

The Role of Motivation and Inspiration in Learning

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THE MEANING OF EDUCATION

At its very core, education is an innate expression of curiosity; a longing to understand and be part of the world; a manifestation of purpose and passion that every person carries within them. The word education comes from Latin *educare* meaning to *lead out from within*. In this light, the teacher becomes an invitation to learning; a request that a student shows up and brings forth her interest, his strengths and challenges, and her commitment to manifest her unfolding future. Learning is not conducted behind closed doors and is not limited to an activity that happens in the classroom between a teacher and a student. It is an expression of the way that a person engages in life through her values, life purpose, and integrity. Self-inquiry and self-assessment provide insight into these values as well as tools for measuring personal and professional growth.

Student Approaches to Learning

Many adult students come to a massage therapy program without a clear understanding of how they learn. All students come with their past history around education including areas in which they excelled and areas of ongoing difficulty. Students may carry a wide range of past feelings from shame to delight as well as moods of anxiety, fear, frustration, skepticism, and optimism. The range of curiosity, confidence, and competence varies greatly. Some students are connected to what inspires and motivates them, while for others this is unexplored territory. Their attitudes and habits toward life vary from a positive “can do” attitude to a negative “nothing I do will ever work”. Students come filled with hope and some arrive just waiting for the massage therapy program and all the instructors to be the next disappointment in their lives.

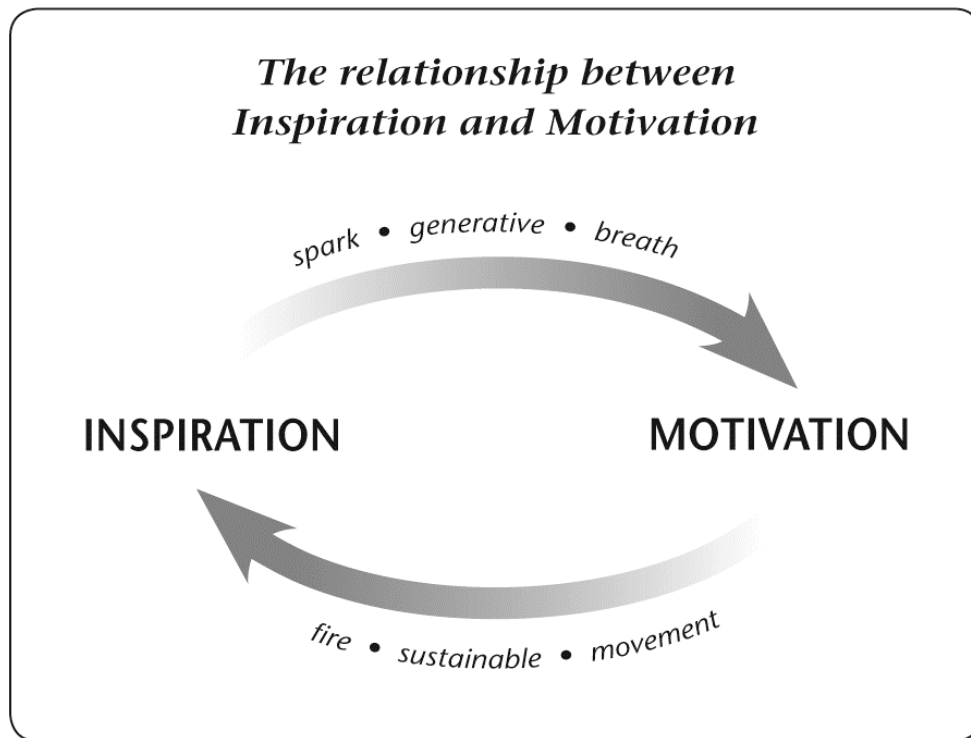
The one consistent ingredient in an educational setting is that students will change. Each new understanding, skill, and person they meet opens them up to a different way of being in the world. Students arrive the first day saying that they are ready for a change in their lives. Yet, change is often the most difficult, feared, and resisted undertaking. There is a risk. There may be discomfort as students move from old familiar patterns into new experiences. For some it is the risk of failure, for others the risk of success. One certainty in education is that instructors and students are in the change business.

Teaching in Action:

Self-Inquiry and Assessment for Students (and/or Instructors)

This exercise is most helpful at the beginning of a program or course. It may be done as a journaling exercise to be shared with a partner, as a homework assignment, or as a class discussion.

- Are you curious, open, and willing to change?
- What are your strengths and challenges when learning something new?
- Do you know how to ask for and receive assistance?
- What and who provides a support system for you?



Instructor Approaches to Encouraging Positive Attitudes Toward Learning

Since there is a direct correlation between attitude and action, instructors can build a bridge for their students so that it becomes clear that successful actions and outcomes rest upon positive attitudes. Positive attitudes arise out of repeatable actions that create success. A carefully crafted educational model provides students with opportunities to understand, develop, and practice the positive attitudes and actions that will result in the manifestation of their goals and dreams. Early on, it is important to provide a class in learning styles and multiple intelligences. This will allow students to identify their own needs and preferences and use those to create strategies that will support them in their own particular style of learning.

Instructors and students can share stories of their own successes and challenges in school and generate lists of attitudes and actions of people they respect. Regular check-ins about attitude or mood at the beginning, middle, or end of class assist students in recognizing what attitudes they most commonly hold and provide an opportunity to set a positive intention toward learning.

Teaching in Action: Attitudes Exercise

Design a group exercise where students name attitudes that support learning and attitudes that undermine learning. Create two columns on the whiteboard for writing their answers. Make it very clear that, as human beings, it is normal to have both positive and negative attitudes. There are no right or wrong answers in this exercise.

- Instruct each student to write down on her own paper all the positive and negative attitudes from the group list that she holds about learning.
- Instruct each student to choose a positive attitude that she wants to cultivate.
- Ask, “What action steps do you need to take to develop this new attitude?”
- Then ask each student to choose one negative attitude that she holds that she is willing to change.
- Ask, “What might be the benefit of changing this attitude?”
- Put the question in this context, “If changing this negative attitude resulted in you becoming a more successful student and future massage therapist, would you be willing to do the work needed to make this change?”
- This can be revisited at various times during the program so that students can track for themselves the attitudes that are shaping their progress. This can also be used as a way for instructors to check in with students who may need support around letting go of negative attitudes and developing positive attitudes.
- Remember that attitudes are always reflected through actions, so make sure that there are practical actions that a student can take to assist her in cultivating a new attitude. For example, being on time, asking for assistance, standing up for her point of view, or asking questions.

As instructors demonstrate their own positive attitudes and perspectives on embracing change and overcoming obstacles, they light a spark for students. This spark ultimately needs to become self-generating, a steadily burning flame within that enables the student to stay the course. (Note that the *Cycles of Learning* model presents a developmental timeline of how students progress through the challenges and opportunities of the beginning, middle, and ending phases of a massage therapy program.)

The Role of Commitment, Mission and Motivation in the Learning Process

Learning is an active expression of life purpose and requires the rigorous, ongoing application of both inner and outer resources on the part of the student. This commitment of resources arises from a dedication to a specified course of action, an ability to make and keep clear agreements, and a sincere interest in developing the skills of a new profession.

A primary task of a massage program instructor is to create a link between a student's commitment, mission, and motivation in the learning process. Students need to be given the opportunity to articulate why they have chosen to attend a massage therapy program so that they can access why this is important to them and their classmates. Questions that are useful in this inquiry include:

- What experiences have you had with massage therapy that led you to massage school?
- What is it about massage therapy that you value?
- What do you want to offer people when you are a massage therapist?
- Is pursuing this profession a way to express what is important to you?
- Do you see massage therapy as a way to lessen pain and suffering in the world?
- What does the massage therapy profession have to offer you?

Instructors can ask themselves the same questions by changing the question to include the words "teach or teaching".

Student Mission and Motivation

The word motivate comes from Latin *motus* meaning *to move; to provide, stimulate or effect some inner drive, impulse or intention that causes a person to act in a certain way*. So a primary consideration for instructors is assisting students in moving toward the fulfillment of their mission. As instructors develop their own motivational presence grounded in their professional mission, the greater skill resides in their ability to stimulate this motivation within each student.

It is important for the instructor to convey that the way a student succeeds in and derives greatest benefit from the program is to become fully involved, generate his own enthusiasm, expand her wonder and respect for the human body, sustain the effort of study and practice, accept and ask for assistance, and discover the magnitude of her own resources and passion for being alive. Over time, a student fulfills her mission by becoming a successful massage therapist who offers these same skills to her clients so that they can move steadily towards an increased sense of well-being and wholeness.

Facilitating Motivation Within the Classroom

At the entry point, students cannot know the full extent or implications of their chosen path. It is up to the instructors to delineate this path by establishing the policies, boundaries, expectations, standards, and agreements of the classroom. This information is delivered within the context of what actions are necessary on the part of students to arrive successfully at graduation day. Viewing the policies as a support for academic and professional success, encourages each student to more fully value and uphold them. The practical implementation of commitment, mission and motivations happens through a number of different activities in the classroom.

- At the beginning of the program, and at the beginning of each course, define the requirements, expectations, standards, and policies in the context of how these are designed to support a student's progress through the program. Highlight the benefits that students will receive through their participation and how these requirements support them in developing the professional skills needed as a massage therapist. Let students know that there are standards of practice that they will be required to uphold as massage therapists.
- Discuss the teamwork between administrative staff, instructors, and students so that the students know how they will be supported through the program. Introduce all those who will be interfacing with students and delineate their job descriptions so that students know where to go with their questions and concerns. State the office hours for faculty and staff.
- Make certain that students understand the concept and practice of self-responsibility in adult learning and connect this with the value of their mission. Include a discussion of what behaviors and practices develop and demonstrate self-responsibility. Describe how the program will provide opportunities to bring a higher level of mastery to these skills. Discuss the value of integrity, keeping one's word, and how integrity builds trust in oneself and others.
- Explain the instructor's commitment to the learning process and the success of each student. For example, instructors will arrive on time, be prepared, observe students, give feedback, offer strategies for greater success, encourage, evaluate progress, communicate clearly, and model professionalism.
- List the skills that students will be developing and why they would be interested in developing these skills. Highlight the "pay-off" in the real world of their goals and mission.

- Request a commitment or agreement from students to uphold the policies that exist in order to ensure their successful navigation of the program. This written and verbal agreement aligns students' actions with the integrity of their word.
- Within the first few weeks of the program, lead students through the motivation exercise outlined in the Teaching in Action box.

Teaching in Action: Motivation Exercise

Use this exercise early in the training program and come back to this activity throughout the term to remind students of their commitment to their mission.

1. Give students 10 minutes to answer the following questions in writing:
 - What is your mission and/or why did you come to massage therapy school?
 - Why is this mission important to you?
 - On a scale of 1-10 what is your level of commitment to your mission?
 - If your commitment level is low, what do you need to do to shift that in order to be successful?
 - What support do you need from your instructors to follow through and complete this mission?
 - What past experiences and current resources will assist you in completion of the program?
 - What new practices do you need to develop to fulfill your mission?
2. Upon completion of their journaling, set up the communication guidelines of how students will be working together in small groups. There will be one speaker at a time and the others will be listeners. The speaker may choose to disclose only the parts of her writing that are appropriate to share in public. Encourage the speaker to be both courageous and discerning. Each person may be allotted three to five minutes for speaking without interruption or comment. Those who are listening can offer an expression of gratitude at the completion of each sharing but no feedback or suggestions. This provides an opportunity for students to share in a safe, non-judgmental setting.
3. Then have them break into small groups and share their answers with one another. When the groups are complete, ask for anyone who would like to share his experience of either speaking or listening with the full class. A great question to ask is: "What did you learn and why is this important?"

Inspiration as a Key to Success

The word inspiration comes from Latin *inspirare* meaning *to breathe spirit*. To inspire another or to be inspired means *to infuse with life; to stimulate or impel some creative or effective effort; to give life or courage to; to cheer; to exhilarate*. One of the primary teaching objectives for instructors is to inspire students and to encourage and stimulate them to engage with the learning in such a way that they begin to generate their own enthusiasm. Instructors need to arrive on time, prepared and excited about the subject to be covered. Opening a class with music, movement, quotes and poems that support the lesson set a tone of enthusiasm. Instructors create an experience of community and trust when they listen openly, embrace and celebrate diversity, make time to answer questions, and build relevance between the subject and the practice of massage therapy. An instructor who listens and speaks with an open mind and heart is a great source of inspiration for students.

Other students frequently serve as a catalyst for inspiration to fellow classmates. Meaningful stories of personal and professional experiences begin to build a sense of community. One student's ability to move beyond doubt and fear can inspire and catalyze an entire classroom. Case studies and the recounting of sessions with practice clients foster an experience of shared mission that is expressed uniquely through the contribution of each individual student.

Teaching in Action: Simple Ways to Bring Inspiration into the Classroom

These ideas can be incorporated in small and brief ways in any lesson plan of any course.

- Bring nature into the classroom with flowers, plants, objects such as shells or stones, and natural oddities.
- Start classes or activities with poetry, music, and literature that is moving and pertains to the theme of the lesson.
- Utilize art as decoration or as part of an activity that portrays the beauty, strength, resilience, and diversity of the human body.
- Look for and use designs in art or nature that illustrate an organizing pattern in the body.
- Plan moments of silence
- Begin or end classes with meditation, mindfulness exercises, or simply paying attention to the breath.
- Plan moments when movement and stretching are used.
- Organize group activities such as setting a learning intention as a class.
- Acknowledge student progress and demonstrate compassion and gratitude.
- Find the laughter, fun, spontaneity, and creative expression in massage.
- Hold discussion about what and who inspires and motivates students.