



what's my motivation?



Shiny carrots may work in the short term, but lasting incentives require teachers to instil a different mindset, says Paul Dix...

Outstanding teachers do not rely on students arriving at the door of their room motivated and ready to learn. They plan to counter the demotivating effects of social and economic hardship, poor parenting, broken relationships and complicated home lives. Outstanding teachers learn not to worry about the aspects of children's lives where they can have little influence but to play the cards they are dealt, and play them with flair.

Your smiling face at the door of the room is a simple yet highly effective motivator. In a moment you can counter the deflating effects of the school run, the arguments over cereal and inevitable conflicts of busy mornings, 'No, you cannot bring the television to school' etc. A smile, kind word, perhaps a handshake does more than just make your pupils feel happy, it gives them energy for the lesson and a consistent model to look up to. Remind your children that they are valued and welcome. Convince them that you have

been waiting all weekend to see them again! Let them know how excited you are by the plans for today and infect them with your passion for learning.

Teachers who sit behind desks and laptops, who allow children to drift in on their own and issue the inevitable 'starter is on the board' command will find it difficult to motivate themselves, let alone the class.

Those who are constantly medicated with computers build an addiction to the screen but not a motivation to learn

Break negative cycles

A positive relationship with a passionate, caring, enthusiastic teacher is the greatest motivator. A teacher who retains an enthusiasm for the relationship and the child despite the lapses in the child's behaviour, manners and fist control is a positive motivator today, tomorrow and far into the future. Children who

have been taught to view themselves through negative reference points need the drip feed of your positive reinforcement and encouragement to break the cycle.

Children who have a particular educational need, and are encouraged to route everything through it, find it difficult to separate this need

from their identity, 'I am stupid because I cannot read' or 'I am trouble because I get angry'. The relentless counter claims from a respected teacher will separate the issues and erode the notion that difficulty in one aspect of learning infects everything else. As a teacher working with the most reluctant learners, I would repeat the same daily mantra:

'You are not stupid because you need help with reading. You can be angry and polite. You are more than just your behaviour.' Chipping away at negative spirals takes perseverance but has a lasting effect.

Give children responsibility

Autonomy, choice and independence over learning is hugely motivating. Children who are machine gunned with targets, levels, objectives and outcomes sense that they are not learners with any control. Targets that fall from above in the adult world are rarely embraced with enthusiasm. So it goes with children. Children who set their own targets, take responsibility for their own learning and contribute to displays tend to be engaged in the fabric of learning. They are motivated at a deeper level. Those who are 'PowerPointed' into submission or constantly medicated with computers build an addiction to the screen but not a motivation to learn. Their motivation is on the surface. They are occupied, but


the learning is not satisfying and the information gleaned does not embed itself in the memory.

Motivating children who appreciate what is given to them is not difficult. Trying to motivate children who have been taught to expect everything for nothing is a tall order. Acknowledgement, praise and reward are seen as the most immediate motivators. Yet we worry about the way reinforcement is being used to bribe, to create unrealistic expectations and how over rewarding children can create over reliance of the approval of others. Techniques that were previously used to nurture self esteem with children who had severe emotional and behavioural needs are now extended to all children. Overloading children with reward and reinforcement can be confusing - 'I just sat down and he gave me a certificate!' - and can set up unrealistic expectations of the role of the teacher, 'OK, so how much will I earn for not kicking Hassan this week?'

through prayer. But teachers can encourage self reflection in secular schools too. Start with three simple questions and ask the children to make lists: 'What have I received from other people? What have I given to others? What troubles have I caused?' Ask the children to consider the last 24 hours of their lives. Have you received a smile, some food, a helping hand? Have you held the door for someone, helped around the house or said thank you? And finally, who have you caused trouble for? Did you speak badly about someone, leave a mess behind you or push in front? Regular rituals of self reflection help children (and adults) to interact with the world with gratitude and grace. Money, sweets, stickers and stuff can teach a hunger for a material world that we have a duty to counter.

Intrinsic motivation begins with an understanding that education is a privilege and achievement a reward. Learning can be as immediately satisfying as a chocolate éclair if you are taught to appreciate it and be genuinely grateful for it.

Let the Children Drive



TAKE ON PAUL DIX'S CHALLENGE TO TEACH IN QUESTIONS...
 Try teaching in questions. Set yourself a challenge for next week and plan a lesson that is taught entirely by questions. Stick to the same content but draw out the answers from your class. Every interaction must be a question and you should not allow yourself room for giving advice or direct teaching. Let the children feel a sense of control and reflect back the ideas they have created, the knowledge they have contributed and the choices they have made. Finish with 'What do you think that I was trying to teach you?' and show them how it matches your previously hidden objectives for the lesson. Outstanding teachers have a relentless and powerful motor but are not afraid of letting others drive.

short term, designed to manage behaviour and requires little engagement from the pupil. It hooks children's attention but is too frivolous to satisfy. Rapport with a trusted teacher, learning

gratitude through self reflection and having autonomy in learning are not quick fixes but they give children a deeper motivation that lasts a lot longer than sparkly carrots.

Make success its own reward

Outstanding teachers know that it is not the value of the reward that is important but the way in which it is given. I can make you feel like a king with a smile and worthless with 20 quid. Teaching gratitude means that your students learn to reflect on the rewards in education that are being lost to the 'big prize' generation; the rewards that are genuinely important - success, achievement, pride and opportunity.

In schools with a religious emphasis, gratitude is taught

Foster lasting motivation

The smallest things seem to motivate on the surface. The reveal of an advent calendar, a quiz, the spin of the tombola wheel, the chance to lead others, the whiff of challenge and the promise of competition. Yet much of this is



Find out more

Paul Dix is a leading voice in behaviour and learning management in the UK and internationally. As managing director of Pivotal Education he leads a team of ten behaviour and learning specialists in training and intervention projects. You can sign up for their free tips service and download free resources at www.pivotaleducation.com