

How to Motivate Your Students

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Presented at:

New Mexico State University-Grants Round-Up Conference, September 30 –
October 1, 2011, Grants, NM

New Mexico Higher Education Assessment and Retention Conference, February
23-24, 2012, Albuquerque, NM

National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development Conference, May 27-
30, 2012, Austin, TX

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Workshop Overview

Motivation is critical for learning. A learning event does not occur without a preceding motivational event. Can you give an example of a student who was not motivated and learned? If you think through any examples that come to mind, I believe you will find that the student was motivated during the learning event, if only for a moment. Both psychological and neuroscientific evidence demonstrate that motivation and cognition are inextricably linked. There are both lower brain centers and higher brain association areas for motivation. Motivation can be affected and learned. Understanding motivation and developing tools to affect and teach motivation to our students are the central purposes of this workshop.

One of the first theoretical frameworks for understanding motivation was based upon a hierarchy of human needs. We are motivated to take care of these needs. Lower needs, such as physiological or safety needs, must be met first; before we are motivated to fulfill higher needs, such as aesthetic needs or self-actualization. This is the oldest theory on motivation, but is still relevant. For example, you can accurately describe the motivational aspects of gang membership for adolescents when you consider the hierarchy of human needs.

A popular framework for understanding motivation has been to divide motivation into two components, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation represents the inner drive or passion people have to excel in a particular pursuit. Extrinsic motivation represents the drive to achieve external rewards, such as money or social status. For a time, there was considerable debate about the relative importance and benefits of internal versus external rewards in motivating students. Over time a consensus has emerged that both play a motivational role in the academic setting.

Interest and motivation are highly related, perhaps even synonymous. Individuals with a strong interest in a specific area are intrinsically motivated to succeed in that area of endeavor. Individual interest tends to be stable and long-lasting. Situational interest is generated by certain conditions or stimuli in the environment that focuses attention. Situational interest tends to be immediate and may not last. Importantly, situational interest and individual interest interact through moderating, eliciting or enhancing one another. Teachers can use situational interest to develop individual interest and intrinsic motivation.

Four contemporary theories of academic motivation are: self-efficacy theory, attribution theory, self-worth theory, and achievement goal theory. These theories are unified by the influence of emotions and beliefs. Emotions and beliefs elicit different patterns of behavior, including: mastery, failure avoidance, learned helplessness, work avoidance, and passive aggression. The unmotivated behaviors observed in your classroom likely fall under one or more of these behavioral patterns.

Significant classroom research has been done to identify the observable characteristics of motivating versus non-motivating classrooms. Motivating classrooms are flooded with motivational instructional practices. Notice that there are instructional practices that can undermine motivation. Motivating teachers use far more supportive motivational practices than non-motivating teachers who use a preponderance of practices that undermine student motivation. In activity #1, you will explore the best practices of motivating teachers.

A combination of scholarly research and field experience has identified nine general instructional strategies that are used by teachers to generate motivation and engagement of students in academic tasks and learning. These nine strategies are listed below.

- Extrinsic Rewards and Cooperative Learning
- Social Interactions
- Student Autonomy and Choice
- Situational Interest
- Goal Setting
- Competition
- Relevancy, Meaning-Making and Real World Connections

As a teacher, you can have considerable influence over your students' motivational levels and classroom engagement. In fact, many of you use motivational strategies to influence students now. In activity #2, you will describe and rate strategies you have successfully used to motivate students.

The neurophysiology of motivation lends insight into the centrality of motivation in learning. The emotional and motivational systems have quite a bit in common. Both systems have centers located in the lower brain. Any sensory input or behavioral output must pass through the emotional and motivational centers of the lower brain. Both centers have extensive projections throughout the cerebral cortex (the higher brain) and can modulate higher brain activities in a widespread, diffuse manner. An example of this is the effect of stress and anxiety on learning. Stress and anxiety affect the cerebral cortex and associated higher brain functions through the emotional centers located in the lower brain.

The cerebral cortex is what you most readily associate the mind with. Here are association areas for motor and sensory processing, language, problem-solving, intellect, cognition, recall, personality, working memory, judgment, reasoning, persistence, planning. Importantly there, are association areas for emotional and motivational processing. We can teach emotional and motivational processing, just like we can teach problem-solving and logic. This is most obvious with emotional processing. We are not ruled by our emotions and lower brain responses. Our higher brain processes emotional events and stimuli and regulates our behaviors. The higher brain is doing the same thing with motivational events and stimuli.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging allows neuroscientists to identify what areas in the brain are active in relationship to higher brain functions such as problem-solving, language, et cetera. Studies have shown that the association areas of the brain involved with motivation become active slightly ahead of association areas for cognition and problem-solving. In the brain, motivational processing precedes the learning event. Simply put, the brain is deciding whether or not something is of value before engaging in learning

Motivation Theories

There are a number of different motivational theories that one can use to establish a working framework upon which to build an understanding of motivation. The simplest theories in science are also the most elegant. An early theory of motivation is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In Maslow's pyramid, we are motivated to fulfill basic biological needs such as hunger, thirst and safety, first. Social needs of belongingness and esteem must be met next, before we are motivated to fulfill self-actualization and spiritual needs.

A popular framework for examining motivation is to divide motivation into two components, intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external) motivation. Extrinsic motivation is associated with lower need levels, while intrinsic motivation is associated with higher need levels in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. There has been considerable debate about the relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in academic achievement. Now there is an emerging consensus that both components of motivation play an important role in the classroom, and that the two interact to determine student engagement.

Interest ties intrinsic and extrinsic motivation together. Often, personal interest and intrinsic motivation are seen as synonymous or interchangeable. Less obvious is the close relationship between situational interest and extrinsic motivation. There are a number of interactions between individual and situational interest, and these interactions can be used by the teacher to develop personal interest around academic lessons and tasks.

Throughout the late twentieth century several motivational theories were developed. In this millennium, those theories have been unified by the underlying theme of emotion. Four theories prominent in current educational psychology include: self-efficacy theory, attribution theory, self-worth theory, and achievement goal theory. These theories unify under the premise that student behaviors, in part, are guided by emotional responses to tasks. Those responses dictate subsequent motivational behavior. When examined from this light, specific patterns of behavior emerge.

Cognition, motivation and emotion are three distinct classes of mental operations and are fundamentally linked. There are specific regions of the higher brain for cognitive, motivational and emotional processing, and these regions integrate with each other. Lower centers of the brain specific to motivational and emotional processing have projections throughout the cerebral cortex. A high degree of feedback exists between higher and lower brain centers for motivation and emotion.

The identification of a specific higher region of the brain for motivation implies that motivation can be learned, just like problem solving, language, or other higher brain functions. The involvement of lower brain centers in motivation and emotion emphasizes the importance of motivational and emotional stimuli, and the importance of minimizing stress and anxiety, in learning. Extensive feedback from higher to lower brain centers implies that motivational behaviors can be consciously controlled, much like emotions.

Classroom Motivation

Situational interest contributes to the development of individual interest. Stimulating deep interest involves both affective and cognitive processes. For example, feelings of enjoyment combined with a perception of importance. Situational interest can impact the cognitive and affective domains to stimulate personal interest and intrinsic motivation. Appealing to each student's individual interest to enhance motivation in the classroom is problematic. However, we can create situational interest and use that to engage and ultimately develop personal interest among students.

Teachers are the difference in motivated versus unmotivated classrooms. Several studies have compared classrooms from a motivational and engagement perspective. Teachers with motivated, engaged classrooms have different characteristics and exhibit different behaviors than those teachers with classrooms in which the motivation and engagement of students is low.

Motivating teachers create a positive, upbeat, compassionate classroom where the emphasis is on learning. Lessons are well-planned, meaningful, interesting, and allow for student autonomy and cooperation. High, positive expectations are projected by motivating teachers with solid support through scaffolding to help students reach goals. Classroom procedures are well-developed in motivating classrooms and effective teachers actively teach these procedures so students fully understand them. Self-regulation is clearly evident in motivated classrooms. Motivating teachers emphasize that students are to take charge of themselves, and carry out routines and tasks without teacher oversight. Finally, motivating teachers model for students: techniques, subject material, positive learning behavior, and interpersonal relationships.

Reading motivation is of critical importance for academic achievement. We can stimulate reading motivation among students in the classroom. The teacher is the key factor once again. Value reading and be enthusiastic about reading. Fill the classroom with books at different reading levels. Choose books that are coherent, relevant and vivid. Provide choice and social opportunities to enhance students' interaction with reading material. Connect the reading material with hands-on activities. Use extrinsic rewards that are strongly related to reading and reading behavior.

Math motivation is also important for academic achievement, and the teacher is important as a math model. Create a comfortable classroom that supports healthy risk-taking to reduce anxiety. Provide meaningful mathematics tasks that are appropriately challenging. Provide choices and allow for cooperative learning opportunities. Engage in mathematical conversations and emphasize conceptual understanding. Allow for mistakes and use them as learning opportunities. Importantly, give frequent, substantive feedback.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are both involved in motivation for learning. Effective use of extrinsic rewards can develop intrinsic motivation to learn. Extrinsic rewards are useful when students' initial interest is low. Extrinsic rewards must place value on learning and be based upon specific learning goals. The reward must be tangible and time-sensitive. Remember that the effective use of verbal praise is a powerful extrinsic motivator.

Teacher motivation is a key element in student motivation. Unmotivated teachers can undermine student motivation. Research studies demonstrate that children enter first grade highly motivated, and slowly lose the sense of motivation up until middle school years, when those motivational behaviors become cemented. Stress, a sense of self-efficacy and emotion are three vital players in the motivational states of teachers.

Activity #1: Favorite Teacher Analysis

Description:

Teachers will describe their most favorite teacher from their days as a student and analyze the characteristics of their favorite teacher.

Materials:

Note Cards
Pens/Pencils

Directions:

Teachers will pair off with their neighbor and describe their favorite teacher from their days as a student. Pairs will determine some of the common characteristics their favorite teachers share and write these down on a note card. Pairs will share their common characteristics of favorite teachers with the group. Each group will come up with 10 common characteristics to share with the whole class. The whole class will identify the top ten characteristics of favorite teachers.

Group Discussion:

What are some of the common characteristics that your favorite teachers share? Which characteristics do you have in common with your favorite teachers? How would these characteristics contribute to a motivated classroom setting?

Classroom Application:

Use these characteristics as a guide and work on developing some of these characteristics in your own teaching.

References:

Schweinle, Amy, Meyer, DK. (2006). Striking the right balance: Students' motivation and affect in elementary mathematics. The Journal of Educational Research. V. 99, Iss. 5; p. 271, 22 pgs.

Activity #2: Teacher-Tested Motivational Strategies

Description:

Teachers create compilation of classroom strategies they have successfully used to motivate students in the classroom.

Materials:

Note Cards
Pens/Pencils

Directions:

What is one classroom method or strategy you have used to successfully motivate a student(s) or class?

Each teacher has two minutes to answer the above question on an index card. The strategy should be short, specific, clear, and legible. Teachers will then walk around and exchange index cards face down. After exchanging cards, teachers will pair up. Each pair of teachers will review the strategies on the two cards and distribute 7 points between these two strategies to reflect their relative usefulness. Teachers will write the score points on the back of each card and then repeat the process of exchanging and scoring strategies four more times.

At the end of the fifth round, teachers return to their seats and add up the total points with the card they currently have. A countdown from 35 will be conducted to identify the strategies with the highest scores. A compilation of the highest scoring motivational strategies will be distributed to all teachers.

Group Discussion:

Which of these strategies would be useful to you in your current classroom? Have you used any of the identified strategies? Can you identify strategies to work with behavioral patterns observed in Activity Two?

Classroom Application:

Use these strategies and methods in your classroom to improve student motivation. Try different strategies. Experiment and see which are effective for you and your classroom.

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Malouff, J.M., Rooke, S.E., Schutte, N.S., Foster, R.M., Bhullar, N. (2008). Methods of motivational teaching. Retrieved from the WWW. Unknown web address.

Theobald, MA. (2006). Increasing student motivation: Strategies for middle and high school teachers. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Motivation Strategies

Here are a few strategies from previous workshops that I have added to and edited. These are examples to help get you started.

Social Interaction

- *All Subjects.* I offer a chance for students who work quickly, with quality, to help a struggling student with the task or assignment. A pair of students is assigned to help a student who is having difficulty learning a new concept. The helpers explain the new concept in their own words (student lingo). They may present examples of how they worked on problems associated with the concept, or make up their own problems or critical-thinking situations to help the student having difficulties. A variation on this theme is to have peer groups teach particular concepts or lessons to the class.
- *Language Arts.* This strategy is especially useful for a Language Arts/Literature block class or for shortened weeks. For the short 3 day week of Thanksgiving, students have a reading marathon. Small groups of 4 students are formed and they choose one of the following options.
 1. Each student in the group reads the same book.
 2. Each student in the group reads a different book by the same author
 3. Each student in the group reads a different book of the same genre
 4. Each student in the group reads a different book.

After reading, tables have a roundtable discussion about the books they have read. Literary questions are presented to groups in a game format using a spinning wheel or dice to randomly choose students.

- *Language Arts.* In a class where I was teaching reading comprehension, I set up a lesson where the students categorized types of comprehension questions. This led to a difference of opinion about the categories and the students began a debate. Instead of just giving them the right answers, I facilitated the debate. When the debate were over, I felt the students really understood the concept because of the good discussion and the sense of ownership they had. They loved it too, the exercise seemed very motivating.
- *All Subjects.* Find your Match. Teacher uses index cards and writes: words/definitions; decimal, %, fractions, equivalents, et cetera. Students choose cards at random and find their "match." Works well for struggling students because students looking for answers or knowledge are helped by other students looking to find their match. Students become teachers and provide learning moments for other students. Once students get used to the game it can be done several times in a class to increase understanding. (Day before a test) Can be used as an exam review for vocabulary; math facts, concepts and problems; social studies; and science.

- *All Subjects.* Apollo 13. Houston, we have a problem. I need help; I don't know how to teach you this. Teacher puts themselves in a position of helplessness. Students must work together to find a way to help the teacher.
- *All Subjects.* Call Grandma. Lunch with Grandma, candles, tablecloth. You are doing so well we have to go to one of the highest authorities—Grandma. We have to call her and tell her. I call where everyone can hear and invite Grandma to lunch sometime. I bring a table cloth and candles. The child, Grandma and I have a special lunch together. Usually the parents show up too. The lunch is sponsored by the school cafeteria. This strategy has the added benefit of encouraging grandparent participation in the student's education.
- *All Subjects.* Turn a problem student into your helper to reduce problem behaviors. You can also use class jobs as a reward for positive behavior. You can create opportunities for leadership. I had an intelligent 9th grade student with emotional disabilities and the behaviors of an elementary student. He would actively provoke students and was creating unsafe situations. I placed him as an aide in our high needs classroom, where he stepped up as a leader, monitoring class behavior, organizing activities et cetera. His disruptive and provoking behaviors decreased.

Extrinsic Rewards

- *All Subjects.* My favorite motivational tool for students is to use class jobs as rewards for on-task behavior and academic engagement. Jobs might include: front, middle and end line leaders, hold the door open for the class, pass out food if food is brought, collect or pass out papers or tools, help with keeping track of collected papers, taking a message to another teacher or staff member, videotaping the class, portfolio file person.
- *All Subjects.* Cookies. I use paper cookies as an extrinsic reward for my students. They can earn cookies for: being on task, positive behavior, homework completion, lining up quietly, et cetera. I also use it as a reward system for my most disruptive kids. When a child is caught being good, I slip them a paper cookie. They write their name on it and place it in the cookie jar. On Fridays, I pick 5 - 10 cookies and those kids get a prize from the prize box. The cookies are given randomly and unexpectedly, except for the students on a behavior contract who get cookies for the desired behavior.
- *All Subjects.* Each Monday, I print out missing assignment sheets from my grade book. Any student that is not given one has completed all work to date. I give those students with no missing work a ticket. I do this every Monday. On the last day of the month I draw one ticket out of the jar and buy that student fast food for lunch. They get to eat it at lunch in the cafeteria. Cost for 1 year is \$48.00 with a monthly lunch limit of \$6.00. This technique motivates students to complete and turn in all assignments
- *All Subjects.* . A ticket system is used to reward positive behaviors. Tickets are handed out during the school day for positive behaviors. It can be for completing and turning in homework, on-task behavior, thoughtful discussion, et cetera. Winners are drawn at the end of the day. Prizes might be: gift certificates, night off from homework, floating A coupons, privileges and treats, et cetera.
- *All Subjects.* In fitness we run the mile every other week. To help motivate students, I announce over the intercom how much students' times have improved each time they run. I also keep a log and announce the rates of improvement immediately after students run their mile. This helps motivate students to persist in improving their times. Importantly, the focus is on individual improvement.
- *All Subjects.* We use a checkbook system to help students self monitor their class behavior. Each student has a checkbook and starts the year with \$30. Payday is at the end of each month. Students earn money for good behavior and lose money for bad behavior. For example, leaving the room for the bathroom, forgetting required supplies, or forgetting homework causes them to lose money. They earn money for being on time, finishing their class assignment, helping other students. If a student hits zero a call is made to the care-giver, and the student must stay after school thirty minutes to earn back \$30.00. Students can use their money on Friday to buy items such as: promethean board, reading spot/chair, candy, pencils, erasers, water.
- *All Subjects.* I group desks into "tables" and when all students at each table are working quietly I write tally points up on the board. This does not require the teacher to talk. I also erase points when tables are talking or not working. The table with the most points at the end of the day can earn a treasure box item.

Situational Interest

- *All Subjects.* This strategy uses a game and movement to add situational interest. A beach ball with a current learning focus (vocabulary, math facts, et cetera) is created so that each panel on the ball has a different question. The ball is tossed around “hot potato” style. When time is called, the student has to answer or respond to the panel her right thumb is on. If incorrect, we discuss the correct answer. Keep going until all kids at least have one turn.
- *Math.* Math Bingo----Teacher prepares 24 problems over a specific concept. Put the answers on the chalkboard and have students fill out their own Bingo card. They can put the answers anywhere they want on their Bingo card. To play the game, the teacher puts one problem up on the chalkboard. The students work the problem out and cover up their answer with a chip. The game continues in this manner until Bingo is called. The teacher checks the card, presents a reward, and continues the same game. Students can win more than once. Keep playing until the teacher has used up about 18-20 problems. Good for review before a test or for practice on a particular skill. Takes about 20-30 minutes.
- *Science.* Use ordinary items to teach science concepts in a hands-on manner. Examples: density column, dry ice, dissolving M & M's, fruit loops, cabbage juice indicator, et cetera. You can use simple science experiments to teach data collection and graphing, as well as create situational interest for related reading.
- *Language Arts.* Readers Theater. Anyone can be a star. Start with a compelling short story or scene from a book being read as a class. Have students choose reading parts, form scripts, and create simple props. Readers Theater is a dramatic presentation of a written work in a script form. Scripts are held by the readers. Lines are not memorized. The focus is on reading the text with expressive voices and gestures. The performances can be videotaped and discussed by the class. Can be used as a vehicle to teach plot, figurative language, et cetera.
- *Math.* To teach the concept of scale in math class, have students draw to scale a dream house they create.
- *Math.* I use heart rates to teach integers. Students record their hearts rates at rest, after a short exercise, and during recovery. I use the class information to find averages. Students record their differences compared to the class average as positive and negative numbers. Students like to see how they compared to the class.
- *Language Arts.* To review a unit on nouns, students form into small groups (4 in a group) and create a new 51st state. Students are given a check list of items they need to include for their state - such as proper nouns for capital city, collective nouns for recreations, abstract and concrete nouns. Students write a fictional biography about the discoverer or founder of the state, and write a song for a state anthem.

Student Autonomy and Choice

- *Science.* For science, collect several magazines of interest. Examples might include: Motor Trend, Discover, Omni, Popular Science, Odyssey, Science News, Yes Mag. Have them find something of interest from the magazine to teach you about. Have them create a presentation, develop a demonstration, write a lesson, make up an assignment, et cetera. The idea is to let the student play the role of teacher while learning about a scientific topic of interest to them.
- *All Subjects.* Treasure chest. As a class, students decide what the guidelines are to be able to visit the “treasure chest”. Each year that I have done this there have been different guidelines. The students take ownership since they came up with how to earn a visit. The chest is filled with pencils, stickers, coupons (lunch with teacher, homework pass, classroom job privileges), bookmarks, trading cards.
- *All Subjects.* Choice menu. Create authentic performance assessments based on intent; students choose project that will be graded. Menu presents choices for all learning styles. Example, The Iditarod.

| Iditarod | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Study dogs used for the race. | Build a model sled. | Write a brochure. |
| Investigate Alaska geography. | Study the history of race. | Write a poem. Write a song. |
| Study how to survive the cold. | Make igloo from sugar cubes. | Chart temperature, times. |

- *Language Arts.* To motivate students to write, develop interest and offer choices. In writing activities, offer them several topics from which to choose. Always make last the last option a question mark. This option allows students to choose their own topic (after checking to be sure it fits the assignment). The students’ writing is consistently better and more comprehensive if they care about and have chosen their topic. To explore elements of fiction, give students a choice of writing an actual novelette or writing a short story and reading a novel (give students several novels to choose from). Have students apply elements of fiction to the novelette or short story.
- *All Subjects.* I use a task sheet which is a list of assignments that students can pick from. Choices might include: create a rhyme or rap, make a model, visit a college course, interview a professional, talk to a career specialist, write a paper about a personal experience. Some of the best work comes when they pick “come up with your own idea” from the task sheet.
- *Social Studies.* I like to role model how a democracy works by using a class vote. I usually choose the options so both options are good. We vote at least once a day on things like; which book I should read, whether to review more or take the test, which game we should play, what they think something means, et cetera.
- *Language Arts.* I have a treasure chest with books in it. I allow students to pick books from the treasure chest to read. If a student reads 10 books; they get to pick a book from the chest to keep. I use scholastic book order points to keep the chest full.

Competition

- *All Subjects.* Chapter review game for extra credit on the test. I group students into teams. Each team has a small white board. I pick out one problem at a time from a textbook or other source and set a time limit. Each team works the problem out and writes the answer on the white board. At the end of time, teams hold up the white boards toward me. If correct, a team gets 1 point. I choose one of the teams to explain the process for whole class. The winning team gets 5 extra credit points for the upcoming test, 2nd place=3 points, all the rest of the active teams get 1 point.
- *Math.* Students work on practice math problems. The first student with all the practice problems completed correctly receives an A+ grade for that night's homework assignment. Students work to be the first one with all the problems done correctly, since that will be their homework grade.
- *Math.* Math Basketball. Class is divided into 2 teams. On each team there is a shooter and a rebounder. Each member of the team has an individual white board. I give a problem. When one team member answers the problem correctly the team's shooter shoots a Nerf basketball. If the 2nd team answers correctly before the 1st team makes a basket they also can shoot. A team gets 2 points for answering correctly. The first team to make a basket gets 1 point.
- *Language Arts.* Hold a writing contest between language arts classes or groups. The group or class that performs the best overall wins a class hot cocoa party.
- *Science.* Play Science Baseball for exam review. Teacher pitches a question and the student has 3 swings (attempts) to get the answer. If they get it right, they move to 1st base and the next student is up. If that student gets their question right, they move to 1st and the first student moves to 2nd base. If they cannot answer the question the students on base may steal (answer the question). If they cannot steal, it's an out. Three outs and the next team comes up to bat. Students may not steal on the 3rd out. Students at their seats may use books and packets to find answers. However, when they are up at bat there is no help. Everyone is encouraged to write down questions and answers as they sit at their seat to review. The team with the most points gets 5 extra credit points on the exam.
- *Language Arts.* Team Spelling. Two lines are formed by dividing the class in half. Each line faces their section of the whiteboard. The teacher says the spelling word out loud. First member in each line goes to the board and writes the first letter. The same student passes their marker to the next student in line and goes to the back of the line. Students continue until the word is complete. Students may erase or add only one letter at a time. Teams get 1 point for finishing first and 1 point for correct spelling.
 - Rules
 - No shouting out letters.
 - Must hold your place in line.
 - Walking only, no running.
- *Math.* We play math games where I write down vocabulary or answers on the board. Students are divided up into teams. Students in each team are numbered and I pick a number from the cup. Students from each team come up to the board with a yard stick. I ask them a question and the first person to point to the correct answer receives a point for their team. If they don't know the answer, they get 3 lifelines to help them. I vary the questions based on the student's ability level. The team that wins gets a prize.

Goal Setting

- *All Subjects.* Plan, Do Study, Act (PDSA). PDSA is a cycle for continuous improvement used in a number of organizational settings, including schools. In this strategy, the class decides on a goal. For example, 100% of students will earn 80% or above on the vocabulary quiz each week. Students can fill out the PDSA worksheet to set their goals, actions and evaluate their results.
- *All Subjects.* Create individual student portfolios used for data collection, personal goal setting, dream making, interest-based material. Portfolios show academic attainment, but also work as an interest-based passion tool—they were anxious and excited to engage in the portfolio type activity.
- *All Subjects.* Weekly Grade Checks. On Monday, I print out individual grades for students. At the same time, students award themselves a current grade in class. The student and I determine the average of my score and their score and put the average score at the top of grade print-out. Students then decide what their goal is for their current week's grade and use the grade print-out to improve their grade for next week (retake low test scores, turn in missing work, et cetera) The grade print-outs need to be signed by parents for credit by the end of the week. Students who reach their goal for the week a reward.
- *All Subjects.* Daily Pride Log.

P = Practice listening daily.

R = Respect for all.

I = I am accountable.

D = Do at first request.

E = Everybody safe.

Pride Log has each subject with four slots for stars or marks to go in.

| Subject | Follow Directions 1 st time | Do Their Best | Take Out and Put Away Materials | Follow Their PRIDE Rules |
|------------------|---|---------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Math | | | | |
| Reading | | | | |
| Science | | | | |
| Language Arts | | | | |

At the end of each subject the teacher has students star or mark their cards. At the end of the day the teacher tallies up the marks. If the students reach the top scores they get free time.

Real World Connections

- *Language Arts.* Have students write for real audiences. For example: older students write stories and make books for younger students, students write persuasive essays to their parents about something they want to change, students submit essays to contests, web publishing, local newspapers, and the list goes on.
- *Math.* Integrate personal investment into math classes. Use *How To Become A Millionaire Using Compound Interest*, and other books on personal finance. View media about investment and finance, including financial television shows and the Internet (ex. Fiscal Policy - PBS online financial podcasts). Let students select topics of interest themselves. Integrate mathematics with various financial analyses.
- *Math.* Cooking for real-life reading and math. Students develop skills with reading and math fractions. Recipes for baked goods and sweets are doubled and tripled. Students' baked goods, made in school from recipes brought from home, were in turn sold as a fund raiser. The proceeds of the fund raiser was announced to the student body. Various types and levels of rewards for involvement and engagement of students were built into the activity. It was originally conceived as a way to differentiate instruction. The end result was a very high degree of involvement with all students.
- *Math.* I ask questions and listen to students to understand and know their likes and interests. Then I take that information from them to connect the math problem or concept to their specific area of interest. Doing this allows me to make my lessons applicable to students and where they are at and what interests them.
- *Social Studies.* I like to talk about the country we live in, how a democracy works, and what a majority means. We talk about how each person has to be in charge of their own behavior. We also discuss the role of authority in helping those who struggle. I relate this role of authority to my duties as a teacher. I assure them that I want each of them to take care of themselves, but if they struggle I will help them.
- *All Subjects.* I attend school activities that my students participate in, sporting events, concerts, et cetera. I tell them I saw them and use that as a discussion point. This lets them know I am interested in their lives. I take pictures and videos of my students and post them in class and on the computer monitors' screen savers. I also use a digital photo frame and rotate pictures of students all day long.
- *Social Studies.* Students are broken into pairs or threes and plan a road trip across the USA. They look up where to stay, transportation, visits to national monuments and parks, museums, and create a budget. This project gives real life application and teaches economics and social interactions. Whoever visits the most historic places, travels the most miles, and is lowest on budget wins a prize.

Relevancy and Meaning-Making

- *Language Arts.* Students have rewritten Romeo & Juliet to make it relevant and meaningful to them. They make it a modern story and perform record it as an audio and or visual presentation. Students look at themes of universality in literature and break down inaccessible language to recreate a story that has meaning.
- *All Subjects.* Before introducing a new assignment I start out by explaining to students why the assignment is relevant. I try to make lessons as interesting as possible. When I explain the purpose of the project they see the point of it, because I have explained a reason why it is useful and important to them. They give more attention to my explanation, more eye contact.
- *Language Arts.* I use a class blog to discuss culturally relevant questions. My class blogs other classes in other schools to allow students to work on the same question across school boundaries. Examples of questions: Are people inherently good or evil? Is it ever okay to steal or cheat? The blogs really get students thinking and writing in a critical manner.
- *All Subjects.* At the beginning of the year I have students fill out an interest survey asking them about their hobbies, likes, dislikes, et cetera.) Based on this information I attempt to make a connection with each one as they enter the classroom. This develops immediate rapport with some of my most difficult students, which in turn increases their motivation level in class.
- *Reading.* Before reading any one piece of literature I engage the class in discussions about themselves, their home life, personal situations, relationships, et cetera. I guide this discussion based upon the characters and themes of the literature we are reading. I let students expand upon their personal stories as much as they want. Even if their story only slightly compares, they feel involved and can relate to something within the reading.
- *All Subjects.* I use personal connections and humor with my junior high school students. I have new students fill out an interest inventory either the first day of school or when they enroll. I find trends in their interests and incorporate them into class projects or independent choice assignments. They know I actually read the forms and care about their interests. We also joke and laugh a lot in my room, creating a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.