



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue XLI



Motivating Students

Whether you are a teacher, a coach or an administrator, you are first and foremost a manager. One of a manager's top priorities is motivating workers, in our case, students. Motivated students are more likely to do quality work, learn eagerly and behave responsibly. There are two approaches to motivation: one appeals to external motivation (extrinsic) and relies heavily on incentives, rewards and/or punishment; the other appeals to internal motivation (intrinsic) and originates from the needs and desires from within each of us. External motivation is most prevalent in schools. We often try to "make" students perform by assigning grades, calling home, or threatening consequences. In his book *Punished by Rewards*, Alfie Kohn (1993) examines the research on external incentives and concludes that the "do this and you'll get that" approach to motivation is, in the long run, ineffective. Citing hundreds of studies, Kohn discusses the reasons that incentives do not work. Through his research, he found that "rewards change the way people feel about what they do" (p. 68). He explains that when a student hears "If you do this, then you'll get that," the message to the learner is, "There must be something wrong with this if you have to give me that to get me to do it." Therefore, what we are doing when we offer a reward for doing class work or behaving appropriately is actually "killing off the interest in the very thing we are bribing them to do" (p.72). Educational brain research guru, Eric Jensen, takes this a step farther: "...the use of rewards actually damages intrinsic motivation" (*Teaching with the brain in mind*, 1998, p. 67).

In *The Quality School: Managing Students without Coercion*, William Glasser proposes a psychological model that explains human behavior. His research has powerful implications for the classroom. Glasser asserts that all behavior is purposeful and is driven by five basic needs: to survive, to love and belong, to gain power, to be free, and to have fun.

- **Survival:** The physiological need to survive is a fundamental to all humanity. Survival includes the obvious needs for food, shelter, physical comfort and safety. Certainly, teachers can insure that all students feel safe in their classrooms, but sadly, the other needs are beyond our control.
- **Love and Belonging:** Humans are social creatures. We live in family units, work on teams, form social and civic organizations, attend social gatherings, and engage in hundreds of other behaviors that help us connect to others. This is as important in today's classrooms as it was thousands of years ago when humans depended on social structures for survival. Building a strong community of learners and creating opportunities for collaboration through effective, flexible grouping are two ways to satisfy this need. See *Literacy Connects* 30, 31 and 36 for community building activities and *Literacy Connects* 39 for ideas on creating and using collaborative learning groups.
- **Power:** The need for power is more than just the drive to dominate. Power is gained through competence, achievement and mastery. Our genetic instruction is to achieve, to master new skills, and to be recognized for our accomplishments.
- **Freedom:** As humans, we are motivated to be free, to choose. Effective teachers help students follow the drive to be free in ways that are respectful to others. Students who perceive themselves as having no choices will behave in ways they think will get them the freedom they believe they need. This often results in disruptive behaviors.
- **Fun:** Glasser relates fun to learning: "Fun is the genetic reward for learning. We are descended from those who learned more or better than others. The learning gave our people a survival advantage, and the need for fun became built into our genes" (1998, p.41).

This year, subsequent Literacy Connects will focus on each of these intrinsic needs and how they can be effectively incorporated into YOUR classroom.

Visit the RPDP website (www.rpdp.net) for a complete selection of *Literacy Connects*.