



12th Annual

Thinking & Learning

Conference



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Monday 25 May


Motivating Underachievers

Session 2

MELBOURNE



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Carolyn (EdD) is an internationally known speaker and consultant who has worked in the field of education and training for over 30 years. She currently teaches courses in gifted education and does workshops for schools on a wide variety of topics. Carolyn has been adjunct professor at several universities and worked all over the world in places like Bermuda, Ecuador and China.



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Motivating Underachievers

Presented by Carolyn Coil

at the Hawker Brownlow Teaching and Learning Conference

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Four Types

Brent – *March to the beat of my own drummer*

Joanna – *Female at adolescence (or earlier)*

Leo – *Problems and concerns outside of school*

Paul – *Class clown*

Definitions

- ▶ *Underachievement can be defined as a discrepancy between the child's school performance and some index of his or her actual ability. Ability may be measured by test scores or even by observing the child at home or at school. (Rimm)*
- ▶ *When a child with a high IQ has low grades or test scores in school. (Ziv)*
- ▶ *An underachiever is any student who is not working up to his or her potential. This student often sees or hears "YOU CAN DO BETTER", but for a variety of reasons continues to do less than he or she is capable of doing. (Coil)*

Characteristics/Causes of Underachievement

Behaviour:

- Socially immature
- No goals or future orientation
- Lack motivation for schoolwork
- Negative peer pressure
- Low self-esteem/self-confidence

Sex:

- Majority are males
- Females upon adolescence

Family:

- Family instability/problems
- Not firm; child can manipulate
- Education not a priority
- Too much pressure: "Counteridentification"
- Not guiding child toward both independence & responsibility

School:

- Lack of variety in teaching styles
- Impossible standards or low expectations
- No patience with difficult/creative/divergent questions
- Overly helpful teachers or strict/repressive/inflexible teachers
- Inflexible curriculum

Student:

- Fear of failure
- Academic holes
- No study skills
- Lack of organisation, time management and planning skills

Society:

- Little respect for teachers and education
- Pop culture glorifies instant success and gratification
- Distractions from all forms of technology
- Connections between school and future success not obvious

10 Strategies for Motivating Underachievers

1. Help students set realistic goals and ways to achieve these goals. *These do not need to be the same for each student you teach.* Give prompt feedback in assessing progress toward individual goals. Provide the student with a sense of progress, focusing on growth and not on how far behind he or she is compared with other students.
2. Pair achieving students with underachievers who have the same interests or abilities.
3. Observe your students' behaviour under various conditions, making note of behaviour patterns you might observe. Point out habitual behaviours that lead to poor school performance and help each student figure out ways to break such habits.
4. Connect learning at school to future success outside of school. Ask former students to come and talk to your underachievers and give examples of why learning in school is important. Ask them to explain that success isn't always instant.
5. Make sure self-management skills (such as taking responsibility for one's own actions) are taught and targeted as much as academic skills. Pair independence with responsibility. (See attached handout)
6. Discuss your underachievers' fear of failure. Do the "Worst Case Scenario" activity as a way of starting this discussion. (See attached handout)
7. Be intentional about teaching study skills, organisational skills and time management skills.
8. Utilise new technologies and show ways these can lead to school achievement rather than distract from it. They generally provide built in motivation. Let your "digital natives" teach you!
9. Connect with parents of underachievers in any way you can. This includes face-to-face meetings, phone calls, email, texting, messaging on social media and any other means available to you. Make sure to send positive messages about the child as well as negative ones.
10. Differentiate your instruction to meet individual student needs whenever possible. Be aware of differences in learning styles, pace of learning, student interests and student readiness.

From a workshop by Carolyn Coil www.carolyncoil.com

Self-confidence**Independence and responsibility**

Some students think the best way to be an achiever is to have their parents take on all of the responsibility for them. For example, if you need a book for tonight's homework and left it at school, you may think it is up to your mum to hop in the car and get it. Otherwise, you won't finish your homework. Or perhaps you leave your lunch money on the kitchen table. The first thing you think of when you get to school is calling your dad to bring it to you.

While the 'parents-to-the-rescue' syndrome can bail you out of a short-term problem, it is not a very good strategy for a long-term solution. Many students use their parents in this way all through school and then are surprised when they get to university or start their first job that there is no one there to take the responsibility for them.

Responsibility and independence go hand-in-hand. The more independence you have, the more responsibility should also be yours. Finding ways to be both independent and responsible is one of the best strategies for increasing your self-confidence as you become an achiever.

Think about it!

List the areas in your life where you have lots of independence



List the areas in your life where you take on lots of responsibility.

In which areas of your life are your parents still coming to the rescue for you?

List ways you could take on both more independence and more responsibility in these areas.

Self-confidence

Failure

It's written in big, bold letters so you wouldn't miss it. It's something we'd all like to avoid thinking about, but it's a fact of everyone's life. It may sound strange, but every successful person has been a failure at some point their life. No one is a winner every time. For example, Michael Jordan failed to make his school basketball team! There are kids (and adults, too) who never try to do anything because they are so afraid they might not do it right. They have a fear of failure.

A famous scientist and author Dr Isaac Asimov once said, '**Some things are worth a reasonable amount of hot water.**' In other words, you are not going to succeed and make everyone happy every time. You might get into 'hot water' some of the time. You might make mistakes along the way. That's OK!

Any attempt to do something, even if it doesn't work out the way you'd hoped, is a victory... if you have the self-confidence to make the attempt. In fact, the worst failure in life is not to have tried at all.

Maybe you've thought of some things you'd like to try. Maybe you have some goals you think you can reach someday, but you are really hesitant to work on them. You may think you are not good enough or smart enough or talented enough to do them.

In the next chapter, you are going to think about setting some goals. Don't limit yourself and your attempts because you are afraid you might fail! If you do fail, **learn** from the experience and move on. That's what makes a successful person.

Think about it!



Now think about your fear of failure. What is one thing you would like to do that you have never done?

What are you afraid will happen if you try it and don't succeed?

Then what would happen?

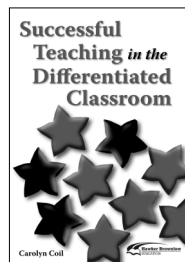
Then what would you do?

What is the worst thing that could happen?

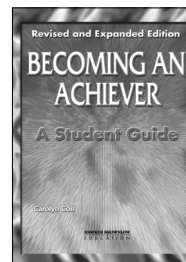


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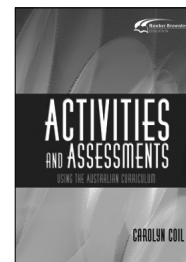
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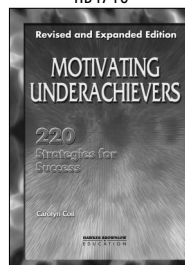
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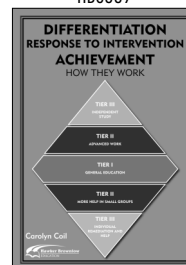
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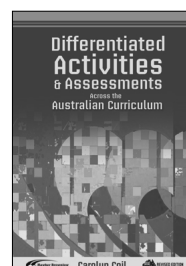
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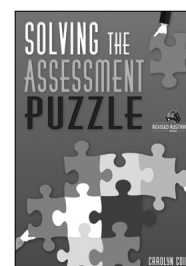
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