

**I Don't Teach Math. I Teach Students Math.**

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"You are the first math teacher who ever cared whether I understood or not." I have heard these words again and again out of the mouths of students who work hard in my classes. As math teachers, we have the unfortunate reputation of loving our content first, and our students a far second, if at all. So, my first key to motivating students is to convince them, in both words and actions, that I care about them and their success in math. My second key to motivating students is to spend a good part of the first day doing math with them and introducing them to my teaching style. I choose material which is relevant to them, challenges them to think, but does not completely intimidate them. More importantly, I create an environment in which participation is not only "safe," but is also crucial in the learning process. Because I have found that students "will not care how much I know until they know how much I care," I carefully weave this theme throughout everything I do on the first day - from necessary administrative tasks, to my choice of content, to the way in which I teach that content. For me, designing such a lesson on the first day reaps huge rewards for the rest of the semester: it encourages students who "hate math" to persevere, and it inspires many others to achieve success in math that they did not think was possible.