Indicator Explanation

DOMAIN	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Instruction	Remove barriers and provide opportunities	3C.7 Teachers seek an understanding of each student's personal "story" and that of his/her family in order to appropriately engage the student and family and teach the student.

Motivation "helps to explain why individuals choose to approach or avoid a task, and once engaged whether they put it effort and persist or simply quit" (Kumar et al., 2018, 9. 78). Research shows that motivation is critical for learning, and that student motivation can be enhanced or dampened depending on the educational context and how educators teach (Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016). Motivating students to learn can be enhanced through educators' understanding of their students' interests and backgrounds; for example, culturally responsive education (CRE) practices that incorporate culturally relevant teaching and curriculum to build student interest and engagement can affect positive and powerful outcomes for all students (Abdulrahim & Orosco, 2020; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Beaulieu, 2006; Brown, 2017; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Demmert et al., 2006; Gay, 2013). These powerful outcomes include increased student motivation to learn, interest in curriculum content, and perceived sense of academic competence, and decreases in behavioral problems, increases in classroom engagement, and efficacy for learning and critical thinking (Kumar et al., 2018). Teachers who seek to understand their students' background and interests and capitalize on them to build motivation also take a step towards building the secure and close teacher-student relationships that are associated positively with students' social and academic functioning (King, 2015; Wentzel, 2017).

How can teachers boost motivation to learn by gauging students' backgrounds and interests and connecting them to learning?

The degree to which learning is meaningful strongly influences learner outcomes, and "multiple theories of motivation assume that students are more likely to approach and engage in academic tasks that have personal significance for them" (Kumar et al., 2018, p. 82), and educators must help students see the relevance of what they are learning. One approach to boosting motivation is helping students integrate their background knowledge with what they are learning. As Ferlazzo (2020) notes:

> The only resources that learners have for approaching new challenge is what they already know and are already interested in. The only way to build new interests and capacities is by activating and building on students' prior interests and background knowledge before instruction. This process honors what students bring to the classroom and provides them with necessary context and connection to the purpose and payoff of what is to be learned. It is essential to culturally relevant pedagogy.

Teachers must capture information about their students' background and interests as a preliminary instructional strategy, and use the information to structure learning experiences wherever and whenever possible. Assessing students' prior knowledge allows teachers to gauge the level of knowledge students bring to a learning task, and also serves as an activator to start the process of integrating new knowledge (Ferlazzo, 2016). There are a number of effective prior knowledge assessment strategies, including anticipatory guides,

K-W-L (what students already Know, Want to know, and have Learned), and Write the Room (students move around the room, writing on posters with words or phrases related to the topic being taught, all they already know about the word or phrase (Blackburn, 2017). More informally, at the beginning of the year, teachers may find out what students are interested in through surveys (e.g., Buckle, n.d.) or learning profile cards that capture perceptual data about students' strengths in subjects, approaches to learning, and interests outside of school (McCarthy, 2014). Then teachers can use this information wherever possible to structure learning opportunities, and give students some degree of choice of learning tasks (McCarthy, 2014).

Utility-Value Interventions, which are interactive, classroom-based assignments designed to help students connect the content they are learning with their lives and see its relevance, have been shown through high-quality research to improve learning outcomes, particularly for students who may be at risk for poor academic performance (Brisson et al., 2017; Gaspard et al., 2015; Harackiewicz et al., 2016; Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Hulleman et al., 2010; Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2021). These activities, which can be adapted for a variety of ages and content areas, involve students 1) describing their interests, hobbies, and personal goals, and 2) documenting the current topics recently covered in class, and brainstorming connections between the two (Hulleman & Harackiewics, 2021). See Character Lab's Build Connections for Classrooms activity for additional information and a teacher guide. Research also suggests that educators can show care and interest by making a conscientious effort to understand students' cultural characteristics and experiences, and draw on this understanding to make learning more personally meaningful (Chen & Yang, 2017). This can be accomplished in part through culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2012). Muñiz (2019) synthesized research on CRE, and core competencies of culturally responsive educators that can build academic motivation (as synthesized by the California Department of Education (n.d.):

1. Draw on students' culture to shape curriculum and instruction: CREs draw on their students' cultures and life experiences (funds of knowledge) when planning their instruction and reject instructional materials that contain cultural biases and/or stereotypes. They supplement the curriculum if it lacks the representation of their students' heritage.

2. Bring real-world issues into the classroom: CREs connect their curriculum to real-world problems and ask students to consider solutions to them. These issues may involve injustices that exist in their communities or nationwide. Through this process, CREs empower their students to see themselves as change agents that can right the injustices that exist in the world.

3. Model high expectations for all students: CREs hold high academic expectations for all students and believe that all students are capable of academic success.

4. Promote respect for student differences: CREs are models for how all students should respect one another and embrace their fellow classmate's social, cultural, and linguistic differences.

5. Communicate in linguistically and culturally responsive ways: CREs understand and honor both the verbal and nonverbal culturally-influenced communication styles of the community in which they teach. They also seek to communicate with parents that speak a language other than English by utilizing translation services.

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