Tips for Motivating Students in a Virtual Learning Environment

For many students, this is the first time they will be working “on their own” without teacher supervision. Motivation is critical; it inspires students to put more effort into their work. Teachers can have a positive impact on motivation in virtual learning environments and create an environment for students to take ownership of their learning.

Here are a few strategies and tips to help you promote a positive experience in a virtual learning setting:

1. **Set up a "Home Classroom"**: guide students to create a productive learning environment.
   - Provide a “learning tools” list: computer/tablet, notebook and pen/pencil
   - Encourage students to minimize distractions (cell phones, music, TV)
   - Suggest that students share a picture of their new learning space

2. **Set Expectations**: Tell students what they will be learning and why. Communicate how their progress will be monitored (frequency, metrics, feedback).

3. **Create a Community**: Foster a virtual community where teachers and students can listen and acknowledge others' points of view. Be interactive and visible to the students through online chats and video sessions.

4. **Plan for Individual Needs**: Acknowledge and address the unique learning profiles of your students. Identify your students' strengths and weaknesses and plan for those individual needs. Here are some examples:
   - Students who have developed an attitude of learned helplessness and dependence are the students who are waiting for teacher direction and praise.
   - Students are worried about failing. They avoid stress through withdrawal and apathetic behavior.
   - Students cannot accept personal responsibility for learning, even when they are successful. Students attribute their success and failure to the teacher, not themselves.

5. **Motivate and Reward**: Students need to be encouraged to take a risk and learn that a certain amount of failure is an unavoidable and acceptable part of learning. Anxious students need reassurance that they can learn.
   - Use both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators
   - Have students monitor and evaluate their performance - provide students with the BrightFish "student story tracker" to track and monitor their performance
   - Reward students for their accomplishments (see a few ideas below)
6. **Connect and Share**: Encourage students to try these new ways of interacting and learning.
   - Share their new experiences through reading logs.
   - Moderate an online chat with other students and teachers.

**Ideas for Rewarding/Acknowledging Students**
- Praise students one-on-one (or in front of the class) virtually
- Write a positive note to the student's parent/guardian
- Award extra points for gameplay in BrightFish Reading
- Print and save student certificates to hang when back in the classroom
- Create mystery e-prizes with different contents each week. Names will be placed in a draw reflecting those who have met specific criteria (such as the highest time on task or activity scores.) At the end of the week, draw a winner and post the results on a shared forum.