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A Psychological Look at the Earn & Learn Program

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Although familiar with the concept behind the Earn & Learn Program, I had little personal contact with the program nor did I fully comprehend the internal dynamics. In January 2008, Mr. Zakian, my principal asked if I would serve as the special liaison between Mr. Rosmarin, the program originator, and Farmingdale High School. As a Clinical and School Psychologist, with particular interest in the application of contingency programs to promote desirable behaviors in students, I agreed.

Since late January, I have had the privilege of working with Mr. Rosmarin and meeting regularly with the current students in the program. Two of the seniors in particular had their share of academic, social and behavioral difficulties in the earlier grades. I am deeply impressed with their tremendous growth. Certainly maturity plays a role, but these students were in need of some incentive to get them started on the right path. That incentive was the Earn & Learn Program. While the monetary rewards were greatly appreciated, the primary reinforcers quickly became the anticipated approval of Mr. Rosmarin. He is a man they admire and respect and view as a role model.

The key ingredient to the success of the Earn & Learn Program lies in the genuine interest shown by Mr. Rosmarin when he meets with students individually and in a group format. During these personal contacts Mr. Rosmarin is able to model appropriate behaviors, encourage initiative, and reward success. Mr. Rosmarin teaches the students behavioral consequences with great compassion. For example, should the students not meet the academic and attendance goals, they will not get paid. However, I have witnessed a few instances when Mr. Rosmarin perceives that there are extenuating circumstances. He will then delay that student's compensation until improvement is shown. The students therefore learn commitment and accountability. Equally important, they learn to respect themselves and fellow students. For most, it is their first exposure to a real job situation.

I can honestly say the fruits of the program are quite evident. Previously unsuccessful students have made honor roll for the first time. Socially reserved students are participating in extra-curricular activities. All of the graduating seniors will be attending college in the fall. The Earn & Learn Program takes a previously aversive unrewarding experience, and transforms it into an opportunity for challenge and success. Through Earn & Learn, students set short and long term goals, build self esteem, and achieve greater self efficacy. Hats off to Mr. Rosmarin and his students for a job well done.