



Follow Up Q&A

COVID-19: Helping Students Develop the Motivation to Invest in their Learning While Sheltering at Home

LeAnn Nickelsen & Rick Wormeli

There were 983 registrants for AMLE's April 14, 2020 Webinar, **COVID-19: Helping Students Develop the Motivation to Invest in their Learning While Sheltering at Home**. The recording of this webinar is available at www.amle.org, Rick can be reached at www.rickwormeli.com, and LeAnn can be reached at www.maximizelearninginc.com. It was a robust, content-rich session, but the presenters, LeAnn Nickelsen and Rick Wormeli, didn't have time to answer everyone's questions in the short Q and A session that followed the webinar. So, they've provided their written responses here. Thank you to all participants!

1

Do you feel some components of our educational bureaucracy promote the coercion and lackluster we try to avoid? If so, how do you recommend we circumnavigate these roadblocks?

In short, yes. Schools are institutions, and by their very nature, they want to protect the status quo, and that often comes through forced compliance, "towing the line," and strict adherence to protocols. In addition, during insecure times such as we are in right now, our communities tend to like quantifiable and measurable things, as exact numbers and direct accountability (and unfortunately, this can be corrupted to mean we have someone to blame for all our worries) seem re-assuring. We want direct causal relationships, such as, "If I do this... then that will happen," and an orderly, mono-linear sequence of learning: We did this first, that second, then move on to the third step. Learning is messy and often all over the place and episodic (done in overlaid bursts), though, and doesn't line up in a perfect schematic, no matter how much we want it to do so.

Teachers can choose to do the wise and wonderful thing in the microcosm of their classrooms – seriously, live up to the promise of what good teachers do, then translate it into the school district's language in order to keep your job. This is a call for gentle insubordination in our calling to teach effectively. The truth is that highly effective teachers occasionally part ways with school procedures and policies in order to teach everyone, not just the easier ones, and that's being a solid, professional educator. At the same time, though, volunteer solutions to the concerns you raise, and volunteer to be on the committees or task forces to reform assessment, grading, teaching, tech integration, reading in content areas, or whatever it is that is out of synch with modern teaching practices. If we have to, we can call everything a, "pilot project," and keep finding another reason each year to extend the pilot – you need a larger sample size, you are working with another school, you're going to publish soon. School pilots are not as threatening as announcing new district directives or policies.

Let's get policy-makers and administrators who are unaware of effective practices up to speed on them. Anonymously or declaratively, put informed writings on their radar, have conversations that are candid, yet constructive. Bring them into the loop so they can better facilitate teachers' growth and practice. Most administrators are very conscientious leaders and they want to do right by students and the profession, but that have so many constituencies competing for their attention, it's hard to get up to speed and add more to that already overloaded plate. If we present concerns along with a willingness to do the heavy-lifting to resolve the concern, we're more likely to get support.

2

During distance learning, what advice do you have for parents in helping their kids stay motivated for learning?

As much as possible, whether distant learning or in the classroom, teachers and parents should support one another and create a partnership in the student's learning. Every distance learning situation in the world looks differently based on resources and access to resources.

The following list of ideas can be helpful to parents. Feel free to share with your parents: (Dear Parents...)

- Prioritize a location in the home where your child can read and study with the least amount of disruptions (yes, we know, this can be a huge challenge in many households, but do the best you can to minimize the distractions which can easily wipe information from the frontal lobe that the student worked so hard to get there).
- Create a schedule together or ask your child to design one that has breaks, short focus times (no phones during this time), built-in rewards (outside play, social time, music break, etc.). Ask them to be in control of their schedule by checking off the times (see the schedule within the webinar slides).
- Remember to celebrate progress and not nag about what didn't get accomplished that day (demotivating). Readjust the learning schedule each night to determine what needs to get accomplished. Show your child your schedule too – they are watching us!
- Encourage as much autonomy as possible (every child is different and will need a different level of support and encouragement). Like adults, teens can resist when we insist. Remember the power of having a voice and having a choice from the webinar as particularly motivating: *"You can choose to do this now or in one hour," "Is there another way you can do this that would be more interesting to you?" "When it comes to getting this done, and given the other two tasks that also need to be done, which one would you prefer to do first?"*
- Don't beat yourself up if you're swamped and can't help much. Do the best you can, explain your work situation to your child.
- Communicate with your child's teacher the best way possible (email, school-wide virtual platform, etc.)
- Check in with your child periodically and ask how you can support them (not do it, but support).
- Encourage them with positive reinforcement.
 - "I love how you are focusing so much and completing your work in a quality manner."
 - "You deserve this break you are taking. You are putting forth much effort."
 - "I love the details in your mindmap – wow – can you explain this to me?"
 - "That book looks interesting. What is it about? What do you like about it; not like about it?"
- At the dinner table, ask your kids about their learning that day and how they are feeling. (refer to the Quarantine Question slide in the webinar). As parents, we must care about their academics, but more importantly right now, how they are feeling about life and responding to the stress.
- Connect with your child every single day with FUN! Play games, walk outdoors, share funny videos and memes, snack/supper together. Relationship building can diffuse the effects of stress.
- Go to LeAnn's website to see her collection of literacy articles to parents (just started): <https://maximizelearninginc.com/home/free-resources-for-parents/>
- Use some of the descriptive feedback techniques Rick was talking about during the webinar. The narration of the text he's using for the video he's animating is available from Rick (rick@rickwormeli.onmicrosoft.com) and the video itself should be up in the coming week.



3

How would you motivate “teachers” who don't believe their students will be motivated if the work is not graded?

If teachers don't have a background in human motivation and cultivating self-discipline/tenacity/self-efficacy in children and adolescents, they almost always rely on coercion through grading which doesn't cultivate any of those things in students – and then they have the nerve to blame the student for his lack of motivation and caring in his schoolwork! Wow. 'Deeply unprofessional. If those same teachers were to study what we know about human motivation, they would see there is no mention of using grades or grading – seriously, no mention whatsoever – as the way to do it. As they continue reading and discussing what we DO know about motivation, they'd realize they never should have raised the question of using grades in the first place.

So, give these teachers as many of the tools and perspectives from the webinar as you possibly can. If we don't perceive we have the tools to do the job, we're not investing in the why, and we will eventually find a way to rationalize our way back to what we find familiar. Once they experience the practicality and real change in students by using them, they'll embrace them more.

Also, let the teachers know that sure, some kids won't do homework because it doesn't count. If students are overwhelmed with assignments, of course they'll do triage on which assignments have more lasting impact on a permanent record. We can still record homework completion rates, even on the report card, but we can beef up feedback on the homework, and we can make homework assignments a heck of a lot more meaningful so they will find value in doing them.

Provide experiential learning on this: Ask some students to not do homework for a week or so, while another group commits to doing it for the same period of time. Then give all students a quiz on the material and see who does better. Surprisingly, they do about the same. Suddenly, some students feel vindicated that homework doesn't matter to learning, and temporarily, you might go along and agree. A month later, though, do another quiz on the material – the group that practiced daily will do better on that second quiz. Homework is about carrying content forward, not about learning it the first time.

Record only a grade or percentage at the top of quizzes, tests, projects, papers, and no other comments. After students look through their assessments, ask them how they feel seeing just the score or grade and nothing else. Guide them into realizing that feedback was really what they were after, not judgement. Judgement (grades, percentages) invokes self-preserve, status, comparison, and doesn't lead to engagement or analysis of performance against standards – or owning their learning. Yet, we want these things to happen. Help them begin to see that grades by themselves mean nothing and actually do more harm. In this process, too, make sure students are self-monitoring/evaluating, and that we, the teachers, are NOT the sole provider of feedback. They can get feedback from each other, themselves, and viewers/readers/listeners outside the classroom. This goes far to help students get over the need for external validation, and the always gaming the system, trying to score the most points. Standards-based grading as an approach is very effective at this.

4

I'd appreciate your ideas on what to include in a letter to students and/or families. Should I be sending weekly letters? I can send them via email. Thanks!

Gosh, yes, but don't overwhelm yourself, and, as warranted, invite students (rotating among them) to send along funny stories, meaningful moments, commentary, insights, perspectives you include in the general portion of the letter, being sure to individualize in comments underneath. Twice a month may be the most you can muster, but if you can do shorter ones but once a week, that's wonderful. Also, be sure you have avenues to deliver them if students do not have access to email, or if siblings might be reading them before the child gets to read them. Remember, too, to include only those things you'd be comfortable



saying with Mom and Dad present; anything outside of this would be inappropriate. You should also send a copy of the letter to mom and dad, just to make sure they are in the loop.

You could even send ideas on how to connect with their child during these challenging times (see the above section about hints to parents on motivating their child at home), where to access free books on line, free articles to read about parenting during stressful times, etc. In other words, make it a valuable resource they love to read.

5

Any suggestions for Shop teachers in this time? Kids so bummed they cannot finish projects.

This is so frustrating, particularly since so much of this course uses specialized equipment available only there at the school! We suggest going back and looking at what you were trying to teach via the original project: mag-lev forward motion? Robotics? Lathes? Jig saws? Computer Aided Design? Sheet metal work? 3D Printing? Plumbing? Computer coded stitching? Physics of flight? Something else? Identify the basic content principles and skills, then brainstorm with individuals in and out of your profession other ways students can use household items, items found around the neighborhood, and good ol' creative endeavor to demonstrate the same principles and content. For some things you teach, there are options like this.

Alternatively, set up a social distancing time period in your classroom, a local rec center, or local Vocational Training Center with similar equipment in which students can use the equipment they need to use. For example, for a particular two-hour block of time, you can have up to eight students in the room, each about 10 feet apart, working in their separate areas without needing to be near anyone else. Wipe the equipment before and after they work, waiting a good 24 to 48 hours before the next group comes in.

Shop teachers can also avail themselves and their students with computer aided design software, and once trained on it (which can be done virtually), students can have the option of designing their projects graphically, demonstrating what they would have done. If possible, they can also send their specific designs in to you remotely, and you, the teacher, processes/builds them via the 3D Printer, revealing the final product, which is evaluated in light of evaluative criteria, and can be picked up by the student or mailed to them.

We know money is an issue, but if there is grant money or a local business would be willing to support it, there are a lot of DIY kits for things that are similar to what we teach in shop classes, and if we could get individual kits or at least the materials to students, and they could work safely under parent supervision to create the projects while sheltering at home, they could take pictures/videos of it and send it in for evaluation.

Some great websites: www.howstuffworks.com; <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/videos/how-things-work/>; YouTube has so many videos on How Things Work (type in the topic that you already gave them some background knowledge on OR let them choose to do a mini-research project on a topic of interest); twitter: @ThingsWork

6

Is there a good resource for learning how to utilize google classroom you could recommend?

Alicekeeler.com, 50thingsbook.com, and Alice's YouTube channel – wow, a ton of practical videos – just type in, "Alice Keeler" on YouTube and you'll come to it. She's my go to for all things Google Classroom, and she's very personable.



7**For students who have experienced years of failure, being underserved by the system, about how long should we expect (after implementing these strategies) before students demonstrate self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.**

Learned helplessness can form within a person after several episodes of failure. Learners who temporarily have this feeling/state of mind of hopelessness - why try?, or I don't care anymore, can act reluctant or show apathy toward that learning situation. If something is reinforced, positive or negative, we tend to repeat those behaviors.

Nobody can ever predict an amount of time that it takes for someone to change this mindset – every single person is different and comes to situations with a variety of experiences with different extremes. We can help our students “unlearn” this helpless behavior by doing some of the following tools to “unlearn” these adverse thoughts/behaviors:

- Teach the student a new narrative. Students who are in Learned Helplessness mode have repeated self-talk statements that make them believe: I cannot do this well, so why even try? We have to coach them to have positive self-talk and help them reframe the phrases and thoughts that enter their head when the situation arises. Determine the thoughts that are causing the actions, and coach that person towards changing those thoughts such as: I understand how you feel because one time... I wonder if you tried... How can I help you...
- Teach the student the difference between optimism and pessimism without judgement (after all, we all have pessimistic views on different subjects/topics). What would it take to think more positive about the future of this situation? Use the ABCDE approach for optimistic thinking (<https://psychologycompass.com/blog/overcoming-learned-helplessness/>)
- Create SMART goals to overcome this type of thinking and the behaviors that go along with them. See above website.
- Help and support this student with small successes in the area in which Learned Helplessness is occurring. Every small success needs a celebration of the progress made. Eventually, when the student experiences enough positive reinforcement with this situation, you might start to see the thinking and behaviors change.
- Seek out books and articles on fostering student or a child's independence, helping them own their learning, 'a kind of self-efficacy. Larry Ferlazzo has a number of great books with activities and lessons in them for children to develop this vital element in their growth that were listed in the webinar, including: *Helping Students Motivate Themselves*, *Self-Driven Learning*, *Self-Motivated Learners*.
- So many more tools will be needed on this journey with the students. It's worth every minute – life changing!

8**Will these strategies work on students with very short attentions spans?**

Yes, and perhaps even more so. We can certainly shorten the techniques and approaches as needed, if we think the wiggle/restless factor will arise, but to be honest, don't underestimate the capacity for a child with a short attention to pay to attention for a long period of time. I know that sounds weird, but students with profound ADD, and other indicators that seem like fleeting attention, can actually focus for great stretches. For example, if the story is good and it resonates enough with the child's life, he can read novels of over 700 pages (Think: The Harry Potter Series). If there is a game and interaction element with feedback, he can focus on one activity for hours (Think: Fortnite, and on-line gaming). The short attention span descriptor for a child may actually be a statement of how an institutionalized classroom works, not really the child's inability to focus. If the child is motivated by whatever we're doing, these kinds of issues diminish.

The following books are some of the best ones on the topic: Dr. Edward Hallowell is a guru on the topic of ADHD and his books are wonderful. My favorite ones: *Delivered from Distraction*; *Driven to Distraction*; *Superparenting for ADD*



9

Can you put these connecting questions into Entrance/Exit tickets?

Yes! Remember, Entrance/Exit ticket prompts, and the connecting questions and whether or not you can do this or that with them all comes down to how are we going to use the responses. So, consider if we're using the question to prime the brain, activate prior knowledge, create curiosity and larger context (entrance) or more to distill salience, process something from a learning experience, or assess informally where students are in their learning (exit). Connecting questions can be used in all these efforts.

10

How do we access the resources mentioned? Packet chunking structures/ examples (LeAnn) and the transcript for the video (Rick)?

www.rickwormeli.com/articles (available here by next Wednesday, or by email, rick@rickwormeli.onmicrosoft.com, before then)

The following article on LeAnn's website explains how to chunk information (<https://maximizelearninginc.com/home/blog-list-articles-by-leann/>). It also includes an example of a graphic organizer that shows the chunking *Teaching So It Sticks! Using High Impact First Time Learning to Maximize Students' Outcomes*. Email me personally about the packet chunking – it will all depend on the grade of the student and how you are using the packets (*email me at: leann@maximizelearninginc.com*)

11

Do you have any resources for elementary students?

Everything cited in the webinar can be used to a great degree in elementary levels. Was there something specific you heard/saw that didn't have an elementary application for you? If so, let's explore it together.

Anticipation Guides are for all grade levels. Look at this website to determine which ones best fit their needs: For Free templates for every grade level: <http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/anticipation-guide>.

Developmental Information: Book: *Yardsticks: Child and Adolescent Development Ages 4-14* (Chip Wood)
https://www.amazon.com/Yardsticks-Child-Adolescent-Development-Ages/dp/1892989891/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=yardsticks&qid=1587146965&sr=8-2

