

Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation

Encyclopedia of Giftedness, Creativity, and Talent (2009). Sage Publications 1:490-491

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Motivation is an internal process that involves initiating, maintaining, and governing self-oriented behavior. It is inextricably tied to one's expectations of success, and the ways in which one values a given task at hand. Motivation has a direct bearing upon how individuals focus their attention, and on levels of persistence, and it is linked to personal perceptions of capabilities with respect to activities and learning. Motivation to learn relates to finding enjoyment in understanding and mastery. It may be associated with such triggers as curiosity, instinct, or need.

From an educational perspective, motivation is the desire to do something well (as may be gauged against certain performance-referenced criteria). It can affect students' participation in class, their task commitment, and the amount of pleasure they derive from learning. The literature on motivation for learning points to two key criteria in order that academic expectations be readily met and even exceeded. Firstly, tasks and ability should match. This refers to both manageability and level of challenge. Secondly, learning opportunities should be meaningful so that students can experience the kind of motivation that results from personal engagement in learning. It is important to encourage individuals' expectations of success, to recognize their efforts, to facilitate understandings of the value of learning and the relevance of the tasks, and to help maintain and enhance self-esteem.

About Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators

Intrinsic motivation is a drive from within oneself that can spark a search for information, generate action, and stimulate further curiosity. Intrinsic motivators include feelings of competence, pride, and internalized values such as diligence and integrity. Factors that help to propel this internal drive might be suspense, appropriate feedback, meaningful learning (e.g., bridging the unknown and the known, being current), controversy and contradiction, and a need for autonomy. Tasks that demand active problem-solving or high-order or divergent thinking, and that require investigating, conjecture, or logistical thought may be more intrinsically motivating for gifted learners. They may be less interested in tasks that involve simple procedural responses, basic applications or memorizing. Students will be more intrinsically motivated by challenging learning goals, ones that will help them gain new skills and master knowledge—not too easy, not too difficult, but rather ones perceived as moderately difficult and realizable such that levels of competency can be developed and met. These levels, as well as internalized value systems, and the appropriate degree of challenge, vary from one person to the next.

Extrinsic motivation refers to external factors or incentives (such as applause or praise) that can serve to reinforce and stimulate efforts. Such motivators can help to build self-esteem and intrinsic motivation. Striking an optimal arousal level for extrinsically motivating individuals depends upon the complexity of the task, the goal, an individual's beliefs about their own abilities, and various external influences (such as past experiences, chance of success, and learning environment). At a basic level, extrinsic motivators might include rewards such as grades, candy, or gold stars. At a more sophisticated level, one might consider incorporating student interest, hands-on applications, targeted assistance, and fostering self-regulation. These kinds of opportunities to succeed can, in turn, facilitate intrinsic motivation. Reinforcing efforts and persistence, and helping students to cultivate a growth mindset about the nature of intelligence—that is, understanding it as being incremental and not fixed—are other ways to increase intrinsic motivation.

School-Based Applications

Teachers can be instrumental in helping to motivate their students. Additional means to instill motivation might include the following:

- Provide many and authentic learning opportunities.

- Encourage children to make choices about their learning, and provide time for independent, group, and extension activities.
- Show children *why* what is being taught is important, and *how* it will be useful to them.
- Help students develop action plans and means to accomplish their self-selected and other goals, involving them in the planning and assessment processes.
- Foster respect for rules, reasonable constraints, consequences, and a mastery orientation for learning.
- Recognize progress; learn from setbacks; understand the importance of being flexible and enabling students to stretch themselves and feel proud of their accomplishments.
- Provide positive reinforcement and constructive and honest feedback.
- Respect the unique qualities of the individual.
- Encourage thoughtfulness, inquiry, creativity, and responsibility.
- Help children maintain a positive sense of self, and health and well-being (all of which affect how they might feel about tackling something).
- Help with organizational aspects (e.g., time management skills, sensible rules, formative assessments, good communication methods, reasonable deadlines).
- Provide an accepting and appropriately structured learning environment, including a chance to be collaborative, and a supportive emotional climate. (“You can do it! Hooray!”)

Motivation and Views of Intelligence

Different people are motivated by different experiences, incentives, learning styles, and choices, as driven by their individuality. This individual diversity influences the amount of satisfaction associated with specific reinforcers, and also personal perceptions about whether someone can do something, and how well. People who believe that intelligence grows incrementally will be motivated to engage in challenges, and to persist, thereby increasing their skill levels and fostering their intellectual growth. The amount of effort one puts forth—the extent of the motivation and the ways in which one chooses to direct attention and performs—can be enhanced extrinsically and intrinsically. Past success and/or failure may affect motivation, and current efforts are likely to be more motivated when the goal-directed activity is deemed to be appropriately challenging. Therefore, in order to motivate, and create and sustain commitment, consider the importance of authenticity, reinforcement, suitable controls, realizable goals, fun, innovative and integrated subject matter, and pacing. Motivation supports self-determination and autonomy, and it should be encouraged in concert with assisting students to balance life’s various demands and responsibilities.

Further readings on Motivation:

- Elliot, A. J., & Dweck, C. S. (Eds.) (2007). *Handbook of Competence and Motivation*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Matthews, D. J., & Foster, J. F. (2005). *Being smart about gifted children: A guidebook for parents and educators*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Whitney, C. S., & Hirsch, G. (2007). *A love for learning: Motivation and the gifted child*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Woolfolk, A. E.; Winne P. H.; & Perry, N. E. (2005). *Educational Psychology (3rd Canadian Edition)*. Chapter 10. Boston: MA, Pearson Custom Publishing.

See also *Achievement Motivation; “Aha!” Experience; Autonomous Learner; Learning Styles; Optimal Development*

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