

Educationally Speaking

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What motivates our students? For educators, this is a very relevant question in the learning process. What is challenging the thinking of many is research concluding that external rewards and incentives are no longer the significant source of motivation as they once were.

In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel Pink concludes that what actually motivates ourselves and others is the internal need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better for ourselves and our world. We can understand by the author's remarks that for students, achieving external rewards such as getting good grades, earning scholarships or achieving other external recognitions such as being accepted into prestigious universities are insufficient motivators for quality student achievement.

If acting on this concept of internal motivation contributes the most to high performance and satisfaction, it will mean that several changes will need to occur in schools. The concept of students directing their own learning means that classrooms no longer are teacher-centric. The role of the teacher changes to one in which she or he provides conditions and opportunities for students to acquire and apply knowledge. There is less dependence on the teacher as the source of knowledge and information.

Much of the 21st century learning research states that the skills students will need in order to be economically competitive in tomorrow's world must include the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn and to be creative. Knowledge is expanding so quickly, that the concept of having students learn as much knowledge as possible during their time in school is simply inadequate preparation for the work place. The emphasis will have to change from teaching students *what* to learn to *how* to learn. Our teaching practices will also have to change to provide opportunities for students to be creative. It is very difficult for adults to be creative if those opportunities have not been nurtured in a school setting.

Doing better for ourselves and our world suggests that schools and communities need to expand student opportunities for growth and service. The challenge is to find an appropriate balance between that which is scripted and directed and that which provides students with freedom of choice.

I wish I could tell you that implementing the above strategies would result in all of our students being motivated to learn, grow, and contribute. The unfortunate reality is that there will always be some students who need external motivation and incentive to learn. However, I am convinced that our students would learn more and teachers would enjoy teaching much more as we expand opportunities for students to pursue their own learning.

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