

Research Based Strategies for the Classroom

Part # 4 - Reinforcing Effort

Introduction

Although research on learning tends to focus on instructional strategies related to subject matter, students' beliefs and attitudes have a significant effect on their success or failure in school. Students growing up amid challenges can develop an attitude that "failure is just around the corner," no matter what. Research makes clear the connection between effort and achievement—believing you can often makes it so. This research shares recommendations and techniques that encompass student recognition, beliefs, and attitudes about learning.

Key Research Findings

- Not all students know the connection between effort and achievement (Seligman, 1990, 1994; Urdan, Migley, & Anderman, 1998).
- Student achievement can increase when teachers show the relationship between an increase in effort to an increase in success (Craske, 1985; Van Overwalle & De Metsenaere, 1990).
- Rewards for accomplishment can improve achievement when the rewards are directly linked to successful attainment of an understood performance standard (Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Wiersma, 1992).
- A critical decision for teachers is how to provide recognition. Abstract or symbolic recognition has more impact than tangible things, such as gum, movie tickets, or prizes (Cameron & Pierce, 1994).

Implementation

Recognizing learning includes specific tactics for improving students' beliefs about their abilities and how and when to recognize them when they achieve. Teachers who understand the value of tapping into students' affective domains for improving achievement employ research-based strategies, such as:

1. Teach the relationship between effort and achievement. Many stories exist to make the connection with famous people. Draw examples from the well-known as well as the unknown so students recognize success in all situations and under many situations. Encourage students to think about: What does effort look like?

2. Reinforce effort. Students who are recognized for effort will make the connection between effort and improvement. Students should be helped to internalize the value of effort to make a strong connection between effort and the desired outcome.

3. Visual representation of effort may increase effort. Students who are helped to design an "effort log" using graphic representation will be more likely to see it in their mind's eye, and refer to it when working.

4. Create a class effort rubric. A class that shares a common definition for effort will also share the understanding of effort and achievement. If students are in learning groups, on the same teams, or in study groups together, they will have a common language and a shared ideal regarding effort and achievement.

5. Be careful about how and when recognition is provided. Verbal praise for small or easy tasks can be construed by students as undeserved, and may actually decrease effort. Ensure that praise and rewards are provided because an authentic standard of performance has been achieved. Doing an activity to a predetermined standard may well be worthy of reward and result in increased effort and motivation.

6. Recognize individual students for personal progress. Winning usually indicates that others have lost, or are "below the winner." When students have personal goals, or reach pre-determined standards of excellence, recognition is for personal achievement, which is unique to each student.

7. Make clear the real goal of effort. "The harder you try, the more successful you are" is what the act of recognition should communicate to students, not "the harder you try, the more prizes you get." Make this clear to students and apply it in practice.

Additional Resources

Dr. Mel Levine publishes All Kinds of Minds - A Web site resource for educators. He shares ideas for recognizing effort of students, and how to support learning differences.

<http://www.allkindsofminds.org/activity.aspx?id=12>

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