

MOTIVATING THE UNMOTIVATED

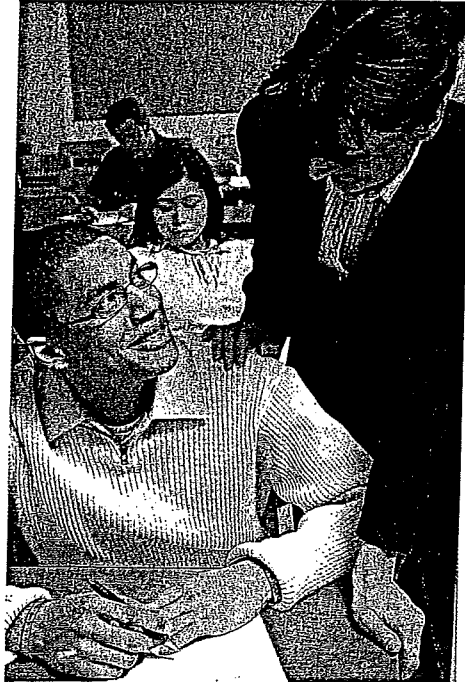
Wouldn't life be easy if every student appeared in school eager to learn! Many teachers believe that students just aren't as motivated as they used to be. Whether that phenomenon is true or not, the reality is that the students in your classroom are the ones *you* have to teach.

In every classroom, there have always been some students who seem unmotivated to learn—at least to learn the things you have to teach. The challenge is to improve the odds of engaging them in your classroom lessons.

There is no magic potion to sprinkle or secret phrase you can whisper to suddenly convert reluctant learners into passionate seekers of knowledge. However, we can learn from those

truly outstanding teachers who have achieved some degree of success in capturing their students' interest and getting them to participate in class.

Here are strategies that research shows that successful teachers use to help motivate their unmotivated students:



- Individualize instruction as much as possible.
- Allow students structured freedom. When feasible, offer options in assignments, projects, or assessments. Give them some control.
- Strive to be clear and concise in your explanations. Use good examples. Those that connect with their daily experiences are most helpful.
- Link your content to your students' personal lives and interests whenever possible. There is no sin in making learning fun when possible.
- Find a way to tap their unique talents in special projects or assignments. Build on their strengths.
- Use hands-on learning activities with real-world problems as much as possible.
- Challenge them to stretch themselves. Seldom do you get more than you expect from your students.

- Show genuine enthusiasm for what you are teaching. It is difficult to generate interest if you are just going through the motions. Great teachers exude passion for what they are teaching.
- Just be real. Don't hide behind a role. You can't be your students' best friend but do treat them with respect and sincerity.
- Show students you care about them as individuals. Express interest in their lives and challenges.
- Offer patience and understanding. Put yourself in the shoes of your slowest students. Some students will always take longer to learn any subject.
- A sense of humor is an asset. Lighten up a little but don't try to be a comedian.
- Break up the talk. Few adults can tolerate sitting and listening to someone else talk for hours. Don't expect students to enjoy it any more than you would. Get students actively engaged in the learning experience by not talking more than eight minutes without some student participation.
- Use visual learning aids—props, costumes, demonstrations, images, manipulatives, charts, or graphs.
- Offer compassionate support and encouragement. Reward progress and effort. Don't wait for perfection before giving positive feedback.
- Vary the routine. The element of surprise generates interest. Use a variety of instructional technique—small-group activities, video, role playing, simulation games, debates, and guest speakers. See Chapter Five for at least thirty things to do besides lecturing.
- Give students a chance to move around occasionally. Revive the energy level when it starts to sag.
- Don't give up on your students. Showing that you believe they can ultimately succeed will often pay off in the long run. Each day you are planting seeds. It is a percentage game. The more seeds you plant, the greater the chance of some taking hold and growing.

Check out the following sources for more detailed suggestions:

Bowman, R. F. (2007). How can students be motivated: A misplaced question? *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 2, 81–86.

Marshall, J. C. (2008). *Overcoming student apathy: Motivating students for academic success*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Riggs, E. G., & Gholar, C. R. (2009). *Strategies that promote student engagement: Unleashing the desire to learn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.