

Summary

This advice sheet highlights some of the reasons why high potential learners struggle with motivation. To try to increase the motivation of high ability students eight strategies are suggested for teachers to try in the classroom. It is aimed at teachers in both the primary and secondary phases.

Introduction

Educators and parents understand that cognitive ability is just one factor that influences the academic attainment of our children. They also need opportunities to find their areas of talent; they need to be inspired by enthusiastic experts; they need to develop their thinking and problem solving skills; they need to be committed to the task at hand¹; and they need to be motivated.

Motivation is a desire and willingness to do something; it is an enthusiasm for something.

Some Reasons Why High Potential Learners Have Issues with Motivation

- **Asynchronous Development**
This is described as being when their advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity mean that their experience and awareness is different to the norm². An example would be a child of 7 years, who can read and comprehend texts aimed at a much older child, yet their social and emotional maturity might be younger than their birth age, or their fine motor skills might be delayed. Educators need to understand that the child has understood the concept, but may not be able to put it down in writing; they may feel extremely frustrated, yet may only be able to show this in a very immature way.
- **Boredom**
If intellectual capacity is ahead of their peers, they understand concepts quickly and are ready to move on to more in-depth tasks, but frequently have to wait or do 'more of the same'.
- **Differences in Thinking**
Whilst the teacher is explaining something perceived by the child as being mundane, the child is 'day dreaming' about something more interesting; imagining fighting dragons or pondering deep philosophical questions.
- **Speed of Thinking**
They have the ability to make connections and get to answers without going through the stages.
- **Little Effort Needed for Success**
They may not need to put in much effort to get good marks, so have little motivation to put in more effort.
- **Lack of Challenge**
The work may not challenge them, so they find it boring and may therefore not attach value to it.
- **Poor Organisational Skills**
Just because they are bright does not mean that they necessarily have good organisational skills or have organisational maturity.

MOTIVATING HLP STUDENTS TO LEARN

What Teachers Can Do to Motivate High Potential Learners

Below are some tips on motivating your high potential learners. Not all strategies will be applicable to all students in all subjects at all times. You know your students. Explore what might work best for them.

1. **Set realistic yet challenging targets.** Motivation to learn works best when the task is well matched to the student's level of knowledge and skill. If it is unrealistic and too difficult it can be frustrating and demotivating; if it is too easy it becomes uninspiring, boring and demotivating. Learning tasks need to ensure that students are working at the very edge of their abilities, and the level of difficulty should be increased as they improve their knowledge, understanding and skill. In this way teachers are moving their students to mastery of the topic or subject. However, it is also important to be aware of the individual student's perception of their abilities. If they lack self-confidence they may perceive a realistic target as being unrealistic. Wherever possible, agree the target with the student, so that they are taking control of their learning and developing self-regulation skills. Encouraging the student to develop SMART targets is one way of doing this: the target is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.
2. **Ask a question or provide a challenge/problem to be solved.** Rather than presenting the students with facts, encourage them to investigate and explore the answers and solutions themselves.
3. **Help them be the best they can be.** Progress motivates! Encourage your students to learn from their attempts and seek ways to improve their own personal understanding of the topic and improve their skills. Their first draft or attempt is a baseline; then help them to keep track of how much they improve (in speed, in accuracy, in content, etc) with each redraft or attempt. This requires 'specific' and prompt feedback from the teacher: what is working well and what could be addressed differently. It also provides opportunities to acknowledge the effort that is put into a learning task, not only the end result.
4. **Connect abstract learning to real situations to which they can relate.** Use real situations and case studies to apply theories and concepts to the real world.
5. **Provide a social context.** Ensure students have regular opportunities for collaborative learning with similar ability or interest peers. Evidence³ shows that HLP students benefit greatly from such opportunities. Being able to spark ideas off each other and explore concepts can be a great motivator.
6. **Broaden, deepen and aim for mastery.** Differentiate your students' learning tasks and/or cluster their learning objectives so that they can move more quickly to broadening their knowledge and skills, deepening their understanding and moving towards mastery of the topic; this is likely to be through a combination of higher order thinking skills, problem solving, collaborative work and self-regulation. Assign the task of becoming the world's expert on one aspect of the material they have to learn (a key concept, skill or piece of content). Encourage them to broaden their expertise by exploring a wider selection of more complex texts, problems, case studies, examples, etc. Help them deepen their understanding by exploring how the piece they know so well connects to all the other

pieces they need to know about; comparing and contrasting them; making reasoned judgments about them; and then using that understanding to create something innovative or different.

7. **Help them to take the long view.** Many high potential learners want to move quickly to the BIG picture and don't see the point in getting bogged down with 'trivial' tasks. Ensure that learning activities and homework are meaningful for them. If they have an idea of their future vocation, or future study, help them to explore **how** they get there; what subjects they need, what grades, what wider experience. If they don't know what they might wish to study or what job they might want to do in future, help them to explore the kind of things that they might enjoy doing: working with animals, travelling, owning a car, writing books, exploring the planets, volunteering in Africa. Help them to put their learning into context: it provides stepping stones to the next level and qualifications generally provide choice for the next stage in their lives.
8. **Provide a motivating environment with 'learning' at its core.** Everything about your classroom, subject and yourself should encourage exploration and investigation. Model the motivation you want to see in your students.

Further Information Books and resources can be ordered from our website shop:

www.potentialplusuk.org

S403 Asynchronous Development	Potential Plus advice sheet: Asynchronous development, whereby a child appears to be 'wise beyond their years' but in many ways is still very immature, has been described as the defining characteristic of high potential learners. This advice sheet explores the issues relating to Asynchronous Development in children with high learning potential and provides useful strategies and clear guidance to teachers on how to support pupils who are developing asynchronously.
S306 Helping Students to Develop Self-regulation Skills	Potential Plus advice sheet: Self-regulation is the process of taking control of one's learning through planning, monitoring and evaluating. This advice sheet is based on information from the University of Connecticut's Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.
S306S Student Resources	A resources sheet to help students check their progress and develop self-regulation skills.

Potential Plus UK Date of Issue: September 2015

Potential Plus UK Planned Review Date: September 2018

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¹Joseph Renzulli, Triad Model, 1976

²The Columbus Group, 1991

³The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre), Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, 2008