

Enhancing intrinsic motivation through observation of others' effort

Research has shown that people who have observed others displaying either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated behaviors will act in the same manner accordingly. For example, when exposed to intrinsically motivated others who show a desire to master difficult tasks, people are more likely to behave in similar ways. When exposed to others whose behaviors are geared towards instrumental purposes, people are more likely to follow suit (Byrne & Russon, 1998; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Friedman, Deci, Elliot, Moller, & Aarts, 2010; Levesque & Pelletier, 2003). Friedman et al. (2010) conducted two experiments to investigate this mirroring effect. In both experiments, it was found that participants, who observed an intrinsically motivated target enjoying the task, displayed intrinsic motivation too by working longer on the same task. The same effect was not found in participants who were observed an extrinsically motivated target. Both experiments showed that people tend to behave in similar ways when exposed to others displaying either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation in their behaviors. This has important implications for teaching.

Be intrinsically motivated ourselves to motivate others

- To promote intrinsic motivation in the people around us (such as friends, students or colleagues), teachers can begin with ourselves by showing interest and enjoying the work we do. We can also share with others our positive thoughts and feelings experienced, such as being curious to know more and wanting to master the work, with others to enhance their intrinsic motivation too.

Promote intrinsic motivation in students in the classroom

- Teachers can create a conducive classroom environment to allow students to be more intrinsically motivated in their work. For example, teachers can seek students' inputs into classroom activities to match students' interest as well structure differentiated activities to match different student abilities. These will also enhance students' engagement in the classroom. At the same time, teachers can get students to verbalize their positive feelings towards their classmates and teachers so as to create a closely connected learning environment. These practices will encourage students to become intrinsically motivated in their work.
- Similarly, teachers can discourage extrinsic motivation in the classroom by de-emphasizing on the use of rewards and punishments when students perform well or badly in their work respectively. Rather, to create intrinsically motivating classroom conditions, teachers can give praise to acknowledge students' effort and to get students' to mirror each others' efforts rather than results.

Key definitions:

Synchronicity: People tend to mirror the behaviors of others whom they have observed

Intrinsic motivation: The tendency to explore and seek out new challenges

Extrinsic motivation: Behaviors enacted for instrumental purposes such as for rewards or to avoid punishments

References:

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