

Eager students = eager teachers

Study finds that teachers are motivated to teach when children show interest in learning

Calvin Yang

A Teacher's Day card is nice, but what really motivates a teacher is students who are keen to learn.

And such a teacher is likely to be more driven to teach, a National Institute of Education (NIE) study found after 1,549 secondary school students and 221 teachers were surveyed last year.

It starts with the teacher creating a conducive environment for students to feel motivated to learn in, said Professor John Wang, who leads NIE's Motivation in Educational Research Lab, a centre that translates research findings on motivation into practical guides for teachers and practitioners in Singapore.

"The source of motivation for the teachers comes from the students. When we go into a classroom, if we feel that the students are eager to learn, that gives us the energy to do more for them," he said.

To create the right environment, teachers have to understand their students' needs, explain the rationale behind certain tasks and provide avenues for students to seek help, he said.

While most studies have focused on what motivates students, teachers' motivations have been largely ignored. The findings showed teachers are also motivated when they have more autonomy in their teaching and methods instead of be-



In order to create the right learning environment, teachers have to understand their students' needs, explain the rationale behind certain tasks, and provide avenues for students to seek help, says NIE's Prof John Wang. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

ing restricted, and this leads to a better understanding of their charges.

On the flip side, stress on the job can negatively influence the level of support a teacher gives his students. The usual stress factors came up in the study – students' performance, time constraints in covering the syllabus and pressure from the school authorities.

The study proposed that teachers be evaluated on their teaching, and not on their students' performance.

"We do have to empathise with the role of a teacher a little bit more," said Prof Wang. "If we keep on piling on all the administrative work and all the other things, it is difficult for them to do their core job well."

The study, which began in January last year and was completed last month, looked at factors influencing the teachers' motivational levels, which can affect the learning climate they create in the classroom.

The students were asked a series

of questions, including how much they enjoyed a particular class and the pressure they feel in that class. The teachers answered questions on their personalities, perceived job pressures faced and perceptions towards students, among other things.

"Teachers draw energy from their students when they are teaching," said Prof Wang. "If they can focus on creating a conducive learning environment, both teachers and students will experience the joy of teaching and learning."

Mr Bernard Lim, 59, a former teacher with about 20 years of experience, said students' persistent desire for more of any subject "would definitely drive the teacher to work harder".

He said teachers need to be entrusted with more autonomy. "Curriculum also has to include relevant and purposeful activities which enhance pupils' life skills," he added.

Jalan Besar GRC MP Denise Phua, who heads the Government Parlia-

POSITIVE VIBES

The source of motivation for the teachers comes from the students. When we go into a classroom, if we feel that the students are eager to learn, that gives us the energy to do more for them.



PROFESSOR JOHN WANG, who leads NIE's Motivation in Educational Research Lab, a centre that translates research findings on motivation into practical guides for teachers and practitioners in Singapore.

mentary Committee for Education, said the role of a teacher is no longer primarily a dispenser of knowledge. "Their role must transform to that of a curator of learning content, life coach in values and character-building, and designer of effective learning experiences."

calyang@sph.com.sg