

MOTIVATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT: Rethinking Rewards, Assessment, and Learning

Most educators, if asked, can explain the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation -- between carrots and sticks on the one hand, and love of learning on the other. But many of our daily practices suggest that we fail to understand the importance of the distinction. In this workshop, Alfie Kohn, the author of *PUNISHED BY REWARDS*, shows why we need to stop asking "How motivated are my students?" and start asking "How are my students motivated?"

That question, in turn, leads to an even more surprising contrast: the distinction between getting students to think about their performance (that is, how well they are doing) and getting them to think about the learning itself (*what* they are doing). These orientations often pull in opposite directions, which means that too much emphasis on achievement can reduce students' interest in learning – and cause them to avoid challenging tasks. When the point is to prove how smart you are, there is less inclination to engage deeply with ideas.

Thus, the problem with standardized testing is not only how bad the tests themselves are, but also how much attention is paid to the results. Even new, “authentic” assessments may backfire if students are constantly led to ask, “How am I doing?” Likewise, research demonstrates that students who have come to focus on grades are likely to think less creatively and come to see learning as a chore. ("Do we have to know this?")

This workshop urges teachers and administrators to reconsider basic assumptions about motivation in general and evaluation in particular. Participants are helped to develop strategies that tap children's natural desire to explore ideas:

- ❖ creating a curriculum that is meaningful and relevant to students' interests
- ❖ bringing students in on the process of making decisions about their learning
- ❖ transforming classrooms into caring communities where students feel safe and connected to others, and
- ❖ moving away from traditional grading in favor of more constructive and learner-centered approaches to feedback.

THE DEADLY EFFECTS OF “TOUGHER STANDARDS”

“[The main effect] of the drive for so-called higher standards in schools is that the children are too busy to think,” said John Holt in 1959. Four decades later, policy makers are pursuing just such a heavy-handed, top-down version of education reform. The results: schools have been turned into giant test-prep centers, the intellectual life has been squeezed out of many classrooms, and some of the best educators have gotten tired (or fired).

This seminar, by the author of *THE SCHOOLS OUR CHILDREN DESERVE*, invites participants to explore five fatal flaws of the Tougher Standards movement:

1. It gets motivation wrong. Leading students to become preoccupied with how well they are doing in school can undermine their engagement with *what* they are doing. Paradoxically, a single-minded concern with results can reduce the quality of learning – along with the desire to explore ideas.

2. It gets pedagogy wrong. Standards are often defined as a long list of forgettable facts that students must know, or else. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to stick with the sort of traditional instruction that has now been shown by the best theory and research to interfere with deep understanding.

3. It gets evaluation wrong. In practice, “excellence,” “higher standards,” and “raising the bar” all refer to scores on standardized tests, many of them multiple-choice, norm-referenced, and otherwise flawed.

4. It gets school reform wrong. Tougher Standards are usually seen not as guidelines but as mandates, with “accountability” a code word for tighter control over what happens in classrooms by people who are not in classrooms.

5. It gets improvement wrong. Weaving its way through all these ideas is the implicit assumption that harder is always better. The result is that tests, texts, and teaching have not become more rigorous but merely more onerous.

This workshop concludes by helping participants to see that the push for Tougher Standards is not a reality to be coped with but a political movement that can be opposed. Practical strategies are suggested by which educators can pursue a more thoughtful vision of teaching and learning.

Alfie Kohn – Longer Workshops

BEYOND BRIBES AND THREATS: Realistic Alternatives to Controlling Students' Behavior

This workshop, by the author of *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*, addresses the nonacademic realm of school life – and specifically the ways that discipline or classroom management not only tends to backfire, but actively interferes with the process of helping students grow into responsible, compassionate people. We begin by addressing the problems with trying to manipulate students' behavior with the use of rewards (including praise) or punishment (euphemistically called “consequences”). Then we dig deeper, looking at how much is lost by focusing on *behavior* in the first place, how a demand for short-term compliance (which is all that carrots and sticks can ever produce) gets in the way of our long-term goals for kids, and how many problems originate with the assumption that the teacher should be in control of the classroom.

In the second part of the workshop, participants hear about, see (on videotape), discuss, and make sense of the alternatives:

- ❖ solving problems rather than administering discipline,
- ❖ working *with* students rather than doing things *to* them,
- ❖ addressing how “misbehavior” may be due to a curriculum that isn't engaging,
- ❖ transforming the classroom (and school) into caring communities where students feel they belong, and
- ❖ bringing students in on making decisions about how they want their classroom to be -- and how to make that happen.