

Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

SUGGESTIONS FOR MOTIVATION

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*“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”
But we can speed up the process.*

1. Create curiosity

Curiosity is perhaps the greatest of all motivators. Here is the difference between American and Japanese styles of teaching: In Japanese schools, students are immediately introduced to a problem or challenge. They **grapple** with it. Curiosity is naturally engendered. By contrast, in American schools the main idea(s) are presented, the solution is taught, and then students practice. Where is the curiosity engendered using this approach?

2. Teach students to ask themselves questions

Encourage students to ask themselves questions. The questioning process starts the thinking process. When students begin to ask themselves “Why?” and “How?” questions, both alertness and interest increase. There are only three things we are more likely to answer than a question--the telephone, the doorbell, and e-mail.

3. Create desire

Students are constantly asking themselves, “**What's In It For Me?**” Since they're tuned to that radio station, **WII-FM**, spend a little time at the beginning to talk about what the lesson has in it for them--long and/or short range. Consider asking why the lesson would be worthwhile, how students may benefit from it, and how they can make use of it.

Start by asking these questions of yourself. Stuck? Put it on the table for students to grapple with. You will be amazed at (1) how resourceful they will be and (2) how it helps them buy into the lesson.

4. Structure experiences to apply to life outside of school

Theory is important, but interest will increase the more you tie it into practice by showing how the learning makes life easier and better. Share

how the content will help students make better decisions, solve more problems, get along better with others, and make them more effective.

Have a poster and re-emphasize the following wisdom: **“Wise people think long-term, not just for today.”**

5. Develop a sense of personal responsibility

Remember the fundamental principle of motivation: consciously or nonconsciously people motivate themselves.

Each individual is responsible for learning, but it is the teacher's responsibility to create the best possible climate in which that learning can take place. An effective way to do this is to give students an opportunity at the beginning of the class to indicate:

- What expectations **they** have,
- What outcomes **they** expect, and
- What **they** are willing to do to achieve those results.

6. Use acknowledgment and recognition

Acknowledgment/recognition/validation simply affirm. “I see you did your homework” fosters reflection and feelings of self-competence.

Also, consider repeating a comment you have heard or that someone has told you. "Evelyn made an interesting comment, one that applies to what we've been exploring. I think it bears repeating."

What has been accomplished by employing this simple technique?

- You gave recognition.
- You not only encouraged Evelyn but you encouraged others to become more involved.
- You demonstrated that you are open to feedback and students' comments can contribute to their own learning.

7. Encourage

One of the most effective techniques is to let the student know that you believe s/he can accomplish the task. A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than a whole lot of praise after a success.

Emphasize that learning is a process and that no one can learn something and be perfect at the same time. Doing something one way and not being successful is another thing learned; don't consider it failure.

8. Use collaboration

Competition improves performance, not learning. Yes, some students will practice for hours spurred on by the competitive spirit--be it in music, athletics, or performing arts. But these students are motivated to compete.

And competition can be fun for short periods, but competing with others is devastating for the youngster who never finds himself/herself in the winner's circle. Rather than compete, the student drops out by giving up.

Every time a teacher asks a question of a group, students are competing for the teacher's attention--and usually only one student wins. A better approach is to establish learning buddies. Even a very shy student will share with one other person. So, instead of asking a question, **pose** the question. Asking implies a correct answer, whereas **posing invites thinking**. Have students discuss the answer with each other. Using this approach, every student participates.

9. Get yourself excited

You shouldn't expect others to get excited about what you are teaching if you are not excited about it yourself. Show your enthusiasm for the lesson. When lecturing, use just a little more enthusiasm than when you are conversing, facilitating, or reviewing.

10. Intensify interpersonal relationships

Connecting with your students on a one-on-one basis is extremely valuable, but helping them connect with one another on a one-on-one basis can be even more valuable.

Give students an opportunity to socialize for short periods before learning activities start. Establishing relationships are extremely important to young people.

11. Offer choices

Regardless of age, everyone likes to feel control over one's own life. When we can make choices, we feel we have that control. Offer a choice of activities--and that includes home assignments.

By providing two, three, or even four activities and letting students choose among them, you give them an opportunity to select something that engenders motivation.

12. Use variety

A myriad of **visual** techniques can be employed including charts; cartoons; selected parts of films, videocassettes, and/or digital versatile discs (dvd's); power point creations (on many new computers); and overhead

transparencies. Dressing the part of a character (teacher and/or student) qualifies.

A myriad of **audio** techniques can be used such as playing music, recording music, rapping, creating verse--or anything that has rhythm. Remember how you learned your ABC's? "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" is the tune for "the alphabet song."

A myriad of **kinesthetic** techniques can be used. Examples are drawing the spelling of a word in the air, standing in a small group rocking together to feel seasick on the boat crossing the Atlantic Ocean as immigrants, and just giving a high five to get attention (two eyes on teacher, two ears listening, one mouth closed).

Other approaches include large group discussions, case studies, and relating personal experiences to a learning buddy on the topic.

Another technique is to use handouts for students to complete **during** the presentation. This activity keeps them involved and also gives them something they can refer to later. This simple technique also allows you to cover more material in less time.

Conclusion

It's a wonderful experience to have in our classrooms eager, young people who are there because they want to be, not because they are obliged to be. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many classrooms today. However, by focusing on these suggestions, we can create lessons that produce better results for both students and teachers.

Ideas for implementing the proactive (Covey), noncoercive (Glasser), collaborative and empowering (Deming) approach to reducing behavior problems is at http://www.MarvinMarshall.com/raise_responsibility.htm

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