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Motivation Is a Mindset



The mind is master of the man, and so, "They can who think they can!"

—Nexon Waterman (as cited in Shanley, 1990)

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By the time students reach their middle school years, they already have a mindset about who they are and what they can or cannot accomplish. Edwards (1954) and Atkinson (1964) developed theories of motivation related to a person's expectations of the value of success based on that person's perceived probability of succeeding and the incentive value of that success. In an article in the August 15, 1993, issue of *Parade*, Jimmy Johnson, who was then coach of the Dallas Cowboys, was asked how he turned a team with a losing record into Super Bowl champions. He simply said, "Treat them as winners . . . and they will win." In the school environment, if students believe they can be successful, they usually are. If students believe they cannot succeed, then students probably will not and will have little to no motivation to do otherwise. Glasser (1990) said that motivation comes from within ourselves.

Teachers can affect in several ways the mindset that individual students bring with them into the school setting. First, teachers need to recognize that each student can learn. I have heard skeptics scoff at this notion, but each student enrolled in a school can learn. It is just the capacity of learning that varies among students.

Second, teachers are responsible for providing an environment where students can feel free to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. Sometimes the most significant learning takes place when students have the opportunity to correct their errors.

Third, everyone needs positive feedback once in a while. Students need to know that teachers appreciate them for who they are and what they can do. Teachers can comment on qualities, strengths, and positive characteristics of their students.

Fourth, in addition to the preceding suggestions, teachers can provide opportunities for students to increase self-esteem and enhance a positive self-concept. This, in turn, will help students develop the confidence needed to be successful.

EACH STUDENT LEARNS

Each student can learn. The challenge for teachers is to figure out what kinds of teaching strategies work for the students in any given class. Getting to know students as individuals is critical to recognizing how each student can best learn. Several practical suggestions for accomplishing this follow.

Tie in relevant, current issues directly to your students.

Connect issues of the times to the social lives of your students. Students need to recognize and find relevance to their own lives in what

you are teaching. If students can make a connection to what they already know about in their lives and experiences, it is more likely they will be interested in what you have to say. For instance, any issue related to economics is important to adolescents when you make a connection to the cost of purchasing and maintaining a car. Income tax and social security become realities when students work and their take-home pay is not what they expected. The hidden challenge here is that as an educator, you need to know about adolescents in the 2000s and what the foci of their lives are.

Allow independent work on self-chosen topics when related to general goals.

When students are allowed to have choices, they will pick topics that are of interest to them. If certain topics interest students, they will find more meaning and application and will ultimately retain concepts for transfer and generalizability later. Consider the basic example of the student who does not like to read anything except books about airplanes. If reading is the goal, continued encouragement to read books on airplanes can lead to reading more about aerodynamics, geometry, physics, and other related academic areas.

Recognize students individually.

This does not have to take much time. Just find a moment when you can look a student in the eye and recognize that the student exists. Sometimes just a comment about how tired the student may look that day can lead to more insight on your part about that student. Just recently (as a matter of fact, it was the first day of class) one of my college students looked as though he was ready to fall asleep in class. He could not keep his eyes open, and he was sitting in front of the class right before me. When I said something to him about how tired he looked, he apologized and explained he had not gotten much sleep. It turns out the student was a Community Adviser in one of the college residence halls and had spent most of the night dealing with “Freshmanitis” and its resultant chaotic activities. Just let students know you recognize them as individuals.

Provide equal opportunities for each student. Generate the feeling that everyone is on the same page.

Point out to students that they are each about the same age, same level of life experience, same “grade” level. Sometimes adolescents, particularly the “younger” ones, are so preoccupied with life and the challenges it presents that they fail to see that they are not alone. Other students are

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experiencing similar feelings and situations. Once in a while I used to ask my students how many of them had felt or experienced whatever topic was at hand. When a student sees the upraised hands of other students who are in the same situation, it makes the student feel better to realize that he or she is not alone.

Ignore student names on tests or quizzes and other similar tasks.

Have students put their names on the back side of their work. (Sure you can peek, but that will not help.) As teachers, we can be influenced by which student's work we are reading or evaluating. Be more objective and evaluate the student's work, rather than the individual student. You may be surprised to find that students you perceive to do well may indeed demonstrate difficulty at times, and some students whose work you perceive more negatively may fully comprehend and demonstrate abilities you did not expect.

Recognize new days, every day.

Accept that each day begins anew, and teach your students to recognize this also. This is especially important following a day of challenges, a day that seemed to be twice as long a school day as others. Teach students through your own attitude that the sun rises each day and a fresh beginning presents itself every 24 hours. Say so. Be up front about new opportunities every day. Like the old saying goes: The past is history, the future is yet to be, and all we have is the present.

Recognize that there are different degrees of motivation.

This is true, especially across content areas. For instance, a student might be more interested in math than language arts. Your job is to figure out what piques the interests of your students and what does not. You are an adult. You do not have the same degree of interest in everything in life, so why should you expect your students to like every subject they study in school? Recognize this and let your students know that you appreciate varying levels of interest on their part. Then, help students develop at least an appreciation for the importance of studying *all* subjects in school. Help them learn to enjoy their most interesting subjects and also learn more about others.

Make up your own mind about students and their abilities.

Refrain from listening to others and their opinions about students. Sometimes we can be influenced about students by what other teachers

have to say. Admit it. Be independent enough to get to know your students yourself. You might find redeeming characteristics in your students and share these positive qualities with your colleagues.

Ignore stereotypes.

Let a student's performance represent what a student can do, rather than be influenced by "labels." It has almost gotten to the point in our society that a student is unique if the student fails to have a "label" (ADHD, LD, behavior disorder [BD], etc.). Let students demonstrate what they can do rather than letting a "label" tell you what to expect.

Keep personal preferences to yourself.

Teachers are in schools for all students. We meet people in life we naturally gravitate toward because of common interests, personality type, and so on. So, it is natural that teachers would "like" some students more than others. As an educator, you have to be careful that your actions and attitudes convey impartial attitudes toward all students. You are an educator for *all* students in your classes.

Consider that you have individual students with their own learning styles in your classes.

There are so many theories about learning styles that you might want to throw in the towel altogether. Hang in there. Just consider that students have different strengths and we need to capitalize on those strengths. For instance, I am a visual and kinesthetic learner. That takes my mind out of it if you were to lecture to me without adding any visual stimuli. So what do you think happens with your students? Just take the basic three styles—auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and combinations—and start from there to find ways to address the different learning styles of your various students. You might want to ask students or take inventory of how your students learn best. (See Resource A for a cross-reference of instructional strategies based on student learning styles.) In addition, there are Web sites that allow students to input their own learning preferences and the sites will automatically analyze this information for a resultant learning style. Go to www.idpride.net. You can also go to www.howtolearn.com and click on Personal Learning Styles Inventory. If you want to use the latter site with your students, you will need to obtain a site license. The Web site explains how to obtain the license.

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Provide clearly stated objectives.

Students will perform closer to our expectations if we let them know exactly what those expectations are. It is sometimes clear in our heads what we want students to do and how to do it, but sometimes students are not clear about the same. Write objectives out so students can see them and hear them at the same time. Put all tasks and behaviors in clear terms. Let students know you want them to list, define, outline, analyze, critique, and so on. Tell students exactly what you want them to do.

Set guidelines and communicate those guidelines for work to students.

Students want and need to know how you expect work to be presented. If you do not tell students, maybe they will ask and maybe not. Your job is to be clear and consistent about the conditions related to an assignment or task. Tell students if you want them to use a computer, work by themselves, use the book, and how long or involved the task should be. Tell students what is acceptable. Giving students clear guidelines lets them know under what conditions you will accept their work. But this is not the same as what the qualitative or evaluative part of their work should be. Make this distinction for students: These are the conditions or guidelines that must be met *before* you will evaluate student work.

Set objectives so students can be successful.

Let students know the degree of acceptance for their work. What exactly will be evaluated? Is it more important to have a certain number of pages, or is it the qualitative and thoughtful ideas reflected in a student's work that will be "graded"? Students need to know this! Make the distinction between "conditions" of acceptability (work must be neat, typed, or students must have worked by themselves, etc.) and what is "evaluated" (the qualitative element of the work the student submits).

Try using "wacky" anticipatory sets!

Sure, it takes time and effort to come up with a good anticipatory set or introduction to a lesson, something that will catch the students' attention and get them excited about what you are about to teach. So, take the time to prepare a "wacky" one once in a while and see what happens. Dress up, or have someone from your local historical society dress up as Abraham Lincoln and see what difference it makes in student attention to the Civil War lesson. Bring a pizza to class and slice it up in front of the

group. Then tell students you want to talk about fractions. You might even enlist a small group of students to come up with a good “set” for the next unit. You might be surprised with what students can create! This may get them more interested in the unit topic. Once students are interested, they will be motivated to learn more. See Robin Hunter’s 2004 updated edition of *Madeline Hunter’s Mastery Teaching* for more examples.

Start teaching and learning with what students already know.

Use a strategy like K-W-L—what students already Know, what they Want to find out, and what they would like to Learn (Carr & Ogle, 1987; Ogle, 1986)—to help control boredom and help you set objectives for learning. Students who already know about the topic you are teaching can be further challenged or utilized to share their knowledge with other students. Sometimes students will be more motivated to learn from one another. Using Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) you can then set appropriate objectives at various levels of challenge for students. (See Resource B for an outline of this taxonomy.)

Implement new and different teaching strategies.

Teachers try to find their comfort zones when it comes to how they teach and what they do. But, the teacher’s comfort zone for teaching may not be the comfort zone for student learning. Because students learn in various ways, teachers should teach in various ways. The learning environment will be more exciting for everyone! Try new and different ways of teaching, and let students in on it. As a teacher, you are not in this alone. Let students know when you have never done a new strategy before; and tell students that if it works, you will do it again. If it does not work, you will fix it or scrap it altogether. Then let students help you decide whether or not you repeat this new strategy. You may find that students were more engaged during the activity than you expected because they knew they would have a say in whether you might use this strategy again. Talk to other teachers about what works for them and adapt strategies for yourself. Be open to trying different approaches. You may be surprised to find how well a new strategy works when you are willing to take a risk and try something you have never done before.

Vary your methods of assessment.

Because students learn in various ways, students ought to be allowed to demonstrate *what* they have learned in various ways. I am an organized and visually stimulated person. So, I enjoy and am motivated to accomplish

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tasks that allow me to demonstrate these characteristics (portfolios, scrapbooks, charts, diagrams, etc.). A friend of mine who is a physical educator wanted students to know and understand the health- and skill-related components of physical fitness. He had one student use a foam board to draw a diagram of these components and then cut the entire diagram into several pieces, creating a jigsaw puzzle that could be used by other students as reinforcement. Another one of his students wrote a poem demonstrating her understanding of health- and skill-related components of physical fitness. Both of these assessment activities were evidence for what students learned. Keep an open mind to accepting various methods of assessment.

Focus on each student's positive characteristics.

You may not know what the positive characteristics of each student might be because they are not obvious. So, ask your students. Have students write or talk about themselves and indicate what they are most proud of and what they would change about themselves if they could. This reminds me of the strategies that teachers used back in the late 1960s and early 1970s in values clarification (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972). It might help to revisit these and make applications to students of the 2000s. Students' interests and ideas change over time, but basic human characteristics remain constant.

Affecting the mindset of students begins with you.

Share your own experiences with students, such as a time when you were not sure you could do something, but then you tried and found that you could be successful. Continually point out that success begins with one's mindset. If you think you cannot, you probably will not. If you think you can, you might find success. Remind students about the childhood story of *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 1990).

Let students help with making their own rules for grading.

Teach students about evaluative criteria, grading scales, scoring guides, and rubrics. They take much time to design. Let students help do this. They will understand to a greater degree what you are expecting of them. Besides, if students take part in some decision making, they will find ownership in it and be more interested and motivated to work.

Get to know your students' names and interests.

Nothing gets a student more interested in learning than a teacher calling that student by name, or relating something in the teaching episode to

an interest of that student. But, how can you do this if you do not know your students to begin with? You can do several things at the beginning of the year. Take time to have students introduce themselves to one another and point out something relevant about themselves (what they are most proud of, what accomplishment they achieved during the summer, something new they have learned, something that they feel is “unique” to themselves). This will help review their names for you as well as give you additional information about each student. I sometimes have students write me a letter. I ask for specific information like birth order in the family, what students like to do in their free time and why, what skills they have that they feel are really good, and what skills are not very good that they feel they need to improve. Then, I can collect these letters and read them at a later time. I often refer back to these letters every so often during the year to remind myself about the lives and interests of my students.

Use interest inventories to help students learn more about themselves.

Sometimes students do not know what their strengths are, or what they are really interested in. There are several interest inventories available (look in the reference sections of your local library, search the Internet, ask your local guidance counselor) that do not take a lot of time to complete in the classroom, but would help your students in the long run to identify their strengths and interests. This alone can provide students with motivation to learn.

MISTAKES AID LEARNING

Sometimes learning takes place when we make mistakes. Consider the fact that errors frequently occur when adults attempt to assemble products before reading the directions. The resulting product often turns out much differently than anticipated. Only then are we ready to learn. The same type of learning occurs with students. However, the environment in school needs to be such that students feel free to make mistakes and then to be able to correct those mistakes. Consider the following suggestions and choose what works for you.

Let students resubmit their work.

Students need to work toward mastery and should have an opportunity to correct mistakes and learn from them. There are limits though! Consider what students do with their work after a “grade” is affixed.

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Many students “file” work on their way out of the classroom. What difference would it make if you pointed out errors and allowed students to correct them before being evaluated for a grade? In life, we all learn from our mistakes. In school, it is the same for students. If they know they have a chance to “fix” their errors and resubmit their work, you might find students more motivated to try. Oh sure, I have read all the controversy about allowing students to redo their work. But, really, what is the formative stage of learning all about anyway?

Use green, purple, or turquoise colored pens.

All you need is a contrasting color from what the students use for their work to make your written feedback stand out. In my graduate classes of “research,” I once tried using a green pen instead of red. At the end of the semester, students told me they were more motivated to rewrite because the green signaled “keep going” to them. The red made them feel their work was all wrong. “Stop. Don’t bother.” I have invested in many green pens ever since. I have shared this technique with numerous teacher friends, and those who have adopted this same approach indicated a difference in the motivation of their students’ willingness to rewrite.

**Make sure students have enough
PRACTICE time in school to learn new skills.**

Do not rely on the home environment to stimulate students to do their best work. Some students do not even have a table on which to work, nor an environment conducive to learning at home. The time and opportunity for assistance that you provide in school may be the only chance a student has to practice skills.

Help students learn from their mistakes.

When I was in graduate school, I approached a professor to discuss some items he marked wrong on a test. He immediately became defensive. I got the impression he thought I was there to complain about his evaluation. In fact, I knew what was wrong. I just did not know *why*. He altered his demeanor when I made it clear that I really wanted to learn the correct processes for what I had erred on in the test. For the most part, students really do want to know how they could correct their mistakes in testing. Take the time not merely to show students their mistakes, but also to point out corrective measures. Sometimes students need to know what is wrong as well as *why* it is wrong.

When students incorrectly answer a question, pose another question to redirect them.

This is easier said than done. Take time to THINK for yourself. Remember, you want to provide an environment where students can learn. So, turn an incorrect response into another question to motivate students to think further, to continue to respond to questioning. This strategy of questioning is stressful for students to begin with, so accept all responses. Just divert those students in error to think in another direction.

Create an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions.

Give positive feedback to students. Do not yell at them! No question is a “dumb” question, nor are there “stupid” questions. How many times has one of your students started with “This may be a dumb question, but . . .”? There is something wrong if we allow students to think this way. If students are to learn, they need to be encouraged to ask questions. Besides, I always tell my students that if one person has a question, chances are several other students have the same question but do not want to ask.

Mistakes are okay.

When you ask students to do something they seem unsure about, if your attitude is “anything’s okay” as long as an attempt is made, then students will be more apt to take a stab at the task. Continue to ask students to work at a new task, and encourage students to “try.”

Make purposeful mistakes.

Once in a while, make a purposeful mistake. See if students recognize it and if not, point it out to them. Sometimes I will share an “untruth” with my students. They get so used to “listening” that they do not really “hear.” Sometimes I will have to point out the untruth, which makes them pay more attention and motivates them to find further errors. This keeps them on their toes . . . for a little while anyway.

Make sure testing is NOT the top priority.

Refrain from teaching “content” and instead teach strategies for learning so that, ultimately, students will test well. (The ACT sponsors local workshops that teach success strategies.) Success in the Miller Analogy

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Test depends on recognizing relationships, not merely knowing vocabulary. Teach skills and strategies for testing, rather than merely facts and information which students can simply find in the text, a reference book, or on the Internet.

Admit your unintentional mistakes.

Do not cover up your mistakes. Admit your mistake and try to correct it while pointing out to students that it is *okay* to make mistakes. If you do not know something, admit it. Teachers cannot be walking encyclopedias. Teach students to locate and gather information, and you do the same. So, if you admit that you do not know something, find out. Then share your information with students.

Encourage students to participate.

Point out to students that in industry, teamwork is important. In school, the class members make up a team. Each person contributes to the achievement of a goal. Stress that success in business depends on participation, as does success in school.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK IS NECESSARY

For students to develop the mindset that they can learn, they can accomplish tasks, they can do well, students need positive feedback for who they are and what they can do. Teachers need to recognize the positive aspects of students. Try some of the following strategies to address this issue.

Write encouraging notes.

This takes time, but you will find that students will recognize your interest in their learning. Encourage students to continue to work with comments like "good start," "keep going," "nice try, continue to work with this."

Verbally tell students "good job" or "nice try."

We can write all the positive comments we want to on student work, but every once in a while students really need to "hear" us tell them they have done well, especially when other students are able to overhear these positive comments. Seize the opportunity to verbally tell students when they have done something well.

Point out correct answers and “good” work as well as errors to fix.

Teachers find it easy to point out mistakes. It takes time to point out what is good or acceptable. I have had so many students thank me for letting them know what they are doing “right.” It is so easy for us to point out student mistakes, but we also need to recognize what students do right to encourage them to build on the strengths they possess. Ever had a student look at the mistakes and then ask if there was “anything right”? I have. Try to balance your feedback with positive phrases along with constructive comments for fixing mistakes.

Always recognize a job well done.

Point out strengths that your students exhibit. (So, what made it so good?) Even students who regularly get top grades appreciate knowing what strengths they possess or demonstrate that earn them those top grades. Let students know when they have expressed themselves well in critically thinking about an issue, organizing their thoughts into a well-constructed essay, and so on.

Use stickers.

All students like stickers! (Stickers are NOT just for elementary students!) I put a smiley face sticker on the bottom of the third page of a semester exam for my college students once, and their anxiety over the test itself was visibly reduced. I have put seasonal stickers on students’ work when they have least expected it and turned apprehension and discouragement into smiles. I have put scratch-and-sniff stickers on a page of directions for a complex project and found students to be more interested to get started on the task. I have observed the disappointment on the faces of adults who did not find a Halloween sticker on their work-out record sheets at the gym when a worker simply overlooked their record sheets while applying stickers to the records of others. I have also heard criticism for using stickers. In my experience, the use of stickers affects students in positive ways. I continue to use them.

Utilize schedules of reinforcement.

Slavin (1997) offers a behavioral approach to motivating students which includes the use of schedules of reinforcement. This refers to the frequency with which reinforcement is provided for a student, or the amount of time which passes between episodes of reinforcement. This is an aspect

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of behavioral theories that really does merit the attention of teachers. As human beings, we all need a pat on the back once in a while. The same goes for our students. Some students need this reinforcement more often than others. We need to figure out how often each student needs reinforcement, and try to provide it on a schedule that works for that student. Use reinforcement on a schedule that is necessary for each student. Some students need constant reinforcement. So, provide it all the time. This is continuous reinforcement. Two major schedules are ratio and interval. Ratio refers to the number of behaviors that must take place before reinforcement occurs. For instance, for every five completed homework assignments submitted, the student might receive a coupon which has value for the student. Interval reinforcement takes place after a period of time. For instance, reinforcement can occur at any particular time during the process of creating a major project.

Use informal conferencing with students to communicate positive things.

Occasionally, I hold a “conference” with an individual student about the strengths and positive characteristics a student has been exhibiting. This conference usually begins because a student has approached me about a different matter and I capitalize on this event by sharing comments about positive behaviors with that student. The same is true when I have small groups of students working on a task. Our communication begins with comments about the task. But again, I take advantage of the situation by extending the focus to other positive characteristics I had been observing. Students are pleased and sometimes surprised by my comments. This approach can help students maintain or increase their motivational levels to continue to work and do well.

Let students know when the goal is achieved.

Effective teachers take larger, long-range goals and break those into smaller, short-term achievable ones. What we need to do is communicate with students about those short-term goals and let students know when these are achieved. All too often we fail to tell students when they have reached a short-term goal. We tend to move on, taking students to the next rung on the ladder without ensuring that students know what is happening. Students need to have the satisfaction of reaching one goal before striving toward another. Teachers simply need to tell students when they have reached that point and are moving toward the next targeted goal.

Be sincere. Mean what you say.

Talk to students as fellow citizens. Converse with them as people, people who just happen to be younger. Smile when you are pleased. Frown when you are not. Show a concerned look when it is necessary. Be sincere. Students know when you say one thing but mean another. Mean what you say and make sure your facial and bodily gestures are in sync with each other.

For every negative comment, make two positive ones.

As educators we would like to make “constructive” comments to students rather than “negative” ones. However, once in a while our intended constructive comments are construed as negative by students. Therefore, make it a goal for yourself to make two positive comments for every constructive one to help students maintain a level of self-esteem that will encourage them to keep trying.

Find some way to compliment all students.

Sometimes a positive comment about something personal rather than schoolwork sends a message to students that you care. You noticed. A comment about a new hair style, a hair cut, or a flattering color of clothing can make students feel like they really do matter in school. Then find something the student does well, and extend the compliment to this skill or characteristic.

SELF-CONCEPT AFFECTS THE MINDSET

Students who feel good about themselves will learn and accomplish much. Teachers can provide numerous opportunities for students to increase their sense of self-esteem and further develop a positive self-concept. Consider implementing any of the following strategies that may help provide the impetus for students to do well because they feel good about themselves and have developed some level of self-confidence.

Put a motivational saying or thought for the day on the board.

There are lots of little books available for purchase at stationery, book, and gift stores with quotes or thoughts that encourage development of the character traits we desire for all citizens of our society. Put a motivational saying or thought on the board or a special place on a bulletin board. Point

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it out to students. Talk about it. You can use this strategy to encourage civil behavior, help students realize that others are experiencing similar difficulties in day-to-day life, look at the humorous side of living, and so on. It is your choice. Once you start using similar motivational approaches, you may wind up with a collection of little books like I have. After a few weeks of writing famous quotes on the board, I bring a book of sayings to class and allow a student to choose which to share. (Later, pass your books on to your colleagues, or trade similar resources with one another.) You might also encourage students to bring positive quotes or famous sayings to class.

Be a role model.

Be positive. Say positive things about how you view yourself. Let students know that there is something positive about every person. Students need to recognize positive characteristics about themselves and be proud of them. Share your positive qualities and characteristics with students so they know it is okay to acknowledge their own. Just tell students. It is as simple as that.

Find good things to say even when it is difficult to do so.

Take time to do this. Sometimes students challenge us in ways we would like to ignore. Find something positive to say even when it may seem difficult. I heard about a first-year teacher who was having trouble with a young man acting up in class. Mrs. C. asked the student to step into the hall for further conversation. Mrs. C. told the student that he was a leader and that however he acted in class, several other students would follow. Mrs. C. then proceeded to ask the student what kind of leader he really wanted to be. After thinking about this, the student ultimately changed his behavior. The way the teacher handled this situation was pretty insightful for a first-year teacher.

Use constructive progress reports.

Indicate to students what should be done to make progress in their learning. Then, tell students *how* they can do it. It is so easy to tell students what they are *not* doing well. Take a more constructive approach and share with students *how* they can do better. Show students they have only limitations they place on themselves. Work with students to help them recognize constructive criticism, and show them how to use it to their advantage.

Learning is lifelong. Model it. Try journaling.

Have students write. And you too! Journal writing can serve several purposes, and there are multiple references to help teachers use this strategy with students in all kinds of classes or courses. Books and articles in professional journals by teachers can give you loads of ideas to adapt journal writing to serve the needs of your students. The key here is to teach your students that journal writing can help them clarify their own thinking, serve as a stress-relief activity, and have other purposes. Model it. Write for yourself and share what journaling does for you. Write when your own students write in class. (Likewise, if you require your students to spend time reading for pleasure in class, then you do the same. You read when your students read.)

Praise in public. Criticize in private.

All teachers have heard these statements. But, sometimes we need to remind ourselves to praise publicly but criticize privately. If what we want to do as educators is help students build their own self-esteem, then we need to remember to praise them in front of their peers and save criticism for more private conversation. All too often I have found that in speaking with students privately, the student has shared something personal that clarified that student's actions. Students will share more about themselves privately than they will when their peers are within earshot. This may provide more understanding of the student's behavior. You can then act accordingly.

Show students what they do right, and help them get through learning hurdles.

When students get stuck with a task, find the stumbling block to learning. I was tutoring a middle school student in a basic math class who was having trouble subtracting three-digit numbers. I had the student orally explain to me what he was doing with the numbers as he worked through the problem. Once I figured out that the student did not understand the concept of regrouping beyond the hundreds place, I knew how to help him. I showed him what he was doing right. Then, I proceeded to talk him through his difficulty in regrouping. He was eager to do better once he knew what he was doing wrong and learned how to fix it.

Always provide feedback on assignments turned in.

If students take the TIME to do assignments, you take the TIME to read these. If you are going to assign students to do work in the first place, and

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students actually DO the work, then take time on your part to actually read and look at the students' work. Two situations come to mind here. The first is a colleague of mine who reads the first couple of pages of a student's work, then puts a letter grade on it based on his first impression. Consider the student who may take a few pages of writing before getting to the depth and breadth expected. Not only has my colleague missed out on what the student actually wrote, but the student has missed an opportunity for self-growth in getting appropriate feedback. The second situation is one my sister-in-law told me about. My then middle school-aged niece completed an assignment after a lengthy period of involvement. The teacher graded the completed assignment in a couple of minutes in front of my niece. Consider the deflated self-esteem of my niece, who had spent a long time to complete this assignment only to have the teacher grade it at a glance. Just a quick, positive comment on the assignment would have been welcomed. Then the teacher could have saved the evaluation itself for another time. No, teachers cannot spend as much time grading an assignment as students spend completing it. But evaluate during private time, and be sure to actually take some time to look at student work and make appropriate comments so students know you have actually taken the time to read, look at, and evaluate their work.

Write extensive comments on student work to explain a grade or their progress.

Even a student who earns an "A" wants to know what was so good about what the student did. Consider your own school experiences. How often did you get a "B" or "C" and wonder what you could have done better? Or, surprisingly, you received a "B" and wondered what was so good about it that you received that letter grade. Provide enough comments on student work that students are clear about why they earned that grade. Develop rubrics or scoring guides to help students see what exactly is expected of them in terms of their performance. Without these guides, teacher comments become even more critical.

Allow students creative choices in assignments that align with their learning styles.

Students may come up with more creative ideas than teachers for demonstrating what they know and can do. If given a choice, students will more often use their stronger skills. Visual learners might produce a PowerPoint presentation, a video, or a design poster. Audio learners might use audiotapes. Kinesthetic learners might build or construct something.

This becomes more fun for students. Learning can be fun! As a teacher, evaluating is also more engaging and fun because of the variety of assessment approaches students may have chosen.

Provide opportunities for leadership.

Remember how exciting it was in elementary school when students were allowed to help the teacher? Elementary teachers develop job charts so students take turns being a leader at accomplishing a task. Middle school and high school teachers miss the opportunities for students to develop leadership skills by neglecting to find ways for their students to be responsible for various tasks. Think about all the work needed for your environment to be effective for student learning, and then allow students to help where feasible.

Create a positive climate.

If students are exposed to a positive environment, a positive climate in your teaching and learning area, then perhaps they will be more positive in everyday life. Surround your teaching area with positive sayings, posters, and bright colors. You might elect to use the Positive Word List for a writing activity (see Resource C for this list). Have students write a paragraph using selected words, using as many words as they can; or create whatever other activities you might think of where this list of positive words might be useful. You could even challenge students to add more words to the basic list.

Involve students in decision making for themselves or the class as a whole.

As a teacher, you are not in this alone. You have a room full of students who can help you make decisions. You do not have to do everything yourself. You are a facilitator of learning. That facilitation includes providing situations where students can be a part of their own learning. This includes decision making. From room arrangements to rules of behavior to assessment strategies, and even *teaching*, students can help make decisions! Let them!

Make sure students have had enough practice before being evaluated.

Assessing what students know and can do should be fair and accurate. Make sure students have had enough time to practice and acquire competence before they are evaluated.

Use formative evaluation frequently before utilizing summative evaluations.

Find student weaknesses. Identify elements needing clarification either in your teaching or in student learning. Use oral or written assessments. Frequent formative evaluation will help identify these elements. Take the time to find out if your students are really learning and practicing what they should.

Use student input.

Having a say in what is taught, and how, provides an opportunity for self-growth. Students should be included in limited curricular decisions at the middle and high school levels. Students are sometimes neglected when it comes to curricular decisions, yet they have the most to gain. One year when I was teaching a basic health class with high school students, I took a risk with the order of unit topics to be covered over the semester. We had about 10 separate units. When I studied the topics, it really did not matter which one preceded another. So I took it to the students. I wrote each unit topic on the board. Then, I proceeded to discuss each topic and some activities I envisioned for each. I asked students to vote on the sequence in which we would study the units. I had a student lead the voting. I made copies for the students of their final order of topics they would study. It was a fun semester! What better way to provide opportunities for self-growth, an increase in self-esteem, and enhancement of a positive self-concept than to have input into your own learning and that of your peers? You might also be sure there is student representation on curricular committees. Their insight can be valuable!

SUMMARY

Teachers can affect the mindset of students with the strategies selected for teaching and the environment provided for learning. If students believe they can succeed, in all probability, they will. Educators need to recognize that all students can learn, though in varying degrees. Students learn from making mistakes and being able to correct those mistakes. But, teachers need to provide the environment that makes students feel that it is okay to make mistakes in the first place. In addition, students need positive feedback for what they do. Students need to know they have the qualities, strengths, and characteristics needed to succeed. Sometimes students do not know they have these unless we tell them. Hopefully, all this leads students to self-growth and the ultimate development of a mindset reflective of increased self-esteem and positive self-concept.