

Motivate Students By Relating To Them – The Role of Relatedness In Academic Engagement.

To motivate students to learn, it may take more than just creating an autonomy-supportive environment (e.g. providing an open atmosphere for opinions and discussion, paying attention to students' interest and preferences) and facilitating their competency (e.g. be clear and consistent in instructions, provide structures and having reasonable expectations). Recent research studies supported the idea that social interaction and connectedness between teacher and students (relatedness) play a great role in motivating students in their learning process as well. Among those positive outcomes (e.g. positive coping, and autonomy; Ryan Stiller & Lynch, 1994) associated with teacher-student relatedness, engagement in academic settings received particular attention. More specifically, engagement means "active, goal-directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused interactions with the social and physical environments" (Furrer & Skinner, 2003, p. 149). Engagement in academic settings is important as it may act as a social signal to elicit supportive actions in return. For example, when a student is more engaged in the academic settings, he may receive more motivational support from teachers (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), which in turn facilitate more engagement in such settings (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Furrer and Skinner (2003) further found that teacher-student relatedness was strongly related to academic achievement which in turn predicted students' academic performance. More interestingly, even though girls may seem more socially connected with teachers, the impact of teacher-student relatedness on boys on their engagement is stronger than girls (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Simply put, a teacher who can socially connect with the students may motivate students to be more engaged in classroom more than if their peers were to encourage them to do so.

Socially connect with students

Get to know more about the students as a person. Teachers can take note of a student's interest outside of the academic settings such as their favourite pastime, music preferences, views on certain social phenomenon (for example, the popular Korean pop song "*Gangnam Style*"). Social relationship is improved in mutual ways. Teachers may share some aspects of their own social life or preferences with the students as well, to connect with the students more as an individual rather than as a teacher who they may seem as someone with higher authority.

Pay attention to students' issues in other domains

Teachers can get to know more about students' issue with peers or family members if the student is willing to share. There is a cumulative effect of relatedness with different targets (e.g. parents, teachers, and peers) on academic engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Even though teacher-student relatedness is the biggest predictor for academic engagement, students' relatedness with other targets may add to this as well. Therefore, by helping students' to overcome issues related to their family or friends, this may help them refocus their attention on their studies. Otherwise, teachers may suggest other form of help such as school counselors to help the students' overcome those issues.

KEY DEFINITIONS:

Relatedness: Refers to individuals' opportunities to feel related and a sense of belonging when they interact within a social environment that offers affection, warmth, care, and nurturance (Skinner & Edge, 2002).

Engagement: active, goal-directed, flexible, constructive, persistent, focused interactions with the social and physical environments (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Positive coping: Students who actively seek solutions to overcome their poor performance (Ryan et al., 1994).

Autonomy: The degree of volition one feels in pursuing the activity and the need to feel congruence between an activity and one's values (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

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