out of this confusion. These instances provide the students with challenges and mind stretching exercises. Whenever a student raises an alarm that he is confused, I usually tell him that is good that you are confused because confusing is the first step towards understanding. A student, in a state of confusion, starts to think about ways to get out of confusion.

7. Creative attitude

Cultivation of creative attitude is an important ingredient of learning and developing new concepts and methods to improve learning. We cannot deny the importance of asking and

answering questions in cultivating creative attitude. It is true that asking questions may become more difficult than answering them. This statement seems strange but on a little reflection, it makes sense. For example, a person sitting in audience will ask a meaningful question only if he is beginning to understand or is trying to understand. When the material becomes above the comprehension level, it becomes for the audience to ask meaningful questions.

In developing creative attitude, failure could trigger motivation to become successful. I know someone who was ridiculed by his classmates when he failed in a midterm examination during his first year of degree program. The comments by his colleague motivated him so much that the student graduated with highest honor.

Competition

Competition between fellow students is source of motivation, particularly among students living in dormitories. In class, the teacher can also invoke competition between the students by properly structuring the course. The teacher can reward success and introduce students to the good work by their peers.

Conclusions

This paper discussed student motivation and good teaching. Student motivation is the first step of learning, the role of teacher has been identified as vital. Challenge, encouragement and competition play role in learning process. The learning process also depends on the structure of instructional material.