

Academic Counseling

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SCN605: School Counseling Internship I

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May 3, 2023

While there are a fair number of students self-motivated and expecting the best out of themselves with every academic activity, there are many who lack this motivation and focus. Not only are we needing to reach all students due to our schools being evaluated on student outcomes that focus on academic performance and graduation rates, we also have the ethical and moral responsibilities of helping all students find academic success. No matter what background students come to us with, their internal motivation is key to their academic performance (Owoseni et. al., 2020). With every child being different, however, the motivation for each individual is found to be unique. As school counselors, it is important to find each student's personal motivation and help them understand how their academic performance will help them reach future goals, thus motivating them to do their best.

One thing I have noticed numerous times is her ability to get students excited when earlier in the day they felt apathetic. Many times a student walks in to her office, knowing they are there due to low grades in one or multiple classes, only to find themselves getting animated as they talk about their plans after high school. Her open communication and her genuineness in caring is obvious with the students, and they open up to her. The power of relationships is clear, and the use of motivational interviewing can help to change their viewpoints (Miller, 2017). It is after they have the chance to tell her of their goals and motivations in life that she then relates it back to the classes and academics. By the time they leave, they are almost always willing to admit that a high school diploma will help them reach the next step (and yes, that eleventh grade English research paper is still going to be useful and needed). Helping them see the big picture and not just the moment allows them to find motivation to go on. Also not being judged based off of whether they plan on pursuing higher education after high school and still feeling valued allows them to stay motivated.

I follow the same strategy with students, working hard to keep my opinions to myself but instead celebrating and getting excited with their thoughts and dreams. My end goal with such motivational interviewing is to help them understand the importance of a diploma. With some

students this is looking at the difference in salaries they can expect as a dropout versus a high school graduate. With others, it is looking at careers they are considering and seeing the educational expectations. In all instances, it needs to be clear that their hopes are possible and that school performance can make a lot of things easier.

I also work on informally incorporating some Satir techniques and the Change Process Model, knowing that students need to internally believe in their self-worth and importance (Wretman, 2016). It cannot be simply me believing in them to motivate them; by believing in themselves, internal motivation will rise. Helping them think about future possibilities and understand that they have every right to dream big (even if parents are expecting them to stay local and continue like generations before them) is a technique that can help make positive, motivational changes that last beyond the school years.

These past few weeks I have also been working with high schoolers with their forecasting for the next school year. Trying to meet with as many students as possible to individually look over their transcripts, discuss math and English teacher recommendations for the next school year, hear their future plans and figure out how the next school year can be a stepping stone towards these goals has been fun, but has also made it quite clear that every student is unique. Being able to allow students some say in their academics can help with keeping them motivated and engaged.

In the end, by keeping students motivated, schools can expect higher academic performance and more buy-in from the students. By having school counselors help support all students in this area, from the high performers to the more apathetic crowd, they can expect the data points the state looks at to be high as well as the actual lives of the students once they exit our school buildings for the last time.

References

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