

# Helping Students Motivate Themselves

Practical Answers to  
Classroom Challenges

Larry Ferlazzo



# Activity Sheets

Many of the figures discussed and displayed in this book are available for download at [go.hbe.com.au](http://go.hbe.com.au).

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# Introduction

This book comes out of my seven years of teaching at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, California, and out of my previous nineteen years working as a community organiser.

It comes out of my recognising that for me to be as effective as I wanted to be as a teacher, I needed to identify ways that I could help my students both learn content knowledge and develop higher-order thinking skills and the attributes that good community leaders must have, including self-motivation, personal responsibility and perseverance. Increasingly, research shows that these qualities are critical for success in careers, university and in life (Hampel, 2010). In fact, a 2011 review of more than 200 studies covering nearly 300,000 students found that simple lessons taught by teachers covering these kinds of topics resulted in substantial student academic gains (Sparks, 2011).

And this book comes out of my understanding that developing these kinds of attributes needs to be done in conjunction with students gaining the academic skills they need to learn. In most of our schools today, for better or worse, both teachers and their students are primarily held accountable for teaching and learning academic skills – no matter how important we believe other life skills might be.

This book shares classroom-tested strategies to accomplish both goals simultaneously.

Most, although not all, chapters follow a similar structure. They begin with a question relating to a common classroom problem, which is followed by an imaginary complaint/concern voiced by a teacher. Even though it is ‘imaginary’, I’d bet most of us have either said or thought something like each concern at some point during our teaching career.

Next is a section on immediate responses that teachers can take *today* to deal with the issue. Each response is accompanied by research supporting it. Almost all of the suggestions support developing higher-order thinking skills and enhancing self-motivation, personal responsibility, and perseverance. However, there are a few ideas sprinkled throughout the book that, while not necessarily designed to further those specific qualities, don’t undermine them either – I have just found these ideas to be effective. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in “Self-Reliance”: ‘A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds...’ (Emerson, n.d.).

A ‘Setting the Stage’ section comes next and provides ideas (and supporting research) on what teachers can do to provide longer-term solutions.



The final section of each chapter includes detailed lesson plans, including printable activity sheets, to implement some of the recommendations of 'Setting the Stage'.

The lessons have specific suggestions for incorporating technology into the activities. Even though each lesson has a different technology suggestion, most of the suggestions are appropriate for all of the lessons in the book. Those ideas, along with the activities recommended in the free-standing chapter on using technology in the classroom in Question 12, provide a wealth of different ways to effectively use technology to enhance student learning.

This book is not designed as a road map; rather, it should serve as a compass to point us and our students in the right direction.

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## Question 1

# How Do You Motivate Students?

*I work so hard at trying to get these kids motivated. Some are, but so many aren't. They just seem to want to get by – if that. I try to encourage them – I'm their biggest cheerleader! But it can get so tiring. I feel like I'm pushing a rope with some of my students. Why can't they just want to achieve instead of having to be pushed into it?*

Strategies that teachers will often use in efforts to motivate students include offering incentives and rewards – “If you read a certain number of books you'll get a prize!” – or cheerlead relentlessly – “Good job, Karen!” It's also not unusual for teachers to just ‘give up’ on some students, “They just don't want to learn!”

One lesson community organisers learn is that you might be able to threaten, cajole, badger or bribe someone to do something over the short-term, but getting someone to do something beyond a very, very short time-frame is a radically different story.

**Organisers believe that you cannot really motivate anybody else. However, you *can* help people discover what they can use to motivate themselves.**