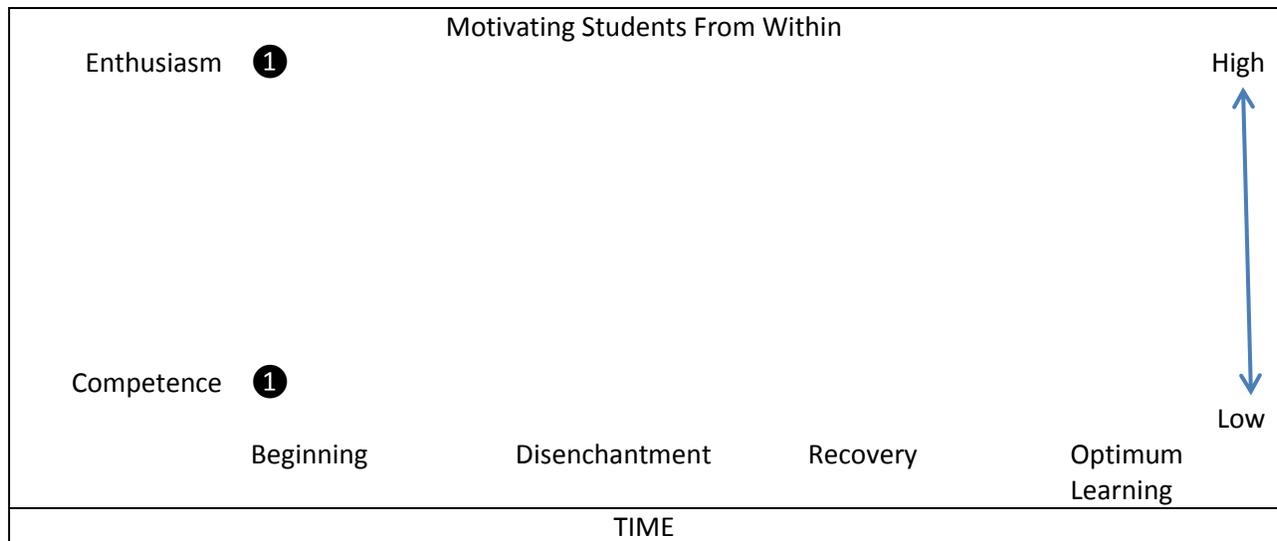


# The Anatomy of Successful and Unsuccessful Classrooms

The initial dynamics for most classrooms are similar; students enter the first day upbeat and enthused but with low competence in the areas of instruction and the new learnings expected of them. Blanchard in his Situational Leadership II postulated this dynamic. Deming, conversely, suggested that individuals will be high in enthusiasm and competence when entering new situations. This seeming conflict is easily resolved realizing that Deming was commenting on perceived competence while Blanchard was talking about actual competence. When entering a new learning situation in math, for example, a student may feel competent about where s/he is in math and the ability to comprehend new learnings; but, s/he is not actually competent in the materials to be learned through the course of study.

Staying with Blanchard's concept of actual competence, the graphic for enthusiasm and competence on students' first day in most classrooms looks like the following:



On the first day of class most students in most grades and courses will be high in enthusiasm and low in competence. At this point, students need structure. They need to feel safe; that this is going to be a caring, safe environment for them to belong. Do not mistake this to mean rules and regulations. Rather think consistency in teacher behavior, clear classroom procedures. Teacher role modeling is extremely important on this first day of class.

Common exceptions to this graph are when there are negative perceptions of a teacher or class resulting in low student enthusiasm or the course represents shallow content learnings for students reflecting high student competence before the class even starts.

Shortly after the first day of class, disenchantment starts to set in. The level of disenchantment will vary by student and by situation. In some cases it will be hardly noticeable; in others it might result in total student disengagement. This is where the highly effective teacher makes a big difference. A teacher who motivates students from within will have lesser problems with disenchantment than teachers who motivate through coercion, fear or rewards.

Motivating students from within can be accomplished in many ways; however they all include student involvement. Two proven effective processes are discussed here. Many highly effective teachers use both to create healthy classroom environments where students thrive and learn.

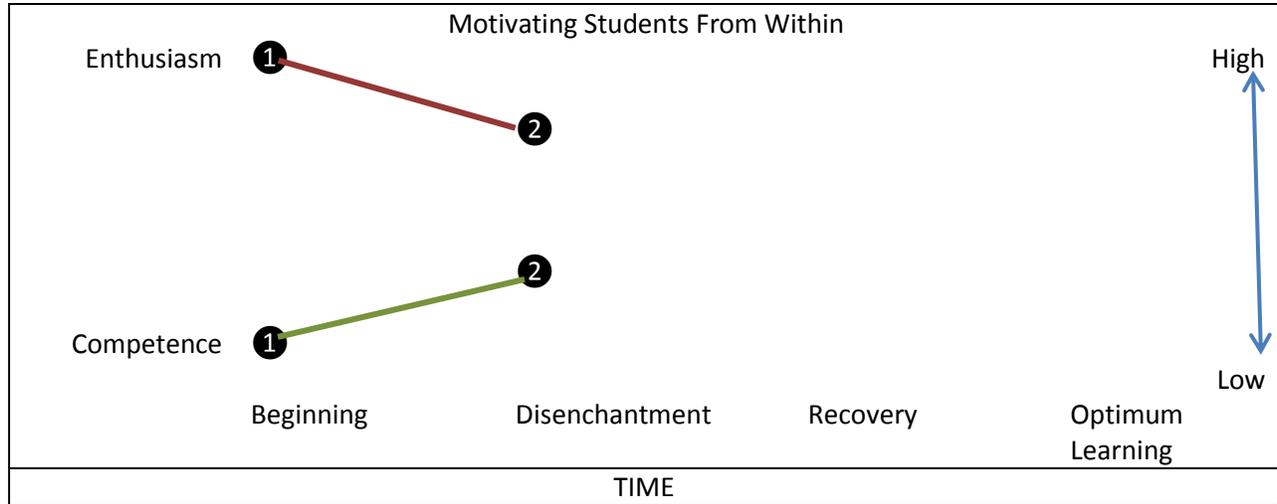
✿ **Above-the-Line Behavior.** Students are engaged in a discussion of how they would like there class to be. This discussion is teacher led and takes place during the first few days of school. Students identify and define what they believe are **above the line behaviors**, which are how they would like to be treated, and **below the line behaviors**. These behaviors become the norms for the class regardless of where the students are located (classroom, recess, sports activates, fieldtrips, etc.). The behaviors are posted in the classroom and can be made into a bookmark or other reminder for both teachers and students. Discussed, but not included on the list of behaviors are bottom line behaviors. These are behaviors associated with school and district policies that require specific action. An example might be when a student takes a knife to school. The other aspect of this process is dealing with a student who displays below the line behavior. **DO NOT RUN FOR THE DISCIPLINE HANDBOOK!** Rather, calmly ask; *Was that above the line or below the line behavior?* Once the student identifies the behavior as below the line, ask *Do you want to fix-it? Or, do you want my consequence?* Never tell the student your consequence. However, do have a consequence in case the student selects that option. And, make it something s/he would not like. The consequence needs to be something specific to that student. Detention is NOT a consequence. Effective teachers do not use detention to control student behavior. When the student says that s/he will fix it, ask *How are you going to fix-it?* An apology is never a fix-it. An apology might be included in a fix-it, but a fix-it is an action that makes a difference. The student must determine a good fix-it or suffer the teacher's consequence. And, the fix-it must satisfy the teacher. This process provides a win-win situation for everyone, as well as turning a discipline problem into a good learning situation.

<p><b>Be Respectful to Other</b> <b>Listen When Others are Talking</b> <b>Do Not Interrupt Others</b> <b>Do Not Hit Another Person</b></p>
<p><b>ABOVE THE LINE</b></p>
<p><b>BELOW THE LINE</b></p>
<p><b>Not Being Respectful to Others</b> <b>Not Listening When Others are Talking</b> <b>Interrupting Others</b> <b>Hitting Another Person</b></p>

✿ **Norm-Setting Class Meetings.** Using class meeting procedures (see, for example, The CHARACTERplus Way®, Caring School Community® and Glasser), norm setting meetings are held with students during the first few days of class. Students establish rules for holding class meetings and identify and define appropriate behaviors for the classroom. These behaviors

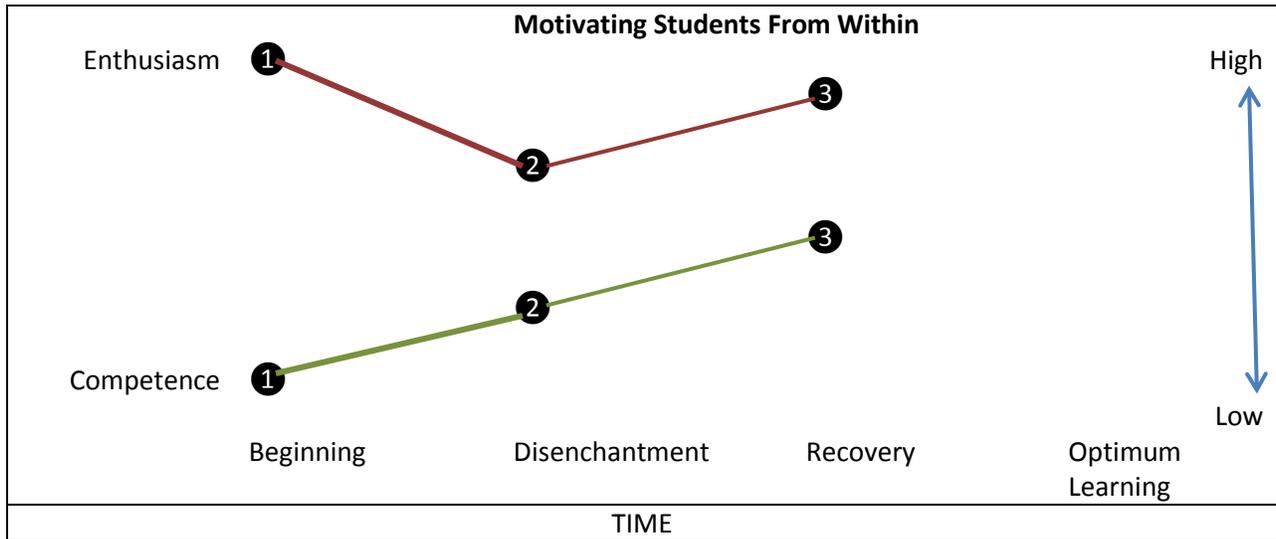
become student and teacher behavioral expectations regardless of where the students are located. The class meeting format can be used to check-in (such as after a holiday), problem solve, plan, or engage in academic learning. It is a very powerful tool for students in early elementary through the college level. It provides a format for student voice in the schooling process.

During this stage, the student enthusiasm and performance graphic will be similar to the following in effective classrooms.

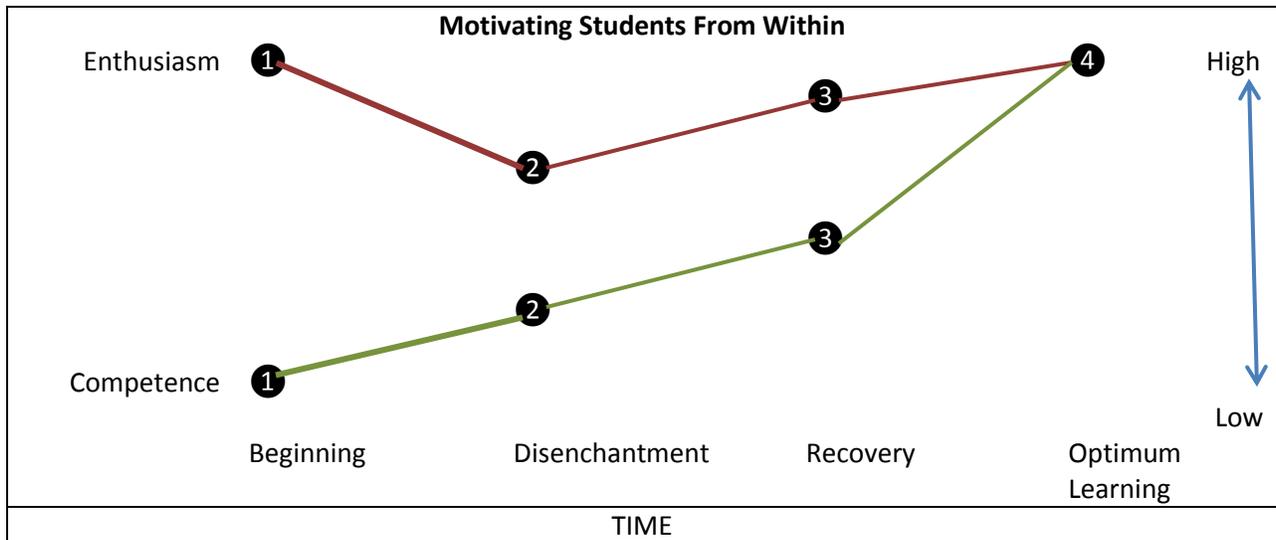


Note that during this time period, disenchantment has set in and the competence is on the rise. The actual time frame represented might be very short or could be longer depending on the effectiveness of the teacher and health of the classroom environment.

As shown in the diagram above, students in successful classrooms show low to moderate drop in enthusiasm while displaying moderate increase in competence. As students move into recovery, effective teachers loosen up on structure allowing students to continue increasing their involvement in planning and decision-making. Collaborative processes such as cooperative groups, reading circles, pair-and-share activities become the teaching-learning norm. Students review their work with others, edit and modify their work with feedback from teachers and others, and engage in school-home activities, cross-grade learning opportunities, and collaborative school-wide learning activities. Experiential and service learning are common. The following graphic represents the return of student enthusiasm and continued growth in competence.



As students become continually more engaged with learning from within, they take charge of their own learning. Students read, write, study and engage in research for their own benefit rather than to please their teachers. Teachers become learning coaches and student supporters; students take charge of their learning. This final stage of healthy classroom development is shown in the following graphic where both student enthusiasm (and engagement) and competence are optimized.



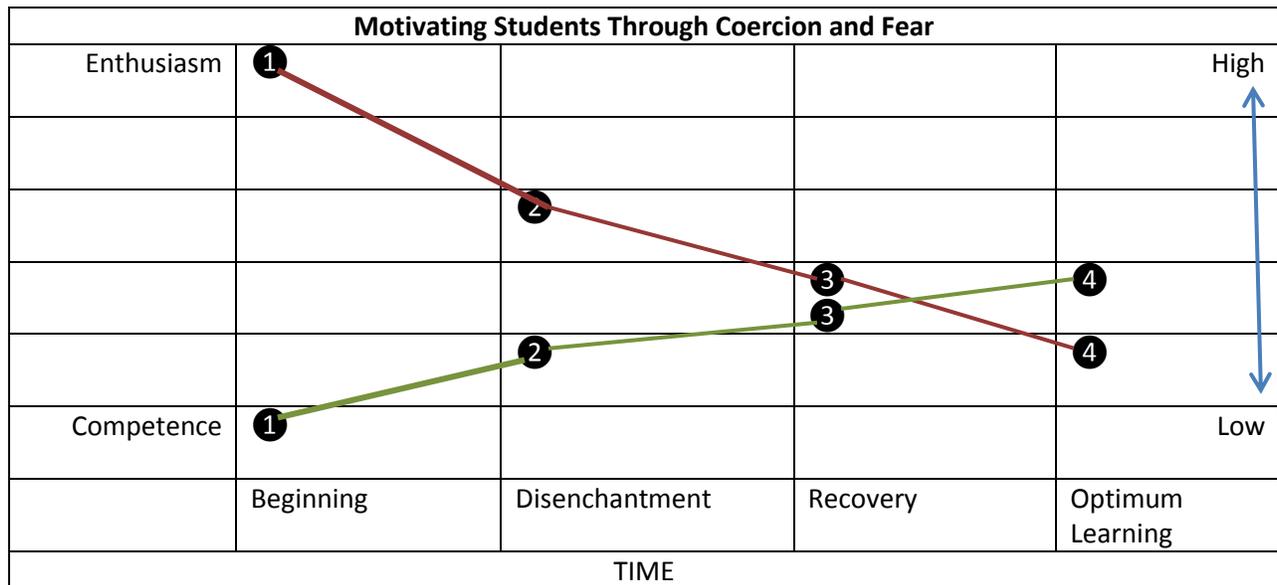
## Student Motivation Trough Coercion and Fear

Motivation through fear and coercion are alive and well within our schools. Students are forced to attend school; they are required to take courses and study things they are not interested in; they are threatened with low grades if they do not live up to someone else's expectations; they are required to take state and federal mandated tests; in some cases, they are even required to pass a test to graduate from high school regardless of all the other forced evaluations. This is education through coercion with deliberately invoked fear.

Many misguided educators and parents ascribe to this as good education; having standards; holding students responsible for learning. Teaching through coercion and fear has the opposite effect. It creates winners and losers; haves and have not's; honor students and dropouts. A few students respond to these pressures by doing excellent work. However, these are the same students that would have optimized achievement through more heuristic processes that supported student learning from within. The underclasses created through coercion and fear is failure in our schooling efforts. The many mental dropouts, who do the required tasks, receive okay grades, pass the test, and continue on, but have only learned to produce when threatened or coerced. These students often turn in ghost written papers and cheat on tests. Why? Students cheat because they are afraid of failure and are attempting to cope with their fears. And, they do not believe that what is required is important to them. They are only doing assignments to satisfy teachers and parents, but have little personal investment in their education. And there are those who become isolates; the ones who tease and bully others and blame everyone else for their failures. Teaching through coercion and fear is the leading cause of gangs in schools. Students only tolerate school and are often afraid. They lack a sense of belonging, voice and competence. They turn elsewhere for these things; gangs fill the void.

As educators, we can be our own worst enemies by accepting coercion and fear as acceptable educational practice. Doing this produces increased discipline problems such as substance use and abuse, gang affiliation and bullying.

There will be some academic learning using these techniques. However, student learning plateaus at moderate levels and enthusiasm drops to very low levels. This dynamic is illustrated in the following graphic.



## Student Motivation Through Reward

Motivating students through reward and punishment (failure to receive the reward) is another misguided approach to education popular with many teachers, administrators, parents and community members. When students meet the externally set standard, they get a trip to the principal's office to dip into the treasure chest, extra recess, popcorn party at the end of the week, coupons for homework holidays, vouchers for free pizza, and the list goes on. Parents get into the act by paying \$10 for every A grade or enact restrictions for every C or below grade. Parents boast bumper stickers that say *My child is an honor roll student* so that they can hold it over other parents who do not tote such bumper stickers.

Rewards are popular because short-term results can be seen very quickly. Those behaviors of students who respond favorably to the rewards can be documented with extra points, special privileges, and even recognition at student assemblies. It has been suggested that the rewards manipulate students into doing what is best for them and after repetition of the prescribed behaviors they become internalized within the student. This is called behavior modification. PBIS is probably the most well-known national program that has fostered this belief, even though it is misguided and in the long term does more harm than good. Nonetheless, rewards thrive in education because of their noticeable short-term results.

Rewards do not work for several reasons:

- ✿ Promote short-term results
- ✿ Learning is only to achieve the reward; focus is on the reward
- ✿ Removal of the reward results in extinguishing the desired behavior; it does not internalize
- ✿ Larger rewards are constantly required to achieve the same result
- ✿ Reward become important; not the learning
- ✿ Students learn to expect rewards for everything they do; when they do not receive a reward it is seen as punishment
- ✿ When students do not receive the reward they blame the teacher; students do not take responsibility for their own behavior
- ✿ Rewards induce the lowest levels of thinking; fight or flight; not higher levels of cognition

As noted above, many educators and parents ascribe to providing rewards (and punishment) as good education; rewarding students for meeting expectations and punishing those who do not meet expectations. Teaching through reward has the opposite effect. It creates winners and losers; haves and have not's; honor students and dropouts. A few students respond to external incentives by doing excellent work. Other students find safety in cliques, disengage from learning, or become isolates. To get rewards and avoid punishment, students may falsify assignments and cheat on tests. Students who chronically fail to receive rewards often become behavior problems, tease and bully others and blame everyone else for their failures.

As educators, we can be our own worst enemies by accepting a culture of rewards as suitable educational practice. Doing this produces a culture of winners and losers that results in an unhealthy school climate with increased discipline problems, substance use and abuse, and sub-optimal student learning.

There will be some academic learning using rewards, but it will focus on short-term results. In this model, student learning and enthusiasm plateau at moderate levels. This is illustrated in the following graphic.

