

Margery B. Ginsberg

Cultural Diversity, Motivation, and Differentiation

The cultural experiences of students significantly impact how they respond to classroom experiences. Classrooms are likely to be more effective in developing the capacity of students from a broad range of backgrounds if teachers understand how culture can shape learning and how teachers can develop classrooms that tap into the intrinsic motivation of culturally diverse learners. This article proposes key principles and provides examples for developing classrooms that are motivating for diverse learners.

MOTIVATION IS A CONCEPT that is intended to explain one of life's most elusive questions: Why do we do what we do? Implicit in seeking to answer this question is the intention that educators might better understand motivation to

encourage student learning. Conventional wisdom indicates that motivated students will surpass unmotivated students in learning and performance. Knowledge about motivation can give all students a better chance to learn.

This article discusses motivation as it relates to student learning within culturally diverse classrooms. Defining motivation as the natural human capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a goal, an undergirding assumption is that human beings are purposeful. We direct our energy through attention, concentration, and imagination to make sense of our world.

Defining learning as a naturally active and normally volitional process of constructing meaning from experience and information (Lambert & McCombs, 1998), this article addresses how teachers can more consistently support motivation to learn among all students. There is substantial evidence that motivation is consistently and positively related to educational achievement. Uguroglu and Walberg (1979) found 232 correlations of motivation and academic learning reported in 40 studies, and 98% of the correlations were positive.

This article proposes that awareness of and respect for cultural diversity influences motivation. Culture can be defined as the webs of significance we spin as human beings: Who we are and how we

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interact with the world is an intriguing intersection of language, values, beliefs, and behaviors that pervade every aspect of a person's life, while continually changing and evolving. Culture is not an isolated, mechanical aspect of life that can be used to explain phenomena in the classroom or that can be learned as a series of facts, physical elements, or exotic characteristics (Ovando & Collier, 1985). Across cultural groups, all students are motivated, even when they are not motivated to learn what a teacher has to offer. Determination to find ways to encourage motivation is fundamental to equity in teaching and learning, and is a core virtue of educators who successfully differentiate instruction (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000).

Ultimately, this article suggests a theory and a set of practices that can help educators develop a clear and cohesive focus on intrinsically motivating instruction for all students. A continuous conversation about the motivational conditions that engage the hearts and minds of diverse students is essential to transformational notions about differentiated instruction, curriculum, assessment, advisory relationships, scheduling options, governance, and family and community partnerships. Such dialogue is also a vital component of a pluralistic democracy, a democracy that, as Barack Obama (Drash & Osier, 2004) has said:

is the true genius of America, a faith in the simple dreams, an insistence on small miracles. That we can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door. That we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe. That we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution.

Constitutionally, "we" means "we."

An Interdisciplinary Lens That Encourages Motivation

As important as motivation is to student learning, scholars differ on their assumptions about motivation, in part because it is something that can neither be directly observed nor precisely measured. Generally, motivation researchers examine

the signs, behavior, words, and stories of people for indications of interest, effort, perseverance, and completion (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000). However, depending on our own ethnic and cultural background, the behaviors we associate with different attributes can vary significantly.

One approach to transforming instructional plans into more motivating and culturally responsive plans is the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000). This framework integrates vital constructs of motivation from many disciplines. These include philosophy, sociology, the study of spiritual ideology, economics, linguistics, anthropology, political science, and a host of other disciplines, including the field of education. What has been missing in instructional theory is an ecology that synthesizes concepts from the various disciplines to inform a comprehensive understanding of motivation. An interdisciplinary understanding of intrinsic motivation provides that synthesis. A central tenet of this conceptual framework is that to support the motivation of all learners, it is necessary to address essential knowledge and skills within a culturally responsive, and intrinsically motivating, pedagogy.

A challenge for all educators grappling with culturally responsive instructional practice is to negotiate the tension between within-group variation and whole-group stereotypes. The influence of language, beliefs, values, and behaviors pervades every aspect of our lives. At the same time, assumptions about entire groups of people can verge on that which is, at best, misleading. The motivational framework demystifies the role of culture in teaching and learning, without prescribing lists of learning preferences and teaching approaches for entire student groups. As Paley (1990) wrote, "We can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events" (p. XII).

This, of course, is easier said than done. Just from the perspective of emotions, one person working at a task feels joy and continues. Another person, working at the same task, feels angry and quits. And, although another person may experience frustration in this situation, she or he perseveres with increased determination. To a large ex-

tent, the response that a person has to a learning activity reflects his or her ethnic or cultural background (Kitayama & Markus, 1994). In fact, social scientists today regard the cognitive processes as inherently cultural (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). For all people, language, ethnic and racial history, experience with political and economic oppression, sense of opportunity, values, and perceptions converge in the response to teaching and learning.

Designing Lessons That Support Student Motivation

For teachers, especially those in high poverty communities, designing lessons that help elicit students' stories, opinions, values, and interests as a catalyst for learning is fundamental to encouraging intrinsic motivation across student groups. Surveys from 25,000 students and teachers across all grade and age levels suggest a strong positive relationship between students' perceptions of teachers who honor their voice and indicators of motivation and achievement (McCombs, 2003). Nonetheless, teachers inevitably face the reality that the very notion of student voice may vary across cultural groups. Icebreakers that press students for personal information are an example of this phenomenon. Intended to create a sense of community among classmates, they often pressure students for a kind of self-disclosure that many learners reserve for trusted friends and family. Even these kinds of simple, well-intentioned gestures to address the basic human needs of belonging and self-determination can contribute to discomfort, lack of trust, or outright alienation. An ongoing challenge for educators is to respect diverse values and orientations while working with students to create learning experiences in which all students can comfortably engage.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Basic to well-intentioned mistakes, ideological confusion, and deep-rooted historical inequalities is an extrinsic orientation to motivation that domi-

nates school culture with the carrot/stick as its fundamental metaphor. However, extrinsic motivation can fuse with intrinsic motivation, as in instances where a reward carries personally and culturally valued information. An Olympic gold medal is a good example of this phenomenon. But schools tend to over-rely on standard rewards and punishments as a way of motivating students.

With an extrinsic perspective on motivation, the focus of learning is on prizes, grades, test scores, vocations, colleges, and so forth. When students do not respond to these incentives or sanctions, a sociopathological view of underachievement tends to prevail, that is, the notion that something is wrong with the student. Students are likely to be described as lacking ambition, initiative, or self-direction. For many students, however, the connection between effort and extrinsic reward is neither obvious nor desirable as a primary reason for learning. According to some scholars, students may have adopted an attitude of inevitable hopelessness, furthered by their association of learning in schools with the historic behavior of privilege and oppression (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Regardless, the reliance on rewards or sanctions to keep students focused on vacuous learning opportunities is, for many students, not appealing, valued, or morally compelling.

Threats and bribes may yield temporary results. Students are likely to take the most cursory approach to accomplishing an academic goal where the grade is more important than the learning itself. Certainly this is an experience to which everyone can all relate. Who has never crammed for a test? Days afterwards, it is nearly impossible to recall what one may have once "memorized." Speaking the language of life-long and substantive learning, but relying on an extrinsic approach to teaching and learning, are contradicting purposes. Deep cognitive learning occurs when students are fully engaged in a relevant and challenging experience (Sternberg, 2004).

Intrinsic motivation can be defined as participation in learning experiences that, even in the absence of extrinsic rewards or sanctions, are of interest and value to students. These primary sources of

motivation reside in all people, across all ethnic and cultural groups. When people can see that what they are learning makes sense and is important according to their values and perspectives, their motivation emerges. Like a cork rising through water, intrinsic motivation surfaces because the environment elicits it. What is culturally and emotionally significant to a person evokes intrinsic motivation (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Instructional Plans as Motivational Plans

Every instructional plan ought to be motivationally conceived from beginning to end. Most lesson plans, however, do not adequately address ethnic and cultural diversity. In some schools, teachers try to do this independently, relying on curriculum guides, intuition, and spontaneous decision-making, much of which is limited by a teacher's experiences and beliefs. Difficulties are most apparent when student motivation seems low or diminishing. Insufficient or inconsistently applied approaches to learning are as great a threat to differentiated learning opportunities as for whole group instruction. As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) stated: "It is how we choose what we do, and how we approach it, that will determine whether the sum of our days adds up to a formless blur, or to something resembling a work of art" (p. 13). Without a sufficiently complex and cohesive focus in lesson design and implementation, it is tempting to believe that we can improve instruction with a single strategy or theory. This sort of thinking is tantamount to what has become known as the "flavor of the month" in school improvement.

A Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

To recap, the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching is built on principles and structures that tend to be meaningful within and across cultures. The purpose of the motiva-

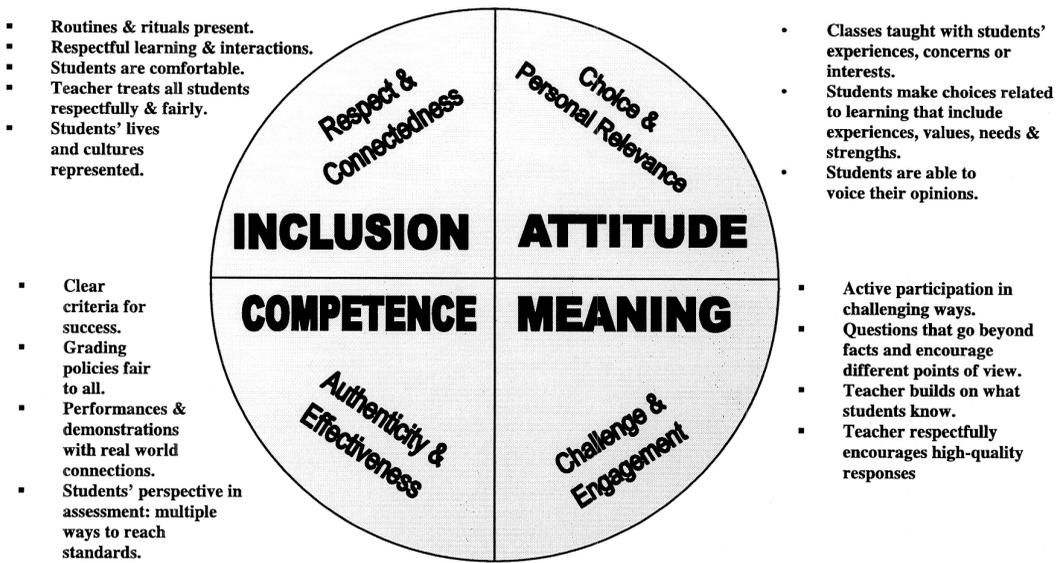
tional framework is to unify teaching practices that elicit the intrinsic motivation of all learners so that educators can consistently design learning experiences that matter to and support the success of all students. As a synthesis of literature and experience, it seeks to be broad enough to accommodate the range of ethnic and cultural diversity found in most schools. It also integrates the variety of assumptions addressed in many disciplines — educational, economic, social, and psychological. In terms of everyday instruction, it seeks to explain how to create compelling and democratic learning experiences that honor the diverse perspectives, values, and talents that students bring to the classroom.

Four Conditions of a Motivational Framework

The motivational framework in Figure 1 represents four basic conditions (attributes in a learning environment), that work together to support students' natural interest in learning: establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence.

Establishing inclusion refers to principles and practices that contribute to a learning environment in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another. Developing a positive attitude refers to principles and practices that contribute to, through personal and cultural relevance and through choice, a favorable disposition toward learning. Enhancing meaning refers to challenging and engaging learning. This condition expands and strengthens learning in ways that matter to students and builds their identities as valued civic participants. Engendering competence refers to principles and practices that help students to be effective at what they value, authentically identifying what they know and can do, and linking them to a hopeful future.

The four conditions simultaneously interact to encourage and support intrinsic motivation within and across student groups. No one teaching strategy will consistently engage all learners, but a rep-



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Figure 1 The motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching.

ertoire of unrelated strategies can be equally ineffective.

Although the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching includes new teaching strategies for each condition (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000), it also serves as a template for recognizing existing strengths in educational practice and providing clues to develop those strengths. In this way, it is respectful of the work that educators are already doing, and it encourages classroom teachers to apply principles of motivation for all students with constancy.

As an adult educator who regularly participates in K–12 lesson studies, designing, teaching, and then encouraging a critique from my practitioner colleagues, I know that it is nearly impossible to ever get it right. In fact, one of the wondrous aspects of our profession is that we work with human beings, none of whom can be reduced to a pedagogical checklist. But a cohesive framework that identifies strengths and generates clues for more motivationally effective teaching can contribute to a level of personal responsibility among educators that is optimistic and informative.

The four motivational conditions of the framework can be framed as essential questions that teachers and students simultaneously create or enhance. They are:

Establishing inclusion—How do we create or affirm a learning atmosphere in which we feel respected by and connected to one another? (Best to plan for the beginning of the lesson.)

Developing attitude—How do we create or affirm a favorable disposition toward learning through personal relevance and choice? (Best to plan for the beginning of the lesson.)

Enhancing meaning—How do we create engaging and challenging learning experiences that include student perspectives and values? (Best to plan throughout the lesson.)

Engendering competence—How do we create or affirm an understanding that students have effectively learned something they value and perceive as authentic to their real world? (Best to plan for the ending of the lesson, but with clear criteria for success understood and agreed to at the start of the lesson.)

The following learning experience at a large, high poverty urban middle school exemplifies a

way to use the motivational framework to compose an instructional plan. The lesson was developed by Terri McLaughlin, a district math coach, and Belinda Rendon, a middle school math teacher in Houston, Texas. It is adapted from Ginsberg (2004).

The goal of the two educators was to review the metric and the customary system of measurement. In modeling the lesson for Belinda, Terri first put up a life-size picture of the 7 foot, 4 inch Houston Rocket's basketball player from China, Yao Ming (developing a positive attitude). Next, Terri facilitated carousel movement around the room with teams of students working on different questions posted on newsprint to help recall what they already know (developing a positive attitude); carousel questions included: What do you know about the metric system of measurement? What do you know about the customary system of measurement? List some examples of things that measure about one centimeter.

Students rotated around the room responding to each question—one question per piece of newsprint (establishing inclusion). Next, Terri asked students to share in small groups ways they can convert inches to centimeters (enhancing meaning and engendering competence). She then asked students to estimate, calculate, and compare their own height in centimeters and inches (enhancing meaning). Terri then asked students to compare their calculations with the basketball player Yao Ming (enhancing meaning), putting students' calculations on an overhead transparency to look for patterns (enhancing meaning). Next, she asked students how well they estimated their own height in centimeters and inches (engendering competence). Finally, she asked them for their estimation strategies (enhancing meaning). Before leaving the room, each student wrote one of their strategies on the back of a 3 × 5 card. On the other side, students wrote something that surprised them from the lesson (engendering competence).

Increasingly, researchers view cognition as a social activity that integrates the mind, the body, the process of the activity, and the ingredients of the setting in a complex interactive manner

(Lave, 1988). The conventional psychological model of perceiving, thinking, and acting is a linear process that may occur far less often than previous theorists have imagined. Because the four motivational conditions work in concert and exert their influence on student learning in the moment as well as over time, it can be helpful to determine an entry point for lesson design and develop the conditions in a way that makes sense from there.

Following Four Students

Teaching rooted in intrinsic motivation presupposes that lessons are designed in purposeful ways. But to a large extent, the response that a person has to a learning activity reflects his or her cultural background, talents that have been nurtured, peer group relations, and so forth; the response a student has to a learning activity may not coincide with that of the teacher. Nonetheless, it has its own internal logic. Differentiating teaching and learning in ways that are motivating and equitable requires knowing students well.

This means going beyond data. Most educators have a tremendous amount of data—state test results, curriculum assessments, teacher-made assessments, homework, self-assessments, grade point averages, and teacher observations. It is one thing to identify gaps, and quite another to imagine new approaches. It is through knowing students, families, and communities well that one can continually polish the lens of equity.

Given the large numbers of students with whom educators work, one way to improve instruction is to focus on four students, preferably from a background that is different than the educator's, to take knowledge deeper in ways that inspire more motivationally-effective and culturally-responsive teaching. It is wise to select two students who are low performing, one near the mean, and another who is high performing.

Cureton Elementary School in San Jose, CA, uses this approach. In grade level teams, teachers (a) identify data sources they already use, (b) develop a pacing calendar to clarify when they will

have examined specific kinds of data and share student work in grade level teams, noting accomplishments as well as gaps, and (c) conduct bimonthly 5-minute conferences with each of the four children, maintaining a focus on each child's strengths. The form they use begins with accomplishments. It also includes an opportunity for the student to share something with the teacher, ranging from something the student has created to something the student would like to say. As a conclusion, the student sets a goal or goals for the coming week.

Adding to this approach, teachers at Oak Ridge Elementary School in Sacramento, CA, regularly visit students' homes. The entire process has been carefully planned, from contacting parents, arriving with the gift of strong student work, and concluding with a family photograph, if it is comfortable for the family. This also includes clearly communicating the purpose of a visit and developing specific ways to identify the biases that educators, as cultural beings, may have. A home visit is an opportunity to learn how a child experiences comfort, curiosity, and learning in their home. This contributes to continuous reflection and imagination, and stimulates differentiation that matters to a broad range of students.

Conclusion

Although human motivation does not always follow an orderly path, teachers can plan ways to encourage it throughout any learning experience. In fact, due to motivation's emotional base and natural instability, it is judicious to painstakingly plan the milieu and learning activities to enhance student motivation. For projects, self-directed learning, and situational learning, as in the case of problem posing, teachers may not be so bound to a formal plan.

The learning environment provides a meaningful context for addressing and redressing the ways bias occurs. The task of understanding, talking about, and working against racism and its consequences may seem formidable. Having the courage to challenge oneself as a cultural being and an

adult learner can help one make a difference. For educators who profess a profound concern for students, the first assumption must go beyond "all students can learn" to "all students can learn in a motivating way."

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