Dear Colleague,

Welcome to your new course. Like you, I think the hardest part of teaching is to keep each day fresh enough to make my students want to keep working. I am good at starting each new unit with something to make it relevant, and sometimes, even really special, to hook their interest. But after a few days/weeks, the flame is gone, and we are slogging along.

One of my great department chairpersons once gave me a glimpse of what was needed when I asked him to tell me how he kept his basic math class working. I had volunteered to teach one such section, and was struggling to keep the class working.

He said that the trick was to do two days of math, one day of motivational practices like teaching goal setting, reviewing fun math activities and games, getting to know one another, and then do two days at the end of the week on math basics. I wasn’t sure I was comfortable doing just that, especially reducing the math instruction by 20%, but he was esteemed and successful, so I gave it a try. During that year, we made amazing progress, most kids growing by over four years on pre and post math tests. We gained, not only basic math skills, but empathy, group process skills, study skills, leadership skills,

I began to realize that there are more teachable moments when we take more time to re-ignite the student energy and focus with much more attention to the time for feeding their personal worth, their personal safety and community needs, better pacing and review, and, especially, their joie de vivre.

Motivation Theory is sometimes like aerobics. To do aerobics, you need fuel, oxygen, and movement. Your body CAN store the fuel. You can’t store the oxygen or movement. You must add them to achieve aerobic benefits. Similarly, to motivate someone, you CAN store the “fuel,” the content or the curriculum. But motivation needs the activation of the equivalent of the oxygen and the movement, which are creating enthusiasm and engaging hooks every time you hope to activate students to get involved in their academic work. Motivation cannot be stored. Even intrinsic motivation needs to be primed.

 So this course and our text book are ready to provide some great research and insights on how to grow your own bank of ways to enliven your classes and provide the “oxygen and movement” for intrinsic motivation. There will be lots to choose from, so you can find what fits your style, grade level, and subject. I hope you find some that work for you too.

My best wishes, Mary Ann Johnson