

Plastic dinosaurs

Business



For me, the state tests began in 4th grade. We had worksheets and pep talks, the whole bit, because making the AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) was so important. Now, I take issue with the law behind the state tests, the benchmarks, the AYP to begin with, but I am genuinely concerned about the motivational techniques some educators have been forced to use – in other words, the plastic dinosaurs. When we got to 5th grade, we students apparently were not doing well enough on our test preparation worksheets. We, evidently, did not possess sufficient internal motivation. The solution was to give adequately scoring students their selection of party favors, including plastic dinosaurs and little creatures whose eyes bugged out grotesquely when squeezed. Of course, this was not the first time external motivation was offered. In 2nd grade, reading a certain number of books could earn you a foam bookmark or a scratch-and-sniff sticker. In 3rd grade, successful completion of timed multiplication and division tables earned a bag of Skittles.

Perfect spelling tests were rewarded with Jolly Ranchers. However, something about the plastic dinosaurs was different. I remember hating division. It was difficult for me, and when we did the tables, I usually didn't finish within the time limit. When I finally did, and was given the Tropical Skittles, I was ecstatic..

. but not because I had a bag of candy. Because I had done something that challenged me, that I had worked for. The candy was congratulatory. The plastic dinosaurs, on the other hand, were a last resort and, in my opinion, a very unfortunate one.

As the years passed, benchmarks and KAP and things to present to the State became increasingly important. The things offered as external motivation increased exponentially: candy, party favors, signatures on a wall, recognition at special assemblies, trips to amusement parks – all for adequate scores; all to motivate kids, not just to do well, but to do the work in the first place. When rewards this excessive are offered to one class of students, a lesser reward can hardly be offered to the next. The students will likely say “ we deserve this, we are entitled to it, we demand it; it’s not fair.” The problem now is that when they believe that it isn’t fair, if they do not value the offered rewards, what is left? Internal motivation? To do something because it is important inside, because it may be difficult? Unfortunately, for many, this is not the case.

When you pass out plastic dinosaurs, everyone can see who gets them and who doesn’t. At the assemblies, everyone hears the names that are called, sees the kids who stand and the kids who remain seated. There is a certain degree of competition between the students in elementary. Later, however, things will change. Over the years, motivational techniques have, together with a number of other factors, divided students.

Those who got the plastic dinosaurs are the ones who went on the field trips, who were recognized in front of their peers for their scores. They make the A’s and B’s and are probably going to college. Then there are the ones who never got to choose a party favor, who stayed at school while the others ate cotton candy at the ball game, who sat in the audience instead of standing on the stage...these students earn the D’s and F’s, are assigned detention frequently, and claim not to care.

<https://assignbuster.com/plastic-dinosaurs/>

Later on in life, say, for instance, in college, is someone going to say to me, “ Oh, Kathryn, you made a passing grade on this exam. Say, I am taking all the students who passed to the ball game next month. Why don’t you come along?”? I think not. Will they say, “ Hey, if you do your job well enough, I’ll give you a package of pencils”? Once again, I doubt it. Now, I understand that while the law is in effect, jumping through hoops to meet certain requirements is important. However, the better motivators have always been and (hopefully) always will be internal rather than external.

So instead of saying “ You can do well because I know how much you want to have this plastic dinosaur,” it might be wiser just to stick with “ You can.”