

Creating a Learning Environment that Respects Diversity

(after: TEDI, 2001)

Motivation

Motivation is usually defined as something that arouses, directs, and maintains behaviour. It is why people do something in the first place. It is why people keep working towards a particular goal and why they keep on working towards that goal even when things get difficult. There are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is based on personal factors such as needs, interests, curiosity, enjoyment and reaching personal goals. It comes from within the person. When we are intrinsically motivated we do not need incentives or rewards; we do something for the pleasure and enjoyment that we get from doing it.

Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside a person. They can be rewards, social pressure, and punishment. When we do something for a reward, to please someone, or to avoid getting into trouble then we are extrinsically motivated. It means we do something that we are not really interested in doing for its own sake. We do it for the reward or gain that may result.

In an educational situation, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are important. Much of a paper or course can and should be interesting to students. But not everything will be interesting or exciting to everyone.

In most papers and courses there will be certain requirements that must be met by the students. For example, at the end of a paper or section of a paper, the students may have to demonstrate that they have achieved a certain degree of competency, demonstrated a skill, or prepared a report. The students can view these requirements either positively or negatively. Some students may view them as a chore or something of a punishment. Others may view them as ways to help them develop and demonstrate their skills and understanding of the paper.

How the students view the requirements of the paper often affects the way they participate in the paper, that is, in the lectures/tutorials/laboratory sessions etc. Most papers involve the students in a number of activities. Creating a pleasant learning atmosphere throughout the time you work with the

students is very important, as it can mean that students are more likely to participate willingly in the whole program. It also means that they are more likely to learn and remember what is being covered in the paper.

It is important not to emphasise the requirements of the paper as a threat. For example, "You should pay attention to what I'm saying because you are going to be tested on it later". This sort of threat will only create a negative learning environment. It is better to explain how the tutorial/paper will enable the students to learn what is required for their work, and how the tests or demonstrations will allow them to develop and practice the skills and understanding they have acquired over the course of the semester. It is then important to point out throughout the paper where the whole program is going and the specific skills that are being developed. Opportunity to practice and demonstrate the knowledge and skills should be provided throughout the semester.

Where at all possible you need to allow the group to contribute ideas and suggestions about the direction of the tutorial and the selection of the specific topic areas. This type of instruction is commonly referred to as "user driven". If the group has this sort of input, then it becomes their own. This will mean that the students are likely to feel a greater sense of ownership and commitment. It becomes something that will meet their needs and they are more likely to work willingly and cooperatively in the various sessions. It is likely that the students' needs are not very different from your planned learning objectives. But with some adjustments on your part, and some adjustments on their part, both the tutorial requirements and the students' personal requirements can usually be met.

Sometimes it is up to you to identify the needs and requirements and describe them to the students. These may be social needs, safety needs, security needs, new technology, career opportunities, new machinery, new methods, or simply an easier way to do something. These needs often create a positive climate for learning.

Regardless of what your session is about you should find some way of encouraging the students to listen. It is not always easy to do this. A good question to ask yourself is, "If I was a student in this tutorial, why would I want to listen to me and be in this tutorial situation?" You should be able to come up with at least three good reasons. If you cannot convince yourself that you should listen to you and that you would want to work in the environment you have created, then you should re-examine your session! If you can convince yourself, then use these reasons to convince the students as well.