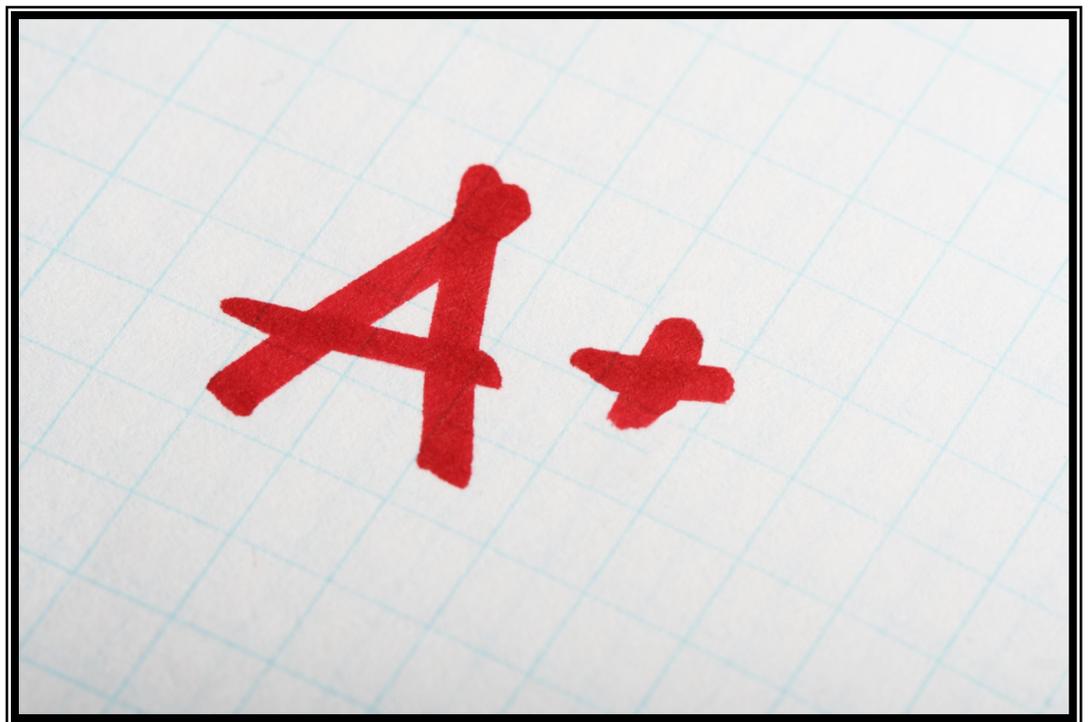


# 10 Ways to Motivate Your Students



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## 10 Ways to Motivate Your Students

There is nothing more satisfying as a teacher than to see your students truly motivated to learn and take in new information. According to many top educators with records of success, the act of inspiring this motivation is actually the main job of teachers, ahead even of knowing the material (although that is, of course, important).

Many teachers have complained of the difficulty that they have in creating this motivation in their students. Many teachers, unfortunately, have decided that the motivation of their students is not part of the job simply because it is not listed on the school lesson plan or dictated specifically by a school administrator. However, it has been proven over and over again that a motivated student body performs better on everything from standardized tests and rote memorization to critical thinking skills and college essays. Fortunately for the teacher who cares enough to give this added boost to their students, there are many techniques for motivation that have been proven to work no matter the schooling environment. A few of the most relevant and universal of these techniques will be listed below.

## **Make Sure to Speak to Your Students in Their Language**

You must show your students that you care about them before they will care about what you know. Kids are better attuned to the feeling behind what someone is saying than what is actually being said. No feeling, no response.

It may behoove a teacher to learn a little bit about the current pop culture of the day in order to provide salient examples of whatever material you are teaching that day. For instance, teaching math by showing how Miley Cyrus counts musical bars in order to make a pop hit has the potential to be much more interesting than simply going through example after example in the book. Teaching Shakespeare by comparing his line structure to the format of a popular rap song can work wonders for the interest level of the boys in your class.

Many teachers go overboard in this endeavor to communicate and try to become a friend to their students. The more successful tactic is to educate yourself on the slang terms and the culture of the students, but to do so from the perspective of a mentor, not a peer. Children either will not respect overzealous efforts to bond as a peer or they will take full advantage of it and the teacher will lose control of the class, making getting through a lesson plan virtually impossible.

## **Make Sure That You Yourself Are Actually Motivated**

Kids are quite attuned to the feeling behind the actions of an adult; you cannot fool them with the old "do what I say, not what I do" excuse. If they discern that you do not believe that what you are teaching is important, this is the attitude that they will take towards the material as well.

Revisit your school material and relearn exactly why you love teaching it in the first place. What has been the personal impact that it has had on your life? This is the information that your students really want to know. Believe it or not, however, disrespectful they are, your students are looking for examples to follow and they are relentlessly brutal in testing the sincerity of those examples.

The best examples that a teacher can use are often personal examples from the teacher's own life. It has been proven through many studies that people naturally draw the attention of others to themselves more readily when recounting a personal anecdote. This is a tactic that can be used to great advantage by a teacher in the classroom.

## **Use the Textbook as a Guide, But Teach from Your Own Plan**

In a study conducted by Washington University, high school students consider teachers who stick to the book no matter what less prepared as well as much less interesting. Students were found to listen to and remember information from teachers who brought in their own supplementary materials and seemed to have an individualized lesson plan for the class.

Although public school teachers may face scrutiny for deviating from the textbooks of the school, teachers may have to find a way to negotiate with school administrators and showcase the increased interest that the students would have in a lesson plan that incorporated outside resources or completely original material from the teacher.

As stated before, personal examples are usually able to hold the attention of students much more readily than cold examples from a textbook or even original examples that do not relate to the teacher directly. Children are always looking to their mentors to showcase the true merits of their philosophies. What better way to do this than to relate how math or science has been directly relevant in making your life better?

## **Reward Participation with Positive and Energetic Feedback**

When children are motivated to participate, that behavior should be rewarded whether or not that participation is exactly what the teacher is looking for. Any type of participation can be redirected into the lesson plan, even behavior by the students that is meant to be disruptive. The most effective teachers are actually able to leverage the energy from such behavior to focus the rest of the class without having to directly discipline the class clown.

Many top educators say that the secret of turning disruptive behavior into productive behavior is not to give the disruptive student the reaction that he or she is looking for. Anger, fear or aggression, far from imposing discipline, will actually suppress many of the more energetic students from expressing their opinions. Instead of trying to face disruptive energy head on like a boxer, a teacher should take the disruptive energy and redirect it like a tennis player into the rest of the class.

Simply learning the phrase, "That's an interesting response. What would make you say that?" can be more than enough to deflect disruptive energy and calm a student down. The teacher can then gradually turn the high energy in the classroom into interest on the subject matter.

Of course students who behave well and are energetic should be rewarded with added attention. However, teachers should avoid the creation of "teacher's pets" by relying too heavily on students who give good energy. Studies have shown that teacher's pets actually serve as ego boost for the teachers because they feel as though they are having an effect on the student. The more that the teacher calls on the pet, the more that this feeling of relevance is able to be reinforced. Do not fall into this trap; continue to spread the attention around the classroom to incorporate as many students as possible into the class discussion.

Feedback should also be focused. Students, both the disruptive students and the teachers' pets, want to know more than anything that they are being listened to. One of the easiest ways to let a student know that you have truly considered a response in class is to ask a follow up question that is directly related to the response of that student. This follow up question can be directed to the entire class, not just the student who gave the response. This is a great technique for redirecting the energy of a disruptive student as well while taking the focus and the attention off of that student at the same time.

## **Help your Students Recognize the Link Between Effort and Achievement**

Self efficacy is one of the most important traits that a teacher can pass on to a student. The ability of a teacher to show the link between effort and achievement is not only a life skill that will serve the student well in the future, but it also helps the teacher to keep control of students in the classroom as well. If students are focused on pleasing the teacher in order to receive kudos, then they are that much less likely to be involved in unproductive actions that draw attention away from the lesson plan.

Many teachers tend to call on the teacher's pets that always get the answers right or the extremely disruptive students who draw attention to themselves. In many cases, the students that are in the middle are ignored.

These are the students that must be shown that their efforts are not being overlooked. Teachers must make the effort to incorporate this quiet middle into the everyday conversation. Although their efforts may not be as loud or as obnoxious as the more extreme students in your class, they will be trying just as hard in their own way.

The other students will also take the example of your rewarding this quiet effort as a positive measure of your equal treatment of all students. They will trust you more as a mentor and as an authority figure and will respond by giving more effort to the lesson plan.

## **Make Success Possible for your Students by Using a Gradual Learning Curve**

By introducing the easier material to the class at first, you encourage success by getting students used to hearing themselves getting praised for the right answer. This is essential in building the confidence of your students for the more difficult portions of the material.

You will definitely have students that are quieter than others. During the easier material, you should identify these students and encourage them to speak more. The louder students will encourage themselves during this point; however, you cannot forget them. As mentioned before, spread your attention around so that you do not create a teacher's pet or ignore students who may not be as outgoing as your more extreme students.

Remind your students of their earlier successes if they become frustrated during the later, more difficult material. They will be encouraged when they see how the later material builds on the earlier material, which they have already mastered.

## **Think Highly of your Students**

People want to be around people who want to be around them. Make it your business to find the positive aspects of each one of your students and of your classes as a whole. Each and every one of your classes has their own personality - a collective consciousness, if you will. With time, you will learn this collective personality as well as how the individual personalities fit within it. For instance, the children who are quieter may be so because the louder kids in the class also have a better grip on the material. You will be surprised at how your kids will react if you show them that you understand the politics of their peer to peer relationships. However, you will only be able to discern these nuances of personality if you take a genuine personal interest in your students one by one.

Thinking highly of your students also involves believing in them intellectually even when they have doubts about themselves. Trust that they will at some point or another and be prepared for it. If you have to give a low mark to a student on a test, encourage them by pointing out the places in which they did well and guide them in the correct forms of study in order to fill in the holes in their mastery of the material.

## **Provide Plenty of Examples and Keep your Examples Original**

Children respond well to surprises. If they know exactly what you are going to do during your lesson plan every day, they will tend to tune out. Your words will have less of an effect even if the subject matter is new because the format of the class is boring. You can spice up the classroom and encourage your students to pay closer attention through different kinds of examples.

Children have three basic ways in which they learn. Some of your students will be visual learners, others will be aural learners, others kinesthetic learners. Bring examples that cater to each of these different types of learning experiences. You will be able to more accurately discern what type of example will more positively affect each class by learning the personality of that class as advised in the previous heading. Many of the best teachers will actually make a three tiered list or Excel file of students who learn in each of the three ways and direct the appropriate example to those children.

Stay away from the book as much as you possibly can without encouraging the ire of any administrator that may be looking over your shoulder. Although examples from most textbooks are quite good at providing a basic prototype for the lessons, it is not usually enough to break through in a consistent way to students who are used to screaming lights and psychedelic robot music.

## **Instead of Teaching to the Students, Try to Arouse Their Curiosity About the Topic at Hand**

If you have ever seen the Leonardo DiCaprio movie "Inception," you are well aware of the much greater influence of an idea that a subject believes he or she has thought up alone. Although attempting to plant ideas in the heads of your students that leads to interest in the lesson plan is quite an advanced technique, in order to maximize the motivation of your students, you must learn how to do it on a consistent basis. This is not manipulation as many of the detractors of this method may argue; students are planting ideas in their own heads all the time. It is your job as a teacher to make sure that this process allows thoughts to form in the heads of your students that will actually help them in their future lives.

The most common way of beginning a discussion to implant ideas into the heads of your students is to ask a question that you can direct into the lesson plan. For instance, you can begin a geometry lesson by asking how you would determine the amount of M&Ms in a jar using formulas about circumference, area and volume of circles and cylinders. You can create a contest out of the lesson by giving away the jar of M&Ms to the student who uses the formulas most precisely to guess the number.

The technique mentioned above will show the students exactly how the concepts that would otherwise be abstract can be used to create a real, concrete effect in the world. Once your students see this, they will begin to look ahead and try to find out how to incorporate future lessons into real world situations without you having to prompt them all the time. This is the beginning of the self-efficacy that is so important to engender in all students.

## **Spend Time Setting Goals so that your Students will be Self-Directed**

Goals are to be set at the beginning of your time with your students and also at the beginning of each lesson. As your students begin to see that you set goals and that you are constantly reminding yourself of them, they will begin to emulate this behavior.

Goal setting at the beginning of your time with your students will make all of the other steps that are mentioned in this article much easier to accomplish. All of these steps can be incorporated into the goals that you set for your students so that they can have an idea of what to expect from you from the beginning of the class.

However, students will more than likely forget everything that you have told them in relation to goal setting by the second class period that you meet. This is why you must reinforce the concept of setting goals as well as the actual results that your goals will achieve by telling your students your goals over and over again, at the beginning of each and every class period.

Setting goals and sticking to them will also increase the amount of trust that the students have in the teacher. Whether a student is highly disruptive or relatively quiet, that student is always looking for direction and an example to follow. The teacher that sets the example of sticking to a plan will gradually cause this attitude to form itself in the day to day behavior of the students.

Motivating your students using these ten steps is not an easy task. Most teachers will not take the time to incorporate them; others may find resistance from administration who simply want their teachers to teach to the test. However, politics and laziness aside, the teacher that truly stands for the students will try to implement all of the above steps because they all redirect the focus of the lesson plan to the students that are in the classroom.

If the entire article could be summed up in one work, it would be personalization. Personalization is the key to keeping students engaged in the lesson plan from day to day as well as creating the link between the different lessons that are taking place each session. Personalization will focus the attention of the teacher on the students, giving the students confidence in themselves. This confidence will lead to students becoming much more self-propelling than they normally would be, at first to please the teacher and receive the rewards of praise and positive reinforcement. However, the reward for students will eventually turn to the lesson plan itself and the students will create in themselves a love for learning. Gradually, they will not need the influence or the rewards of the teacher in order to learn; they will naturally group the good feelings of reward to the concept of learning itself.

It is at this point that the teacher will know that his or her job is well done. Once students have learned how to love learning, they will propel themselves into the knowledge that they are naturally inclined to study. This is the kind of motivation that leads to incredible results in students in later life.

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