MOTIVATION

IN THE

CLASSROOM

CHERYL L. SPAULDING

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About the Author

Cheryl L. Spaulding is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Connecticut, where she specializes in English education. She received her Ph.D. from Stanford University, her dissertation work focusing on high school students' motivation to write about academic topics. She is the author of articles appearing in *Teacher Education Quarterly, The Teacher Educator, Research in the Teaching of English, Language Arts,* and *The High School Journal.* Her ongoing research interests include the study of motivational processes in language arts classrooms and the study of teachers' conceptions of human motivation with an emphasis on how those conceptions change through professional experience and study.

Preface

Everyone knows that motivation is the key to student learning. We know this as a result of our own school experience as well as through observing our friends and family. Research merely confirms the fact. Why is it, then, that this topic, which is so vital to successful teaching, is given such fragmented and superficial treatment in most teacher preparation programs? And why is it that this fragmented treatment is nearly always limited to a review of the research underlying existing theories? Is it realistic to assume that teachers can convert such information into coherent programs of action that fit their existing routines?

Motivation in the Classroom was written to fill what I perceived to be a definite gap in the literature available to teachers. My goal was to organize the rich knowledge base on motivation into a simple, coherent framework that corresponds to the way teachers normally think and behave. Only then is it likely that readers will assimilate and act on this important body of knowledge. Consequently, I have produced a text with the following features.

Conceptual framework. The framework I have chosen focuses on the twin concepts of personal competence (or self-efficacy) and personal control (or self-determination). These two variables were chosen for several reasons. First, they are ubiquitous in the field of human motivation. Nearly every contemporary theory of human motivation addresses them in some manner.

Second, they map nicely onto methodological concerns about whether to run a teacher-centered classroom, a student-centered classroom, or some blend of the two. Teacher-centered classrooms typically focus more on students' academic achievement (self-competence), while student-centered classrooms normally focus more on their autonomy (self-determination). In actuality, the recommended instructional and management program that emerges from this book is a blend of the best teacher-centered and student-centered practices.

Finally, these two sets of self-perceptions lie at the heart of intrinsic motivation, which is the primary focus of this book. I want to help teachers learn how to decrease their reliance on material and social rewards and punishments in their attempts to motivate students. The long-term consequences of pressuring students to conform to the wishes and expectations of their teachers and parents is evident every time I step into classrooms and see joyless lessons in progress. This condition is at least partly the legacy of a

school system that has relied too heavily on extrinsic forms of reward and punishment. Hence, I have written this book to put some balance back in the equation by giving teachers a better understanding of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and encouraging them to promote students' intrinsic motivation whenever possible.

Theory-practice integration.   Part One discusses most of the contemporary cognitive theories of human motivation, including teacher expectancy theory, social cognitive theory, attribution theory, social learning theory, self-determination theory, and achievement motivation theory, as well as theories of task and ego involvement, of primary and secondary control, and of self-regulated learning. I have also covered traditional reinforcement theory and shown how it is at odds with some of the more recently formulated cognitive and social theories. These theories and their supporting research then reappear in Parts Two and Three, where they are used to review and justify specific motivation strategies.

Teacher thinking focus.   Teachers tend to think about motivational issues in the same way that they think about their other classroom responsibilities, the whole group first and individual students second. Consequently, I have organized the book in this fashion. Part Two is devoted to strategies for working with large groups of students and Part Three to strategies for helping individual students. Moreover, within each of these two parts, descriptions of specific strategies precede their theoretical analysis. If you doubt that this sequence conforms to actual teacher thinking, all you have to do is listen to faculty room conversations.

Proven strategies.   The vast majority of strategies presented in this book have been thoroughly field-tested by numerous teachers in states all across the country. These practices have been informally investigated in teacher-based classroom research (see Chapter 13 for descriptions of two such studies), and they have stood the test of repeated application across all grade levels and in all content areas.

Books are almost never the work of a single person, and this book is no exception. Consequently, I would like to offer thanks here to all those who directly and indirectly helped motivate and guide me through the long and arduous writing process. I shall begin with the principal reviewers: Judith Meece, University of North Carolina; John Gaa, University of Houston; and Myron Dembo, University of Southern California. Their close readings and positive suggestions improved the book in many important ways. I must also thank Lane Akers for his professional insight and encouragement during every phase of the writing process.

Two other individuals deserve special mention. Guy Klitgaard, one of my principals when I taught high school English, gave me special support during the period when I was first experimenting with motivational strategies for underachieving and at-risk students. I am also grateful for his permission to include in the end-of-book appendix an evaluation letter that

he wrote to me at the conclusion of a 35-day observation period. Finally, I owe Robert Spaulding more credit and thanks than I can ever express. He introduced me to the research and pedagogical practices that became the foundation of this book. He also taught me what it means to have a personal philosophy and how to guide one's life, both personally and professionally, by that philosophy. It is to him that I dedicate this book.

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PART

ONE

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION

Many teachers today, especially those who are just beginning their careers, conceptualize student motivation as something that exists in entertaining materials, colorful displays, and energetic activities. Thus, when their students seem uninterested in their schoolwork, these teachers work hard to come in with a "more motivating" lesson, with activities that will capture the attention and interest of their students. Sometimes the students will respond to these more creative lessons; other times not. When the latter is the case, then their teachers, who have worked so hard to perfect their already good lessons, go back to the drawing board, looking for that elusive, more perfect, more motivating lesson.

While working to create interesting lessons is always worthwhile, this conception of student motivation as something that exists in the materials and lessons used by the teacher is an unfortunate one. The problem with this view of student motivation is that it suggests that students will not be motivated to engage in some of the harder, less colorful activities, such as writing research reports or completing geometric proofs. These activities require students to tune out distractions so that they can get on with the challenging work at hand. No fancy displays are needed, no entertaining lessons, just hard work and lots of practice. How can we account for the sort of motivation that outlasts the temporary interest that students show when lessons are colorful and interesting, carrying students through their homework assignments and independent studies when they are far removed from their teacher's influence?

The motivational theories that will be described in Part One will provide the reader with another perspective on student motivation, one that places the seeds of motivation in the students themselves, not in the teacher's lessons and materials.

1

Motivated
Learners

When teachers are asked to describe good students, they typically respond by listing a set of qualities such as hardworking, cooperative, and interested. Sometimes they shorten the list and just say "good students are motivated." What they probably mean to say is that good students are motivated to perform competently in academic settings, such as a school. After all, with the exception of individuals with severe mental disorders, *all* human beings are motivated to do some things and not motivated to do others. Some teenagers I have met are motivated to ride skateboards competently. Some are motivated to earn money to buy a car. Some are even motivated to cause grief and upset for the authority figures in their lives. Yes, virtually all individuals are motivated, but not always to complete schoolwork.

One interesting aspect of the typical teacher description of good students is the relatively little emphasis given to intelligence. While intelligence may be a desirable quality, motivation is more so. Many teachers have spoken highly of hardworking students who make slow, but steady, academic gains. In contrast, teachers complain often about bright students who do not use their intellectual gifts wisely. If given the opportunity to choose either a room full of highly motivated students of low to average intellectual ability or a room full of highly intelligent students with low to moderate levels of motivation, most teachers would probably choose the former.

Teachers tend to believe, and rightfully so, that when students are motivated to perform competently on academic tasks, they will learn in accordance with their academic abilities. For this reason alone, working to enhance students' academic motivation is worthwhile. But in addition to maximizing student learning, another beneficial by-product of having highly motivated students in class is that they make the teacher's job of managing the instructional program simpler. Academically motivated students tend not to disrupt the instructional environment; they infrequently need to be disciplined; they listen when listening is appropriate because they are interested in what is being said; they discuss when discussion is appro-

priate because they want to share their thoughts with others. When students are academically motivated, their teachers often become professionally motivated, working hard to provide students with worthwhile educational experiences and finding more satisfaction in doing so. In short, the whole educational enterprise is strengthened when teachers find ways to help their students experience the joys of learning.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN MOTIVATION

Before trying to understand how to promote academic motivation in classrooms, we probably should know something about human motivation generally. Theorists and researchers of human motivation point to two generic types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Lepper & Green, 1978; Malone & Lepper, 1987). Extrinsic motivation exists when individuals are motivated by an outcome that is external or functionally unrelated to the activity in which they are engaged. For example, a child who cleans his room because he has been told that his older sister will take him to the movies when he is done is extrinsically motivated to clean his room. In the context of school, a student who works hard on a report because she needs an A in order to remain eligible to play softball is extrinsically motivated to write a good report. These youngsters are engaging in their respective activities in a highly committed manner. They certainly could be called motivated, but their reasons for working hard have nothing to do with the nature of their tasks. They are working hard because they view their tasks as means to some other desired ends.

In contrast to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation exists when someone works because of an inner desire to accomplish a task successfully, whether it has some external value or not. People who are intrinsically motivated to engage in a specific activity do not have to be enticed into participating in that activity. Instead, they actively seek opportunities to participate. And when they do have extended opportunities to participate in the activity, they often become consumed by it, losing all track of time and other obligations. Deci and Ryan (1985) refer to this state of deep attention to an intrinsically interesting task or activity as being in "the flow" (p. 28), meaning that the person attends so carefully and closely to the activity that he or she effectively tunes out all other aspects of the environment.

Consider for a moment the following examples of intrinsic motivation. An adolescent boy who spends the day straightening up his room because he has a new set of posters that he wants to display in a prominent manner in a tidy room is intrinsically motivated to clean his room. He takes obvious pleasure in arranging and rearranging his belongings so as to satisfy his sense of order. Or a preadolescent girl who has relatives living in Honduras decides to write a report for her social studies class on how the people of Honduras live. She already knows much about life in Honduras from letters her Honduran relatives have sent to her family, but she wants to know more. She is not working for a good grade, although that reward will probably be a

consequence of her hard work. Rather, she is motivated by a desire to understand better the topic of her research.

While both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational orientations are at work in most classrooms, our school systems and classroom practices are designed to promote extrinsic motivational orientations almost exclusively (Lepper & Hoddell, 1989; Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985). Good grades, colorful stickers, and praise, for example, are used ubiquitously as extrinsic rewards for competent work and cooperative behavior. The right to play sports and be involved in other sorts of extracurricular activities is often used as an extrinsic reward for satisfactory grades. High school students with a good record of extracurricular activities, coupled with top-level grades, are typically rewarded with entreé into a top-of-the-line university. In short, a whole series of desirable behaviors and activities is kept in place and functioning by a parallel series of external rewards, ever increasing in value. Extrinsic motivational orientations are also encouraged and maintained by the extensive array of punishments employed in most schools. Many teachers and administrators rely on a series of external punishments, ever increasing in severity (e.g., loss of recess, staying after school, attending Saturday school, suspension, expulsion), to extinguish or limit the occurrence of inappropriate behaviors and activities.

In spite of this heavy emphasis on working hard and behaving appropriately for extrinsic reasons, schools are still places where intrinsic motivation can be found. Some students do discover in school that reading can be a pleasurable pastime. Some students do experience a sense of personal satisfaction when they have successfully completed a geometric proof. Some students do conduct science experiments simply because they want to find out the results. Two premises of the instructional and management practices that will be presented in this book are that most students can discover some level of intrinsic pleasure in academic work and that teachers need to give at least as much attention to promoting intrinsic motivation in their classrooms as they give to extrinsic motivation. While we will not go so far as to suggest that there is no place for extrinsic motivation in schools, we will emphasize that teachers and administrators rely too heavily on extrinsic rewards and punishments to keep the whole system running. Teachers need to learn when to rely on extrinsic motivators and when to promote a more intrinsic motivational orientation. And perhaps even more importantly, teachers need to know how to help their students move from extrinsic to intrinsic motivational orientations.

UNDERSTANDING EXTRINSIC AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Understanding the cognitions that accompany an extrinsic motivational orientation is not difficult. When individuals are extrinsically motivated, they hold some desired outcome as a goal (e.g., getting a good grade or avoiding punishment), they recognize that a certain way of behaving is an

expedient means to that goal, and they make plans to modify their behavior in such a manner that they are likely to experience the desired outcome (Lepper & Hoddell, 1989). This series of cognitions makes intuitive sense to people. We all recognize this mode of thinking and functioning in ourselves. Perhaps because the cognitions associated with extrinsic motivation are so intuitively available to people, they have come to be the ones that educators most consciously try to promote in their schools and classrooms.

Unfortunately, the cognitions that accompany an intrinsic motivational orientation are not as intuitively available to most of us. Why does one student take pleasure in science lab work and not in speaking a foreign language? And why does one student enjoy reading novels when another student despises reading them? Fortunately, research focusing on intrinsic motivation has revealed a pattern of self-perceptions and cognitions that accompanies an intrinsic motivational orientation. Intrinsic motivation appears to be a by-product of two self-perceptions. People tend to be intrinsically motivated in situations in which they feel both competent and self-determining (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985). That is, if individuals perceive themselves as being capable of performing successfully in a given situation (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Schunk, 1989) and they also perceive that situation as one that they can control or regulate in some meaningful way (Corno & Rohrkemper, 1985; Stipek & Weisz, 1981; Weisz & Cameron, 1985), then they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated than if either or both of those self-perceptions were not present.

Let's look at a specific example. Consider the preadolescent girl writing a report on how the people of Honduras live. At first we might have been tempted to explain her intrinsic motivation in terms of her personal connection with the topic of the report. But that explanation is really not sufficient. After all, there are many topics that individuals might be able to relate to their lives without becoming intrinsically interested in them. For example, a person who drives an automobile every day might never become intrinsically motivated to figure out how its engine works. In order for this girl to become intrinsically interested in her topic and her report, she first had to perceive herself as being capable of understanding the topic. Because her family regularly receives letters from cousins in Honduras, she has learned much about life in that country. She begins this task, in other words, with a working knowledge of the place and its people. She already perceives herself as being somewhat of an expert on Honduras. If her cousins in Honduras had never written to her family and she had never learned much about them and their country, she would likely be less intrinsically motivated to write the report on that topic. The connection between her and Honduras would still exist, but she would be less interested in the topic; she would not have sufficient understanding of it to sustain her interest and efforts when confronted with the challenges inherent in the writing of an academic report.

In addition to feeling competent with respect to the task, this girl also had to feel that she was in control of the task in some personally meaningful way. If her teacher had come to class and told her that she had to do most of