



## ¿How to encourage motivation to learn in our students?

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a concern in the teaching practice related to the lack of interest in learning that many students show. What leads to reflect and change the didactic strategies used in the classroom, to motivate students to improve their academic performance. However, these changes have not always yielded the desired results and the search for these “key points” continues. The book “Pedagogy of Motivation”, by Brigitte Prot, allows a deeper analysis of the pedagogical processes that should be taken as reference points to be able to motivate students every day, since the author through this work, presents a set of fundamental elements aimed at awakening the desire to learn.

This article contains a reflection on what is considered one of the most significant problems found in the academic field: *the students lack motivation to learn*, as well as some aspects that have proven positive results throughout the teaching practice; Starting from the premise that any change that is made at the institutional, curricular level, as well as any efforts developed by them, does not serve anything, but rather encourages students to learn.

### 2. FACTORS AFFECTING MOTIVATION

In order to awaken and motivate students, it is important to take as a starting point those elements that have a positive or negative impact on motivation and their desire to learn. To do this, the nucleus where the young grows and develops in their first years of life has to be analyzed, until they become integrated into a society, in which the media play a determining role.

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## **2.1. Family environment**

The family is the fundamental nucleus of any society in which the formation of the human being begins. Parents play an essential role in the education of their children, in the formation of values; therefore, this should be the incentive and the cornerstone to make them good people that allow the construction of a better society. When the children grow up in a family where parents are always aware of their education and encourage them to learn, and also help them, guide them and listen; in consequence, motivated and self-confident children and adolescents who obtain good results in the academic and social field are found.

On the contrary, if children grow in a family environment where it is not heard, it is not taken into account as a person, where the parents only focus on satisfying their material needs, creating in them a “yes” culture as a way of justifying their absence in the home, rewarding them through material things, without limiting their actions, these children and adolescents have no motivation, present school problems, because they do not have a clear vision where to go and feel entitled to do what they crave, without recognizing any kind of authority. As Prot points out, “parents have not said “no”, or rarely, and young people have not found enough limits” (2005, p.30).

Another family situation can arise, as Prot points out, in which children and adolescents feel valued only for their success, whether school, sports, art or any other field. In this sense, they do not feel recognized as individuals, as human beings (2005, p.62). In this sense, the motivation of the students is not in the desire to learn but in meeting the expectations of their parents.

In addition, another scenario can be presented where children and adolescents are assisted and many of their academic assignments are carried out by their “support staff” who advises (or collaborates) outside the classroom. This situation does not allow them to develop academically, their tasks are “made”, presenting two extreme situations that, in one way or another, do not create the conditions that allow to encourage the motivation to learn and arises the need to find a little of equilibrium, “it is a question of finding a middle point between two extreme adult behaviors that we find today: either the children are left to their fate or else they are over-assisted” (Prot 2005: 62).

It should be borne in mind that, “an assisted person loses some of his or her own desire and autonomy: caregiving creates a personal deficiency” (Prot, 2005, p.11). When a student on attendance reaches the university level, it usually happens that this student seeks assistance or collaboration at this academic level, but he does not always do it for the right reasons. Student’s “search for help” is not motivated by his/her desire to learn, but by the need to obtain a score that allows him/her to pass the subject. The following is exemplified as follows:

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When teaching the subject of Programming to a group of students in second year of the Computing Science Major, on one occasion they were assigned to elaborate a set of programs that responded to a series of concrete problems. To understand the logic they had used it was decided that, one by one, in front of the computer, explain step by step how they had organized the solution. With this activity it was found that not even 50% of the students had worked in the programs, but had been “entrusted” to senior year students. This was because they felt more the need to pass the subject, than to learn the solution of the assigned cases. This confirms the urgent need to encourage in students a real desire to learn.

## **2.2. Social environment and media influence**

We live in a society of consumerism, devoid of values, referents, with few leaders that serve as “inspiration” to students. This society is immersed in attitudes of passivity and conformism.

“Our society is imitative. There is no creativity, we are hooked to a past that no longer makes sense, because we do not get to build the present without imagining the future” (Prot, 2005, p.30).

This situation influences our students negatively, makes them lose the sense of why or what for study if in the end they will increase the list of professionals who are unemployed, or, to hold positions for which a minimum of academic preparation is needed. This means that students lose interest in developing academically and that they are gradually leaving the classroom or culminate the major “because there is no option” to satisfy their parents, or because society dictates that they should have a university degree to “be someone in life”. These students do not have the motivation to learn, but to pass in order to reach a goal that in the end , does not have a real meaning for them. It causes a “flight from a reality too heavy to carry, a socio-economic context that, a priori, offers few spaces” (Prot, 2005, p.62).

Media influence is significant in students lack of motivation, since they live “bombarded” with messages in which people are valued for what they have and not for what they know; Where there is “the abandonment of being, the cult to have, this culture of appearance and individualism leads to catastrophe and incredible passivity” (Prot, 2005, p. 28).

This cult for the having and the abandonment of the being causes a disinterest, almost generalized, for the desire to learn, to know. Prot expresses that we are facing a generation that makes our children and adolescents the consumer bank (2005, p.28), which causes that their main motivation is focused on obtaining an employment that allows them to generate income, in order to satisfy their needs of unbridled consumerism in their eagerness to find their identity.

### **3. HOW IS THE MOTIVATION AT THE EDUCATIONAL LEVEL?**

#### **3.1. Teaching: A profession not valued**

In our environment, as in other parts of the world, teaching is a profession that is to some extent undervalued, both economically and professionally, at all academic levels. This situation is acute in primary and secondary schools, where many teachers find themselves in need of double shift work in order to face a difficult economic situation.

This, coupled with the lack of motivation for not feeling valued, has the consequence that the great majority of teachers are concerned, mainly, to teach their classes and to comply with the syllabus of the subject, in which, their didactic strategies are very poor and limited, that do not encourage or motivate their students to learn to think, to analyze, to discover. In many cases, it is a “traditionalist” education, in which the teacher is the central axis of class and the students are limited to being receptors, and then “reproduce” what their teachers have “taught” them.

Then, a scenario is presented where students are not given the tools to respond to a situation in the environment. These “gaps” significantly affect performance, self-esteem and, as a consequence, motivation to learn. They reach the next level of education practically “unarmed”. As Prot points out, “a student who has not acquired working methods in primary school, even though he/she becomes interested afterwards, will have to acquire it in one way or another to get ahead” (2005, p .49).

#### **3.2. Is it verified if students are learning?**

Few times the teacher questions if the students are really learning, all he does is, come to the classroom, develop the class and work. But how many times does teacher pause throughout the class and with real interest, ask the student if understands? The following is a case that shows the behavior of our students when the teacher verifies what has been learned:

“I taught the subject of numerical methods to students of the computer major. The program of this subject addresses a set of techniques to solve problems formulated using mathematical models; in particular, one of these techniques presents a greater degree of difficulty. On one occasion I found myself explaining to a group and when I consulted if students understood, they answered affirmatively; however, I did not feel them convinced. I developed another example and I consulted again, their answer was always affirmative, but the level of conviction did not change. Then I told them: “Take a sheet; write your name, they will solve an exercise using this technique. I will evaluate it in 10 points. “This phrase provoked the reaction of my students, at that moment, I felt that they “woke up” and began to express that they had partially understood” (the author).

Many times the teacher does not stop to ask: Do my students understand what I am teaching them? Are my teaching strategies working? Does the way I teach my class motivate my students to learn? These questions would serve as a guide for the teacher to reflect on the teaching practices implemented in the classroom.

### **3.3. Comfort Zone**

In university teaching it has been verified that some teachers who for years have taught the same subject, in different majors, come to the classroom with the same material that they have used for more than 5 years. They are located in their “comfort zone”, which shows a lack of interest in providing their students with an education that suits their needs and that is oriented to the profile of the major in which they are being formed.

Most of them are professionals who have dedicated themselves to teaching because they have not found options in their work field, they do not have pedagogical training and do not worry about having it. They develop their class retaking, perhaps, strategies used by the teachers who taught them; do not worry about updating themselves at the scientific-technical level and when they are invited to attend pedagogical and methodological training, which allows them to reflect on their practice and learn about new didactic strategies, they attend to comply with an obligation, not with the intention of incorporating this into the classroom.

However, there is another scenario of teachers, who alone, really care about the training of their students, who innovate in the classroom, who research constantly to teach their students up-to-date technical knowledge, which give counseling, which link theory with practice. However, these individual efforts do not always succeed in stimulating the students' desire to learn.

## **4. WHERE TO GO?**

In order to determine where to go, what changes must be made, it is necessary to stop along the way and reflect on the teaching work. This work must develop actions that allow students to be stimulated by the desire to learn and to know. One must “take pleasure” in what one does, commit to this mission and be aware that, to a large extent, success or failure of the students depends on the performance in the classroom.

At this point, two essential questions come to mind: What changes should be made as teachers to be able to encourage motivation? How can motivation to learn in students be encouraged?

#### **4.1. Teachers capable of motivating**

The role of teachers, both inside and outside the classroom, is fundamental to encourage motivation. It is necessary to remember that “the motivation of the students passes for that of the professors” (Prot, 2005, p.20). That is, if you are not motivated as a teacher, you will never have the ability to motivate the students.

It is advisable to renew the practice, to develop listening, to be aware of the importance of researching, being up to date, to encourage in the students a critical, analytical, reflexive thinking that allows them to take a sense of why and what to learn. Below are some of these elements that all teachers must improve to be able to motivate.

##### **4.1.1. Changing pedagogical practice**

To encourage motivation, the pedagogical practice must be transformed in order to help the students to find the meaning of their presence in class. In this respect Prot mentions that, teachers should leave the traditional scheme and place the student, and his/her act of learning, at the center of teaching practice (2005, p.109).

Scenarios should be created where the student is the main protagonist of the teaching-learning process and the teacher plays the role of guide, guiding, motivating. As Prot points out, “the point of anchoring a new motivation is the new place that the educator has to adopt” (2005: p. 109).

This involves carrying out a review of the subject syllabuses and adjusting them according to the students’ needs, according to their professional profile. A sense must be given to the theory that is developed so that they understand the utility of this technical knowledge and can determine when and how to apply it. “Today’s classes need ‘field people’, who dare to invent new tools and adapt to their needs” (Prot, 2005, p.109).

In short, it is necessary to change the pedagogical practice, to work in another way and this means “to have in mind and in the heart two different axes: the class and the students in their identity of work, of results and of behavior, with different priorities for each” (Prot, 2005, p.14).

##### **4.1.2. Learning to communicate**

The communication with the students is essential in the teaching practice, the power that the listener has and the respect to the opinions of others. When a student is listened to, he feels that he is valued, that he is taken into account, thus raising his self-esteem and, consequently, his motivation.

When communication is appropriate, spaces are created where students and teachers feel respected both in their identity and in the place they occupy in the classroom (Prot, 2005, p. 105). The way in which communication occurs and the students express themselves determines, to a great extent, the climate that is generated in the classroom. If you show openness, respect, cordiality, if you develop listening and generate spaces so that students can express their opinion, it creates a climate of trust, a space where their ideas, opinions, doubts and others are respected and listened to. Thus, as Prot points out, “the educator establishes a relational space adjusted to each class, sets the ‘rules of the game’ and leaves open the possibility for all to communicate with him/her, with his/her own self” (2005, p. 106).

These spaces of communication significantly encourage the desire to learn, as the teacher gives openness to express students’ difficulties and thus be able to clarify doubts and give meaning to what they are learning. As Prot illustrates, “a response must be given so that the pupil realizes that his/her request has been heard” (2005: 107).

In this sense, starting the teaching practice very young, means that situations arise in which students are five or six years younger. Faced with this, and due to the lack of experience, it is considered maintaining the distance with them to “give themselves to respect”, this does not generate spaces for dialogue, for listening and a very serious attitude is maintained in the classroom that does not match often with the personality of the teacher and generates, to some extent, a climate of tension. In classes, participation is not voluntary, students are afraid to express their ideas. It is the colleagues who value the attitude of the teacher when commenting that he is feared by the students, by his serious and strict attitude. This comment obliges to stop along the way and reflect, that only frank and open dialogue with students, within a framework of respect allows to be loved by them and not to be “feared.”

The greater the participation of students in the classroom, the more enriching and motivating will be the learning process. In this respect, Prot cites that “this communication with multiple interactions determines the quality of the learning situation and constitutes, as we have seen, the central incentive of student motivation” (2005, p 108).

It should be kept in mind that “communication and relational are tools of motivation through which we transmit knowledge. We must never forget the end that is being pursued” (Prot, 2005, p.19).

At this point in communication it is important and meaningful to add a little humor during the class development; there is an element that allows, “breaking the ice” and create a climate of trust with the students, which encourages them and motivates them to attend the class. In addition, as Prot shows, “when teachers integrate humor into our work, we gain humility as teachers, and then we find the humanity of the students” (2005, p.17).

#### **4.1.3. Quitting work in “solitary”**

Pedagogical practice can be significantly improved and enriched when experiences, tasks and mistakes are shared with other teachers, through the implementation of pedagogical teams, which are constituted as the “true managers of change” (Prot, 2005, p. 46)

All pedagogical innovations that have given valuable results in the classroom must be shared, as the author says, “pedagogical initiatives: they should be cataloged, disseminated and made known more than what is being done” (Prot, 2005). , P.47). That is why, it is considered of vital importance to abandon the work alone and begin to form pedagogical teams that allow the design of scenarios that encourage students to desire to learn.

Many times, when the teacher leaves the work alone, allows encouraging the motivation to learn in the students. “I have been working with students from the Computer Science and System Engineering majors and one of the subjects I teach is oriented to the analysis and design of information systems. On some occasions I have not worked alone because I have coordinated the work with the programming teacher, in order to propose the students a single course project, the motivation in them increases in a surprising way, because it allows them to live the experience and see their effort, their learning, in a specific product, in this particular case, in an information system created by them and that works efficiently” (the author).

#### **4.1.4. Incorporation of new technologies**

Students are digital natives, for them, the use of technology is part of their daily lives. Prot argues that integrating new technologies into teaching is a mandatory step and that there are three reasons for this, one of which is the familiarization and closeness of students with these tools (2005: p. 116).

Students are enthusiastic when a teacher uses social networks, particularly Facebook, as an alternative communication mean outside the classroom. In that environment, they write their comments and inquiries, which are feedback from the teacher and other colleagues, thus encouraging their desire to learn. As Prot indicates “it allows a very interesting mediation of learning” (2005, p.116).

In addition to Social Networks, there are other virtual learning environments designed especially for the academic field. It is important to point out that the mechanisms that allow the significant insertion of technologies in the teaching-learning process depend to a great extent on the strategies designed by the teacher as well as on the educational curriculum.

## 4.2. Motivating students

Prot argues that a factor that prevents a student from being motivated is their lack of self-confidence (p.16, 2005). And this lack of trust is often associated with having experienced failure, not achieving his/her achievements, or not feeling valued or listened to as a human being. Motivation is linked to self-esteem, in this sense, Prot indicates, that “comes from the capacity to believe in oneself” (2005, p.16).

Strategies to motivate students are necessary. Prot expresses that “motivation does not come from mind or reason, but, although it seems impossible, it comes from the *bowels*” (2005, p.16), that is, it must arise from the interior of each one, that is why, the first step that must be done, is to guide students in the pursuit of their own motivation. However, as Prot indicates, in the academic field, this search must be accompanied by a sense, there must be a why and what for.

This sense can be reached by proposing the development of an academic project, oriented to a particular area of interest, without taking into account the objectives of the subject. The ideal is to define, together with the students, the scope of this project, taking as references their strengths and weaknesses. As Prot points out, it is necessary to “define achievable objectives, stages and means necessary to reach those objectives and place them in the time” (2005, page 72).

With the teaching practice it is verified how the interest and the motivation of the students change, when they are involved in decision making referred to end of course assignments. Often teachers prepare and guide projects without taking their opinion into consideration and do not take the time to analyze whether or not the assigned work was to their liking.

To encourage motivation, students must propose the work they would like to do, always within the framework of the subject objectives. Each group should review its proposal and define the tools to be used and methodology that will be implemented. This change of strategy allows reducing the percentage of failures, helps to combat their indifference to learn and to assume responsibly, their role in the learning process. In this regard, Prot expresses that to define well the objectives, the place of the students and their responsibilities, allow to reduce disappointments (2005, p.113).

Once the motivation to learn in the students is achieved, through a project or academic work, it is vital to provide them with a process of accompaniment and counseling, in order to keep that flame alive, “it will help the student to motivate himself/herself by doing a regular review of their academic situation” (Prot, 2005, p 72). And during that accompaniment, to

congratulate him/her on the achievements, as Prot reminds, “to validate the successes in each journey, rather than to carry out an evaluation based on the errors” (2005, 73).

#### **4.2.1. Help them find their strengths**

There are subjects that are more difficult than others. In short, we are all good at something. Some have more ability for math, others for science, others for arts, others for music, among others. In order to encourage motivation, students should be helped to find out their strengths and identify their difficulties

It is necessary to discover with them the method of work that suits them best and, as the author points out, it must be kept in mind that “educating a student is based on their potential to grow, to build, and to develop” (Prot, 2005, p. 45).

Under no circumstances one student’s performance should be compared with another’s, there is nothing more demotivating than feeling less intelligent or less capable than their peers. On the contrary, personal challenges must be proposed, which will allow to “help them to compete with each other and to overcome themselves” (Prot, 2005, p. 68).

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Teachers must be conscious about the mission and obligation they have to create the conditions and apply pedagogical strategies that encourage the desire to learn and to know and also a sense of practical application to the theoretical contents that are developed in the classroom. The central axis that determines the success or failure of the students is the motivation they have to learn, which will allow them to face the challenges of the environment.

On the other hand, it is necessary to keep in mind that each student is motivated differently and that at some point in his/her life must have experienced the feeling of success in order to be motivated. Motivation must arise from the depths of your being, otherwise, any effort made by teachers, will not have the desired effect.

Teaching strategies should be designed to meet students’ needs, encouraging the formation of pedagogical teams that allow enriching the teaching practice. Moreover teachers must be constantly updated and with an open mind to change.

It is vital to maintain effective communication with students to feel heard and valued. A climate must be created in the classroom that invites analysis and reflection, placing the student as the central axis of the learning process, providing the methodological tools that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge.

The reading of this book leads to a deep reflection on essential aspects that must be taken into account to encourage motivation and the desire to learn, aspects that from now on must be

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put into practice through various strategies and methodological tools, which fit and meet the needs and characteristics of each class group.

## **REFERENCES**

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