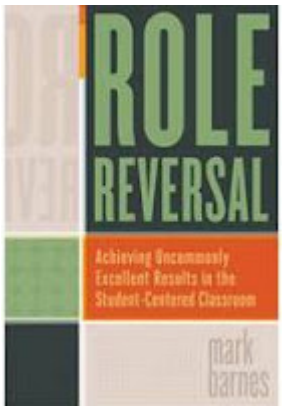
Developing Intrinsic Motivation

In my use of backwards planning to gain student motivation, I am continually asking teachers to identify what student behaviors are needed to reach the student achievement that has been set as a goal. Very often they identify intrinsic motivation. When we take the next step in backwards planning, we have to examine "what teacher behaviors are needed to get the desired student behavior". At this point people are ready to describe teaching strategies and classroom environment that support intrinsic motivation. But what if intrinsic motivation isn't present? I am discovering that in many cases when we identify the needed student behaviors we uncover behaviors that students must first learn.

So the needed behavior becomes a desired outcome. When the student has the behavior or strategy, it can then be used to produce a new outcome- "achievement".



"Intrinsic motivation has to be taught.. retaught, and emphasized from the first day of school until the last," writes Mark Barnes in **Role Reversal: Achieving Uncommonly Excellent Results in the Student Centered Classroom**. *"You may think that teaching something to be intrinsic is a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, even though intrinsic motivation comes from within, young people need a little coaching to find it."*

Barnes is guided by Daniel Pink's focus on autonomy, mastery, and purpose. He suggests projects to help build intrinsic motivation and recommends at least one year-long project. His students do a **Reading All Year** project aimed at each middle school student completing at least 25 books. He encourages

"fanning" intrinsic motivation by setting goals, celebrating successes, and stating the value of a learning activity.

"I constantly remind them that reading and writing will improve their lives in every way," writes Barnes.

Moving away from grades and providing quality feedback are also critical in his plan.

On the website for Educational World, I found an interview with Carol Dweck, who I often quote in my workshops on student effort. Notice how her comments match with Barnes:

Education World: What can teachers do to help develop mastery-oriented students — students who will face a challenge rather than be overwhelmed by it?

Dweck: *Students who are mastery-oriented think about learning, not about proving how smart they are. When they experience a setback, they focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent.*

This leads directly to what teachers can do to help students become more master-oriented:

Teachers should focus on students' efforts and not on their abilities. When students succeed, teachers should praise their efforts or their strategies, not their intelligence.

When students fail, teachers should also give feedback about effort or strategies — what the student did wrong and what he or she could do now.

In other words, teachers should help students value effort. Too many students think effort is only for the inept. Yet sustained effort over time is the key to outstanding achievement.

In a related vein, teachers should teach students to relish a challenge. Rather than praising students for doing well on easy tasks, they should convey that doing easy tasks is a waste of time. They should transmit the joy of confronting a challenge and of struggling to find strategies that work.

Finally, teachers can help students focus on and value learning. Too many students are hung up on grades and on proving their worth through grades. Grades are important, but learning is more important.

You can get a quick summary of Barnes' Results Only Learning Environment here. He states that the payoff is, "Students develop a thirst for learning" (Intrinsic Motivation).

See another example of building motivation by reading, **How A School Gets Students Excited To Learn Outside The Classroom.**