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Finding Graduation Success in Vocational Education

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**Abstract**

Rancho Cielo is a social and learning institution serving the disconnected and underserved youths situated in Monterey County who share the organization's vision for their success in the future. The organization is ensuring self-esteem and self-sufficiency for every young person. The students are currently facing learning barriers that have an affect on their performance. To solve this, the students were asked to complete a workshop and survey. The project's findings revealed that students enjoy their time when in Rancho Cielo and have managed to acquire valuable skills during their attendance. To address the lack of motivation among learners, Rancho Cielo should consider using the learning styles of the students for coming up with the curriculum of the future. At the same time, students should continue conducting an annual survey to identify the concerns of the students and problems within the agency.

*Keywords: Youths, Learning, Care, Success, Future.*

## **Agency & Communities Served**

Rancho Cielo is a non-profit organization based in Salinas, California that provides educational, vocational, and life-skill training to underserved youth and young adults. The agency serves underserved and at-risk youth living throughout Monterey County. The population they serve includes young people who come from low-income families, those who have faced challenges such as homelessness, foster care, and involvement in the juvenile justice system, and those who are seeking to improve their education and job prospects (Candid, 2020). Its mission is to “transform the lives of disenfranchised youth and empower them to become accountable, competent, productive and responsible citizens” (Rancho Cielo, n.d., para. 5). This vision aims to create a future in which all young people have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. To achieve this, the organization provides a range of services, including high school completion programs, job training and placement, life-skill development, and mentorship opportunities. The organization offers programs for culinary, construction, and auto and diesel repair. They also host events and dinners throughout, providing additional opportunities for young people to develop their skills and grow personally and professionally (Rancho Cielo, n.d.). These programs are designed to help young people overcome the challenges they face and achieve their goals, so that they can build bright futures for themselves and their communities.

## **Problem Model Background and Literature Review**

### **Problem Statement**

#### ***Lack of Motivation Among Learners***

Motivation is an essential factor influencing academic success. This is a specific lack of motivation among the students in the agency. Many students have said that they do not want to do the work. Due to this, the learners have been found to lack the self motivation to complete

their work without having to be encouraged by their caseworkers. Owens and Crohn's (1983) study found that low motivation among vocational school students can be caused by limited access to resources, financial aid, or quality teaching and a disconnect between the course curriculum and their chosen career paths. Such lack of drive may lead to poorer grades or even abandonment of studies. To improve the situation, schools must ensure adequate resources - financial support, competent tutoring, and courses relevant to future job needs-are made available to inspire these students' achievement aspirations. Ford (2013) states that an abundance of students are faced with academic motivation which is related to boredom, poor concentration rates, and learned helplessness. With sufficient encouragement and the necessary means, they are more likely to progress toward their goals successfully. These initiatives will, in turn, positively impact the overall performance of vocational school students. Therefore, educational institutions must take appropriate measures and ensure these students receive the necessary support to motivate them for their academic endeavors. A detailed version of the Problem model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Problem Model

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Learning Styles	Lack of motivation among learners	Longer rates of completion
Marginalized youth		Poor learning outcomes
Student-teacher relationships		

### **Contributing Factors**

#### *Learning styles*

Learning styles can either be aligned with what motivates learners more or what can become an obstacle if they don't fit within their chosen path. Research done by Mazuin Mat Halif et al. (2020) suggests that differences between learning styles have moderating effects on the relationship between motivations and engagement among postgraduate business management degree holders as well as undergraduate economics majors where those who preferred visual learning received higher grades compared to tactile learners while acknowledging extrinsic rewards over intrinsic ones was positively linked with decreased participation levels. A similar effect has been observed even at the pre-university level based on Bargmann's research from 2021 which showed how differentiating the approach to reach a broader array of learning styles was significantly associated with increased student motivation and career decidedness.

### ***Marginalized Youth***

Marginalized youth are those who are at a disadvantage in society due to factors such as poverty, race, ethnicity, or immigration status. These young people often face multiple barriers to success, including inadequate access to education and job opportunities, discrimination, and a lack of support from family and community (Rana et al., 2022). As a result, the distinct challenges marginalized adolescents in vocational schools face can also hinder their acquisition of suitable education. A shortage of necessary resources for learning, such as textbooks, computers, and educational materials, can arise from these problems. Moreover, these disadvantaged young individuals might encounter sensations of disaffection resulting from their self esteem, resulting in poor motivation and involvement within the academic setting (Hashim et al., 2018). This factor can further compound the lack of motivation in vocational schools.

### ***Student-Teacher Relationships***

The connection between students and teachers influences the issue, as students may feel intimidated by their teacher's power or lack the confidence to communicate openly and pose questions. Numerous learners feel daunted by their instructor's authoritativeness or experience a lack of trust to share their thoughts and pose inquiries (Duong et al., 2017). Various reasons account for this, such as a teacher's lack of passion or trouble forging a connection with their learners, or perhaps the students' self-doubt or introverted tendencies (Cook, 2019). Furthermore, insufficient resources and a lack of incentives impede teachers from establishing a conducive learning setting. The aforementioned include scarce resources, inadequate training, or a shortage of comprehension regarding the students' necessities all play a role in student-teacher relationships. When students do not feel supported by their teachers this can lead to a lack of motivation to complete the work.

## **Consequences**

### ***Longer Rates of Completion***

Extended time for completion in vocational schools is attributed to inadequate levels of student motivation. As per the Center on Educational Policy's (CEP's) recent report, the average rate of students graduating from vocational schools is around 57%, which falls short of the rate observed in conventional four-year institutions (2022). Varied factors, including inadequate motivation, resources, and assistance strategies, could lead to low completion rates. McInnis and colleagues (2022) highlighted that a significant factor that can explain the longer completion rates of vocational students is the lack of motivation. Lack of motivation in students increases the probability of delaying tasks, skipping lectures, and not meeting submission deadlines, eventually resulting in prolonged completion durations. Moreover, the absence of drive

frequently triggers disinterest in the curriculum, causing substandard academic accomplishment and, eventually, a lengthier duration to finish the course.

### ***Poor Learning Outcomes***

Inadequate attainment of learning objectives is a further repercussion of a shortage of drive among students in vocational institutions. Haegg (2020) suggests that vocational schools aim to equip students with relevant practical expertise and knowledge for their prospective professions. In case of insufficient motivation among students, their learning results can suffer adversely, and they might not attain the essential competencies and awareness. Tokan & Imakulata (2019) highlighted that students with insufficient motivation have inferior academic performance, leading to unsatisfactory learning results. When vocational schools fail to impart adequate knowledge and training, students may need more crucial skills for their profession, ultimately increasing the probability of unemployment or underemployment. Furthermore, unfavorable academic results can hurt the image of technical institutions, causing difficulties in recruiting fresh candidates down the line.

## **Project Description and Implementation Process**

### **Project Proposal**

My capstone project consists of a workshop that will educate the students on the different educational components needed to graduate. First, the students get to watch a presentation teaching the students what vocational skills, enrichment opportunities, and educational learning opportunities are offered at Rancho Cielo which gives the students a clear understanding on what questions will be asked next. Additionally, the group gets to sit down and fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses on what projects and activities they currently enjoy and which ones they do not. Once the students have filled out their surveys a discussion is held to discuss their



conclusions. This assists the students in choosing three additional projects or policies they would like to see implemented in their school.

### **Project Justification & Benefits**

Giving the students an opportunity to choose the things that they would like to do while in the program, addresses the lack of motivation among the students to complete school. There is a lack of motivation among the students to complete their tasks. Teaching the students what vocational skills, enrichment opportunities, and educational learning opportunities are currently available will allow them to understand the different ways they are currently learning. My project will be used to detect both why this is and allow the students to express their interests in certain topics. This will allow the students to reflect on their current educational struggles and find solutions. This will also be helpful to the agency because it can help the agency make necessary changes to better their students' experience.

### **Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan**

With the completion of the workshop and student surveys, I planned to gather data on what problems the students are having with the way their school educationally motivates them. Giving the students a voice and allowing them to develop a solution to their problems gives them more incentive to complete the tasks they set for themselves. Thirteen people were expected to participate in the workshop, and 70% of them were expected to show an increased interest in completing class activities.

Once the thirteen surveys were completed the responses were to be sorted and the information to be gathered based on the most popular responses. The survey results and student solutions would then be presented to the Principal. During that review the principal would

declare whether or not the survey was useful and what solutions would be implemented into the following semester.

### **Implementation Process**

I worked with the students who are currently a part of Rancho Cielo's Student Leadership Club to develop a workshop. First, the group was presented with a PowerPoint that addressed the different ways they are currently earning credits for graduation. Next, they were given a survey to be individually filled out. This survey consisted of two likert-scale answers, one rating survey question, and nine open-ended questions. After filling out the survey, the group was able to identify the areas they would like to see improvement in while completing a discussion. After the workshop I gathered the surveys and reviewed their answers. I then used the responses the students used in the discussion to present the solutions to their principal. A detailed plan is provided in Appendix A.

### **Project Results**

As a result of my project it was expected that 70% of the students would develop an increased interest in completing class activities. The survey results indicated that the students are currently enjoying their time on the Ranch and have learned useful skills while attending. They enjoy most enrichment activities that they have participated in and showed an interest in bringing more sports into enrichment time. The agency also plans to add additional enrichment programs for bicycle repair, equine, gardening, dog, and bee programs. The results also showed that the student's are having trouble completing curriculum packets and feel like their teachers are not actually teaching them anything. It was found that the teachers at the school are experts in their vocational fields but are not certified, this is something the school is currently working to correct. It was decided that testing the students on their learning styles would be a useful way to

cater to the students struggling with completing the packets. The student developed solutions will not be implemented in time to measure the results of the students motivation to complete their work, therefore instead I assessed if the gathered information would be useful to the agency. The students also concluded that they would like to listen to music while working on projects, this would be done by playing an appropriate radio station for the whole class. When the information was presented to the principal it was found that the information was useful and the solutions would begin taking place at the beginning of the new school year. A detailed graph of the survey data is included in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Survey Responses

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Majority Response</b>
I have enjoyed my time at the ranch	58% strongly agree
I have learned something that will help me succeed in life.	58% strongly agree
Rate these components from favorite to least favorite.	Depended on individual
In what ways is it challenging to earn credits?	58% have trouble completing packets
In what ways is it easy to earn credits?	33% said by showing up and doing the work
List 1-3 ways in which you would like to change the current credit system.	42% wouldn't change it
What type of enrichment activities have you enjoyed?	25% enjoy fishing 16% enjoy science projects, LED light projects and field trips
What enrichment activities have you disliked?	66% haven't disliked
List 1-3 enrichment clubs or activities you would like to participate in.	41% would like to add Sports 25% would like to add Camping or Music Clubs
In what ways has the vocational education portion been beneficial?	25% said it was an additional way for students to earn credits 16% said it has not been
In what ways has the vocational education	33% said it isn't challenging enough

portion not been beneficial?	16% would like more support from teachers
List 1-3 activities or changes you would like to see added to the vocational portion.	25% wouldn't change 16% would like to listen to music while working

**Conclusion & Recommendations**

In conclusion, students who are attending vocational schools often face a lack of motivation and fall behind due to various issues. The students at Rancho Cielo are currently dealing with this due to problems like not having enough educational support, reading packets for curriculum, and the need to feel more challenged by current curriculum. A recommendation for the agency is to use the students' learning styles as a way to develop future curriculum. If a majority of the students are tactile learners it would explain why they are not eager to learn through reading and writing. It would also be beneficial to continue doing an annual survey that looks into what it is the students have concerns about, this information would be a useful tool in identifying additional problems within the agency.

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### Appendix A

#### Project Implementation Plan

Tasks	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff	Materials/Services Needed	Deliverables
Assist in the teen watershed program to get to know the students.	January to February, 2023	Mentor & Students	Classroom	Establishing Relationships
Develop a survey to be handed out to the students.	February 2023	Mentor & Agency Case Workers	Laptop	Survey
Get survey approval	February 2023	Mentor & Agency Case Workers	Laptop & survey	Approval
Research potential ideas or solutions in order to assist in the workshop.	March 2023	Mentor, Students, Agency Case Workers	Surveys	Completion of Surveys
Prepare slide show to support the workshop	By March 16, 2023	Mentor, Students, Agency Case Workers	Surveys	Data
Get slide show approval	March 16, 2023	Mentor & Agency Case Workers	Laptop	Solutions to offer students
Get Workshop date approval	No later than March 20, 2023	Mentor & Agency Case Workers	Laptop & PowerPoint	Presentation
Host Workshop: Sit down with the students to develop solutions.	April 4, 2023	Mentor, Students, Agency Case Workers	Classroom space, survey, Projector, & Laptop	PowerPoint and Survey
Hand out survey to student leadership group	April 4, 2023	Mentor, Students, Agency Case Workers	Classroom space, survey, Projector, & Laptop	Students vote
Collect surveys to review student answers.	April 4, 2023	Mentor & Students	Surveys and Notebook	Survey
Present student solutions to Principal for approval	April 13, 2023	Mentor & Students	Data, Votes	Finding out principals opinion