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# Motivating students – carrot or stick?

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**ABSTRACT:** Motivating students who are progressing through the Diploma in Veterinary Nursing – both within the practice and the further/higher education setting – can be challenging and rewarding. Students frequently become demotivated during the learning process; but what is motivation, and is it an instinct or a learned behaviour?

Understanding and utilising the different learning styles of students has a positive impact on their motivation. By exploring different approaches to teaching we can encourage students to enjoy the learning process, to participate actively in developing their own learning agreement or plan, and this can ultimately result in the student developing a habit of lifelong learning and professional development.

### Motivation

According to the definition given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2012), 'Motivation is the general desire or willingness of someone to do something'.<sup>1</sup> Motivation is a powerful tool and it drives an individual throughout everyday life; whether it is for personal or professional achievements.

What motivates an individual? Some would say money, or success, or passion, or fear of failure? Motivation is a mixture of complex desires that differs between individuals. A person may want to achieve for the benefits conveyed above or for the appreciation of others. Additionally the

individual may enjoy fulfilling their potential, gaining knowledge and being involved in teamwork.

As students are all individuals, there are a number of different factors that motivate them, and a single motivating technique will not work for all.

### Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Motivation can be described as being either intrinsic or extrinsic to the individual.

Intrinsic motivation arises from a desire to learn a topic by virtue of its inherent interest, for self-fulfilment, enjoyment and to achieve a mastery of the subject. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation expresses a need to perform and succeed for the sake of accomplishing a specific result or outcome.

Students who are very grade-oriented are extrinsically motivated, whereas students who seem truly to embrace their work and take a genuine interest in the subject are intrinsically motivated. Motivation to select veterinary nursing as a career is guided by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

The theorist Abraham Maslow (1971) provides a good example of intrinsic motivation.<sup>2</sup> His Hierarchy of Needs helps to explain how these needs motivate us. To achieve the student's full potential

Figure 1: Factors in the provision of a favourable learning environment

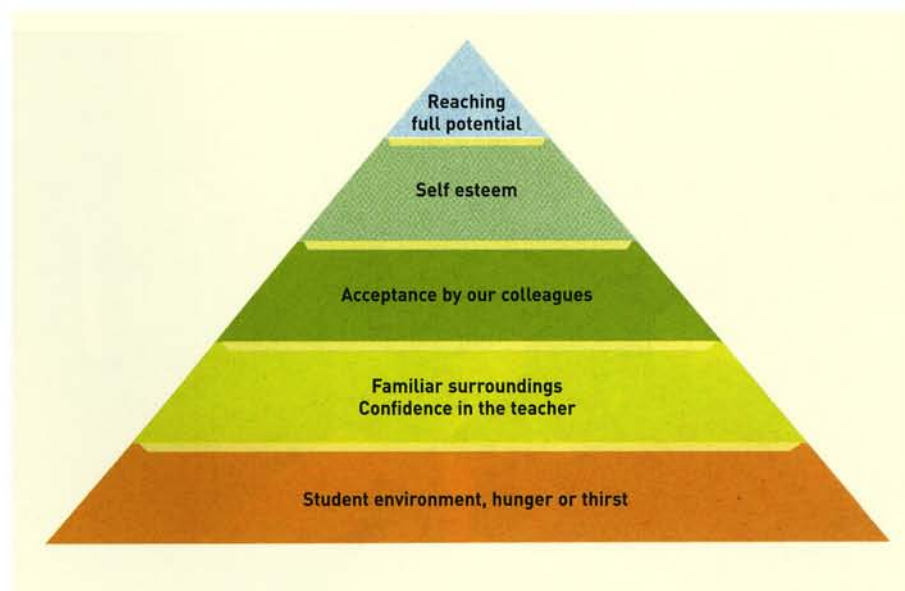
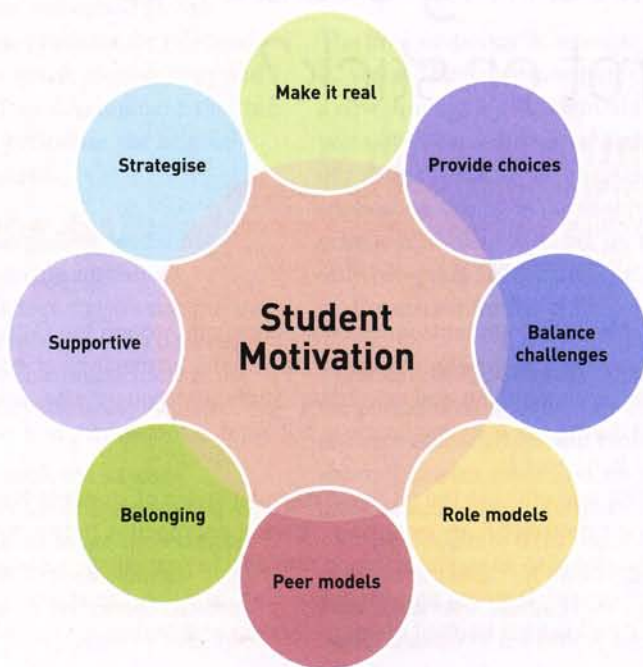


Figure 2: Key factors affecting student motivation



he or she must develop self-esteem, and there must be mutual respect between student and teacher/clinical coach.

Students also need social acceptance within the context of their workplace or college – in other words to feel that they belong. They need to feel safe, to have familiar surroundings, to know their colleagues and to have confidence in their teacher/coach.

Last, the environment must be suitable for learning – that is it must be at the right temperature, quiet and enable frequent breaks to eat and drink (Figure 1).

**Increasing a student's motivation to learn**

There are numerous approaches to increasing the motivation for learning. These are summarised in Figure 2.

**Make it real**

In order to increase the student's intrinsic motivation, provide 'real-life' examples of what is written in books or journals. This can make an academic topic more interesting and relevant to working life (Figure 3).

**Provide choices**

Student motivation will increase when he or she feels some sense of autonomy in the learning process; that motivation

declines when students have 'no voice' in the learning structure.

Providing options can be as simple as letting students pick the section of learning they want to complete (within reason). Or they can determine their own grading scale and how they felt about their progress over the last week/month.

**Balance challenges**

Students perform best when the level of

difficulty is slightly above their current ability level. If the task is too easy, it invites boredom and may communicate a message of low expectations.

**Use role and peer models**

If students can identify with role models, they may be more likely to see the relevance in the subject matter. In some cases, the tutor will provide a role model; but differences in gender, age and social circles will act as barriers for some students.

However, there are many potential role models, including colleagues or fellow students. The fact that students can learn by watching a peer succeed at a task is often overlooked.

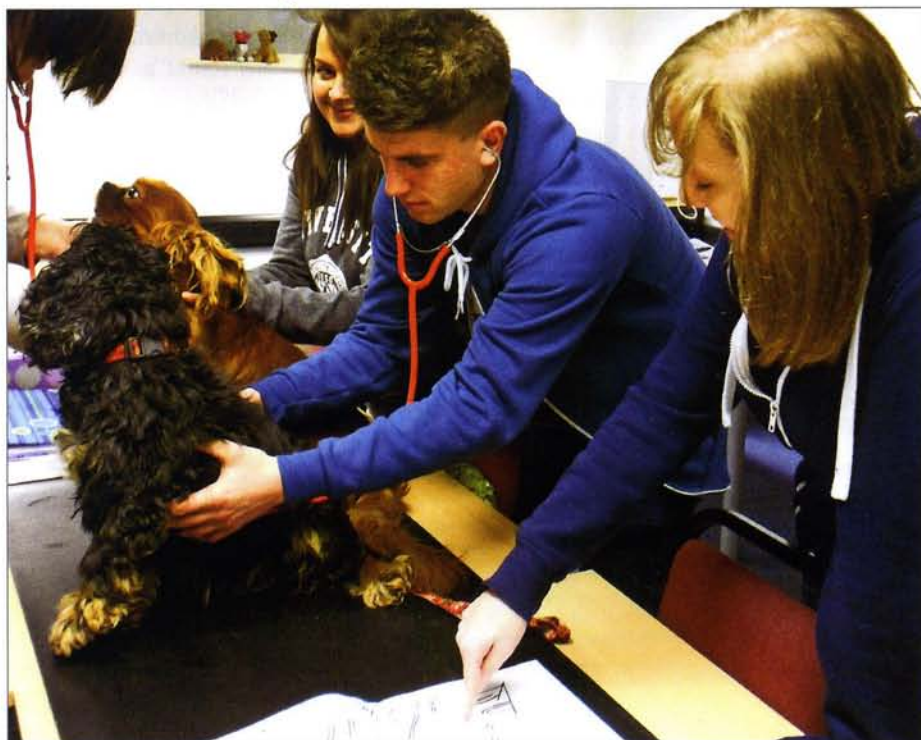
**Establish a sense of belonging**

People have a fundamental need to feel connected or related to other people. According to students, their sense of belonging is fostered by a tutor/coach who demonstrates warmth and openness, encourages student participation, is enthusiastic, friendly, helpful and organised.

**Be supportive and use strategies**

Become supportive and use strategies to help support struggling students. A supportive teaching/coaching style that allows for student autonomy can foster increased student interest, enjoyment, engagement and performance. Supportive

Figure 3: Turning teaching about the chambers of the heart into a 'real' situation in order to enhance learning



teacher behaviours include listening, giving hints and encouragement, being responsive to student questions and showing empathy for students.

If a student is under-achieving, consider how you are teaching a skill. Is there a better approach that would be more appropriate for that particular student's learning style?

### Learning styles

There are differences in motivation and personality between individuals, but there are also differences in their preferred way of learning or processing information. A good coach/tutor must be adaptable to meet the diverse range of age groups and backgrounds of veterinary nursing students.

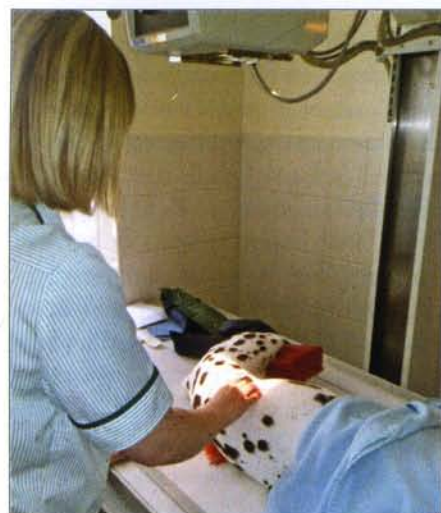
There are many different ways of describing learning styles. A simple one to use is the 'VAK' model as described by Petty (2004).<sup>3</sup> This model splits the learners up into visual, auditory or kinaesthetic/tactile learners.

### Visual-biased learners

Visual learners have a preference for seeing. These learners will benefit from thinking in pictures, so use visual aids such as overhead slides/videos, diagrams or hand-outs. Encourage the student to try and transform lists of text to a more memorable diagram, flash cards or table.

Within the classroom, these students often work better if they sit in the same place/same table every time because this increases focus as they will have a tendency to become visually fatigued and overloaded.

■ **Figure 4:** A kinaesthetic 'classroom' learning approach (hence no lead apron) reinforces an understanding of patient positioning for radiography



### Auditory biased learners

Auditory learners learn most easily through listening – by means of lectures, discussions, tapes, etc. Encourage the student to ask questions both in the workplace and in class. Studying is best achieved by either recording a lecture or reading notes out aloud.

### Kinaesthetic-biased learners

Tactile/kinaesthetic learners prefer to learn via experience, moving, touching and doing – using active exploration of the subject. The kinaesthetic learner's short- and long-term memory are strengthened by use of their body. For example, turning the X-ray tube head into a movable model can enhance understanding of that structure (Figure 4).

VAK and other learning-style questionnaires are available to download from the internet and it can be useful to use these to ascertain each student's learning style at the start of their study. This can help you break down a particular task and to match teaching style to the student's preferred learning style.

It is also helpful for you as a tutor/clinical coach to know what learning style you have.

### Summary

Motivation is an important factor in the learning process. However, it is not as simple as offering a big reward or threatening the student. Students need to be encouraged to be self-directing learners and to take responsibility for their own learning.

Our aim as clinical coaches or tutors is to increase the student's motivation to learn and be empathetic and supportive throughout that process. ■

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### Further reading

- HERRMAN, J. W. (2008) *Creative Teaching Strategies for the Nurse Educator*. F. A. Davies Company, Philadelphia.
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## NEWS REVIEW

by Jean Turner

### University seeks pet dogs for 'play date' sessions

The University of Lincoln is seeking dogs for a study that aims to identify whether a dog's cultural identity impacts its behaviour, as it does with humans.

The university is appealing for owners to bring their dogs along for 'play date' sessions, which will compare and contrast the dogs' reactions to new, mentally challenging experiences. The researchers are seeking medium-large sized pure-breed dogs, such as Border collies, Labrador retrievers, Cocker spaniels and Huskies. The dogs must be at least one year old and be kept mainly as indoor pets. They must also have the potential to be motivated to work for food.

Sessions will take place between 10th January - 25th March 2013, at the University's Riseholme campus. For further information, contact Dóra Szabó at [szaboodoora@gmail.com](mailto:szaboodoora@gmail.com) or call 01522 886244. ■

### Manual of exotic pet and wildlife nursing

The number of exotic and wildlife cases presented at the veterinary practice has increased significantly during the past 10 years, with increasing expectations regarding level of care. The nursing requirements of these less familiar species are significantly different from those of dogs and cats.

The BSAVA Manual of Exotic Pet and Wildlife Nursing, edited by Molly Varga, Rachel Lumbis and Lucy Gott, provides veterinary nurses with a greater understanding of these requirements, enabling them to modify and apply their skills to these cases.

A variety of useful tools, including husbandry questionnaires, anaesthesia record forms and a collection of client handouts are also included. Additional material in the form of client handouts is available online to readers.

The BSAVA Manual of Exotic Pet and Wildlife Nursing was published in October 2012, and has 312 pages. ISBN 978 1 905319 35 0. £68 (£45 to BSAVA members). ■