

POSITIVE AND PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING CLASSROOM SUCCESS AND STUDENT MOTIVATION^{1 2}

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Material in this article is drawn (with permission) from:

'Building Classroom Success: Eliminating Academic Fear and Failure' (London, Continuum)

by Andrew Martin 2010

and

'How to Help Your Child Fly Through Life: The 20 Big Issues' (Sydney, Bantam)

by Andrew Martin 2005

and

'How to Motivate Your Child for School and Beyond' (Sydney, Bantam)

by Andrew Martin 2003

(see Further Reading and Resources, p. 8)

In recent decades, researchers have looked at the many ways students can succeed in the classroom. One useful framework addresses the multiple dimensions of motivation and engagement that are relevant to academic outcomes in students' lives. Contextualizing motivation and engagement in a multidimensional way communicates to students that there are many ways in which they can succeed from a motivation and engagement perspective. The Motivation and Engagement Wheel (below) is an integrative way to represent these different parts of motivation and engagement. It separates these parts into positive thoughts, positive behaviors, negative thoughts, and negative behaviors.

Positive thoughts include:

- Self-belief
- Valuing school
- Learning focus

Positive behaviors include:

¹ Any of the following can be used as citations for material from this document: Martin, A.J. (2010). *Building classroom success: Eliminating academic fear and failure*. London: Continuum; Martin, A.J. (2005). *How to help your child fly through life: The 20 big issues*. Sydney: Bantam; Martin, A.J. (2003). *How to motivate your child for school and beyond*. Sydney: Bantam.

² Document downloaded from www.lifelongachievement.com

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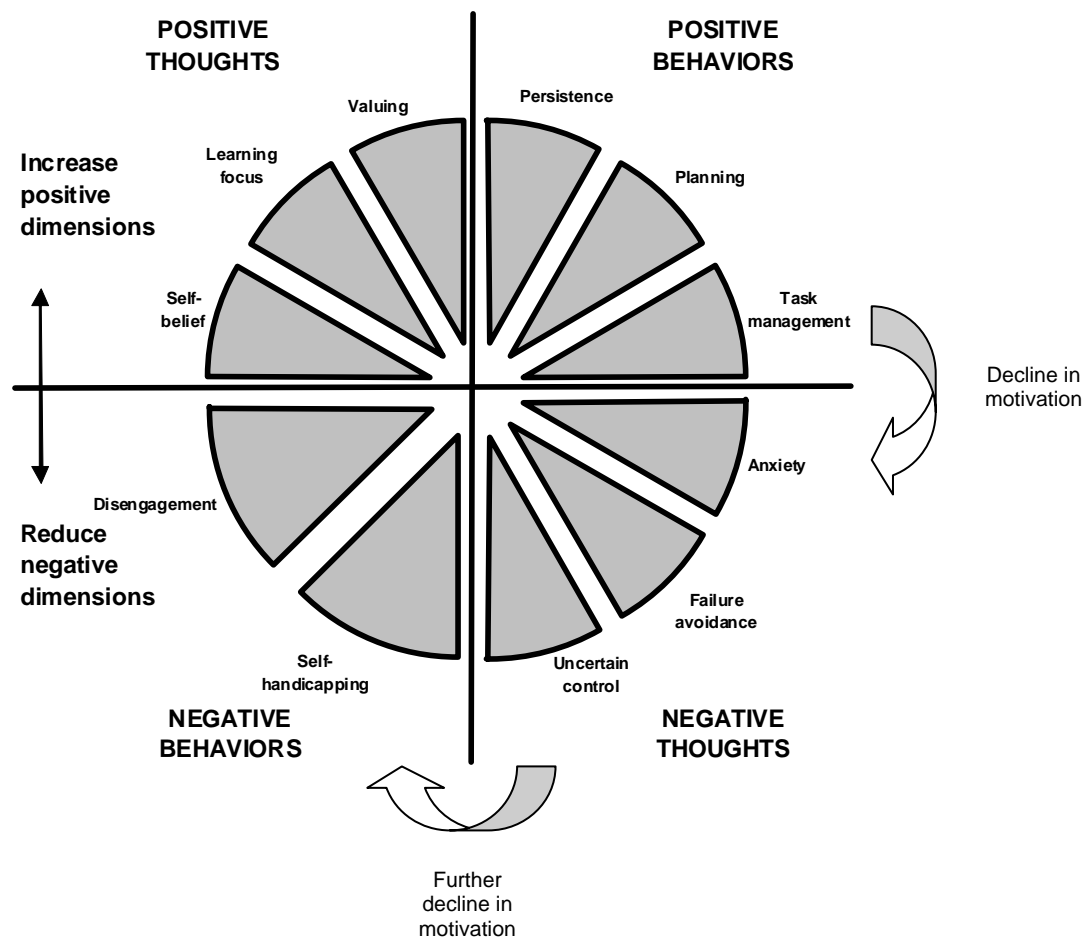
- Planning
- Task management
- Persistence

Negative thoughts include:

- Anxiety
- Failure avoidance
- Uncertain control

Negative behaviors include:

- Self-handicapping
- Disengagement



The Motivation and Engagement Wheel – adapted with permission from Martin, A. (2010). *Building Classroom Success: Eliminating Academic Fear and Failure*. London: Continuum)

The Motivation and Engagement Scale (MES – see Further Reading and Resources, p. 8) assesses students on each part of the Wheel. There is a primary/elementary school version of the MES, a high school version, and a university/college version. Teachers, counselors, and psychologists can use the MES to identify students' motivation and engagement strengths (successes) and also to identify what factors may need to be addressed to improve students' motivation. There is also an accompanying Motivation and Engagement Workbook, a self-paced program for students to sustain motivation strengths and improve motivation weaknesses (– see Further Reading and Resources, p. 8).

Tips and techniques in this article

This article briefly addresses three parts of the Wheel and what educators can do about them:

- Self-belief
- Valuing school
- Learning focus

All three are key elements of academic life.

Self-belief

Self-belief is students' belief and confidence in their ability to understand or to do well in schoolwork, to meet challenges they face, and to perform to the best of their ability. Students who have a positive self-belief tend to get better results, do difficult schoolwork confidently, feel optimistic, try hard, and enjoy school.

Discussed here are three ways to increase students' self-belief:

- Challenging negative thinking traps
- Building more success into a student's life through chunking
- Building more success into a student's life through expanded views of success

Challenging negative thinking traps

One reason students do not believe in themselves or in their ability to do their schoolwork is because they fall into some common negative thinking traps. Negative thinking erodes self-belief. Here are described two negative thinking traps that reduce a student's self-belief.

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Turning positives into negatives: Students who do not think positively about themselves often turn something positive into something negative. For example, when they get a good mark, they are the ones who think the teacher felt sorry for them when marking their paper, or the teacher got the grades mixed up, or that there is no point doing well on one thing when they are just going to fail everything else. Students need to recognize and take credit for the positive things that happen in their life.

Mountain building: Students can build negative or unpleasant events into mountains that can seem impossible to get over. For example, getting a lower mark than expected, not being able to answer a question the teacher asked in class, not understanding what the teacher is saying, or having difficulty in a particular subject can be built out of proportion. These students lack perspective and this can make them feel dreadful and think very negatively about themselves. A more helpful perspective is that this unpleasant event happened at a particular time and in a particular aspect of one subject and this does not mean it will happen in other parts of the subject or in other subjects.

Boosting students' self-belief through chunking

When students experience success they are also likely to think more positively about themselves. Building more opportunities for success into a student's life can therefore be a great way to boost their self-belief. Chunking is one effective strategy to build more success into a student's academic life.

Chunking involves:

- (1) Breaking schoolwork into bite-size pieces, and
- (2) Seeing the completion of each piece as a success

When students chunk their schoolwork into manageable pieces and then see the completion of each chunk as a success, they build more success into their life.

For example, in an essay a student can succeed in many ways, including: (a) fully understanding the question, (b) breaking the question into parts, (c) doing an initial search for information at the library or on the internet, (d) summarizing the information they read, (e) organizing the information under sub-headings, and so on. When the student recognizes these successes, they will enjoy schoolwork more and will be more motivated to complete it. The student will also think more positively about him or herself.

Boosting a student's self-belief through broad views of success

Another way to recognize more success in a student's life is by expanding their views about success. Often students see success only in terms of being the best, topping the class, and beating others. Success at school involves more than this. It also involves improvement, skill development, personal progress, mastery, understanding new things, learning new things, problem solving, and personal bests.

When students see success in these expanded ways, success becomes more accessible to them. Every student can improve, develop new skills, and reach personal bests. This increases a student's motivation because it is motivating for a student to believe they can succeed. It also increases a student's belief in him or herself.

Valuing school

Valuing school is how much students believe what they learn at school is useful, important, and relevant to them or to the world in general. If a student values school, he or she tends to be interested in what he or she learns, persists when schoolwork gets difficult, and enjoys school.

An important part of students' valuing stems from their beliefs about school and school subjects. To develop more positive beliefs about school and school subjects, educators might like to look for opportunities to demonstrate or talk about the following:

- What they do in one subject is relevant to other subjects they study
- What they do in one lesson is related to what they do in the next or a later lesson
- What they do at school is relevant to their lives now – either in their part time job, at home, or in their hobby
- What they do at school is relevant to their lives further down the track – either at university, in their apprenticeship, or in the job they want when they leave school
- What they do at school is relevant to the world as a whole
- What they do at school develops their thinking and analysis skills which help in other parts of their life – such as at work or with friends
- What they do at school gives variety so they can select what subjects to focus on in senior school, at college, or at university
- School develops their people skills and that this is useful beyond their school years

Learning focus

Students who are learning focused are interested in developing new skills, improvement, personal bests, understanding new things, and doing a good job for its own sake and not just for rewards. They are less focused on comparing themselves with others, working only for marks, or how others see them. The more students are learning focused, the more they enjoy their schoolwork, the less anxious they feel, and the more they can give good quality attention to the task at hand.

Three ways to increase students' learning focus include:

- Increasing the emphasis on personal bests
- Reducing comparisons with other students
- Recognizing the journey as much as the destination

Increasing the emphasis on personal bests

Personal bests are very important because they are achievable for all students. A student gets a personal best when their level of performance, skill, or knowledge is higher than or is as good as their previous best level of performance, skill, or knowledge. Students like the idea of personal bests in school. They feel a bit like an academic athlete racing against themselves. Instead of looking around at everyone else's marks and how they compared, they are focused on their own game and trying hard for personal reasons rather than competitive reasons. Focusing on personal bests does not compromise a student's performance because it is still asking excellence of the student – but importantly, it is excellence in personal and achievable terms.

Reducing comparisons with other students

The more students look at how they compare with others, the less attention they can give to their schoolwork. Comparing themselves with others also takes the focus off their own standards and personal bests and puts it onto others' standards.

It is also helpful for educators to reduce the extent to which they compare students to each other and to increase the extent to which students are their own benchmark. It is also useful to encourage students to focus on the task, what can be learnt from the mark or feedback they got from the teacher, how their mark or feedback compares with their previous performance, and the best ways to improve next time.

It is also important to catch students putting themselves down compared to other students. This is a good opportunity for educators to encourage students to see that they are their own

benchmark and to show them that the teacher's focus is on them and their potential and not on how better or worse they do than another student.

Recognizing the journey as much as the destination

Although learning-focused students know there are times they have to perform, they also realize that their performance is only as good as the attention, energy, and effort put in along the way. If a student has travelled well (that is, studied hard, tried a new study technique, read an extra book for the assignment, put aside a day at the weekend for study, kept a positive attitude towards school and so on), never let the journey go by without genuinely recognizing it. What's more, the journey is often filled with many achievements and it is important that students recognize these achievements. These successes are what a learning focus is all about. Although marks and grades are a very important part of students' achievements, there are usually other achievements on the way to getting those marks or grades. These include developing skills, solving problems, and learning new things.

To sum up

This article has presented a sweeping look at some key parts of motivation that are important for academic success. The main points to take from this article are:

- Motivation is students' energy and drive to try hard, study effectively, improve, and work to their potential
- Motivation assists schoolwork and also makes the journey through school a more satisfying and fulfilling one
- Motivation can be learnt and changed. Every student can improve, work more effectively, become more interested in schoolwork, and achieve to his or her potential
- Motivation can be divided into thoughts and behaviors that boost motivation and achievement and those that reduce motivation and achievement
- Positive motivation thoughts are self-belief, learning focus, and valuing of school. Positive motivation behaviors are planning, study management, and persistence. Negative motivation thoughts are anxiety, failure avoidance, and uncertain control. Negative motivation behaviors are self-sabotage and disengagement
- There are many straightforward strategies that educators, parents, and students can use to enhance motivation and to maintain motivational strengths. This article focused on strategies to assist three important aspects of motivation: self-belief, valuing school, and learning focus.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

(for information, visit www.lifelongachievement.com)

Practitioner Reading

Martin, A.J. (2010). *Building classroom success: Eliminating academic fear and failure*. London: Continuum.

Parent Reading

Martin, A.J. (2003). *How to motivate your child for school and beyond*. Sydney: Random House/Bantam.

Martin, A.J. (2005). *How to help your child fly through life: The 20 big issues*. Sydney: Random House/Bantam.

Motivation Testing Resources

Martin, A.J. (2010). *The Motivation and Engagement Scale (10th Edition)*. Sydney: Lifelong Achievement Group (www.lifelongachievement.com).

Motivation Enhancement Resources

Martin, A.J. (2010). *The Motivation and Engagement Workbook (10th Edition)*. Sydney: Lifelong Achievement Group (www.lifelongachievement.com).