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How Can We Improve Students' Motivation to Learn?

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There has been a lot of news reports lately about how students' test scores in the United States are not meeting the overall performance level of their international peers. In the past year, Australia, Britain, China and South Korea have all launched national initiatives for educational improvements, while we continue to fall behind them in literacy, technology and thinking skills. With the resources and funding that the United States has available, why do we continue to find ourselves taking a back seat in global education? I realize solving the education crisis is complex, but one area I feel is overlooked is the overall attitude and culture of students in the United States today. Let me explain.

The Value of Education Around the World

People around the world have different philosophies about the necessity and value of education for success in life. Let's look at values around the globe to those right in our own country with this simple question: How do countries value education?

Australia

The culture of Australia is rooted in a "fair go" mentality, which ensures that everyone, including the underdog, has an equal opportunity in life. The way this relates to education is that Australia is willing to ensure that everyone has the same access to educational advancement. This is evident in its effort "to guarantee Internet access, teacher training and instructional materials" to every school throughout the country."

Britain

The United Kingdom on the whole has prided its highly esteemed private schools and educational scholars for hundreds of years. With world-renowned institutions in Oxford and Cambridge, coupled with the prestige of the Scottish public school systems, the culture in this part of the world places a high value on its education.

China

Chinese students endure a great deal of pressure to excel in school. This culture values education as a building block to success for the benefit of society. When we look at China's economic rise in recent history, it's clear that its Ministry of Education played a part.

France

Education in France is deeply embedded in its culture. The French stress that each student must contribute to society as a whole rather than support the pursuits of the individual. Students in this country would not dare to turn in homework late or skip class. This could be attributed to its highly centralized education system that requires students to earn their higher education through performance.

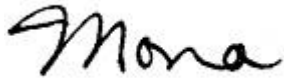
South Korea

The educational environment in South Korea is highly competitive. Students in this country believe that their admission into a prestigious university determines their life success.

The Value of Education in the United States

When we raise the question in the United States, how do students value education compared to our global competitors? Maybe our inability to stay on top in education doesn't stem solely from our system, resources, funding or initiatives, but rather how as a country we value education. We can better support teachers by instilling students with a greater drive to learn and to work hard to succeed. I feel that when students take personal responsibility for their learning they have a greater chance at success.

When we shine the light on students, I think it's important to raise a few questions. How do we motivate students to respect their education, meet a higher standard and succeed in our school systems? What do you think?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mona". The script is fluid and cursive, with the 'M' and 'a' being particularly prominent.

Mona Westhaver
President and Co-founder, Inspiration Software

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