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The Renaissance Concept and the Effect of  
Positive Reinforcement on  
Student Performance

by  
Henry N. Kobik

A Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the  
Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of  
Rowan University  
April 13, 2000

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved May, 2000

## Abstract

Henry N. Kobik

The Renaissance Concept and the Effect  
of Positive Reinforcement on Student  
Performance

2000

Ronald L. Capasso, Ed.D.  
Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of extrinsic rewards on the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation levels of high school students. To complete this task, 118 students were chosen to complete a series of surveys which measured perceived levels of academic performance and motivation. This process allowed the students to not only respond in a multiple choice format but also provided the opportunity for written feedback as well. Further information on the topic was gathered from discussion with these students. All of the participants were chosen through random selection using the school roster and they represented the various ages, ethnic groups, and both genders which exist in Delsea Regional High School. Data between the initial survey which was administered before the Student Recognition Program was initiated was compared with information attained from a second survey which was completed after recognition activities were installed. Collected information from the data gathering process was analyzed and the intern concluded that extrinsic rewards do enhance extrinsic motivation. There is also evidence which suggests that intrinsic motivation may be increased as well. In the future, further study on influences on motivation will be required if the program's success is to continue.

Mini- Abstract

Henry N. Kobik

The Renaissance Concept and the Effect  
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Performance

2000

Ronald L. Capasso, Ed.D.

Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of extrinsic rewards on student motivation. By operating the Student Recognition portion of the school's Renaissance Program, analysis of student motivation occurred. This led the intern to conclude that extrinsic rewards can result in an increase in student motivation.

## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of the Study

The public education system of this country has been increasingly criticized during the past decade for not providing proper instruction to students. Many citizens believe that teachers are over paid and under skilled, while school administrations are over staffed. It is also perceived that funds are wasted while essential problems that plague our youth such as dropout rates, violence, and poor performance on standardized tests are ignored. One cannot blame the public for their concerns when the funding methods for our educational system are considered. A substantial percentage of the finances that keep our schools operating is generated through local property taxes, therefore, all taxpaying citizens have an interest in the actions and productivity of the community's schools. Those in the media also show disdain when they eagerly publish reports of misallocation of funds and below average student performance on state and national tests. Solutions to these and other school related problems have been posed and in certain cases implemented. Increased educator training, state and national teacher exams combined with the current movement towards mandatory continuing education for both instructors and administrators exist in order to have students excel in the classroom.

It is believed that these solutions may be addressing important educational issues but that a change in the motivation level of our students must also occur if we are to truly increase their performance. Of course, there are numerous factors that can determine if a student has an academically successful high school experience. Many educators believe that reading comprehension is the main component while others argue that analytical skills create a successful

adolescent. There is another belief, however, that motivation is the difference between failure and success. If this is true then the school community must utilize methods that motivate students to value their education. This is the purpose of a school wide Renaissance Program.

The foundation of this program is the idea that students who believe they can be recognized for their efforts will concentrate on their academic performance. The plan of this study is to go beyond the traditional Honor Roll and "Student of the Month" recognition so that a greater portion of the school population will be able to receive positive reinforcement for their achievements. Of course, opportunity for recognition will still exist for the consistently high achieving student, but a greater emphasis of this project will be the identification and rewarding of students who show improvement during the school year. One of the objectives of the Renaissance Program is to involve as many students as possible in this recognition process. Student motivation towards the program should increase when one realizes that the norm is to be a member of the program. In the past, the average and even the below average student viewed those who received academic notoriety as outsiders.

The rewards alone should also provide the students with an incentive to focus on academic performance. Unlike honor rolls which merely list a student's name, the Renaissance Program not only identifies the pupils individually, but also provides them with a physical reinforcement. Examples of Renaissance rewards may include discounts at local eateries, retail stores, and entertainment sites. In this manner, the entire community will also have the opportunity to become involved in the program so that the taxpayers will be aware of the increase in student academic performance.

Another positive aspect of the program is that the extrinsically motivated learner will see



an immediate purpose to increase their grade point average and avoid any discipline incidents. The Renaissance concept appears to have many beneficial attributes, but questions about the results for all involved do exist. These issues will be addressed in this study through the establishment of the Student Recognition Committee portion of the Renaissance Program which will develop and monitor the impact of multiple reinforcement activities. The intern hopes that through the establishment of the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School a renewed focus on academics will occur among the student body, and that this will result in the development of an academic environment which will assist the adolescents of Franklin and Elk Townships in attaining academic and personal success.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Renaissance Program on high school student motivation using an action research design. This study will result in an informative report for school officials and community members. The use of the Renaissance Program at Delsea will provide students with an educational environment that will foster success and increased motivation for all types of students.

Many educators believe that the major difference between a student who fails at a particular task and one who succeeds is the amount of effort put forth to attain the goal. This does not mean that all motivated students will achieve "A" averages in every subject but, the institution of this program could motivate students so that they will achieve their full academic potential. This study will attempt to identify a correlation between the motivation level involving academics and the level of success achieved in the classroom. Initially it is believed that certain students will not be motivated by the opportunity for academic success but, will view

the Renaissance Program's rewards as the main benefit of excelling school. This project will also try to identify students who enter the program with this view who, in later months, become intrinsically motivated once they identify themselves as academic achievers.

Discipline will also be another category which will be analyzed. There will be identification of pupils who improve their behavior as a result of the enticing rewards that the program offers. The Student Recognition Committee will establish a system to identify those students who improve academically and behaviorally during a given marking period, as well as those who only improve in a given subject area. The Renaissance Program and specifically the Student Recognition Committee should provide a framework so that the students will have the opportunity for constant self-monitoring which will result in increased positive reinforcement.

For the past decade, Renaissance Programs have claimed to raise the academic achievement level of all high school students while decreasing discipline problems. While this may be true, it remains to be seen how well it will work in our district. The Student Recognition Committee will be assisted by teacher volunteers who work with the targeted youths on a daily basis. By operating in this manner, effective techniques will be developed that have the potential to motivate all students. Those adolescents who are currently succeeding in Delsea Regional High School will also be targeted by the Student Recognition Committee so that they will continue to achieve; if improvement does occur, they will also be rewarded. As a result of this focus on the entire school population, numerous students will have the opportunity to belong to the program. It is the goal of the Student Recognition Committee that 75 percent of the students in Delsea Regional High School will earn Renaissance status during the 1999 - 2000 school year as a result of the program's focus on positive reinforcement.

## Definitions

*Blue Card* - The reward given when a student achieves an "A" average in two subjects. All other averages must be "B's" with the exception of one class where a "C" is permitted. 1 detention is permitted to attain this status. The student is not permitted to have any more than two unexcused absences during the marking period. Holders of this card are entitled to specific discounts and preferential treatment at certain functions. Benefits will be greater than those granted to White Card holders.

*Gold Card* - The reward given when a student achieves an "A" average in four subjects or the equivalent grade in a weighted class. Grades that are not "A's" cannot be any lower than a "B". No discipline referrals will have occurred during the marking period and the student is not permitted to have not more than one unexcused absence. Students who hold this card are entitled to specific discounts and preferential treatment at certain functions. Benefits will be greater than those granted Red, Blue, or White Card holders.

*Improvement* - The act of either increasing school attendance, grade point average, or decreasing involvement in activities which result in discipline. Can be defined as any combination of these as well.

*Motivation* - The act of improving in school as a result of the rewards system established by the Student Recognition Committee.

*Red Card* - The reward given when a student achieves an "A" average in three classes or the equivalent in a weighted class. The student's grades in the remaining classes cannot fall below a "B" average. No discipline referrals will have occurred during the marking period and the student is not permitted to have more than two unexcused absences. Students who hold this card

entitled to specific discounts and preferential treatment at certain functions. Benefits will be greater than those granted to Blue and White card holders.

*Renaissance Program* - A program that encourages improvement among students and staff through the use of structured, practical rewards.

*Reinforcement* - The encouragement of a particular action or behavior through the use of reward as dictated by the Renaissance Program.

*Reward System* - A hierarchy of benefits that are valued by those exposed to the Renaissance Program which is based upon the degree of achievement.

*Standards* - The guidelines established by the Student Recognition Committee that will determine the rewards that will be provided as a result of certain actions.

*Student Recognition Committee* - That portion of the Renaissance Program that will be responsible for monitoring student progress, recognizing improvement, and developing and administering the rewards.

*White Card* - The reward given when a student achieves averages of "B" or above with the exception of two classes where "C" averages can exist. Not more than two detentions are permitted for this level and students cannot have more than two unexcused absences. Students who hold this card are entitled to specific discounts and preferential treatment at certain functions.

#### Limitations of the Study

Although this study will include the entire student population of Delsea Regional High School, it should be noted that only students in grades 9 - 12 will be used and not the pupils of Delsea Regional Middle School. The middle school does not have any of the initial framework

in place for the establishment of a Renaissance Program. Eventually, it is believed a program will be developed in the middle school but this depends upon the level of success that the Renaissance Program achieves in the high school. If this experiment results in increased student motivation which leads to improved student behavior and academic performance, then the Renaissance Program may include the middle school as early as next school year. It should also be understood that this study will focus primarily on the actions and effects of the Student Recognition Committee and the study will not be involved with the Teacher Recognition Committee which will focus on the impact of positive reinforcement on professional staff members, or any of the other six committees.

The purpose of the Student Recognition Committee will be to identify fluctuations in student grade point average, attendance, and behavior that may be attributed to positive reinforcement from the organization. The study will be limited as a result of the emphasis that the committee will place upon improvement. Some student performance may decrease but unless this occurs to a substantial percentage of the population, the negative effect on these individuals may go unnoticed. It is possible that certain students will become unmotivated when they witness other pupils being rewarded for improving their academic status. This is a concern that those establishing the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School have regarding students who are currently achieving on a high academic level. In order to alleviate this potential problem, teaching staff members of Delsea Regional High School who represent varying levels of experience will be interviewed so that accurate analysis of student performance in the targeted areas will occur. As the school year proceeds, this method of data collection should become increasingly accurate but this may prove to be especially challenging during the months of

September and October since there is not yet a solid foundation for the program.

There is no past precedent in the district to follow and the reinforcement system will be in its infancy. In order to attempt to form an initial accurate list of deserving students, standards will be developed that will be similar to those of schools that have had Renaissance Programs work successfully during the past few years. School officials and teachers will be used in the establishment of the Renaissance Program but oral feedback from student representatives on the committee will also be analyzed in order to identify pupils who improve academically. When using the information attained from the students committee members, educators must remember to consider the various insecurities, such as jealousy, which can motivate an adolescent. This area of the program will require close monitoring.

Finally, and unfortunately, the greatest limitation on this study may be the fact that the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School is new. The progress of Renaissance Programs in other local and out of state districts will be analyzed but an accurate assessment of the long term impact of the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School will not occur in this study. These limitations may hinder the study at times, but it is still believed that enough information will be generated which will allow for an accurate assessment of the program.

#### Setting of the Study

Delsea Regional High School is located in Southeastern Gloucester County, New Jersey and provides educational instruction for the adolescents of Franklin and Elk Townships. This 72 square mile region is a rural area with the majority of the working community being employed in small businesses or agricultural positions. Both of the districts sending regions do currently operate under a township form of government which allows for community involvement when

establishing policies. Interestingly, however, the similarity in government structure does not dictate that these two neighboring areas are identical politically. The 19,000 residents of Franklin Township are predominantly Republican, while Elk Township's 3800 civilians have supported Democratic candidates during the the elections of the past decade. Although political beliefs may differ, both Franklin and Elk Townships have supported the budgets of Delsea Regional High School in each of the past four years. This is not surprising when one views the programs and the educational performance of the Southern Gloucester County Regional School District.

This school district is comprised of Delsea Regional High School and Delsea Regional Middle School. This study will only involve the 1187 students of Delsea Regional High school. These pupils are exposed to a variety of academic and athletic activities that exist so that they will develop into productive citizens and effective leaders. These programs include Advanced Placement courses, JROTC, School to Work, a curriculum that emphasizes technology training and even a television broadcasting class that utilizes the most current equipment in the visual entertainment industry. All of these opportunities for learning occur in an environment where teachers have the chance to develop professional relationships with the students as a result of the low 11.6 students for every teacher ratio. Of course, certain class sizes are larger but with an average of 24 students per class educators do not view their pupils as numbers. It should also be noted that the teachers at Delsea Regional High School have an average of 13 years of experience. Students, therefore, are provided with quality instruction from professionals who are still able to relate effectively to the younger generation. These teachers are dedicated to continued learning for themselves and have demonstrated this through attendance at various

workshops on current educational trends. Formal study has also occurred and 30 percent of the members of the teaching staff in the district have attained their Master's Degree in either their subject or an administrative field. Of equal importance is the fact that during the past three years the district's faculty has maintained a 97 percent attendance rate. From these supporting facts it appears apparent that employees in the Southern Gloucester County Regional School District are working to provide the best learning experience possible for the children of Franklin and Elk Townships.

These educators are supported by an administration that is equally dedicated in providing the teachers with the proper tools to present meaningful lessons. All of Delsea Regional High School's 90 classrooms are outfitted with at least one computer; there are nine computer labs dispersed throughout the building which hold between 20 and 30 computers each. Every learning environment within the school also has a mounted 19 inch television. Recently the district purchased 30, 32 inch televisions which were provided to selected teachers so they could work towards educating through multi media presentations. The educators who were given these larger televisions actually won them as a result of submitting an essay detailing why they needed them and how the televisions would be used. Delsea Regional High School has made a commitment to focus on what is good in education and positive reinforcement is not used sparingly. Teachers have responded by experimenting with new techniques and the students have reacted positively to this change both academically and socially.

During the past four years the student attendance rate has averaged slightly over 93 percent. Although there is room for improvement this average is better than many other schools within the state. High School Proficiency Test Scores have also been above the state average for



three of the past four years and this renewed emphasis on relevant education has resulted in an average of 66 percent of the graduating classes during that four year time frame believing that education was important enough for them to dedicate themselves to either two or four year colleges. This positive attitude towards our school permeates through each class and it is believed to have had an impact in decreasing the number of physical confrontations which can occur within a large population of adolescents. Unfortunately, there are still certain students who neither excel nor fail, but instead gain little attention as a result of their mediocrity. Of course, there are also still those who give little effort as a result of not identifying the relevance of what is to be learned. This is the major target group of the Student Recognition Committee. By constantly working to improve Delsea Regional High School, it is the belief of the professional staff, students and citizens of the community that an effective school can be made exceptional.

#### Significance of the Study

There are many positives that could result from the implementation of a school wide Renaissance Program and more specifically a Student Recognition Committee. An increase in student academic performance is expected but other benefits can be attained through proper planning by an enthusiastic administration and staff. All students will have the opportunity to take part in the program, therefore, more students can be rewarded than in traditional methods of positive reinforcement such as "Honor Roll" and "Student of the Month". As a result, a greater percentage of the student body should become motivated to succeed. The Renaissance Program is also unique because it rewards improvement as well as initial achievement. Short term goals are established especially for those students who have received little or no recognition in the past. By operating in this manner student interest is held and the pupils begin to build confidence in

their academic abilities as they witness their own improvement. Improved attendance should occur and students who sought attention through deviant behaviors should begin to conform to the academic environment of the high school. Because of these factors, strong work habits will have the opportunity to develop and positive peer pressure could become the norm. These learned skills will result in not only improved students but better citizens as well.

It is with this goal in place that Franklin and Elk Townships will benefit from Delsea Regional High School's Renaissance Program. Parents, guardians and other interested citizens of the district should immediately identify a more positive attitude towards school from their adolescent. It is believed that students who enjoy the time that they spend at school will be more likely to communicate their experiences with those at home. Parents, therefore will become more interested in the activities that their son / daughter is exposed to and they will, hopefully, take a more active role in their child's education. By having a community that is aware of the of the educational process that they support with their tax dollars, the opportunities for negative fallacies regarding the school will be diminished. The link between the school and community should be strengthened so that Delsea Regional High School will no longer be viewed as a separate entity from Franklin and Elk Townships but, instead will be considered a vital location that will ensure continued prosperity within the region.

### Organization of the Study

This study will be organized into four additional chapters. Chapter Two will focus on a review of literature that will analyze the role that motivation has on increasing student performance. Literature will also studied in order to identify the positives and negatives of reward systems in an educational setting and the impact that these rewards have on intrinsic and

extrinsic motivation. Chapter Three will target the design of the study with a description of the research design and an explanation of the development and type of research instruments that will be utilized. The sampling technique will be analyzed. Finally, the data collection approach and the analysis of this data will be discussed so that the question of the type of evidence needed in order to prove that the Student Recognition Committee branch of the Renaissance Program is impacting the level of success of the student's of Delsea Regional High School. Chapter Four will present and explain the meaning of the information that was found through the study. The final chapter, Chapter Five, will describe conclusions and their implications on both the school and the intern. The intern's leadership development through this study will be explained and an analysis of the organizational change within Delsea Regional High School that occurred as a result of this study will be addressed. The final chapter will conclude with an overview of areas of the project that demand further study. By organizing the study in this manner, it is believed that a structural analysis of the Student Recognition Committee will occur which will provide the administration with valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the program.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

As the United States prepares to enter the new millennium, we have become aware of certain social and economic challenges that await us in the near future. An increasingly multi-cultural society, combined with an emphasis on technology, assures us that our current beliefs and methods of operation are changing. This fact is evident on a daily basis in schools throughout the country. New curricula aimed at reducing the effects of prejudice and racism are being developed while the use of technology is being infused into almost every subject area. These issues along with the current public trend to verbally attack education because of questionable standardized test results, force school officials to re-evaluate their traditional methods so that our educational system will once again earn the taxpayer's respect. There have been numerous proposals developed regarding methods of educational improvement. These have included increased licencing standards for teachers, the abolishment of tenure for school administrators, and mentoring programs aimed at assisting new educators in taking theory into practice. Many school reformers, however, have overlooked the most important group in education; the students.

There has been a renewed emphasis placed upon increasing student motivation in order to improve the quality of our educational system. Some experts believe that this motivation must come from the child's home while others are becoming proponents of school programs. One of these, known as Renaissance, uses various extrinsic rewards to motivate students to achieve in the classroom. Debate is currently developing among experienced educators and those who are new to the profession regarding the use of non academic rewards such as free pizzas or movie

tickets. In order to judge the validity of such a program one must review the professional literature.

The concept of student's achieving their potential in the classroom is based in the theories of A.H. Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. Before one can be motivated to learn effectively they must have attained the level of what Maslow (1970) termed, "Self - Actualization". At this stage all physiological needs have been met and an individual is confident with his/her ability to complete a particular task. This is the goal all educators want their students to attain so that not only will the child excel academically in the short term, but as the child matures, they will be more willing to be risk takers who adapt to new challenges. This development, however, may also be affected by intrinsic motivation and the use of extrinsic rewards. How and when rewards are to be used and their impact on those who have varying levels of intrinsic motivation are issues that professional research attempts to address.

Pritchard, Campbell, and Campbell (19 )in their study "Effects of Extrinsic Financial Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation" attempted to build upon the earlier research of Deci (1975) which developed a theory explaining the factors that can influence intrinsic motivation. Using a sample of only 28 mixed gender subjects who were enrolled in an introductory psychology course, the authors developed a procedure in which a portion of the subjects were rewarded financially for completing an enjoyable task. Performance as well as time spent voluntarily practicing the task were measured. An important result of this study that could alter the opinions of the advocates of the Renaissance program was that the group that initially received the financial reward exhibited a larger decrease in time spent practicing the task than did the group which received no financial reward. It appears that the financial reward was a motivating factor

which decreased a participants intrinsic motivation for completing the task. Task satisfaction, however, was high for both groups. This information was retrieved through the use of a paper and pencil satisfaction scale which was completed by all participants. Questions regarding this method of information gathering do exist with one being unclear as to how the students who took part in this study defined satisfaction. Of equal interest is the fact that "there were no significant differences in performance between the paid and unpaid groups" (Pritchard et al., 1977, p.13). In fact, during the second session in which the task performed in session one was repeated, performance for each group increased. Perhaps a learning curve could explain this but it could also be the result of the interest in the task. Maslow's hierarchy could also explain this phenomena when one considers that no participants were initially aware of their evaluation in the study and that all participants acted in a manner that demonstrated confidence and control of individual actions. It appears then, that self actualization was attained. The results of this experiment are interesting in terms of their relation to the establishment of a school wide program based on extrinsic rewards but its validity can be questioned because of the use of a small sample and participants who were not volunteers for the experiment. Questions regarding variables that can control intrinsic motivation in motivated and unmotivated students also exist. This is an important issue when one considers the implementation of a Renaissance Program. Educators do not want to develop a school project that decreases the performance of those who are already intrinsically motivated. A student's feelings of self determination, beliefs of competence, type of instructor feedback, and difficulty level of particular tasks can all influence intrinsic motivation level (Pritchard et al., 1977).

Another study of the 1970's also attempted to determine the role that extrinsic rewards

have on intrinsic motivation. Unlike the Pritchard, Campbell and Campbell (1977) study with its small sample size, Arnold (1976) randomly selected 200 potential volunteers who could participate in the study if they chose. Of this group, 53 were obtained who were instructed to complete an enjoyable game playing task. Financial rewards were once again used to determine the role of an extrinsic reward on intrinsic motivation but as a result of the activity being enjoyable the issue of the effect of extrinsic rewards on improving intrinsic motivation could not be developed. What was discovered, however, was that when initial intrinsic motivation exists, the providing of an extrinsic reward for the activity will either increase intrinsic motivation or, at worst, have no effect upon it (Arnold, 1976). If this is valid, then school administrators do not need to be concerned with the impact of extrinsic rewards on intrinsically motivated students. Care must be taken in attaining information in this manner because the validity of self reports of satisfaction were found to be an unreliable method of extrinsic motivation (Arnold, 1976). The question exists then, on how one can determine what types of activities develop intrinsic motivation and what are the factors that can hinder it. Later studies of motivation address these two issues.

Butler and Nisan (1986) worked to analyze the effect of various forms of feedback on motivation. It must be remembered that not all extrinsic motivators are in the form of monetary rewards or physical manifestations such as gold stars and certificates. Simply saying "good job" or "well done" is an example of a motivation technique that is used on a daily basis throughout our schools. Also common in our educational system is the use of grades to provide information on a student's level of achievement. The impact of these forms of extrinsic motivators on 261 sixth graders was measured and the results hold valuable information for this project.

It was discovered that task related feedback, information regarding performance for each individual student, proved to be the greatest motivator. In fact, it was found that informative comments maintained and in certain cases enhanced intrinsic motivation by providing for mastery needs (Butler and Nisan, 1986). If this is true then individualized attention could be the greatest motivator of all. Numerical grades, which have been viewed as the goal of students nationwide, were found to increase an individual's focus on extrinsic motivation while decreasing one's intrinsic motivation. Finally, those students who received no feedback regarding the assigned task were found to lose interest and therefore, performed poorly in this experiment. It appears that school administrators who encourage individual communication between students and staff members regarding academic progress are reinforcing intrinsic motivation and helping to ensure future classroom success. This communication does not need to be always positive but the action of providing individualized information on a task gives the student a belief of control that will assist them in maintaining interest (Butler and Nisan, 1986). The question of the role that an individual's interest has in maintaining intrinsic motivation must then be answered. Bishop (1989) claims that getting students interested in what you want them to accomplish is the key to any successful school program. He also reinforces the results of Butler and Nisan (1986) when he states that "the fundamental cause of student and parent apathy is the absence of good signals of effort and learning in high school and consequent lack of rewards for effort and learning" (Bishop, 1989, p.28). If response to effort is provided then does this mean that the entire community will refocus their attitude toward education from one that is solely the school's responsibility to more of a community based approach? Bishop (1989) states that this is possible because students are presently discouraged from succeeding by peer



pressure which labels them as “nerds” if they make academics a priority. Unfortunately many potential achievers make little or no effort to work towards academic success because their chance of receiving individualized academic recognition is slim (Bishop, 1989). Certainly, the Renaissance Program addresses this issue by giving all students who improve upon past performance the opportunity for recognition. This is completed in a similar manner to high school athletics where letters, stickers, and certificates are awarded when certain goals are achieved. For example one only needs to look at the helmets of their local high school football team to locate the stickers in the shapes of stars, lightening bolts, or skulls that represent the achievements of past games. Studies have indicated that rewards foster interest; in an academic setting that interest should result in the attainment of higher grade point averages.

Evidence has shown a direct correlation between effort and grade point average (Wentzel, 1989). In fact, Wentzel (1989) clearly states “that GPA was significantly and positively related to student reports of efforts to: be a successful student, be dependable and responsible, understand things, do one’s very best, and get things done on time.”(Wentzel 1989, p.134). Of course, students who responded to the questionnaire in this manner were already interested in success before this study occurred. These results were attained from a study that involved 203 high school adolescents from a suburban California high school. Adding further validity to these findings was that they were collected from students over varying academic abilities. Of particular interest, was Wentzel’s discovery that students who experience varying levels of achievement in the classroom perceive the school environment and themselves differently. As a result, altering the school environment into one that is more conducive to achievement may have to begin with the restructuring of both individual and socially prescribed goals. The success of

this undertaking may be dependant on finding particular rewards that motivate students and will increase their level of intrinsic motivation.

Task related feedback has already been addressed as a potential motivator for disinterested students; however teachers can not be with every student all of the time so there must be other forms of rewards that will have a beneficial effect on intrinsic motivation while providing the child with the necessary components to attain Maslow's highest level. Many studies have attempted to identify the types rewards and the methods in which they are distributed in order to determine if a student's intrinsic motivation can be increased using an external reward system (Jordan,1986; Harackiewicz, Abrahams, and Wageman, 1987; Chance, 1992). Not all of their findings, however, have been similar.

Jordan (1986) used a study of 48 health care technicians to determine the impact of performance based rewards on intrinsic motivation. His findings were similar with many of the early theories, including those of Deci (1975). These findings showed that intrinsic motivation among the sample group which was to receive a financial reward resulted in decreased performance. The results in the opposite group, which did not have their reward based upon performance, showed an increase in intrinsic motivation. These results are alarming when one considers their educational ramifications; before conclusions are drawn, the study must be questioned in certain areas. This study was a field experiment that occurred in an actual workplace with adults, therefore, it may be that individuals of varying ages react to extrinsic motivators differently. Also, there were other reward programs already operating at the Center, therefore, the impact of a new motivation program could not be measured in an environment that was vacant of other similar programs. An initial over view of this study may not immediately

identify itself as relevant to the development of an extrinsic reward program for high school adolescents; but when one considers age difference, the potential question of how students of varying ages will react to the program must be a concern. This study is also important in that it identifies the fact that too many reward programs may conflict and as a result fail in their goal of increasing motivation.

Contrary to the findings of Jordan (1986), Harackiewicz, Abrahams, and Wageman (1987) found that among the 78 students who took part in their study, those who were offered a performance contingent reward were more concerned about their ability to complete the required task at a higher level than other students. As a result, it was stated that external contingencies in this study enhanced interest. In fact, the authors believe that “these results demonstrate that contingencies communicated at the outset of task engagement can enhance subsequent interest independently of the competence information they provide at task conclusion” (Harackiewicz et al., 1987, p.1022). Notifying subjects of potential extrinsic rewards upon completion of an activity is a questionable practice according to other researchers. Chance (1992) found that intrinsic motivation is more likely to decline when rewards are used as incentives for a task that is already considered to be enjoyable. This finding refutes previous studies that established that extrinsic rewards will not have an effect on the intrinsic motivation of a student who already values a particular task. Perhaps the inconsistency on this level is due to the failure of identifying types of rewards and the instances in which they should be used.

There are three general types of reward contingencies. Task contingent rewards are those which are provided for participation in an activity. Performance is not considered when utilizing this form of extrinsic motivation. Performance contingent rewards are provided upon

achievement of a certain standard. It is this type of reward that many of the early researchers such as Deci (1975) found to have negative effects on intrinsic motivation. It should also be mentioned that this type of reward system may be the most difficult to evaluate because if a student fails to attain the standard, they are likely to lose interest in the activity because of their own academic shortcomings. The third form of extrinsic motivation is the success contingent reward. In this situation a reward is given according to positive performance or progress toward a desired goal (Chance, 1992). It is this third form of reward structure that is becoming increasingly popular among programs such as Renaissance which emphasize academic improvement. If a program of this type is to be successful, then certain guidelines in the distribution of rewards must be followed.

Performance standards must be established so that they are attainable for students of all levels. This practice will foster success which will increase student interest in the desired task. Once interest is developed then intrinsic motivation will have the opportunity to grow (Chance, 1992). Reinforcing in this manner will lead to improvement among that portion of the student body which has received little or no success in the classroom. The positive attitude that develops in the school will also permeate into the community where parents should be encouraged to become involved in their child's learning process. As achievement increases in the school, the local labor market should begin to employ more graduates of the school with the potential of occupying positions of greater responsibility and therefore higher wages being earned. This will then motivate younger students to study harder while they are in school (Bishop, 1989). By creating a chain of success involving the school, home, and community, students should begin to see the rewards of intrinsic motivation. The value of education has been a complaint of the past

and at times the issue of academic relevance is questioned. In other words, pupils do not understand why they are learning particular information. This issue can become more complicated when one realizes that certain skills are needed in order to develop intrinsic motivation. For example, Chance (1992) states that “ Knowledge, understanding, and the aesthetic pleasures of language are all intrinsic rewards for reading, but they are not available to those for whom reading is a difficult and painful activity” (Chance, 1992, p.206). As a result, extrinsic rewards used properly can be used as an effective teaching tool. Perhaps, Brophy (1987) states the purpose of extrinsic rewards the most clearly when he writes “People do not invest effort on tasks that do not lead to valued outcomes even if they know they can perform the tasks successfully, and they do not invest effort on even highly valued tasks if they are convinced that they cannot succeed no matter how hard they try” (Brophy, 1987, p.41). This statement supports the findings of previously mentioned research but educators must be certain to not rely to heavily upon extrinsic motivational strategies or students may lose focus of why they are learning a particular topic(Brophy, 1987). A classroom that is based solely upon competition is not academically healthy. Identification of fluctuations in motivation have already been presented and while high academic achievers may not be impacted in such a climate. The goal of analyzing the results of extrinsic rewards and their influence on developing and maintaining intrinsic motivation focuses more on the students who need to find success in school. It is this group, which requires initial rewards in order to develop an interest in academics. Once this interest is gained, then success can be achieved and intrinsic motivation will have the opportunity to develop. As previously stated, unmotivated students must have their basic needs met before they attain any form of success. If this occurs, then all members of the community will be

rewarded with confident, motivated, life long learners.

## Chapter 3

### The Design of the Study

#### General Description of the Study

As the 21<sup>st</sup> Century dawns, our country's educational system is being increasingly criticized for using archaic methods of instruction. Those who are scrutinizing our schools claim that these outdated methods create an atmosphere of mediocrity in our educational institutions which results in poor student performance in the classroom. Ironically, this conclusion has been reached through the analysis of standardized test scores which are meant to measure the accomplishments of past pupil learning and the potential for future success in post secondary studies. Many educational researchers claim that poor methods of instruction do play a major role in an adolescent's academic achievements but they also state that it is the level of the student's motivation that could be the vital component in determining classroom success. This study is currently being developed as a result of this belief that pupil motivation towards a particular task can determine the level of success that is attained. Various methods of increasing student motivation have previously been studied but recently a new program known as Renaissance has been developed by the Josten's Company. This program emphasizes the use of extrinsic rewards in order to increase student motivation. For example, a low achieving student is presented with the opportunity to receive a discounted pizza if their grade point average improves. To date, it is still to be determined if this method of motivation actually enhances student performance. It is hoped that by analyzing the impact of extrinsic rewards on low achieving students that clear observations will result which will provide an accurate assessment of this reward system structure in educational settings. An additional component of this project

involves the analysis of extrinsic rewards on already high achieving students. Hopefully, there will not be a negative impact on these students, but instead, all pupils at Delsea Regional High School will be effected positively by extrinsic rewards so that intrinsic motivation increases.

#### Development and Design of the Research Instruments

This study will utilize the “Funnel Approach” method of action research in which the study will be initiated with general questions on the topic of external rewards and their potential impact on education. Through a logical progression, there will be an increased focus on the specific areas which could result in inconsistencies in the project conclusions. Eventually, the identification of specific phenomenon will occur that should lead to focused conclusions for the project. The “Funnel Approach” is described in detail in Wiersma’s book Research Methods In Education (1995). As his text states, non specific questions initiate the study and are distributed to subjects once a potential site and group of subjects is chosen. Sources of data are then determined and a particular method of data collection is decided upon. Data is then collected. At that point, a distinguishing characteristic of the “Funnel Approach” occurs. Revisions are made to the study in an attempt to narrow the topic to the exact cause of the differences in data that exist. There is then an increased focus on the phenomenon being studied and the subjects being used to attain the information. More specific data collection occurs and the information attained is used to develop focused conclusions for the study.

There are many positives in using Wiersma’s plan for action research. The “Funnel Approach” allows the individual conducting the research to begin the study with broad ideas and then narrow the topic to the true solution to the problem. Organization is maintained and the intern will be forced to maintain his focus on the purpose of the project. Other aspects of this



research design that define it as effective include the fact that the researcher can clearly infuse into each category specific information relative to the study. For the current project, the initial questions involving the role of motivation in learning among high school students and the impact of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation will attempt to be answered.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

A random sample of students from Delsea Regional High School will be used to attain the pertinent data. This group of 80 adolescents will include 1 out of every 15 pupils in the high school. It is hoped that this sample number will involve students that will represent the attitudes of the entire student body. Once the initial surveys are completed and the data is analyzed then revisions will be made to the project in order to specifically target the role of motivation on those who are low academic achievers and also those who are currently intrinsically motivated high achieving students. This is presently the plan of the current study but if it becomes apparent that other evidence can be gathered which will prove the project's validity then those alterations will occur. Additional factors that could influence the outcome of the study will also be given attention. These include gender and age differences that exist among the participants as well as differences in students' previous academic performance. Activities will then be implemented which will attempt to motivate all students towards academic success. Many of these rewards will originate from the lists of motivating factors generated from the initial survey. It is assumed that the list of motivating factors for the previously unsuccessful student will differ from that which is developed for the previously successful pupil. A second survey will then be distributed to the identical sample group which completed the initial survey and the data will be compared with the first set of responses in order to determine if the Renaissance concept is positively

influencing student classroom performance. It is anticipated by the intern that through organized research, results which develop will be valuable to educational institutions that desire to discover the impact of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation.

### Data Collection Approach

The research instrument that will be used in this study will provide the intern with a clear understanding of the type of student who is completing the study. Specific areas to be analyzed will include participant age, gender, past academic performance, and opinion of extrinsic motivators. The survey begins with these general questions and then proceeds to the more task specific issues of explanations for high or low performance. As a result, the intern will be exposed to the student's expectations of education at the high school level and the factors that could improve his / her learning. Students will then respond as to what they perceive the role of motivation to be in determining success or failure. Respondents will have the opportunity to not only answer in a standardized format but also give written information which will provide the intern with a greater understanding of the students beliefs on motivation. By providing a survey that is structured in this manner, participants should not be intimidated by the data collection process but instead will have the opportunity to answer simple, comfortable questions before they need to think critically about their own performance. It is believed that a data collection instrument of this type will evoke honest responses which will result in the accumulation of accurate information from students of varying academic abilities.

### Data Analysis

Students at Delsea Regional High School come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of their parents operate small businesses while a minority commute to

professions in Philadelphia or Wilmington. Small communities are scattered throughout rural Franklin and Elk Townships where schools are not only valued for their academic purpose but also their emphasis on discipline. Extracurricular activities, specifically, participation in the school's sports programs, are important in the district and to certain pupils athletics provide the potential opportunity to eventually continue their studies at the college level. Unfortunately, many of the district's students realize that they will not be able to attend college because of the costs involved. They also notice that those career paths chosen by their parents did not require any degree beyond a high school diploma and they erroneously believe that they can follow a similar road to success. As a result of these situations, a substantial percentage of Delsea Regional's students have difficulty identifying the relevance of challenging academic course work. Of course, this is the justification for the initiation of the school's Renaissance Program.

The survey results attained in this study will be analyzed specifically to determine the initial motivation level of the student population. Once this is completed then activities will be initiated which will be developed in order to increase the motivation and, therefore, performance of the low achieving students. Special attention will also be given to those pupils who are already successful in our classrooms so that if a decrease in their academic performance was to occur actions could be taken immediately to correct the problem. The Renaissance concept places an emphasis on student academic improvement in all disciplines. The theory which to this point has supported the program is that positive reinforcement will encourage students to perform to the best of their ability and that once any level of success is attained it will encourage each student to attain their academic potential. The action research design employed in this study allows for flexibility so that Delsea Regional can mold this program to fit the needs of it's

students.

Each piece of data that is collected will be analyzed by the Student Recognition Committee of the Renaissance Program. Trends in responses will be identified so that educators will be better able to identify the impact of external rewards on motivation. This activity will be completed after the first survey is collected. At that time the pupils will be grouped according to their age, gender, and responses on the survey. Cross referencing will occur between the questionnaires in order to determine if the Renaissance Program is effective. For example, if the initial survey reveals that 67 percent of the students are unmotivated learners then one of the program's goals will be to increase the number of students who classify themselves as motivated. Other potential goals of the program will be to increase academic performance and involvement in school activities. With all of the collected data both consistencies and inconsistencies among the participants will be sought out and an attempt will be made to explain why they exist. The committee will also use the surveys to assist them in planning activities which move the entire student body of Delsea Regional High School towards the final goal of motivated, high achieving academic performance.

Developing a project which uses action research can be difficult as a result of the lack of specific long term planning that exists. Using the "Funnel Approach", however, will assist the intern in keeping his focus throughout the entire research process. A clear outline will be followed but the opportunity for flexibility will exist so that if changes need to occur in order to make the study more valuable to the school district they will be able to happen without restructuring the study plan. Equally important to the Delsea Regional School District is the fact that in later years the effectiveness of the Renaissance Program will still be able to be studied in a

similar manner even if other questions or goals take priority over those which are currently in the outline. Of course, before this occurs the validity of the Renaissance concept must be proven. This overall goal will determine if the concept of using extrinsic rewards to eventually develop intrinsic motivation is merely a passing educational fad or a revolution on which the school system of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be based.

One factor that may distinguish the Renaissance Program from similar past motivational enhancing projects is the emphasis which is placed upon improvement in all students. High achieving students will still have the opportunity to be recognized for their accomplishments but the student who increases his / her grade point average from a "D" to a "C" will also receive a considerable amount of recognition. Students are also encouraged to perform to their maximum potential because the quality of the reward increases as greater achievement occurs. Potentially, the Renaissance concept can spread through an entire school with teachers, administrators, and support staff all being eligible for certain rewards which are contingent upon their improvement in particular areas. This study does not involve these individuals but instead only seeks to analyze the motivation of the current student population of Delsea Regional High School and how this motivation can be enhanced so that outstanding academic achievement results. Every community in the United States should be concerned with guaranteeing that the democratic principles which have allowed our country to rise to prominence continue to be upheld in the next millennium. Additionally, citizens must also be aware that this country's future leaders are currently enrolled in our schools. As a result, one cannot fail to attempt new methods of instruction in order to motivate the adolescents who will be responsible for the survival of the United States.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of the Research Findings

#### Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of extrinsic rewards on student motivation. Before this could occur, current student motivation had to be determined. This information was attained by randomly surveying 118 students from Delsea Regional High School. The chosen subjects represented approximately 9.9% of the pupil population and were taken from all academic and grade levels within the high school. General information was first gathered. This data showed that 42.6% of the subjects were male, while the remaining 57.4% were female. Grade level of the participants also varied with 28.8% of the respondents currently enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and an additional 30.5% in 10<sup>th</sup>, 22% in 11<sup>th</sup>, and 18.6% in 12<sup>th</sup>. Delsea Regional High School has four distinct tracking levels which are lettered according to academic ability. "Honors / AP" is the highest level. "A" level considered to be academic, "B" level to be basic college bound, and "C" level to be general with low achieving and educationally disaffected students. It should be noted that the "B" level had the greatest representation in this study with 43.2% of the participants enrolled in this track. 39.8% of the participants are classified "A" level with 9.8% "C" level and 6.7% "Honors". Grade point average was also determined through a survey question and it was discovered that only 14.4% of the students estimated their GPA between 3.5 and 4.0. The majority of the students, 60%, responded that they believed their GPA to fall within the 3.0 to 3.5 range. 17.7% were within 2.5 and 3.0 while only 7.6% had averages between 2.0 and 2.5. 0% of the respondents had GPA's below 2.0. This information allows the researcher to better understand the students who participated in this study and their past academic

experiences. This information was also used in the establishment of the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School so that project implementation would result in greater academic motivation among the student body. Before this could occur, however, student self perceptions of their own motivation and the amount of academic motivation that occurs in their learning environment had to be determined.

This portion of the study also involved survey questions which were attached to the general data collection questions. In terms of self motivated behavior, 56.7% of the students responded that they attempt to do their best at times and sometimes get annoyed when they receive a poor grade. Another 34.7% stated that they always do their best and become dismayed when they do not do well. Only a combined 8.4% of the 118 subjects informed the researcher that they rarely attempt to complete their work to the best of their ability. As a result, it can be assumed that the majority of the students at Delsea Regional High School attempt to strive for academic excellence in at least a portion of their classes. It was also discovered that 42.3% of these students responded that they were intrinsically motivated to perform academically. Interestingly, when asked to respond to the question " who motivates you the most to attempt to do well in school?", they responded "Myself". Additional responses to this question resulted in 20.3% believing that other students or friends were their main motivators, while 24.5% see academic motivation coming from home. Unfortunately, only 12.7% of the pupils believed that they were motivated the most by educators. This final percentage was alarming when one compared the results of the respondents' belief of who should motivate them the most in school. It was on this question that 39.8% of the students believed that teachers or coaches should be the main motivators in an academic setting. Slightly over a quarter, 26.2%, responded that students

should be self motivated, while only 14.4% think that parents should be responsible for their child's academic motivation. The present motivational state of the high school was then analyzed by requesting that the study's participants provide their view of the current level of academic motivation which currently exists among the entire high school student population. The intern was optimistic when 74.5% of the participants responded that all students were motivated at times, but the level of motivation was dependent upon the subject matter or instructor. Only 1.6% stated that the school's students were never academically motivated. Additional data for this question included 20.3% believing that Delsea's students were rarely motivated with 3.3% responding that our student body was highly motivated in all classes. Using this information, it would appear that the students of Delsea Regional High School are capable of being motivated, but the best method was still to be determined. To assist the researcher in this task, two final questions were asked on the preliminary survey so that a method of building greater student motivation could be developed.

The first of these two questions required the students to respond to the impact that a reward based grading system would have on their personal academic motivation. An overwhelming, 61.8% stated that "it may - depending upon what the rewards are." This number, combined with the 26.2% who responded that it absolutely would, could lead one to believe that this school district is ready for the Renaissance Program. The second question on the reward based grading topic attempted to narrow the student's thoughts into what types of rewards would have the greatest potential for enhancing student motivation. It was determined that students earning direct, valuable classroom rewards would have the greatest potential for success. This assumption can be assumed when one analyzes the data and realizes that 81.3% of the



respondents would increase their effort to learn if the reward was to not have to take a final exam in a class where an "A" average was attained. An additional 5.1% believed that they would focus more on their academics if the opportunity for product rewards in the form of free pizzas or discounts at retail stores existed. This information allowed the intern to move in a definite direction in order to implement a Renaissance Program which would have a realistic chance of success.

All of the information from the preliminary survey was reviewed and used so that the Renaissance Program would, hopefully, influence students to increase their academic motivation and, therefore, increase their grades. Once the program was implemented and activities occurred, the same students who participated in the original survey were asked to complete another questionnaire which was meant to evaluate the success of the program. Four months had passed since the initial survey was completed and it was hoped that responses between the two surveys would lead the intern to believe that the Renaissance Program had, or at least had the potential to have, a positive impact on education. The survey once again began with a collection of general information such as grade level, gender, and academic level. This was done so that the intern could compare the two surveys and determine if any incongruent aspects existed in the collected information. No inconsistencies were found. Students were then asked what their grade point averages were and if a change for the positive could be attributed to the Renaissance Program. 16.1% of the students responded that their GPA's were currently between 3.5 and 4.0. This was a slight increase from the initial survey. The largest change, however, was the decrease of students who classified themselves in the 2.5 to 3.0 range. The original number had been 17.7% but this fell to 12.7% on the second questionnaire. It can be assumed that these students moved

to the highest average or, at least, into the 3.0 to 3.5 group where an increase from 60% to 64.4% occurred. No students reported a decrease in their grade point averages. Attribution for these changes attempted to be placed on the Renaissance Program with 24.5% of the students stating that Renaissance was responsible for some of their improvement while an additional 3.3% believed that the Renaissance Program helped them greatly. Those students who had reported an increase in academic improvement were asked to identify the aspect of the program that motivated them. Of those surveyed, 39.3% liked the rewards while an additional 48.4% merely enjoyed the opportunity for recognition. A small percentage claimed that peer pressure and parental interest had motivated them. These numbers appear to be encouraging but there were still many students who were not impacted by the program. At first, the intern was discouraged that 72% of the respondents claimed that no change had occurred in their GPA but upon further analysis it was discovered that out of this group, 67% replied that improvement did not occur because they did not know much about the program. There were some flaws in the dispersion of information regarding the Renaissance Program to the student population and it appears that this had an impact on the students. 12.9% of the respondents also reported that they did not value the rewards which were being offered. This does not appear to be a major problem but in the future it will need to be addressed.

Student self perception of motivation was measured in the second survey. The gained information was compared with the responses from the initial survey so that fluctuations could be identified. It can be assumed that any changes in the response data can potentially be attributed to the implementation of the Renaissance Program. On the topic of the student identifying their own attitude towards learning at Delsea Regional, there was a shift in student

responses with more individuals reporting that they now attempt to work to their potential and that they are not pleased when their own academic goals are not met. Specifically, 37.2% of the respondents reported that they always attempt to do their best as opposed to 34.7% on the initial survey. 61% stated that they work to their potential at times. This is an increase from the 56.7% who believed they operated in this manner on the first survey. There was also a slight increase in the students' perceptions of the motivation level of their peers. 77% of those questioned reported that students at the school were at times motivated to learn. This was an increase of 2.5% from the original survey. Additionally, 4.2% of the pupils now believed that other students were highly motivated learners. This represents an increase from the first questionnaire where only 3.3% held the same beliefs. Although these numbers do not show major shifts in the motivation of the school, it does appear that change is occurring. Of added interest was that part of the second survey which attempted to measure the student's own motivation. It was on this topic that an unexpected shift in responses between the two surveys was identified. In terms of who the respondents believed motivated them the most to succeed academically, the second survey witnessed a drop in the number of individuals who reported that their friends or parents were their main motivators. 20.3% reported that friends filled this role on the initial survey while 17.7% held the same beliefs on the follow up questionnaire. 24.5% of the respondents believed that parents were their motivational force but the number dropped to 22% on the later survey. Conversely, the number of students who reported that teachers were their main motivators increased from 12.7% to 15.2% and those who believed that they provided the majority of their own motivation increased from 42.3% to 44.9%. It is understood that these numbers do not represent substantial changes of thought, but they are noteworthy and can also possibly be

attributed to the Renaissance Program.

### Information Meaning

The data collected in the two surveys leads the intern to believe that the Renaissance Program did have a positive impact on student motivation. There were not any overwhelming changes in student opinion but as evidenced by the data, attitudes towards learning were altered. The surveys used in this study also provided the intern with student self perceptions of their own motivation and the motivation of their peers. A substantial percentage of the surveyed students, 27.8%, did report academic improvement as a result of this program's implementation and they provided valuable insight when they directly identified the rationale for their success as being their desire to attain rewards and recognition. It is interesting to note that a larger percentage of students reported being motivated by the opportunity for recognition than by the possibility of attaining a physical reward. It is possible, then, that a Renaissance Program which emphasizes recognition alone could be as successful as a program which has monetary discounts as its foundation. Another critical feature in implementing this type of motivation program is the advertisement of the activity. Unfortunately, a large portion Delsea Regional High School's students claimed that they did not improve their grades because they were unaware of the Renaissance Program. This breakdown in communication resulted in a flaw in the administration of the program. Organized communication must occur between all individuals involved in any educational practice but, as witnessed by the intern, there was a status power struggle which occurred outside of the Student Recognition Committee that was still able to influence that group's results. Certainly, this was a negative issue for those who were organizing and implementing the committee's activities but valuable information was still acquired

regarding the impact of recognition on student motivation.

After the Renaissance Program was in effect for four months, there was an increase in the number of students who reported that they were now more willing to attempt to work to their ability and they also stated that they were more apt to become annoyed when their effort did not reap rewards. This data leads the intern to believe that the Renaissance Program can influence the academic attitude of an entire school. Additionally, the information on the second survey showed that the participants' opinions of the motivation level of the student body in the high school had been altered. More students responded that their peers were highly motivated or at least, motivated at times depending upon the class. This fact, once again, focuses on the issue of school morale improving as students perform better academically. Of course, this is one of the goals of the Renaissance Program. Finally, the data of the two surveys did not match identically on the topic of who motivated the student participants to do well in the classroom. More respondents reported on the post Renaissance implementation survey that teachers had a greater motivational role. The intern took pride in this fact considering that he is presently an educator in the school. Other professionals also were encouraged by this data and it is believed that they will attempt to educate more students effectively so that they can receive positive feedback. It also appears that there was an increase in student responsibility to enhance academic performance. This fact is evidenced by the greater numbers who reported that they motivated themselves to learn. This data suggests that intrinsic motivation among the students was increased, therefore, the major goal of the Renaissance Program was achieved.

The Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School shows the potential to be successful. Research data suggests that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation among the student

body increased. It also appears that the opportunity to enhance motivation among the professional staff may also exist. The belief that all members of the learning community can become more focused in the goal to educate every student effectively is an impressive conclusion to this study. There were certain issues that, in the future, need to be corrected in order for the program to attain its maximum potential and this study also exposed areas that demand further study. Overall, however, the research does show that students can be positively affected by this program.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

#### Major Conclusions and Implications

This study resulted in conclusions being developed regarding the effect of external rewards on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. All of the findings of this study have educational implications and lead the intern to believe that there currently is a place in this country's educational system for the Renaissance concept. One of the most important conclusions of this research was that extrinsic rewards do increase motivation. With this fact established, it appears obvious that academic reward systems should become commonplace in our schools. These rewards do not need to be substantial. In fact, this study also found that mere recognition of improved performance may be a greater motivating factor than physical rewards. Many critics of reward based programs such as Renaissance claim that the benefits provided alter the purpose of learning into an action that is only performed in order to receive a reward. Critics also claim that these types of school activities are doomed because of the cost of providing substantial rewards. The findings of this study, however, contradict such beliefs and lead the intern to believe that Renaissance Programs should be able to function effectively with a slim budget. In our current educationally cost conscience society this lack of required funding may guarantee the concept's success. Perhaps, the most valuable conclusion to result from this study is the fact that students of varying academic abilities are motivated by this program. Too often it is the high achieving group in a school that receives a disproportionate amount of staff recognition. Average and low achieving students are ignored although they may be working diligently to improve their grades. These students, at times, may become frustrated and lose faith

in the ability that they do have. They may also believe that the only method of attaining attention would be through educationally unacceptable actions. By entrenching a program that can reward students based on academic improvement it is possible that students who exhibit inappropriate behavior as a result of poor academic performance could be encouraged by this program in a way that their behavior would be positively effected. Of course, this could have continued beneficial results such as a decline in the drop out rate and an increase in standardized test scores. If more students are interested in school as a result of the presence of possible recognition, then their increased motivation could enhance their own learning which would conclude with better performance on college entry and state exams. It is a goal of our educational system to develop motivated, educated individuals for our society and it is believed that the Renaissance Program which currently exists at Delsea Regional High School is helping to meet this need.

#### Leadership Development

The establishment of the Renaissance program and more specifically the Student Recognition Committee has had a major impact on the intern's leadership development. During the project, the intern has assumed the leadership of the Student Recognition Committee. Leadership actions in this capacity have included the initiation of the program, allocation of particular tasks among volunteer staff members, effective interaction with all school faculty so that they would view the program positively and the solving of administrative problems which transpired. These tasks were all completed so that the program would continue to move in a positive direction. Each of these leadership roles proved to be vital to the success of the Student Recognition portion of the Renaissance Program. One must remember, that before any new program is presented to the student body, it must first meet the approval of those who are to



encourage it. Therefore, it was required that the staff become supporters of Renaissance before any student was made aware of the program's potential implementation. At times, this was difficult because of a core group of veteran staff members who were not willing to readily accept the program. The intern did not attempt to undertake the potentially massive task of "selling" Renaissance to the entire staff alone but instead met initially with a small group of volunteers who later fulfilled a public relations role for the program. This process also led to shared decision making among an ever increasing list of committee volunteers. As the Student Recognition portion of the Renaissance Program became more popular, organizational skills were tested and the intern remained consistent in the application of the program. Perhaps, the success of this new program at Delsea Regional High School can be traced back to the open and effective communication that was maintained throughout the school year. The intern constantly listened to the opinions of others with the understanding that both positive and critical comments should be accepted and utilized in the strengthening of the program.

### Organizational Change

The academic atmosphere and educational organization of Delsea Regional High School did change as a result of the Student Recognition program. The school community became more aware of the benefits of improvement and as a result more individuals became interested in the Renaissance concept. This interest was not only generated by the teaching staff but also by administrators, parents, and students. Throughout the entire school, a greater emphasis was placed on improved learning with rewards being provided for those students who were succeeding in enhancing their academic studies. The Renaissance Program became popular because it provided an opportunity for the low achieving or average student to receive

recognition. This was something that Delsea Regional needed because recent years had witnessed a growing rift between the academically accelerated students and those who were not classified as "gifted". The entire atmosphere of the school was, therefore, positively influenced by the potential of recognition for all students. It should also be noted that as each Marking Period passed an increasing number of students were recognized by the Student Recognition Committee. One can then assume that students realized that their performance counted and they took advantage of the opportunity to be noticed. Student norms as a whole were also altered by this program. No longer was it acceptable to do poorly in class unless the student honestly did not understand a concept. Homework averages were increased and a larger percentage of the students were willing to seek extra help either before or after school hours. Numerous teachers also reported that they no longer had to spend as much time as they previously had motivating pupils who were doing poorly. Instead, it was the students who encouraged each other to work to their abilities. Incidents of discipline also dropped once the program became popular in the school. It was deemed as foolish to become involved in an altercation which would forfeit the student's opportunity for recognition and rewards. More students took advantage of peer mediation and other means of avoiding confrontation so that they would not jeopardize their Renaissance status. Organizationally, Delsea Regional High School did change positively as a result of the Student Recognition portion of the Renaissance Program. Students became more responsible learners and the academic environment of the school became more focused. Administrators were able to spend less time on discipline related issues and more of their day visibly working to further enhance the learning community. Overall, the Renaissance concept had many benefits in this particular school but there are still areas which demand further study if

Renaissance is to continue to operate effectively.

### Areas of Further Study

The 1999 - 2000 school term was the initial year of the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School. Certain reward based programs had been attempted in the past but they lacked the emphasis on improvement that the Student Recognition portion of the program provided. The school became a closer learning community but there was still a percentage of students who were not interested in Renaissance. In the future, attempts will need to be made to identify why this group did not readily accept the program. Increased study will need to occur in the areas of gender and age differences in motivation. Perhaps, motivators for female and male students do differ at times. Other factors which may need to be recognized are socioeconomic status and family stability. It did appear in this study that the quality of the rewards did differ between students according to their age. Older students were more apt to become motivated by rewards that they would attain from the community. For example, discount tickets to stores. Younger students were more focused on recognition and the opportunity to receive discounts to school store items, cafeteria food or the opportunity to attend special academic pep rallies. Whether this view will continue once the program becomes a part of the school culture, remains to be seen. At that time it will also be easier to determine if rewards need to be increased with time. Students initially reported that recognition alone was a motivating force but as the Renaissance Program becomes commonplace one does question the impact that mere recognition will have on student motivation. Further study will also need to be completed regarding the long term impact of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. There does not appear to be any negative impact in the short term. In fact, the results of this study lead the intern to believe that

intrinsic motivation was actually enhanced as a result of the Student Recognition program. This type of activity, however, must be monitored so that students do not begin to view the school as a place where prizes can be earned. Educators must reinforce the fact that although a program like Renaissance exists it's purpose is not to restructure our educational system but to only enhance it. As the Student Recognition portion of the Renaissance Program at Delsea Regional High School matures these and other currently unidentified areas of further study will be addressed so that the students of the district will be exposed to the finest educational environment possible.

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Appendix A  
Research Instruments

Renaissance Committee  
H. Kobik - Coordinator

As a part of this year's Renaissance Program, the administration has requested that I survey the current students of Delsea Regional High School in order to obtain results which will assist in our planning of future Renaissance activities. The collected information will also be combined with data that will be collected at a later date which will assist in determining the program's effectiveness. Please respond to the following questions by circling the letter that corresponds to the answer which applies to you. All collected information will only be used by those in the administration of this program. Your name is optional.

1. What is your gender?
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
  
2. What is your current grade level?
  - A. 9
  - B. 10
  - C. 11
  - D. 12
  
3. What level are the majority of your classes?
  - A. C Level
  - B. B Level
  - C. A. Level
  - D. Honors / AP
  
4. What is your best estimate of your current Grade Point Average (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0)?
  - A. 3.5 - 4.0
  - B. 3.0 - 3.5
  - C. 2.5 - 3.0
  - D. 2.0 - 2.5
  - E. 0.0 - 2.0
  
5. Choose the statement that best identifies your attitude towards learning at Delsea.
  - A. I always try to do my best and get annoyed when I do not do well
  - B. At times I try to do my best and sometimes I get annoyed when I do not do well.
  - C. I rarely try to do my best but I still get annoyed when my grades are not good
  - D. I rarely try to do my best and I do not care what my grades are.

6. Who motivates you the most to attempt to do well in school?
- A. Students / Friends
  - B. Parents / Relatives
  - C. Teachers / Coaches
  - D. Myself
7. Would a reward based grading system increase your desire to improve your grades?
- A. Absolutely
  - B. It may - depending upon what the rewards are
  - C. Probably not
  - D. No
8. Which of the following would most likely increase your effort to learn?
- A. Not having to take exams if I earned an "A" in the class
  - B. Earning a free pizza for improving by 5 or more points in 3 classes
  - C. Having the opportunity to attend a pep rally during 12<sup>th</sup> Period if I showed academic improvement
  - D. Earning a homework pass for improved academic improvement
9. Which statement best represents your view of the students of Delsea Regional regarding their level of academic motivation?
- A. Highly motivated no matter what class
  - B. Motivated at times depending upon the class
  - C. Rarely motivated no matter what class it is
  - D. Never motivated no matter what class it is
10. Who is responsible for motivating Delsea's students to learn?
- A. Students / Friends
  - B. Parents / Relatives
  - C. Teachers / Coaches
  - D. Students should motivate themselves
11. Please provide one recommendation that could be used by the staff to motivate the students of Delsea Regional to improve their grades.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!



Student Recognition Committee  
H. Kobik - Coordinator  
2<sup>nd</sup> Survey

As a part of this year's Renaissance Program, the administration has requested that I once again survey the current students of Delsea Regional High School in order to obtain results which will assist in our planning of future Renaissance activities. This collected information will be combined with data that was collected at an earlier date. All of this attained information will assist us in determining the program's effectiveness. Please respond to the following questions by circling the letter that corresponds to the answer which applies to you. All collected information will only be used by those in the administration of this program. Your name is optional.

1. What is your gender?
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
  
2. What is your current grade level?
  - A. 9
  - B. 10
  - C. 11
  - D. 12
  
3. What level are the majority of your classes?
  - A. C Level
  - B. B Level
  - C. A. Level
  - D. Honors / AP
  
4. What is your best estimate of your current Grade Point Average (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0)?
  - A. 3.5 - 4.0
  - B. 3.0 - 3.5
  - C. 2.5 - 3.0
  - D. 2.0 - 2.5
  - E. 0.0 - 2.0

5. Has your Grade Point Average been affected positively by the Renaissance Program?
  - A. Yes, it has increased a lot
  - B. There has been some improvement
  - C. No
  
6. If your answer to #5 was “Yes”, then identify why. If your answer to #5 was “No”, then move to Question #7.
  - A. I liked the rewards that were offered
  - B. I like the opportunity for recognition
  - C. I wanted to do better in school because my friends were
  - D. My parents/relatives wanted me to do better
  
7. If your answer to #5 was “No”, then identify why.
  - A. I did not like the rewards
  - B. I do not like recognition
  - C. My friends did not like the program
  - D. I still do not know much about the program
  
8. Choose the statement that best identifies your attitude towards learning at Delsea.
  - A. I always try to do my best and get annoyed when I do not do well
  - B. At times I try to do my best and sometimes I get annoyed when I do not do well.
  - C. I rarely try to do my best but I still get annoyed when my grades are not good
  - D. I rarely try to do my best and I do not care what my grades are
  
9. Which statement best represents your view of the students of Delsea Regional regarding their level of academic motivation?
  - A. Highly motivated no matter what class
  - B. Motivated at times depending upon the class
  - C. Rarely motivated no matter what class it is
  - D. Never motivated no matter what class it is
  
10. Who motivates you the most to attempt to do well in school?
  - A. Students / Friends
  - B. Parents / Relatives
  - C. Teachers / Coaches
  - D. Myself
  
11. Please provide one recommendation that could be used by the staff to motivate the students of Delsea Regional to improve their grades.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

## Appendix B

### Research Instrument Results



Question #8: Learning Attitude: 37.2% Always Try and Care  
61.0% Sometimes Try and Care  
0.0% Rarely Try but Care  
1.6% Rarely Try and Do Not Care

Question #9: View of Student Motivation: 4.2% Highly motivated  
77.0% Motivated at times  
17.7% Rarely motivated  
0.9% Never motivated

Question #10: Who Motivates You the Most: 17.7% Students/Friends  
22.0% Parents/Relatives  
15.2% Teachers/Coaches  
44.9% Myself

Question #11: Recommendations (Most Common Responses)  
35.5% No Response  
17.7% Need a larger Variety of Rewards  
16.1% Need More Activities

## Biographical Data

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