

INSPIRE TO CONNECT A LEARNING DESIRE

By Brad McLennan and Karen Peel

Brad McLennan
0402807547
PO Box 227
LAIDLEY 4341
Brad.McLennan@usq.edu.au

Karen Peel
0409546591
42 Laidley Creek West Rd
LAIDLEY 4341
Karen.Peel@usq.edu.au

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INTRODUCTION

A vibrant classroom environment, with an ambience of belonging, is not constructed from timber, concrete and furnishings or manufactured using a blueprint for success; it evolves when people, who genuinely care about each other, unite to form a common culture. This unique connection cannot be replicated within dynamic groups of people and does not happen by chance; it is a created milieu. As our middle school students file through the classroom door at the start of the day, we welcome them with a smile, a reassuring glance and brief personal conversation to connect with their worlds. This chapter utilises a series of snapshots to illuminate the connection that takes place inside our classroom, to ensure our vision; students striving to become the best they can be.

Assembled on the common carpeted area before us, students' body language reveals their readiness for learning. In our cooperative classroom, the parameters for optimum learning are clearly defined from the very outset of the school year.

Interactive dialogue is encouraged in a courteous, non-threatening environment, where mutual respect amongst all stakeholders is highly valued. Free to take risks with their inquiry, students understand the advantages of having all the tools of their trade at their disposal, motivated to complete all impending tasks to the best of their ability.

Positive language rebounds back and forth around the room; justified opinions are valued, eradicating the 'I can't do it' mentality that often cripples other learning environments. Students forge individual learning pathways, utilising their cognitive strengths within a guided inquiry philosophy that ensures effective coverage of the diverse curriculum requirements.

Setting themselves up for success by using initiative, highlights the proactive mindset instilled. Students understand that whilst we are prepared to model, guide and facilitate their learning, they are ultimately responsible for their own productivity.

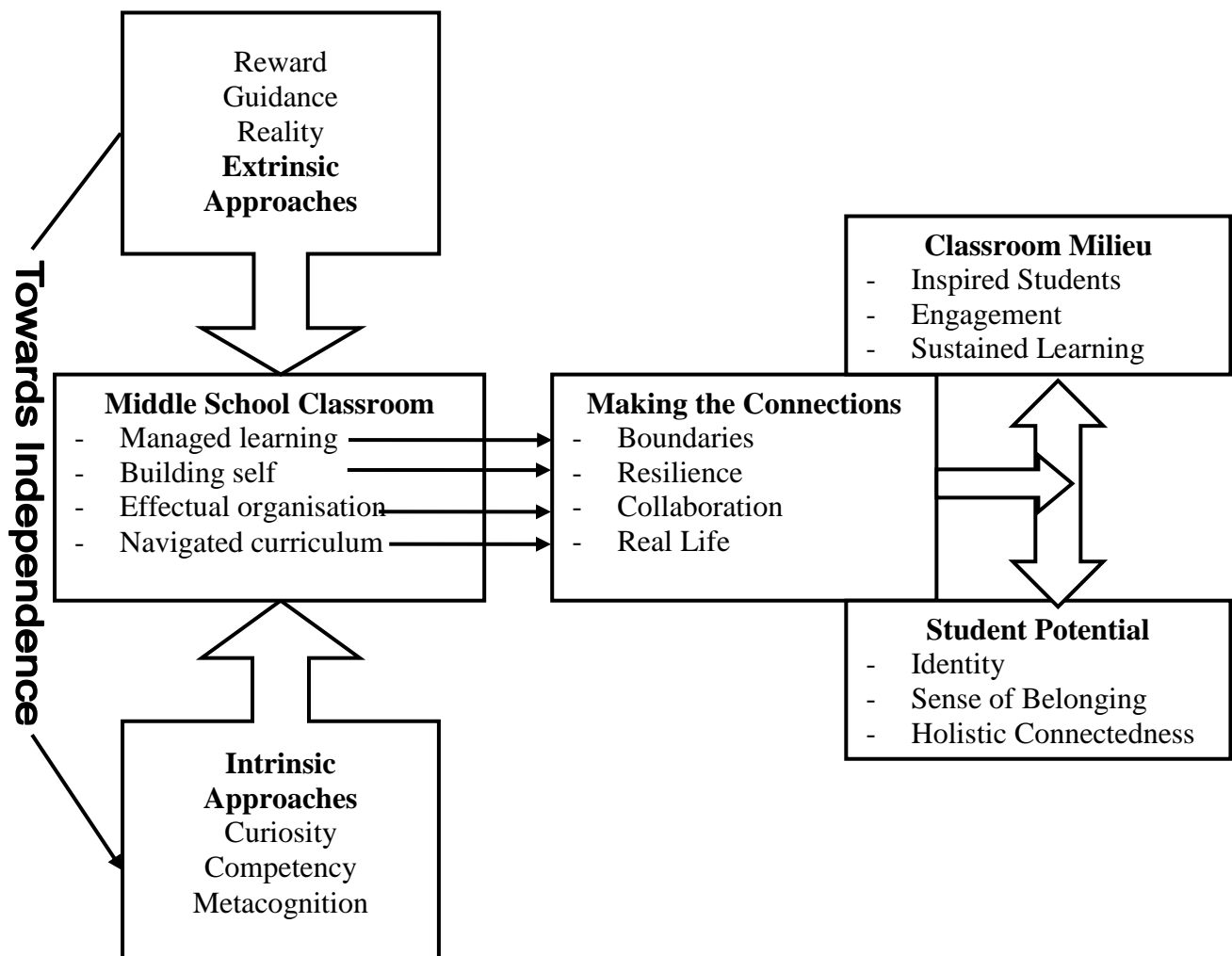
The social literacy introduced to the students provides the language that the culture of our micro community is built upon. It is this literacy that is the base of communication between all members of this community. The vocabulary is reinforced in conversations and communications related to our daily context. It is spoken, it is written and it is heard. It enables a common infrastructure upon which everyone's learning can be constructed.

BACKGROUND

The National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, adopted by Ministers in December 2008 (Ministerial Council on Educational Employment Training and Youth Affairs) commits ‘to supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’ (p. 7). Curriculum and assessment provide a structure for this intention however we agree with Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard (2006) that the quality of teaching is what makes the difference. Leading educational thinker Sir Ken Robinson commissioned to define a British education strategy for the future of education, supports this view and we are aligned to his philosophy in which the emphasis is on the development of the human being and his/her ability to be productive in the world (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2009).

We are experienced senior teachers and for the past decade, we have taught collaboratively in the public education system. Through reflective practice we have developed the teaching framework of Motivational Pedagogy (McLennan & Peel, 2008). Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework of Motivational Pedagogy, which is the foundation for maximising student potential and establishing an inspired, engaged and sustained classroom milieu.

FIGURE 1 MOTIVATIONAL PEDAGOGY TEACHING FRAMEWORK



In recent years, a downward trend in middle year's student engagement has been acknowledged (Ryan, 2008). Gardiner (1991) suggests that for many students education has become nothing more than drill and response, with little relevance for the learning expectations. Determined not to succumb to this drift, we recognized that motivational factors were linked to the achievements of students. The importance of motivation in learning is so taken for granted, that it now seems obvious. However, knowing how to inspire students to learn or indeed implementing Motivational Pedagogy is an art form. It is a proactive approach to ensure effectual organisation, where student learning is managed, their confidence is nurtured, and the curriculum is substantial.

The curriculum is delivered through *Motivational Pedagogy* to engage and instil a love of learning in our preadolescent and adolescent students. A unit integrating device we have constructed generates a practical, real world context for inquiry, which can then be utilised to unveil learning throughout the term. Expectations of students are set high level and the students are supported by positive, constructive and honest feedback which builds student self confidence and esteem. The classroom is a vibrant, evolving environment and in this chapter we will present evidence on how this carefully constructed learning environment contributes to the creation of individual student identity, students' sense of belonging and a feeling of holistic connectedness. For teachers seeking reward in their profession, this is a proven recipe for classroom success.

It is generally accepted that there are two types of motivation. Extrinsic motivation (Petri, 1991) exists when a student is compelled to do something or act in a certain way because of factors external to him or her. Intrinsic motivation (Malone & Lepper, 1987) occurs when people are internally motivated to do something because it either brings them pleasure, they think it is important, or they feel that what they are learning is significant.

The Motivational Pedagogy framework identifies six approaches. The first three approaches being extrinsic - reward, guidance, reality - and the final three, intrinsic - curiosity, competency, and metacognitive.

The 'Reward Motivation' approach inspires the students to learn using material rewards and praise, as approval is one of the strongest social motives (Harris, 1991).

As Sam fulfils an expectation, we take the opportunity to 'Dangle the Carrot'; ensuring his reward is apt, whether that is verbal praise, a photograph on the paparazzi board, or material prize. It must be desired, instant, and well earned. The worth of any reward to Sam is measured by the level of value he attaches to it.

The 'Guidance Motivation' approach provides students with the necessary support, resources, knowledge, and skill base to develop a readiness to progress to the next step in their learning. As Dewey (1938) prophetically recognised, children learn more from guided experience than authoritarian instruction.

Having observed the explicit modelling of a personal letter, Jennifer synthesises her understanding via the construction of a graphic organiser. She

makes use of the relevant cues we display in the classroom, including genre charts, word walls and picture stimuli. 'Building the Foundation' through scaffolding and deconstructing the salient features of this genre, set Jennifer up for learning transformation and success in her own writing.

'Reality Motivation' provides a real life purpose and short term intent. White (1959, p. 297) acknowledged that, "all students need to engage intellectually, see how school activities are connected to the real world and to their own experience, and be able to use tools to participate successfully in the knowledge economy."

Anna understands that there is more to text than just reading books. Whilst acknowledging their value, she is 'making connections' between school and her life utilising an array of literature. Anna is particularly interested in exploring the early Aztecs to build field knowledge, as we immerse her in this SOSE topic of ancient civilizations and their relevance to modern society. Being multi-literate, allows Anna to be discerning when selecting appropriate texts and understand the authors' intent to position her as the reader.

Teachers can employ a variety of extrinsic rewards, but a student needs to strive towards independence and intrinsic drive for self directed competence. In fact overuse or inappropriate use of extrinsic motivation can impede the transition to intrinsic motivation. We agree with Deci (1975), that extrinsic motivation can destroy intrinsic; and at the very least have a negative impact upon it. Students know when they deserve rewarding and they have a strong sense of what is 'fair'. The aim is to nurture the transition from a short term goal motivation to a more independent, self regulated learning drive.

Curiosity Motivation, an intrinsic approach, provides an environment for enthusiastic learning through challenges and mysteries. Beswick (2004) describes curiosity as a process to create, maintain and resolve conceptual conflicts. Teachers manage and enhance this motivation so that children will see that guided exploration is more meaningful and satisfying than the random, spontaneous learning they encounter on their own.

Over the duration of a week, Alice observes the germination of a 'Broad Bean' seed, noticing the strength of the mature stem. She questions why the cotyledons have become insignificant when compared to the flourishing twin leaves. Alice ponders the system in which the plant receives its nourishment and identifies links with a previous experiment, where she observed how dye revealed the transportation system of the plant. Reflecting on the perpetual dynamics of life stimulates Alice, inspiring her to explore further. Inherently curious, Alice exploits 'The Why Factor' to increase the intellectual quality and depth of understanding.

'Competency Motivation' occurs when students are experiencing success, gaining confidence and developing determination to achieve goals. These feelings of competence and belief in potential to solve new problems are derived from first-hand experience of mastery of problems in the past and are much more powerful than any external acknowledgement and motivation (Prawat & Floden, 1994).

Larry eyes off his self assessment checklist that has been co-constructed among his peers and teachers, as part of the planning phase of the inquiry process. Keen to ascertain the elements of this Mathematics investigation, the checklist connects real life attributes and expectations of the task. Utilisation of the checklist tool, through the four phases of the inquiry (preview, plan, prove perfect), provides Larry with a systematic approach to enable 'Success to Breed Success'. As he completes each element of the task, his success concertinas, building momentum as the investigation evolves.

'Metacognitive Motivation' is revealed when the students utilise an understanding of what they learn and why they are learning it. Within this approach, student's use their ability to reflect on learning and possess a willingness to repair breakdowns as they arise (Winn & Synder, 1996). Higher order thinking is the outcome of this motivational approach.

Acknowledging his strengths and weaknesses, Jim utilises a vast amount of field knowledge to independently understand or seek to understand. This interdisciplinary strategy requires him to select resources judiciously, manage time effectively and reflect on his ideas thoughtfully. This 'Thinking About Thinking' is a high level cognitive device, which drives Jim's desire for self directed competence.

IMPLICATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Motivational approaches can be expressed from a developmental point of view along a continuum. The teacher needs to consider the student's age, stage and interest level before employing strategies that lead to working towards independence and intrinsic drive with self directed competence. Students come into our classroom from lower grades with a need for short term external rewards. It is our job as middle school teachers to 'wean' them off these and create an emotional attachment, which is crucial to becoming an intrinsic learner.

Engaging and energizing students is not an inherent skill specific to all teachers, but a fundamental element to be developed in the modern educator's armoury. If we are to believe, as Geen (1995) did that motivation is having a desire and willingness to do something, motivation within classroom pedagogy consequently becomes crucial to inspire learning. We argue that in the middle school, although it is important for teachers to understand the content and processes of learning, without effective motivational practice it is difficult to manage learning, build self, promote organisation and navigate curriculum planning and assessment for academic achievement.

- **Managing Learning**

Through experience, we recognize that behaviour management is a critical component of teaching and learning. We have observed motivated students, who are engaged and on task, have significantly reduced issues of inappropriate behaviour. Although the term 'Boundaries' (Cloud & Townsend, 1998), referring to behaviour expectations,

can evoke a negative connotation; when linked to the word 'responsibility' a more positive image is portrayed. 'Boundaries' are explained as being limits applied to behaviours of people. This means that boundaries, as a principle, can apply to all people of all ages; however the age and circumstances of the person would determine the limits that form the principle. In this way the classroom learning management structure provides lifelong guidelines and instils resilience.

Within our classroom, 'Boundaries' are our social literacy, promoted and modelled astutely using the alliteration of the 4 Ps; Positive, Polite, Prepared and Proactive. They are collectively explored and accepted by the extrinsically and intrinsically motivated learners, thus encouraging self discipline through responsibility. The 4 Ps are explicitly taught at the beginning of the year and consolidated daily to become an integral part of the class culture. Astutely chosen literature stimulates conversation and creativity; consequently our students participate in a diversity of scrapbooking activities to reinforce the literacy, incorporate elements of Visual Art, as well as hone their general presentation skills. Symbols are designed to represent each of the 4 Ps and are displayed prominently around the room as visual cues. Through this immersion, our students create and self regulate their own micro community.

Encouraging leadership within the class promotes self regulation and this enables the group dynamics to function efficiently and effectively. Students monitor 'Boundaries' among themselves, removing the need for authoritarian discipline. This decreases the overall volume and anxiety of the learning environment.

'Boundaries' are communicated to all members of our class community and students from our class can be identified because of the specific social literacy they demonstrate. Often, our orientation evening inspires parents to adopt the principles in their own homes, fostering consistency with rewards and consequences.

'Boundaries' inherently provide high expectations that align to our vision of 'being the best you can be' and supplement our desire to set the bar for all individuals at a level challenging but achievable. They provide a supportive classroom environment that allows all learners an opportunity to learn, attain productive outcomes, without inappropriate distraction.

On entering the classroom for the first time on transfer from a nearby school, Joshua was initially anxious about the unfamiliar setting. Unsure of his social belonging, the rushed introductions to other students, where to put his bag and books, when and where is lunch, who is to be around at this time and scrambling routines, all of which to the other students, seem organised. He is quickly introduced to his group and its leader, who controls the busy conversational traffic that creates this self regulated micro community of which he is now a member. Once seated, his senses are overwhelmed by the overt visual representation of the social literacy explicitly shaped, that forms the infrastructure of the class. At this early point of orientation the 4Ps are abstract in their intent; however, in a very short period he soon realises the value of these attributes in becoming a productive citizen, resilient to cope with the obstacles in his path. Joshua is soon immersed in the real life topic, surprised at the minimal inappropriate distractions and the motivation of his new classmates. Joshua has

every opportunity to be the best he can be in this supportive, safe environment and he transforms his social skills to other areas of the school and to his home life.

- **Building Self**

Recognising the adage that success breeds success, Motivational Pedagogy provides a framework for our students to grow self confidence and esteem. We believe that those who have made the transition to be more intrinsically motivated have the ability to cope and to develop resilience and a positive self concept. For others, the challenges appear daunting, their interest wanes, progress slows and their self concept and sense of belonging is adversely affected. Our observations consolidate the theory that during this middle phase of learning young people are experiencing the greatest physical, emotional, intellectual and social changes in their lives (Fuller, 2005).

The relationship between a teacher and a student therefore is especially crucial in this middle phase, as diminishing self esteem and an erosion of confidence often occur, whilst students begin to recognize their individualism. We acknowledge, that as children grow older, often their attitudes to school deteriorate and that adolescents' academic motivation declines. Considering how to increase motivation and create a reciprocal connection in these students is a major issue for schools in the 21st century.

Valuing individuality, we provide a pathway structured upon the scaffolding of an array of coping skills and strategies. Our class culture nurtures and promotes the inevitable growth of self. Belonging is built through recognising individual strengths and celebrating them amongst the entire class community. When students truly believe teachers care about their well being, they trust their guidance, are more prepared to explore the depths of their learning parameters and have the self belief to aspire to be the best they can be. We celebrate this enlightenment.

Emily, hiding behind her fringe, yearns to be invisible. Amongst her group she lacks the confidence to contribute to the discussions, a resistance to cooperate with her peers is obvious and avoiding eye contact during questioning raises suspicions. Determined to uncover her values and beliefs in an effort to illuminate how she is best motivated, and to explore her learning style and personal interests; we carefully observe and analyse patterns of behaviour. So Emily can be the best she can be, she needs to experience ongoing success and receive the subsequent extrinsic rewards attached. Measured scaffolding is designed for her individual success, building confidence and consolidating belief. As the identity grows, belonging is established and a willingness to explore challenging learning begins. Emily is willing to raise the bar and her self-belief continues on a rising plane, as she realises that her teachers care. Work is displayed in the classroom, action photographs adorn the paparazzi board, birthdays acknowledged through song, all celebrating her value as a class member. Her ability to cope with the challenges she confronts, develops resilience as a lifelong learning tool. No longer fearing failure, Emily's positive demeanour and presentation are evidence of her personal growth, reflecting increased academic and social outcomes.

- **Effectual Organisation**

Motivated students are efficient, organised and remain focused on tasks. Setting realistic time goals and deadlines for students to demonstrate competency at their individual level, ensures a quality product or outcome.

Motivated teachers establish familiar routines, which provide their students with a supportive, non-threatening learning environment and allow for effective inclusiveness to occur. Consistency of work patterns and of habits ensures students understand the essential structures for learning. Within our classroom structure, timetables are balanced across the curriculum, and negotiated within bureaucratic systems. They are flexible to ensure continuity, cohesiveness and the fluid flow of learning. These timetables, along with other visual cues, are prominently displayed around our classroom. They are motivating, because we ensure they are topical, stimulating and scaffold current learning. These visuals are simplified in the form of logos, symbols, acronyms and dot points. Our goal is to establish student readiness and preparedness for learning.

Motivated learners develop teamwork, empathy for others and cooperative skills. A sense of ownership readily develops, as the class group's identity and pride grows. Consequently the students display the initiative to maintain their classroom environment. Recognizing that random groups are more often than not, dysfunctional, we use careful blending of cognitive and social competencies form core mixed ability groups, which enable dynamic interaction between each other in a positive and proactive way. The promotion of leadership skills provides opportunities and responsibilities to organise efficient movement and transition of students and the organised collection and distribution of relevant learning resources and materials. The interactive dialogue that occurs within these learning contexts is conducive for students to teach one another.

The collaborative nature of our teaching team is underscored by numerous roles that have evolved naturally over time but are distinctive to each individual. In our circumstance it is significant that our individual practical teaching knowledges complement each other, providing a balanced approach to teaching and learning. Teacher Aides and significant others, who support learning in the classroom are empowered to self regulate, set goals and ultimately reflect on the effectiveness of their work with the students.

Creating connections in the classroom requires a vehicle for communication between all the participants. The 'homefolder' provides a secure, transportable storage system for such items as the Communication Book, which contains term overviews, relevant correspondence and homework tasks. The assessment portfolio showcases an array of work samples for students to self reflect upon and parents to critically view.

As a leader, Laura understands the significance of her role in facilitating an efficient and effective group learning environment. At the beginning and throughout the year, her teachers establish routines that allow for continuity of learning. Laura is responsible for her group resource collection and distribution; tasks which she shares among the members. She is an active listener to the teacher's initial instructions and consequently is a capable communicator to self regulate within her group. Members around her have been carefully selected by

her teachers according to an equitable mix of academic and social compatibility. 'Dressed for Success' in complete school uniform, the group is armed with the necessary materials and resources to complete focused tasks. In Laura's classroom, this creates a mindset for a learning context, which cannot be misunderstood. She leaves the classroom and arrives each day with her communication book inside her homefolder. In this, her parents are well informed of the events in her class, through term overviews, notes and personal messages from her teachers. Laura values classroom routines because she is comfortable knowing what she is required to do, when she is required to do it and where it is required to take place.

- **Navigating Curriculum Planning for Academic Achievement**

Taking into account students' desires and curiosities, motivation is initiated through measured planning. Establishing an engaging theme with a thought provoking question, keeping in mind the students' prior knowledge of the learning topic, allows us to stimulate interest and connect learning to their real world. Being aware of gender differences, we attempt to appeal widely to individual inquisitiveness across all curriculum areas. Careful to lead with a genre focused, front end assessment task, that has a subject specific literacy, the unit's learning opportunities build skills and field knowledge that provide the scaffolding for the successful completion of the synthesising task. Through careful deconstruction of text, critical analysis of purpose and tenor, and explicit teaching of the salient features, students are provided with an infrastructure to demonstrate their competency. When students can make connections with their learning at school and their life outside, an opportunity for tangible cognitive development emerges. Through judicious selection and management, students manipulate resources that ultimately inspire intellectual quality in their writing and reflection. Catering for diversity in individual differences is critical if students are to be the best they can be.

As teachers we take on the responsibility to engage our learners, challenge them intellectually and guide the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. While building rapport, facilitating learning and guiding development, we are continually, evaluating and diagnosing individual motivation approaches. This allows us to tailor the learning needs for all unique individuals within our classroom. Once we have identified an extrinsic reliance, we actively plan a transition strategy, recognising that it is intrinsic motivation that leads to lifelong learning. Irrespective of the motivation approach, all students must be suitably catered for to achieve success, however creating connections occurs significantly when the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic is concrete.

As Jonah scans the authentic Mathematics investigation that has been introduced to the class, he previews the key components making links to his prior knowledge and experiences in the real world. Significant elements are identified, the purpose of the problematic task is revealed and his role is clarified. Jonah's inherent curiosity engages him into the context; consequently assumptions are made and strategies are devised, as the planning process unfolds. Armed with a myriad of skills and field knowledge, Jonah's intent is to explore and demonstrate his competency by providing evidence of his ability to apply concepts, utilizing mathematical literacy. Peer

support and group discussion opportunities, to question and challenge the direction of the inquiry process, lead to scaffolding and modelling of unfamiliar skills. Teacher intervention guides Jonah, whilst still allowing him to exercise his own exploration of the task. As a group, a self assessment criterion is co-constructed to checklist the components that need to be communicated in the proving phase of Jonah's inquiry. He has become competency driven, as the excitement of solving the problem unravels. Determined to learn more than just the answer from the inquiry, Jonah embarks on discovering the appropriateness of his strategies and whether alternative methods would have resulted in more efficient solutions. This reflective process develops metacognition and ensures intellectual quality and depth of understanding. Jonah's inquiry is assessment for learning, as how and what, he and his peers learn, directs future planning and teaching for each unique individual.

CONCLUSION

The rewards of teaching lie within the unity of the classroom, not the physical properties of the walls but the symbolism of the educational context in which we practice, the created milieu. The culture of our community that evolves through social, academic, cultural and sporting experiences aim to always provide a win-win situation; however it is never without its perilous moments. Importantly these problematic situations and celebrated successes are of considerable value to all, because they become teaching moments and learning opportunities that assist the creation of active, ethical, responsible and productive citizens. It is our contention that Motivational Pedagogy provides the framework that establishes the robust connections existing among the primary participants and it is crucial in enabling students to truly become the best they can be. The challenge for 21st century teachers is to embrace this pedagogy to maximise student engagement and create the connections between learning at school and its relevance to real life.

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