

# The Importance Of Student And Teacher Motivation

John R. Campbell

Human learning is a complex process that involves numerous genetic and environmental factors. On the genetic side, we can do very little to enhance or improve the innate learning abilities of our students other than recruiting academically talented, intellectually oriented individuals. On the other hand, we can have a considerable effect on the environmental aspects of learning. Providing a climate conducive to learning. Offering continuing encouragement and support, and motivating students to realize the significance of the learning process are profoundly important to the academic success or failure of students.

Proper student motivation is critical. Motivation and positive reinforcement of students by their teachers clearly go hand-in-hand. Indeed, teachers may be likened in some respects to baseball coaches as they shape a winning or a losing attitude in the impressionable minds of their young charges. Losing coaches call their players names, criticize them frequently, and rarely offer praise or encouragement. They do not communicate effectively with their players, except to comment on their inadequacies or to inform them that losing is a real part of life.

Winning coaches, just like winning teachers, attempt to motivate, to build a positive attitude among youth. They offer encouragement. They are quick to praise players for their successes, slow to offer criticism and negative remarks. They provide useful information and instill a competitive spirit, a desire to win. Perhaps most importantly, winning mentors build the self-confidence of young people, and this is an essential aspect of teaching.

Many students entering college badly need encouragement and a heightened sense of motivation. To achieve academically, they need to realize the merits of doing well in college, to develop an urgency for learning. This was vividly illustrated by an experience a few years ago.

I had been asked to speak at an Agriculture Alumni Association meeting in northern Illinois, and in the audience was the vice-president of a major agribusiness firm headquartered in the state. I discussed some of my philosophy about teaching and motivating students, and my remarks seemed to be falling on receptive ears. After the program, this prominent business leader approached me and said, "You know, it was my mother who put me back on track in life, and I'm going to send you the poem she wrote which did the job."

The now-successful businessman had grown up in DeKalb County, Illinois. He had won a county scholar-

ship to attend the College of Agriculture at the University of Illinois and was a very active student. One of his friends had helped him find a part-time job in the Chemistry Department, because he needed more financial support than the scholarship provided.

During his first semester, this student found excuses for not studying, and he ended up on academic probation. As a result, he lost both his scholarship and his part-time job, and he became despondent.

Seeing his prospects for future academic success as bleak, he finally wrote his mother, saying he had decided to quit school. She, in turn, composed a poem she hoped would inspire him to continue in college. She entitled the poem, "To My Son," and I want to share it with you:

### TO MY SON--

*Do you know - that your soul - is of  
my soul such part,  
that you are, in fact, fiber and core of  
my heart;  
None other can pain me as you,  
son, can do;  
None other can please or praise  
me - as much as - can you,  
Remember the world will be quick  
with its blame,*



Remarks presented by John R. Campbell, Dean, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, during the 29th Annual NACTA Conference, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, June 13, 1983.

*If shadow or stain ever darken  
 your name;  
 "Like Mother, like son," is a saying  
 so true,  
 The world will judge largely of  
 Mother, by you;  
 Be this then your task, if it shall be,  
 To force this proud world to pay  
 homage to me;  
 Be sure it will say when its verdict  
 you've won.  
 "She reaps as she sowed, this man  
 was her son."*

*--Your Loving Mother*

In his letter of transmittal, the businessman noted:  
 When I received this poem from my mother, it caused me to stiffen my back and say quietly, "So help me God, I'll make it." Then the grades came, and I got my scholarship back; I was elected president of the Ag Club, and went on to graduate with dignity and pride--a better man for the tests and trials I had encountered. Further, I share this poem with you to prove the importance of saying "someone cared" -- and what a difference that made in my life! In addition, I trust it may lend hope and faith to those who may be walking the "rocky road" of doubt about their own personal self-worth.

All of us privileged to teach in college are in positions to be that surrogate parent who gives encouragement and provides a strong sense of motivation--psychological support that does not always come from a parent.

A few years ago, I presented a lecture at Iowa State University on student-teacher relations. Following my remarks, a student approached me and said, "I want to tell you a true story about my psychology teacher last semester." The teacher had randomly divided the class of 300 students into two groups of 150 without revealing his plans. He then recorded and averaged the grades on the first examination in each group and found them to be the same. Before returning the examinations, he took time to write words of praise and encouragement on those of Group A (the test group), but wrote nothing on those of Group B (the control group). The students were not advised of the fact that they had been assigned to two groups, nor that comments were being written on only half the examinations. He continued to write encouraging comments -- to give positive reinforcement -- to Group A students throughout the semester. As the semester progressed, grades of students in Group A went up, exceeding those of Group B significantly. The spread widened as time went on.

Eventually a number of students in the control group must have become discouraged and wondered, "Why do some students get positive remarks on their papers while I receive none?" At the end of the semester, grades in the test group were significantly higher

than those in the control group. This example underlines the extreme importance of encouragement and attitude reinforcement.

A second major topic I want to discuss is **teacher motivation**, particularly the matter of **attitude**. Poor attitude is evident in the teacher who displays a condescending attitude toward students, in contrast to the one who maintains an attitude of friendliness and respect for students. The teacher with a poor attitude typically "talks down" to students and views them as a bother, rather than cultivating two-way communication and classroom rapport. Conversely, the master teacher shows a sincere concern for students, builds their self-confidence, and establishes their trust. She takes a personal interest in her students' intellectual development and considers them to be valued learning partners. The teacher who demonstrates a positive attitude also makes herself readily available to students and encourages the two-way communication process. Students quickly sense that they are liked and appreciated, that they are respected as learning partners.

The Biblical parable according to Matthew, Chapter 7, contrasts the sturdy house built upon rock with the flimsy one built upon sand. I liken these two situations to good and poor attitudes, respectively, among teachers, underpinning and therefore strongly affecting their teaching methods and over-all effectiveness in the learning process.

It is critically important for teachers to encourage, motivate, and communicate positively with students, instilling in them self-confidence and stimulating in them the desire to achieve academic success. Only those teachers who do cultivate a positive attitude in their students can hope to build a learning environment "upon the rock."

One of my favorite anecdotes about attitude involves two salespeople who were sent to the hills of Kentucky to sell shoes. One wrote back to the home office at the end of the first week requesting a transfer, reporting: "I can't possibly sell any shoes down here--they all go barefooted." The second one wrote his company headquarters, but thanked them profusely for sending him to such a fine territory. "The opportunity here is tremendous," he reported. "None of these people have shoes." This story not only points up the difference between positive and negative attitudes, but also demonstrates attitudinal factor involvement in success.

Another desirable behavioral trait to be cultivated by teachers is **enthusiasm**. It affects the quality of the teaching environment immensely. Why should students be more enthusiastic about the subject matter than their teacher is? The level of student enthusiasm generally parallels that displayed by the teacher. When the teacher exhibits great interest in the subject-matter at hand, the students tend to become more actively involved in the learning process.

Another factor that directly affects student attitude is the teacher's capacity to **inspire**. In paying special tribute to Mel Fink, students writing in the 1978 **Illinois Hoof and Horn Club Yearbook** emphasized that, "During his 15-year tenure as coach of the Illinois 4-H Livestock Judging Team, Mel Fink coached seven national championship teams." I might add that every one of his 15 Illinois teams either won the national judging contest or placed among the top five.

Why was he so successful as a coach? This is how the students expressed it in their yearbook tribute: "Mel Fink had the ability to inspire people. His genuine concern for people and their problems, and the energy and enthusiasm that went into whatever he did, were his trademarks."

The young people who worked with Mel Fink on judging teams learned a great deal about livestock evaluation, but they also learned a great deal about his philosophy of livestock production and of life in general. "He had a true interest in helping people, and an enthusiasm that caused those who knew him to not just respect him, but also to admire him as a special friend."

So bear in mind that to associate with young people, we should strive to inspire them and to serve as role models. If we set high standards of achievement for ourselves, our students most likely will do likewise for themselves. Students welcome the opportunity to associate with master teachers, to rub shoulders with those who are dedicated to scholarly investigation, and to be on the receiving end of sound, practical knowledge.

Numerous other factors influence the learning environment and student motivation. One is the use of timely, up-to-date information and instructional techniques. We certainly should not spend much time teaching students how to make buggy whips today, but it is undoubtedly relevant to teach them how to use computers in agriculture.

We need to be flexible in order to adjust to new trends and needs in education. Nature makes it possible for the animals to adjust to their particular environments, just as it affords us the intellectual capability to adjust if we are alert to changing situations.

Breakdowns in adaptation are known to occur, however, as demonstrated by the frog. If a frog is placed in a pan of warm water to which additional heat is applied very gradually, it will typically show little or no inclination to escape. Being a cold-blooded creature, its body temperature approximates that of the surrounding water, and it doesn't respond to the slow change in temperature. As the water temperature continues to rise -- again, quite slowly -- the frog remains oblivious to the impending disaster. It could easily hop to safety, but it is perfectly content to stay put, even as the steam begins to fill its nostrils. Eventually, the frog succumbs to an unnecessary misfortune that claims its life -- one that would have been avoided if it had simply

been alert to the crisis. We must be able to adjust quickly to changes in the teaching situation, and not be like the frog, which does not always react to changes in its environment so as to survive.

Sound instructional techniques and methods are crucial in effective teaching. In my book **In Touch With Students**, I have discussed such pertinent topics as creative and innovative teaching, effective instructional techniques, the physical aspects of the classroom and laboratory, as well as how to become a master teacher. All of these factors are important, as we seek to improve the learning environment and our teaching effectiveness.

As teachers, we are a select and privileged group-- we help influence and shape the intellect of our nation's youth. In particular, we are entrusted with the important responsibility of educating our agricultural leaders of tomorrow. The gospel of Matthew 22:14 says: "For many are called, but few are chosen." I believe we are a chosen, privileged few who have been entrusted with the distinct opportunity to work with students. Therefore, we should heed seriously the injunction of Luke 12:48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." As professional educators, I hope all of us will be willing to give a great deal of ourselves so that we may inspire and encourage our students.

A story published in the March 1983, **Reader's Digest** concerning actor Jack Lemmon underlines the importance of dedication to one's career. Lemmon's father was vice-president of a large baking company, and as with many fathers, he hoped that his son might pursue a similar career. However, Jack Lemmon had performed in summer theater, and decided he wanted to become a professional actor. He went to his father and asked for \$300 to finance a trip to New York City to seek a career in acting.

Lemmon's father said to him, "I take it that you don't want to follow my business?" Young Jack replied, "That's right; I'd rather become an actor." And his father said, "Do you really like acting?" Jack replied emphatically, "I do." So his father said, "I'm going to give you the \$300, and I want to tell you this: The day I fail to find romance in a loaf of bread, I'm going to quit this baking business."

What Jack Lemmon's father was telling his son, at least from my perspective, was that whatever one does in life, he or she must believe in it strongly and be certain that being a part of it brings satisfaction and pride. To have a sense of accomplishment in any profession, one must be dedicated to it, and have a sincere belief in the intrinsic value of the endeavor.

I submit that this sort of dedication and commitment is of utmost importance to all of us honored to be called teachers. If we sincerely believe in NACTA, if we believe in teaching and feel good about it, if we believe that we are accomplishing something of value--

then we will have an interesting, rewarding, and successful teaching career and life. To borrow again from Jack Lemmon's father, we will be experiencing the "romance" of teaching.

A favorite Biblical parable of the noted agriculturalist and centenarian, D. Howard Doane, speaks of the sower who goes forth to sow his seed. I liken this parable to those of us in teaching, or in other life professions, who seek a productive sharing and use of our ideas. We examine the many valuable things that are shared in meetings such as this one, and observe four possible dispositions that can be made of them.

You may remember that the sower in the Biblical parable went forth and broadcast seed. The birds came and devoured part of them; part of them fell upon stones and dried up; and still a third part fell among thorns and were choked out. Finally, according to St. Matthew, the fourth part of the seed fell on fertile soil, and returned thirty-fold, seventy-fold, and even a hundred-fold to the sower. I would stress that the sharing and use of ideas from this meeting--sowing in fertile soil--can prove constructive and beneficial to us all, and our students will be the beneficiaries. The constructive discussion and sharing of ideas can yield in excess of a hundred-fold.

I do not know precisely what the future holds for NACTA or for those of us involved in agriculture or the teaching of the food and agricultural sciences. However, I do know who holds the key to that future: those of us assembled here and our peers in the colleges of agriculture across the nation. This is a rather awesome responsibility, is it not? Yet it also represents a challenge which we should welcome. Nothing of great worth is achieved without effort and hard work, a thought which is eloquently imparted by the following poem:

The tree that never had to fight  
For sun and sky and air and light,  
That stood out in the open plain  
And always got its share of rain,  
Never became a forest king  
But instead lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil  
By hand or mind mid life's turmoil  
Who never had to win his share  
Of sun and sky and light and air,  
Never became a manly man,  
But, instead lived and died as he began.

Good temper does not grow in ease,  
The stronger the wind, the tougher the trees.  
The farther the sky, the greater the length,  
By sun and cold, by rain and snows  
In tree or in man good timber grows.

Where thickest stands the forest growth  
We find the patriarchs of both,  
And they hold converse with the stars  
Whose broken branches show the scars  
Of many winds and much of strife----  
This is the common law of life.

The author of these lines is unknown, but they came my way from J. Dan Lehmann, a former National FFA President.

Over the mantle of a dining hall fireplace at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, are inscribed the following words: "They gathered the sticks, kindled the fire, and left it burning." With reference to NACTA's mission, this can be paraphrased and expanded: "They gathered the agriculture teachers, those committed to the principles of NACTA; they reviewed the opportunities and challenges at hand; they worked together as they shared ideas related to the learning environment; and they renewed their commitment to teaching excellence. For these commitments and contributions, they were remembered in history as those whose efforts resulted in the education of future leaders of agriculture and of our society, and as those whose fruitful labors brought forth extraordinary potential in ordinary people."

Willie Phelps, a famous master teacher at Yale University a number of years ago, expressed the attitude that all of us in the teaching profession should aspire to become master teachers:

I do not know that I can make it entirely clear to an outsider the pleasure I have in teaching. I had rather earn my living by teaching than in any other way. In my mind, teaching is not merely a life work, a profession, an occupation, a struggle; it is a passion. I love to teach. I love to teach as a painter loves to paint, as a musician loves to play, as a singer loves to sing, as a strong man rejoices to run a race. Teaching is an art--an art so great and so difficult to master that a man or a woman can spend a long life at it, without realizing much more than his or her limitations and mistakes, and his/her distance from the ideal.

As Phelps' words make abundantly clear, teaching is a refined art that demands dedication, motivation, and steadfast love. As we strive to improve the learning environment for both students and teachers, we move one step closer to the ideal.

You have been a very kind audience, and I want to wish all of you the very best. I believe in the professional goals and activities of NACTA, and am committed to doing everything possible to expand the number of master teachers in agriculture. You will always have my strong support, and any time I can be of assistance, I will certainly be happy to do so.

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John R. Campbell, In Touch With Students — A Philosophy For Teachers, Educational Affairs Publishers, P.O. Box 248, Columbia, Missouri 65205.