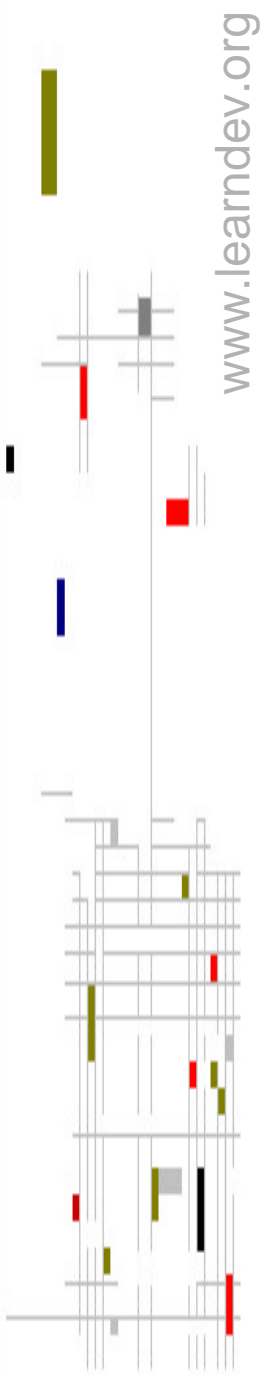


The beauty of simplicity

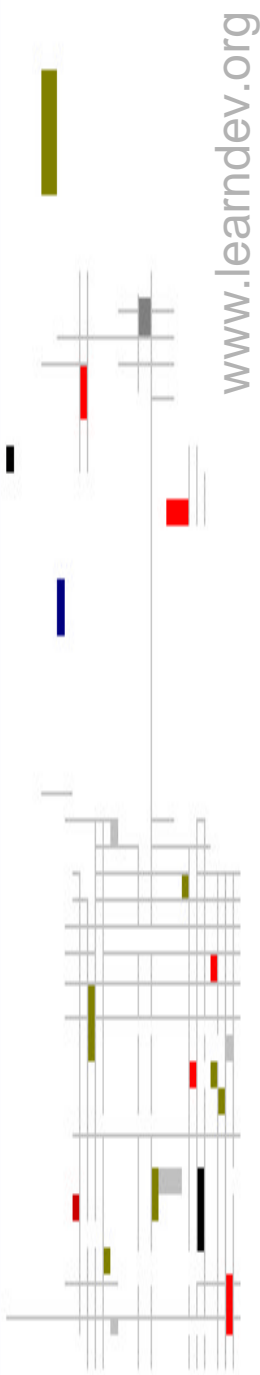
Exploring the role of motivation and communication in distance learning courses

Lya Visser Ph.D.



Identified problem

Many students drop-out of courses for lack of motivation and may never study via distance education again.



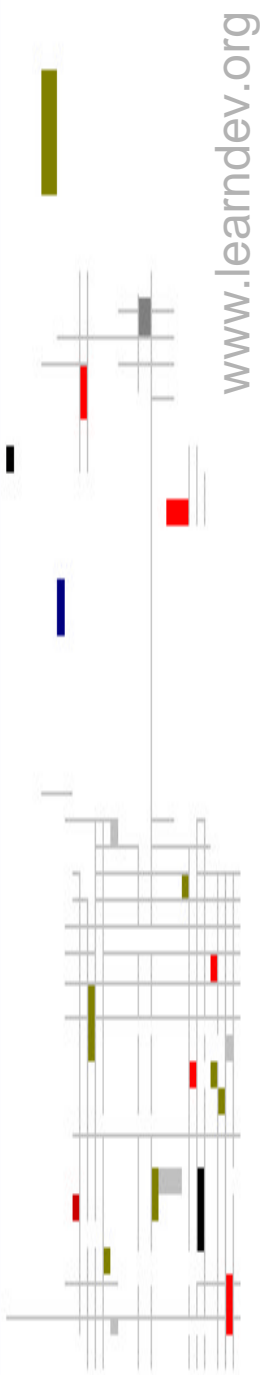
Keywords

Motivation and Communication

Motivation

Refers to choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach and the degree of effort they will exert in realizing them.

(You cannot tell someone to be motivated)



Motivation

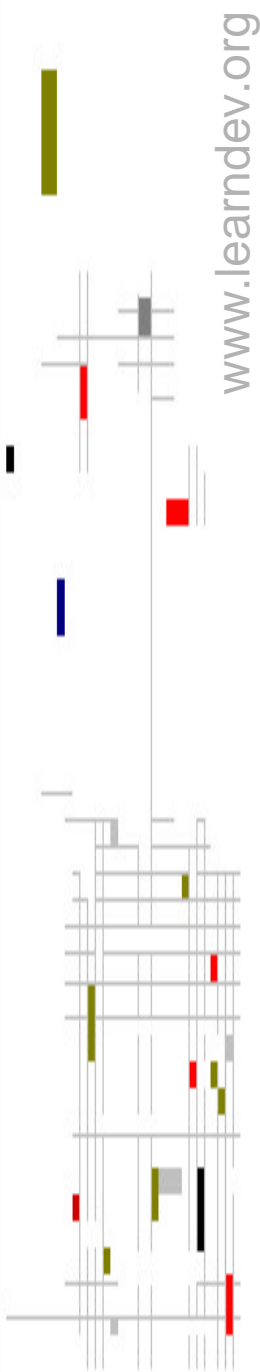
A bit of early theory: Hull (1943)

Drive theory

Key ideas

- Size/quality of reward is a critical variable for learning.
- Incentive.

Unsatisfied need initiates behaviors that lead to a pleasant state.



Motivation:

A bit more of early theory: Atkinson, Rotter (1953)

Expectancy –Value theory

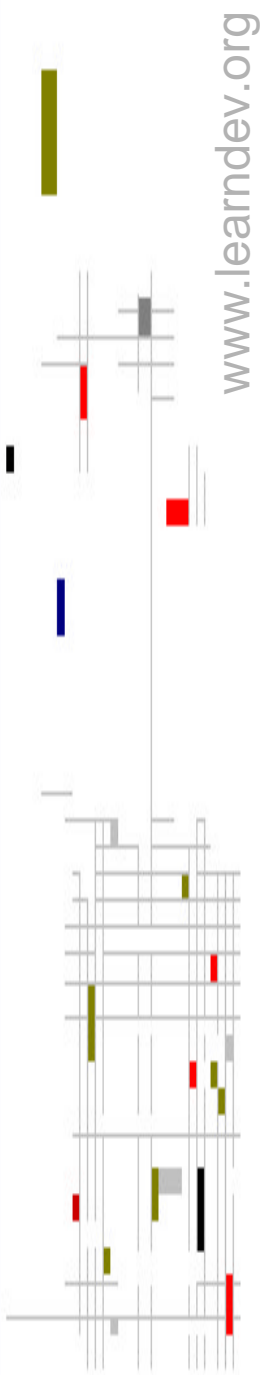
Key ideas

- ❑ Motivation is determined by a student's expectancy and perception of ability.
- ❑ Expectancy beliefs of learners about their capability to do a task and succeed is closely related to actual achievement.

What have we, educators, learned?

To help students to be more successful it is important to:

- ❑ Recognize motivation as a general state for learning to be effective.
- ❑ Consider motivation to be a set of continually changing factors that influence students' behavior.
- ❑ Aim at helping students to set motivational factors at appropriate levels so that optimal learning can take place.
- ❑ Monitor/increase success expectancy.
- ❑ Change the perception of ability (ability becomes a varying not static condition).



Research interest: How can I help students to be motivated so that they complete their courses?

Literature study showed little research
interest in motivation.

Example: Four international conferences
on distance education with a total of 801
presentations offered only six papers on
motivation.

Increase students' motivation

Required:

A analytical model that offers a systematic approach to help students increase their motivation (and assist teachers to help their students to do so).

Keller's ARCS model of motivational analysis (1983)

Four components, based on the main theories of motivation, contribute to the interest and effort students put into learning:

- **Attention** (sensation and knowledge seeking: curiosity)
- **Relevance** (what to expect and what is expected of student)
- **Confidence** (confident people rely on their actions to reach their goals)
- **Satisfaction** (satisfied learners are in agreement with expectations they had)

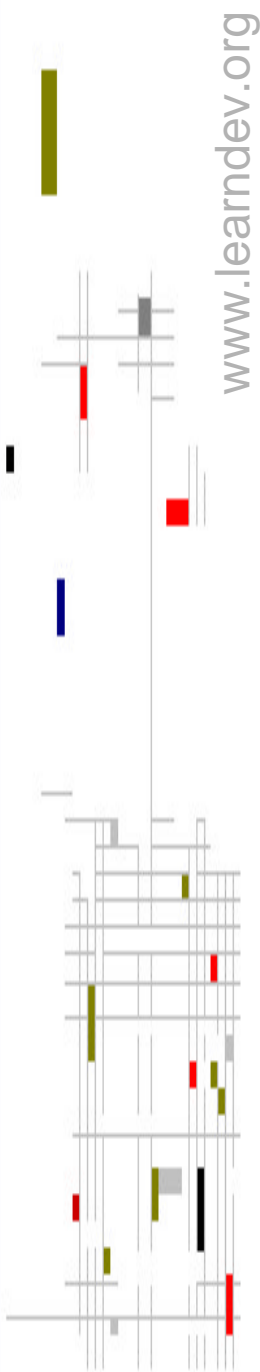
More about the ARCS components

Attention: get the interest and attention of the student and keep the momentum.

Relevance: transmit why what is learned is relevant, what can be expected, how to enrich performance.

Confidence: emphasize likelihood of success if student works hard, stress realistic goals.

Satisfaction: aim at agreement with expectation, offer frequent satisfaction, motivational feedback, appeal at intrinsic pride.

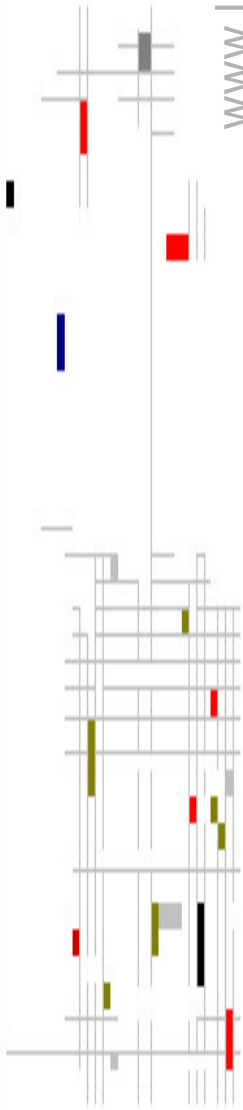


Applying the ARCS model for written motivational messages

Use of motivational (not instructional) messages in a face-to-face context in Mozambique.

A motivational message is designed in such a way that the content has a positive effect on the learner's disposition to engage in the learning task.

(J.Visser, 1989)



Example of a motivational message

You are one of the few students who have not yet sent in their first TMA. If you want to sit the exam in October, and I'm sure that is your intention, it is now urgent to finish your first TMA, send it off and it on with the other units of the course.

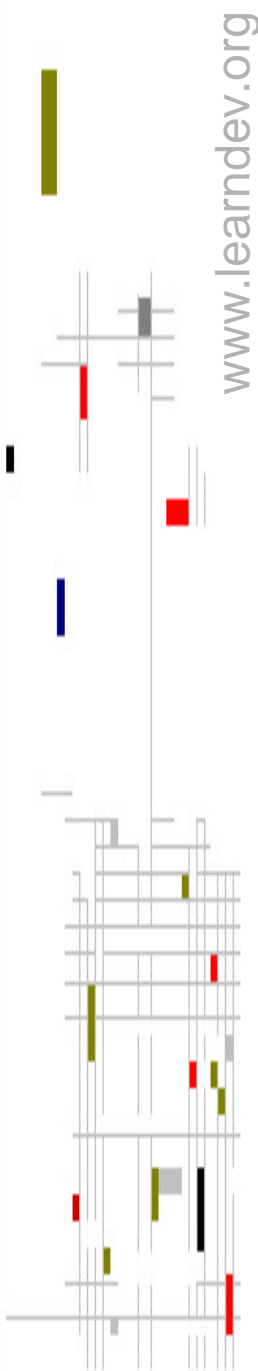
It is important that you plan your work well. You still have three months, which will give you time enough to send in a second TMA and revise the course. You have to work hard these last three months, but you will be so happy when you get it done and have taken this important step of finishing course 2 within the time set for it.

Keep going strong and get to work NOW! I know you can do it!

Jason Pennells



**No news from you.
What's happening?**



Example of a motivational message

You are one of the few students who have not yet sent in their first TMA. If you want to sit the exam in October, and I'm sure that is your intention, it is now urgent to finish your first TMA, send it off and it on with the other units of the course.

It is important that you plan your work well. You still have three months, which will give you time enough to send in a second TMA and revise the course. You have to work hard these last three months, but you will be so happy when you get it done and have taken this important step of finishing course 2 within the time set for it.

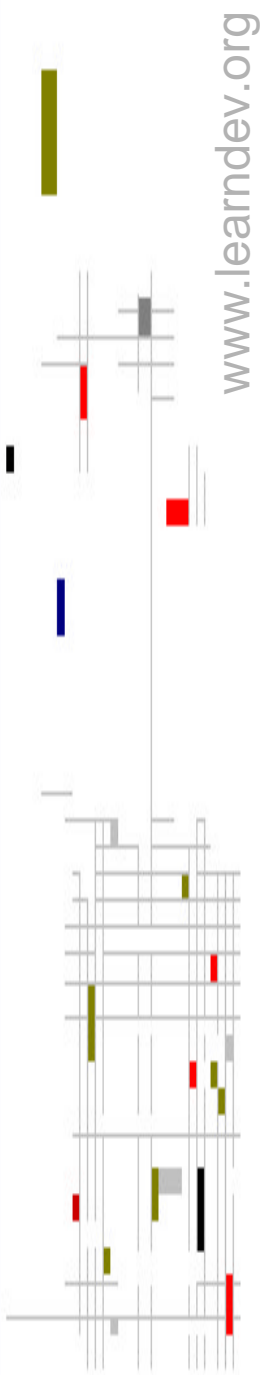
Keep going strong and get to work NOW! I know you can do it!

Jason Pennells

Application of the ARCS model to influence completion rates in D.E.

The study sought to answer the following (main) question:

To what extent are motivational messages, based on Keller's ARCS model of motivational analysis, effective in distance education?



A Motivational Message (MM)

Pilot study examined a variety of messages through prototyping. Result: a “best” message in the form of a greeting/birthday card with a drawing and a short catchy sentence on the outside, and a motivational message on the inside.

Another motivational message

You are one of the students of course two who are going to sit the October 1996 exam. Congratulations that you have come so far.

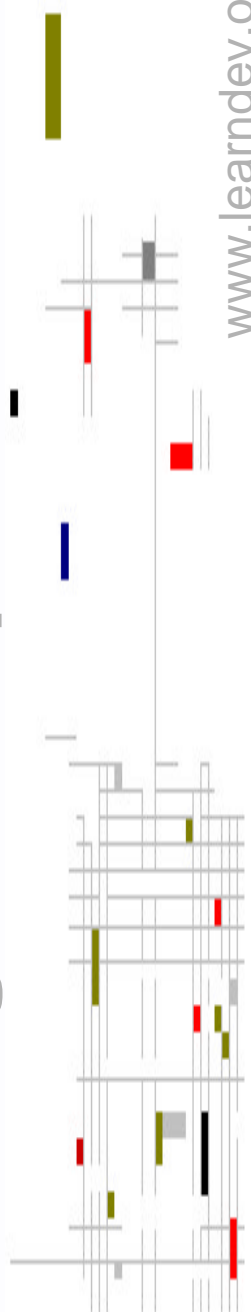
I wish you lots of good luck. Don't be nervous - just make sure that you plan your answers well and show the examiner that you have learned a lot this year.

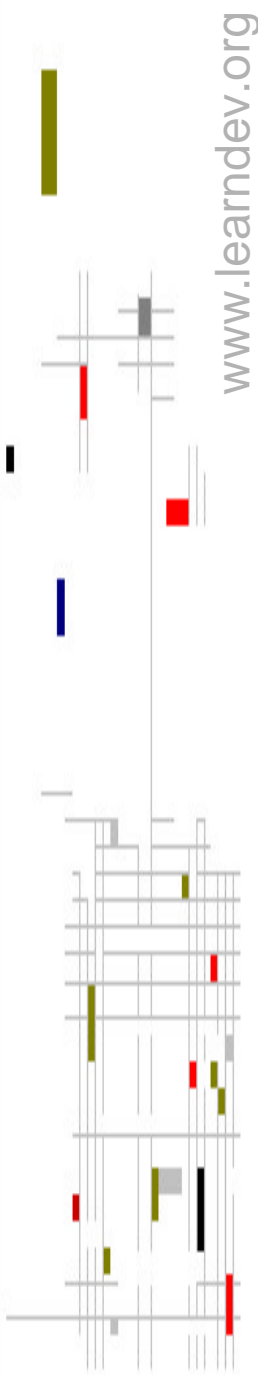
For those of you who are accustomed to using a computer, remember that handwriting is more time consuming.

Good luck and you can do it!



You're one of them





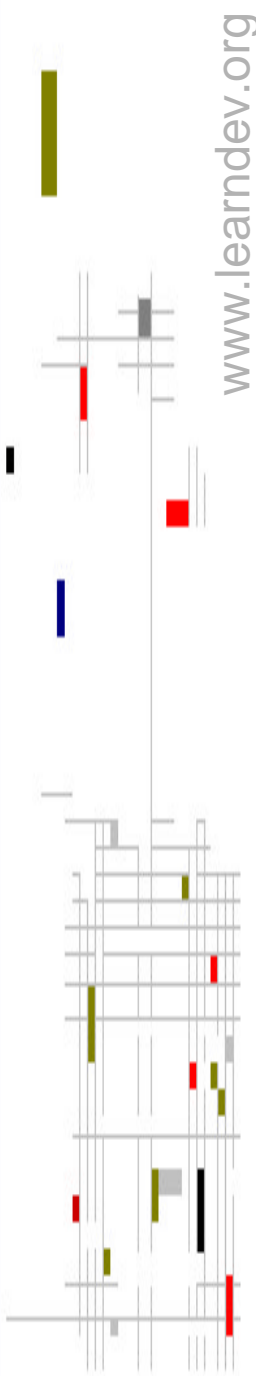
Another motivational message

You are one of the students of course two who are going to sit the October 1996 exam. Congratulations that you have come so far.

I wish you lots of good luck. Don't be nervous - just make sure that you plan your answers well and show the examiner that you have learned a lot this year.

For those of you who are accustomed to using a computer, remember that handwriting is more time consuming.

Good luck and you can do it!



One more motivational message

Let's hope my THA looks still good after you've marked it.

1 year of
pursuing my
Tampus fight

is going well
I think I should
be looking for
my next (and a wins)

6 FOR THE
GRADE I JUST
HAVE THE NEXT
ONE WILL BE BETTER

my only problem
is not finding
time enough

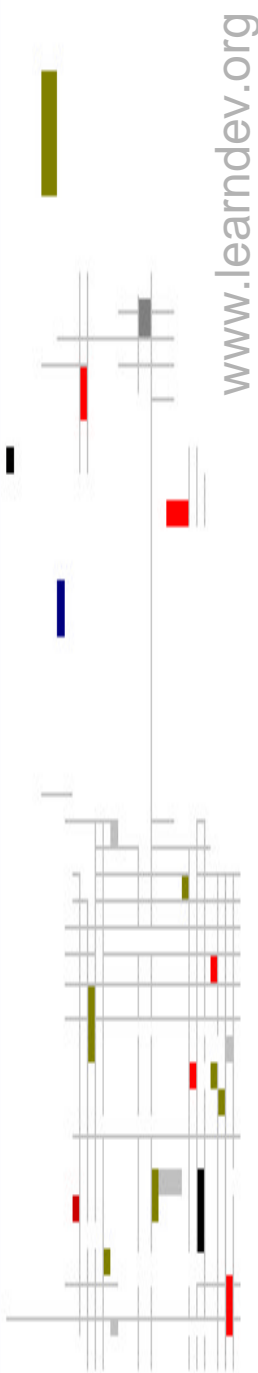
I'M DISAPPOINTED
and certain
fluid hinders
thinking

the distance from ed
education has given
me a chance.

Thanks for the confidence
that note gave me.

I'M WORRIED THAT I WON'T
REMEMBER IT.

TO MEET AT THE PUB.



One more motivational message

November 1996

We have come to the end of this course year.

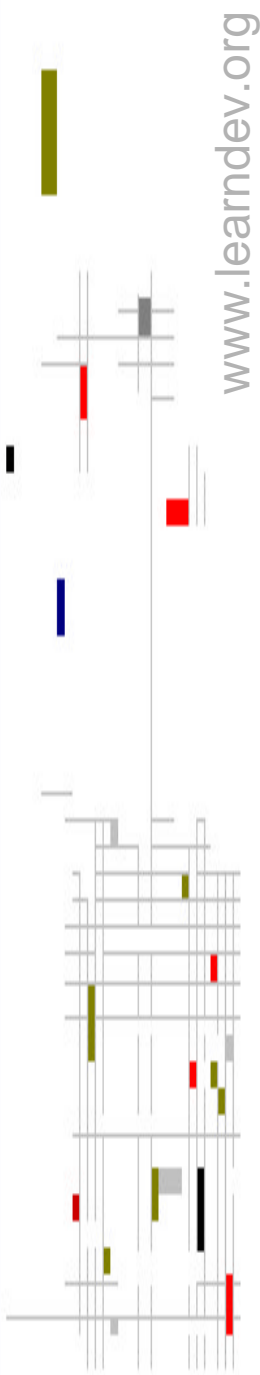
For those of you who have done the course I exam - congratulations!

For those of you who will sit the course I exam next year - Courage - you, too, can do it!

I've enjoyed working with you. Thanks for the many nice letters and messages I've received.

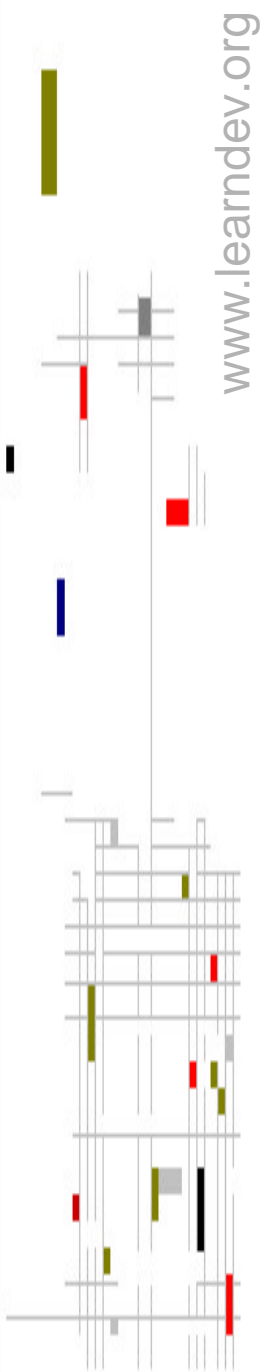
I hope we will get another opportunity to work together

Dina Visser



The motivational intervention MA courses in D.E. at Univ. of London

- Program: Diploma in D.E. part of MA.
- Audience: International.
- Duration of one course: nine months.
- Learning materials: print & 2 audio-cassettes.
- Contact with instructor: snail-mail, occasional fax.
- Average course completion rate: 32%.



Audience and instructors

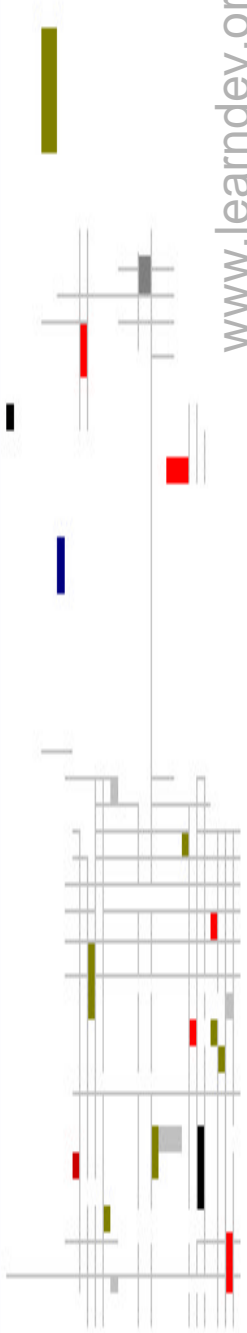
- ❑ Students from 20+ different countries.
- ❑ Number of students: 81.
- ❑ Instructors involved: 3 and researcher.
- ❑ Training instructors: one day.
- ❑ Design messages: instructors + researcher.
- ❑ Number of messages to be sent: between 4 and 8, based on need.
- ❑ Distribution of messages: university and/or instructors.
- ❑ Audience analysis: most problems in confidence area.

Implementation

Four courses, fifth course control group without motivational intervention.

N=81

Problem encountered. After nine months it turned out that one instructor had not sent out any messages.



Results of the motivational intervention

Completion rates:

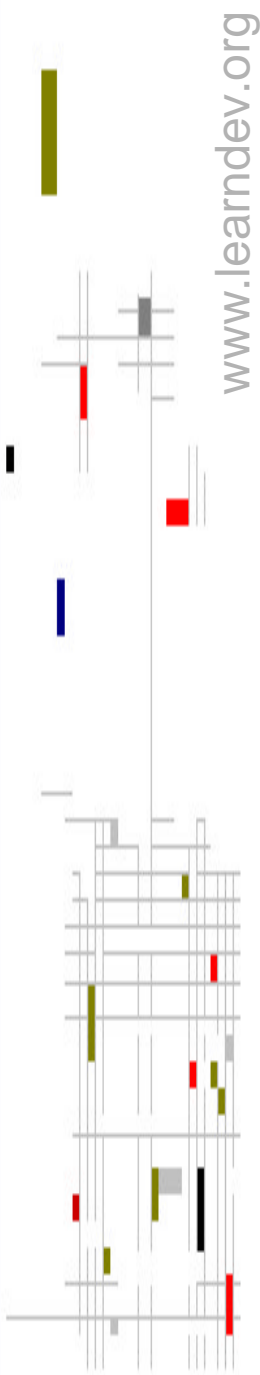
First time enrolled students:

Before intervention 42% after 79%

Repeaters:

Before intervention 24% after 48%

Time instructors spent on students during course increased by between 63 and 78 minutes (messages were pre-prepared).



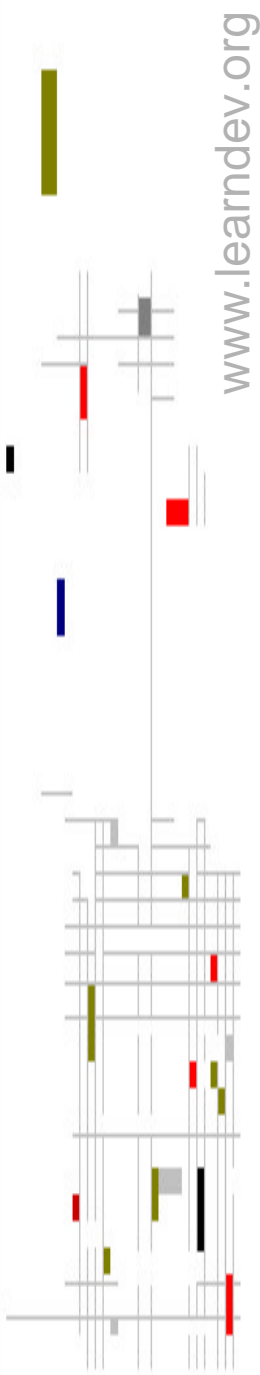
Communicative aspect of messages

Nature of communication related to Carl Rogers' (1962) concept of empathy in communication, while the content of the communication was based on the perceived motivational needs of the students (as analyzed by the ARCS model).

Rogers' three behaviors that are essential to effective communication

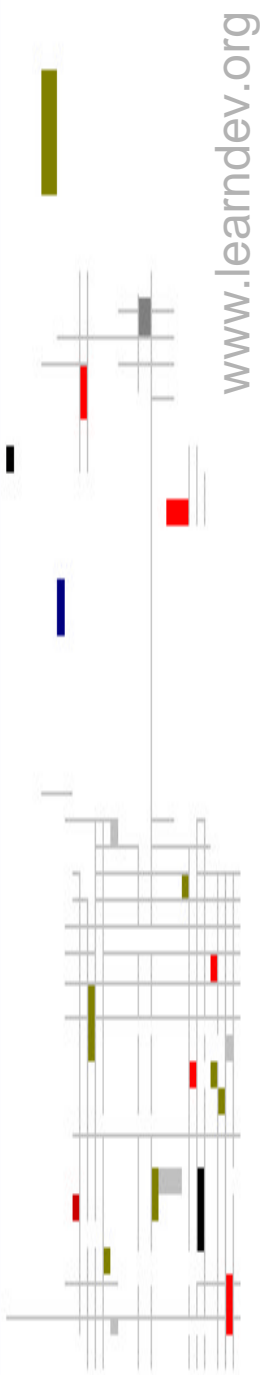
- ❑ Open disclosure (relationship is mutual and based on more than minimum information).
- ❑ Warm affirmation (instructor is really interested in student as a person).
- ❑ Empathic comprehension (capacity of the “other” to place him/herself in the position of the opposite party: student and instructor should feel that the other knows what it is “to be me”.)

Rogers' behaviors aim at dissolving alienation.



Examples of student observations

- ❑ The notes encouraged me to have a high level of **motivation** to continue.
- ❑ The notes built my **confidence** and **motivation**.
- ❑ I felt I could not go on – the notes **encouraged** me to go on.
- ❑ Thanks for all **encouragement** and **motivation** you have given me.
- ❑ **Instructor cared.**
- ❑ The notes show **warmth** and **care**.
- ❑ Without the **personal approach** through the messages I might have given up.
- ❑ Messages **encouraged** and **pointed out** success.



How students saw the motivational messages

Although the messages were photocopied many students perceived them as having been written especially for them.

This was not strange because sometimes there was a personal note on the message such as:

“I really liked your second assignment, it had some very good ideas”.

“Your writing has improved a lot”

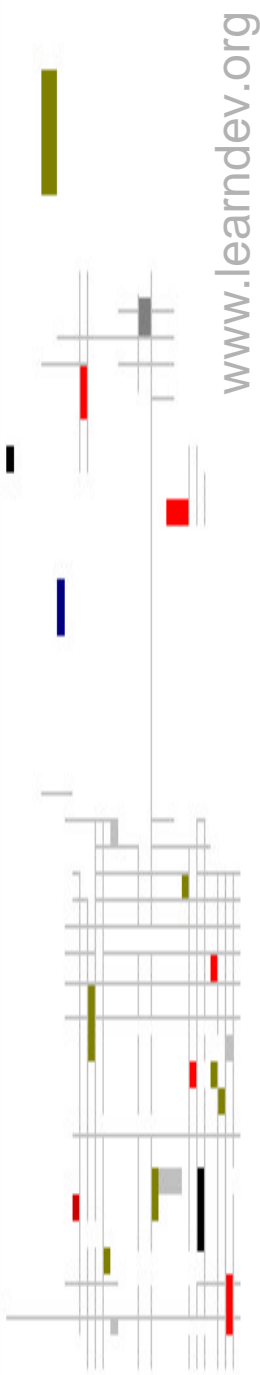
Example of process of communication

Leo, a religious minister: Three stages in communication:

1st stage: Letter: Don't give my name to others. Task of tutor is feedback on strengths and problems. (signed with all clerical titles and family name.)

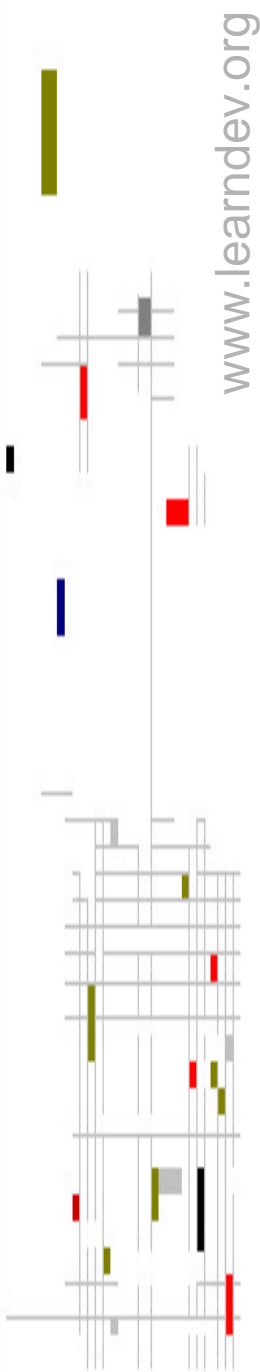
2nd stage: reply to fax of tutor that he was falling behind. "Desperation struck last night". (Signed with first and family name.)

3rd stage: letter: "The motivational messages encouraged me to open up a personal dialogue which I find difficult ... Greet your family." (signed with first name and included a photo of him and his family.)



But also the following three remarks

- ❑ I have met my tutor personally-better than fax or little notes. I don't think adults need a lot of notes.
- ❑ The truth is I don't remember the notes, although they are all in my file.
- ❑ Whilst I appreciated the notes, they were not based on individual needs.

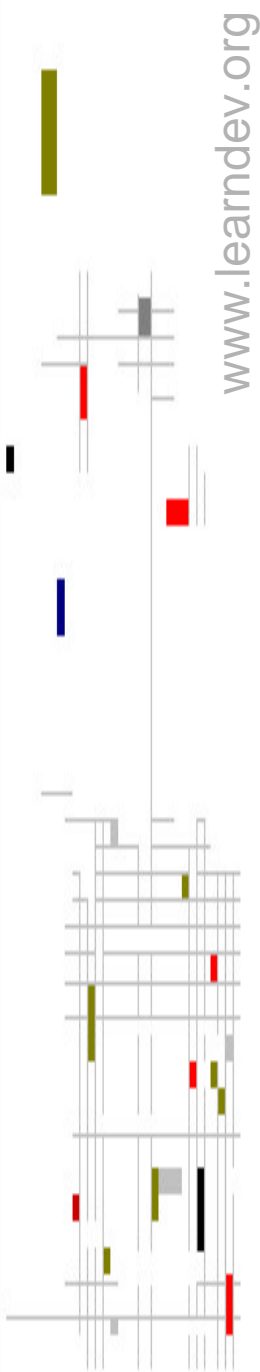


Reactions of family members of students

It was seen that the messages had a place on the student's desk. Children commented:

“Your teacher made a mistake, she forgot to draw you, because there is no one in the drawing with a beard and a moustache.” (letter from student)

A student returned one of the black and white motivational messages, nicely colored in by her daughter. The little girl had said: “I think the drawing is OK, but I can improve it... and started coloring it in.

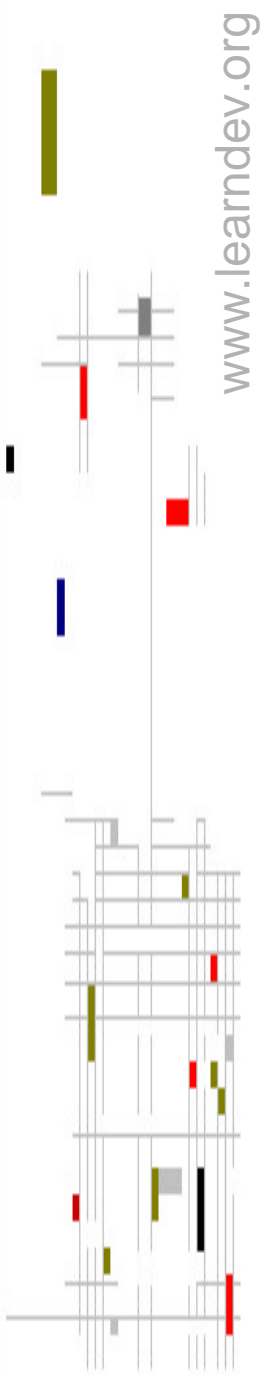


Reactions from the instructors

- ❑ It was just a little more work, but the increased contact with students motivated me.
- ❑ Even if they do not pay me the extra time, I will use the messages.
- ❑ They never talk about the isolation of the instructor. It was less this time.
- ❑ Next time I would like to design the messages on my own.
- ❑ I got my family involved-my daughter would like to draw the messages.

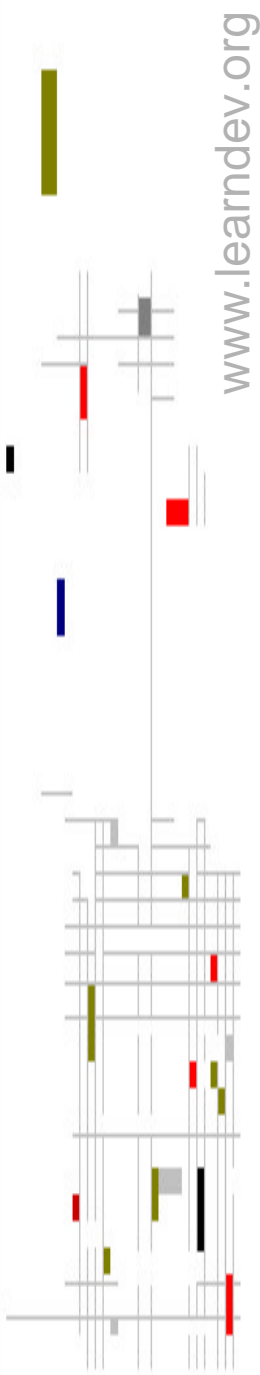
Conclusions

- ❑ The beauty of the motivational message is its simplicity.
- ❑ Motivational messages can be effective.
- ❑ Design and distribution does not take up much time.
- ❑ Messages can be used in very basic (old-fashioned) courses (snail mail) or online.
- ❑ Surprise effect is strong motivator.
- ❑ Potential for different message formats/applications.



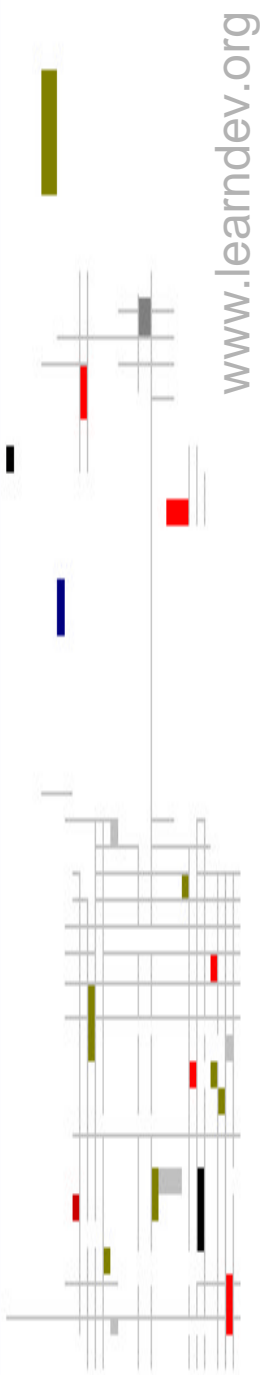
Limitations of the study

- ❑ Numbers of subjects have been small.
- ❑ Some results were not conclusive (such as are motivational messages differentially effective for repeaters).
- ❑ Researcher was one of the four instructors.
- ❑ Research took place in only one program (5 courses).



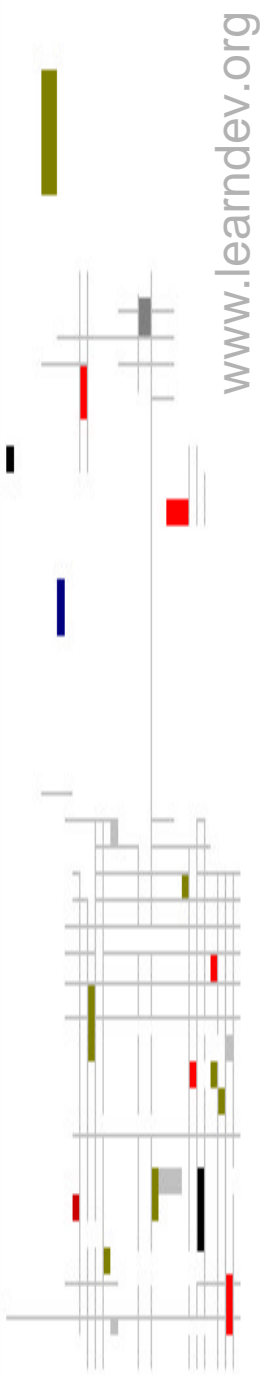
Suggestions for further research and action

- ❑ Offer rapid motivational feedback through e.g. email and encourage dialogue.
- ❑ Involve students in motivational support of colleagues. Exploratory research using fewer messages and a newsletter that involved the students showed that 11 of the 12 students finished the course successfully.
- ❑ Give students a choice to be included in motivational support or not (and give them a task).



Conditions for successful use of messages

- ❑ Student support should contemplate the affective needs of students as an integral component, alongside cognitive needs.
- ❑ Motivational support should be an integral part of student support, from admin-to-finance-to follow-up.



A final remark on the ARCS model

The combination of Keller's ARCS model with its affective components and Rogers' empathic communication behaviors makes it easier to appreciate and to understand what's going on in someone else's situation and to react in a supportive and open way.

(The most important message for me was that it also works in other circumstances such as relationships with colleagues, friends and family.)

www.learndev.org

Thank you for being here!



Lya Visser

[lvisser @ learndev.org](mailto:lvisser@learndev.org)