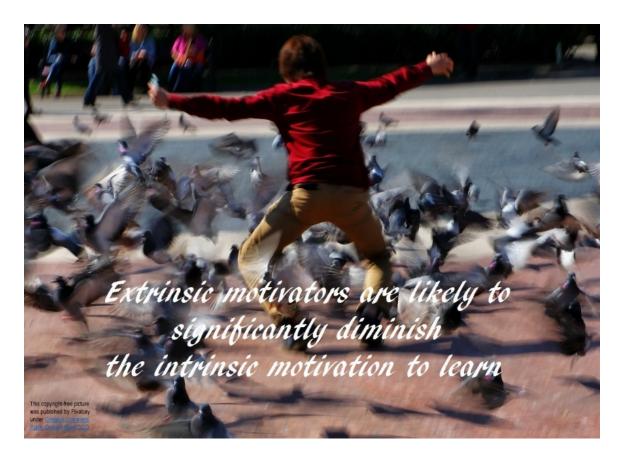From *Education Follies: four decades of tilting at windmills for no apparent reason*
by Jeff Lee Byrem, (c) 2016

Extrinsic motivators are likely to significantly diminish the intrinsic motivation to learn

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The Three C's (Children Are Not Pigeons!)

The basic tenets of Self-determination Theory are described in *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions* by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci.

Understanding motivation is, to my way of thinking, perhaps the most important understanding an educator can possess, but my nonscientific sample of one tells me that a typical American educator's understanding is far less than what it needs to be. Too many of us rely upon extrinsic motivators, which *can* influence behavior, but extrinsic motivators are likely to significantly diminish the intrinsic motivation to learn that we find with typical four-year-olds.

Many of us have been programmed to treat children like B. F. Skinner's pigeons. You *can* influence a child to do something if a reward is sufficiently valued by the child, but what happens when the reward is no longer provided? <u>Educators need to understand and employ what is known about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to ensure that the remarkable capacity and eagerness of four-year-olds to learn by exploration and experimentation lasts for a lifetime!</u>

Consider: By fifth grade, have we gold-starred, stickered, candy-barred, atta-boyed, and student-of-the-monthed a child's natural intrinsic motivation to learn right out of our children (in a school setting), especially those students who are sometimes described as high-fliers. (I don't know about you, but to me, "high-fliers" creates an unfortunate connection with pigeons!)

Instead of using extrinsic rewards that may have a deleterious impact upon our children's intrinsic motivation to learn, Ryan and Deci suggest: "…in schools, the facilitation of more self-determined learning requires classroom conditions that allow satisfaction of these three basic human needs—that is (the need) to feel connected, effective, and agentic as one is exposed to new ideas and exercises new skills."

Elsewhere in the paper, the authors refer to these *three innate human needs* as the need for *autonomy, competence,* and *relatedness*. Given the barrage of ideas that are thrown at educators (by educators!) during the course of a year, some years ago I gave a little thought to how I might help adults retrieve these three foundational needs.

I considered acrostics (a sentence made up of words that begin with the first letters of the words you want to remember) as a way to remember autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and I came up with a few. I considered *All Children Run*, which was a little

too banal. I also considered *Angry Canadians Rage*, but Americans know that Canadians never get angry, so that would not have worked.

Ultimately, I opted to substitute control for autonomy, and connected for relatedness, because I thought the substituted words might have a more immediate hook for the educators I was training, *AND* it allowed me to encode **control, competence,** and **connected** as *The Three C's*. (Ryan and Deci actually use the terms competence and connected in the paper, so using those terms was not a stretch on my part!)

Presented to professional development participants, *The Three C's* has proved to be a helpful way to remember the three innate wants that each of us needs to employ if we wish to create a culture and climate in schools that allows students and colleagues to motivate themselves:

> *Control*............each of us has the need to feel as though we have some degree of control in our lives

> *Competence*......each of us has the need to feel capable, knowledgeable, and proficient

> *Connection*.......each of us needs to feel connected with others in an emotionally meaningful way

Remembering three words is not the same as understanding the concepts, so it is important that you connect the three concepts with observed phenomenon, i.e. in order for you to incorporate the concepts into your practice, you have to implicitly understand what each looks like in the real world.