



A Gentle But Powerful Way To Increase Learning, Motivation, And Independence

So you teach this great lesson. Your students are really into it. They're **listening** and participating. Their eyes are bright and inquisitive. They pass all your checks for understanding with flying colors.

But as soon as you finish and give the signal for them to practice what they've learned independently, only a few get right to work.

Some students look around the room, unsure of how to begin. Some sit poised, pencil at the ready, but unmoving. Others don't think twice. As if on cue, their hands go up in the air. Other than a predictable few, most of your students seem unable or unwilling to dig into their work.

You set them up for success, take them right to the edge of learning . . . but there they stand, frozen.

So you do what you have to do. You bustle around the room from one student to the next, re-teaching what you taught to the entire class just minutes before. You **remind**. You review. You cajole, exhort, and praise the slightest headway.

You do for them what you *know* they can do for themselves. It's exhausting, but you do it lesson after lesson and day after day because it's

the only way you know how to get them to the finish line. It's the only way you know how to transfer their learning from concept to knowledge.

Yet still, progress is slow. While you're working with one student, several others sit idly by, just waiting for you. And because they're unfocused, behavior, too, suffers. It's a stressful way to teach, but what are you to do? If you don't help them, little or nothing will get done.

Well, not so fast.

Their problem, you see, isn't their inability. It's not motivation, at least not directly. If they can pass your checks for understanding, then you've provided everything they need to work independently. The problem is learned helplessness.

Many students have become so accustomed to receiving one-on-one support that they can no longer do for themselves. They've lost the spark of initiative. They've lost the pride of self-reliance. They've lost the thrill of the challenge, the perseverance of the will, and the self-starter quality they need to grow and mature as students.

Independence is a gift you give your students by gently withholding help for that which you know they can do themselves. You prepare them for success with spot-on instruction, to be sure. But then you fade into the background.

Now, you can't just turn your back and stop helping cold turkey.

Improving independence is something you must ease into through kindly encouragement. You'll still respond to hands in the air. You'll still

approach your students. But instead of kneeling down to help, you'll offer words of reassurance.

"You can do it. I believe in you."

"You don't need my help. I promise. Trust yourself."

"I have confidence in you."

"Don't think so much. Just begin. You can do this."

As the days and weeks go by and you fade further into the background, you'll notice far fewer hands in the air and far fewer students in genuine need of support. Their work will become more self-assured and competent. Learning, **motivation**, and independence will increase tenfold.

This doesn't mean that you'll never help individual students. As both you and they grow accustomed to true independent work, you'll be able to recognize when a student really does need assistance. But even then, you'll only offer enough help to get them moving.

Independent practice is critical to learning, and giving too much help is often more problematic than not giving enough. In time, your students will develop tenacious independence. Instead of glancing around the room lost and perplexed, they'll be empowered to attack their work with confidence.

After finishing up a lesson, you'll become a ghostly presence, neither ignoring nor helping, but just watching for signs of struggle, for signs a student is in need of a soft reminder or word of encouragement.

Your job is to provide world-class, high-interest lessons and all the instruction and support your students need to succeed.

But then they take it from there.