

# Project 4: A Student-Designed Study of Intrinsic Motivation in the Design of Instruction

by Mary Anne Lynch

"Motivation is the neglected heart of instructional design," according to Keller (1983). It's almost understandable...students are in school for one reason: To learn. It's mandated by the state (at least through eighth grade) and by their parents. Isn't that enough?

Looking at how and why people learn, it isn't.

Society wanting children to learn, or their parents wanting them to learn, are examples of extrinsic motivating factors. Someone or something else is telling them they *must* learn. For a fiercely independent child (I'm speaking from experience), such motivation may actually be a deterrent.

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is defined as "the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures, or rewards" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Rather than learning to get good grades or to delight one's parents, a child should, ideally, learn for learning's sake. In order for that to take place, however, the design of the instruction must have intrinsic motivation as one of the goals. It must be factored in early on, and not an afterthought.

The design of intrinsic motivation requires careful attention to the material and its relevance to the learner. Sometimes, however, making that connection isn't the easiest thing to do. But in such cases, I believe it's acceptable to take what was a solely extrinsic motivator and at least make it relevant – beyond, for instance, “because I said so.” I undertook this challenge without realizing it before our study of motivation began in this course.

My daughter, age eleven, has interests that differ from what is being taught in fourth grade (I'm certain most of the class is afflicted). For instance, the class is studying 1800 and 1900 American history: A time of railroads, steel, and monopolies. Social studies, as fascinating a topic as it is to me today, is not her favorite, nor was it mine at her age. And I can tell you that I remember how incredibly boring my textbook was back then.

While helping her study and preparing to hear another sigh as I said how interesting this stuff was, I asked, "Madeleine, somehow, *you've got to make this matter* to you."

Without thinking, I held up my iPhone. It's the latest -- a 5S model. I said, "You know how I buy a new iPhone every time a new one comes out? You've even kidded me about what an

agonizing decision it is whether or to upgrade because 'I just got this one a year ago'? You finally said, 'Why do you even talk about it? You know you're going to get a new one. Just buy it!' Well, do you know why I *can* 'just go buy it'? Because someone is paying me for my mind. I'm getting paid for the things I know. How did I get the jobs I have? I know things, but you can't get your foot in the door without a degree. So I went to a good college. How did I get into a good college? They accepted me because I got good grades. High school, middle school...elementary school. (Perfunctory point at social studies textbook.) It all starts here."

For my final project on beneficial insects in the garden, I must also address the question of "Why should I care?" Who cares if there are a few less ladybugs (arguably one of the better-known good bugs, apart from bees) in the world? One response to that is, if you can let beneficial insects do the job of a pesticide, wouldn't it be nice to not have to use toxins in your vegetable garden -- the same chemicals which, if used in large enough quantities, are toxic to mammals, a group to which we belong? Like the iPhone upgrade story, you've got to make the learners care. Even if it's a "selfish" or self-preservation type of caring, it's still caring and still, in part, motivating.

In the real world, teachers typically cannot take the time to make the study of a particular subject relevant to each learner. So I believe it is our task as instructional designers to work with the subject matter experts and the learners as an aggregate and build in intrinsic motivating factors by making things relevant to the learner, which, in turn, helps them to care.

#### *References:*

Keller, J. M. (1983). *Motivational design of instruction. Instructional design theories and models*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25(1), 54-67.