

Seeking the Faith Quotient

Hope

Research in the Social Sciences has shown that students with a strong sense of hope will set higher goals, work harder to accomplish them, view setbacks as temporary and will eventually do better in tests of learning. This is one of the reasons why such importance is placed on a child's self-perception. How a child views his/her abilities and potential will affect how he/she approaches challenges and learning.

But just as the worldly view of self-perception is different from the spiritual view (I am a child of my heavenly Father, forgiven by my Savior and powered by the Holy Spirit) the spiritual view of hope is different, also. The world uses the word hope with crossed fingers: as in, "Maybe good will happen, maybe not but I really 'hope' it will." Or "I am hopeful that things will turn out well." Our hope is not a maybe; it is an assurance. We don't *wish* that Jesus' death and resurrection will save us, we don't *wish* we will go to heaven: we *know* these things are true. The hope of the Bible is an assurance which is why it is so very efficacious. The hope found in the Bible can and does fill our heart with joy.

Children who live in a world of hope, especially spiritual hope, are also blessed with an attitude of gratitude. They are optimistic, see the brighter side of things, eager to dig in and generally pleasant to be around. Not only does hope improve learning and coping but it improves social skills as well. The children who are typically on the A-list socially are often those who get there by control. They either control others or they control themselves to follow the strict rules of the "in group." The children who are part of the bottom group are not usually children who display a hopeful attitude. They are often the pessimists who resign themselves to their lot in life and build up resentment. Interestingly enough, the happiest children are those who are not a part of the popular group. They are the children in the middle, who do not have a desire to be in the popular group and manage to stay under the radar if the popular group controls itself by being mean to the children in the rejected group. The children in the middle are the children who live in a spirit of hope. They are the ones with the strongest social skills and the ones with an appropriate popularity.

We would hope that in our Lutheran schools and childcare centers that there are not groups of "mean girls" or "rejects." However, we cannot assume we will be exempt from this phenomenon. Our best defense against this sort of social hierarchy is to integrate the faith and teach our children to be salt and light. As Christians we have an influence on our world, whether we know it or not. Because we are powered by the Holy Spirit we make a difference in the lives of those around us. We preserve what is good and shine a light on what needs to be changed. Helping children to develop this goal will draw them out of being self-centered. Because we are all children of the heavenly Father we are all on an even footing, socially. Because we are forgiven by our Savior we do not need to live in a world of shame.

Be joyful in
hope.

Romans

12:12

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5: 13-16

Children with a sense of hope are intrinsically motivated. This is an important ingredient to healthy self-regulation. Motivation comes in two basic forms: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside of us and can be a positive influence to do something or a negative influence to stop something. The possibility of getting a ticket is a negative influence that may cause me to drive at or below the speed limit. The possibility of getting a break in my car insurance because I didn't get any tickets is a positive influence to encourage me to follow the law. Both of these are extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is one that comes from inside of us. I do not need tickets or reduced insurance rates to encourage me to read my Bible. I am intrinsically motivated to read scripture. I don't come by this naturally; it is through the power of the Spirit, but I do not do it out of fear or to seek reward. Intrinsic motivation is the type of motivation we want to foster in our students. Intrinsically motivated students are the best learners because they are eager. While our world needs extrinsic motivation in order to survive it should be noted that too much extrinsic motivation will destroy intrinsic motivation. Reading incentive programs, for example, teach children that reading must not be fun or interesting on its own if my school has to bribe me to do it or test me every time I complete a book. While extrinsic programs can have a short term benefit they very often are harmful in the long run.

Students who are intrinsically motivated by the Spirit with a hope that shows in a life of gratitude are poised and ready to learn, to cope, to meet challenges, and to know that God has a plan for their lives.

Group Discussion

1. Are there social hierarchies in your school among the students? Are these social groups harmful to themselves or to each other?
2. What learning activities in your school utilize extrinsic motivation?
3. Do these programs remain effective or do you find yourself having to increase the reward/punishment or constantly battling with students who find ways around the rules?
4. Is there a way to encourage intrinsic motivation that can replace some of your school's extrinsically motivated programs?
5. Why do children of hope have a healthy popularity among the other students?
6. How does a sense of hope foster learning?

Putting it into practice

Teachers

Think about motivation techniques that you use in your classroom. Do you use stickers, incentive charts, grades, notes home to parents, detention? List them here and mark them on a scale of 0-5 (zero being ineffective and 5 being highly effective) on how well they work.

Set a goal to replace some extrinsic motivation methods with techniques that foster intrinsic motivation.

Record your observations here:

Putting it into practice

Administrators

Spend the next week or so observing your staff. Is there a social hierarchy among your staff members? Is there a clique group that goes beyond enjoying each other's company to treating people outside their group differently? Here are some things to watch for:

1. Pay attention to how teachers discipline in their classrooms. If teachers discipline without empathy, they may be using power to control their children. This would be a form of bullying.
2. Do your teachers all understand and take responsibility for how their brand of discipline affects their students? Just as popular children often feel their victims deserve what they get and deny that their actions hurt others some teachers have difficulty seeing things from a student's point of view.
3. If teachers complain extensively about a student and dismiss this student in front of the class, this can easily set up this student to be part of the rejected group and to suffer bullying from other students.

Assessing learning with follow-up discussion

These questions can be used for a follow-up discussion after teachers have completed classroom observations:

1. Did the level of hope improve in your classroom? If so, give an example.
2. What changes did you make that encouraged this improvement in hope?
3. How can the school help the children who do not have a sense of hope?
4. Does your attitude as a teacher affect the hopefulness of your class? If so, how?
5. What does it mean for our children to be salt and light in a dark and wasting world?
6. In light of the idea that children who are hopeful tend to do better at tasks, how can you use this to prepare your students for achievement tests or for their next year in school?