My students aren't motivated - how can I help them?
Teachers have a lot to do with their students' motivational level. A student may arrive in class with a certain degree of motivation. But the teacher's behavior and teaching style, the structure of the course, the nature of the assignments and informal interactions with students all have a large effect on student motivation. We may have heard the utterance, "my students are so unmotivated!" and the good news is that there's a lot that we can do to change that.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation - Educational psychology has identified two basic classifications of motivation - intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from a desire to learn a topic due to its inherent interests, for self-fulfillment, enjoyment and to achieve a mastery of the subject. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is motivation to perform and succeed for the sake of accomplishing a specific result or outcome. Students who are very grade-oriented are extrinsically motivated, whereas students who seem to truly embrace their work and take a genuine interest in it are intrinsically motivated.

Motivating Students - This chapter from the book *Tools for Teaching* by Barbara Gross Davis (Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco, 1993) is a great place to start for ideas and tips about increasing student motivation in your classes. The author presents a handy distillation of research on motivation and uses examples and anecdotes that bring this material to life. In addition to general strategies, this chapter addresses successful instructional behaviors, how to structure a course to motivate students, de-emphasizing grades and responding with other types of feedback to students, and tips to encourage students to complete assigned readings. A reference list points the way to more specific information.

Excerpts from this chapter:
- Give frequent, early, positive feedback that supports students' beliefs that they can do well.
- Ensure opportunities for students' success by assigning tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult.
- Help students find personal meaning and value in the material.
- Create an atmosphere that is open and positive.
- Help students feel that they are valued members of a learning community.

Make it real - In order to foster intrinsic motivation, try to create learning activities that are based on topics that are relevant to your students' lives. Strategies include using local examples, teaching with events in the news, using pop culture technology (iPods, cell phones, YouTube videos) to teach, or connecting the subject with your students' culture, outside interests or social lives. ([Brozo, 2005] ; McMahon and Kelly, 1996)

Provide choices - Students can have increased motivation when they feel some sense of autonomy in the learning process, and that motivation declines when students have no voice in the class structure. Giving your students options can be as simple as letting them pick their lab partners or select from alternate assignments, or as complex as "contract teaching" wherein
students can determine their own grading scale, due dates and assignments. Kurvink, 1993 Reeve and Hyungshim, 2006 (Perkins 2002, GSA Abstract)

**Balance the challenge** - Students perform best when the level of difficulty is slightly above their current ability level. If the task is too easy, it promotes boredom and may communicate a message of low expectations or a sense that the teacher believes the student is not capable of better work. A task that is too difficult may be seen as unattainable, may undermine self-efficacy, and may create anxiety. Scaffolding is one instructional technique where the challenge level is gradually raised as students are capable of more complex tasks. (Wang and Han). [Margolis and McCabe, 2006] [Adams, 1998]

**Seek role models** - If students can identify with role models they may be more likely to see the relevance in the subject matter. For example, Weins et al (2003) found that female students were more likely to cite a positive influence with a teacher as a factor for becoming interested in science. In some cases, you can be a role model but it's unlikely that you will connect on that level with everyone in the class due to differences in gender, age and social circles. However there can be many sources of role models, such as invited guest speakers, fellow students or other peers.

**Use peer models** - Students can learn by watching a peer succeed at a task. In this context, a peer means someone who the student identities with, not necessarily any other student. Peers may be drawn from groups as defined by gender, ethnicity, social circles, interests, achievement level, clothing, or age. [Margolis and McCabe, 2006]

**Establish a sense of belonging** - People have a fundamental need to feel connected or related to other people. In an academic environment, research shows that students who feel they 'belong' have a higher degree of intrinsic motivation and academic confidence. According to students, their sense of belonging is fostered by an instructor that demonstrates warmth and openness, encourages student participation, is enthusiastic, friendly and helpful, and is organized and prepared for class. [Freeman, Anderman and Jensen, 2007] [Anderman and Leake, 2005]

**Adopt a supportive style** - A supportive teaching style that allows for student autonomy can foster increased student interest, enjoyment, engagement and performance. Supportive teacher behaviors include listening, giving hints and encouragement, being responsive to student questions and showing empathy for students. Reeve and Hyungshim, 2006

**Examples of supportive-style teacher behaviors**
- Listening - carefully and fully attended to the student's speech, as evidenced by verbal or nonverbal signals of active, contingent, and responsive information processing.
- Asking what student wants - Such as "Which problem do you want to start with?"
- Allowing students to work in their own way
- Allowing the students to talk
- Using explanatory statements as to why a particular course of action might be useful, such as "How about we try the cube, because it is the easiest one."
- Using praise as informational feedback, such as "Good job" and "That's great."
- Offering encouragements to boost or sustain the student's engagement, such as "Almost," "You're close," and "You can do it."
Offering hints, such as "Laying the map on the table seems to work better than holding it in your lap" and "It might be easier to work on the bottom of the map first."
Being responsive to student-generated questions, such as "Yes, you have a good point" and "Yes, right, that was the second one."
Communicating with empathic statements to acknowledge the student's perspective or experience, such as "Yes, this one is difficult" and "I know it's sort hard to tell."

Examples of controlling-style teacher behaviors
- Talking
- Holding or monopolizing learning materials
- Giving the solutions or answers before the students had the opportunity to discover the solution themselves.
- Uttering directives or commands, such as "Do it like this," "Start this way," or "Use pencil."
- Making statements that the student should, must, has to, got to, or ought to do something, such as "You should keep doing that" and "You ought to . . ."
- Asking controlling questions, such as "Can you move it like I showed you?" and "Why don't you go ahead and show me?"
- Making statements communicating a shortage of time, such as "We only have a few minutes left."
- Using praise as contingent reward to show approval of the student or the student's compliance with the teacher's directions, such as "You're smart" or "You are really good at playing with blocks."
- Criticizing the student or the student's lack of compliance with the teacher's directions, such as "No, no, no, you shouldn't do that."