



Practical Application of Motivation and Behaviour control

By Lina Ashar

"In my experience, achievement depends on willingness to accept a challenge, take risks, make errors and the belief that one has the control over the outcomes. Achievement is hindered by perfectionism, fear of failure, and the belief that control, credit and/or blame belong to someone else". P. Theroux Jan 1994

In my previous article 'Motivation and Behaviour Control' (Parents Today Oct Dec 2007), I explored an understanding of Behaviour Control Theories and the difference between developing intrinsic and extrinsic means of controlling the behaviour of students and motivating students to learn. The article encourages the moving away from using rewards to control the behaviour and motivation of children. I have been asked to; in this article explore the practical applications of that theory for teachers and parents.

When I entered Indian classrooms in the late 80s as a student teacher from Victoria College, Melbourne Australia there were a few things that struck me as odd. The listed 'ranking' system which was only beneficial to the top three students but caused extreme levels of low self esteem and anxiety for the others. Also the fact that it only pushed the cause of an external basis of motivation for the top three students struck me as it being a negative exercise on the whole.

In this scenario I observed students constantly 'playing it safe'. An example of this was a child who had a vivid imagination and produced brilliant pieces of work, in a creative writing class I held at the school (interestingly my class did not contribute or affect his 'grades' in any way)

create and submit extremely drab and dry sentences during a creative writing activity in class. When I quizzed him about this, the child's response was remarkably astute, a true observation and understanding of human behaviour and in some sense comical! "I only use the spellings I know I can spell because otherwise teacher puts red lines across the words and cuts my marks". I could only marvel at the fact that at times we as educators encourage the 'dumbing down' of our students. So a Grade 2 boy would not use the word 'adventurous' (as he was likely to phonetically spell it as advencherous) and end up being safe with the word 'brave'. This cutting of the marks would happen despite the fact that at his age he was not expected to be able to spell the word 'adventurous' correctly. When we teach children to perform to extrinsic rewards (marks and stars) their intrinsic motivation to perform may be affected. Punishment (red marks, lower grades) and rewards (higher grades) both may work detrimentally if that is the motivation for the child. These sorts of experiences set in motion a serious question of, how should we as educators or parents, encourage achievement and correct behaviour patterns.

Over the years, a number of studies have been conducted that have examined the relationship between young people's achievement and their level of development of confidence, persistence, organisation, interpersonal skills, and emotional resilience. In addition, areas of positive mind habits that include traits such as self acceptance, internal locus of control for learning, optimism, non approval-seeking, goal setting, time management, reflective problem solving etc are also shown to have a positive impact on achievement. It is possible for teachers and parents to support encourage and develop a child's social-emotional-motivational competence.

One of the most frequent failures in education is that students rarely say that they find studying to be intrinsically rewarding. One of the most straightforward

conclusions of research from the past two decades is that extrinsic motivation alone is likely to have precisely the opposite impact that we want it to have on student achievement. **Intrinsically motivating activities are those in which people will engage for no reward other than the interest and enjoyment that accompanies them. The challenge here for schools and teachers is to excite students to learn because it is interesting and exciting to do so. Learning has to be more fun than fun. We have to design learning experiences that will encourage students to be active participants in the learning process.**

As an educator what I dwell on 'day in and day out' is how to capture the imagination of children who would not usually be interested in 'high end' content. When I explore literature for kids, it is with the understanding that very few children, especially boys can get caught in the web of words. For most other children, especially boys (because of the different make up of the brain), literature has very little functional meaning in their daily lives. Give these same kids Cyndi Lauper's 'Time after time' or Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sound of Silence' as poetry instead of Keats or Yeats and it all starts 'happening for them'. It is that understanding that led to my vision of Billabong High and a 'Commitment to Colourful Learning'. When students find a link and meaning for learning to real life it seems to increase student motivation and therefore naturally help in the development of the skills or strategies that make a student more competent. In this environment we find that students are able to take ownership of their own learning. Fortunately, many of the strategies that "empower" and "engage" students also lead to increased motivation. As students become engaged in the learning they begin to discover the relationship between effort and success; between success and motivation, and to develop a higher self-concept. Failure is unmotivating. Success is motivating and allows students to develop their confidence and competence. So as much as possible we must take advantage of the student's talents and interests to motivate them. Children will continue to achieve if they usually see the relationship between the learning process and its outcome. After initially tasting success with Poetry in song they will be more likely to succeed with Keats or Yeats.

We also need to support the building of CONFIDENCE in our children and not allow our children to be afraid of making mistakes. Children should be encouraged to raise their hands to answer questions, contribute to discussions or share ideas. Teachers and parents responses even in cases when children are 'off the mark' should be encouraging, nurturing and supportive. This will lead to high levels of confidence and self esteem and a desired outcome of children accepting themselves and their mistakes, taking risks and being independent. In classrooms that practice such high levels of emotional safety and trust, a highly engaged learning environment flourishes. Students should learn that they can and must learn from their mistakes. Fear of failure sometimes causes students to deliberately sabotage their own efforts.

Locus of control is also closely related to motivation. Students who feel they have the power to control some events in their lives are more likely to become self motivated than students who see themselves as powerless. If they don't believe they have any power/control over the events in their lives, then everything that goes wrong is someone else's fault, not theirs. I often ask parents to allow children to control some of the aspects of their life that are not going to have detrimental long term affects and to sometimes be allowed to experiment with choice. The child who perceives that he or she has no power will either see himself as a victim of chance (and/or other people's power) or as a warrior who needs to gain power to control or manipulate other people in order to avoid being helpless. Children who have been controlled too much often tend to see themselves as powerless. I also ask parents to avoid power struggles as far as possible. A child who is engaged in making limited choices from an early age is unlikely to feel powerless. My advice is from the age of 'toddlerhood' that sometimes it is okay for the child to be allowed to have the chocolate before dinner. Children develop confidence and an internal sense of control if power is given to them in gradually increasing increments as they show maturity and responsibility.

Competition can enhance or reduce motivation depending on how it is used. It is good for some, but it may result in a few winners and many losers. Unmotivated and or underachieving students often have difficulty dealing with defeat. Until they are ready to cope with defeat it is more productive to encourage students to compete against their own performance rather than with someone else's. In recent days the spate of student suicide has shown us just how dangerous competition, fear of failure and not having an internal locus of control can be. ■



MOTIVATION. THE DRIVING FORCE.

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Q & A

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Q My child is at school for most of the day. By the time he is back, there is hardly any time to do much as he has to finish his homework, attend classes, play with his friends, have dinner and go off to bed early. Even your school timings are till 3 o'clock. Isn't it better if the child is back by one o'clock so that he has ample of time for rest and other things too? Since most schools have similar timings, I am curious to find out about your view as an educationist on the subject. *Vidya Makhija, Mumbai*

A. A child needs opportunities in all areas to develop holistically. These experiences require time for the children to be exposed to and a school therefore needs time to schedule these experiences. The activities mentioned by you sum up all that a child would ideally be able to do in order to maintain a balance in every aspect of his or her life. You may be aware that children are a bundle of energy and they need to expend their energies in a constructive manner which you as a parent are ensuring but at the same time going to bed early after having a 'complete' day is a good habit for the child. According to the latest brain research children need at least 8 to 9 hours of sleep because information is encoded into the long term memory during sleep hours. Encouraging your child to get enough sleep every day will be helpful to the child in the long run since it will help him or her to consolidate what he or she has learnt during the day during sleep hours.

Q. Some schools present options of extracurricular activities within school hours, however some don't. What do you think is the right thing to do? *Shabana Rahman, Hyderabad*

A. Co-curricular activities that include sports and other performing arts activities provided within school hours allow all students to participate therefore contributing to an overall development. However, students with aims for higher specialisation need to improve their performance at a competitive level and require additional support that can be arranged for after the regular school hours. But it is crucial that any sporting or performing arts activity whether it is offered at school or outside must aim at instilling a healthy competitive spirit and team work skills amongst the children.

Q. My daughter is doing well in an ICSE school, but with the advent of IGCSE, I am confused. She is certain that she wants to take up medicine and I am certain that I will not send her abroad to study. The question is that though I am convinced that IGCSE promotes an overall development and is a better option, however I fear that after doing her IB, will my daughter be able to cope with the Indian method of education once she pursues her degree in medicine. Will she be able to take the stress after being used to a more practical system? *Manisha Vanwari, Mumbai*

A. Often it is observed that children who have done exceptionally well up till the HSC level find the courses offered at an Engineering / Medical college quite challenging. The explanation to this is very simple, while the curriculum up till secondary prepares students to get the necessary subject knowledge and facts skills the demands of a professional course are quite different. The curriculum offered by promotes application of knowledge, analysis and evaluation of facts. This also contributes to reduce the stress and the pressure of examination amongst children since project work which is application oriented is equally emphasized upon for formative and authentic assessments. In my opinion students having done IGCSE (Grade 10) and A-Levels (Grade 12) of are to a great extent equipped to handle the challenges posed by professional degree and diploma courses. But any school offering an Indian board can also be beneficial learning experience for a child provided it creates room for application oriented learning. A parent has to do enough background research to be able to identify such a school for his or her child. For further information on IGCSE, A-Levels and other qualifications from CIE you can always visit the following website: <http://www.cie.org.uk/qualifications/academic>. I would like to also clarify for your knowledge that the International Baccalaureate (IB) is a different board based in Geneva and is different board from the CIE and the programmes offered by the two of them cannot be used synonymously.

Q. I went to an all girls convent school whereas my husband went to a co-educational one. Since our daughter has been born, this is the only thing we argue upon. What do you think is advisable in today's times? *Sabina Daruwala, Bangalore*

A. Women are a part of every arena today. Men and women walk shoulder to shoulder and so having a healthy and normal interaction amongst both the sexes is essential. Co-educational schools present the dynamic opportunity for children of both sexes to interact in a comfortable environment at an age in which children are highly impressionable and so they provide the opportunity for an enriching learning experience. As time changes our thoughts need to change and so do our ways of living. If children are not allowed to interact with each other and not treated as equals from an early age, it can cause various problems of adjustment between the two at a later stage. But even if you put your child in a girl's convent school you can ensure that you provide her with enough additional opportunities to interact with boys and develop a healthy relationship with them. When children do not get an opportunity to do so they sometimes turn out to be reserved and feel awkward with members of the opposite sex as adults.

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