Six Reasons Why Students Are Unmotivated (and What Teachers Can Do)

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Motivating Students: Agenda…

1. Defining 'Motivation' (and Related Behavioral Principles)

2. Analyzing Why a Student Lacks Motivation and Selecting Appropriate Strategies

3. Reviewing Additional Internet Resources

Six Reasons Why Students Are Unmotivated (And What Teachers Can Do)

- This handout provides guidance to teachers in identifying why a student lacks motivation and what general strategies are recommended in the research.

- The teacher then has latitude to use the general guidelines and the research that supports them as a starting-point for their own intervention ideas to boost motivation.

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RTI Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Schools

Six Reasons Why Students Are Unmotivated (and What Teachers Can Do)
Jim Wright, Presenter

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Contents

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Motivation: What is It?

Focus of Inquiry: How do schools define 'motivation' in a manner that empowers them to fix the problem?

Academic or Behavioral Targets Are Stated as 'Replacement Behaviors'

"The implementation of successful interventions begins with accurate problem identification. Traditionally, the student problem was stated as a broad, general concern (e.g., impulsive, aggressive, reading below grade level) that a teacher identified. In a competency-based approach, however, the problem identification is stated in terms of the desired replacement behaviors that will increase the student's probability of successful adaptation to the task demands of the academic setting." p. 178

Source: Batsche, G. M., Castillo, J. M., Dixon, D. N., & Forde, S. (2008). Best practices in problem analysis. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), Best practices in school psychology V (pp. 177-193).

Inference: Moving Beyond the Margins of the 'Known'

"An inference is a tentative conclusion without direct or conclusive support from available data. All hypotheses are, by definition, inferences. It is critical that problem analysts make distinctions between what is known and what is inferred or hypothesized….Low-level inferences should be exhausted prior to the use of high-level inferences." p. 161

Source: Christ, T. (2008). Best practices in problem analysis. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), Best practices in school psychology V (pp. 159-176).

Examples of High vs. Low Inference Hypotheses

An 11th-grade student does poorly on tests and quizzes in math. Homework is often incomplete. He frequently shows up late for class and does not readily participate in group discussions.

High-Inference Hypothesis. The student is 'just lazy' and would do better if he would only apply himself.

Unknown
Known

Low-Inference Hypothesis. The student has gaps in academic skills that require (a) mapping out those skill gaps, and (b) providing the student with remedial instruction as needed.

Unknown
Known
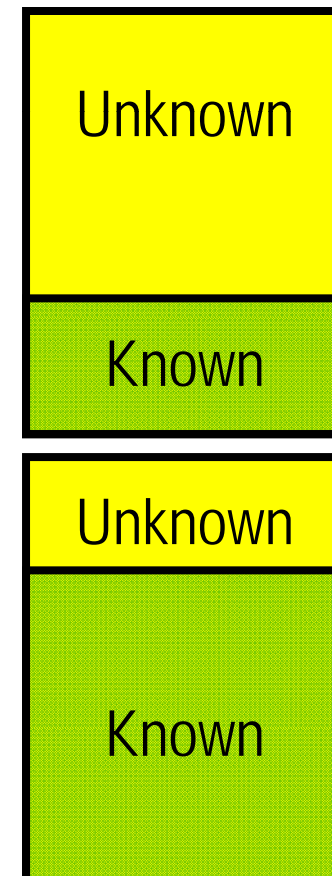
" *…educators continue to exert change efforts toward the individual, particularly in the form of punitive responses, when academic or behavior problems arise. Yet, a rapidly growing literature base offers evidence that this may not be an altogether effective, expedient, or comprehensive approach to academic and behavioral challenges. Instead, intervention strategies that are likely to have a large impact and sustained effect must duly alter those environmental events that beget student challenges.* (Kern & Clemens, 2007) "

Source: Kern, L., & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. *Psychology in the Schools, 44,* 65-75.

Unmotivated Students: What Works

Motivation can be thought of as having two dimensions:

1. the student's expectation of success on the task

   Multiplied by

2. the value that the student places on achieving success on that learning task

The relationship between the two factors is *multiplicative*. If EITHER of these factors (the student's expectation of success on the task OR the student's valuing of that success) is zero, then the 'motivation' product will also be zero.

Source: Sprick, R. S., Borgmeier, C., & Nolet, V. (2002). Prevention and management of behavior problems in secondary schools. In M. A. Shinn, H. M. Walker & G. Stoner (Eds.), *Interventions for academic and behavior problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches* (pp.373-401). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

"An intrinsically motivated behavior [is defined as] one for which there exists no recognizable reward except the activity itself (e.g., reading). That is, behavior that cannot be attributed to external controls is usually attributed to intrinsic motivation."

"…an extrinsically motivated behavior refers to behavior controlled by stimuli external to the task."
p. 345

Source: Akin-Little, K. A., Eckert, T. L., Lovett, B. J., & Little, S. G. (2004). Extrinsic reinforcement in the classroom: Bribery or best practice. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 344-362.

Intrinsic Motivation: Is There Any Utility to This Construct?

By definition, intrinsic motivation is supported by the reinforcing quality of the activity alone. As a construct, 'intrinsic motivation' may be untestable, because the reinforcer cannot be directly observed or experimentally manipulated.

"Intrinsic motivation has been defined as behaviors performed in the absence of observable external reinforcement. Defining any construct in terms of what it is not does little to advance the course of science."
p. 358

Source: Akin-Little, K. A., Eckert, T. L., Lovett, B. J., & Little, S. G. (2004). Extrinsic reinforcement in the classroom: Bribery or best practice. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 344-362.

Student Motivation: Reframe the Issue in Observable (and Fixable) Terms

Step 1: Redefine 'motivation' as academic engagement: e.g., The student chooses "to engage in active accurate academic responding" (Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005).

Step 2: Build staff support for this mission statement: "When a student appears unmotivated, it is the school's job to figure out why the student is unmotivated and to find a way to get that student motivated."

Source: Skinner, C. H., Pappas, D. N., & Davis, K. A. (2005). Enhancing academic engagement: Providing opportunities for responding and influencing students to choose to respond. *Psychology in the Schools, 42*, 389-403.

Motivation Deficits: What Do We Do About Them?

Focus of Inquiry: How can schools identify why students are not motivated and select effective strategies to motivate them?

Six Reasons That Students Are Unmotivated (And What Teachers Can Do)

■ The student is unmotivated because he or she cannot do the assigned work.

■ The student is unmotivated because the 'response effort' needed to complete the assigned work seems too great.

■ The student is unmotivated because classroom instruction does not engage.

■ The student is unmotivated because he or she fails to see an adequate pay-off to doing the assigned work.

■ The student is unmotivated because of low self-efficacy—lack of confidence that he or she can do the assigned work.

■ The student is unmotivated because he or she lacks a positive relationship with the teacher.

Motivation Deficit **1**: *The student is unmotivated because he or she cannot do the assigned work.*

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem:** The student lacks essential skills required to do the task.

Motivation Deficit **1**: Cannot Do the Work

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem (Cont.):** Areas of deficit might include:

- *Basic academic skills.* Basic skills have straightforward criteria for correct performance (e.g., the student defines vocabulary words or decodes text or computes 'math facts') and comprise the building-blocks of more complex academic tasks (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009).

- *Cognitive strategies.* Students employ specific cognitive strategies as "guiding procedures" to complete more complex academic tasks such as reading comprehension or writing (Rosenshine, 1995).

- *Academic-enabling skills.* Skills that are 'academic enablers' (DiPerna, 2006) are not tied to specific academic knowledge but rather aid student learning across a wide range of settings and tasks (e.g., organizing work materials, time management).

Motivation Deficit **1**: Cannot Do the Work (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says:** When a student lacks the capability to complete an academic task because of limited or missing basic skills, cognitive strategies, or academic-enabling skills, that student is still in the acquisition stage of learning (Haring et al., 1978). That student cannot be expected to be motivated or to be successful as a learner unless he or she is first explicitly taught these weak or absent essential skills (Daly, Witt, Martens & Dool, 1997).

Motivation Deficit **1**: Cannot Do the Work (Cont.)

- **How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem:** The teacher collects information (e.g., through observations of the student engaging in academic tasks; interviews with the student; examination of work products, quizzes, or tests) demonstrating that the student lacks basic skills, cognitive strategies, or academic-enabling skills essential to the academic task.

Motivation Deficit **1**: Cannot Do the Work (Cont.)

- **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:** Students who are not motivated because they lack essential skills need to be taught those skills.

  Direct-Instruction Format. Students learning new material, concepts, or skills benefit from a 'direct instruction' approach. (Burns, VanDerHeyden & Boice, 2008; Rosenshine, 1995; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009).

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Nichols, 2009). When following a direct-instruction format, the teacher:

❑ ensures that the lesson content is appropriately matched to students' abilities.

❑ opens the lesson with a brief review of concepts or material that were previously presented.

❑ states the goals of the current day's lesson.

❑ breaks new material into small, manageable increments, or steps.

❑ throughout the lesson, provides adequate explanations and detailed instructions for all conce
    and materials being taught. NOTE: Verbal explanations can include 'talk-alouds' (e.g., the
    teacher describes and explains each step of a cognitive strategy) and 'think-alouds' (e.g., the
    teacher applies a cognitive strategy to a particular problem or task and verbalizes the steps
    applying the strategy).

❑ regularly checks for student understanding by posing frequent questions and eliciting group
    responses.

❑ verifies that students are experiencing sufficient success in the lesson content to shape their
    learning in the desired direction and to maintain student motivation and engagement.

❑ provides timely and regular performance feedback and corrections throughout the lesson as
    needed to guide student learning.

❑ allows students the chance to engage in practice activities distributed throughout the lesson
    (e.g., through teacher demonstration; then group practice with teacher supervision and
    feedback; then independent, individual student practice).

❑ ensures that students have adequate support (e.g., clear and explicit instructions; teacher
    monitoring) to be successful during independent seatwork practice activities.

Motivation Deficit **1**: Cannot Do the Work (Cont.)

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❑ ensures that students have adequate support (e.g., clear and explicit instructions; teacher monitoring) to be successful during independent seatwork practice activities.

Motivation Deficit **2**: *The student is unmotivated because the 'response effort' needed to complete the assigned work seems too great.*

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem:** Although the student has the required skills to complete the assigned work, he or she perceives the 'effort' needed to do so to be so great that the student loses motivation.

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says:** Research indicates that (1) as the perceived effort to complete an academic task or other behavior ('response effort') *increases*, people are *less* likely to engage in that behavior, while (2) as the effort to complete the same behavior *decreases*, people are *more* likely to engage in it (Friman & Poling, 1995).

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

- **How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem:** The teacher first checks to see that the student has the requisite skills needed for academic success. The teacher then looks for evidence that, in specific situations, the student is reluctant to undertake academic tasks because they are perceived to require too much effort.

  Tell-tale signs that a student may be unmotivated because of the required response effort include procrastination, verbal complaining, frequent seeking of teacher help, and other avoidant behaviors.

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

- **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:** Teachers can increase student motivation through any method that reduces the apparent 'response effort' of an academic task (Friman & Poling, 1995). - so long as that method does not hold the student to a lesser academic standard than classmates (Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005).

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by Reducing Response Effort :

- *Start Assigned Readings in Class.* Whenever the teacher assigns a challenging text for students to read independently (e.g., as homework), the teacher (or perhaps a skilled student reader) reads the first few paragraphs of the assigned reading aloud while the class follows along silently in their own texts. Students are then expected to read the remainder of the text on their own.

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by Reducing Response Effort :

- *Begin Challenging Homework Assignments in Class.* When assigned challenging homework, students are paired off or divided into groups and given a small amount of class time to begin the homework together, develop a plan for completing the homework, formulate questions about the homework, or engage in other activities that will create the necessary momentum to motivate students then to complete the work independently.

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by Reducing Response Effort :

- *'Chunk' Assignments.* The teacher breaks a larger student assignment into smaller 'chunks'. The teacher provides the student with performance feedback and praise for each completed 'chunk' of assigned work (Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005).

- *Select a Supportive Peer or Adult to Get a Student Started on Assignments.* If a student finds it difficult to get organized and begin independent seatwork activities, a supportive peer or adult in the classroom can get the student organized and started on the assignment.

Motivation Deficit **2**: Response Effort (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by Reducing Response Effort :

- *Provide a Formal Work Plan.* For more complex assignments such as research papers, the teacher gives the student an outline of a work plan for completing those assignments. The plan breaks a larger assignment into appropriate sub-steps (e.g., 'find five research articles for the paper', 'summarize key information from research articles into notes', etc.). For each sub-step, the plan provides (1) an estimate of the minimum 'seat time' required to complete it and (2) sets a calendar-date deadline for completion. The teacher then touches base with the student at least weekly about his or her progress.

Sequencing of Activities: Precede Low-Probability Items with High-Probability Items

Using High-Probability Sequencing. A 'low-probability' problem or item is one that the student is less likely to attempt, perhaps because of poor motivation. However, educators can make use of behavioral momentum to raise the odds that the student will attempt a low-probability challenge problem by first presenting that student with a series of problems that are 'high probability' (the student is likely to attempt and to complete them correctly) (Cates et al., 2003). On a spelling test, for example, the instructor may present three easier words in a row before presenting the low-probability challenge word (e.g., 'specific'). The instructor can experiment with the number of high-probability problems or items that precede each low-probability challenge problem to find the most efficient sequence that still promotes student motivation and learning.

Source: Cates, G. L., Skinner, C. H., Watson, T. S., Meadows, T. J., Weaver, A., & Jackson, B. (2003). Instructional effectiveness and instructional efficiency as considerations for data-based decision making: An evaluation of interspersing procedures. *School Psychology Review, 32*, 601-616.

Motivation Deficit **3**: *The student is unmotivated because classroom instruction does not engage.*

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem:** The student is distracted or off-task because classroom instruction and learning activities are not sufficiently reinforcing to hold his or her attention.

" *…researchers [shows] that when provided with a choice of two or more behaviors, with all else held constant, students are more likely to choose to engage in the behavior that results in more immediate reinforcement, higher rate reinforcement, or higher quality reinforcement… Thus, educators can increase the probability of students choosing to engage in assigned work by both enhancing reinforcement for assigned tasks and weakening reinforcement for competing behaviors…* (Skinner et al., 2005; p. 396) "

Source: Skinner, C. H., Pappas, D. N., & Davis, K. A. (2005). Enhancing academic engagement: Providing opportunities for responding and influencing students to choose to respond. *Psychology in the Schools, 42,* 389-403.

Motivation Deficit 3: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says:** In classroom settings, students can choose to respond to a variety of reinforcing events— for example, watching the teacher, interacting with peers, looking out the window at passing traffic. The fact is that classroom instruction must always compete for student attention with other sources of reinforcement (Billington & DiTommaso, 2003; Skinner, Pappas, & Davis, 2005). There are two ways that the instructor can increase the student's motivation to attend to classroom instruction: (1) by *decreasing* the reinforcing power of competing (distracting) stimuli, and/or (2) by *increasing* the reinforcing power of academic activities.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

- **How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem:** The teacher observes that the student is engaged in behaviors other than those related to instruction or is otherwise distracted by non-instructional events occurring in the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher has verified that the student's lack of attention to instruction is not due primarily to that student's attempting to escape or avoid difficult classwork.

Motivation Deficit 3: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

- **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:** The teacher can increase the inattentive student's focus on instruction and engagement in learning activities by:

  - *Reducing the Reinforcing Power of Non-Instructional Activities.* The teacher identifies any non-instructional activities in the classroom that are competing with instruction for the student's attention and takes steps to reduce or eliminate them.

  - *Increasing the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction.* The teacher strives to boost the reinforcing quality of academic activities and instruction to better capture and hold the student's attention.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Reducing* the Reinforcing Power of Non-Instructional Activities:

- *Use Preferential Seating* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The teacher seats a student who is distracted by peers or other environmental factors in a location where the student is most likely to stay focused on instructional content. All teachers have an 'action zone', a part of the room where they tend to focus most of their instruction; the instructor seats the distractible student somewhere within that zone. The ideal seating location for any particular student will vary, depending on the unique qualities of that student and of the classroom.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Reducing* the Reinforcing Power of Non-Instructional Activities:

- *Create Low-Distraction Work Areas* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004. For students who are off-task during independent seatwork, the teacher can set up a study carrel in the corner of the room or other low-distraction work area. The teacher can then either direct the distractible student to use that area whenever independent seatwork is assigned or can permit the student to choose when to use the area.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Reducing* the Reinforcing Power of Non-Instructional Activities:

- *Restrict Student Access to Electronic Devices and Other Potential Distracting Objects.* The teacher creates a list of personal possessions that can pose the potential to distract from instruction (e.g., cell phones, personal game devices, etc.). The teacher either completely bans use of these items of student property at any point during a course session or restricts their use to clearly specified times or conditions.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Increasing* the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction:

- *Use Bellringer Activities.* The teacher routinely gives students 'bellringer' activities to work on as soon as they enter the classroom. The point of this strategy is to capture students' attention at the outset with academically relevant activities. Ideally, bellringer tasks should be engaging but also should review and reinforce previously taught content or prepare students for the upcoming lesson.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Increasing* **the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction:**

- *Provide Opportunities for Choice* (Kern, Bambara, & Fogt, 2002). One efficient way to promote choice in the classroom is for the teacher to create a master menu of options that students can select from in various learning situations. For example, during independent assignment, students might be allowed to (1) choose from at least 2 assignment options, (2) sit where they want in the classroom, and (3) select a peer-buddy to check their work. Student choice then becomes integrated seamlessly into the classroom routine.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Increasing* the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction:

- *Structure Lessons around High-Interest or Functional-Learning Goals* (Kern, Bambara, & Fogt, 2002; Miller et al., 2003). A student is more likely to be engaged when academic lessons are based on 'high-interest' topics that interest the student (e.g., NASCAR racing; fashion) or that have a 'functional-learning' pay-off—e.g., job interview skills; money management skills --that the student values and can apply in his or her own life.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Increasing* the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction:

- *Incorporate Cooperative Learning Activities into Instruction* (Beyda, Zentall, & Ferko, 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Teacher-directed cooperative learning activities can be highly reinforcing for adolescent students, who typically find opportunities to interact with classmates to be a strong motivator. Cooperative learning tasks have the added advantages of promoting active student engagement and allowing the instructor to get real-time feedback through direct observation about the abilities and learning of individual students.

Motivation Deficit **3**: Instruction Does Not Engage (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve Motivation by *Increasing* the Reinforcing Power of Classroom Instruction:

- *Maintain a Brisk Pace of Instruction* (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). Instruction that is well-matched to the abilities of the classroom and moves at a brisk pace is most likely to capture and hold student attention. Additionally, the teacher is careful to avoid 'dead time', interruptions of instruction (e.g., time-consuming transitions to other activities; etc.) when students may get off-task and be difficult to redirect back to academic tasks.

Motivation Deficit **4**: *The student is unmotivated because he or she fails to see an adequate pay-off to doing the assigned work.*

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem:** The student requires praise, access to rewards, or other reinforcers in the short term as a temporary 'pay-off' to encourage her or him to apply greater effort.

Motivation Deficit 4: Insufficient Student Pay-Off (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says:** The use of external rewards ('reinforcers') can serve as a temporary strategy to encourage a reluctant student to become invested in completing school work and demonstrating appropriate behaviors (Akin-Little, Eckert, Lovett, & Little, 2004). As the student puts increased effort into academics and behavior to earn teacher-administered reinforcers, the student may in turn begin to experience such positive natural reinforcers as improved grades, increased peer acceptance, a greater sense of self-efficacy in course content, and higher rates of teacher and parent approval. The teacher can then fade and perhaps fully eliminate the use of rewards.

Motivation Deficit 4: Insufficient Student Pay-Off (Cont.)

- **How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem:** Through direct observation, student interview, and/or other means, the teacher has verified that instruction is effectively delivered and sufficiently engaging for most of the class, that the target student has the academic and related skills required for the academic work, and that the student has failed to be motivated by existing incentives such as grades that are typically available in classrooms. In the teacher's judgment, the target student needs additional incentives (e.g., praise, rewards) to promote motivation to complete academic tasks.

Motivation Deficit 4: Insufficient Student Pay-Off (Cont.)

- **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:**

  Praise the Student. The teacher praises the student in clear and specific terms when the student engages in the desired behavior (Kern & Clemens, 2007). The teacher uses praise statements at a rate sufficient to motivate and guide the student toward the behavioral goal.

Praise: Effective…and Underused

Praise can be an efficient way to raise the compliance level of whole groups or individual students. However, studies show that praise is seldom used with general education students and is used even less often with special-needs students (Kern & Clemens, 2007).

Source: Kern, L. & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. *Psychology in the Schools, 44,* 65-75.

Motivation Deficit **4**: Insufficient Student Pay-Off (Cont.)

- **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:**

  Use Rewards. The teacher establishes a reward system to motivate an individual student by implementing these steps (e.g., Kazdin, 1989):

  1. *Define the Target Behavior.*
  2. *Establish Criteria for Success.*
  3. *Choose Student Incentives.*
  4. *Decide Whether a Point System Will Be Used.*
  5. *Decide How the Reward is to Be Delivered.*

Setting Up a Reward Program for a Middle or High School Student: Five Steps

Students who lack motivation to apply effort or behave appropriately in their middle or high school classrooms may benefit from the temporary opportunity to earn incentives for important behavioral goals such as paying attention in class, doing assigned work, or complying with teacher requests. Reward programs can work well for students who chronically struggle in the classroom and do not see a meaningful payoff to doing their assigned work. The purpose of a reward program is to give the student external incentives to encourage increased effort. Presumably, as the student tries harder to attend to instruction and complete academic tasks in order to earn rewards, there is the possibility that the student will also begin to experience collateral benefits from the increased effort, such as improved grades, greater peer acceptance, and an improved sense of self-efficacy with course work. As these benefits accrue, the teacher can gradually fade, then discontinue, the reward program.

General guidelines appear below for setting up an individual reward program in a middle or high school classroom:

1. **Define the Target Behavior.** The teacher writes a definition of the undesired student behavior to be decreased or the desired behavior to be increased as a result of the reward program. The behavioral definition should be written in clear, specific terms—sufficiently clear to allow different observers who might review the behavioral definition to all be in general agreement about when the student is displaying that behavior in the classroom.

   Here are sample behavioral definitions:

   - *John turns in homework, with clear evidence that he has attempted each problem or item assigned.*

   - *Jane remains in her seat during large-group instruction.*

   - *Frank complies with teacher requests within 1 minute.*

2. **Establish Criteria for Success.** The teacher defines the minimum acceptable criteria for student success in the target behavior, which may include information about time intervals, cumulative frequency, and/or percentage of compliance.

   Time-intervals. Most reward systems are based on time intervals. If the student meets the behavioral goal within a specified time interval, the student is judged to have earned an incentive (e.g., reward, token point, praise, etc.). Here are examples of success criteria tied to time intervals:

Motivation Deficit **5**: *The student is unmotivated because of low self-efficacy— lack of confidence that he or she can do the assigned work.*

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem:** The student has a low sense of self-efficacy in a subject area, activity, or academic task and that lack of confidence reduces the student's motivation to apply his or her best effort. NOTE: Self-efficacy is the student's view of his or her own abilities specific to a particular academic area (e.g., mathematics) and should not be confused with self-esteem, which represents the student's global view of his or her self-worth.

Academic Motivation: 'Domain-Specific'

"Research on achievement motivation has documented the role of self-competence beliefs as mediators of actual achievement in various domains…According to numerous theories (e.g., attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, self-worth theory), children perform better and are more motivated to select increasingly challenging tasks when they believe that they have the ability to accomplish a particular task….Most current research and theory focuses on the links between domain-specific self-competence beliefs and domain-specific motivation and performance." p. 509

Source: Jacobs, J. E., Lanza, S., Osgood, D. W., Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Changes in children's self-competence and values: Gender and domain differences across grades one through twelve. *Child Development, 73,* 509-527.

Motivation Deficit 5: Low Self-Efficacy (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says:** Students often sabotage their academic performance by engaging in negative self-talk about their abilities and by making faulty attributions to explain poor academic performance (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002).

Motivation Deficit 5: Low Self-Efficacy (Cont.)

- **How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem:** Teachers can tap students' impressions of self-efficacy by asking them to 'think aloud' about their abilities in the academic area of interest, encouraging the student to:
  - talk about their perceived strengths and weaknesses as learners in particular subject areas
  - give examples (with details) about specific successes and failures that they have experienced on academic assignments present strategies (if any) that they typically use to
  - Discuss how they complete a range of common academic tasks (e.g., undertaking a term paper, completing a chemistry lab exercise, doing homework)
  - disclose their routine for preparing for quizzes and tests.

Motivation Deficit 5: Low Self-Efficacy (Cont.)

• **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:**
Challenge Faulty Student Attributions about Ability. As a student articulates attitudes toward learning and describes techniques that he or she uses as an independent learner, the teacher can use this information to identify whether a low sense of academic self-efficacy may be holding the student back.

A useful framework for analyzing student views about their academic abilities is presented by Linnenbrink & Pintrich (2002). The authors analyze student attributions along three dimensions: internal/external; stable/unstable; and controllable/uncontrollable.

How Attributions About Learning Contribute to Academic Outcomes

Attribution Theory: Dimensions Affecting Student Interpretation of Academic Successes & Failures (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002)	
The situation or event is…	
• Unstable (changes often)	• Stable (can be counted on to remain relatively unchanged)
• Internal (within the student)	• External (occurring in the surrounding environment)
• Uncontrollable (beyond the ability of the student to influence)	• Controllable (within the student's ability to influence)

How Attributions About Learning Contribute to Academic Outcomes

Some people are born mathematicians. *I was born to watch TV.*	
The situation or event is…	
• Unstable (changes often)	• Stable (can be counted on to remain relatively unchanged)
• Internal (within the student)	• External (occurring in the surrounding environment)
• Uncontrollable (beyond the ability of the student to influence)	• Controllable (within the student's ability to influence)

Challenging 'Faulty' Student Attributions: Example

A student says 'I am just not wired to be a writer" (faulty attribution: stable, internal, uncontrollable). The teacher shows the student evidence to disconfirm her attribution: examples of the student's own writing from a portfolio that are of high quality because the topic had interested the student.

The instructor demonstrates that when the student puts effort into her writing, the product is reliably and predictably improved--reframe: unstable/changeable (quality of the writing product depends on student effort), internal (the student has the necessary skill set to produce good writing), controllable (student effort is the key factor in producing a quality writing product).

Source: Linnenbrink, E. A., & Pintrich, P. R. (2002). Motivation as an enabler for academic success. School Psychology Review, 31, 313-327.

Motivation Deficit **6**: *The student is unmotivated because he or she lacks a positive relationship with the teacher.*

- **Profile of a Student with This Motivation Problem:** The student appears indifferent or even hostile toward the instructor and thus may lack motivation to follow teacher requests or to produce work.

Motivation Deficit 6: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says:** Because humans are highly social beings, positive teacher attention can be a very powerful motivator for students (e.g., Kazdin, 1989).

Motivation Deficit 6: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

- **What the Research Says (Cont.):** At times, however, instructors and students can fall into a 'negative reinforcement trap' (Maag, 2001; p. 176) that actively undercuts positive relationships: A student who has difficulty with the classwork misbehaves and is then sent by the teacher to the principal's office. Both teacher and student are reinforced by the student's exclusion from the classroom: The teacher is negatively reinforced by having a difficult student removed from the room and the student is *also* negatively reinforced by being allowed to escape the challenging classwork. Because this scenario is reinforcing to both parties, it is very likely to be repeated with increasing frequency unless the teacher intervenes to break the negative cycle.

Motivation Deficit 6: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

- **How to Verify the Presence of This Motivation Problem:** The teacher looks for evidence that the student lacks a positive relationship with the teacher, such as:
  - the student's apparent avoidance of opportunities to talk to the teacher
  - a lack of eye contact, sarcastic or defiant student comments
  - a general pattern of defiant or non-compliant behavior.

  NOTE: Because teachers as well as students are social beings, an instructor's impression of whether a student 'likes' them or not can often be a good predictor of the actual state of the teacher-student relationship.

Motivation Deficit **6**: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

- **How to Fix This Motivation Problem:** The teacher provides the student with increased doses of positive attention at times when the student is engaging in appropriate behavior. (At the same time, the teacher keeps interactions with the student brief and neutral when that student misbehaves—although the student otherwise is held to the same behavioral expectations as his or her peers.)

Motivation Deficit 6: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve the Student-Teacher Relationship:

- *Strive for a High Ratio of Positive Interactions with Students* (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). A general, proactive rule of thumb to promote positive teacher-student relationships is for instructors to maintain a ratio of at least three positive interactions with any student for every negative (disciplinary) interaction that they have that student.

Motivation Deficit 6: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve the Student-Teacher Relationship:

- *Commit to a Short Series of Positive 'Micro-Conversations'* (Mendler, 2000). The teacher selects a student with whom that instructor wants to build a more positive relationship. The instructor makes a commitment to spend 2 minutes per day for ten consecutive days engaging the student in a positive conversation about topics of interest to that student. NOTE: During those two-minute daily conversations, the teacher maintains a positive tone and avoids talking about the student's problem behaviors or poor academic performance.

Motivation Deficit 6: Lack of Positive Relationship (Cont.)

Try These Ideas to Improve the Student-Teacher Relationship:

- *Emphasize the Positive in Teacher Requests* (Braithwaite, 2001). The teacher avoids using negative phrasing (e.g., "If you don't return to your seat, I can't help you with your assignment") when making a request of a student. Instead, the teacher request is stated in positive terms (e.g., "I will be over to help you on the assignment just as soon as you return to your seat"). When a request has a positive 'spin', that teacher is less likely to trigger a power struggle and more likely to gain student compliance.

Anticipating the Unmotivated Student

Teachers can proactively use the checklist of reasons for poor motivation (and related strategies to address them).

The teacher reviews each motivation blocker and verifies that he or she has procedures in place at the group level to address them.

- The student is unmotivated because he or she cannot do the assigned work.

- The student is unmotivated because the 'response effort' needed to complete the assigned work seems too great.

- The student is unmotivated because classroom instruction does not engage.

- The student is unmotivated because he or she fails to see an adequate pay-off to doing the assigned work.

- The student is unmotivated because of low self-efficacy—lack of confidence that he or she can do the assigned work.

- The student is unmotivated because he or she lacks a positive relationship with the teacher.

Helping the Student Who is 'Under Water' With Late Assignments: A Structure for Teacher–Student Conferences
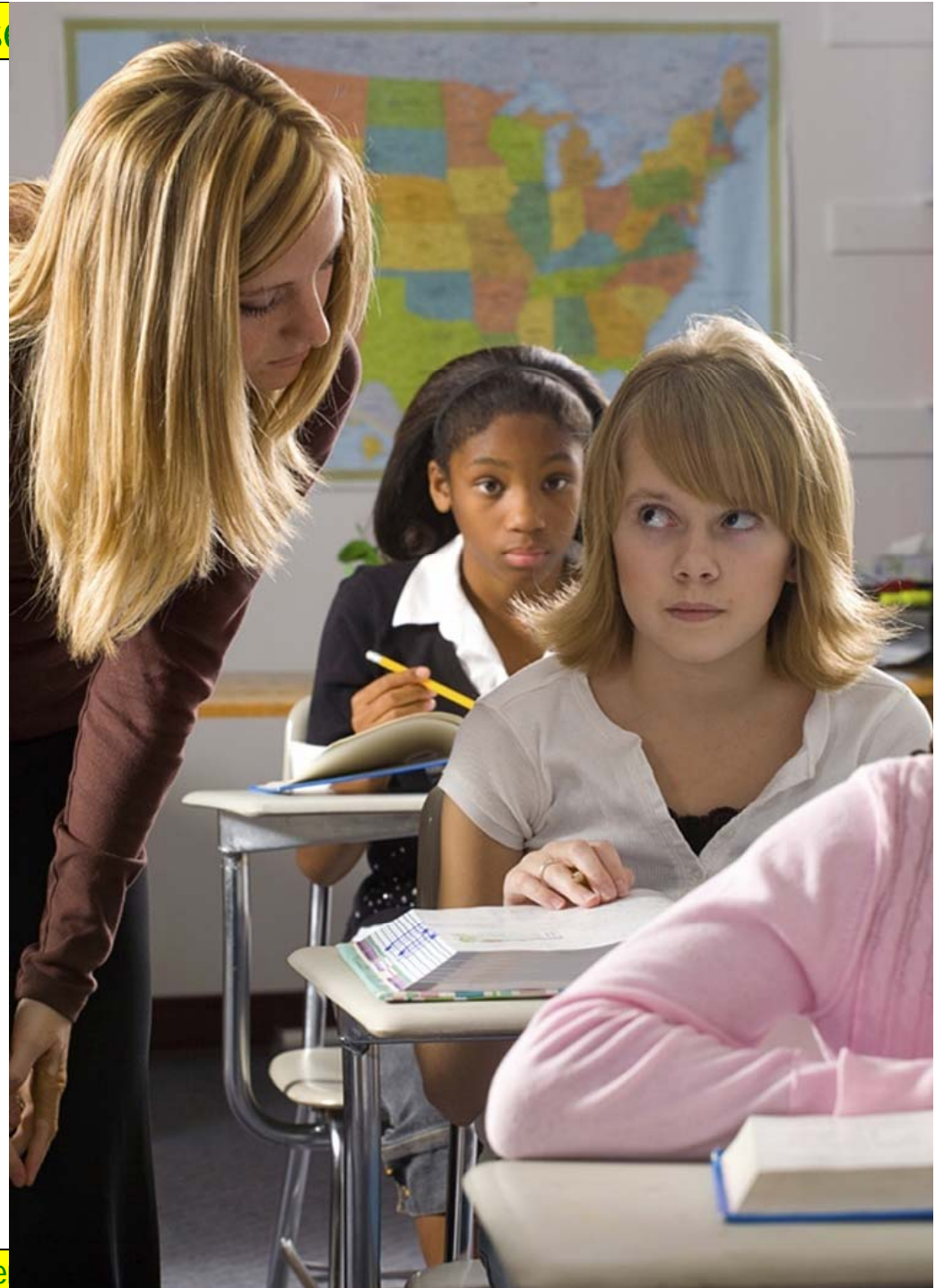
Negotiating Missing Work: Student-Teacher Conference

When students fall behind in their classwork, they can quickly enter a downward spiral. Some students become overwhelmed and simply give up.

In such cases, the teacher may want to meet with the student –and if possible, a parent--to help that student to create a work plan to catch up with late work.

At the meeting, the teacher and student inventory what work is missing, negotiate a plan to complete that overdue work, and perhaps agree on a reasonable penalty when late work is turned in. All attending then sign off on the work plan. The teacher also ensures that the atmosphere at the meeting is supportive.

Negotiating Missing Work: Student-Teacher Conference (Cont.)

Here in greater detail are the steps that the teacher and student would follow at a meeting to renegotiate missing work:

1. *Inventory All Missing Work*. The teacher reviews with the student all late or missing work. The student is given the opportunity to explain why the work has not yet been submitted.

Negotiating Missing Work: Student-Teacher Conference (Cont.)

2. *Negotiate a Plan to Complete Missing Work.* The teacher and student create a log with entries for all missing assignments. Each entry includes a description of the missing assignment and a due date by which the student pledges to submit that work. This log becomes the student's work plan. Submission dates for late assignments should be realistic--particularly for students who owe a considerable amount of late work and are also trying to keep caught up with current assignments.

Student Late-Work Planning Form: Middle & High School

Teacher: _____   Course: _____

Student: _____   Date: _____/____/_____

Directions: At a teacher-student conference, use this form to create a plan for the student to complete and submit missing or late work.

Assignment	Target Date for Completion	NOTES

What penalty--if any--will be imposed for these late assignments? _____

_____

_____   _____   _____
Student Signature   Teacher Signature   Parent Signature

Negotiating Missing Work: Student-Teacher Conference (Cont.)

3. *[Optional] Impose a Penalty for Missing Work.* The teacher may decide to impose a penalty for the work being submitted late. Examples of possible penalties are a reduction of points (e.g., loss of 10 points per assignment) or the requirement that the student do additional work on the assignment than was required of his or her peers who turned it in on time. If imposed, such penalties would be spelled out at this teacher-student conference. Any penalties should be balanced and fair, permitting the teacher to impose appropriate consequences while allowing the student to still see a path to completing missing work and passing the course.

Negotiating Missing Work: Student-Teacher Conference (Cont.)

4. *Periodically Check on the Status of the Missing-Work Plan*. If the schedule agreed upon by teacher and student to complete and submit all late work exceeds two weeks, the teacher (or other designated school contact, such as a counselor) should meet with the student weekly while the plan is in effect. At these meetings, the teacher checks in with the student to verify that he or she is attaining the plan milestones on time and still expects to meet the submission deadlines agreed upon. If obstacles to emerge, the teacher and student engage in problem-solving to resolve them.

Preventing Students from Falling Behind Through Proactive Teacher Communication

What is the Advantage of 'Proactive Teacher Communication'?

Struggling students benefit greatly when the teacher provides a clear explanation of course requirements, and offers regularly updated information about upcoming assignments, missing work, and students' current standing in the course. When the teacher makes a proactive effort to keep students fully and continually informed about course expectations and their own performance, the instructor substantially reduces the likelihood that students will fall behind in their work and be at risk for underperformance or failure in the course.

The Elements of 'Proactive Teacher Communication'

1. *Prepare a Course Syllabus.* At the start of the semester, the teacher hands out a syllabus listing all major course assignments, their descriptions, and due dates, as well as dates of quizzes and tests. This syllabus provides the student with a comprehensive map of all of the work to be done in the course for the semester. It also gives a clear explanation of the grading system, including the relative weight toward the final grade of tests, quizzes, homework, classwork, and student participation. Additionally, the syllabus spells out any penalties for submission of late work.

The Elements of 'Proactive Teacher Communication'

2. *Hand Out Weekly Work Agenda.* On Mondays, the teacher gives students a work agenda for the week. The agenda lists any in-class and homework assignments for that week, their descriptions (if necessary), and due dates. [Optional but recommended] The agenda may also include milestone tasks from larger, multi-week projects (e.g., reminding students in a November agenda that they should have their 6 required source documents for a term paper selected by Friday of the current week).

The Elements of 'Proactive Teacher Communication'

3. *Schedule Weekly Student Conferences.* The teacher holds brief meetings with individual students to review their performance in the course to date, note any missing work and get the student to commit to a plan to submit that work, and checks in with the student about upcoming assignments, quizzes, and tests to ensure that the student continues to stay on top of course requirements. NOTE: If time constraints prevent the teacher from being able to conference with the entire class each week, the instructor may instead meet with at-risk students weekly and meet less frequently (e.g., every other week or monthly) with the remainder of the class.

Internet Resources

Focus of Inquiry: What free resources available online could help teachers in tracking behaviors, including those relating to 'motivation'?

Behavior Report Card Generator

- Helps teachers to define student problem(s) more clearly.

- Reframes student concern(s) as replacement behaviors, to increase the likelihood for success with the academic or behavioral intervention.

- Provides a fixed response format each day to increase the consistency of feedback about the teacher's concern(s).

- Can serve as a vehicle to engage other important players (student and parent) in defining the problem(s), monitoring progress, and implementing interventions.

Behavior Report Card Maker

www.interventioncentral.org

ChartDog GraphMaker

Provides teachers with a tool to create single-subject time-series graphs. The free application allows the user to save his or her data and store online. ChartDog also allows the user to:

- enter up to four data series on one graph
- enter and label phase changes
- set goal-lines and aimlines
- compute trend-lines for any data series by phase
- carry out other statistical calculations

ChartDog GraphMaker
www.interventioncentral.org