

## C. Understanding and Applying Intrinsic Motivation

## **Intrinsic Motivation Is a Fundamental Concern In Every Classroom**

- **Understanding *Intrinsic Motivation* motivation clarifies how essential it is to avoid processes that**

- >limit options,

- >make students feel controlled and coerced, and

- >tend to focus mainly on “remedying” problems.

- **Overreliance on extrinsic motivation risks producing *avoidance reactions* in the classroom and to school.**

- This can reduce opportunities for positive learning and for development of positive attitudes.**

- **Over time, the result is that too many students *disengage* from classroom learning (*and misbehave*).**
- **Practices for preventing disengagement and efforts to re-engage disconnected students (families, staff) require minimizing conditions that negatively affect intrinsic motivation and maximizing those that enhance it.**

Can you translate the following formula?

$$\mathbf{E} \times \mathbf{V} = \mathbf{M}$$



*If the equation stumped you,  
don't be surprised.*

The main introduction to motivational thinking that many people have been given in the past involves some form of reinforcement theory (which essentially deals with extrinsic motivation).

Thus, all this may be new to you, even though motivational theorists have been wrestling with it for a long time, and intuitively, you probably understand much of what they are talking about.



Translation:

*Expectancy times value equals motivation*

- **“E”** represents an individual's *expectations about outcome* (in school this often means expectations of success or failure).
- **“V”** represents *valuing, with valuing influenced by both what is valued intrinsically and extrinsically*. Thus, in a general sense, motivation can be thought of in terms of expectancy times valuing.

*Such theory recognizes that human beings are thinking and feeling organisms and that intrinsic factors can be powerful motivators.*

This understanding of human motivation has major implications for learning, teaching, parenting, and mental health interventions.

Applying the paradigm:

Do the math.

$$\begin{array}{cccc} \mathbf{E} & \mathbf{x} & \mathbf{V} & \mathbf{=} \\ \mathbf{0} & \mathbf{x} & \mathbf{1.0} & \mathbf{=} \end{array}$$

What are the implications?



Within some limits

(which we need not discuss here),

low expectations (E) and high valuing (V)

produce relatively weak motivation.

***I know I won't be able to do it.***



Now, what about this?

$$\begin{array}{cccc} \mathbf{E} & \mathbf{x} & \mathbf{V} & \mathbf{=} \\ \mathbf{1.0} & \mathbf{x} & \mathbf{0} & \mathbf{=} \end{array}$$

What are the implications?



High expectations paired with low valuing also yield low approach motivation.

Thus, the oft-cited remedial strategy of guaranteeing success by designing tasks to be very easy is not as simple a recipe as it sounds.

Indeed, the approach is likely to fail if the outcome is not valued or if the tasks are experienced as too boring or if doing them is seen as too embarrassing.

In such cases, a strong negative value is attached to the activities, and this contributes to avoidance motivation.

***It's not worth doing!***



Two common reasons people give for not bothering to learn something are

**"It's not worth it"**

**"I know I won't be able to do it."**

In general, the amount of time and energy spent on an activity seems dependent on how much the activity is valued by the person and on the person's expectation that what is valued will be attained without too great a cost.

Discussion of valuing and expectations emphasizes that motivation is not something that can be determined solely by forces outside the individual.

Any of us can plan activities and outcomes we think will enhance engagement (and learning)

***But ...***

how the activities and outcomes are ***experienced*** determines whether they are pursued (or avoided) with a little or a lot of effort and ability.

Understanding that an individual's *perceptions* can affect motivation has led researchers to important findings about some *undesired effects resulting from over-reliance on extrinsics*.

# *Appreciating Intrinsic Motivation*

Think in terms of

- *Enhancing feelings* of
  - >>Self-determination
  - >>Competency
  - >>Connectedness to others
- *Minimizing threats to feelings* of:
  - >>Self-determination
  - >>Competency
  - >>Connectedness to others

In particular, minimize

- strategies designed only for social control

and maximize

- options
- choice
- involvement in decision making

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## Some Guidelines for Strategies that Capture An Understanding of Intrinsic Motivation

- minimize coercive interactions
  - facilitate students' desire and ability to share their perceptions readily (to enter into dialogues with the adults at school)
  - emphasize real life interests and needs
  - stress *real* options and choices and a *meaningful* role in decision making
  - provide enrichment opportunities (and be sure not to withhold them as punishment)
  - provide a *continuum* of structure
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## **About Psychological Reactance and Misbehavior**

It is particularly important to minimize the heavy  
emphasis on social control  
and coercive procedures!!!!

**Those in control say:**

*You can't do that ...*

*You must do this ...*

**Most of us (adults and kids) think and  
often say**

*Oh, you think so!*

**and react overtly or covertly.**

*This is called Psychological Reactance.*

- When people perceive their freedom is threatened, they experience *psychological reactance*, which motivates them to act in ways that can restore the threatened sense of freedom.
- With prolonged denial of freedom, reactance diminishes and people become amotivated – feeling helpless and ineffective.

## ABOUT SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AND RE-ENGAGEMENT

A growing research literature is addressing these matters. Below is an excerpt from a recent review which concludes: **Engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure.**

### **Engagement is defined in three ways in the research literature:**

- **Behavioral engagement** draws on the idea of participation; it includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out.
- **Emotional engagement** encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work.
- **Cognitive engagement** draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

**A Key Outcome of Engagement is Higher Achievement.** The evidence from a variety of studies is summarized to show that engagement positively influences achievement

**A Key Outcome of Disengagement is Dropping Out.** The evidence shows behavioral disengagement is a precursor of dropping out.

**Antecedents of Engagement.** Antecedents can be organized into:

- **School level factors:** voluntary choice, clear and consistent goals, small size, student participation in school policy and management, opportunities for staff and students to be involved in cooperative endeavors, and academic work that allows for the development of products
- **Classroom Context:** Teacher support, peers, classroom structure, autonomy support, task characteristics
- **Individual Needs:** Need for relatedness, need for autonomy, need for competence

### **Measurement of Engagement**

- **Behavioral Engagement:** conduct, work involvement, participation, persistence, (e.g., completing homework, complying with school rules, absent/tardy, off-task)
- **Emotional Engagement:** self-report related to feelings of frustration, boredom, interest, anger, satisfaction; student-teacher relations; work orientation
- **Cognitive Engagement:** investment in learning, flexible problems solving, independent work styles, coping with perceived failure, preference for challenge and independent mastery, commitment to understanding the work

“School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence” (2004) by J. Fredricks, P. Blumenfeld, & A. Paris. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109.

### *Activity*

- (1) Discuss what factors seem related to students who become disengaged from school learning.
  
- (2) List out ways to help prevent such disengagement.

# Working with Disengaged Students

Four general strategies for working with disengaged students are:

## ***(1) Clarifying student perceptions of the problem –***

Talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged so that steps can be planned for how to alter the negative perceptions of disengaged students and prevent others from developing such perceptions.

## ***(2) Reframing school learning –***

In the case of those who have disengaged, major reframing in teaching approaches is required so that these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why the procedures are expected to be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

## ***(3) Renegotiating involvement in school learning –***

New and mutual agreements must be developed and evolved over time through conferences with the student and where appropriate including parents. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

## ***(4) Reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship*** (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed).

To maintain re-engagement and prevent disengagement, the above strategies must be pursued using processes and content that:

- minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others
- maximize such feelings (included here is an emphasis on a school taking steps to enhance public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)
- guide motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- provide continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments
- provide opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction).

# Talking with Kids

## How to engage youngsters in productive dialogues

Create the context for dialogue

- >Create a private space and a climate where the youngster can feel it is safe to talk
- >Clarify the value of keeping things confidential
- >Pursue dialogues when the time, location, and conditions are right.

Establish credibility as someone to whom it is worth talking

- >Respond with empathy, warmth, and nurturance
- >Show genuine regard and respect
- >Use active and undistracted listening

Facilitate talk: be an active listener

- >Avoid interruptions
- >Start slowly, avoid asking questions, and minimize pressure to talk
- >Encourage the youngster to take the lead

*Remember:*

*Short periods of silence are part of the process and should be accommodated.*

## Creating a Caring Context in the Classroom

- *A Learning Community:* Learning is neither limited to what is formally taught nor to time spend in classrooms. It occurs whenever and wherever the learner interacts with the surrounding environment. All facets of the community (including the school) provide learning opportunities.

It is important that teachers establish a classroom atmosphere that encourages mutual support and caring and that creates a sense of community.

### *Caring has Moral, Social, and Personal Facets*

On an ongoing basis, caring is best maintained through use of personalized instruction, regular student conferences, activity fostering social-emotional development, and opportunities for students to attain positive status. A myriad of strategies can contribute to students feeling positively connected to the classroom and school.

*Just as with students and their families, school staff need to feel truly welcome and socially supported.*

# Learner Options to Enhance Motivation and Learning

Learner Options include:

- Content* - Students should be able to explore content that has personal value.
- Expanding options to include a wide sampling of topics that are currently popular with the majority of students (e.g., animals, sports, music)
  - Ask students to identify additional topics they would like included
  - Options the teacher identifies as important and worthwhile.
- Process* - Students should be helped to pursue outcomes and levels of competence that reflect their continuing interest and effort.
- Process outcomes can be expanded by adding procedures that are widely popular (e.g., video or audiovisual materials)
  - by adding those of special interest to specific students, or
  - by adding those newly identified by the teacher.
- Structure*- It is expected that those with the lowest motivation are likely to need the most support and guidance. At the same time, they are likely not to seek help readily. Moreover, those with avoidance motivation tend to react negatively to structure they perceive as used to control them.

## Decision Making to Enhance Motivation and Learning

Are students competent to make good decisions?

*Learning to make decisions should be  
a basic focus of instruction.*

- **Decisions about participation are the primary foundation upon which all other decisions rest.**
- **Helping students make decisions**
  - > The student must understand the value of making his or her own decisions.
  - > The process must include ways for students to actively sample and select from available options and to propose other when feasible.
  - > Working out problem details should be done as soon as choices are made.
  - > From the moment the student begins an activity, it is important to monitor motivation.

## ***To Recap:***

- Understanding Intrinsic Motivation is essential to enhancing engagement and re-engaging those who have become disengaged
- Overreliance on extrinsics can undermine efforts to enhance engagement in learning and to promote generalization and maintenance of what is learned

# Key questions we hope you are thinking about at this point:

Why is an emphasis on *intrinsic* motivation essential in engaging and re-engaging students in classroom instruction?

How might an *overreliance on extrinsic rewards* undermine intrinsic motivation?

## *Activity*

**Analyze school practices to identify**

**(a) those that seem to *threaten* and**

**(b) those that seem to *enhance***

**>feelings of competence**

**>self-determination**

**>relatedness to staff and peers**

## *Some Additional Relevant References & Resources*

From the Center:

- »Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling (a guidebook)
- »Revisiting Learning & Behavior Problems: Moving Schools Forward (book-length)
- »Classroom Changes to Enhance and Re-engage Students in Learning (a training tutorial)
- »Re-engaging Students in Learning (a very brief Quick Training Aid)

A few other general resources:

- *Motivating Students to Learn* by J. Brophy (2004). Erlbaum Pub.
- *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn* by National Research Council (2004). D.C.: National Academies Press.
- *Motivation to learn: From theory to practice* (3rd ed.) by D.J. Stipek (1998). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us* by D. Pink (2009). NY: Riverhead Books
- For a theoretical foundation and applications to education, psychotherapy, and the workplace, see Ed Deci & Richard Ryan (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.