



Giving Students What They Need

If a student has the mindset not to comply, nothing you do can make him.

Internal motivation, however, guides all human behavior.

Jonathan C. Erwin

Everyone knows the three unwritten rules of real estate: Location! Location! Location! But fewer people have heard of the three equally important rules of classroom management: Relationships! Relationships! Relationships!

My undergraduate education program, like those of many teachers, emphasized a different classroom management rule: Don't smile until Thanksgiving. When I entered my class-

room as a new teacher, I wasn't able to heed that advice for long. As soon as the first group of 7th graders came in with all their textbooks precariously crammed under their arms and looks of equal parts eagerness and fear on their faces, I blew it: I smiled. I should have known right then that the traditional classroom management practices that I'd learned in college would prove almost useless.

As it turned out, my intuition was

better than my undergraduate education courses. As soon as I realized that getting my students to like me was not only OK, but also something to work toward, my classroom became a place of higher-quality learning and fewer behavior problems. But starting out in the traditional paradigm meant that it took me some time to effectively apply a better classroom management approach.

You don't need to wait. You can immediately begin to create the conditions for high-quality learning and respectful, responsible behavior in your classroom.

One of your most important concerns as a classroom teacher is student motivation. Unmotivated students will probably do poor work or no work, learn little, and often exhibit irresponsible or disruptive behaviors. Motivated students will probably do high-quality work, learn well, and behave responsibly. Teachers can approach the job of motivating students in two ways: They can use *external motivation*, which relies heavily on rewards and punishments, or *internal motivation*, which inspires the natural drives within the students.

Teachers who use external motivation assume the full responsibility for motivating their students. By contrast, teachers who focus on internal motivation create the conditions for their students to be motivated, but they recognize that students must take some of the responsibility.

The Problems with External Motivation

External motivation, the proverbial carrot-and-stick approach, predominates not only in most classrooms but also in the world. Think of the ways in which people try to make other people do what they want them to do. When a parent tries to make a child get ready for school, a boss tries to motivate her employees to work harder, or a teacher tries to persuade his students to complete their homework, a variety of external control strategies come into play. The "motivating" person may first ask nicely, then try reasoning or negotiating, and then move on to flattering or bribing (also

known as rewarding). If these strategies don't work, then nagging, yelling, threatening, punishing, or even resorting to physical force may come next.

Unfortunately, none of these strategies is guaranteed to work. If a student has the mind-set not to comply, nothing you do will make him. Further, these

the toy barrel, and As do not work. When a student hears, "If you do this, then you'll get that," he or she gets the message that "there must be something wrong with this if you have to give me that to get me to do it." Thus, by offering a reward for learning or following classroom rules, we may unintentionally



external motivators can actually impede learning. Perceived threats, from yelling to physical force, create conditions that many students experience as highly stressful. When students feel stressed, "thinking and memory are affected . . . the brain's short-term memory and ability to form long-term memories are inhibited" (Jensen, 1998). When under stress, students' brains tend to go into the fight-or-flight response, which may be manifested in school through acting out or withdrawal. Clearly, the "stick" approach will not motivate students to behave in the ways that we want them to.

What about the "carrot"? Don't rewards provide an incentive for students to behave appropriately and perform well? Contrary to the conventional wisdom, rewards are no more effective than threats and punishment. Kohn (1993) cites hundreds of studies suggesting that such incentives as stickers, pizza parties, free time, trips to

"kill off the interest in the very thing we are bribing them to do" (Kohn, p. 72). Jensen echoes these concerns, warning that

students will want [rewards] each time the behavior is required; they'll want an increasingly valuable reward. . . . The use of rewards actually damages intrinsic motivation. (1998, pp. 66-67)

Even worse, external motivators tend to rupture relationships. Think about the last time that you were on the receiving end of any of the strategies listed previously (with the exception of being asked). When we feel manipulated by someone, our level of trust in the relationship goes down. The next time that person tries to get us to do something, we are even less inclined to comply.

If we want to manage students in ways that develop and maintain trusting relationships, relying on external motivation is self-defeating. Internal motiva-

tion offers us a better option. William Glasser's Choice Theory (1998) can help teachers understand the components of internal motivation and how we can apply it to build warm, positive classroom relationships. As a staff development specialist and a faculty member of the William Glasser Institute, I help other teachers apply Choice Theory in their classrooms and frequently hear teachers say how much it has improved their students' learning.

Choice Theory

According to Choice Theory, five basic needs constitute the source of all internal motivation and guide all human behavior. By understanding these needs, you can transform your classroom into a place where students want to learn, perform high-quality work, and behave in respectful, responsible ways. As you read about each of these needs, think about their significance in your life.

Survival

The need to survive often comes to mind first when we discuss basic needs. Survival includes the needs for food, shelter, physical comfort, and safety. Because humans have the ability to imagine the future, however, we think beyond our immediate physical needs. We also care about our financial and physical safety and security. We keep savings accounts, buy insurance, and invest in stocks and real estate. We exercise and diet. The need to survive, although primarily physical, takes on a psychological component: the need for order and security in our lives.

In classrooms, students need to feel physically and emotionally safe. To help students meet their need for survival, therefore, we can

- Provide opportunities for students to get food, water, and fresh air by allowing snacks, encouraging regular water breaks, and growing classroom plants or opening windows.
- Maintain behavior guidelines that support safety and respect.
- Develop consistent classroom procedures and routines that add to a sense of order and security.

Love and Belonging

Humans, like many other species, are social creatures. We live in family units, work on teams, form civic organizations, attend social gatherings, and engage in hundreds of other behaviors that help us connect with others. Research shows that there is a lifelong connection between the quality of our relationships and our physical and

mental well-being (Ornish, 1997).

Teachers can create the conditions for students to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in dozens of ways. For example,

- Learn each student's name as soon as possible, and engage students in activities that help them learn one another's names.
- Greet all students as they enter your classroom.
- Let students get to know you personally: your outside interests, what you stand for, and who you are.
- Regularly engage students in team-building activities.
- Teach students how to work cooperatively, and give them regular opportunities to learn in structured cooperative activities.
- Conduct class meetings on a regular basis for class-building, problem-solving, and content-related discussions.
- Smile *long* before Thanksgiving.

Power

For many people, the word *power* is synonymous with dominance, authority, or control. For that reason, many don't want to admit that they have an intrinsic need for power. When thoroughly understood in Choice Theory terms, however, the concept of power takes on a more positive meaning. Power means personal growth: developing knowledge and skills that increase the quality of our lives, lead us to achieve, and increase our feeling of self-worth. In short, meeting the need for power is at

the heart of education.

When students fail to meet their power needs through learning and achieving, which I refer to as *power within*, they may instead engage in win-lose power struggles in an attempt to gain *power over* other students or the teacher, initiating a struggle that could continue throughout the school year. To avoid this painful scenario, teachers can

**Teachers can provide something that distractions cannot:
warm, trusting, human relationships.**

- Give students a voice in the classroom. Solicit their input regarding classroom rules and behavioral guidelines; allow them to generate questions that guide the direction of the curriculum.
- Discover students' instructional levels and meet them where they are.
- Teach to a variety of learning styles.
- Hold regular discussions about the value of the curriculum to students' lives.
- Use research-based best practices, such as structured cooperative learning, authentic assessment, and brain-based teaching strategies.
- Instead of giving students low or failing grades, allow them second and third chances to demonstrate their learning (Bloom, 1971; Glasser, 2000).

Freedom

The need for freedom does not require much explanation. The Declaration of Independence refers to freedom, or liberty, as one of humankind's "inalienable rights." As human beings, we need to control the direction of our lives as much as possible. This need for freedom includes both *freedom to* and *freedom from*.

Freedom to involves choices: freedom to go where you want, say what you want, associate with whom you want, and pursue an interest or a career of your own choosing. Like all of us, students need to be able to make choices. In the interest of maintaining an orderly learning environment, providing choices does not mean that

students have license to do or say anything they want. With every freedom comes a degree of responsibility. We can appeal to students' need for *freedom to* by providing them with choices regarding

- Their seating.
- Team members for cooperative learning activities or projects.
- Assignments (topics for essays or class projects, outside reading, and odd- or even-numbered math problems).
- Performance tasks for assessments. There are dozens of ways in which students can demonstrate their understanding of course content. Provide them with a list and let them choose one that allows them to play to their strengths and talents.

Freedom from refers to the avoidance of physical or emotional discomfort, including fear, stress, disrespect, and monotony. The safe, orderly, respectful environment that meets students' survival needs also appeals to their need for this kind of freedom. Teachers should also provide freedom from monotony by balancing routine with novelty. Although students need to experience order and structure, a totally predictable classroom can be boring (Jensen, 1998). To gain and keep students' attention, we can

- Change location (the teacher's, the students', or both).
- Introduce lessons with different kinds of music.
- Use a variety of instructional strategies.
- Change students' cooperative learning partners or team members regularly.
- Begin class with a variety of team-building activities.
- Go on field trips.

Fun

The need for fun does not appear fifth in this list because it's the least important. Try to imagine life without enjoyment, laughter, or pleasure. Don't dwell on that thought—it's too depressing. Humans need to have fun, to play!



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The old adage "Play is a child's work" is true. Young children at play are learning how to cooperate, negotiate, and get along with others. They are learning how the world works: what dirt tastes like, how gravity works when you let go of a tree limb, and how to use simple tools like sticks to discover where worms live.

Play is also the work of older children, youth, and adults. It inspires creativity and reduces stress. Play is not only essential for learning and for our physical and emotional well-being; it is also wonderful for building relationships.

It takes a lot of effort to get along well with each other, and the best way to begin to do so is to have some fun learning together. Laughing and learning are the foundation of all successful long-term relationships. (Glasser, 1998, p. 41)

Fun is a by-product of having friends (love and belonging), being successful (power), having autonomy (freedom), and feeling safe and secure (survival). Therefore, if we create the conditions that allow students to meet those needs, they will probably also have fun. In addition, we can intentionally address the need for fun in specific ways. For instance;

- Play review games, such as Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, Family Feud, or Jeopardy.

- Play drama games that relate to course content, such as Science Term Charades.

■ Engage your students in brain teasers, such as Mental Math (Craig & Ward, 1994) or Lateral Thinking Puzzles (Sloane & MacHale, 1994).

- Use adventure-based learning games, such as those described in *Adventure in the Classroom* (Henton, 1996).

Internal Motivation Works

When I applied these ideas in my own high school English classroom, I experienced a dramatic improvement in students' attitudes and behavior and remarkable improvement in the quality of student learning and performance. My enthusiasm for teaching these ideas to other educators was born from my personal experience. I recently received an e-mail from an elementary teacher:

Knowing that a needs-satisfying environment is essential for student learning was an idea that set me free. I now teach in an environment of powerful learners who direct much of their own experience.

Teachers in other schools and classrooms who have focused on building relationships by appealing to intrinsic motivation have also had encouraging results. For example, one alternative high school that I worked with, Cross-

roads Academy in Elmira, New York, experienced a 78 percent decrease in behavior referrals in one year as a result of a relationship-focused initiative. Other schools across the United States have focused on applying Choice Theory in their classrooms. These schools, known as Quality Schools,¹ commonly experience reductions in behavior incidents and improvements in state achievement test scores (Glasser, 1998).

The Power of Relationships

Anyone who works in schools often hears the complaint, "These students are not motivated!" The truth is that all students are motivated, but they may not be motivated to learn and behave in the ways that teachers and schools prefer. Educators have a lot of competition for students' attention: exciting video games, hundreds of television channels, music videos, and the Internet, to name a few of the most powerful distractions.

But teachers can provide something

that these distractions cannot: warm, trusting, human relationships. Satisfying human relationships can have "the greatest impact on our quality of life" (Ornish, 1997, pp. 2-3) as well as a profound positive effect on student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Appealing to students' needs for survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun will not only help us build and maintain these essential relationships, but will dramatically increase the likelihood that students will behave responsibly and want to learn what we want to teach. By giving students what they need, we will get what we want. ■

¹For more information about Quality Schools, contact the William Glasser Institute (www.wglasser.com) or e-mail Jonathan Erwin (jerwin1@stny.rr.com).

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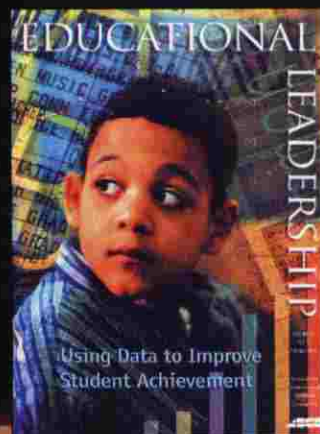
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