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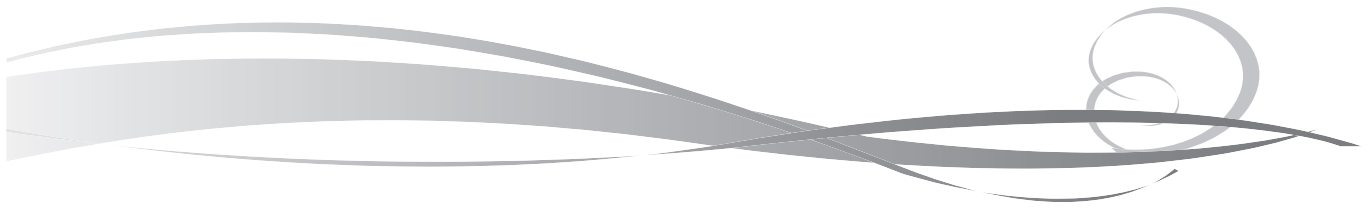
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# Introduction

Teachers already use innovative strategies to promote engagement. In fact, they work tirelessly to design new ways to increase learners' achievement and students *are* learning. Growth in the use of technology, standards, and quality instructional practices informed by assessment has made a big difference! Still, educators struggle daily with unmotivated students.

How do we motivate students who don't care? What do we do when a student refuses to participate or forgets to hand in homework? In our classrooms, we have all seen students who are daydreaming, doodling, fidgeting, staring blankly, tapping, humming, texting, or even resisting instruction. Sound familiar? This age-old scenario remains a critical issue for educators today. Disengaged students can zap the energy from teachers and throw a classroom into chaos. The focus of the classroom quickly shifts from igniting a love of learning to putting out the fires of misbehavior.

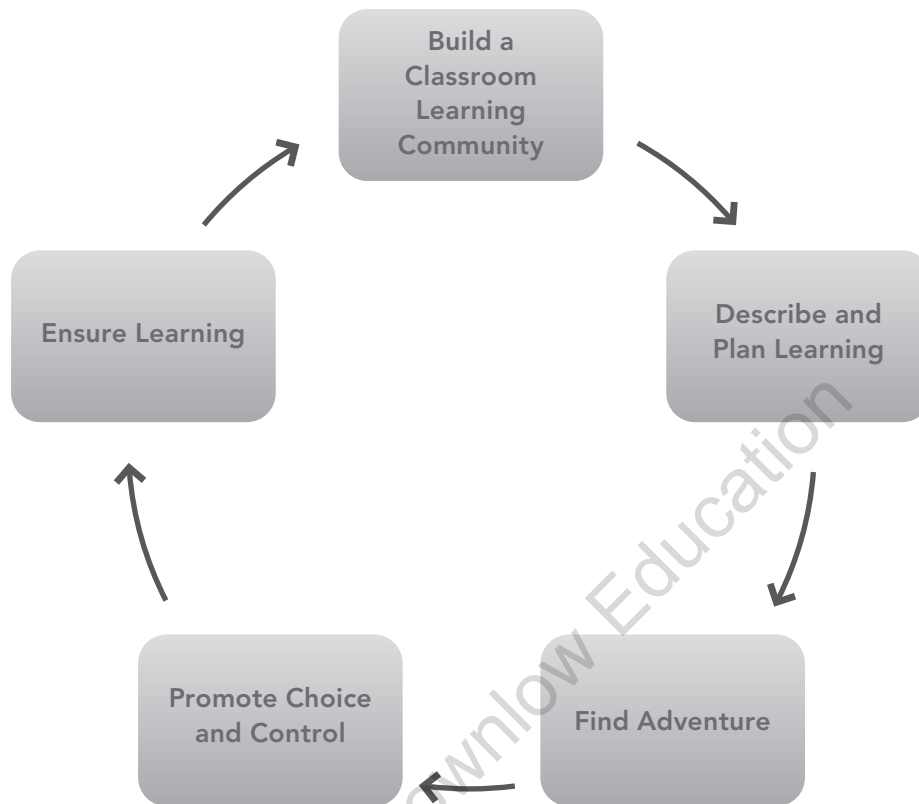
Successful educators use “the magical moments of best teaching practices” (Barkley, 2007, p. ix) to turn flickers of interest into a roaring desire to learn. Learning is contagious and spreads when motivated, passionate teachers engage students with relevant, interesting topics that are essential for student success. These teachers build relationships by getting to know their students' interests, strengths, learning tendencies, and prior knowledge. They create an engaging environment that is welcoming by offering diverse and challenging learning opportunities that foster a desire to learn. These magical moments occur in classroom communities that clearly define and describe the learning goals for students, make learning a fun adventure, promote student choice and control, and ensure success. This type of classroom builds trust and instills in students a sense of efficacy, or a belief in their own capacity to learn. Engaged learners link their acquired knowledge, backgrounds, and experiences to the concepts being taught. A teacher who fosters learning connections for students, bridging their interests, experiences, and prior knowledge will see this flame ignite and take hold. Clearly, motivation is a key component in meeting our ultimate goal of student success in schools today!

## How to Use This Book

Many factors influence motivation, making engaging learners a profoundly complex task. Later, we articulate critical factors and describe what they look like and how they impact student motivation. However, what fuels student motivation—to learn, to try, to engage, to get excited—is different for each student.

What can teachers do when students are seemingly lazy, off task, volatile, or disinterested? Based on current research, years of experience, and conversations with educators, this resource

is designed to provide teachers with twenty-five practical, effective strategies that can be adapted to motivate a whole class or an individual student. While we say and believe, “All students can learn!” *Motivating Students* offers tools that will help us *show* with evidence that all students really *are* learning. Figure I.1 illustrates our framework for motivating students and lighting the fire of engagement.



**Figure I.1: The motivation framework.**

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork by defining motivation, exploring the research, explaining influential factors, describing common unmotivated learners, and providing a self-assessment for teachers to reflect on their current motivational practice.

Chapters 2–6 discuss in detail each aspect of the motivation framework and outline twenty-five strategies to employ based on the root causes of particular unmotivated behaviors. In many cases, of course, these factors are interdependent. For each strategy, we describe its purpose and rationale, identify tips and traps for planning and implementation purposes, and finally provide detailed, specific activities to put the strategy into practice.

- Chapter 2 offers strategies for *building a classroom learning community*, including knowing your students’ interests and learning styles, being culturally responsive, building relationships with and among students, and setting clear rules and expectations.
- Chapter 3 explains the power of *describing and planning learning* in order to hold high expectations for all students, make connections that provide relevance, and offer quality assignments and assessments.
- Chapter 4 identifies strategies for *finding adventure* by using irresistible hooks and clever closures, capitalizing on technology, playing games, spicing up activities, and celebrating success.

- Chapter 5 focuses on *promoting choice and control* for students, including providing quality choices, facilitating goal setting, and using the arts to engage learners.
- Chapter 6 is all about *ensuring learning* and provides strategies to engage students as partners in their learning through effective assessment practices, probing questions, descriptive feedback, and targeted interventions.

Finally, chapter 7 summarizes the big picture, explores how teachers, administrators, school staff, parents, and others contribute to student motivation, and provides suggestions for some of educators' most frequently asked questions about motivation and engagement.

Each of the seven chapters closes with a *campfire talk*, in which key questions guide teachers in professional learning conversations with colleagues. Research on professional development suggests that a focused study on motivation and engagement yields more effective facilitation of motivation and engagement in the classroom (Martin & Dowson, 2009, p. 331):

Participants [in a study on professional development on motivation] increased their practical knowledge about student motivation, were better able to identify and consider motivational problems, and planned new instructional programs to sustain their students' motivation (see also Schorr, 2000). Similarly, Stipek et al. (1998) found that teachers participating in professional development focusing on student motivation were more likely to emphasize mastery and understanding in their teaching, to encourage student autonomy, and to create psychologically safer classroom environments. Participating teachers also made more accurate assessments of students' motivation—an important precursor to effective and targeted intervention (Martin, 2008a).

There is something magical and inspiring about the light from a campfire. These questions are intended to spark lively and engaging discussions that promote deep implementation of the research on best practice in motivation and engagement!

This book aims to provide innovative, research-based, classroom-proven strategies to engage learners. Read this book independently or with a team; focus on a section here or there to troubleshoot specific problems; or study it chapter by chapter to strategize how to create a culture primed for motivation. Our purpose is to inspire teachers, create an engaging classroom environment, and motivate students to become active, successful learners. Some ideas will be new and others familiar. Whatever the case, we hope you *use* these strategies to affect student motivation. Perhaps you have asked students about their interests in the past. But have you *used* their interests to plan instruction or make links and connections with their learning? We hope this book inspires not only fresh ideas but also new ways of using old ideas.

We all move in and out of being more or less motivating, and it is normal for some students to temporarily disengage now and then. But when students show a consistent lack of motivation, it is time to identify and address the root cause of their disengagement to create long-term changes in student behavior and motivation.

Give yourself a pat on the back each time a learner improves that internal desire of motivation. You are making a difference! We hope these enriching, high-energy ideas spark success and inspire educators to persevere to reach and teach every student.

# Understanding Motivation

*Motivation* is an internal state or feeling that makes us want to act. Motivation is *intrinsic* when a person does something to gain a feeling of satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, or deeper understanding. Motivation is *extrinsic* when a person does something to receive a specific reward such as money, a prize, food, a grade, or personal time.

Extrinsic motivation is often effective in the short term and can prompt students to comply or attend to a teacher's requests. A good grade, extra credit points, a favorite food, or an amusing toy creates positive feelings. Incentives like these propel students to acquiesce in the moment. In contrast, intrinsic motivation builds confidence and success that last beyond the moment. This intrinsic desire cultivates, ignites, and sustains lifelong learning. Daniel Pink (2009), in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, describes studies across decades and disciplines that confirm the power of intrinsic motivation:

In environments where extrinsic rewards are most salient, many people work only to the point that triggers the reward—and no further. So if students get a prize for reading three books, many won't pick up a fourth, let alone embark on a lifetime of reading—just as executives who hit their quarterly numbers often won't boost earnings a penny more, let alone contemplate the long-term health of their company. . . . However, when contingent rewards aren't involved, or when incentives are used with proper deftness, performance improves and understanding deepens. Greatness and nearsightedness are incompatible. Meaningful achievement depends on lifting one's sights and pushing toward the horizon. (p. 58)

Students are always motivated, but not necessarily toward what the teacher expects or wants. For example, some students may be more motivated to talk to a friend or walk about the room than follow directions, take copious notes, or participate in an activity.

Learners are inspired or discouraged for a variety of reasons. Consider when a teacher gives an assignment or a task; students who complete the assignment may:

- Understand the directions or the task
- Maintain confidence in their abilities
- Realize benefits of the activity
- Feel successful



- See personal relevance for future use
- Possess background knowledge to connect concepts
- Respect the teacher
- Want the grade

Students who do not complete the assignment may:

- Lack understanding of the directions or the task
- Have little or no confidence in their abilities
- Fear failure
- See no reason to complete the activity
- Lack background knowledge to connect concepts
- Have little or no respect for the teacher

For students, classroom appeal is a combination of what the teacher does, how the learning is framed, and how the student perceives the experience. Learners ask themselves: “Will the material be relevant, interesting, and important? Will I experience success?” Some students respond to an intriguing opening or a humorous story. Others need to see relevance or connections to the world or community before they will engage.

Suppose a group of adults decides to watch a serious documentary on television. Some people may have particular reasons to give their undivided attention to this program: perhaps they know the filmmaker personally. Others may have just found the title, the preview, or the topic intriguing. Ten or fifteen minutes into the program, only some viewers are still watching. For others, the documentary does not meet their expectations. Perhaps they feel it is a waste of time because the information is already familiar, too difficult to learn, presented in a boring way, or different from what was expected.

Consider your own classroom. Would students choose to stay through the lesson if they had a choice? While we can turn off the TV or go to another room if a program is no longer gripping, school is a different story. Students are not able to “turn off” the teacher, get up, and leave. Some students do, however, *flip the channel*. When learners become bored or frustrated, they are not motivated to continue with what the teacher expects. They turn their attention to their own worlds of daydreaming, talking to their neighbors, doodling on the desks, and so on.

According to Martin and Dowson (2009, p. 327), motivation is “a set of interrelated beliefs and emotions that influence and direct behavior” (Wentzel, 1999; see also Green, Martin, & Marsh, 2007; Martin, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). These beliefs and emotions are intensely personal. In our documentary example, some viewers felt positive and continued watching the program. For others, it produced a negative emotion, and they moved on to another activity. The same is true in the classroom. What influences one student to engage may cause another to shut down or tune out.

Given the complexity of motivating all learners, what are the causes of disengagement, and who is responsible for it? The student? The teacher? How many adults could attend to a lesson that did not hold their interest or seemed irrelevant to or disconnected from their world? A teacher must strive to make boring information interesting, challenging, and meaningful so learners yearn to listen, participate, and complete a task. Enticing content is only the

beginning of the engagement issue. Let's face it—there are times when we have to do things we don't want to do. Learning to persevere through the mundane or the difficult is a valuable endeavor. Developing this perseverance is possible and probable when students learn through challenging, appealing, and rewarding experiences (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Learners keep on trying when they see where they are going and how they can get there.

When teachers effectively motivate students, they ignite an intrinsic desire to want to be in school and grow academically, cognitively, and emotionally.

## How Does Motivation Affect Learning?

Motivation has been studied for decades. The research around it varies, depending on the focus of the study. For the purposes of this book, we explored the research on academic motivation and found both depth and breadth as it spans decades, cultures, age levels, and countries. As John Hattie (2009) notes in his synthesis of the research on motivation, "motivation is highest when students are competent, have sufficient autonomy, set worthwhile goals, get feedback, and are affirmed by others" (p. 48). Hattie's meta-analysis also notes the importance of exploring *demotivation*, or what shuts down a learner, such as "public humiliation, devastating test results, or conflicts with teachers or peers" (p. 48). We will address each of these findings with specific strategies in later chapters.

Clearly, relationships with teachers influence students' beliefs and values toward school and schoolwork. Motivation and engagement increase when teachers know their students and build trusting relationships. In addition, teachers who know their students develop interest and understanding of their cultures, beliefs, and values. Through these interactions, teachers build a community of learners and increases in motivation and engagement. Students with strong personal relationships with their teachers internalize the ways of being academically successful. Positive relationships with teachers and peers influence students' motivation to take on a task or activity. They also encourage students to achieve or learn something to gain satisfaction, such as fitting in with the group of peers, or to avoid something negative, like disappointing a parent or a teacher (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Barker et al., 2002; Dowson & McInerney, 2003).

This sense of belonging facilitates academic motivation. When students feel connected to the learning community, classroom, peers, school, or teachers, they are more likely to engage in schoolwork, try challenging tasks, engage in self-assessment, or analyze their understanding and mistakes (Meyer & Turner, 2002; Maslow, 1968; Glasser, 1999). Collaborative activities develop a positive learning community. Students who learn and work together feel more connected to their peers. Creating a classroom climate in which teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships are fostered is integral to influencing academic motivation (Martin & Dowson, 2009; Martin, 2002, 2003).

When students experience quality relationships in school with both peers and adults, they not only perform better academically, their feelings of self-worth increase because they feel like valuable and contributing members of the community. Specific descriptions of students' progress also contribute to self-worth. The more students can identify their achievements in terms of learning, the greater their self-worth. This increase in self-worth helps students engage and try new and difficult challenges (Covington, 2002).