Showing Up is Not Enough:
Motivating Unmotivated Students in the Secondary English Classroom

Author: Jennifer Walker
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Abstract

In this inquiry I identified 12 students in my 10th grade English classroom who came to school consistently, but did not turn in work and thus were failing. I researched factors contributing to their lack of motivation by tracking student turn-in rate through 12 major essay assignments and analyzing these assignments according to the content of the material, the context of the classroom, and the process used for writing. I also conducted informal student interviews and student surveys. These two methods of collecting allowed me to draw conclusions about motivation on both an individual level and on a larger group level. I found that using the writing process and knowing the individual needs of unmotivated students is important in increasing motivation to complete assignments.

Showing Up Is Not Enough: Motivating Unmotivated Students In The Secondary English Classroom

Jennifer Walker
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UCLA Teacher Education Program
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Faculty Advisor: Rae Jeane Williams

Rationale and Posing of Question

Victoriano and Ruben

One afternoon at the end of the first semester of school, two days before Christmas break, I sat in my classroom wanting to go home. The time was almost 5:30, the final bell had rung two hours ago, my work for the day was done, and yet I could not leave. My student Victoriano sat huddled over his laptop, typing slowly and diligently, staring intently at the screen. Victoriano was working on the final assignment of the first semester, a persuasive research essay. Victoriano had chosen to research school uniforms, and he now was typing his final draft. Most of the other students had finished the assignment in class earlier that day or the day before, but Victoriano has a learning disability and it takes him longer to complete his work, especially when it comes to writing essays. He was determined though, as always, to finish his work, and that is why I could not go home. If Victoriano was willing to stay and complete this assignment, struggling with it at times, then the least I could do was be there while he completed his work.

Students like Victoriano inspire me at the end of a difficult day. Like many of his classmates, Victoriano must overcome many obstacles to succeed in school. Like many of his classmates, he is an English Learner, with Spanish the language of his home and culture, and English the language of his school. Like many of his classmates, Victoriano comes from a low-

income family, and lives in a poverty-stricken part of South Los Angeles. Like many of his classmates, he has experienced some of the worst instruction his school district has to offer (for a whole year his two-hour English as a Second Language (ESL) class was taught by different substitutes).

Unlike many of his classmates, however, Victoriano's learning disability makes reading aloud and articulating thoughts orally difficult. Though a good writer, he needs twice as much time as other students to complete his assignments. Unlike many of his classmates, Victoriano is painfully shy and socially awkward. And, despite these disadvantages, unlike many of his classmates, Victoriano earned an "A" at the end of the first semester in my tenth grade English class. The other two tenth grade students to earn an "A" in my class have skill levels much higher than Victoriano (one of them has since been moved to the honors class), and though they both worked hard to earn their grade, I know that they did not have to work as hard, or as long as Victoriano did to achieve the same results. But where Victoriano lacks in ability, he makes up for in motivation, effort, and heart, and I have no doubt that this will pay off for him in the future.

Teachers like me love students like Victoriano because they are self-motivated. Ask them to do an assignment, they will stay until 5:30 to finish it. If they fail a quiz, they will ask to take it over. They ask for help when they need it, they listen when you are talking, and, most importantly, they do all of their work to the best of their ability. Students like Victoriano set the bar in terms of effort and motivation; however, students like him were not the impetus for this inquiry. Instead, students like Ruben were the impetus. Simply put, Ruben is a student who comes to my class every day but does not work. Every day, he comes to class and says hello. Every day, he listens to what is going on in class and will respond if called upon. He even takes

notes and partakes in class discussions, but he never, ever turns anything in. He is bright and a decent reader and writer. He scores proficient in several of the areas tested on the California Standardized Test (CST), which is no small feat in a school where most students score below basic or far below basic, but Ruben, a child who could easily be earning an "A" or a "B" because of the skills that he brings to my class, is failing because he never turns in assignments.

Because of students like Victoriano I find students like Ruben to be such a mystery. Ruben came to my class with skills in reading and writing that Victoriano did not have. While both students are bright individuals, Victoriano struggles with spelling, sentence structure, and vocabulary and Ruben does not. Ruben reads at a higher level and understands abstract ideas, such as the theme of a story, while Victoriano has difficulty with this. Victoriano is an English Learner; Ruben is not; Victoriano has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP); Ruben does not. Normally given this set of circumstances one would expect Ruben to be the one excelling and Victoriano the one who needs more attention and support. Instead Victoriano, who does not have the skills, slowly builds them through intense effort and hard work, and Ruben, who does have the skills, does not use them and fails as a result. The situation is like the story of the tortoise and the hare, except in this version the hare never even leaves the starting line.

The Problem

While I had been aware of the disconnection between the potential of students like Ruben and their actual performance in school, the magnitude of the problem became apparent to me after I had turned in my final grades for the first semester. The number of students failing my class was significant. In some classes, more than half the class was failing. Many who were not

failing were on the brink of doing so, having earned only a "D." In one class 69% of my students had earned either a "D" or an "F."

Though these numbers may be startling to some, in many urban classrooms they are not unusual. Greeley High School has a graduation rate of about 38% and a drop-out rate of 62%. Greeley is a Title-One school that serves approximately 4,800 students, almost all of whom qualify for a free or reduced lunch, illustrating that most of the student population comes from economically disadvantaged homes. There are two ethnic groups represented in the student population: Latino/a and African American. The school is approximately 89% Latino/a and 11% African American. The school serves a large number of recent immigrants and English Learners; 44% of the students are considered to be English Learners, and 37% have been reclassified to Fluent-English-Proficient (FEP) students. Eleven percent of the students qualify for special education services.

Academically, the students at the school struggle. Greeley has an Academic Performance Index (API) of 503. This is 118 points lower than the district average and 180 points lower than the state average. Though the school's scores have been steadily climbing, increasing 104 points in the last seven years, 67% of the tenth grade students at the school score below basic or far below basic on the English Language Arts portion of the CST. Students who score basic make up 25% of the student population. Only 7% were considered proficient, and 2% considered advanced. The students have been underserved in their educational experience and arrive at Greeley, and often leave it, without the skills that their more privileged peers in other parts of the city and state have.

The school is overcrowded, further evidence that the students here have been denied the education they deserve. Because of the large size of the school, Greeley has been divided into

Small Learning Communities (SLCs) in an effort to improve the students' education. SLCs were created so that students could form personal connections with each other and with their teachers, and in my SLC we are making progress toward this goal. I feel confident that my co-workers in the SLC sincerely care about the welfare and learning of their students and are making an effort to teach them every day. I have taught at one other urban school and know that this is a privilege that not many urban educators experience.

When one considers the statistics of Greeley High School, the number of students in my class failing at the end of the first semester seems on par with the rest of the school. About 62% of Greeley students never receive a high school diploma, and in my tenth grade classes about half of the students were failing. But no matter how I thought about the numbers, I could not justify what I saw as an enormous problem in my classroom. And while grades are not necessarily an indication of learning or of a student's motivation to learn, for me they were a warning that signaled a problem in my classroom that could not be ignored and that needed to be investigated more thoroughly if I was to do anything about it.

Showing Up is Not Enough

In the recent movie "Hardball", Keanu Reeves plays a white coach of an inner-city baseball team in Chicago. At a key point in the movie, he tells his team of young, Black players that the "most important thing in life is showing up." Keanu is right, in life showing up is pretty important. The kids who did not show up to my class did not pass; however, simply showing up is not enough to make my students succeed. In looking more closely into those ugly fails on my grade reports, I came to the conclusion that students failed my class for one of two reasons: either they did not come to class, or they came, but did not do their work. I decided to focus my

research on the second group of students: those who come every day but turn nothing in. I did this for several reasons. First of all, failure due to absences is a problem that plagues urban schools, but one that many teachers, including myself, find difficult to deal with given the issues we face concerning the students who are in school. The question of why students do or do not come to school is one that can be addressed by individual teachers, but at the secondary level is much more effectively dealt with by the students' core group of teachers and administration. For example, my Small Learning Community has made significant efforts to target frequent ditchers through conferences and parent phone calls, and slowly but surely is making progress in getting kids to come to school.

Furthermore, I chose to concentrate on the students who come every day yet do not work because I felt a deep personal responsibility for their failure and because it saddened me that many students had spent so much time in my class first semester and yet were no closer to graduating than they had been at the beginning of the year. In total, I identified twelve students in my three tenth grade English classes who came to my class on a regular basis but were failing because of the number of zeros recorded in the grade book. I could hope that these twelve students had learned something by spending five hours a week sitting in my classroom, but I could not be sure because they did not produce enough work for me tell. Not only that, but without a passing grade in their English class, they could not get a diploma, let alone attend a four year college, an option that I wanted for all my students.

Guiding Questions

I began my research with the following basic questions:

- What motivates students to complete their work and turn it in?

- Why do many students come to school, display some signs of investment (taking notes, beginning assignments, partaking in class discussions), yet are unable to complete their work and turn it in?

- Why are some students with low skills (like Victoriano) highly motivated, even when the work is difficult for them, while other students with higher skills (like Ruben) have such low motivation to do their work?

As I examined the motivations of my students on an individual level and the theories concerning motivation in education, I began to see that the problem in the classroom was due as much to my lack of knowledge of what motivated my students individually as their personal lack of investment in the class. Given this assumption, I developed further questions that I wanted to answer:

- If I could discover what motivates my students as individuals, would it be possible to meet the motivational needs of all of my struggling students?

- Will an increased display of care towards my students increase their motivation to complete work?

- Will an emphasis on learning, rather than grading increase motivation?

- More specifically, and because of my deep commitment to making my students competent writers, will an emphasis on the writing process rather than the final product increase my students' motivation to complete their major essay assignments, while also giving them a safe opportunity to improve their writing?

Theoretical Underpinnings/Secondary Sources

The term motivation refers to an internal state of being (this could be a desire, want or need) that directs behavior towards a certain end or goal. While this definition seems fairly simple, what I discovered through research with my students, both motivated and unmotivated, was that what motivates one student does not motivate another. The students in my classroom who were motivated to turn in work were not motivated for the same reasons, although there were commonalities, and the twelve students in my target group who were unmotivated pointed to different reasons for their lack of motivation. Given the complexity of the issue and the individual psychology that it stems from, I needed several theories of motivation to explain my students' behavior.

For a basic definition of motivation, I begin with a discussion of the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. I then draw upon several cognitive and social cognitive theories of learning, including attribution theory, expectancy and self-efficacy theories, and goal theory. These theories were especially helpful in understanding the individual psychology of my typically unmotivated students. Because the act of learning in a social environment affects a student's motivation, I also include a brief discussion of social cognitive, constructivist, and social constructivist theories. Finally, I found care theory, through the work of Noddings (1992) and Valenzuela (1999), to be the most important in understanding and increasing student motivation in the classroom.

Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation

Discussions of motivation usually begin with the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is motivation that occurs because of some outside

force and is discussed by Thorndike and Skinner (as cited in Woolfolk, 2006) in what is known as operant or classical conditioning where behaviors are controlled through positive or negative reinforcers. These reinforcers are meant to increase desired behavior or decrease unwanted behavior. For example, if a student is extrinsically motivated to complete an assignment, she completes it because she wants to receive a sticker, to participate in a school sport, or because she does not want the teacher to yell at her. Intrinsic motivation is motivation that comes from within one's self, whether it is a positive emotion, such as pride, satisfaction, or belonging, or a desire to increase one's knowledge of a subject. Educational psychologists tell us that intrinsic motivation is fundamentally important to learning, and the work of Thorndike and Skinner (as cited in Woolfolk, 2006), which places such importance on extrinsic motivators, has long been held out of date. Extrinsic motivation will work only as long as the positive or negative reinforcers are in place, and therefore such an approach to motivation does not lend itself to developing life long learners. While I agree that extrinsic motivation is limited in its effectiveness, I also I believe it is important to recognize that many students are powerfully motivated by extrinsic forces. The dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation becomes complicated when one begins to talk to individual students. As one student said on his class survey, "I turned in the essays because I couldn't wait to get a response along with a grade that I deserve. I did them to advance myself and to increase my grade." This response shows that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivating our students simultaneously.

Cognitive and Social Cognitive Theories of Motivation: Attribution, Expectancy/Efficacy, and Goal Theories

Cognitive theories of motivation were helpful in framing my research because of their emphasis on the individual learner. Though there were common trends among the target group

of students, there were also individual differences in terms of what factors contributed to their lack of motivation. Cognitive theories of motivation tend to dominate the discussion of motivation because of their emphasis on the individual learner, rather than on the learner as a social being or a member of a group.

<u>Attribution Theory</u>

Attribution theory developed by Weiner (as cited in Woolfolk, 2007) holds that how motivated we are is dependent upon to what we attribute our successes and failures. According to this theory, we explain our successful or unsuccessful outcomes in terms of location (internal to ourselves or external), stability (whether the cause stays the same or changes), and controllability (whether the cause can be controlled or not). Influencing these explanations are the ideas students have about their own ability, which is usually seen as internal and nonchangeable, the difficulty of the task, the amount of effort they are willing to put in, and the degree to which they attribute outcomes to luck. These variables influence each other to some degree, so that a student's view of his or her ability will also influence the perceived difficulty of the task (Weiner as cited in Woolfolk, 2007). Through my research I often found that one student would perceive a task as easy, while another would perceive it as difficult, and that these perceptions affected whether or not they were willing to complete an assignment. The perceived difficulty of the task was a huge influence on some students' decisions to complete work.

According to attribution theory, students are motivated when they see success as internal to themselves, as changeable depending on the effort exerted, and as something they control. In other words, students need to believe they have control over their own learning and that their abilities are changeable so that if they experience difficulty they will continue trying, knowing

that failure is a changeable outcome (Weiner as cited in Woolfolk, 2007). Much of attribution theory is concerned with how a student will approach the next task based on past experience. For example, if students extend a great deal of effort on an assignment and still fails they are likely to attribute this to their own personal failure and therefore have less motivation to extend the same amount of effort on the next assignment.

Expectancy and Self-Efficacy Theories

Two closely related theories are the cognitive expectancy theory and the social cognitive self-efficacy theory. Vroom's (as cited in Huitt, 2001) expectancy theory, says that the level of students' motivation is a combination of three factors: their perceived probability of success, their perceived connection between their work effort and the final result, and the value of obtaining the goal. This theory can be expressed as the following mathematical equation: Expectancy x Instrumentality x Value = Level of Motivation. If any of these variables is zero, then the level of motivation will be zero and the student will not be motivated to complete work (Vroom as cited in Huitt, 2001). I found this theory especially helpful in understanding my students' lack of connection between their actions and the final outcome on individual assignments and on their grade as a whole. As I interviewed students, I realized that this lack of connection was an important factor in explaining some of the individual behavior in my classroom. The other part of this theory that I found helpful in explaining my students' motivations was their perceived value of the goal. I was interested to find that students used different cues to evaluate the importance of different assignments and decide whether or not to complete an assignment based on this evaluation.

Bandura's (as cited in Parajes, 1996) self-efficacy theory differs from expectancy theory in that it takes into account the many things that can affect a person's perceived ability to succeed in a given situation. Bandura (as cited in Parajes, 1996) takes into account environmental factors and sees self-efficacy as related to specific tasks and to specific situations in a student's life. When perceived ability to succeed is looked at from a social cognitive level, we see that there are many more variables in student motivation than expectancy theory allows. The subject, the environment of the classroom (including the relationship with the teacher and fellow students), and the process of learning all affect the way a student feels about his or her chances of succeeding at a particular task. Students' self-efficacy could be high when it comes to solving math problems but low when it comes to writing. Similarly, their self-efficacy could be high when it comes to reading for understanding but low when it comes to writing essays. As I interviewed my focus group of students, I realized that their individual ideas of what they were likely to succeed at and what they were likely to fail at had a big part in whether they decided to attempt a task at all.

Goal Theory

I found goal theory helpful because of its distinction between performance and mastery goals, which I used to frame my discussion of the type of essay assignments I asked my students to complete. According to Nicholls and Miller (as cited in Woolfolk, 2007) students who are focused on performance goals concentrate on the extrinsic value of completing a task, such as earning a high grade, looking good in front of their peers, or feeling good about themselves. Students who are focused on mastery goals work towards goals as a way of increasing their knowledge, developing themselves as a person, or learning new skills. Performance goals put

emphasis on the final product and its rewards, while mastery goals put emphasis on the process of learning and the actual knowledge gained by completing a task. It is important to encourage students to hold mastery goals rather than performance goals because performance goals are an ineffective way to motivate students in the long term even if they work for individual assignments. I found this theory particularly helpful when I began to think about the types of goals I was implicitly asking my students to set through the types of writing assignments I gave and where I placed the emphasis, whether on the final performance or the process of mastering the skills they needed.

Social Cognitive, Constructivist, and Social Constructivist Theories

The theories of constructivism and social constructivism were helpful in thinking about how my students would best learn the material, and what would motivate them to learn that material. According to constructivism, students acquire new knowledge by constructing it themselves, instead of acquiring it from a teacher. Constructivism rejects the idea that teachers are to give knowledge to a passive student, and instead puts students in control of their own learning. Along with this is the social cognitive, Vygotskian (as cited in Woolfolk, 2006) theory of tapping into prior knowledge and putting emphasis on why students are learning the material that they are. In this way of thinking, motivation occurs through choice and the passing of power from the teacher to the students so that students have power over what they learn and how they learn. Motivation also occurs when students see how material connects to their lives, and by tapping into students' funds of knowledge (Moll, 2000) teachers can increase student motivation because students will see a relevance to their world. Moll (2000) says that we must pay attention to the cultural context that our students come from and use this context as an important part of

the classroom and as an asset to their learning. Students will be more motivated to learn when

they see their culture reflected in the pedagogy of their classroom. Indeed, I noticed that when

the material we were reading connected to the students' culture, they were more willing to

complete the assignment. What was interesting was that students were more motivated by

popular cultural connections than connections made to their cultural heritage.

Social constructivism (Vygotsky as cited in Woolfolk, 2007) adds to constructivism by

saying that knowledge is gained in social situations. Motivation can be both extrinsic and

intrinsic because students may be working towards goals that are created in the social situation,

but it can also be intrinsic in that the act of learning in a social situation can be motivating in and

of itself. Also, because the students themselves are responsible for their own learning, social

constructivism depends on the students' intrinsic motivation.

Care Theory

Much of the theories of motivation I have discussed so far depend on the individual

students' conception of themselves as a learner and their ability to think about their own learning

in an appropriate way. Students are motivated if they attribute their successes to their own hard

work and to their own abilities, rather than to an outside source such as luck. Ideas of self-

efficacy are very important, determining how students approach assignments and whether or not

they see a connection between their work and the result achieved. While these theories helped

me to understand my students a great deal, I also knew that the realities of urban schools provide

an environment where the development of self-efficacy is difficult. Because of the educational

experience of many inner-city youth of color, one or more of the variables present in expectancy

theory (Expectancy x Instrumentality x Value = Motivation) are down to zero, leaving them with

little motivation. Many of the students in our inner-city schools have become accustomed to failure and therefore expect it before they have even approached a learning task. They often feel powerless to change their situation, and incapable of succeeding in school. Most importantly, our students do not always see the value of succeeding in school because so few of the people around them, including their teachers, seem to value their educational experience.

Care theory seems to present a way for teachers to approach this problem and to understand our students' lack of self-efficacy or lack of appropriate attribution in terms of the systematic denial of a caring education, not in terms of the students' own individual failures. Inner-city youth of color are not accustomed to teachers caring about their grade in class, let alone caring about them as individuals. I believe that care theory is relevant to the discussion of motivation because the word "care" is often used as a less formal way of saying "motivation." When teachers say that kids do not care about school, they are essentially saying that students are not motivated in school.

According to Noddings (1992) and Valenzuela (1999) effective pedagogy and learning can only happen when there is a positive, authentic, caring relationship between the teacher and the learner. Noddings (1992) says that teachers should be the initiators of this caring relationship because of their position of authority. When the student acknowledges this care and in turn trusts the teacher enough to reveal his or her self, authentic caring is reached. Authentic caring is based on caring about who students are as people and about their personal well-being. Aesthetic care is concerned with more superficial things, such as a student's grades or their behavior in class. A good teacher, according to Valenzuela (1999) can combine these two forms of caring so that students know that a teacher may care about aspects of their aesthetic self (such as grades) only because they care about their authentic self. As Valenzuela (1999) notes, "an obvious limit

to caring exists when teachers ask all students to care about school while many students ask to be cared for before they care about" (p.24). Essentially care theory represents the old adage that students will not care about what you know until they know you care.

Particularly important to my research was Noddings's (1992) emphasis on dialogue. When I conducted informal one-on-one interviews with my students I tried to create a space where dialogue was possible. Through the open-ended, genuine dialogue Noddings promotes I believe solutions can be found to the problems posed by cognitive theories of education. Though I feel that I still have some work to do in creating completely open dialogue, I found the dialogue I engaged in with my students to be extremely helpful in understanding their motivations because it gave students a chance to express their individual reasons for being unmotivated. The dialogue also allowed me to express to them that I cared about them as people who had lives beyond my classroom. Many students expressed very directly that our dialogue was proof that I cared about them and their performance in my class. Through these dialogues, I tried to incorporate the idea of confirmation, which Noddings (1992) says is a way of seeing what she calls a "better self" in another person and encouraging its development. When a better self is seen and encouraged we can find a way to see students as agents of change in their own lives. This agency can be powerful and used to solve the problems of self-efficacy and attribution as discussed earlier.

Theory Summary

All of the theories I discussed influenced the way I thought about the data I collected and the way I approached the problem of motivation in my classroom. I noticed the motivations of my target students could not be explained through one theory, both individually and as a group. This resistance to simple explanation seems to reflect the complexity of the issue of motivation

and to underscore the fact that one theory cannot explain the many competing influences on an individual's motivation.

Inquiry Process/Data Sources

I used several data sources to investigate why many of my students were unmotivated and how to increase their motivation. I wanted to look at the students' individual approaches to school and their individual motivations, as well as what motivated students on a larger social level. To do this, I identified twelve students whom I followed closely throughout the process. I used data from a class survey, as well as informal interview responses from the students in the target group. Additionally, I measured student motivation in terms of whether or not they turned in major assignments in the class. I tracked the trends for the group as a whole while closely analyzing the content, classroom context, and process that framed each assignment.

The Focus Group

The impetus for this inquiry, as I have already stated, was the high number of students who came to my classroom every day and yet were failing because they turned nothing in. To target this population, I identified a group of students with high attendance rates and low grades who I would study closely. I chose twelve students who regularly attended class but rarely turned in assignments. I limited the group to students who were in one of my three sections of tenth-grade English despite the fact that many of my ninth grade students qualified given the above criteria. I did this because I wanted to measure the turn-in rate of my students on a certain set of assignments completed by that class.

The group turned out to be majority male, with nine boys and three girls. One of the students was African American, and the other eleven were Latino, coming from Mexican and El

Salvadorian ancestry. I did not have any specific qualifications for the focus group when I initially chose it, just a general impression that these students came regularly but did not turn in work. But when I looked at the data more closely I realized that the students in the focus group had many other similarities. All of the students in the focus group had an attendance rate at or above 83%, which is around the average attendance rate for the SLC that I work in. Seven of the students had an attendance rate of 90% or higher for the first half of the second semester. Ten of the twelve students failed my class first semester; two had passed with a "D." All but three of the students were English Learners and have now been redesignated as Fluent English Proficient (FEP). In terms of ability, this group of students covered a wide range, from students like Ruben who scored proficient on the Language Arts section of the CST to students like Emmanuel who scored below basic or far below basic on most areas of the standardized test. Many of the students were good readers, while several of them struggled with reading. Though the group represented a range of ability levels, they were similar in that I was firmly convinced that, although the students were not producing work and were therefore failing my class, each one of them was capable of succeeding in my classroom.

Student Responses: Survey and Interviews

I began to gauge my students' motivations for success through a survey (see Appendix) that I distributed to my tenth-grade classes. On this survey I asked students which of the major essays they had completed, which they had not, and why they had or had not completed these assignments, providing possible reasons and leaving room for individual comments. I also asked my students for any feedback about what would help them turn in assignments more often. I asked my students to put their names on the survey so that I could

compare the answers of the students in the focus group with some of their more motivated peers. These surveys provided a type of background against which to understand my struggling students and my successful students.

To know my focus students and their motivation on a more individual level, and to help them set specific goals, I conducted informal interviews with each of them individually. These informal interviews occurred during my conference period, when I would pull the students from their class to speak with them. My classroom was used by a traveling teacher during my conference period, so some interviews had to be conducted sitting on the floor in the hallway outside the classroom. On some occasions, I was able to find an empty classroom nearby so that we could sit in desks as we talked. I sat with my laptop and told the students that I would be typing their responses to the questions as they answered them.

In these informal interviews, I went over the students' individual surveys and asked additional follow up questions. We talked about their goals for their future after high school and any outside influences upon those goals. Then we talked about their goals for the class. For the class goals, I tried to steer students towards setting mastery goals rather than performance goals, and I tried to focus their attention around essay writing and any other areas that needed improvement. I also attempted to turn these interviews into individual motivational meetings. I repeatedly emphasized that I believed that each of them was capable of doing the work I assigned to them and that I cared a great deal about them personally and about their performance in my class. I told them that I was willing to help them in whatever way I could, both in this class and other classes.

Based on the work of Noddings (1992) I tried to make these informal interviews more in the format of a dialogue than simply asking questions the students would answer. Though I had

a general idea of the questions I wanted to ask the students (see Appendix), I felt it was more effective to allow the students' responses to my questions to dictate the direction of the discussion, which is why I have termed these "informal" interviews. Each interview went in a different direction depending on the individual student and as we began to talk I did less typing on my computer and more listening. I did my best to listen to what my students had to say about what would help them succeed in my class as individuals. My hypothesis was that students would be more motivated to complete their work if I explicitly showed that I cared personally about their performance in my class, and that by helping them to set goals I would give them tools to become more self sufficient in achieving these goals.

Student Assignments: Content, Context, and Process

While I looked at individual students and what motivates them, I also looked at the nature of the assignments I asked my students to complete. My goal was to look at the essay assignments in terms of their content, context, and process. Based on these factors, as well as my students' individual motivations, I compared the turn-in rate for these assignments and explored possible reasons behind my students' level of success. I was particularly interested in comparing the turn-in rate for the essay assignments from the beginning of the school year to the essay assignments that we had been working on more currently. These assignments are grouped according to the emphasis placed on them: mastery or performance, product or process (specifically the writing process). In the first three major essay assignments of the year, much more emphasis was placed on product, rather than process, thus placing more emphasis on performance goals rather than mastery goals. In the last four essay assignments, I attempted to put more emphasis on the writing process, having students work toward mastery of skills, rather

than work toward a particular performance goal, or letter grade. I will describe the nature of these assignments more specifically below.

The three essay assignments in the first group were completed at the beginning of the school year. The first of these assignments was a class goals essay, which was a highly structured essay in which I asked students to set goals concerning where they wanted to be by the end of the semester. The second essay was in response to the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which students were given four options of essay assignments to choose from with various degrees of difficulty. The third assignment was a persuasive essay in response to readings we had done on the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. This proposed federal legislation would have given illegal immigrants in-state tuition at public universities if they met certain conditions. The act was designed to benefit students who had spent most of their lives in the U.S. and were essentially, though not legally, American citizens. The students were asked to write a persuasive essay either supporting the proposed federal legislation or opposing it.

Though differing in content, I grouped these essays together because they were all essentially "one-shot" essays where I gave the students a prompt and asked them to write an essay with little time for revision and little support from me or their peers in improving their essay. The students did not receive credit for completing a first draft, and although I might have discussed the idea of developing writing skills through revisions, my actions in the classroom did not correspond with this, thus the final product of the assignment was emphasized, with little emphasis placed on the process of getting there. This is not because I do not think that the revision process is incredibly important, it is just that I did not allow enough time to complete the writing process within the confines of our fragmented year-round schedule on B track. For

example, by the time my students had finished reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* during the first half the second semester, they only had two weeks to complete a first draft of an essay on the book, revise it, and type a final draft before they went off track, not to return to school for two months. For many of my students, especially those who were typically unmotivated, this was not enough time to go through the writing process in any meaningful way, especially given the high level of material in the book and the complexity of the writing tasks they had to choose from. Under a normal schedule, I would have adjusted my plans and allowed more time for the writing process; however, given the circumstances, it would have been impossible to ask my students to return to the writing task after coming back on track eight weeks later. Thus, because there was no peer revision, there was no opportunity for social learning or social construction of knowledge. Whether it was my own fault for not planning well enough, or the craziness of the B track schedule, my students were shortchanged when it came to these writing tasks.

Another aspect of this first group of essays that is important to note is that there was very little emphasis placed on the connection between my students' work and the final outcome of the assignment, and therefore little emphasis placed on the importance of the assignment itself. Students who did not turn in an essay on the day it was due never heard about the essay again until a week (eight weeks for the *To Kill a Mockingbird* essay) later when I handed back the essays to those who had completed them. Even with three or four days of class time devoted to working on the assignments, it was easy for the students feel as if the essay was not that important and to ignore the connection between their lack of effort and their final grade.

As my students worked on the second group of essays, I tried to put more emphasis on the process of writing, rather than just the final product, I allowed for increased social interaction, and I tried to make a more explicit connection between my students' efforts and their

final results. The first in this group of assignments was a persuasive research essay in which students chose a controversial topic that they were interested in, researched it, and wrote a persuasive essay about the topic. The next two assignments were responses to the short stories "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker and "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin. Both of these essays asked the students to analyze the personal or emotional characteristics of a character in the story. The final essay was a response to a reading called "The Smurfette Principle," which discussed the representation of women and girls in children's media. Students had to discuss the main arguments of the article and agree or disagree with them using characters from two children's television shows as evidence. For the culminating task, I asked students to choose one of the last three essays they wrote, revise it, and type it up on the class set of laptops.

The process of writing with this second group of essays differed greatly from the first. Once the assignment was presented to the class, the process followed the following format more or less: we would discuss the assignment, and I would give the students a general idea of how they might want to organize the essay, then I would give them time to write, usually two class periods. If they were not able to finish the first draft in those two class periods, they were to take the essay home for homework. I tried as best as I could to give the students a weekend over which to complete the first draft, making it due on Monday. On Monday, I would collect the first draft, giving each student full credit for having completed the assignment if it looked as though they had sincerely tried. I would read a few of the essays that evening to get a general idea of what students were doing well on and what they were struggling with, but I would not grade them.

The following day I passed back the essays and the students worked with a partner to revise each other's papers. I would give the class as a whole some specific things to look for

based on what I had seen in the papers the night before. Students who had not turned in a first draft when it was due would use this time to finish their first draft. When they finished the first draft, they would simply show me their essay to receive credit for it before they too began peer revising. Although I graded the assignment down one grade level for each day late, students could still have a good grade on the first draft since one day late meant a "B" and two days late meant a "C." After two days of peer revising, and two more days for individual revising, the students turned in a second draft, which I read carefully and assigned a grade after giving specific feedback. I also looked at the changes each student made from the first to the second draft. Finally, before we began the next essay, I made copies of one excellent essay, which we would read as a class, discussing the reasons that this particular essay was a good model to follow.

I had several reasons for changing our process for writing essays. First, I hoped that as students began to see that I was not concerned with how good or bad their first draft was, and that I was more concerned with whether they had something to "work with," that they would feel less pressure and be more likely to turn in something. Students succeeded at the first draft by simply turning it in, and having a rough draft increased the likelihood of their success on the second draft as well. Also, through the peer revising, the importance of the assignment was emphasized to students who did not have a rough draft on the day it was due, increasing the value of the goal, and increasing the students' connection between their actions and their grades. These students also were given extra time to complete the essay and extra motivation to do so as they watched their classmates engaging with each other's writing on a social level. Although these slower-moving students may not have gotten the chance to participate fully in the peer revising process, they were more likely to at least turn something in, a step up from where they

had been before. In providing the example essay to students, I tried to emphasize the characteristics that they should mimic in their own writing in the next essay. I encouraged students to have these example essays out as they sat down to write their next one, thus, I hoped, placing more emphasis on the writing process than on the end product. My hypothesis was that, given more time to complete assignments, and with more emphasis on the process of writing, rather than on the final product, the students will be more likely to complete assignments.

Findings and Analysis

As I conducted my research I realized that student motivation occurs as a result of two different influences: teacher pedagogy and individual psychology. This realization is reflected in my two primary findings. First, I learned that pedagogy that emphasizes the process of learning, rather than the final product, improves the turn-in rate of typically unmotivated students. Other pedagogical factors that influence turn-in rate positively include allowing students greater freedom of choice, connecting the writing to their own lives, and allowing for the social construction of knowledge. My second finding was that increased knowledge of what motivates and does not motivate individual, underperforming students is key to setting them up for success. This individual knowledge allows teachers to know which students are primarily extrinsically motivated, which need additional signs of caring, which are social learners, and which need more personal attention for understanding. Through my interviews and my survey I also found that a student's perception of the level of difficulty of a task, the likelihood of success, and the importance of the task were big factors in determining whether the students attempted and completed assignments.

Teacher Pedagogy: Process vs. Product

	Class Goals	TKM	DREAM Act	Persuasive Research **Draft 1**	Persuasive Research **Draft 2**	Everyday Use **Draft 1**	Everyday Use **Draft 2**	The Story of an Hour **Draft 1**	The Story of an Hour **Draft 2**	Smurfette Principle **Draft 1**	Smurfette Principle **Draft 2**	Culminating Task
Emmanuel	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Jose T	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
Stephanie	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
Edgar	Y	N	N	N	N	Y*	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jose V	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y
Clifton	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y*	N	Y*	Y*	N
Jessica	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jose Z	N	N	N	N	N	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Jose B	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y*	N	Y	Y	Y
Ruben	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y*	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Miguel	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	N	Y*	Y	N
Gloria	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y*	Y	Y*	Y	Y
Turn in Rate	Y=6 N=6	Y=3 N=9	Y=0 N=12	Y=5 N=7	Y=6 N=6	Y=4 N=8	Y=6 N=6	Y=8 N=4	Y=5 N=7	Y=12 N=0	Y=12 N=0	Y=8 N=4
Percentage	50%	25%	0%	41%	50%	33%	50%	66%	41%	100%	100%	66%

* Indicates that assignment was turned in late

The table above charts the turn-in rate for each of the twelve students in the focus group through the eight major essays assignments they had completed midway through the second semester. As I mentioned earlier, my theory was that the turn-in rate for the last five assignments would be higher than the first three. This would be because of an increased emphasis on the writing process rather than the final product, an increased emphasis on the importance of the task, and an increased opportunity for social learning as detailed in my data sources section. The first grouping of assignments, the "one shot" essays (class goals, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and DREAM Act), had an extremely low turn-in rate, with the exception of the class goals essay, which had a turn-in rate of 50% for this group. My explanation for this is that

the class goals essay was the first essay the students wrote; they began it the third day of classes, a time when students are eager to please and when many of them are trying to start the year off right. Though the structure of the essay was dictated by me, the content of it was largely determined by the students themselves. This greater opportunity to connect their learning to their own lives and tap into their funds of knowledge may also have been part of the reason that this first assignment had a higher turn-in rate than the others in this group of essays.

However, tapping into prior knowledge and connecting to students' lives is not enough unless the right structures are in place to increase student motivation. The DREAM Act essay had an especially bad turn-in rate, with no students from the focus group submitting an essay. Ironically, I picked this topic when we began our persuasive unit because I believed that the articles would be of high interest, culturally relevant, and timely. I chose two articles on the topic, one by the National Immigration Law Center, which supported the DREAM Act, and one from the Heritage Foundation, which opposed the act. I wanted to use these non-fiction texts not only because they provided such a good illustration of persuasive techniques, but also because they dealt with issues that affected my students or people in my students' lives. Indeed, my students, even the typically unmotivated ones, were highly engaged in our discussions of the articles and reacted strongly, especially to the article from the Heritage Foundation. A highly engaged set of students is a wonderful thing, and I believe that the students learned a lot through our classroom discussions; however, I was disappointed that this enthusiasm did not translate into actual work being turned in. It is interesting that compared to the DREAM Act essay, the first draft of "The Story of an Hour" essay had a much higher turn-in rate. Though this story does contain important themes of feminism and resistance to oppression, to which my students were able to connect, the main character in the story is an aristocratic, white woman living in the

late 1800s. My point here is that culturally relevant, high interest material in and of itself will not motivate students to complete work when little to no attention is given to the writing process. I believe that the turn-in rate for "The Story of an Hour" essay was higher than for the DREAM Act essay because emphasis was placed on the mastery goal of understanding the material and improving the students' writing rather than on the performance goal of completing an essay for a grade. The 0% turn-in rate for the DREAM Act essay shows that a social justice educator must combine high interest material with good pedagogy and methodology to increase student motivation.

What was encouraging to me was that both drafts of the last four essays had a higher turn-in rate than either the *To Kill a Mockingbird* or DREAM Act essays. The first draft of "The Story of an Hour" essay was the first assignment where a majority of students in the group turned the assignment in, completing a first draft in time to make some revisions. I think that the first draft of this essay had a higher turn in rate than the previous first drafts because students were becoming accustomed to the system that I had put in place and were beginning to realize that I cared as much about them completing a first draft as I did about them completing a second draft. Thus, the goal of mastering the skill of writing a quality essay was emphasized, rather than the performance goal of getting a good grade. Students were beginning to see the value in the process of learning, not just the value in the end product.

It is significant to note that most of the students who turned in the first draft of this assignment took advantage of the additional time given in class to complete it, though it was graded down for being late. The additional time I provided for these students, while the others moved on to peer revising, meant that more students in the focus group completed a first draft. Perhaps more important than the additional time, was the fact that the students who did not turn

in their first draft were made more aware of the importance of the assignment, or the value of the goal, as expectancy theory would say. Students who were unmotivated to work during the regular time allotted were suddenly able to work with a greater sense of urgency as they saw their classmates moving on to the next step in the writing process. It is easy for students to forget about an essay and not realize the impact it has on their grade when they do not turn it in and thus never receive a graded product. It was harder for students to have this kind of "assignment amnesia" because they saw the essay taking up a good deal of class time and they saw their classmates engaging the assignment socially, while they themselves were still working on the first part of the writing process. Students could not participate in the peer revising if they did not have the first draft done, and they did not get the chance to read their peers' writing. Though I am still searching for ways of making peer revising more effective in my classroom, I do believe that participation in peer revising is a powerful motivator for students because it is a social method of constructing knowledge.

This social motivator, as well as several other factors, is important for understanding the 100% turn-in rate for "The Smurfette Principle" essay. First of all, I believe that both drafts of "The Smurfette Principle" essay had a much higher turn-in rate than any previous essay for my typically unmotivated group of students because by this time they had realized that it paid off to have the first draft done, be able to revise with a partner, and write a second draft. Not only did they receive credit for simply completing the first draft, they realized that their second draft would be much improved through this process. Providing time in class for the writing process increased my students' perception that there was a connection between their work and their performance in my class.

More importantly, however, the "Smurfette Principle" essay results show that when good practice is combined with high interest, culturally relevant material, students are more likely to be motivated to complete their work. Sociocultural theory holds that teachers should tap into students' prior knowledge and funds of knowledge to increase learning. This applies to the "The Smurfette Principle" assignment because the students were asked to analyze television shows from their own childhood. The students not only were motivated to engage in class discussions about the article we read, but they also were highly motivated to write about their perceptions of sexism in children's television. They enjoyed looking for examples of strong and weak female characters and examples of tokenism and stereotyping. Students expressed a great deal of interest in the topic because many had never thought about children's television shows through this lens and several of them said that they felt "let down" by the shows that they used to watch because of their portrayal of female characters. All of the students I interviewed cited their personal connection to the material and high interest in the article as the reason they completed the assignment. This high interest also seemed to be the reason behind their perception that the essay was easy, because analyzing television and a reading about television seemed easier to them than analyzing a story. As Jose B said on his survey, "The assignment was easy because I wrote about what I know."

The assignment also generated high interest because the students had more reason to connect socially regarding the material. As I walked around the room helping individual students with their essays, I heard many students engaging in conversation about the shows they had chosen and what these shows seemed to say about their female characters. I heard students giving each other suggestions of what shows to choose, and also pointing out aspects of shows that their peers had not thought of. For example, one student was writing about the show

"Arthur," saying that it portrayed females stereotypically because of the character D.W., Arthur's annoying, tag-along little sister who wears dresses and hair ribbons. "But what about Francine?" a student's group member asked, "Francine dresses in overalls and acts kind of tough and mean; that's not a stereotype." I listened to this conversation and then suggested that the student include an analysis of the character Francine because it showed the complexity of gender representation on television. These conversations were especially important in the context of the assignment because of my limited and outdated knowledge of children's television. This assignment offered an excellent opportunity for the students to be the ones constructing their own knowledge with the help of their peers, rather than with the help of the teacher.

Individual Differences in Motivation

Disconnection and Self-Attribution

Through the interviews with my focus students and the surveys I was able to gain a more individual understanding of what motivated my students. What I found with some of the focus students through my interviews was one of the causes of their lack of motivation was the disconnection between their work and their product. For example, when I asked Emmanuel what grade he expected to receive in the class, he replied that he expected at least a "C" when his actual percentage in the class at the midpoint of the second semester was a 39%. Stephanie and Jose Z also believed that their grades in the class were significantly higher than the ones that they actually had. Similarly, all of the students set high goals for themselves but seemed to have no idea of how to achieve them. When asked what their goals were, they said things like "to turn everything in and be more responsible," "to make up all of my work I haven't done," and "pay more attention in class." While these are worthy goals, I felt that there was little connection

between these goals and their behavior in class. According to self-efficacy and expectancy theory, students need to see a connection between their work and their final product. One explanation for the students' lack of motivation could be their inability to see this connection.

Despite showing a lack of connection, these comments do show a great deal of self-attribution for their own successes and failures. What I found in talking to my students more personally was that they did take a great deal of responsibility for their own work or lack of work. Some of this self-attribution was productive, and some was not; many students explained that they did not turn in their assignments because they were lazy, offering no further explanation. This response is common from students when they are asked why they or their peers do not succeed in school. However, my students' self-attributed failure was in their opinions not due to a lack of ability, but to lack of effort. In response to the question "what would help you turn in assignments more often?" Jose T said, "There is no one that is going to help me but myself." Though the students cited many other reasons for not completing work, in the end they seemed to attribute their failure to their own personal lack of effort. When I asked students if they thought they were capable of completing the assignments, they all responded that they were, but that there were certain aspects of the tasks they struggled with. Furthermore, I was impressed with my students' abilities to pinpoint the areas that were difficult for them. For example, Jessica and Clifton both said that introductions were difficult for them to write, and Jose V, Stephanie, and Gloria all said they could start the essay, but that once they were stuck it was difficult for them to keep going and to finish the assignment.

So, it was not because of a lack of self-attribution that students were unmotivated. What seemed to be more commonly cited as important in determining whether or not an assignment was completed was the perceived difficulty of the essay. This perception of difficulty, which is a

variable in attribution, expectancy, and self-efficacy theories varied from individual to individual. For example, Emmanuel found the persuasive essay difficult because he was intimidated by doing research on computers, something I did not know until I interviewed him. Because he has little knowledge of computers, he believed the assignment was too difficult for him to complete. Also, the difficulty of the readings associated with the essays was an issue for several students. Jose B noted on his survey, "The essays were mostly [based] in reading and they were hard because the reading was hard to understand." Stephanie noted that the "Everyday Use" essay was hard for her because of the length of the reading, while "The Story of an Hour" "was only two pages long, so it wasn't that hard to get the reading." It is interesting how powerful the physical presentation of a text can be in shaping students' perceptions of its level of difficulty, especially considering the fact that these two stories have similar levels of complexity.

Assessing Individual Student Needs

The work of Noddings (1992) emphasizes the importance of dialogue in an authentic caring relationship. Through my interviews with my students I tried to keep the dialogue as open as possible so that my students and I could come to some kind of solution to help motivate them to complete their work. I found that dialogue was important because through dialogue my students and I became more aware of their individual needs. Though there were general trends, not all of my unmotivated students needed the same thing because not all of them were motivated for the same reasons.

Extrinsic Motivation

Though it is generally accepted that extrinsic motivation will not lead to lifelong learning and motivation, teachers cannot deny the power that extrinsic motivation holds for our students. Edgar was emphatic that the only reason he had started turning in his essays was because he was able to listen to his I-pod in class while he was writing them; whereas, I had not allowed that at the beginning of the year. "I know it sounds weird, but it's the truth," he said when I questioned the validity of the I-pod as a motivator. Jose V is another student who is motivated through extrinsic forces. Jose received a Fail on all three report cards first semester, but earned a "C" on his first report card of the second semester. The difference? Jose wanted to play on the baseball team and needed the good grade to qualify. Stephanie too mentioned that she wanted to join the basketball team partly because it would give her motivation to keep her grades up. While Stephanie, Edgar, and Jose V have other factors that contribute to their motivation, as I will discuss below, the power of these extrinsic motivators cannot be denied.

Social Learners

Some students like Edgar did not want input from their peers in writing their essay; Edgar preferred to put his headphones on and write to his heart's content. Other students, like Jose V, Jessica, and Jose B, benefited from the input of their peers. I learned through the research process that these students were social learners and would be more motivated to complete a task if they were given freedom to consult with peers who were willing to help them. Again, I was impressed by my students' self awareness in identifying this need. Jose V asked to change his seat so he could sit next to Jossy, a student who excelled in class, and whose essays I used as models. Jossy and Jose had a good relationship and Jossy was very instrumental in Jose's

successes in my classroom. Jessica was paired with Jocelyn in a similar sort of working

relationship, and Jose B, who was easily distracted when he sat next to other people, knew that

he could get up from his isolated desk when he needed to and seek help from certain other

students in the classroom. It is important in a situation like this that the working partner is

willing and able to help their peer and will also benefit from the relationship. If this social

learning situation can be arranged, then it can be very productive in terms of motivating students.

Increased Individual Attention for Better Understanding

Because so many students cited a lack of understanding either of the reading or the

assignment as the reason they did not complete their work, I found that increasing the amount of

individual attention that I could give to these students helped push them through parts of the

assignment that were difficult for them. Jose T, Jose B, Clifton, Edgar, Jessica, Stephanie, and

Miguel all benefited greatly from more personal attention from me as they were writing their

essays. At times this was frustrating because for some students this meant sitting down with

them and explaining the assignment to them individually because either they did not understand

or had not been listening when I explained it to the class as a whole. However, other students

needed my individual attention because they got stuck at a certain point in their essay, became

frustrated, and were unable to keep going. Also, students like Stephanie and Jose T admitted that

when they came to these difficult areas, they did not typically ask for my help. During the

interviews, I told these students I would try to give them more of my individual attention by

asking whether or not they needed help, but that they also needed to be responsible for

requesting this help. Though this need for individual attention was a common finding among my

struggling students, it is a troubling one because of the logistical difficulties involved giving it.

How can I give all of my struggling students the individual attention they need when I have twenty other students to work with as well? How can I push my other students to achieve higher levels of learning if I spend all of my time with the struggling ones? How will my struggling students learn self regulation and problem solving if they always have me to help them out? These questions are not easily answered, but are worthy of serious consideration.

<u>Caring Increases Motivation</u>

All of the students I interviewed responded positively when I asked if they knew that I cared about them. When I asked them how they knew, they said "Well, you wouldn't have pulled me out of class to talk to me if you didn't care." It is significant that the opening of a dialogue for mutual problem solving was such important proof to them that I cared. When I asked if there were any other ways they could tell I cared they said things like "because you're on me all the time to do my work" and "because you are always coming up and asking if I need help." Though all of my students said that they believed I cared, there were certain students who seemed to need this care more than others.

The only student I have not mentioned so far in terms of needs is Ruben. That is because Ruben's primary need, I believe, is to feel cared for in his educational experience. As I discussed in my rationale, Ruben is a bright student and is capable of higher levels of understanding than many of his peers; yet he exerts no effort in the classroom. It looks as though Ruben does not care about himself or his educational experience, and he does not expect others to care either. He describes himself as lazy, and in the interview told me the reason that he comes to school is because "it is better than being at home." I met Ruben's mother at the first back-to-school night and it seemed as though she was concerned about his grades in school. We

set up a separate time to meet and discuss Ruben's struggles; however, she did not come at the appointed time and unfortunately we have not talked since. I have no reason to believe that Ruben has an especially difficult home life; I just think he feels generally apathetic. When I expressed my personal caring for his well being, he seemed pleased and as he left our interview, he turned at the door and said "Thank you Ms. Walker."

There are at least two other students who seem to place a great deal of emphasis on the notion of caring. Stephanie seemed to respond very positively to the notion of care because she said she has a tendency to give up on herself. When I asked her how she knew that I cared, she said it was because I did not give up on her even when she gave up on herself. When I pressed her for details, she talked about another teacher as an example saying, "[He] kind of cares, but when he sees me giving up, then he does the same thing." Several students expressed the notion that true caring means believing in them even when they do not believe in themselves. This sounds easy to do, but it can be difficult as a human being to believe in someone who repeatedly shows they do not believe in themselves. I am close with the teacher Stephanie was talking about, and I know that he does care deeply about his students, showing how difficult it is for teachers to always represent their care towards their students.

Clifton, the third student who benefited from a caring relationship, did not find that caring relationship with me. Though I care about Clifton and he acknowledged that, he has benefited most from his personal connection with his math teacher, Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith adopted an attitude of caring for Clifton that went beyond his own classroom and increased Clifton's motivation to do work for my class. Mr. Smith asked about Clifton's grade in my class and put pressure on Clifton to complete his assignments for my class. I think the case of Clifton shows that individual personalities and connections are important in building authentic caring

relationships. An authentic caring relationship with one teacher can carry over and have positive effects on other aspects of the student's academic performance.

Final Outcomes

I believe through the process of researching my students' motivations I was able to see some significant, if inconsistent improvement from most of the students in the focus group. While only two of the focus students had passing grades at the end of the first semester, at the midway point of the second semester, seven students did. This still meant that five of the focus students were failing, but even these students showed significant improvement in their completion of major assignments for the class. For example, Emmanuel who completed zero out of the first six assignments completed four out of the last six. Jose T completed his first major essay assignment in my class by turning in both the first and second draft of "The Smurfette Principle" essay. Stephanie, Edgar, Jose V, Jessica, and Gloria all turned in the last five assignments. Other students' improvements were not as linear because improvement is not easy, but I feel by continuing to focus on the things that motivate students as individuals and thinking critically about the type of assignments I give, student motivation will continue to grow. More importantly, as students become more motivated, we can begin to work together to help them improve in terms of ability, making them better readers, writers, and thinkers.

Learnings and Implications for Teaching

There are two major implications for my teaching I plan on incorporating into my classroom as a result of the inquiry process, and that I highly recommend to teachers who have students like the ones in my focus group. First, I plan on identifying unmotivated students earlier

in the year and dialoging with them on a regular basis to discover their individual needs. I will

use these dialogues as a time for students to reflect on their motivation and the factors that

influence it so we can come to an agreement about what can be done for a solution. I will also

use these dialogues as opportunities to express caring. Secondly, I plan on making the writing

process an important part of my classroom from the very beginning so that students will have

more opportunities to succeed. Along with this, I will have an increased awareness of the

students' perceptions of the ease or difficulty of a task, and their level of interest in the material

the task is based on.

Identifying Unmotivated Students

Communication with colleagues can be helpful in identifying unmotivated students.

Luckily, because of the SLCs at Greeley High School, I work closely with my students' other

teachers and can discuss with them which students are motivated and which ones are not before

they have even entered my classroom. In my SLC, it is common for teachers to meet together

before the year begins and give each other some background information on each student. While

I believe it is important not to judge students before you know them, this process can be helpful

in identifying the particular needs of students. For example, I can now tell Jose T's English

teacher next year that he is perfectly capable of completing assignments, but that he gets stuck

easily and will at times need assistance even though he will not ask for it. I can explain that

Jessica, Jose V, and Jose B are social learners and are more likely to understand a concept if they

learn it with the help of their peers. If I had known these things before I began the year, I might

have been better able to serve these students.

Often constructive communication with peers is not possible, in which case a teacher should work to identify the group of unmotivated students as early in the school year as possible and to meet with them on a one-on-one basis. These one-on-one meetings, I believe, were very important motivating factors, especially for my students who needed increased signs of caring from me to motivate them to complete their work. The meetings gave me an opportunity to expressly communicate caring, and they allowed the students a chance to think about their motivation and to work with me to come to a solution to the problem. Because I conducted the informal interviews outside of our normal class time, the meetings also illustrated to students how important it was to me that they complete their work in my class; the fact that I was willing to use my free time to discuss their performance in my class impressed the students. I believe this kind of one-on-one dialogue is essential to increasing the motivation of students who come every day but turn nothing in.

The Writing Process

The other important implication for my teaching is the implementation of the writing process in my classroom from the very beginning of the school year. The research I conducted illustrated to me very clearly that students do not do well in academic situations where the emphasis is placed on performance goals rather than mastery goals. Students learn in different ways and at different paces that performance goals do not take into account. Mastery goals, however, account for these differences in learning by emphasizing the learning itself, instead of the product associated with it. The writing process in the English classroom is the most important way teachers can emphasize the process of learning. The writing process also communicates to the students the importance of the task through increased awareness in the

classroom and gives students an increased chance of success, both in the initial and final drafts of a writing assignment. Again, I feel if I had implemented the writing process more fully in the beginning of the year I would have increased the motivation of all of my students, including the typically unmotivated ones.

Final Thoughts

As I consider Victoriano and Ruben, the two students I discussed at the beginning of this inquiry, I am still amazed at how complex the topic of motivation is. Motivating students who are not self-motivated is not easy to do and it is not simple; in fact there are circumstances where it cannot be done. However, as teachers we cannot expect every student will come to us with the drive and motivation that a student like Victoriano has, especially when they are facing difficult circumstances, both inside and outside of the classroom. Because he already has the motivation, Victoriano, despite his many challenges, is far ahead of the game compared to the students in my focus group. By knowing our students on a more personal and individual level, teachers can make a big difference in the lives of students like Ruben, who only need a little push from someone who believes in them. Motivation, however, is only the first step in terms of preparing a student for success; teachers do not want to motivate students simply for the sake of motivating them. Once a student is motivated to participate fully in school, they can work to improve the academic skills that will be important for them in the future and will increase their chances for success.

Appendix

Survey: Turning Stuff In

Put a check next to the essays that you have turned in for this class:

- To Kill a Mockingbird essay

- Class Goals essay #2

- DREAM Act essay

- Persuasive Research essay

- "Everyday Use" essay
    1st draft
    2nd draft

    "The Story of an Hour" essay
    1st draft
    2nd draft

Think about any of the essays that you did not turn in. Why do you think you did not turn them in? Check any of the options below that apply, and provide your own reason if you think of something that is different.

___ I did not understand what to do.

___ I started it, but I didn't finish it.

___ I didn't think I would get a good grade on it, so I didn't do it at all.

___ I didn't think that I could do a good job on the assignment.

___ I didn't have it done on time, then I forgot all about it, and didn't realize how much it would effect my grade in class until much later (assignment amnesia).

Other reasons/comments:

Think about the essays that you did turn in. Why do you think you turned these assignments in?

What is your motivation for completing your work?

     ___ I want a good grade in the class.

     ___ I want to improve my reading and writing skills.

     ___ I want to make my parents proud.

     ___ I cared about the assignment

     Other reasons/comments:

What would help you turn in assignments more often?

Guiding Questions for Informal Interviews:

As I mentioned in my inquiry, I did not follow a set script of questions when I conducted my interviews, and I tried to turn these interviews into chances for authentic dialogue. However, I did prepare a list of possible questions that I asked the students in order to continue dialogue if needed.

What are your goals?

What would help you complete your assignments?

Do you understand that I care about your grade in my class?

Do you care about your grade in my class?

Do you know that I care about you as a person?

Why did you complete this assignment when you did not complete another assignment?

What are your goals for the future?

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