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Current Issues in the Field of Education

Currently, in the field of childhood education, caring teachers are concerned about the following issues: a lack of motivation exhibited by students in today's schools, and the passing of a merit pay law for teachers. Just as poorly motivated students perform inadequately in the classroom, so do poorly motivated teachers. It is intriguing that a similar issue is at the heart of both concerns.

Poorly motivated students are in every school system in America. Whether in grade school or high school, school faculties ponder the same concern. How can we motivate our students? This is a question I ask myself every day. I work in an after school program at a local middle school and see uninterested and unmotivated students daily. The students I come in contact with are intelligent but refuse to apply their knowledge and think for themselves. Teachers play an important role in student behavior and motivation. Unfortunately, the problem may be that many teachers are not motivated to keep students engaged in the learning process. In all schools, "...everyone, down to the littlest child in each school, can tell you who the strongest and weakest teachers are" (Bassett). In an effort to strengthen weak teachers, The Department of Education is trying to implement a performance pay law.

Case studies are often referred to by authorities in the field of education.

According to certain case studies cited in Handbook of Child Psychology, one way to improve student motivation is to promote autonomy in the classroom. Other case studies in USA Today are used to show that merit pay for teachers did not positively impact student performance. Curriculum writing is also extremely important in the field of elementary education. Effective teachers know that a strong curriculum leads to motivated students. Therefore, teachers are always exchanging curriculum ideas. There are as many different types of curricula as there are teachers who create them. Edsitement.com offers a plethora of lesson plans for any elementary educational topic.

Will merit pay for teachers improve student performance in the classroom? Merit pay for teachers is currently a controversial topic in education. Some believe that merit pay is the best direction for education, and that it will improve student scores, behavior, and most importantly, motivation. Several state lawmakers have been pushing policies for the advancement of merit pay for educators in the hopes that all these issues will be addressed. In Nashville, the U.S. Department of Education began the POINT Project (Project of Incentives in Teaching) to study the effect of merit pay for teachers. Over the three year time span, the research concluded that the performance bonus incentive “simply did not do much of anything” (Connell). In other words, student performance cannot be directly tied to motivating teachers via merit pay.

How does teacher motivation impact student learning? There are many different teaching methods used in the classroom to help motivate students, but it is possible that poorly motivated students are a product of poorly motivated teachers. Many elementary

educators are saying “if only my students could...” and “I wish my students were...” creating a stressful work environment and causing teachers and students to lose their motivation. Once teachers begin looking for the root of their students problems, then they will be able to address the issues that cause a stressful environment. Teachers that connect with students are able to communicate effectively and will then begin to see improvement from their students. This will begin to motivate the teacher which will lead to more motivated students.

What makes autonomy in the classroom so beneficial? Some believe that the best motivational tool teachers have is the ability to provide autonomy in the classroom. If teachers can provide their students with more learning choices and options, then it is possible that students will become educationally motivated. It makes sense that a student who offers input into an assignment is more likely to develop a connection with that assignment promoting intrinsic motivation. “Students who do their work for external (i.e., external factors or pressure) or introjected reasons (i.e., internal pressures such as guilt or social approval) are less likely to perform as well as those who do their work for identified (i.e., school work is personally valuable) or intrinsic reasons (i.e., school work is intrinsically interesting)” (Wong).

English 101 gives me the opportunity to prepare for my studies in the field of education by exposing me to current elementary educational concerns, by teaching me how to effectively communicate with colleagues in order to share ideas, and by showing me how much research is required to teach even the most basic concepts. This paper has stressed the importance of educational case studies to me. Educators are constantly being

influenced by the publication of statistics based on case studies that end up shaping educational trends. This class has also taught me the value of sharing educational ideas among colleagues, whether its lesson plans, teaching methods, or merely general educational insights. While in college, my aim is to become an effective, motivated elementary teacher, and English 101 has given me a nudge in the right direction.

Works Cited

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