Building Motivation with the Dialogue Page: Engaging Students Diagnosed with Learning Disabilities
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Abstract
The dialogue page is an effective tool for building intrinsic motivation with students diagnosed with learning disabilities. An adaptive motivational pattern is developed in which the student focuses on progress goals instead of performance goals. Praise in general, focuses on the outcome of one performance. The dialogue page focuses the educator on praising for improvement or effort in a student's work. Referencing studies completed on students diagnosed with learning disabilities, it is noted that the students do have lower intrinsic motivation, especially in academics. Supporting the ideas of building relationships with the dialogue page, building intrinsic motivation, and allowing teachers to praise for improvement, the work of contemporary researchers in special education and motivation are discussed. Effectively praising a student and developing a growth-mindset that focuses on progress goals is fundamental to building motivation in students who are not as motivated academically as typically achieving peers.

Keywords: dialogue page, motivation, praise, learning disabilities

Introduction
Motivation in the classroom is important for all students, especially for students who are diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. The dialogue page is a way to build motivation. This strategy is good to use in all classrooms. Three reasons it is a good idea to use the dialogue page are to build intrinsic motivation, it allows teachers to praise for improvement, and the dialogue page builds relationships between educators and students.

The dialogue page, designed by E. and L. Kozminsky, was created to assist teachers in building an adaptive motivational pattern in students with disabilities and students without. The purpose of the page is to effectively praise students while commenting on what students say to build up adaptive intrinsic motivation. Casual attribution theory, cited by Kozminsky and Kozminsky (2002), states that "in situations of success and failure, people tend to analyze the causes that led to their failure or success"(p.88). Students with learning disabilities tend to attribute their issues to external causes.
The dialogue page is a relatively easy strategy to incorporate into the classroom setting. The teacher might set aside a time at the end of the day where the students sit quietly at the desk and fill out the dialogue page. The dialogue page is essentially a template that guides students’ thinking. First, the student writes down one success and one failure for the week. Then the student writes what he or she could have done to make it better. Finally the student writes what he or she is going to do better for the next day or week. The teacher then reads the dialogue page and comments on the student's efforts. Three elements teachers need to incorporate in the response to students are: 1) reinforcing internally controlled attribution, 2) verbally reflecting the students' attributions, and 3) providing a leading question to the students. When the student receives his or her dialogue page back from the teacher, he or she is able to read the teacher's comments. In the study completed by Kozminska and Kozminsky, this process was completed for three weeks in a row and then a week was taken off, giving the students an opportunity to work on developing adaptive motivational patterns without any input. After a year of implementing the study, Kozminska and Kozminsky (2002) found that "students abandoned their uncontrolled internal or external attributions that characterized the responses to their successes and failures at the beginning of the school year" (p.95).

Motivation is "perseverance in the face of difficulty" (Howell, 2012). When pondering the idea of how the dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name: Sandy</th>
<th>Date: November 12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class: 6th grade</td>
<td>School: Middle School</td>
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1) **What did I succeed at this week?**
I got a 95% on my essay.

2) **Why did I succeed?**
Because I worked really hard and planned out my paper and revised and edited it.

3) **What did I not succeed at this week?**
To remember to wear the right kind of shoes for PE

4) **Why didn't I succeed?**
Because I always wanted to wear something that didn't look good with my PE shoes.

5) **How could you make this week even more successful?**
If I thought about it, I could have brought my PE shoes with me and just worn them for class.

6) **Teacher's comments:**
Great job on your essay! It is always nice to get a good grade, especially when you put a lot of effort into something. By taking on the responsibility to that much work on your essay, it showed effort. There are those days where we sometimes do not want to wear something. What would make it easier for you to remember all the things you want to?

7) **Student's reply:**
If I kept a planner then I would be able to remember when I need to bring something.

8) **How did I use the suggestions from the dialogue page?**
I got a planner and wrote down when I need to bring something to school. This way I might remember to bring it next time.
page builds motivation in students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, the general topic of motivation must be addressed. According to a leading researcher on motivation, there are two motivational patterns: adaptive and maladaptive. Students with an adaptive motivational pattern tend to focus on making progress goals, looking at the big picture and not the success of one event as a deciding factor for the future. Performance goals, are "goals that focus on just one event or one assignment and the outcome from that one assignment" (Howell, 2012). This typically leads to a maladaptive motivational pattern because there is no desire to continue to learn in the long term future. Maladaptive motivational patterns and other motivational issues are not only limited to low-achieving students or students with learning disabilities, although low-achieving students are often the ones struggling.

The dialogue page focuses on building motivation in students who are diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, however, other students may also struggle with motivation. Completing the dialogue page with any student who is struggling with motivational issues, may give the student the opportunity to create adaptive motivational patterns. Motivation processes have been shown to affect (a) how well children can deploy individual existing skills and knowledge, (b) how well they acquire new skills and knowledge, and (c) how well they transfer these new skills and knowledge to novel situations (Dweck 1986).

Teachers need to motivate students intrinsically. By intrinsically motivating students, educators teach students to focus on factors that are controlled internally. Zisimopoulous and Galanaki (2009) hypothesized that there would be lower levels of perceived academic competence in school learning in students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. It is systematically related to intrinsic motivation in both students with learning disabilities and student without learning disabilities. In the study completed by Zisimopoulous and Galanaki, 980 students were assessed, 40 of whom had been diagnosed as having a learning disability by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children and by other local assessments. To determine if the hypothesis was correct, Zisimopoulous and Galanaki (2009) had all the students complete self-reports. The students were asked to rate his or her level of intrinsic motivation in different school subjects, and then what the student perceives his or her academic competence to be in different school subjects. Students needed to be motivated to engage in an activity for the sake of the activity (Zisimopoulous and Galanaki, 2009, p. 1).

The researchers found that students with specific learning disabilities have, relative to age mates, a lower self-concept regarding personal academic skills, whereas nonacademic self-concept is almost equivalent to that of typically achieving peers. According to Zisimopoulous and Galanaki (2009) students diagnosed with learning disabilities had both lower academic intrinsic motivation and perceived academic competence than peers that were typically achieving. This proved Zisimopoulous and Galanaki's hypothesis that lower levels of perceived academic competence in school learning would be present in students with
learning disabilities, and that perceived academic competence is systematically related to intrinsic motivation for both students with learning disabilities and students without learning disabilities (Zisimopoulous & Galanaki, 2009, p.35).

Students with learning disabilities have low intrinsic motivation and academic competence. Praise can assist the students in building a greater self-esteem. Dweck (2007) posed the theory that the wrong kind of praise keeps students from learning and the right kind motivates students to learn. When students are praised for performance goals, less motivation is present than with effort or progress goals. An example of a performance goal is, "if I don't get 100% on this test, then I am stupid." Progress goals tend to sound more like, "as long as I have learned something from this lesson, then I have succeeded." If students are exposed to progress goals and accompanying praise, there is a chance that he or she may develop effective motivational strategies (Dweck, 1986).

According to Dweck (2007), praise is elaborately linked to how a student views his or her own intelligence. Praising for intelligence only provides a small rush of motivation, while praising a student's effort provides intrinsic motivation that lasts longer. Praising students' intelligence provides the opportunity to develop a fixed-mindset. A fixed mind-set is not ideal because it creates "things cannot change attitudes," and win/lose thoughts. Praising effort develops more of a growth mindset because students focus on the progress of learning and not the end result of one thing. The challenge of a task should drive the student, along with the praise he or she receives when trying his or her best to continue to motivate effort. If a student is excessively concerned about how smart he or she appears, it may be a sign of a fixed mind-set in which the student will then seek tasks that will only prove his or her intelligence and avoid the tasks that may question it. Praising for effort leads to persistence of a task, whereas praising for intelligence leaves a person with the conclusion that he or she is not smart and that cannot change.

Students attribute successes and failures in three different ways. Everyone attributes his or her successes and failures to his or her own internal ability, internal effort, or to factors that are external to the person. If a student is attributing his or her success or failure to an internal ability, the student is saying that the cause of something is coming from inside him or her and cannot be changed. A student who attributes his or her success or failure to internal effort believes that the cause of something is from inside him or her, but it can be changed. Attributing successes or failures to external factors implies that the student believes the cause of something came from outside of the student.

Effectively praising and motivating students is important in any classroom. However, for students diagnosed with learning disabilities, it can mean a lot more if done correctly and really change the future of the learning he or she will do. The dialogue page builds effective praise and allows for progress goals, a growth mind-set, and adaptive motivational patterns to emerge in students who statistically have lower
motivation and perceived academic competence than those who are described as typically achieving students.

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References


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