# Classroom Strategies and Practical Applications to promote Motivation in Struggling Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Students

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ENG 6531: TESOL: Methods and Practicum

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# May 2, 2022

**Community college students often struggle with motivational issues that affect their success in college programs. Currently, I am teaching a support course called EMT-SOS in the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) segment of the firefighting curriculum. I often observe motivational issues. While these students are enthusiastic about firefighting, they struggle in the EMT-Basics course. I have observed that failed student efforts to learn EMT protocols and medical terminology lead to decreased student motivation.** The students in the EMT-SOS course developed learner apathy as a result of this decreased motivational level. The lack of motivation and resulting apathy stem in part from the fact that the students had been identified as low-level readers. Many students volunteered the information they had learning disabilities, so this was not the first time these students had been placed in a separate class. The associated stigma of being in a special class also contributes to lack of motivation. According to Zeeb, Ostertag, and Renkl (2020), “Whether students want to learn depends on whether they believe they can learn: those who believe that abilities improve with practice tend to show higher motivation than those who believe that abilities are unchangeable” (p. 1).

According to Wery & Thomson (2013), “Struggling students and those with exceptional education needs often have apathetic attitudes in the classroom or poor behaviors that exacerbate their problems in school” (p.1). Gibson (2019) states, “non-cognitive factors such as motivation, self-efficacy, and academic hope are important for student success” (p.6). To improve motivation and lessen apathy in my SOS course, I plan to employ the practices of the effects of teacher beliefs and goal setting. **Through my research, I hope to learn strategies and practical applications for motivating students to overcome the apathy and actively engage in learning.**

**Course Description**

The course I teach is a pilot course called EMT-SOS. The course divides five contact hours per week into two parts: (a) an EMT SOS face-to-face class to review content strategies and (b) an online program called Edmentum to enhance reading efforts. The course began on March 1, 2022 and ends on May 3, 2022. Students are referred to my class after taking a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment in reading. The TABE is a diagnostic prescriptive test used to evaluate student reading levels. Scaled score ranges identify grade levels in reading from K – 12th grade.

From March to July, EMT-SOS students are enrolled in the Fire Academy as their primary course. The Fire Academy classes run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday through Wednesday, and the primary EMT classes on Thursday and Friday during the same hours. The EMT-SOS course meets on Tuesdays from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The content material in all three classes is science-based and difficult. The students’ primary goal is to finish the Fire Academy as quickly as possible to get paying jobs, but student motivation stems from student academic success, and the high number of contact hours per week can hamper success. The community college system must develop courses to meet the students’ perceived needs to increase enrollment, but the course difficulty, long classroom hours, and unsuccessful test scores can quickly lead to loss of motivation and student apathy.

**Student Description**

My action research project focuses on the student firefighters who were assessed by the TABE test as needing supplemental help in content area reading. The Fire Academy requirements identify an 11th grade reading level as optimal for graduation. The TABE test results showed ten students as having reading levels ranging from the sixth to ninth grade. The group is diverse in race, culture, age, and gender. The students’ range from 17 to 26 years of age.

Some students still live with their parents, but other students have the added responsibility of their own families. All students work at least part-time. The students will be retested after completion of the first 40 contact hours to detect reading level gains.

**Problem Identification**

The EMT-SOS students are completing an EMT course that runs for two years on the curriculum side of campus, but only 16 weeks on the Continuing Education side of campus. During these 16 weeks, students are concurrently attending classes to learn to be firefighters and to earn an EMT certification. This perfect storm of work, class, study, family, and other responsibilities eventually leads to lack of motivation and apathy in the classroom environment. Although students love the hands-on activities in the firefighter classes, many are less motivated to do what it takes to succeed in the EMT portion of the class. When the students fail to succeed in coursework, they begin to lose confidence, hope, and motivation.

**Research Question**

## **What motivational strategies and practical applications can I use to assist students in overcoming motivational deficits and actively engage in learning?**

**Motivational Strategies and Practical Applications for the Classroom**

In preparation for my action research project, I knew that lack of student motivation was a frequent problem, but it was surprising to learn that several strategies and applications are directed at the teacher’s actions and mindset rather than the student.

Wery & Thomson (2013) suggested specific teacher beliefs and actions to promote student motivation:

* Believe your students can learn.
* Model enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation
* Create a learning environment that is encouraging and challenging
* Acknowledge the difficulty of tasks
* Connect learning to the world
* Set Goals
* Involve students in the learning process
* Allow for independence
* Evaluate the task not the student (p. 8,9)

I also discovered the SMART goal standard for setting goals (Janabergenova, 2021). Although I have used goal setting activities in my classroom to promote motivation, I have not used this explicit tool. I will discuss implementation of the strategy later in this document.

**Plan for Intervention**

My teaching practice already includes the teacher beliefs stated by Wery & Thomson (2013). For my intervention plan, I will adhere to these beliefs and have a colleague and my students evaluate me during a class session. I have created a checklist of teacher beliefs for motivating students so that when my colleague and students can observe if I demonstrate those behaviors. The checklist the students complete will be anonymous. A summary of my colleague’s observation is attached as Appendix A. A summary of my students’ observation is attached as Appendix B.

I introduced students to goal setting practices using the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed (SMART) goal standard for setting goals (Janabergenova, 2021). Each week, the class will reassess their goals, and modify, as necessary. The students will begin writing their goals on paper, but I have offered them an online fillable practice sheet so they will have a copy with them when they study. A link to the fillable document is attached as Appendix C. To evaluate the successfulness of this part of the action plan, I will compare student grades from tests given on March 1, 2022, to April 14, 2022, for trending patterns.

**Conclusion**

The students in my SOS-EMT class experienced Wery & Thomson (2013) teacher belief traits for the duration of the course. I developed an observational survey to be completed by a colleague and my students to note if the teacher belief traits were observable. The checklist summaries are attached as Appendix A and B.

I also explicitly taught how to set SMART goals throughout the course. The SMART goal setting device used is attached as Appendix C to this document. My plan was to analyze test scores to identify trending in grades as SMART goals were established and applied. Students signed a permission agreement to allow me to use their grades in this study. I have attached the permission agreement to this document as Appendix D. Due to factors discussed in my reflection, data learned from test results are inconclusive and are not included.

**Reflection**

There were obstacles to overcome in effectively performing the action research plan. The Fire Academy is a satellite of the college campus, so I was not able to communicate with the students’ other instructors in a meaningful way as I had hoped. I made attempts to schedule meetings to discuss the plan, but I was unsuccessful. It is vital for there to be clear communication between instructors who share students when searching for ways to improve student learning. Communication between the primary instructors and students was also poor, and miscommunications in test scheduling interfered with my students’ grades and my action research plan. Test schedules were not always followed, and this made it difficult for students to study for the tests.

My purpose was to increase student motivation through teacher beliefs and consistent goal setting. Sadly, of the ten students originally involved in my action research project, only five passed the midterm exam on April 14, 2022. Due to a miscommunication, the midterm exam was administered two weeks earlier than the students expected, and they were not prepared.

During my time there, I came to realize an unfortunate truth. The course in which I was offering student support was being used to “weed out” students that did not learn the material quickly. I understand that EMT students must think fast and make quick decisions, but in my teaching career students who are “C” students often become excellent hands-on students. Maybe if I had realized this earlier, I could have insisted on better instructor communication.

Overall, the action plan would have been more successful with better communication between instructors. Choosing colleagues who have both the time and interest in research is critical for research to be viable. Research is important for teachers to engage in to improve their teaching practice.

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**Appendix A – Colleague Evaluation**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Specific Teacher Beliefs** | **Noted during class.**  **(+ for yes)**  **(- for no)** | **Comments** |
| Believe your students can learn. | 100% Yes | Reminds students they know specific information and that she (Ms. Brannan) believes they know it. |
| Model enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation | 100% Yes | Ms. Brannan is energetic and engaged students in two-way conversations. |
| Create a learning environment that is encouraging and challenging | 100% Yes | Encourages questions and gives examples for student understanding. |
| Acknowledge the difficulty of tasks | 100% Yes | Acknowledged challenging content and encouraged learning in small chunks. |
| Connect learning to the world | 100% Yes | All content used is related to the real world. |
| Set Goals | 100% Yes | Gave the students examples. |
| Involve students in the learning process | 100% Yes | Invites participation and student use in answering questions on the white board. |
| Evaluate the task and not the student. | 100% Yes |  |

Wery & Thomson (2013, p.8,9)

**Appendix B – Student Evaluation**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Specific Teacher Beliefs** | **Noted during class.**  **(+ for yes)**  **(- for no)** | **Comments** |
| Believe your students can learn. | 100% Yes | Every student had a chance to succeed.  I felt confident that I could learn in this class.  Ms. B acknowledged our hard work. |
| Model enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation | 100% Yes | I always feel motivated and happy in this class.  Ms. B. made the class fun. |
| Create a learning environment that is encouraging and challenging | 100% Yes | Concerns and potential limitations were addressed, and solutions were offered.  Bringing in new ideas to make it more challenging.  I’ve seen students test Ms. B. when they were distracted, and Ms. B. was able to keep them focused with tact. |
| Acknowledge the difficulty of tasks | 100% Yes |  |
| Connect learning to the world | 100% Yes | I don’t understand the question. |
| Set Goals | 100% Yes | We set goals in class using SMART goals.  The goal sheets were helpful. |
| Involve students in the learning process | 100% Yes | I think every student had a feeling of involvement.  We took turns reading review questions. |
| Evaluate the task, not the student | 100% Yes | No student was judged for any reason. |

Wery & Thomson (2013, p.8,9)

**Appendix C**

<https://www.create.101planners.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SMART-Goals-Worksheet-with-action-plan-1.pdf>

In my research for this action plan, I found an article discussing the use of Smart Goals to focus students on learning and to provide student motivation. I chose to use an online link to allow the students to type their goals into a fillable document. After I introduce the goal setting methods of SMART goals, and we do the activity on paper first, I provide the link to the students so they can input their goals chart into their cell phones. My purpose is for the students to be able to review their goals when they are studying outside the classroom. A summary of students written goals is attached.

**Appendix D**

Statement of Permission

I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (*name of student printed*) provide Pat Brannan (*name of instructor*) permission to use **your class observations and grade averages in an Action Research project I am completing as part of coursework for East Carolina University.**

Student Work Details

Course Number and Title: EMT-SOS # 1198

Title of Work: Test Grades

Select one of the following by adding your initials in the space on the left:

\_\_\_\_\_\_ You may use my first and last name to identify **me as a student in your class.**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ You may use my first name only to identify **me as a student in your class.**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ You may use my work, but do not list my name.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ You may **NOT** use my work**.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_