Inspiration for Times of Desperation

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I’ve always loved the word “Inspiration” and I think I know why. The Latin root word is “spire” which means to “breathe” and inspiration is creative breath. When one is inspired, one is literally breathing mental energy, focused on creating something fresh and wonderful. What’s not to like?

I’ll tell you what. Sometimes, those of us who work in creative fields: the arts, teaching, marketing, and designing and carrying out lesson programming can get “short of breath”, creative breath that is, and we must be re-inspired in order to do our best work.

This feature takes a look at what keeps us inspired and offers strategies for infusing new emotional and creative air into programming. Are you ready to put the oxygen mask on yourself my teaching sisters?

Why Inspiration Matters

The premise for work in the educational setting is that “Novelty” keeps all brains, but especially brains under stress, such as those of students who live in poverty supple and engaged. Novelty demands lots of unexpected, fresh ways of thinking and doing. Educators must infuse novelty into every event and encounter, but it need not be intense nor intrusive. We are after a more refined, continuous flow of fresh cognitive energy. And to maintain that level of energy, one must remain inspired.
In all teaching situations, inspiration is an essential component of the SPF paradigm that underpins instruction. SPF in this case is not sunscreen, but rather a cognitive process of:

**SCHEMA + PRACTICE + FOCUS**

**Schema** = Knowledge or information

**Practice** = Layering of the knowledge or information to achieve mastery

**Focus** = Attention to the schema during the practice

Skilled teachers apply SPF constantly and “inspiration” is essential during all three steps. One must be inspired to organize the schema in memorable and digestible chunks. One must be inspired to layer the practice in fun and fruitful ways. One must be inspired to maintain the focus of students throughout the lesson. Wow! Did you ever pause to consider how valuable an inspired mind and disposition might be to your work?
Seven Ways to Stay Inspired

Attend meetings and conferences where other professionals share their best practices. Borrow freely, both their ideas and their positive energy.

Post, judiciously, to social media. Research suggests that sharing in healthy ways triggers dopamine, which increases inspiration and satisfaction.

Add a sensory component to your day, such as listening to music that makes you feel happy or infusing essential oils. These steps may stimulate the limbic system in the brain, inspiring energy and feelings of well-being.

Review activities that went well in the past and “tweak” them by adding, subtracting, multiplying or dividing one aspect to get inspirational mileage.
Work with a partner to collaborate on something new and fresh. That’s a good practice, but here’s the inspired part. Team teach it together or trade off and work with one another’s students for a mix up day.

Go for a walk outdoors if possible for at least 10 minutes before you deliver a lesson. An alternative to this is to put a pillow under your head and flip your legs “up the wall” and simply breathe deeply for 10 minutes before the lesson. Research suggests that both practices open up the bridge between left and right brains.

Sip a strong brew of coffee or a spiced tea before planning or delivering a lesson. Be mindful of blood pressure if this is a health issue for you. The components increase focus which make you more aware of ways to be fresh and inspirational in your practice. And, that said, let’s close with a fun activity that will provide both you and your students with a dose of inspirational beverage. This is fun to use as a holiday or Mother’s Day gift.
Dr. Bone’s Brain Tea

Step One: Mix up the tea.

Ingredients

1. Sugar free iced tea mix (lemon flavored). Use the caffeinated version unless you prefer the decaf. I use the Lipton “Diet” jar that makes 20 quarts.

2. 10 “sleeves” of any sugar-free orange drink mix, such as “Crystal Light”. Get 2 of the 5 count canisters, not the individual ones for bottles of water.

3. 2 tbsp. each of cinnamon, cloves, and allspice.

Mix all ingredients in a large bowl or a large container with a lid that can be shaken. The mix can be doubled or tripled to fill the desired number of jars.
**Step Two: Decorate the jars or containers**

Use repurposed jelly jars, small plastic containers with lids, or decorative canning jars with lids and decorate the tops with fun labels, ribbon, raffia, or buttons.

**Step Three: Fill and Label**

*Use a funnel to fill the jars and then apply labels that say: 1 tsp per 1.5 cups of very hot water and stir.*