Primary School Student Motivational Intervention Program

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Abstract

This paper presented the concept for a motivational intervention program that would help motivate primary school students. The reasons behind children's dislike for school are discussed in addition to the different types of motivation, psychological needs, and instrumentality beliefs. This motivational intervention program would be able to encourage students to be more interested and motivated within school intrinsically through a lengthy process. Yet, teachers must participate responsibly and sensitively as well as utilize the recommended methods and activities in order for the program to succeed. However, the potential benefits would be worthwhile and result in a positive outcome for primary school students. Further research and discussion would be required in order to see if this motivational intervention program would truly benefit primary school students in regards to motivation within primary school.

Keywords: *Motivation; Intervention; Primary School; Elementary School; Students; Extrinsic Motivation; Intrinsic Motivation; Psychological Needs; Autonomy; Competence; Relatedness; Instrumentality Beliefs; Goals; Feedback; Trivia Crack; Duolingo*

Introduction

As Reeve [1] explains at the beginning of Chapter 17 of his book, *Understanding Motivation and Emotion*, proving that both motivational and emotional capabilities are able to be changed and strengthened is, in theory, quite significant: "Successfully demonstrating that motivational and emotional resources are malleable and can be strengthened is important theoretically" (p. 497). However, Reeve [1] adds that this cannot be accomplished just by "short-term boosts": "From a more practical point of view, however, short-term boosts to people's motivation and emotion are not enough" (p. 497). Reeve [1] explains that intervention programs are capable of generating these positive changes in a variety of environments, but these programs require more than just experiments to create them: "What is needed in applied settings such as the schools, the workplace, in therapy, in healthcare, in the home, and on the athletic field, is a long-term effort to build people's enduring motivational and emotional resources. To produce these changes, one needs to go beyond brief experimental manipulations to employ step-by-step, state-of-the-art intervention programs" (p. 497).

Majority of children tend to dislike school for numerous reasons, and this dislike begins to develop early in a child's life. Such reasons why students tend to dislike school are that students are compared negatively to others, punished while others are rewarded, and lack a quality relationship with their teachers. Some students are not even motivated enough, but instead are discouraged by how the successes of other students are highly valued. Thus, students are treated unfairly as some students' needs are focused on more than other students. However, these reasons can be resolved and/or avoided in order for children to genuinely enjoy school once again as well as improve their academic achievement over time. Schools do not provide the proper support and administer the appropriate methods capable of increasing students' intrinsic motivation and satisfying their psychological needs.

Therefore, the utilization of a program that can prevent a growing dislike of school in primary schools can help resolve this situation for future generations. If the prevention of the growing dislike of school can be avoided and/or resolved, children may enjoy school more and possibly perform better academically. In order to change students' perception of school, we must work on satisfying their psychological needs. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are psychological needs that are satisfied differently for each individual. In the textbook, Reeve [1] explains that autonomy is satisfied through receiving autonomy, giving autonomy, engagement, development, learning, performance, and well-being (p. 181). To support the notion that teachers should be more autonomy-supportive, Reeve, Nix, and Hamm [2] found within one of their studies that autonomy-supportive motivating styles correlated far more with a student's experience of internal locus and perceived choice than within controlling-motivating styles (p. 379-380). Moreover, to satisfy competence, Reeve [1] explains that if a person's environment satisfies their need for competence by allowing them to interact effectively in order to "extend one's capacities and skills," then a person is more willing to find and master more "optimal challenges" that would help them to "develop and grow." (p. 167; p. 181) Finally, Reeve [1] explains that in order to satisfy the psychological need for relatedness, then "a person needs to confirm that the emerging social bond with another person involves caring, liking, reciprocity, and a sense of exposing one's authentic self and having that authentic self both accepted and valued by the other" (p. 182).

However, to truly enjoy a task, not only would a student's psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness have to be satisfied, but there must be an experience of "flow" when completing the task. According to Reeve [1], "Flow is a state of concentration that involves a holistic absorption and deep involvement in an activity" (p. 171). This state of concentration occurs when a person is using their skills to overcome a challenge, which also relates to their psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and intrinsic (or extrinsic) motivation. By reviewing how each of these psychological needs need to be satisfied, it is clear to see the connection between these needs, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and "flow" as satisfying all of these psychological needs of a student allows them to experience "flow." However, when these needs are not satisfied, "flow" is not achieved or experienced.

Dan Pink [3] spoke about people's autonomy, competence, and relatedness in his TED Talk as to how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation affects and satisfies (or dissatisfies) these psychological needs differently. This is particularly why Pink [3] spoke about companies that focus on intrinsic motivation of people as well as their autonomy, competence, and relatedness. If an employee's work environment supports their autonomy, if their work is the right amount of challenging, and if they have a good amount of social interaction as well as a good relationship with those around them, then their intrinsic motivation increases [3]. Thus, in these types of environments, "flow" is experienced as people enjoy the challenges they are given as these are the challenges they find suitable, meaning that these challenges are not too easy or not too difficult, to handle and overcome [3]. Yet, if their work environment or profession does not satisfy any of their needs in the ways I have just described, then a person does not experience "flow" [3]. However, the enhanced performance and productivity of employees at these particular are not a result of a reward, but of the ability and freedom to work on and create whatever they wanted to Pink [3]. For example, Pink [3] spoke of how Australia has days called FedEx days where the workers are able to work on whatever they wanted, as long as it was not something they were assigned to work on, and then they were required to present it to the rest of the company by the end of the day. In that time, these workers have been able to come up with the best products, apps, and ideas overall [3].

Therefore, a program that might foster the development of intrinsic motivation and "flow" in an occupation later in life would involve the same concept companies, such as Google, use as described by Dan Pink [3] in his TED Talk. To encourage children to enjoy school, build and increase their intrinsic motivation, and help them experience "flow" later in life, teachers must allow one day of the week to be a day for a student to be allowed to work on whatever school-related subject that they would like. Whether this is one day every week or every other week, it would make a huge difference. Every child has their own favorite subject in school that not everyone knows about. On these particular days, students would be able to delve further into their interest by being allowed to do any type of "fun" assignment, project, or activity related to their particular subject of interest.

Results

To support the idea of allowing students to work on anything they desire on particular days of the week, the value of choice must be emphasized and supported. Leotti and Delgado's [4] discussion of the results of their study proved that choice is desirable and that the anticipation of an opportunity for choosing was associated with increased activity in brain regions involved in reward processing: "Collectively, the findings suggest that simply having the opportunity to choose is inherently valuable in some situations" (p. 1314). Furthermore, within their study, Hagger, Rentzelas, and Chatzisarantis [5] had found that the individualist group norm participants spent a longer amount of time on the puzzles when they could personally choose rather than the ones who were decided for by the experimenter or in-group member (p. 219). Thus, if students are provided with more options and the ability to choose, students would begin to become more motivated to complete assignments, study, and pass exams as their intrinsic motivation would be increased. Furthermore, the encouragement of growth mindsets within primary school curricula will be beneficial for students during the present as well as the future.

Reeve [1] explains that one with a growth mindset, or an incremental theorist, believes that they as well as others are able to change their personal qualities as a way for them to "grow, increase, strengthen, and otherwise develop" (p. 250). Reeve [1] explains that incremental theorists think that, "the more you try and the more you learn, the better you get" (p. 250-251). Basically, individuals with growth mindsets believe that if an individual puts in the effort to change their personal qualities for the better, then they will certainly succeed in getting back positive results after all that hard work. Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck [6] continued to explain that individuals with growth mindsets show improvement in performance over time whereas individuals with fixed mindsets show no improvement at all, which was noted in a longitudinal study following students: "Students who endorsed a growth mindset showed significantly improved performance two years later, while students who endorsed a fixed mindset showed no such improvement in their performance two years later" (p. 246-263; [1], p. 252). Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck [6] continue on to explain that these types of mindsets actually can be "learned or trained" in schools as certain approaches to teaching can influence students to think in a certain way more than another, which was proven by sessions given to middle-school students by researchers (p. 246-263; [1], p. 253). Therefore, if primary school students can be taught that intelligence can be improved and changed while they are young, they will develop a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset as they grow older. Aronson, Fried, and Good [7] also supported this point as they conducted a study with college students by showing half that "intelligence is malleable" while the other half "did not receive the same information" (p. 115; [1], p. 253). The college students who received the "intelligence is malleable" training had enjoyed their work more and had higher grade point averages than those in the control group ([1], p. 253).

To support and encourage growth mindsets with students, teachers must work to encourage students to set goals that they would initially doubt achieving by providing assistance and support to help students accomplish their goals. Goals help generate motivation and focus on what a person's goal is and what their idea of accomplishment would be: "Like plans, goals generate motivation by focusing people's attention on the discrepancy (or incongruity) between their present level of accomplishment (no boxes of cookies sold) and their ideal level of accomplishment (100 boxes sold by the end of the month)" ([1], p. 220). Goals encourage a person to perform better, but this performance also depends on the individual's goal as each goal differs in their difficulty, specificity, and congruency with the self: "Goal setting generally enhances performance, but the type of goal one sets is a key determinant in the extent to which a goal translates into performance gains, because goals vary in how difficult they are, how specific they are, and how congruent with the self they are" ([1], p. 221). Furthermore, the more specific a goal is, the more easily an individual is able to focus clearly on what they are needed to do as they are not confused or stressed by thinking about what they need to do as the specificity of the goal has simplified that aspect: "Goal specificity is important because specific goals draw attention to what one needs to do and reduces ambiguity in thought and variability in performance" ([1], p. 222). Finally, feedback helps encourage an individual to keep going as they are able to know how much they have progressed and what they still need to accomplish.

Discussion

Not to mention that instrumentality beliefs must be handled appropriately by teachers. Kover and Worrell [8] discovered that extrinsic motivation varied in predictability as instrumentality was strong predictors in certain examples, performance goals were unimportant, and the last test was pointless (p. 483-490). Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, showed that proximal goals did not muddle mastery

and performance goals, instrumentality added slightly to the variance with more proximal goals and that performance goals were not important predictors ([8], p. 483-490). However, Selart, Nordstrom, Kuvaas, and Takemura [9] found that rewards did not interfere with an individual's self-regulation when it was rewarded at a lecture rather than for completing a task: "The participants were instructed that the reward was to be given to them at a following lecture. This could be one potential reason why the three reward groups displayed nearly the same level of self-regulation" (p. 452). Thus, if a student was to be rewarded for attending a lecture to learn about something rather than for completing a task, their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation would not be negatively affected.

Equally important, there are two particular activities that are found to be both interesting and educational, which would make them ideal to incorporate into elementary schools as afterschool assignments or part of the curricula. One such activity would be to play the app called "Trivia Crack," which is quite popular lately, on a phone, tablet, or computer. Assuming that a student has one of these electronic devices available at home, they can easily download this app and play with family, friends, or strangers. Within this app, a student can play a game against either one opponent in a classic game or against nine other opponents in a challenge game. In addition, within a game, a student answers questions from six different categories, which are history, science, geography, art, entertainment, and sports. These games last for twenty-five rounds, but if a student obtains all of the "crowns," the symbol of each category, they win. This is found to be a beneficial game as it questions a person about various topics that range from the past to the present. Furthermore, it is a fun way to enjoy trivia and play with family and friends.

The other activity that will be helpful for students is the app called "Duolingo," which a student can download onto their phone, tablet, or computer through the app store. A student who uses this app has the choice of learning Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch (Netherlands), Irish, Danish, Swedish, and Turkish. This app is free as well, which allows students to fully learn a language in depth. Duolingo is a great that makes learning a language completely easy. A student starts off with learning the basics, such as basic words, phrases, food, and animals. Students are also tested in various manners within each lesson. A student will be tested by having to speak the language, translate it, type the correct word or sentence, and match the word to the picture. Learning a new language in a fun and educational manner is beneficial for students who might be required to learn a particular language in school, especially if students are struggling with learning that language or are disinterested in learning it [10-12].

Conclusion

The incorporation of such a program within elementary schools will motivate children to go to school and work harder. The reason for this belief is due to the fact that the students would have something to look forward to every week or every other week as they certainly will genuinely enjoy this "free day" to focus on whatever they would like. Within this program, not only is their autonomy need is satisfied, but their need of relatedness and competence are also satisfied as they are able to truly enjoy themselves and are encouraged to do so. As a result, intrinsic motivation will increase without using any extrinsic motivation. Also, this program will help children realize earlier on what they truly enjoy and are passionate about, which will help them in the future as to decide what type of profession they would want to pursue. In conclusion, this program would indeed be a successful and beneficial program for children if it was to be incorporated into the elementary school curriculum.

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