Reducing Educator Bias of Student Apathy: How Student Self-Perception Affects Academic Motivation

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1. Key Terms
2. Background: Understanding the Population
3. Self-Perception
   a) Self-Concept
   b) Self-Efficacy
4. Academic Motivation vs. Academic Engagement
5. Strategies to Increase Self-Perception
   a) Faculty level
   b) Course level
   c) University level
Definition of Key Terms
Implicit Bias

- The unconscious attitudes and stereotypes we hold about different groups of people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, and gender that influence our actions (Jackson, 2017).

- “Social scientists believe that implicit biases are learned as young as age 3, and may be fueled by stereotypes perpetrated in the media, or beliefs passed along by parents, peers, and other community members” (Flannery, 2015).
Confirmation Bias

- The unconscious tendency to **seek information that confirms our preexisting beliefs**, even when evidence exists to the contrary.

- Commonly, there are six steps to confirmation bias:
  1. Form a theory (or ‘have an opinion’)
  2. Find ‘data’ that supports that opinion
  3. Work hard to collect more and more data that really ‘confirms’ your theory (i.e., what you believe)
  4. Identify the kinds of data that are most compelling to the people you most frequently want to convince of your theory (because that’s what people like to do), then collect and memorize and repackage and refine that data to more neatly fit your theory
  5. Become more emotional in your theory-holding (i.e., your opinion) because you’re now surer than ever that ‘you’re right’
  6. Continue to discount and discredit new or better data because then you’d have to reconstruct your belief system, apologize to people, admit you were wrong, etc.  

Staats, 2016  
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Social-Emotional Disabilities

- Anxiety
- Bipolar disorder
- Eating disorders
- Obsessive-compulsive disorders
- Conduct disorders
- Psychotic disorders
- Emotional & Behavioral disorders
- Schizophrenia
  - Does not apply to socially maladjusted students without diagnosis of emotional disturbance
Social-Emotional Domains

Empathy
- One’s ability to recognize and share the feelings of another person.

Responsibility
- One’s ability to behave conscientiously and think before acting.

Self-Regulation
- One’s self-awareness, metacognition, intrapersonal insight, self-management, and direction.

Social Competence
- One’s ability to maintain friendships with peers, engage in effective verbal communication, and feel comfortable around groups of peers.

(McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016; Merrell, 2011)
Background: Understanding the Population
A Growing Detachment

High retention and dropout rates of students with social-emotional deficits are due to:

- Insufficient personal and emotional support
- Insufficient instructional practices
- Unprepared educators
- Insufficient student services
- Negative school climate

(Mihalas et al., 2009; USDE, 2016)
Students who have undergone some sort of trauma, as well as students with other social-emotional disabilities, often lack critical psychological and educational social skills needed to participate in personal and professional situations.

(Cumming et al., 2008; Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997; Morgan, 2012)
Psychological Social Skills

● Expressive skills
  ○ Exhibiting appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors to meet specific objectives

● Sensitivity skills
  ○ Comprehending one's ability to impact and be impacted by others

● Controlling communicative skills
  ○ Expressing appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors to convey a point to one's immediate environment

Educational Social Skills

● Prosocial emotional and behavioral skills:
  ○ Listening
  ○ Joining classroom discussions
  ○ Appropriately dealing with stressful or negative situations

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(Cumming et al., 2008; Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997; Morgan, 2012)
High Attrition Rates of Educators

- Between 30% to 50% of educators certified to teach students with social-emotional disabilities leave their positions within the first three years of teaching (Cheney & Barringer, 1995).

- Can be linked to a lack of teacher preparation and teacher support (Rock et al., 1997; Skiba et al., 2002).

- Dobbins and colleagues’ 2010 Study
  - Surveyed 87 general educators and 150 licensed special educators to examine in-service training programs for teachers of students identified as EBD.

  Found that 42% of the general educators and 28% of the special educators received no training on social skills instruction strategies.
“Ill-equipped to handle the challenges of disruptive classroom behavior, inexperienced teachers may increasingly adopt an authoritarian approach to management and engage students in power struggles that serve only to escalate disruption, especially in urban environments.”

Skiba et al., 2002, p. 336
Educator Bias

- Racial and socioeconomic educational inequalities appear in areas such as:
  - Representation in curriculum
  - Quality of instruction
  - Physical resources
  - School funding (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 322).

- Some examples may include:
  - Assuming students who can’t sit still are “out of control”
  - Assuming certain genders or ethnicities are not good at specific subjects (such as girls are not good at math)
  - Assuming extroverted students are “teacher’s pets” and/or introverts are dumb or “socially inept”
  - Assuming students can or can’t do something based on their cultural background
“If teachers have an implicit bias to give lower grades to those students who previously got lower grades, the students might indeed be improving without the feedback to show it.”

The Graid Network, 2018, p. 8
Levi’s 2013 Study
- Students with learning disabilities indicated that:
  - They felt their teachers did not understand the academic challenges they faced.
  - Teachers resorted to assumptions that they were less capable or lazy.

Sutherland and Wehby’s 2001 Study
- Found that the average ratio of reprimands to praise in EBD classrooms ranged from 2:1 to 4:1.
Self-Perception
Consider Self-Perception

● When examining the reasons for low academic performance of students who have undergone trauma or have social-emotional disorders.

● Self-Perception often manifests in two distinct categories:
  ○ Self-Concept
  ○ Self-Efficacy
Self-Concept

A student’s *comparative connection to identity, competency, and perception of the self as a learner* (Conradi et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2007).
High vs. Low Self-Concept

Students with High Self-Concept:

● Typically try harder.
● Persist longer when faced with a task that is difficult or challenging.
● Believe they have the ability to accomplish a certain task.
● Are more motivated to move on to increasingly challenging texts.

Students with Low Self-Concept:

● Feel relatively worthless and ineffective when facing difficult work.
● Have noticeable effects, such as persistent failure, and negative social-emotional development.
  ○ Students with lower IQs appeared to have poor self-concepts regarding personal academic abilities, and increased aggressive tendencies.
  ○ Conversely, students previously diagnosed as aggressive often experienced difficulties in learning and, as a result, developed poor self-concept regarding their academic abilities.

Taylor et al., 2007
Self-Efficacy

A student’s comparative judgment on his or her own ability to successfully participate in an activity (Bandura, 1984).
High vs. Low Self-Efficacy

Students with High Self-Efficacy:
- Are confident and motivated to work towards a learning goal.
- Approach setbacks in a more positive manner.
- Attribute failing grades to an inefficient effort and continuously try harder.

Students with Low Self-Efficacy:
- Do not feel as though they are in control of their learning.
- Feel as though they do not have the capabilities for success in school.
- Are not motivated to work towards a learning goal.
What Does it Look Like in the Classroom?

Take three minutes to:

1) Identify 1-2 things an instructor can do to foster high self-concept and self-efficacy in students.
2) Answer the question: What might an instructor (un)intentionally do that leads to low self-concept and self-efficacy?

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Academic Motivation vs. Academic Engagement
Definitions and Characterizations

● **Academic Motivation**
  ○ Defined by a student’s desire (as reflected in approach, persistence, and level of interest) regarding academic subjects when the student’s competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence (McClelland, et al., 1953).

  ○ A motivated learner is one who develops a heightened sense of self-concept, which brings about an increase in values and goal setting.

● **Academic Engagement**
  ○ “Engagement is a complex term that emphasizes [sic] students’ various patterns in motivation, cognition, and behavior [sic]” (Alrashidi, Phan, & Ngu, 2016, p. 41).

  ○ An engaged learner is one who is seen as having on-task behavior, holds a purpose, seeks to understand, and takes responsibility for his or her own learning (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).
Negative Motivation

- Typically appears when a student is more focused on distractions such as:
  - Fear of failure
  - Learned helplessness
  - Anxiety
  - Outcome and consequences of the task, rather than the task itself (Brophy, 1983).

- When low performing or highly anxious students are constantly put into uncomfortable situations in the classroom (such as instructional games/competitions, or being put on the spot) it can cause them to become:
  - Less engaged
  - Less motivated to learn, which will lead to a decrease in willingness to achieve the desired outcome of the activity.
A Word of Caution!

- While similar, **academic motivation and academic engagement are not interchangeable.**

- An engaged student may be one who is involved in the lesson and who participates in the hands-on activity the teacher has planned for the day...

  However, they may not be motivated to achieve academic success over the course of his or her time in school.

- When students become engaged in their school work, they may be more likely to move towards academic motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).
Take three minutes to:

1) Identify 1-2 reasons why students might be unmotivated to learn.

2) Answer the question: What are 1-2 ways you can increase academic motivation through engagement?
Strategies to Increase Self-Perception and Academic Motivation
Faculty Level

● **Combat negative motivation in the classroom.**
  ○ Incorporating instructional activities such as games and classroom competitions in small and appropriate doses is helpful for understanding concepts.

  However, educators should be aware that students who are easily distracted, student who are low-level learners, and students who are highly anxious may not be motivated to participate, further decreasing self-perception.

  Try to have a variety of assignments and activities in the course. Consider “open assignments” (or “choose your own adventure”) that allow students to pull from their strengths.

● **Survey students to find areas in need of improvement.**
  ○ Checking in with students before, during, and after large-scale projects shows support and allows educators to check for understanding. This is especially important if you have another similar (or the same) activity later in the semester.

  Addressing possible issues before they occur can alleviate anxieties, and prevent avoidance issues, negative motivation, and lack of engagement.
● **Develop safe learning environments.**
  ○ Talking to students and discussing their intended outcomes for a specific class can help create a safe environment and provide students various opportunities for success, allowing educators the opportunity to tailor their instruction to appeal to the individual learners in the classroom.

  Incorporating student interest into instructional content can improve student engagement and achievement.

● **Design and implement lessons and activities through a self-efficacy lens.**
  ○ Educators should develop units, lessons, and assessments, through a self-efficacy lens.

  This lens uses important cognitive tools for learning while simultaneously building student engagement and motivation to ensure students know when to appropriately apply these tools in a variety of situations (Scott, 1996).

● **Prepare students for social skills beyond the educational setting.**
  ○ Providing real-world simulations that introduce and teach students social behaviors prevalent to employability can better prepare students for the social skills needed in the workplace – and let them know if they would be comfortable in their chosen profession.

  Consider activities such as role-plays, field studies, simulations, case studies, interviews/shadowing/mentoring, guest speakers, etc. Look at partnering with the office of professional development / career development (co-op programs, finding internships, etc.) – they have many great resources that can take the stress out of planning!
University Level

- **Implement additional faculty training or professional development.**
  - Providing faculty with training/development in a variety of instructional methods geared towards addressing the academic, social, and emotional demands of the student population helps create more meaningful instruction.

    Offering additional training sessions for faculty may increase in their own instructional self-efficacy, which could create opportunities for faculty to build positive relationships with students.

- **Provide opportunities for professional learning communities.**
  - Work with the teaching and learning department (or individual schools) to develop faculty-led professional learning communities. These can include (but are not limited to):
    - **Workshops:** Can be department-specific or advertise programs and services.
    - **Teaching Networks:** A short cohort-based program that discusses and practices pedagogical techniques.
    - **Teaching Cafes:** Informal, hour-long conversations around key teaching issues.
    - **Course Design Institute:** A “bootcamp” style program that guides faculty through the design of a new course or the redesign of an existing one in a facilitated, supported environment.
    - **Teaching Day:** A place to learn about innovative teaching practices and to be re-energized by your faculty colleagues.
    - **Faculty Learning Communities:** A specifically structured learning community of faculty and staff in higher education that includes the goals of building community, engaging in scholarly practice, and developing the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).
Conclusion
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