Rashaki Maskani Perspective

Positive Math Perspective: The Elimination of Negativity

Positive thoughts render successful outcomes; therefore, negative thoughts render negative outcomes. When a task is given to a person, how it's accepted mentally affects if it will be carried out or not. If the task is viewed as a challenge, the mental energy creates desire to accomplish versus failure. Consequently, when a person has no desire to accept the task or has insufficient skills, negative energy creates a mental block or a search for excuses to not complete or attempt the given task. This premise draws from seventeen years in education and observing student behavior towards learning mathematics.

Math is viewed by many as a complicated school subject. Since 1996, I have taught Algebra at the Middle and High School levels. The grade rate was forty percent "C" grade and above until 2010, and currently, about fifty percent, a slight increase. Contemplating the reason why the success rate is low, I have noticed the contributing factor is how students view math.

In general there are many variables that lead to school achievement, but math has a stigma of negativity that outweighs most other school subjects. When discussing issues in math department meetings, one hundred percent of the teachers agree with the statement, "Student success begins at home!" This statement equates to the history of the student. Naturally if the student come from what I call, "a culture of education" at home, in which education is a priority, school success is imminent. For many students in Urban or Inner-City environments, survival is a priority over school achievement. However, for many math students the negative parent or guardian can transfer their energies to the student. Key phrases parents or guardians can use to mentally damage a student in math are; "I hate math", "I was never good at math", or "You are probably like me, I wasn't good at math either". There are many phrases similar to these, and if a child constantly hears these comments about math, it builds a negative perspective. These perspectives can create defense mechanisms which replaces the desire to learn math. Students began to conjure thoughts of why they can't do math rather than using that energy to actually learn what is being taught.

For many students who struggle in math, it is usually related to the four basic operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. These are the pillars of math success, which has to be memorized. If the student can access these facts mentally at a sufficient rate, it reduces learning tension. When a student is not able to recall basic skill facts, they become frustrated. Students began to lose interest and act disruptive in class.

Math experience can play a major role in whether or not a student is successful in the subject. Students encounter many teachers during their educational lives. These teachers can have a great impact on student achievement. Students at a very young age have critical learning periods that affect their ability to advance to higher levels of math. During this period when the student is learning basic skills, positive experiences lead to future success. Reinforcement from home during this period can also contribute to success. Now if a student has a negative experience during this critical period, it can psychologically damage his or her learning. Because

of this, the student may develop many negative tendencies. The student may withdraw or disrupt a class lesson. When the teacher asks a question, the student will often get nervous and say abruptly, “I don’t know”. Some students will try to entertain the class to detract from the lesson to cover up their deficiencies. Peer embarrassment can also contribute to student withdrawal. Students may not want to participate because they have a fear of being incorrect in the presence of their classmates. Due to today’s high use of technology, which allows the requisition of information to be instantaneous, students are accustomed to receiving the information faster. This causes many students to become impatient when learning new information. They expect to learn the tasks faster, and when the information that is being taught requires extended time, it causes tension. The above-mentioned behaviors and thoughts students develop inevitably lead to student failure. If these behaviors persist year after year, a comfort level of failure develops.

Eliminating Negativity

Teaching and learning in general are a process. When parents and guardians raise their children to perform basic functions in the home, it takes years for most children to learn correctly. Parents and guardians must show, model, and vocally give directions numerous times for children to accomplish a task. Some tasks may take years for a child to actually accomplish it successfully. When teachers teach, they attempt to access prior knowledge to engage students initially. They then introduce, model, and create activities for student reinforcement so they can retain the information. During these learning processes, positive and negative tendencies are developed. When students succeed, they look forward to the next lesson. When they do not succeed, many negative tendencies are developed. Some of the tendencies are withdrawal, lack of interest, disruption, and negative verbal responses during lessons.

There are some tactics to eliminate student negativity. The first thing to do is to inform the student that they can accomplish learning any task. When students attend the class the first week of school, create activities that will ease their tension during orientation (fun or interesting icebreakers). In teaching pedagogy, this is known as “lowering the affective filter”. Most students who struggle in math enter the class with fear and carry negative tendencies. If teachers initially make the students feel comfortable, it eases their fear. The negativity aspect of the students will take “repetitive positive psychological reinforcement vocabulary” to begin to eliminate the characteristics. Repetitive positive psychological reinforcement vocabulary is changing words that carry a negative tone to words that carry a positive tone. Every time the student uses a negative word, correct them with a positive word immediately, and make sure they repeat the positive word. Sometimes, go as far as making them say the positive word in a complete sentence.

Most common negative words and phrases that are used in math and other subjects during lessons are: “hard”, “difficult”, I don’t know,” too much”, and “I’ll try”. The words “hard” and “difficult” carry a negative tone when used. Students may think that the task is unattainable. These types of thoughts cause uncomfortable feelings towards the task, and students usually

“shut down” and give up, this is a form of escape. “Hard” and “difficult” should be replaced with the term, “challenging”. This term has a more competitive tone which places the student’s thoughts towards eventual conquest or accomplishment. The phrase “I don’t know” is used by students as an immediate escape route to avoid a teacher’s question or request during a lesson. This phrase is used by many students who do not care to think or participate in the learning process. When a student uses this phrase, explain to them that it is fine not to know at the exact time the answer to the question, but have them take a few seconds to think about what was asked. After they have thought about it, have them answer the question to the best of there ability. If the answer is incorrect, explain to the student that all incorrect responses can be corrected. Also, inform them that when they do not respond to a question, learning remains at the starting point. Consequently, when they do respond to question, learning is moving towards mastery of the subject content. This dialogue reduces tension and is in direct opposition to negativity. The phrase “too much”, suggest that a task is a great amount of work and doing less work is desired. This creates a negative environment that affects other students in the class. Immediately begin a dialogue with the student suggesting that, the amount of work will help you master the content that is being taught. This dialogue will replace the thought of the amount of work that’s being given. The phrase, “I’ll try” is not totally negative initially but can become an excuse for a student saying, “at least I tried”. This is an escape from thinking. This phrase can be used as an initial tool for students to open up to allow learning to occur. Upon recognizing that students are actually attempting to answer questions and participating in the learning process, began to replace the phrase with, “I am”, “I will”, “I can”, and “I’m going to”. These phrases give the students power and confidence. There are more words and phrases that can be changed from negative to positive connotations.

Parent Guide

Parent and Guardian involvement in the learning process for students is very critical. Teachers and parents can forge a bond to assist students with the education process. Parents must first release all negative aspects of their learning history, and only use it when trying to show students what not to do while they are learning. For example, a parent can say,” The reason I did not do well in math is because I didn’t study regularly”. Also say, “I’m going to assist you with your process of learning to make sure you succeed”. This will immediately show students support in the home. Parents must make a priority list with students. For example, upon arriving home, students must complete important tasks first then the least important last. Homework and chores first, then fun activities last. Parents who are not able to help with homework content can seek assistance from tutorial programs at community centers, afterschool programs, relatives and neighbors who are capable.

Beginning as young as four and five parents can drill basic math operation facts with their children. The goal is to memorize all single digit facts. Single digit addition, subtraction, multiplication and division mastery will allow a student to calculate all general math exercises. There are some activities that parents can use to build basic skills. 1). Repeated writing. Have students write skills that they do not know numerous times daily, and then test verbally or on

paper after about a week. Repeat weekly until learned. If this is done daily, the skill should be mastered within two to three weeks. 2). Flash Cards. Have students create flash cards, study, and then periodically test the students. Students creating the flash cards give them ownership in their learning of the skill. 3). Computer Programs and Games. Students enjoy technology; most of them have phones and computer access. There are many programs and games that involve basic math skills; encourage them to use technology for learning purposes. 4). Reward system. Parents can present students with incentives to look forward to for accomplishing a task. For example, if a student masters single digit multiplication fact, a parent can provide some type of reward.

In conclusion, all humans are born with a will to accomplish tasks. If we observe infants, they show a great desire to walk and talk like other people around them. They try and fail many times before they actually learn how to walk and talk, but they eventually accomplish the task. In education, students are able to learn any given task, but failure precedes success. Students must know that learning is a process, and if they are assured that it is not a problem if they don't know something at first, this will enable them to ease tension. When tension is minimal learning can occur more efficiently. Mathematics has been labeled by many as a difficult school subject. This gives math a negative identity, and students develop fear upon entering a classroom. To combat math negativity, teachers and parents can provide positive support to help students learn mathematics more effectively.