

## **Student Motivation in India: An International Research Reflection**

As a teacher in a small, rural American school, the most common challenge I face on a day to day basis is a lack of student motivation. As each year goes by, this challenge only seems to grow exponentially and my interventions seem to fall flat with many of my students. I could not help but wonder if other teachers around the world also face this issue. While in India for my international field experience, I planned to investigate whether or not Indian teachers also face this challenge and what they are doing to combat the issue. However, once in country, I realized that this was not a common problem for my Indian colleagues, so I then set out to discover why this issue didn't seem to be so prevalent.

Based upon my observations and interactions while in Bengaluru, Wandoor, and Delhi, I feel that there are two key reasons why Indian students are more motivated to work hard and be successful at school. The first reason is that culturally more value is placed upon education and being successful in school. Almost all Indians I met expressed that education was a way to better yourself, your family, and your life. It was very obvious that they understood that if they wanted to be successful and to have a comfortable life, working hard to educate yourself was the best way to obtain those things.

Here in the US, when I ask my students what they want to be when they grow up, I often hear that they want to be a professional athlete or famous in some way. Most Indian students had a much different answer; the majority wanted to be doctors or engineers of some kind. While both of these goals might be unrealistic for every student, there is an intrinsic difference of values being expressed in these lofty dreams. My American students have dreams that focus on fame and easy wealth for themselves, while their Indian counterparts' dreams require hard work and sacrifice to achieve something that will give back to the world around them. The Indian students have been brought up in a culture that understands that hard work and education will improve their lives and the lives of those around them, where my American students live in a culture which, for the most part, places more value on money and fame.

The other, not so obvious reason why I believe student motivation is not a problem in Indian schools is because of their family structure. In India, families are very connected; extended families often live together and spend a lot of time together. Additionally divorce rates are very low in India, only 1.1% as compared with 50% in the United States. This provides students with a solid support system, something many of our students are lacking. Even if their parents are busy working, Indian students have grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other family who are actively involved in their lives.

For example, my host teacher, Riyas, credits his uncle as being a huge influence and source of support in his education and in helping him find his wife. The husband of Ruxana, another teacher I met, works away from home most of the time, but as their family lives with some of their extended family, her children have more adult support than just their mother to rely upon when their father is away working. Many of my students live in single parent homes because of divorce, and I do not have any who live with grandparents, aunts, or uncles in addition to their own parents. Though some might have extended family that provides regular support, this is more the exception than the rule. This lack of support means less encouragement, guidance, and help as these children develop into young adults.

Another factor in their family structure is the importance placed upon family in Indian culture. To most Indians it is very important to bring honor and respect to your family. One way to do this is to succeed in school so that you can go on to become a successful adult. While many American parents might be upset, angry, or disappointed in their children if they do poorly in school, there is not the sense that you are bringing shame to your family by doing so. In India, if you accomplish something great, your whole family shares in the joy, honor, and pride of your accomplishment in a way that is much more meaningful and much more deeply felt than here in the US. The family of my host teacher, Riyas, all received special attention and gained respect because Riyas was chosen to host three American teachers - they all shared in his honor and accomplishment because of his hard work.

Additionally, in India it is important to be able to help provide for your family, including your parents and sometimes extended family as you grow older. By getting an education and becoming successful, you are better able to do this. Oftentimes, this includes a lot of hard work, dedication, and personal sacrifice. Yasir, another teacher I met in Wandoor, is very interested in applying for the International Leaders in Education Program, which would include a five month fellowship in the United States. However, his elderly parents are in poor health and his brothers are all currently working abroad, so it is his responsibility to care for his parents at this time. This sense of obligation to family seems to run deep in Indian culture.

While I cannot change the value placed upon education or family here in the United States, and while I cannot fix the problem of broken families or lack of familial support, I still feel there are ways that I can use what I have learned to increase student motivation in my own classroom and school. The first way that I can do this is to educate my students about the power of education to change their lives. While I might not be able to change our whole culture's views on the value of education, maybe I can begin to change it for some of my students. Additionally, I can work with my colleagues and my administration to create a

family atmosphere at school. I can work to make them feel that they have encouragement, guidance, and support from me and from our staff, even if they don't at home. We can help them to develop pride in the accomplishments of our school family and hopefully want to contribute to those accomplishments themselves. I understand that it might be a slow progress, but with hard work and dedication, I believe that I can make an impact and improve the motivation levels of my students here in the United States.