

Motivational Strategies

Excerpted from Wlodkowski (1998), p. 101-110.

Certain motivational strategies appear to be classic in their relationship to the instruction of adults. These strategies are well documented in the literature of psychology and their application is widely supported by the wisdom of practice. They are realistic methods that have a logical probability of enhancing learner motivation. Here the strategies are categorized according to the major motivation factor to which they most directly relate.

Attitude

- **Ensure successful learning.** It is difficult for adults to dislike a subject in which they are successful. Conversely, it is rare to find adults who really like a subject in which they are unsuccessful. Competent learning in a subject is probably one of the surest ways to initiate a positive attitude toward that subject.
Some adults may need more time and effort to master what is being taught. We can positively influence their attitudes as well as those of our faster learners when we *guarantee* the following three conditions:
 - 1) Quality instruction that will help them learn if they try to learn.
 - 2) Concrete evidence that their effort makes a difference.
 - 3) Continued feedback regarding the progress of their learning.
- **Make the first experience with a new subject or topic safe, successful, and interesting.** This strategy is based on the idea that first impressions are important. Therefore, the first time learners experience anything that is new or occurs in a different setting, they are forming an impression that can have a lasting impact. Making that initial contact as safe, successful, and interesting as possible will help the learners to form an attitude that will positively influence their future involvement with that subject.
- **Where accurate, stress the importance of the amount and quality of effort needed for success in learning tasks and do this prior to their initiation.** Since effort is something over which learners have control, this emphasis establishes their responsibility, reduces their feeling of helplessness, increases their tendency to persevere, and helps them to feel genuine pride of accomplishment.
- **Make the learning goal as clear as possible.** When learners understand exactly what they are to learn, confusion cannot detract from their expectancy to succeed. This may mean distributing instructional objectives, handing out a list of learning outcomes, or writing the purpose of a particular unit of study—whatever it takes to clearly let the learners know what they are expected to learn.
- **Make the criteria of evaluation as clear as possible.** For most adults, evaluation procedures will heavily influence their receptivity to feedback, their feelings of reinforcement, their sense of progress, and their self-

confidence as learners. The criteria of evaluation have to be clear to them from the beginning of learning if they are to know which elements of their performance and effort are essential. When the criteria are clear, they have a “road map” to success and can self-direct and self-evaluate their learning as they proceed. The teacher’s role is to explain as specifically as appropriate the standards of evaluation so that the learners can comprehend how these are applied and used as measures of learning.

- **Promote the adults’ self-determination within the learning experience.** Because adults are inclined toward autonomy, giving them the opportunity to initiate and/or direct their own learning should enhance their positive attitude toward the learning endeavor. To the degree possible, have learners plan and set goals for their own learning and make their own choices about what, how, and when to learn.

Need

- **Know and emphasize the felt needs of the learners throughout the instructional process.** Felt needs are in the conscious awareness of the learner and they are needs that the learner wants or desires to gratify. Although felt needs may not represent all the real needs of adult learners, these needs are a fundamental part of the goals and interests that adults bring to a learning experience. The most direct method to survey these needs is to ask the learners through interviews, group discussion, or questionnaires what they most want to get out of this learning experience. The teacher then integrates these learner-felt needs into the learning activities.
- **Plan activities to allow adults to share what they have learned and produced.** When adults know from the beginning that their learning outcomes will be shared and available to their fellow learners, their motivation for the learning task is usually increased. However, the emphasis should be on sharing, gaining, feedback, appreciating uniqueness, understanding personal differences, and learning from one another.

Stimulation

- **Provide variety in the process and materials used for learning.** Variety is stimulating and draws learner attention toward its source. People tend to pay more attention to things that are changing than to things that are unchanging. Strategies to infuse variety include changing methods of instruction, changing materials used for instruction, and changing interpersonal learning patterns (e.g. individual, partners, or small groups)
- **Use disequilibrium to stimulate learner involvement.** Cognitive disequilibrium is the tension people feel when they experience something that does not fit with what they already know. This tension causes them to involve themselves with the new experience until they can understand it or fit it into what they know or can do. For instruction,

this works in both content and process. New topics, unusual class assignments, unfamiliar insights, surprising research, and unique skills will encourage learner involvement.

Affect

- ***Make abstract content more personal and familiar.*** To some extent this can be done by applying what is being learned to the daily lives of the learners, such as how new technology or new ideas are found in current events, local lifestyles, and regional media. Other ways include demonstrations using familiar objects, pictures, and movies as well as employing examples with famous people or events. In general when people find any way to identify with what they are learning, they will more readily have their emotions involved in the learning process. This enhances their overall participation.
- ***Use cooperative goal structures to achieve learning outcomes.*** A cooperative structure exists when learners work together to achieve joint goals. In cooperative groups, members seek outcomes that benefit both themselves and their colleagues. A common example is for a group of learners to produce a single product such as a research report, a problem solution, or a plan of action.

Competence

- ***Provide consistent and prompt feedback to learners regarding their performance and mastery in learning tasks.*** Feedback is information that learners receive about the quality of their performance on a given task. Knowledge of results, comments about skill performance, notes on a written assignment, graphic records and an approving nod are forms of feedback that teachers often use with adult learners.
- ***Whenever possible use performance evaluation procedures.*** Performance evaluation procedures are the construction of situations in which the learner actually performs a sample of the behaviors with which a given learning experience is concerned. This is done in a manner resembling as closely as possible the ways in which what has been learned will ultimately be expressed. This may be a real situation in which an actual learned behavior, such as operating a machine or carrying out a procedure, is performed and the performance is rated, timed, or otherwise measured. Also, it may be a simulated situation resembling real life as closely as possible.

Reinforcement

- ***Use positive reinforcers for routine, well-learned activities, complex skill building, and drill-and-practice activities.*** Routine, well-learned activities are situations where the learner has the basic skills but there is a need to improve the speed, rate, or persistence of the skill. All of these learning activities have one thing in common—

they usually follow some form of set sequence and process for effective learning and application. Positive reinforcement has been demonstrated as a very effective means to teaching such skills.

- ***When learning has natural consequences, help learners to be aware of them.*** Natural consequences are the changes or results that the learners can perceive as produced by their learning behavior. Reading a book has the natural consequence of producing new insights. Solving a problem results in the natural consequence of a solution. Often learners are not aware of the natural consequences of their learning and teachers can help them by highlighting and emphasizing results. Also, by making learners active as soon as possible, natural consequences can occur to increase and maintain their motivation. Discussion, feedback, and comparison of learner progress with past work can positively draw the attention of adults to their learning accomplishments and enhance their sense of growing competence. “Look what you have done” can help a person to realize “look what you can do.”

References

- Wlodkowski, R. J. (1998). Strategies to enhance adult motivation to learn. In M. W. Galbraith (Ed.), *Adult learning methods* (2nd ed., pp. 91-111). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Associates.