



MAINTAINING THE MOTIVATION TO PURSUE YOUR PERSONAL BEST

By Wilson McCaskill

A measure of the capacity for independent, self-motivated learning is the ability for students to maintain the constant pursuit of their personal best. Schools that have managed to remove the unwarranted use of praise and rewards will likely encounter students who, although motivated by the realisation that the reward of learning is learning itself, stay within their comfort zones rather than stretch their capabilities in pursuit of their personal best.

Eager to do well and keen to learn, they may lack the necessary drive to do their best, take risks and deeply explore ideas.

We must remember that these children do not live in a vacuum. Daily they witness the expression of the belief that one only does something if someone will give you something for it. Extrinsic motivation abounds and as most of us have a price we are willing to please the person who can pay it.

Authority dependent behaviour is the reverse of independent behaviour and it would be a rare child who has not been shaped by the notion that there is no point in doing your best if you're not going to get a reward for it. Add to this the fact that much as a school may have developed the child's capacity to be independent and self-motivated, his or her early developmental years were likely heavily influenced by carrot and stick techniques. The hangover of this manipulative but effective means for temporary compliance and motivation can influence a child's thinking and behaviour well past its last overt and obvious use. The child may also be returning daily to a home that undermines self-motivation by the indiscriminate and reflexive use of praise and rewards.

Pursuing your personal best without the lure of extrinsic rewards, though challenging, is possible for a short period of time or in fits and starts. It is obviously easier to pursue your personal best in the things that interest you or are inherently interesting or that you enjoy. The challenge is to be equally motivated in areas that are of less appeal but of value nevertheless.

Self-motivation at these times is easier if you have been taught a particular capability. Sadly this capability has been poorly developed in many children. Much as schools may be working on developing independent learners, teachers are often exclusively in charge of evaluating the knowledge, capabilities and productivity of students.

If grades, scores and levels are necessary to determine whether or not a student is fulfilling their potential then regular and frequent evaluations of the student's work will be required. It is here that the students learn to wait with anything from, *couldn't*



care less to caring far too much, for a judgement they have little say in.

Learning to be the knowledgeable assessor of your own work and to defend that assessment or acknowledge someone else's accurate assessment creates an attachment to the product of your labour and skills that is both empowering and motivational. Having the capacity to honestly assess your own work and determine its merit or lack of, takes guidance and training.

If you are using PITW's *Permission To Process* strategy or implementing the *Ultimate Community Role Model (UCRM)* your students will already be developing self-evaluation skills.

However, there is more that can be done and should be done. An opportunity for productive development lies in assignments (either electronic or hard copy) that students submit for assessment.

Rather than simply submitting their assignment students can be asked to attach a written evaluation. The size and scale of this evaluation is for the teacher/class to decide and if a score is to be given by the teacher than the student should first propose the score they believe their assignment deserves and supply substantiating reasons.

Knowing how students evaluate their work is at the very least informative and gives the teacher another perspective by which to assess the assignments.

Once the teacher has assessed the assignment they can return it with comments that relate to both the assignment itself and the student's evaluation of the assignment. This will improve the sense of connection between the student and the teacher and give both parties a better understanding of each other's expectations and standards.

How much is written is up to the teacher. It may be as simple as, "*Thank you. Let's talk,*" followed by a discussion that arrives at an accepted evaluation or "*I agree with your assessment*" or "*I don't agree and I'd like to explain why.*" The ensuing conversations can help students learn to effectively self-evaluate against criteria that is guiding the assessment of the teacher. This process also allows students who are unduly harsh on themselves to be more realistic and grounded in their assessments and gives them the chance to modify their assessment based on the evidence within their assignment.

It is so much easier to determine if you have pursued your personal best in things that are physical and require exertion, stamina or strength. Knowing if you have run your hardest in a race is often easier than knowing if you have give an assignment your utmost when your score was 97%.

Self-evaluation requires critical thinking and analysis. It requires insightful questions asked of self and the courage to answer those questions honestly. Self-awareness is a thoughtful and intimate relationship between what you want to believe and the evidence of what you have actually achieved or attempted to achieve.

I am sure creative teachers can think of many and varied ways students can be invited to self-evaluate their learning as well as their contributions to the classroom



community, and their development mentally, physically and emotionally. I am also sure that junior primary teachers can embed this skill at an age appropriate level thereby making it a helpful and supportive habit of action.

Self-evaluation develops a meaningful sense of self-worth based on the evidence of who you are (character) as well as what you can do (capacity).

I believe if we want students to be genuinely independent learners then we must, when we can, avoid the authoritarian approach of always assessing their work before they have openly assessed it themselves and validated that assessment.

If we want children to develop a love of learning and be motivated to pursue their personal best, then we must give them the skills to genuinely understand themselves and be deeply interested in their own progress and betterment. If we don't, we will discover that independence and self-motivation hover in the calm waters of complacency rather than thrive in the tempestuous seas of academic excellence.

Academic Excellence: the maximum development of our intellectual capabilities.