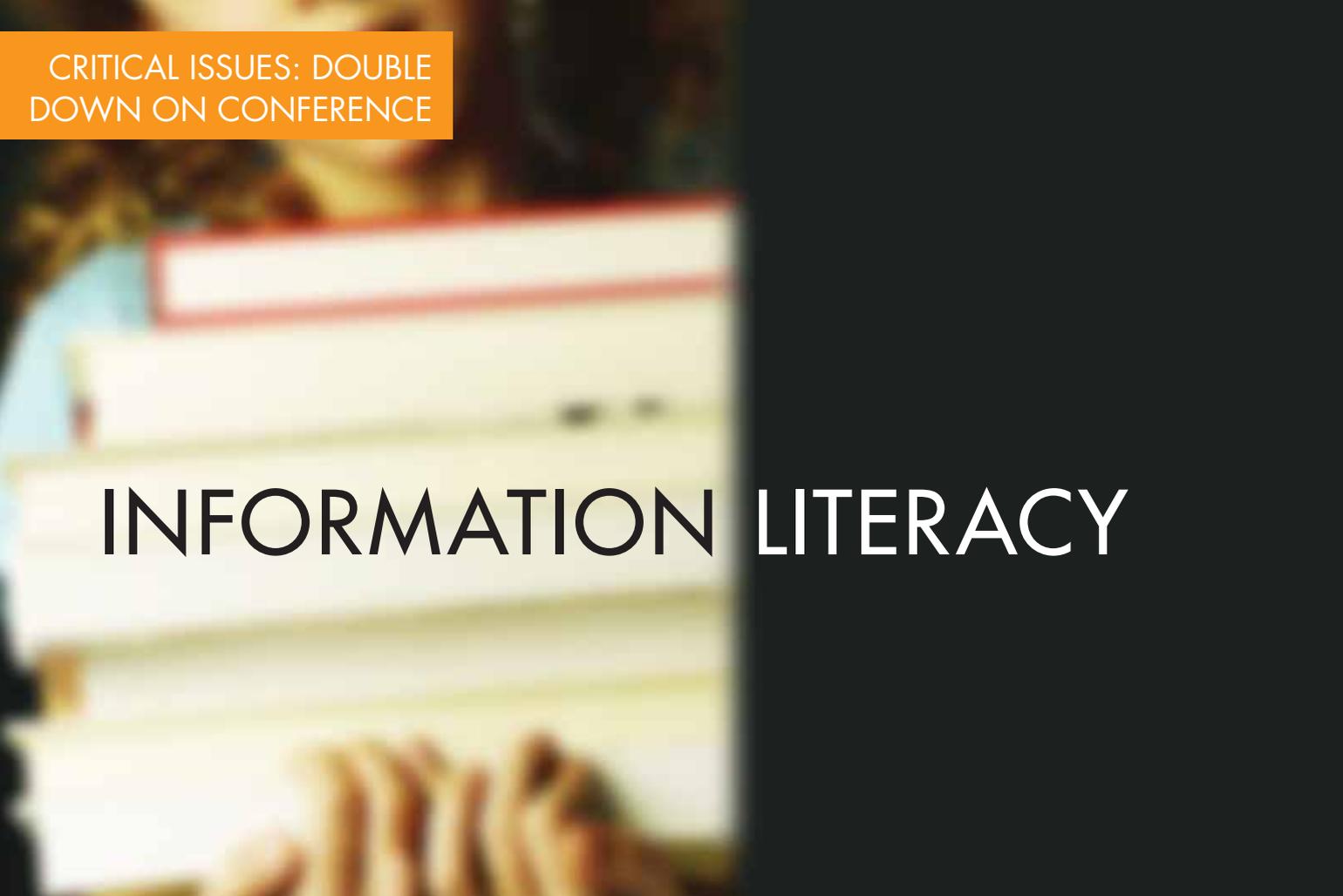


CRITICAL ISSUES: DOUBLE
DOWN ON CONFERENCE



INFORMATION LITERACY

What's Motivation Got to Do with It?

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They've talked you into reading it again, and still they look up at you with bright eyes and eager faces as they listen with rapt attention to *Skippyjon Jones* (Schachner 2003) for the third time. All hands go up, as they can barely wait to tell about the tricks *their* pets can do. Afterward, half the class wants books about dogs, and the other half have chosen quickly from among the books displayed around the library media center. Those kindergarteners are just bursting with excitement. Sure, they are wiggly, they lack certain skills, they might not even know the alphabet, but they *want* to learn. Every display seems to catch their eye. When it comes to excitement, checking out books is on a par with an African safari!

Then, somewhere in second semester of third grade, you notice a change. For some, hiding and running through the stacks seems more exciting than investigating the books on them. Students seem to enjoy the research project on planets at first, but they tire easily and get frustrated finding that last piece of required information. And the slope toward apathy gets slipperier as time goes by, until a few students in sixth grade respond with a heart-rending groan when presented with an assignment that requires library research. What happened to those eager students who began school with such zest for learning? Why did their love of learning fade?

Intrinsic Motivation: Too Often a Fading Star

Intrinsic motivation is the key, and the answers aren't simple. Developmentalists tell us that children are born with the intrinsic motivation to learn (for example, Harter 1978), but studies show that

this intrinsic desire to learn begins to wane during the early school years, around third grade, and continues a steady decline through eighth grade (Lepper, Corups, and Iyengar 2005).

So what happens to that burning desire to find out how rattlesnakes rattle or what made the dinosaurs disappear? A look at Self-Determination Theory (SDT) might lead to an answer (Deci and Ryan 1985).

How Can We Keep Them Motivated?

SDT attempts to explain the reasons a person decides to act in a particular situation. The idea is that people (children included) have certain psychological needs that must be met in order to be intrinsically motivated to do anything. Those needs are autonomy, perceived competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2000).

If you are interested in the topic of information literacy, look for these programs in Reno:

"Project-Based Learning: How High School Librarians Impact School Reform" — Violet Harada, Carolyn Kirio and Sandra Yamamoto

"21st Century Vision: Creating Culturally Responsive School Librarians" — Laura Summers

"The Future begins with Homework Help @ your library®" — Cathy Watson-Pittman and Paul Lanata

"What Works as the Library Media Specialist Pushes into the Center of Teaching and Learning?" — David Loertscher

"CSI: Reno" — Pat Coutts and Jill Rooker

"Making State Standards and Big6 Work for You" — Michael Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz

Autonomy refers to the volition (desire) to do a task. Intrinsically motivated activities have an internal perceived locus of causality (Heider 1958; deCharms 1968), which means that the student naturally and spontaneously desires to do that task (Deci and Ryan 2000). In contrast, when given extrinsic reasons (such as threats, deadlines, even positive reasons, such as rewards) for doing an intrinsically interesting act, people's perceived locus of causality shifts from internal to external. The student feels forced to do the task, which, in turn, decreases creativity, problem solving, and conceptual information processing. Research indicates that students show impaired performance when their teachers, under pressure to improve student performance, use controlling teaching strategies (Flink, Boggiano, and Barrett 1990). The irony is that the pressure for schools to perform well on high-stakes tests may actually lead to teaching strategies that create unmotivated learners.

Choice, on the other hand, enhances a sense of self-initiation (the perception that the student is responsible for setting his or her own actions into motion), thus satisfying the need for autonomy. When people have some choice in a task, they buy into doing it. When students help design their own projects, have input and choice in the topic, and are encouraged to ask their own questions as they investigate, they are more willing and interested—and they may learn more, too.

A second component of intrinsic motivation is **perceived competence**, the belief one is able to accomplish a task. People need to feel they have the ability to do a job before they begin doing it. Granted, we want our students to stretch, but it is important that they see a success

as attainable. While they may not completely understand *how* to do a project before they begin, they need to have the confidence that we will provide them individual support as they do it.

That leads us to *scaffolding*, adjusting your instructional support for each student as his ability grows. The support should enable the student to operate at a comfortable level of challenge. The gap “between [a student’s] actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978) is called the Zone of Proximal Development. Specifically, a library media specialist and teacher bridge

this gap by scaffolding the research process. They help students build structure and organize ideas through modeling, thinking maps, waterfall note folders (manila folders with note cards taped inside in an overlapping, waterfall fashion), Web Quests, and research cycle modules (see wwwsil.bham.wednet.edu/Curriculum/Explorers_Time_Machine/homeport

[.htm](#) for a good example [Offut 2002]). As students begin to master the research process they rely less on these scaffolds. Some students, however, will need them longer than others; experienced educators are sensitive to individual students’ growth and needs, providing and removing structure as needed.

Some students may have the ability and skills to do a task, but not *believe* in their ability to do it—the distinction between competence and *perceived* competence. In a study of above-average students, Miserandino (1996) found that there was a correlation between students who perceived themselves as competent and their intrinsic motivation. Even though all the students in the study were found to be competent, only those that believed themselves to be capable actually wanted to learn and do well. The students who perceived themselves as incompetent (despite their high achievement) “reported feeling anxious, angry, and bored in school and reported avoiding, ignoring and faking schoolwork” (208).

Ability-labeling material in the school library (for example, Accelerated Reader levels) and then insisting that a student only use certain labeled books can send students a subtle message that they are not capable. ALA has long taken a stand against labeling materials in the library media center (ALA 2005) on grounds that the practice restricts intellectual freedom. When library media specialists label materials based on grade or reading level, they are setting up a system whereby students compare their abilities with others’, with the result that some students’ perceived competence is seriously impaired.

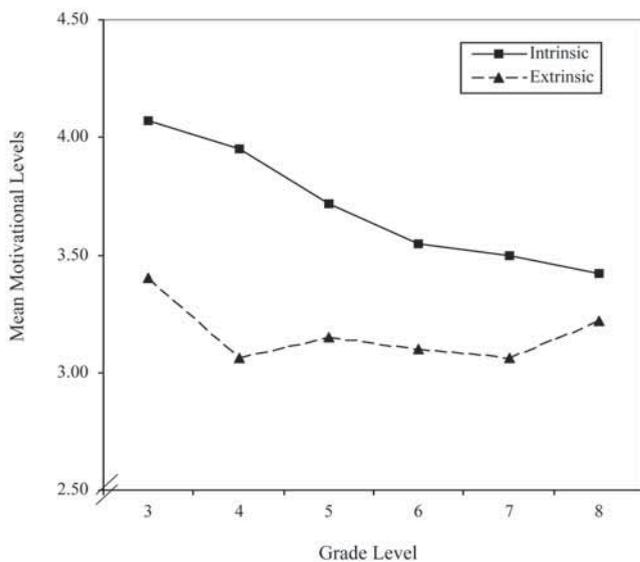


Figure 1. Mean Levels of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation by Grade Level

Note. From M. R. Lepper, J. H. Corpus, and S. S. Iyengar, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Orientations in the Classroom: Age Differences and Academic Correlates,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 97, no. 2 (2005): 190. Copyright 2005 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

Relatedness is feeling “securely connected to the social surround” and “to experience oneself as worthy and capable of love and respect” (Connell and Wellborn 1991, 51–52). Children who feel secure also feel freer to explore and interact with others (Bowlby 1969). A study by Furrer and Skinner (2003) shows that elementary students’ relationships with their teachers promoted both motivation and school performance. While students’ relatedness to all social partners (teachers, parents, and peers) played a role in their motivation, relatedness to their teachers provided the most striking influence on their emotional engagement in the classroom. Students who reported feeling appreciated by their teacher “were more likely to report that [their] involvement in academic activities was interesting and fun,” while students who felt ignored or unimportant “reported more boredom, unhappiness, and anger while participating in learning activities” (159). Interestingly, while girls showed a higher relatedness than boys in school, the effect of relatedness on boys’ engagement was more pronounced. In other words, fewer boys than girls related well to their teachers (possibly a gender gap?), but for those boys who did relate well, the relationship showed a stronger effect on their engagement in classroom activities.

Even though it seems peer relationships would be more influential in meeting the relatedness needs of teens, research indicates otherwise. A study by Ryan, Stiller, and Lynch (1994) measured middle school (seventh- and eighth-grade) students’ attachments, school utilization, emulation practices, coping skills, and self-esteem. The

surprising results were that “whereas relatedness to parents and teachers was predictive of school motivation and adjustment, relatedness to friends generally was unrelated to these outcomes” (27). Even though they seem more focused on friends, the active adult relationships in teens’ lives may in fact have more influence.

I have found that my role as a library media specialist enables me

to connect to students in ways not easily achieved by their teachers and other school staff. I can engage in a helping and teaching role that does not associate me with extrinsic motivators (grades and tests) or judgmental behavior. I believe this role is especially important with those students who don’t get along with their teachers, or who just don’t fit in socially in school. This is not to say that we should focus solely or

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inordinately on “misfits.” On the contrary, our relationship with all students is important and should be based on seeing every student as an interesting individual with valuable ideas and abilities and worthy of respect. And by providing consistent relatedness throughout their years in our school, our academic influence is magnified.

Intrinsic Motivation: The Heart of Information Literacy

Intrinsic motivation is at the core of information literacy, the foundation for a desire to learn and find information independently. “The goal is to assist all students in becoming active and creative locators, evaluators, and users of information to solve problems and to satisfy their own curiosity” (AASL and AECT 1998, 2). This concept is firmly situated in Standard 4,

which describes the information literate student as one who “pursues information related to personal interests” (8) and in the proposed Standard IV: “learners use 21st century information skills, resources and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth” (AASL 2007, 7). It’s also the basis for the inquiry-based process that is embedded throughout the proposed standards (1–7).

To conclude, we are not in the business of creating information-finding robots that produce the minimum product for the grade. Those are students who throw information literacy aside the minute they walk across the stage to get their diplomas. Instead, our primary goal is to foster students who are on their way to becoming lifelong learners, “people who display an attitude and

ability that prompts them to learn across their life spans” (Crow 2006, 23) Students need *both* the attitude and ability to achieve information literacy. It’s time we took a closer look at how we help students develop and retain that Kindergarten spark for learning way beyond their elementary years. Their future success is worth the effort.



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