

Summary

Research has shown that if a child is motivated at an early age this tends to continue to develop up to and beyond adolescence. As there are aspects of the child's environment that can have a significant impact on children's motivation to learn – both positively and negatively – parents can help by providing a better environment.

Introduction

It is very clear that motivation plays an important role in achievement and, ultimately, success in life. Recent studies in the USA have shown that it is a unique contributor of academic achievement over and above IQ. This suggests that children can have high motivation levels whilst not necessarily having high IQ and vice versa.

How is academic intrinsic motivation assessed?

There is a certain degree of overlap between IQ and motivation; children who have high learning potential do often show significantly more motivation than their peers. However, motivation can be a more powerful predictor of academic achievement in certain topics such as numeracy, over and above IQ. Academic intrinsic motivation with a child is defined as someone who:

- Makes more goal-directed effort
- Has more interest in their work
- Has a higher attention span or better focus on the teacher
- Is more cooperative with their teacher
- Is more positive in their attitude towards the task

The Children's Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory is a standardised assessment used to measure a child's motivation to learn. Research using this assessment suggests that intelligence only goes part of the way to actually predicting academic success.

Is academic intrinsic motivation variable?

Children assessed at the age of three who presented 'cognitive mastery motivation' i.e. a positive attitude towards cognitive tasks (such as building blocks) also presented academic intrinsic motivation at subsequent ages, including adolescence, up to the age of 17 years. This suggests motivation is relatively stable and continuous across childhood.

However...

Teachers, parents and carers play a key role in recognising and influencing children's academic intrinsic motivation.

The role of parent strategies to motivate

The type of strategies used by parents and carers can have a major influence on a child's motivation to learn.

- Using intrinsic strategies (such as encouraging a child's curiosity) helps the development of academic intrinsic motivation and achievement.

- Using extrinsic strategies (such as giving money, toys and extra time on the computer) can adversely impact on a child's academic intrinsic motivation.

Home Environment

Helping a child develop a curiosity about the world can lead to motivation to learn. This can, in turn, encourage academic achievement. For this it is beneficial for the child to be exposed to a stimulating home environment that includes, for example:

- Regular library visits and lots of reading time.
- After-school extra-curricular groups, such as music clubs/sports clubs/drama etc.
- Frequent home discussions on political, social and moral issues.
- Interest and exposure to cultural activities and the opportunity to reflect on these afterwards.

Patterns have been found with adolescents who show high motivation, they seem to spend more time reading at home and are also involved in more extracurricular activities. The amount of TV watched does not impact on motivation levels. However, it may be indirectly linked by its relation to activity levels. A child who is less energetic can increase in apathy in a general sense. Therefore, their motivation to learn would be negatively influenced by this decrease in energy.

A deeper understanding of motivation in its own right is important when supporting children with high intellectual learning potential who are more likely to underachieve if they are not strongly motivated.

It is important to recognise children with high intellectual learning potential who may not be achieving their full potential, even if they are 'top of the class'. Intrinsic motivational strategies should be put in place both at home and in school to ignite their curiosity and love of learning again. This can be done by, for example, applying the knowledge they have already learnt to debate/discuss/write a play/put together an argument on a political or philosophical issue relating to the topic they have learnt.

All students who excel in their motivation, even if they are not children with high intellectual learning potential, would benefit by being included in gifted and talented programmes.

“Teaching the desire to learn may be as important as teaching academic skills.”
(Gottfried & Gottfried, 2004, p.129)

Further Information

<p>Gottfried, A. & Gottfried, A. (1996). A longitudinal study of academic intrinsic motivation in intellectually gifted children: Childhood through early adolescence. <i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>, 40 (4), 179-183.</p>	<p>A study that looks at motivation levels in children with high intellectual learning potential and a comparison group from the ages of 9-13yrs. Children with high intellectual learning potential showed significantly higher motivation across all subject areas and school in general compared to the comparison cohort.</p>
<p>Gottfried, A. & Gottfried, A. (2004). Toward the development of a conceptualization of gifted motivation. <i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>, 48 (2), 121-132.</p>	<p>This study reveals academic intrinsic motivation to be separate from IQ or 'intelligence' and how it uniquely predicts academic achievement in spite of children's IQ levels.</p>
<p>Shavinina, L.V. (2009) <i>International Handbook on Giftedness</i>. Springer Science + Business Media B.V.</p>	<p>Comprehensive account of high learning potential; how it is measured and how it develops. Specialists write about various aspects of high learning potential looking at types, specificity of high learning potential, social and environmental contexts and recent innovations in education.</p>

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