Motivating the students through managing the atmosphere and awareness of needs:

[This is a draft. Add comments from a devotion on this topic.]

Hello- I’m Bruce McNeice – a former school Principal, Homeschool Dad, and education consultant. My passion is to impart courage to parents, and to equip and support parents in their God-given role of teaching and training their children to reach their full potential, and live an abundant life.

Regarding the social-emotional atmosphere we provide a warm, loving, personable atmosphere where each child is cared for – relaxed and productive at the same time. In contrast - where there is tension, arguing, anger, a feeling of 'walking on eggshells', constant berating and nagging, no child can relax enough to be interested and learn new things. So, we aim to provide a positive healthy social-emotional atmosphere without pressure or competition. When I say – a learning environment without competition – I mean without the use of prizes, punishments and rewards, lollies, grade-scores, and without using fear, blame, or threats as a cheap motivating tool. Instead – we create an atmosphere where each child is valued and encouraged and gently redirected to focus again, to do their own personal best - simply because it is worth doing.

The problem with prizes and rewards as a motivating factor is that, as Bill St Cyr puts it *“what we draw them with, is what we draw them to”*. By this we mean that if you say things like *“If we get through all our Maths and English then we can have pizza and a movie on Friday afternoon”*; then what you are really saying is *“you couldn't possibly be interested in Maths and English for its own sake, so we need to bribe you to get through all this boring stuff. But what is really worthwhile is pizza and a movie”.* Do you see that what you have drawn them towards is the pizza & movie, not an appreciation for Maths and English? (“What you draw them with, is what you draw them to.”)

Prizes and rewards are all 'external motivation', whereas what we want to develop is an internal motivation, an enjoyment at doing a job well, because it is worth doing. A classic example of the use of merely external motivation is the analogy of the donkey which has a carrot dangling in front of it, and a whip or prod at the back. Enticing with a prize or punishing with whip or prod, only develops an external motivation. But children are not donkeys or stupid animals. Because humans have a spirit, they can learn to choose what is right, simply because it is right; and we do this by training the child's ‘tastes’.

So, in our home-education we model enthusiasm for learning in an atmosphere of awe and wonder about the world we live in – and the students catch the atmosphere of the home or learning centre – they breathe it in, as we maintain a discipline of the habit of focusing on the true, the beautiful, the honourable, things worthy of good report. As we are modelling a love of learning, children absorb our enthusiasm, and the family or classroom becomes a 'learning community'.

We are always co-learners together with our children; and we strive to maintain a sweet positive, encouraging, spirit in the home. It is not a sin to make a mistake – give your children room to grow and develop.

Many parents tend to correct a child’s actions but allow the child to harbour attitudes that are negative, complaining, selfish, uncooperative or disobedient. Even more important than what children do, is the attitude or motive behind their actions. The parent’s consistent example of a godly character displaying gracious speech and positive attitudes, provides the best model. Just be aware that children also pick up attitudes and character traits from their peers, television, computer games, or comics.

Poor behaviour is often a habit that can be retrained. However, another reason behind a person's behaviour has to do with the filling or depleting of their needs. Often poor behaviour is a sign that the child is getting depleted in one of their essential 'needs'. Dr William Glasser suggests everyone has a range of needs that are like storage batteries or fuel tanks; needs such as 'Love & Belonging', 'Fun', 'Freedom', 'Power to accomplish', 'Purpose', or 'Survival Needs' (food, water, rest, clothing & shelter, etc); as well as a 'Spiritual need for transcendence' (that is a connection with God who is totally other than our physical reality and yet transcends into it to meet us in a very personal way).

Glasser explains that our behaviours (the things we do, say, think, feel) are our best attempt at filling our needs (even if it is an inappropriate way of meeting one's needs). If your child is acting inappropriately, think about how long it has been since you have spent some quality time with them (to fill their need for love & belonging). If they've been working inside for two hours, maybe they need to run around outside for a while (to fill the needs for fun & freedom). If they have been struggling at school in a competitive environment – a sense of hopelessness may have crept in (they've been depleted in their need for the power to accomplish). Are they running on empty regarding food, water, or rest (their survival needs)? Adults have these needs also. If you or your spouse are depressed, touchy, or grumpy, then think about when was the last time you encouraged or hugged them, or how long has it been since you both did something fun together?

Regarding our Spiritual need: One of the ways to keep a sweet spirit in the home is to make sure you are getting time-out yourself. The scriptures say it is life that begets life. If you want your children to display positive sociability, good manners, and respect for others, then you need to model this yourself, and train them in these good habits. It is out of the richness and sweetness of your own soul that you pass on good character to your children. Therefore, it is vitally important that you spend some alone-time meditating on the words of life in the Bible, while thinking and praying for your family. In these times of reflection and talking with God, He will point out areas you need to change yourself, and give you strategies for training your children.

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Before you go – I would like to briefly pray a blessing over you.

Lord God - awesome creator of the universe, you came to set the captives free; and to give us abundant life. So, I ask your blessing over these dear folk as they launch out on their learning journey. Help them to comprehend the breadth and depth of your love for them, and open their eyes to this amazing learning journey in pursuit of all goodness, truth and beauty. Bless them, in Jesus name amen.