

RENAISSANCE®



A Passion for Learning: **30 Ways to**

**Motivate Students**

Research has shown that experts are made, not born—and motivation is the spark that sets students on the path to mastery. It is the first key element of the new science of expertise. Together with practice and coaching, motivation empowers students to reach their fullest potential.

However, as researchers K. Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool have noted, educators are unlike sports or music coaches: they “must help every child improve their performance and start building skills, no matter how little motivation they may have.” Based on *Unlocking Student Talent: The New Science of Developing Expertise*, the latest book by Robin J. Fogarty, Gene M. Kerns, and Brian M. Pete, this guide provides practical strategies for sparking a passion for learning in every student.

## Inspire: Starting the Journey

Inspiration is the initial ignition, the flash of discovery, the “aha” moment in which a student decides what they want to do and where they want to go. It’s how all great journeys get started.



### 1. Increase exposures to new and diverse experiences.

The more experiences that students have—and the more diverse those experiences are—the more likely students are to discover new interests or abilities they want to pursue.

**From show-and-tells in the classroom to field trips to museums, theaters, and businesses**, each new experience is an opportunity for inspiration.

### 2. Explore stories of greatness.

**Videos, stories, and examples of successful individuals—especially those who overcame an initial lack of talent**, such as ballerina Misty Copeland being told she had the wrong body type and was too old to start ballet at age 13—can help students realize their own potential for greatness.

### 3. Eliminate the idea of average.

When the US Air Force decided to make an airplane cockpit based on the “average pilot,” they made a startling discovery: Not one of the pilots was average! Instead of comparing themselves to an average that doesn’t really exist, **encourage students to focus on what makes them unique or how they would like to be unique.**

### 4. Establish a “Genius Hour.”

Started in the workplace with high-tech companies including Google, Apple, and Yahoo, the “Genius Hour” **is time students can spend working on any project of their choice.** This allows them to explore their passions as well as discover new ones.

## 5. Praise interest and exploration.

When a teacher sees the spark of talent and comments on the potential, it can have a lasting impact on the student. **Compliment students when they express interest in new topics and recognize them when they explore those interests.** They'll be more motivated to try new things and find the "one thing" they want to be an expert at.

## 6. Don't answer every question.

Encourage students' curiosity and **empower them to investigate the answers to their own questions** as much as you can. It'll help students take charge of their own learning and build the skills they need to independently pursue their interests.

## 7. Give more choices—within a structure.

Choice doesn't mean "everything." **Allowing students to choose from a limited number of options is a great way to boost motivation while keeping students on task.** For example, for a unit on South American culture, students could be allowed to choose one of six areas of study: foods, music, sports, art, literature, or government.

## 8. Set the stage for positive peer feedback.

Make positive peer feedback part of your daily routine. Set aside time for students to recognize and celebrate one another. **Establish a "good idea" rule: Students have to explain why another child's idea is a good one before they can say anything else about it.** Receiving positive feedback can help motivate students—and giving it can, too!

## 9. Tell the real story of talent.

Explain to students that movies and television often get talent wrong—the myth of the child "destined for success" from birth is just that, a myth. In real life, only 10 to 15 percent of success is the result of innate talent and **even "naturals" have to work very hard to succeed.** Tell students they can build their own talent with hard work and dedication!

## 10. Believe in the extraordinary potential of every child.

School and district leaders, classroom teachers, and other educators—both real and fictional—are forever inspiring others. **Review your own assumptions about talent and consciously let go of the ones that limit students' potential.** Your wholehearted belief in your students is one of the most powerful motivators in the world.



# Invigorate: Continuing the Momentum

As students progress along their talent journeys, they're bound to stumble at some point. There are roadblocks, frustrations, and failures. Invigoration is how the tough keep going, even when the going gets tough.



## 11. Set personalized goals.

It's easier to get where you're going when you have a specific destination in mind. Setting personalized goals **according to a student's interests, starting point, and learning needs is a great way to keep them motivated and moving forward.** For big endeavors, consider setting a series of smaller goals that lead up to the larger success.

## 12. Track progress visually.

Once personalized goals are set for each student, help them find ways to track their daily, weekly, or monthly progress toward those goals in a highly visual way. This **can be as simple as crossing off days on a calendar, keeping an activity log, or coloring in a thermometer.** It could also be more creative, like adding rings to a paper chain or adding pieces to a do-it-yourself puzzle.

## 13. Get students up and moving.

Physical activity is a brain-friendly way to motivate students! **Movement causes oxygen to push into the brain and energize the mind as well as the body.** Even if it's just to gather supplies for an impending activity, getting up and moving around can boost engagement.

## 14. Provide the "just-right" level of challenge.

If we are not pushed or stretched, we do not grow. If we are pushed too much, we become overly frustrated and motivation withers. But if we are pushed at an ideal level—just beyond our reach—we grow optimally. This "just-right" level of challenge is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). **Invest in tools and resources that will help keep students working within their individual ZPDs.**

## 15. Give continual feedback.

Meaningful positive feedback is one of the crucial factors in maintaining motivation. Use formative assessments to monitor students' progress and provide encouragement with positive, actionable feedback. **Use statements such as "You really improved on... and you'd get even better if you..."** When students know they're getting closer and closer to their goals—and the steps they need to take to get even better—they will be continually motivated to succeed.

## 16. Let them show off.

The opportunity to showcase one's work **can be incredibly motivating and inspire students to raise the bar.** Invitations to display artwork, perform in a physical education demonstration, participate in the school musical performance or poetry fest, or even surprise their family during parent-teacher conferences can all do the trick.

## 17. Set up healthy competitions.

Students rise to the occasion when they're responsible for helping their team complete a project or win a challenge. **Relay team games within the classroom, or competitions between entire classrooms or schools**, can motivate students to support one another and put extra effort into their work.

## 18. Encourage a growth mindset.

Students who believe that ability is developed—and not fixed—are more likely to work through challenges. Support a growth mindset by recognizing efforts, even if they didn't succeed. Celebrate trials and errors as well as steps forward. Acknowledge failure as something that helps to clarify the goal. Talk about how **only those who have known failure can really appreciate the joy and empowerment of success**.

## 19. Make recognition a public affair.

Students want to excel and are invigorated by positive recognition of any sort—even **something as simple as being mentioned on the morning announcements or named in the school newspaper**. Make a ceremony of awarding students with special certificates, or another type of public recognition, when they achieve personal bests.

## 20. Allow for recovery time.

No one can give 100 percent of their energy 100 percent of the time. Research indicates students can meaningfully engage in intensive, deliberate practice for only about four hours a day. **When students are fatigued and unfocused, practice doesn't result in growth**. Include some lighter work in lesson plans—and don't feel guilty on days when you show a movie.



# Instill: Becoming the Destination

At a certain point, the goals we pursue become part of who we are. Motivation is intensified, internalized, and instilled within each student; pursuits become personal; and learning transforms into a lifelong endeavor.



## 21. Envision the future self.

Ask students to envision who they will be and what they will do in the future. Have them **create a vision board or a collage depicting their dreams and aspirations fulfilled.**

Focusing on this vision, encourage students to start thinking about the steps they need to take to get there.

## 22. Make daily affirmations.

**There is real power in telling ourselves that we can—that we will—accomplish something.**

Tennis star Serena Williams kept up her motivation during one competition by collecting matchbooks and writing affirmations in them. Have students include an affirmation on each piece of homework they turn in or worksheet they complete to get them in the habit of daily affirmations.

## 23. Explore colleges, careers, and job pathways.

**Not all students know what they want their future to look like.** Help them explore the possibilities through school-sponsored career days, guest speakers in the classroom, field trips that offer authentic learning experiences, and the promotion of positive role models from history as well as current events.

## 24. Encourage self-discovery.

As humans, we all want to know more about ourselves. Adults take personality tests, strengths finders, and other assessments to discover more about themselves. Give students the same experience **by directing them to online surveys.** Especially helpful are interest inventories, multiple intelligence surveys, learning-style preferences, and tools to determine proclivities, talents, and raw ability in problem solving and decision making.

## 25. Provide examples of benchmark.

In order to pursue greatness, students must first know what it looks like. Provide examples of benchmarked work—such as an example of an A paper, as well as B, C, and D papers—that serve as models of success and failure. Provide a brief explanation of how the papers differ **so students understand not only what success looks like but why it was successful.**

## 26. Facilitate group discussions.

Help students understand the power of their own voice by letting them use it in constructive ways in the classroom. **Engineer effective group discussions, questions, and learning tasks to elevate students' engagement** in everyday tasks and motivate them to deeper understanding.

## 27. Turn students into teachers.

Help students “own” their expertise **by having them play the role of an expert and teach their skills to another student**. Students who play the role of teacher can be motivated to grow their skills so they have more to teach—and students who learn from them can be inspired by seeing a peer command the topic and may start on their own path to expertise in that area.

## 28. Teach goal-setting strategies.

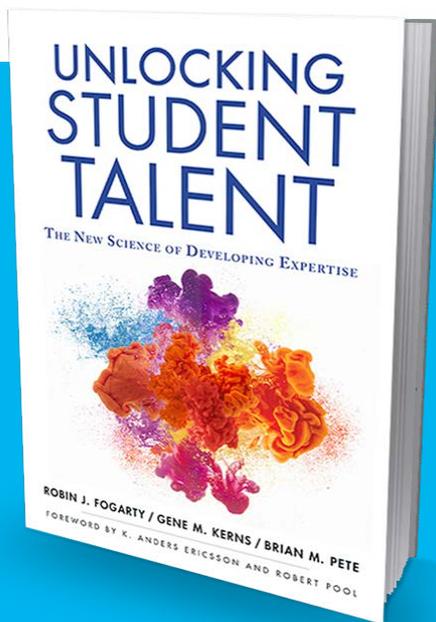
To invigorate, the teacher sets personalized goals for the student; to instill, students set goals for themselves. Having students set goals **helps them learn about taking control over their own learning**. As part of each goal, have them justify how they plan on reaching that goal. In the process of creating that step-by-step plan, they’ll become more self-sufficient and on their way to self-regulation of their learning.

## 29. Ask for long-term commitments.

Students who make long-term commitments are often more successful. Ask students for commitments that stretch over time, even if the commitment itself is small. Read five more minutes a day for a month. Complete two more practice problems each week for the semester. **Habits will be built through repetition and familiarity that become their own motivation.**

## 30. Learn to let go.

As students become more capable, responsibility shifts from the teacher to the students. **It’s the gradual release of responsibility that allows students to become agents of their own success.** Look for opportunities to put students in charge—even if they’re not sure they’re ready yet. “I know you can do this” can be magic words.



# The new science of developing expertise

Get even more insights into motivation—and then explore the other two elements of student talent, practice and coaching—by purchasing your copy of *Unlocking Student Talent* today.

“This book offers some revolutionary proposals for transforming general education and, in particular, describes how to produce high school graduates who are independent learners that are prepared and ready to employ appropriate methods to acquire whatever skills they need to succeed in their careers.”

K. Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool  
coauthors of *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*

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