

1. Motivation

I would like to specifically talk about motivation in students who test well and do well on class work, but do not complete their homework. Often students that have these tendencies are willing to pay attention and participate in class. However, they do not always do their work and the most common excuse is I did not feel like it. So, I would like to conduct interviews and get a better understanding about what really "motivates" them to not do their work. Throughout these interviews I would like to find out if material was suited more to projects or assignments they would be more interested in completing the assignments. I believe it is a question of motivation more than a question of inability to do the work and if assignments can be created that are tailored more to their needs then they will be more likely to complete them.

2. Description of the Situation

In my classes I have many students that all the work and do well. I also have many students that do not do the work and do not do well. These are obvious conclusions one would make about a student's performance. If you do the work in the class you should be able to get a decent grade and if you do not do the work you will more than likely fail. However, there is one group of students in my class that often do not do the homework, but get pretty good grades on the test. Though the amount of these students tend to change from chapter to chapter there are two specific students that seem to have made a habit out of this for the entire year.

They have been able to settle into this mode because getting an A on the test and doing the occasional assignment has been able to keep them in the low C range. Since, Cass does not differentiate between a C+, C, or C-, this seems to be a sufficient enough grade to satisfy them. I have confronted them about this before and have showed them by changing their assignment grades from a 0% to even a 70% what their grade could be. This does not seem to motivate them and their response when asked about why they do not do their homework generally tends to be, "I don't feel like it," or, "I just forgot."

The main assignment they tend to not complete is what we call in our class "binder work." Binder work consists of doing a chapter outline, the section reviews, the vocabulary, the chapter assessment, and the guided reading. They have been aware of the format for the entire year and it does not change from chapter to chapter, yet with every passing chapter they only turn in a portion of the work or forget it completely. In that respect it is my job to improve awareness about upcoming assignments and help them be more aware of them on a daily basis, even if they are far into the future.

The first student I will discuss in this case is James. James is an extremely nice student that has difficulty staying on task. He often misses class about once a week and often does not do every assignment or turns in work half complete. However, when he is in class he participates actively and always is involved with the class discussion. James problem is not organizing himself to know when the work is due, but getting the motivation to actually do the work.

India is the second student I will be discussing in this case. India, like James, is extremely nice and attentive. However, her problem is not being motivated to do the work. India, unlike James, takes several honors courses and this has had the effect of increasing her homework load greatly. Any assignment India turns in is completely done, but most the time because of the amount of work she will forget to do an assignment and it will end up being a “0.” Therefore, India’s problem consists of organizational issues that need to be resolved.

3. Interpretation of the Situation

The thing I would most like to understand about my students who do not do their homework, but still do well on the test is how are they spending their time at home and are they actually studying. Also, is it a possibility that the student is able to perform well on the tests simply from paying attention in class and participating?

As Weinstein discusses in her text, motivation can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. She argues that students who have a drive to accomplish a goal for the sake of being more informed and to develop good practices will do better than those students who are motivated simply by the grade (Weinstein, 215). The problem in my class is that these two specific students do not seem to be motivated by the traditional intrinsic or extrinsic motives of enhancing your learning experience or receiving a good grade. This obviously cannot be completely true so it will be up to me, as a teacher, to find out what motivates them.

Though they participate in class and are active in discussions they do not seem too concerned about doing any of the homework outside of the class to expand their educational experience and improve their overall understanding of the subject. The issue that I may be facing is that since they have to be in class they are willing to be active. With guidance from a teacher and their classmates and encouragement to participate they are willing to do so. If this is the case, then increasing their awareness of homework and receiving more encouragement from their teacher could help the problem.

Also, they are limited in their motivation because they are satisfied with surviving in the class with a C, which is considered average when their test scores show they should be performing above average overall. Though their test scores show that they are achieving at a high level perhaps in their other classes this is not the case. If they are receiving a C in this class it could possibly not be the case in other classes. Perhaps these students are motivated to get a better grade and getting a C instead of a D or an F has shown that. One way of possibly improving this would be to find out the students grades in their other classes and show them that though they are doing better in this class a C is not as high as they can go. Sometimes students see that they are doing better in one class over the rest and that is as far as they are willing to go. Though this shows a lack of motivation to get a better grade, it could also be interpreted by a misuse of motivation. If this is the case then it will be up to me to show them that a C is not the limit of their potential.

Using Weinstein’s “strategies for increasing perceived value” list it is hard to say what more can be done to improve perceived value in the class. I have related lessons to the student’s lives, I have expressed enthusiasm in the material, I have provided opportunities for students to respond

actively, and I have provided extrinsic rewards in the form of extra credit. However, one of those items on the list could provide an opportunity for the students to differentiate the assignments and may find them more appealing and easy to complete. Weinstein mentions the possibility of providing opportunities for choice (Weinstein, 217). By giving students the opportunity to pick between a set of assignments that might catch their interest they are more likely to choose something that appeals to them and therefore complete the assignment and hand it in. This is one strategy for motivation that I think can make a big difference in the student's ability to complete work.

Often these two specific students engage in the classroom discussions and the material, but when it is a topic that they are extremely interested in, or have prior knowledge in the subject they become very animated and involved. One area I would particularly like to improve in all of my students, not just the students in my case, is their ability to write a proper essay. I tend to only give them one option on the test and often I get poor responses. However, one thing I have noticed in class discussion is that the more diverse and varied the topics are the more likely everyone is to respond and give well thought out responses. By applying this idea to this case I believe that if I were to assign more homework assignments that had them write essays based on their choosing from the chapter this would get them more involved and more likely to complete the assignment. Also, this would help all students in my class improve their writing and be more prepared for essay questions on the test.

All of these interpretations could easily be applied to their ability to complete homework if they were able to choose things that greatly appeal to them.

4. Stakes

Jim Fay and David Funk pose the question in *Teaching with Love and Logic*, "How do you make someone motivated?" They answer this rhetorical question of theirs by stating, "This becomes a moot question because people *are* motivated to enhance their sense of self-worth" (Fay and Funk, 79). In the case of the students in my class who complete all their homework and do at least moderately well on the tests this is completely true. If they had problems completing the homework or turning in assignments they either asked for help in figuring out how to do so, or worked hard enough to the point that they were able to figure it out. However, the students I am focusing on in this case study have not reached that point yet, and may not in the time period I have with them. Therefore, that is what is at stake. By trying to fix the problem of a couple of students I am risking throwing off a system that others have found to be successful and useful in improving their academic performance in class.

The system that is in place now where students know what is expected of them in every chapter and have a relatively set amount of time to do it will more than likely be changed for a system with more options and flexibility. The flexibility may help out the students that are disinterested in the former material, but reinvigorated by the newfound option to produce assignments of their choosing. However, students that have created a regimen that involves completing a set amount of material every night could be confused by the change of tactics. To counteract that I would set aside time in class to discuss the new material and take their suggestions into considerations before implementing anything.

However, those students that have adjusted to the old way of completing homework are more than likely to be able to adjust again because they have what Fay and Funk were describing in their discussion: the motivation to enhance their sense of self-worth. Therefore, one would expect those students to respond and the students that need the flexibility and choice to feel more positive about the work.

5. Deliberation of Options

After assessing the situation there seems to be two courses of action that could take place. The first is to adjust the current method of assigning homework by supplementing it with a more structured pattern and more reminders about due dates and expectations. The second option is a radical restructuring of how homework is assigned and completed in the class and the types of things asked in the homework.

The first option appears to be more practical because it only modifies a system that seems to be working for a majority of students, while the few exceptions just tend to forget about the upcoming due dates or do not manage their time properly. The solution is to first alter the structure of what parts of the binder work is due and when and to provide the students with a tool to organize their time and homework better. The first step might be separating the more time consuming outline from the other parts of the binder work. Instead of having it due at the end of the chapter worth 50% of the homework grade it can be due at the beginning of the chapter and be worth a completely separate grade. By assigning the outline at the beginning of the chapter it is breaking up the amount of work all due at once and therefore will free up more time right before the due date to complete the other assignments. Also, a non-related positive that can come out of this process is that the students will be guaranteed to have read the chapter before it is discussed because it is necessary to completing the outline properly. The second part of this approach involves assigning the students a weekly checklist that outlines the objectives of the day for both the material being covered and the homework that they should have completed by the end of each day. This will allow the students to stay on task with all the assignments at hand and show them the ones they should have completed to stay on track with the material being taught. By taking this step for them it models better organization that might be useful if the specific students problems are wondering where to start.

The second option is much more different and complicated to install, but could be very successful if the specific students' issues are with engaging in the material. Right now a majority of the assignments done in class involve answering content based questions and working out of the book. Often this can bore those students that do not fall into Fay and Funk's group that are motivated to improve their own self worth. By adding more creative assignments that could assess the students' artistic, musical, or creative sides they may be more likely to engage themselves in the material and complete the assignments because they have more interest and take more pride in doing assignments that appeal to their skill sets. The way this homework style would be formatted would be to offer options to the students that would assess various skill sets and allow students to choose those they are most compatible with or take the most interest in. Items like vocabulary and main idea questions would still be included and have to be

completed, because of their value in understanding the material, but they would be weighted much less than these varied assessments.

6. Alternatives and Plan

The first step to implementing my plan would be isolating these students and gauging information about their motivation. So they do not feel like they are being singled out I would choose several people of varying abilities to participate in the survey and perhaps offer extra credit to make them feel more comfortable. Throughout these interviews I will seek to acquire information about each student's motivation for doing or not doing homework and why they choose to neglect some assignments but not others. The types of questions I would include would try to understand why they do certain assignments over others. Perhaps there was something about those assignments that really grabbed their attention, or on certain nights of the week they have more free time and that assignment happened to be on that night. Also, I would like to focus on specific things like what types of assignments do you like. Are they related to required readings? Writing prompts? Interpreting timelines, charts, and graphs? If I can understand what types of assignments really motivate students I would definitely use them more because they would be proven to be effective learning tools.

Based on this information I hope to devise a plan that leads to them being able to choose certain aspects of their assignments in the next unit. To do so I will scrap the current format of completing an outline, section reviews, guided reading, chapter assessment, and vocabulary. Instead I will give them assignment that will include doing other aspects of the original assignment, but offer more hands on assignments that they can choose one of. They would include make a journal, draw a picture, create a diagram, and other creative mediums that might allow them to look at the material in a different light. By doing this I will be able to test my hypothesis to see if offering various mediums to complete assignments can get students who do not normally do their work to complete the assignments on time.

7. Implementing the Plan

The first thing I discovered when discussing the subject of completing the assignment with students is they liked to have choice. They felt that if given the choice between certain questions, certain types of assignments, or a variation of different methods made them feel like they had a better control of an assignment because they could pick out the questions they understood how to do and focus on those. They felt when assignments were limited in what they could do they felt they spent more time trying to figure out the directions and therefore less time working on the content.

The next subject I chose to discuss with them was their feelings on projects. They both stated that they like doing projects but not on a regular basis. They felt projects offered them the opportunity to explore different aspects of the subject material in a non-traditional way, however with the amount of work that goes into them, doing them too often might eventually lead to them losing interests and treat them like other assignments. I thought this was interesting and decided to leave doing creative projects out of the regular work for a chapter. I plan on implementing a

creative project at the end of March to supplement their work, but felt they made a valid point about doing to many of them.

Therefore, I decided to make the transition from doing the traditional “binderwork” of vocabulary, guided readings, section reviews, and chapter reviews to something more focused on what we would be talking about in class and what would appear on the test only. Often the “binderwork” overlapped itself and was repetitive. I decided to create one assignment sheet per chapter that would limit the focus of our discussion. Included on this list I decided to choose the vocabulary words myself instead of relying on the bolded words in the text. This limited both the amount of words they had to do and the focus of what I wanted them to understand. Also, I created ten short answer questions that served as the main ideas of the chapter that I wanted them to focus on and could use as a starting point for their studying. Finally, I decided to give them choice in the last portion which focused on essays. Both students had mentioned that they liked writing and thought the more that it was used in assignments the better overall their writing would become in the class. For this portion of the assignment I created three essay questions and told them that they had to choose two and write two one page essays for them. I also added a little motivation to do all three by telling them one of these would be chosen as the essay for the chapter test.

The second step I took was to change the chapter outline from being turned in at the end of the chapter to the beginning. Students would have to read the chapter prior to the beginning of the discussion of its content and would turn it in the day after the last chapter test.

I checked in with the students everyday to see their progression and reminded them daily of where they should be on the assignment sheet, when it was due, and when the test was.

At the end of the chapter I collected the work and both James and India had turned in their assignment sheets completely done. In class the next day I fielded responses about what was different about the assignment sheet and had the students done more of their work or less of the work this time. I made sure to field responses from James and India and found out they like that the material was broken down into smaller portions because they did not feel like they had to spend as much time searching for the material and could spend more time actually working on it. Also, they enjoyed the writing portion, although most of my other students did not. They felt that it gave them an opportunity to talk about what they wanted to and also they did the other two because they knew that one of them would end up on the test.

8. Interpretation of Plan

Jim Fay and David Funk challenge teachers to think, “What is my responsibility, and well within my abilities, is to change my students’ field of awareness. I need to give my students information that will cause them to think differently about a situation” (Fay and Funk, 79). I looked at this quote very seriously when thinking about my plan of action. The goal I was hoping to achieve was to change my student’s field awareness by getting to think differently about homework. In my hypothesis I stated I believed it was a matter of motivation and that if assignments were created that could change their motivation then they would be more likely to complete these assignments. Generally, I think the hypothesis stood up in this case.

The first thing I hoped to do was change their perception of what homework was. By changing the assignments to focus more on what is being talked about in class and what will show up on the test I was able to show them a different value that homework has. It was no longer just about turning in work to get a grade, but completing the work to do well on the test.

In Weinstein's text the authors state, "Too much school time is devoted to exercises, drills, and practice. Students practice writing, but barely write. They practice reading skills, but rarely read. They practice mathematical procedures, but rarely do real mathematics. Yet, creating a finished product gives meaning and purpose to assignments and increases students' motivation to learn" (Weinstein, 230). To some degree I am guilty of this practice as well. I often discuss many skills or try and model these skills, but especially with writing, they are not asked to complete finished products of essays until the test. The change I made in writing essays in class was specifically made to counteract this. I wanted them to see the value of a finished product. By only doing partial aspects of homework they showed that they did not see the importance of completing a task all the way through. Especially in terms of writing essays they are only asked to do this on tests. Including essays as part of the regular homework assignments showed them the value of writing because it was included in all parts of the learning experience and also gave them some extra practice as well.

Finally, I think the most successful part of changing the style of homework in the class to increase motivation was having the outline turned in at the beginning of class. It seemed at the very least to take some of the burden of the students leading up to the date the homework was due. Several students, including my case study students, felt that there was too much due at once and that they were overwhelmed. Having this assignment turned in before the material was discussed gave them more time to complete their other assignments. Also, it also made students more prepared for class. Not only with my case study students, but all of my students. They seemed to have a better understanding and this enhanced classroom discussion.