

Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design

Motivating Adults to Learn

Motivation is a concept that helps explain why people think and behave as they do. Though we may be familiar with the term, truly understanding how it affects each of us is much more difficult.

Why Motivation is Important for Education

- A motivated person will surpass an unmotivated person in performance and outcomes.
- Basically, when there is no motivation to learn, there is no learning.
- Instruction with motivated learners can be joyful and exciting.
- Learners who leave the educational environment feeling motivated are more likely to have a future interest in what they learned and are more likely to use what they have learned.
- Outstanding effort can be limited by the learner's ability or by the quality of instruction.
- One of the most commonly measured indicators of motivation is persistence, and when this exists, people work longer and with more intensity.

Intrinsic motivation is an internal energy called forth by circumstances that connect with what is culturally significant to the person. In other words, intrinsic motivation relates to those things that are near and dear to us because of values, beliefs, or circumstances.

Ways Intrinsic Motivation Affects Adult Learning

- Rather than try to know what "to do to" learners, we work with them to deepen their existing intrinsic motivation and knowledge. Seeing learners as unique and active, we emphasize communication and respect, realizing that through understanding and sharing our resources together, we create greater energy for learning.
- Instead of a focus on intrinsic motivation, some adult education is dominated by **extrinsic motivation** (external rewards, "carrot and stick"). Unfortunately, this attitude tends to keep learners "less than" the instructor (dependent) and in need of further help.
- Because learning is the act of making meaning from experience for people, involving all learners requires us to be aware of how they make sense of their world and how they interpret their learning environment. This helps adults connect who they are with what they learn for greater levels of intrinsic motivation.

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Connecting Intrinsic Motivation to Adult Learning

- Adults will choose vocational and practical education that leads to knowledge about “how to do something.”
- Adults are keen to success indicators which help to signify accomplishments of learning tasks, i.e. the "ah-ha!" learning moment. This causes adults to seek out and become engaged in learning activities where this is present.

Assessing Learner Motivation

There are **observable indicators of intrinsic motivation** that educators can watch for among learners. **High intrinsic motivation leads learners to:**

- Begin learning activities without resistance.
- Prefer challenging aspects of tasks.
- Spontaneously relate learning to outside interests.
- Ask questions to expand their understanding beyond the learning at hand.
- Go beyond required work.
- Find joy in the process of learning – the studying, writing, reading, etc.
- Be proud of their learning and its consequences.

Final Points to Keep in Mind About Motivation

- No one can motivate anyone to do anything, but educators can create circumstances in which people motivate themselves.
- To appeal to the needs of the targeted clientele, broadcast on radio station **WWII-FM: “What’s In It For Me?”!**
- If you *listen* long enough, people will *tell* you what motivates them.
- If you *watch* long enough, people will *show* you how to motivate them.

Material on adult motivation is adapted from:

Wlodkowski, R.J. (1999). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults – 2nd edition*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass Inc.

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