



How To: Use the Power of Personal Connection to Motivate Students: 4 Strategies

A positive relationship with the teacher is often a crucial factor in motivating a struggling student. The power of positive teacher-student interactions is illustrated in one recent study, which found that--when instructors took just a few seconds to greet inattentive students by name at the start of class--the percentage of time those students spent academically engaged during the first 10 minutes of instruction soared from 45% to 72% (Allday & Pakurar, 2007).

Teachers who are 'proactively positive' in their classroom interactions can foster strong student connections with a minimum of effort. However, in the push to increase the academic rigor of classrooms to implement the Common Core State Standards, teachers can sometimes forget to use simple but effective tools such as praise (Kern & Clemens, 2007) that motivate students even as they strengthen teacher-student relationships. In this discussion, we review efficient strategies to use in connecting with students, along with pointers for integrating those practices into teachers' instructional routines.

Connecting With Students: 4 Strategies. Here are four recommendations for building student relationships that work--but do not require a great deal of time or effort--with fuller explanations of each strategy appearing in the table at the end of this document:

1. *Greet students at the start of class.* As students arrive at the start of class, the teacher stands at the door and briefly greets each student by name (Allday & Pakurar, 2007). This modest effort has been shown to substantially increase student attention and focus. Teachers who commit to using student greetings rearrange their start-of-class routine to allow them consistently to be standing just outside or inside the classroom door as the students arrive.
2. *Promote positive interactions via the 3-positives:1-negative ratio.* To keep relationships on a positive footing throughout the classroom, the teacher self-monitors encounters with particular students and sets the goal of having at least 3 positive interactions for each disciplinary interaction (Sprick, Borgmeier & Nolet, 2002). Positive teacher-student interactions can vary in format: for example, greeting, praise, conversation, smile, thumbs-up sign. By maintaining at least a 3:1 ratio between relationship-enhancing vs. disciplinary interactions, the teacher bends the odds in his or her favor that every student in the class will view the instructor as fair and caring.
3. *Use targeted praise.* Teachers can enhance the positive climate of the classroom, motivate learners, and shape student performance in the desired direction by using frequent praise-statements (Kern & Clemens, 2007). To maximize its impact, praise should describe in specific terms the behavior that is praise-worthy and be delivered as soon as possible after the observed student behavior .

A significant challenge for any instructor who wishes to increase use of praise statements is to employ them with consistency. After all, it is easy for teachers to forget to praise when faced with competing instructional demands. One idea to improve delivery is for the teacher to select as a goal a minimum number of praise statements to be given in a class period (e.g., 10). The teacher then keeps a running count of praise statements as they are delivered throughout the period to verify that the daily goal is reached. A second idea to self-monitor frequency of praise statements is for the teacher to decide on a minimum time-interval for delivering those statements to students--for example, every 3 minutes. The instructor can then use an audio tape with tones at 3-minute intervals to signal when praise should be given. NOTE: Free self-monitoring audio tapes in MP3 format with a



range of fixed intervals playable on smart phones or other devices are available at:

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/free-audio-monitoring-tapes>

4. *Provide teacher attention for positive behavior: The 'two-by-ten' intervention.* If a teacher has a strained (or non-existent) relationship with a particular student, that teacher may want to jump-start a more positive pattern of interaction using the 'two-by-ten' intervention (Mendler, 2000). With this time-efficient strategy, the teacher commits to having a positive 2-minute conversation with the student at least once per day across 10 consecutive school days. The active ingredient in the intervention is regular and positive teacher attention delivered at times when the student is *not* misbehaving. After the 10-day intervention, teachers often find that their relationships with formerly problematic students have improved markedly.

Teachers know that building relationships with students is not a process that occurs by magic--but instead requires thoughtful planning and effort. However, the four ideas presented here are a good starting point for instructors who seek efficient ways to promote interpersonal connections that motivate and inspire students.

References

- Allday, R. A., & Pakurar, K. (2007). Effects of teacher greetings on student on-task behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 40, 317-320.
- Kern, L. & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. *Psychology in the Schools*, 44, 65-75.
- Mendler, A. N. (2000). *Motivating students who don't care*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- Sprick, R. S., Borgmeier, C., & Nolet, V. (2002). Prevention and management of behavior problems in secondary schools. In M. A. Shinn, H. M. Walker & G. Stoner (Eds.), *Interventions for academic and behavior problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches* (pp.373-401). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

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This form provides descriptions of the selected intervention, a listing of research articles supporting the intervention ideas, and space for teacher notes.

Behavior Intervention Strategies	Research Citations
<p>1. TEACHER GREETING: INCREASE ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT. A personalized greeting at the start of a class period can boost class levels of academic engagement. The teacher spends a few seconds greeting each student by name at the classroom door at the beginning of class.</p>	<p>Allday, R. A., & Pakurar, K. (2007). Effects of teacher greetings on student on-task behavior. <i>Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 40</i>, 317-320.</p>
<p>2. MAINTAIN A HIGH RATIO OF POSITIVE INTERACTIONS: BUILDING STUDENT CONNECTIONS. Teachers can increase the odds of building a positive relationship with any student by maintaining a ratio of at least three positive teacher-student interactions (e.g., greeting, positive conversation, high-five) for every negative (disciplinary) interaction (e.g., reprimand).</p>	<p>Sprick, R. S., Borgmeier, C., & Nolet, V. (2002). Prevention and management of behavior problems in secondary schools. In M. A. Shinn, H. M. Walker & G. Stoner (Eds.), <i>Interventions for academic and behavior problems II: Preventive and remedial approaches</i> (pp.373-401). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.</p>
<p>3. PRAISE: ACKNOWLEDGING AND SHAPING BEHAVIOR. To increase desired behavior, the teacher praises the student in clear, specific terms whenever the student engages in that behavior. The teacher uses praise statements at a rate sufficient to motivate and guide the student toward the behavioral goal: (1) The teacher selects the specific desired behavior(s) to encourage through praise; (2) The teacher sets a goal for how frequently to deliver praise (e.g., to praise a student at least 3 times per class period for working on in-class assignments). (3) The teacher makes sure that any praise statements given are behavior-specific.</p>	<p>Kern, L. & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. <i>Psychology in the Schools, 44</i>, 65-75.</p>
<p>4. 'TWO-BY-TEN': STRUCTURING POSITIVE TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS. This strategy ('non-contingent teacher attention') can be helpful with students who lack a positive connection with the teacher. The instructor makes a commitment to spend 2 minutes per day for ten consecutive days ('two-by-ten') engaging the student in a positive conversation about topics of interest to that student. NOTE: During those two-minute daily conversations, the teacher maintains a positive tone and avoids talking about the student's problem behaviors or poor academic performance.</p>	<p>Mendler, A. N. (2000). <i>Motivating students who don't care</i>. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.</p>