

Timmy's Motivational Assessment  
By Amber Miller

Timmy is the 7 year old boy that I am studying for my motivational case. He is a child who is easily distracted, consciously and unconsciously blurts things out randomly, and touches other students just to annoy the teacher. He is also a student that never reads for leisure, gives me one sentence stories in his writing and says he doesn't know how to read every day, yet is reading just below grade level according to previous running records. He, like many other boys his age seems highly unmotivated in terms of reading and writing, as he prefers playing with blocks in math, or watching things grow in science.

For the past two weeks I have been trying to get my students acclimated into writing every day, as I have been introducing the writer's workshop. They have to get used to a sustained period of time where they aren't talking to the teacher, and are spending quality time engaging in the writing process. So just last week I read a story titled "The Sneeches," by Dr. Seuss to the children, and just like Dr. Seuss created the Sneeches to introduce a problem we also created our own original creatures to write stories about. Timmy used colorful construction paper to make a creature named "Booga Booga Tim," as he diligently colored in the lines, and outlined the sections of the creature with deep tones of red and green. He was so meticulous about his work, and he spent so much time on it, yet when it came to actually working on a storyline behind this creature he was left with a blank. All he wanted to do was say he loved the creature and it loved him. After walking around and helping all the other children in the room I would come over to him or look over at him and he would be goofing around talking to the boy next to him and across from him. Not only was he trying to escape his own work, but he was prohibiting other children from doing theirs, when at first they were seemingly motivated to engage in the activity.

The room we were located in was a room clear of clutter, clear of too many decorations and distractions, and clearly labeled with instructions for what to do “when we are writing,” and what to do “when we are done.” He was grouped with three other students of similar interests with him, and within proximity of two desktop computers located in the corner of our room. The room had many tools for writing, many tangible manipulatives to use when working with math problems, and a diverse genre of books to choose from in the colorful library. Because the room was so accessible to him he took part in every portion of the room when I wasn’t looking. As I sat down to talk with other students he would be over by the computers looking to see what he could get into. He would be playing with the animal rubber bands in his desk, and touching the little boy right next to him. All the things he wasn’t supposed to be doing, he was actually doing, in order to escape doing the assigned writing everyone else was doing.

Originally I had thought creating the creatures and stories about them would be an activity that Timmy could find his niche for writing in. I thought I was deliberate about the instructions for the assignment, and the purpose behind why the students were even doing the assignment to begin with. Every time I saw Timmy doing what he was supposed to be doing I would give him verbal praise in front of the whole class. I would have him go put marbles in the jar, or put an X on the hundreds chart, all positive incentives to do his job. Yet that wasn’t enough. It came to the point where I had to guarantee him extra computer time if he could perform his job. The kids in my class loved computer time, so I told him that he had earned extra computer time, but in order to keep it he had to do the best job he could do with his writing. I also gave tangible rewards, like tootsie rolls at the end of the day for getting all the marbles in the jar. It seemed as if the intrinsic motivation to do well for himself wasn’t working, yet the physical extrinsic rewards that were promised to him did the trick, even if temporary. But, by far the computer time was what motivated him to do his job every time, as he couldn’t wait to get on the computer, show someone

else how to get on the computer, and play educational games, that he didn't even know were educational.

In terms of the TARGET method in reference to the **Task** all the students were exposed to the same material, which was generated by the Dr. Seuss book, but what the students choose to create was entirely up to them. Their perception, their imagination allowed for them to create their own creature, and not only create their own creature but name it. I stressed to students that they could write about anything, but perhaps I shouldn't have done that because when he wrote about how he loved the creature that was anything. Yet my original thought was that they could write a story about anything, yet Timmy was not clear on what a story actually looked like. In terms of the authority I know see that I determined what was acceptable and what was not. This early in the writing process if I expect for him to write a story, I need to first show them what a story is, while simultaneously showing him what a story is not. Yet I still allowed for him to create his own authority by allowing for his creature to look like anything he imagined it to look like. In terms of recognition I openly addressed his good work in front of the class, but perhaps I should have given students an open forum for them to share that work, that way ideas could have been elicited while also positively rewarding the children. I didn't just recognize the students who were always doing their job, but I took most of my time to recognize the students that didn't always do their job, like Timmy. Looking back on how I grouped the students the activity started out as an individual yet collaborative working environment. Though they were asked to create their own creature they could still seek out their peers for ideas. It wasn't until they got to the writing part that I deemed it be quiet time for students trying to work, and ironically that was when Timmy started acting up. I evaluated the students not in the form of letter grades, but rather feedback. Each child is different and in terms of writing you can't expect to get the same product and label it equally as good or equally as bad. Writing is subjective, so I framed my feedback on what the students did good on

and then offered one or two suggestions for them to work on. In terms of time the students all had the same forty minute block to complete their writing. What I should have done was stress that it was a draft and that if they wanted to go back to that writing and extend it then they would have an opportunity to do so later on.

All in all the ways in which I motivated Timmy were not concepts of motivation that will continue to go along with him as he continues to age. He will not always be motivated and encouraged with candy or computer time, although computer time is a better concept of a reward than candy because I can frame it around educational values. But he has to be intrinsically motivated in some way; he needs to value learning for the sake of learning and not just to get something in return.