



Learning Times

Motivation: One of the Keys to Academic Success

Why does my child spend more time and energy avoiding schoolwork than it would take to do it?

Have you observed your child expending significant energy to avoid schoolwork? It can be baffling to try to understand why a child feels it is worth fighting for two hours to avoid solving 10 math problems. Kids can lose motivation to learn for several reasons. For one, schoolwork that is beyond a student's ability level threatens their competence. Feeling competent is a basic human need.

Research indicates that for the first four years of elementary school kids tend to believe that success comes with effort. Around sixth grade students begin to compare their performance with their peers. The once held belief that effort leads to success is changed as students start comparing their performance to others. Suddenly effort becomes perceived as an indicator of one's ability. Hence, the more effort one has to spend on math the less capable he/she is in math. For example, in early elementary school a child will increase effort after failing a task believing that failure may have been caused by lack of effort. By middle school a similar situation may elicit a response of withdrawal and belief that failure was caused by a lack of ability. So, in middle school and junior high, students will begin to avoid tasks or subjects that they feel they are incapable of because they wish to avoid being perceived as incompetent.

Since perceived lack of ability puts the student at risk for being ridiculed by peers, students with learning difficulties/disabilities will go to ultimate lengths to avoid tasks that require too much teacher help to complete, risk possible exposure to failure, or are perceived by peers as "easy". Adults must remember that it is developmentally normal for any child, not

just a child with a learning difficulty/disability, to need to be perceived as capable by his/her peers.

To increase motivation, parents and teachers must emphasize that effort leads to success when effort is used effectively.

Unless teachers and parents challenge the belief that effort equals ability, students will

continue to believe that a subject that requires great effort to succeed is an indication of a lack of ability. Teachers and parents who only encourage a student to put in more effort may be confirming the belief that the student has to put in more effort because he/she is less capable. It is also not uncommon to hear students say they will put in more effort for the next test only to find that

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they still receive a failing grade. He/she may even respond by saying, "but I spent hours studying." In all likelihood the student spent two hours with the books open, but may not have been applying good study habits or using a learning strategy that is effective for him/her. To increase motivation, parents and teachers must emphasize that effort leads to success when effort is used effectively. Teaching a student how to study effectively and efficiently can reduce the amount of time needed to prepare as well as increase the frequency of success. In which case success will breed a desire for more success and the motivation to work hard at difficult tasks.

Students who experience continuous failure or inability to understand schoolwork despite increased effort can develop the belief that he/she is helpless to do anything right. This is especially true for students who are several grade levels behind in reading. These thoughts can generalize to expectations of failure across multiple tasks and subjects. Students with this belief system even come to anticipate failure in tasks they have never tried before. Researchers call this learned helplessness. Unfortunately, individuals who develop learned helplessness quit trying despite their potential or what others say to them. The danger in holding these beliefs is that it puts students at increased risk for depression, academic failure, and poor health across their lifespans.

10 Things that **ZAP!** Motivation

1. Schoolwork that is beyond a student's ability level.
2. Homework in the same subject that the student has struggled with for long hours during the school day.
3. Sarcastic comments from parents and teachers. (e.g. "If you weren't so lazy, you might actually succeed at something.")
4. Focusing too much on performing for rewards and not on mastering the material.
5. Rewarding kids for doing things they already find enjoyable.
6. Chaos, unpredictable expectations, and unclear criteria for success.
7. Requiring effort that is not productive.
8. Setting expectations too high.
9. Publicly announcing who is not succeeding or doing well.
10. Setting up reward systems solely based on performance.

Ten Ways to Spark Motivation!

To Motivate the Reluctant Student

1. Provide clear expectations of what is required to succeed.
2. Explicitly teach or model effective effort leading to success.
3. Provide examples of when a learning strategy will be effective vs. ineffective.
4. Help students to learn how they learn best and apply their preferred strategies to any subject they struggle with.
5. Adjust difficult tasks by length and/or level to a student's ability.

To Help Your Child Unlearn Learned Helplessness

1. Encourage students to take credit for their success. Have them explain what they did to succeed and challenge any statement that discounts effort.
2. Set up situations that guarantee initial success then work on more risky tasks.
3. Keep appraisal of a student's work private and personal.
4. Encourage students to evaluate their own work.
5. Base evaluations on personal improvement rather than only on performance.

If you are interested in learning more about motivating reluctant learners, LDA can provide your school or parent group with a 3-hour workshop on motivation. Please call 952-922-8374 for more information or to set up a workshop!

Seven Things People Do to Avoid Being Discovered as Incapable

1. Faking attention during class discussions.
2. Asking questions even though the answer is already known.
3. Pretending to be thinking really hard.
4. Using excuses such as not having their book or materials for class.
5. Waiting until the last minute to study. This provides a build in excuse for why they could have done better.
6. Set unattainable goals. Failure at an unreasonably difficult task doesn't imply low ability.
7. Do easy tasks where success is guaranteed and attempt unreasonably difficult ones so the teacher can't pinpoint the ability.



LDA Project Changes Climate in School

LDA Learning Center has partnered with Risen Christ School, a private parochial school in south Minneapolis for the past 4 years. LDA's partnership with Risen Christ School has expanded this year to include the implementation of a new program the school has adopted called "Discipline With Purpose" (DWP). In order to help facilitate the introduction of DWP, two LDA staff, along with several Risen Christ staff and administrators, attended a two-day intensive training in St. Louis, MO. With this new knowledge, LDA staff then prepared and facilitated several in-service trainings to the entire Risen Christ staff as well as parents and volunteers at the school. LDA also provides weekly DWP faculty meetings and support to the staff and administrators with DWP issues.

Discipline With Purpose is a comprehensive program that incorporates self-discipline skill development with school-wide discipline resources such as rule structure and discipline cycles. During the teacher in-service week that LDA staff facilitated, the Risen Christ staff developed and adopted a set of acceptable behaviors for all common areas of the school such as the hallways and playground. Each teacher then taught the acceptable behaviors for each area in their classrooms during the first few weeks of school and continues to make it a part of their daily plans.

In addition to the school-wide discipline procedures, the staff use developmentally appropriate lesson plan folders from DWP to help students become proficient in self-discipline skills. There are **15 Skills of Self-Discipline** that have been adopted by the Risen Christ staff through the Discipline With Purpose program. The assumption of the program is that self-discipline can be taught just like any other subject. The 15 skills will be taught formally and informally and will become a part of their everyday routine throughout the school year. The 15 Skills of Self-Discipline are: Listening, Following Instructions, Asking Questions, Sharing, Social Skills, Cooperation, Understanding Reasons for Rules, Completing a Task, Leadership, Communication, Organization, Resolving Problems, Initiating Solutions, Understanding Fact vs. Feeling, and Service to Others.

The effort, time and involvement of the entire faculty in coming to consensus on these key issues have already revealed positive change in the overall climate of the school. Feedback from teachers, staff, parents, and administrators has been overwhelmingly positive. The Discipline With Purpose program has offered a consistent format for dealing with discipline, nurturing self-disciplined individuals, and allowing faculty the freedom to be flexible and creative.

Effort, time and involvement... have already revealed positive change in the overall climate of the school.

Let's keep in touch

We would like to provide you with timely news, information, and resources about LDA Learning Center and our services. Please provide us with your e-mail address, and we will send you updates.

Contact Emily Nordhus, LDA's Marketing Administrator at 952-922-8374 or email her at en@ldalearningcenter.com.

Thank you for your continued support!

Intensive Reading Program Grows

LDA has recently received a three-year grant from The Cargill Foundation to expand its Learning Connections Program's intensive reading services from two schools to six schools by school year 2005. Since 1993, The Cargill Foundation has awarded over \$150,000 to LDA, including a \$100,000 two-year grant in 2001.

"A satisfying life is filled with learning, and we're very grateful to The Cargill Foundation for helping children experience the joy of reading which opens up a whole new world of learning for children," said Kitty Christiansen, executive director of LDA Learning Center. "It's so rewarding to see the results that occur in a child's life when teachers, volunteers, parents and the community work together to overcome learning challenges in our youth."

With the goal of promoting literacy and learning success for children at-risk for reading failure, the Learning Connections Program partners with Twin Cities communities and elementary schools to work with students, parents, teachers and volunteers. The program offers students an individualized, hands-on approach to reading instruction and offers parents workshops, support groups and training in activities that encourage literacy. Additionally, the program works with teachers and volunteers to improve reading instruction and behavior management.

"Cargill has been working in partnership with LDA for the past two years and we are very impressed with the gains in reading the students have attained," said Toni Green, senior program officer of The Cargill Foundation. "This program supports the Foundation's mission, which is to prepare the next generation for success in school, work and life. We are gratified to be able to assist LDA in this important work."



The Learning Connections Program is positively impacting the lives of participants. In 2001, the program served 489 economically and educationally disadvantaged children and families. Ninety-three percent of the 218 children involved in the intensive reading services demonstrated academic skill gains, and 100 percent of the parents enrolled in parent education said they gained new knowledge and skills to support their children's learning.

The Learning Connections Program has operated for six years and has established a variety of partnerships. Current partners include Andersen Elementary School, Andersen Family and Community Resource Center, Four Winds American Indian School, Risen Christ Elementary School, North Star School, Jefferson School, and the American Indian Center's Golden Eagles Program.

Make a Gift to Help a Child

LDA Learning Center relies on gifts from corporations, foundations, and most of all from individuals like you. Your contribution supports programs and services benefitting individuals of all ages with learning disabilities. Donations to LDA Learning Center are tax deductible.

- \$1,000 to provide training and coaching on LD issues to 10 teachers
- \$500 to provide a diagnostic evaluation for a child or adult with suspected LD
- \$250 to provide five hours of 1:1 tutoring for a child
- \$100 to provide school-to-work resources for five high school students with LD
- \$50 to provide reading materials for children at-risk of academic failure

Please consider making a gift through our web site at www.ldalearningcenter.com

LDA is a private, non-profit, educational agency that specializes in helping children, youth, and adults with learning disabilities or other learning difficulties maximize their potential so that they and their families may lead more productive and fulfilled lives.

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