

Motivation to Learn paper - Assignment 2b2

This paper is a synopsis of the five major cognitive theories of motivation, together with a description of some of the author's experience with the actual use of several of the theories in learning situations. Early psychological theory emphasized the reactive, passive aspects of motivation, of instincts, subconscious processes, and the like; since the 1960s, however, the development of and research on cognitive theories of human behavior have reemphasized the role of the rational mind in motivation (Cofer, 1981 in Liggio, 1978-1982). These newer views do not by any means explain the full complexity of human behavior, but they form a solid basis for working with issues of motivation in the classroom.

Part I – The Five Theories of Motivation**Self-efficacy Theory:**

Self-efficacy beliefs are the beliefs that persons have in their own abilities to master situations, to plan and act in ways to attain desired results. These results can be a physical activity such as a sport or skill, or a mental activity such as learning a language. The belief in one's ability to succeed may depend on the subject in question. The degree of motivation a person will exhibit towards completing or even beginning a task depends on the confidence she has in her own competence or ability to complete the task.

People develop their beliefs from four sources. (In the following discussion, we are assuming that the value the person places on task completion is sufficient for him to attempt it.) The most important of these is how one perceives his own past performance in an area. If the person believes that he has exhibited competence or ability towards completing a task, he will have a sense of high efficacy and will, as a result, have higher motivation to persist through difficulties for a longer time, to try harder, and to try more difficult tasks. On the other hand, a sense of low efficacy will discourage the person from putting much effort into the task.

The second source of self-efficacy beliefs is modeling or vicarious experiencing, which becomes an important factor when the person is uncertain of her ability or inexperienced with the task. By watching other people perform the task, especially if the subject believes that her own capabilities are similar to the model's, the subject can form a sense of her own chances when faced with the task.

Verbal or social persuasion can be a very powerful way for individuals to develop a belief in self-efficacy, either positively or negatively. The subject must believe that the information being provided by the persuader is valuable or believable. Praise that the subject feels is undeserved, or encouragements that subtly negate the subject's efforts ("Billy can do that, so why can't you?") may actually have a negative effect on the subject. Overtly negative appraisals may have a more powerful effect on the person's sense than positive appraisals (Pajares 2002).

Expectancy X(times) Value Theory:

Also called Instrumentality Theory, this is based on the idea that motivation depends on two main factors. The first is the degree of *expectancy* people have to succeed, and the second is the *value* they place on success. The two factors are said to interact in a multiplicative sense, in that if either is non-existent, or zero, there will be no motivation to succeed. (In an additive relationship, one or the other being zero would not wipe out all motivation.) If either of the two factors is low, no matter how high the other factor is, the relative degree of motivation will be lower. For example, the author once placed a high value on learning to rock climb, and really wanted to learn the sport. A season on the rock, however, revealed an insurmountable fear of heights, which significantly lowered his expectation of success. Expectancies for success are part of the *self-schemas* of the person. A self-schema is the set of beliefs held by that person about himself, abilities, attributes, appearance, etc. (Eggen & Kauchak 2007).

Because of the multiplicative aspect of this theory, a simple grid can be made to predict motivation based on the expectation of success matrixed with the value placed on success. High expectancy and high value leads to strong, sustained effort and high motivation. Both high expectancy/low value and low expectancy/high value lead to lessened motivation, and low expectancy/low value result is near zero motivation to complete or even attempt the task.

The value of a task is influenced by four factors, intrinsic interest, importance, utility value and cost (Eggen & Kauchak 2007). *Intrinsic interest* is the degree that the subject finds the task itself interesting. A person interested in history is much more likely to be motivated to wade through a difficult history text than someone who finds all history boring. The perceived *importance* of a task is related to the person's self-concept of her ability to complete the task. Doing well in the task supports a positive self-concept, so motivation to succeed will be high. The utility value of a task is the degree to which completing the task will help the person attain some future goal. For instance, a person who believes that she can improve her physical fitness might be motivated to jog through rain, snow and sleet if she believes that the completion of the run will aid her fitness goals. Finally the *cost* of a task is the negative side of engaging in the task. In the earlier example, the author's fear of heights was too great a cost for him to complete his goal of becoming a rock climber. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French philosopher, demonstrated the concept of the cost of a task in his famous conundrum of whether a reasonable man should believe in God (Linger 1977). According to Pascal, the cost of not believing (an eternity in Hell) was so great, whereas the importance of believing was also so great (an eternity in bliss), that a reasonable man should believe, even if the chance of God existing was small.

Goals and Goal Orientation Theory:

This theory concentrates on a person's goals. These are desired outcomes for a person faced with a particular challenge. These are not necessarily congruent amongst individuals faced with the same challenge and may reflect the person's sense of his capabilities and his interest in surmounting the challenge. The goal may be to avoid or to put as little effort as possible into the challenge. Let us say that a parent has given her teenager the task of cleaning his room. The parent's goal will be a tidy room, while the

teenager's may be to sneak out of the house and to be with his friends. Those responsible for eliciting positive goal development need to be able to identify these negative goal situations.

There are four main types of goals we will consider. These are *learning* goals, *performance* goals, *social* goals and *work-avoidance* goal (Eggen & Kauchak 2007). Learning goals are directed to mastery of a challenge, learning a skill, etc, while the performance goals are concerned with competitive activity or competency in comparison to others' performances. Another way to define these would be to consider the direction of focus of the goal. A learning goal is one that does not need other people to be met. The mastery of the challenge is focused internally, towards the task itself, though it may be expressed externally. A performance goal can only exist in the context of how the person pursuing the goal compares in *performance* to others, so the focus is external. Mastery of the task may be required to successfully meet a performance goal, but the goal itself is oriented not towards the task, but towards the social rewards that mastery brings.

Performance goals are subdivided into two categories, *avoidance* and *approach*. Persons avoid trying for performance goals to avoid seeming incompetent. A student in a gym class who feels unable to complete a climbing wall may will generate an avoidance goal, such as convincing the coach he is sick, not to seem a coward or a wimp to his classmates. Another person, believing that he can reach the top, may strive through any difficulties to do so and to appear competent in the eyes of the coach and of his peers. Reaching the top becomes a performance-approach goal for that person.

For true mastery of a skill, the learning goals are more effective. Performance goals may depend on a number of external factors that are out of the learner's control. To go back to the author's earlier example of rock climbing, he was unable to achieve his performance goal of being a great climber and gleaming the status that would have brought him, but he was able to maintain a learning goal of mastering the skills necessary to make difficult moves on the rock face while safely roped.

Similar to a performance-avoidance goal, but with a different focus of attention, is the work-avoidance goal. The former was set because the person wanted to avoid appearing incompetent in public, while the latter is simply directed towards avoiding work. Minimal or no effort is put into the task involved. The person is not concerned with the appearance of incompetence, and may even feign this in order to avoid working.

The final type of goal we are considering is the social goal. These are goals that relate entirely to a person's social environment, and may affect the motivation to pursue other goals, either positively or negatively. For instance, a person may enjoy working in groups, not because of the chance to learn from others' insights and input, but because of the chance to chat with others. Conversely, a person who wants to appear responsible and reliable will, in the same group, work to further the purpose of the group and will make a greater contribution to it.

Self-Determination Theory:

Self-determination theory considers the process of determining how a person needs to act in her environment in an effective manner. It posits that the ability to determine one's own actions and to make

effective choices is central to motivation. According to the theory, people need to be able to make decisions, act decisively and feel competent. If all needs are taken care of and all decisions made for them, they may ultimately feel discontented, but will certainly suffer in both the feeling of competence and in motivation to face challenging tasks. There are three basic needs associated with this theory: *competence*, or the ability to work well in the world, *autonomy*, or control over a person's own actions and decisions, and *relatedness*, or the feeling of being a valued, loved and lovable part of a social environment. The lowering of any of these factors will lower the sense of self-determination, leading to a lessening of motivation.

Attribution Theory:

Attributions are the explanations that people create to explain the reasons for their successes and failures. These reasons can be both external and uncontrollable, such as luck, bad teachers, who-you-know, etc., internal and uncontrollable, such as innate ability, or internal and controllable, such as the effort put into a task. This aspect of attributions is called the *locus*. Other aspects are *stability*, whether or not the person can modify causality, and *control*, the degree to which the person can accept ownership of and responsibility for the reasons for success or failure. Negative attributions have a very negative effect on a person's motivation. By inappropriately defining the three aspects of attributions, a person can descend into a state of *learned helplessness*, which is categorized by a state of expectation of failure and lack of control.

Part II – Cognitive Strategies

Part of my experience as an educator included several seasons of involvement with the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School. The underlying philosophy of HIOBS can be neatly summarized as the application of the Self-Determination theory. The rather florid motto (“To serve, to strive, and not to yield”), cadged from Alfred Lord Tennyson, is a perfect description of the attitude of the highly motivated person, bursting with autonomy, competence and relatedness. The original idea for the Outward Bound schools came from the discovery during the 2nd world war that young and presumably healthier sailors from torpedoed merchant ships were dying more frequently than their older peers. Lack of motivation based on a lack of a sense of personal ability was thought to be the cause, and the school was founded to instill a sense of personal confidence, competence and ability to relate to others in crisis. We would take students into situations of high stress. There would be periods of sleep deprivation, extended (3-day) isolation, perceived danger through difficult activities (rock climbing, ropes course work, sea kayaking, group challenges), close-quarter stress from living in a crowded bunk-house environment, together with intensive “debriefing” sessions during which the instructors would discuss the various activities and work on increasing the individual and group sense of competence and relatedness. Although the schedule was fairly rigid, autonomy and relatedness were supported by providing the students with a challenge, then leaving the solution for them. This even extended to the 5-day expedition at the end of the course, in which the students were responsible for selecting the gear and the food, stowing all, and generally being responsible for the success of the trip.

As Outward Bound is seen as a place to send problem kids, we were often dealing with students who exhibited learned helplessness to a greater or lesser extent. Part of the task for each instructor was to identify negative attributions and to help the students turn them around. This took place both in the group debriefings and individual talks with the students. Many were poorly motivated and believed that they were incapable of success, and we attempted through example, encouragement and group support to begin to free them of that state.

This year in 1st grade I am working with a student who has had serious behavior problems in kindergarten and pre-school. I have been working extensively with him in both attribution modification and goal-setting activities using attribution statements and modeling. He tends to make statements about himself like, "I am writing, 'I am stupid!' on my paper," and "I can't do anything." He complains that the work is too hard and draws (which he does very well!) instead of doing work. I have been working with him to modify his stated image of himself as incompetent, and to help him set specific goals for each activity. The idea is to give him a definite goal in a definite time-frame that he can achieve. I also use a token reward system and a daily summary sheet (smiley face, flat face, frowny face for his behaviors) that we fill out together to help him assess accurately how he has succeeded in controlling himself and doing his work. Over the year I have seen a marked improvement in his ability to set goals and stay focused.

Conclusion

The five theories of motivation are Self-Efficacy, Expectancy X Value, Goals and Goal-Orientation, Attribution, and Self-Determination. While these do not completely describe the complexities of human behavior, they form a solid basis to help the educator understand and respond to the vagaries of motivation amongst his students. By understanding the basic concepts of motivation these theories present, the teacher can modify his presentation to maximize motivational enhancement, and to identify and categorize those students with severe motivational issues.

Sources:

General:

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To my new First Grade parents:

Welcome to my class! Your child has already received my letter of greeting and introduction, but I wanted to take this opportunity to explain to you some of the theory that underlies the work we will be doing in class to support and improve the motivation of your child as he or she meets new levels of academic challenge.

While, in the past, the Golden Rule, the dunce cap and the hickory stick were deemed sufficient motivators for any student, modern research has shown far more successful ways to help students with the development of good motivation. We will be using these methods in class, and hope that you will support them, as well.

The first method I will describe is called the Expectancy X (times) Value theory. This states that the motivation the student feels toward completing a task successfully has two factors, the *value* the student places on success and the *expectancy* that he will be able to succeed. If either of these is low or lacking, motivation will be negatively affected. For instance, if the student feels she can complete the task successfully, but doesn't care at all about the result, she will have little motivation to learn. Similarly, if she is interested in the results, but believes she is incapable of achieving them, she will have little or no motivation. For instance, if a child would like to learn to ski, but is convinced he is too uncoordinated to be successful at sports, he will not be motivated to learn. It is our task to make sure that each child is supported in the knowledge that she is capable of doing the work assigned. It is my task to present the work in a way that each child understands its relevance to his life and values the learning process.

The second method we work with is called Self-Determination theory. This describes three basic needs that students have to achieve high motivation, the need for *competency*, or the sense that they can function successfully, the need for *autonomy*, or the ability to make independent choices and to have a degree of control, and the need for *relatedness*, or the feeling that they are not alone in their own world, that they are respected and loved and worthy of those. While the second of these especially is hard to implement in first grade, I try to create an environment in my classroom which supports as much independent choice and activity as possible. Responsible autonomy is something which must be learned, and it starts here. Both competency and relatedness are supported by making my classroom a warm and caring environment, safe for learning.

Finally, we work also with Attribution theory. Everybody has probably tripped over a garbage pail at some point, fallen, and blamed the pail for the accident. Similarly, students create explanations, or *attributions*, for failures that put the cause outside of themselves. They may blame a poor performance on bad luck, the teacher being unfair, etc. I work with the students to learn about how they construct their attributions, and teach them how to modify negative ones and to acknowledge their own control over their learning successes and failures.

While this is a very brief synopsis of these ideas, I would be happy to speak further with any who would like more information. I have list of books, articles and websites that will be helpful, as well. Here is looking forward to a productive and high learning year!

Yours sincerely,

David Eden