

TIPS TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATOR – TRAINEE RELATIONSHIP

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ANNOTATION

Social studies educators are just as likely to experience trainees motivational problems as are educators in other content areas. While it is not my purpose in this article to discuss the problems that lead to a lack of motivation, I would like to suggest a few of the reasons educators may have more trouble now than before in motivating trainees.

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One source of motivational problems stems from the problems in Uzbek society that are found in too many Uzbek families. Poverty, divorce, one-parent families, and dysfunctional families sometimes create situations that cause young people to focus their time and attention on dealing with personal problems rather than classroom subjects. Another source of motivational problems may paradoxically stem from a success in the public school system. The effort to keep as many trainees as possible in school has been partially successful (Bracey 1991). This has resulted in trainees remaining in school who at one time would have either dropped out or have been removed. Although the goal of keeping as many trainees as possible in school is certainly worthy, it can lead to having more trainees in the classroom who lack a sense of direction and purpose, and hence a low level of motivation for learning.

Bearing in mind that the challenge of motivating trainees may be more difficult than it once was the literature from research and classroom practice related to motivation often mentions the quality of teacher-trainee relationships as a critical variable. High-quality relationships can motivate trainees to learn and engage in fewer disruptive behaviors (Hawley 1982; Morganett 1991; Spaulding 1992; Włodkowski 1986). Here are ten practical and easy ways to improve teacher-trainee relationships.

1. *Get to know the trainees by name as quickly as possible.* Trainees will appreciate this. You may want to distribute an information sheet at the first class session. The sheet can ask trainees for their name, the name they prefer to be called by, where they live, interests or hobbies, a success experience, goals, places they have visited, part-time jobs held, etc. After you have trainees use the information from the sheet to introduce themselves to two or three other trainees whom they may not know in the class, you can have them come before the whole class and introduce themselves. As trainees do this, you will have a chance to focus on one trainee at a time. You may want to use imagery to help you remember each trainee by associating some particular image that is based on the trainee's name. You may also want to ask some follow-up questions. This will not only allow you to come to know more about each trainee but will also communicate your interest in them. If you are teaching a history class, you might ask trainees to list on the information sheet described above any famous historical places they have visited. Many trainees have visited historical places such as the homes of presidents (e.g., Mount Vernon or Monticello), cities (e.g., Washington, DC, or Boston), or places designed to re-create or maintain the past (e.g., Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts). This will provide you with the opportunity to let trainees in the class talk about these places if and when they come up as you teach your class. Also, trainees may have obtained things (e.g., pictures, videotapes, maps) that you can incorporate in your lesson to make it more interesting and real for the class. You might let the trainee who collected the item present that part of the lesson.

Regardless, it can help you and the trainees come to know and hopefully like each other better as you share interests and experiences.

2. *Get to know some personal things about each trainee.* Using the survey described previously is one way to accomplish this. Another activity is to take advantage of the time at the beginning and end of class, after tests, before holidays, or after holidays just to talk with and listen to trainees. Ask trainees about their weekends, goals and aspirations, and opinions about local, national, and world events. What you talk about is probably less important than the fact that you were interested enough to ask and listen. In your effort to improve classroom climate and build better teacher-trainee relationships, avoid focusing on answering factual questions or testing trainees' knowledge when discussing current events. Instead, ask them opinion questions. The goal is to get trainees to participate, to feel like they are valued members of the class and that their comments are valued-not to assign grades.

3. *Conduct a values analysis discussion about some current event or topic.* In this activity, it is important that certain rules be followed. Make sure that when anyone is speaking, everyone listens to the speaker. Trainees may ask questions to help clarify what a trainee is saying, but they cannot challenge or disagree with the speaker. Other trainees can respond with their opinions and support it, but they cannot directly disagree with each other. For example, in a history class we could ask trainees to read about and discuss the dropping of the atomic bombs in World War II. Ask trainees if they would have dropped the atomic bombs had they been President Truman. Have them explore why they would or would not have dropped the bombs. Or, in a government or sociology class you could have trainees examine the issue of the death penalty. Have trainees take a position on whether they favor or disapprove of the death penalty. Then have them explore the reasons for and against its use. In a psychology class, you could have trainees discuss the issue of using animals to conduct research. In getting trainees to listen to each other and you, you may need to discuss why it is important to listen carefully to others. Talk with them about respect and how they feel when others listen carefully to what they have to say. After all, as social studies educators, aren't teaching and understanding good interpersonal communication important goals for us?

4. *Provide positive comments when appropriate.* Sometimes we become so busy or frustrated by the problems that occur that we forget to notice and comments on the positive things trainees do. Educators can recognize effort, cooperative behavior, and helping behavior. Positive comments can also be made about things like a new hair style, a shirt, a pair of shoes, or a good voice. If you think the trainee might be embarrassed by public recognition from a teacher, then comment privately to the trainee. This can be done during study time. Or, you can write comments on papers you are returning to trainees such as homework assignments or tests.

5. *Be positive and enthusiastic when teaching.* Most trainees find it difficult to be motivated when the teacher is not. As we demonstrate our interest and joy in teaching, it shows that we enjoy being in the classroom and implies we enjoy being with the trainees. This should enhance teacher-trainee relationships.

6. *Show trainees that you are not only interested in them but also that you care about them.* How can you do this? Take the time to talk individually with trainees. You could do this by setting a goal for talking individually with each trainee every week, or whatever is practical. You can ask about how they are doing with the content

and skills in the course or you may prefer to make the conversation a more personal one. For example, you might ask trainees about their extracurricular activities, hobbies, or interests. Some educators make it a practice to greet trainees as they come into the classroom as yet another way to demonstrate their interest in their trainees. Another activity that some educators use to help trainees and to show them that they care is to have set times before, during, or after school to provide trainees with extra help on assignments or just to be there to talk with them. For example, you could be available to help trainees for thirty minutes before or after school.

7. *Avoid the use of threats and punishment.* If trainees do something that is disruptive, use a time-out procedure rather than punishment. After the time-out procedure has been used, be sure to sit down with trainees and talk with them. Practice active listening. That is, ask them how they feel about what occurred. Give them a chance to get out any frustrations and feelings. After they have had a chance to discuss their feelings, then you can talk about ways to avoid such an occurrence in the future. Make it clear to the trainee that it is the behavior and not the person that is unacceptable. In fact, make it a point to say or do something that will make the trainee feel valued.

8. *Do not play favorites.* Some trainees are easy to like, while others are not. Yet we need to be sure that some trainees do not get special privileges and others harsher treatment because of our feelings toward them. When we have tasks or responsibilities to be carried out, be sure to give all trainees an opportunity to participate. This will give us one more opportunity to strengthen our relationship with trainees by showing trust in them, as well as providing us with the opportunity to thank them for something they have done. If you have a particularly challenging trainee, you might try an activity suggested by Wlodkowski (Hawley 1982). Every day for two weeks, spend two minutes talking with the challenging trainee. During your conversation, say something positive about the trainee. Over the course of the two weeks, try to change the balance of the conversation so that the trainee does more of the talking.

9. *Create a supportive classroom environment.* Instead of having trainees compete with each other for grades, recognition, and/or success, have trainees work together cooperatively to carry out some task or project. In the evaluation process, base the grade on both individual and group achievement. Structure the evaluation process in such a way that individual improvement will help the group grade as well as the individual grade. This will hopefully get trainees to work together and help each other.

10. *Create an environment where questions and answers-even wrong answers-are encouraged and valued.* Trainees learn more and participate more when they feel comfortable asking and answering questions. But trainees will not ask or answer questions if they think they will be embarrassed. Encourage and recognize trainees when they ask and answer questions. When trainees tell you that they do not understand something, tell them that you appreciate their comment because it helps you to know what aspects of a lesson need additional coverage. In this article I have discussed only a few of the many activities that educators can use to strengthen teacher-trainee relationships. The ideas and activities listed in this article are not an exhaustive list, but rather a beginning. Use them to stimulate your thinking about what you can do to improve teacher-trainee relationships in your classroom. Research and practice indicate that trainees will become more motivated and that you will have fewer disciplinary problems. Even more important, both you and your trainees may experience an increased sense of pleasure from the time spent in the classroom.

1. REFERENCES

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