

Effect of Motivation Theory, Classroom Management Techniques and Teaching Methods on Student Performance

When I was a student, there was one basic model of instruction that I and my fellow students were exposed to. A teacher stood at the head of several rows of evenly-spaced desks and expounded on the subject at hand. While my experience could hardly be considered a nationwide survey of teaching methodologies of the 1950s and 1960s, I did not know of any examples of schools where education was handled differently. We were aware of some “experimental” schools through such media as *Auntie Mame* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but these were generally subjected to ridicule and were definitely not part of mainstream thinking. Classroom discipline was strict and unquestioned, if you did not want a swift journey to the principle’s office, detention, writing lines, or any number of other punishments. There was subject matter that was considered to be intrinsically valuable, presented in one way, with formal tests or other assessments leading to a letter or number grade. If you worked well in this environment, you did well in school. If not, you were considered a trouble-maker or a failure.

Fortunately, this instructional model has been crumbling for many years. Instead, there has developed an increased interest in the student, rather than the material, as the center of focus for education. Research into motivation and experiments with new methods of classroom management and teaching methods have all contributed to the freeing of the classroom from the restraints of earlier practice.

Perhaps the most interesting change in classroom management techniques that I learned about in my master’s program was the concept of granting students a role in the development of a set of classroom rules and in the setting of some learning goals. The idea of transferring some of the locus of control from the teacher to the students is directly attributable to studies of motivation and the resulting theories (in this case self-determination theory), which conclude that the practice gives students an ownership interest in their education, which is a strong motivator. In this case, while it is true that every classroom needs a set of rules to ensure a safe and comfortable place to learn and take reasonable risks, allowing students to take part in the development of the rules changes the set from an arbitrary imposition to a mutually developed and agreed upon contract of behavioral expectations.

Self-determination theory is only one of the theories of motivation. It is not my purpose here to discuss them, but to state that a modern teacher cannot assume the authority of his position and the rigorous application of coercive discipline to motivate students. He must be aware of the theories and be able to use them to structure his teaching methods and his relationships with his students in ways that will encourage motivation.

Allowing students a share in the setting of rules and learning goals does not imply that the teacher cedes control to his classes. Good management technique will ensure that the classroom will function like a well-oiled machine most of the time. Once the students have taken part in the development of classroom standards, it is the teacher's job to make certain that these standards are met. This becomes especially difficult in the face of a major change in teaching strategy and technique: differentiated instruction.

While all students are capable of learning, not all learn at the same rate or are starting at the same level. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences goes beyond this long-recognized factor in use of a particular teaching method with a particular student and points out that, all other things being equal, there are a number of different intelligences that can exist singly or severally in a particular student. The teacher must carefully plan lessons to allow the fullest range of activity and assessment so that each student's particular mix of intelligence types will be able to gain and express mastery over the material.

A major implication in my arguments so far is the need for a teacher to not only be familiar with the various theories of motivation, with principles of good classroom management and with a number of teaching methods. Before everything else, the modern teacher needs to be fully cognizant of his students' strengths and weaknesses, of their motivations and intelligence types.

In conclusion, a teacher can no longer be content to stand at the head of the class and simply spout content. Research has shown the value of differentiated instruction and other flexible teaching methods, knowledge and application of motivational theories, and good classroom management practice have positive effects on student performance. It is the responsibility of the modern teacher to assimilate and utilize these to maximize the learning of every student in his classes.