



Lens on Learning Theory

“Like the national economy, human motivation is a topic that people know is important, continuously discuss, and would like to predict. We want to know why people do what they do. But just as tomorrow’s inflationary trend seems beyond our influence and understanding, so too do the causes of human behavior evade any simple explanation or prescription.” (Wlodkowski, 1999, p.1).

Motivation is complex with many different theories informing various aspects of it. In a learning situation, motivation can be impacted by any number of things, including:

- Needs Interests Values
- Attitudes Incentives Fears

Needs: Maslow’s hierarchy of needs offers one theory of motivation. Maslow proposes that in order to strive for **higher level needs** (i.e. esteem and cognitive), **lower level needs** (physical, safety) must be met. Learners who are physically uncomfortable or who feel unsafe (threatened) are not likely to be able to focus on learning.

Fears: Many fears affect motivation, including **fears of failure, rejection, reactions from others, success, pain**, etc. Fear is a very difficult psychological phenomenon, so as teachers our goal is to create a learning environment that is as **safe, positive, inclusive, and success oriented** as possible.



Reflection on Practice

1. What might be affecting your students’ motivation?
2. How could various aspects of your instruction enhance motivation – learning outcomes, course topics, teaching strategies, classroom environment, assessment methods?

Expanding Your Teaching Toolkit:

From a teaching perspective, it is important to focus on the things that you (the teacher) can do something about. Strive to **engage more students more of the time**, rather than all students, all the time. For the most part, sound teaching strategies will improve motivation in cases that are within the teacher’s “sphere of influence”. As Wlodkowski points out, “every instructional plan also need to be a motivational plan” (p. 23) In this section we identify a number of strategies using John Keller’s ARCS model for motivational learning design.

A – Attention; R – Relevance; C – Confidence; S – Satisfaction

...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.
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 13 in R. Wlodkowski, 1999, p. 24)

Attention

- ❑ Tie learning in your course to the students' motivations. Take time early in the course to **find out about motivations** for being in college and for taking your course.
- ❑ Incorporate **fun, current, and/or everyday examples** for course concepts.
- ❑ Design instruction using a variety of strategies and to meet the needs of **various learning styles**. See the Pedagoogle on Teaching to a Variety of Learning Styles.
http://edu.georgianc.on.ca/teaching/pub/pedagoggles/LearningStyles_2_2.pdf
- ❑ Focus students in their **reading and notetaking** using charts, visual organizers, outlines, etc.
<http://www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/>

Relevance

- ❑ Use a variety of **Classroom Assessment Techniques** to highlight what students already know related to topics and then connect new information to prior learning.
<http://www.siue.edu/~deder/assess/catmain.html>
- ❑ Build an **interactive learning community** that involves everyone in the learning process. See R. Wlodkowski's list of motivational strategies using a time-continuum model (before, during, after) on pp. 294-297 in his book listed below.
- ❑ Give students **options** in major assignments whenever possible
- ❑ Link learning outcomes, classroom activities, and assessment. See the following resource on **Integrated Course Design** for more information.
<http://www.ou.edu/idp/significant/integratedcoursedesign.htm>

Confidence

- ❑ Be **firm, friendly, fair, and consistent**. Set clear and reasonable expectations.
- ❑ Give students **specific, constructive feedback early**, allowing more opportunity for success. Incorporate formative assessments (assessments for learning)
- ❑ **Structure assignments for success**. See the pedagoogle on Assignment Design.
http://edu.georgianc.on.ca/teaching/pub/pedagoggles/Assignments_3_2.pdf
- ❑ Use a variety of strategies to "**structure learning for success**" – scaffolding, modeling, opportunities for guided practice, coaching.
- ❑ Get students **actively involved** in the learning process. See CTL web resources on Active Learning Strategies. <http://edu.georgianc.on.ca/teaching/teaching/activestrat/>
- ❑ Help students **link achievement to effort and effective learning strategies**. Give students opportunities to share and/or practice a variety of learning strategies.
<http://www.muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/>

Satisfaction

- ❑ Design **relevant, achievable, and authentic learning tasks** and assignments.
- ❑ Provide **several opportunities to demonstrate learning** of key skills.
- ❑ Build in the **development of essential skills** (critical thinking, communicating, etc).

References and More Information

IDDE (n.d.) ARCS Motivation Theory. Retrieved September 16, 2005 from
<http://ide.ed.psu.edu/idde/ARCS.htm>

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Psychological Self-Help (n.d.). Behaviour, motivation, and self-control. Retrieved September 16, 2005 from <http://www.mentalhelp.net/psyhelp/chap4/>

Wlodkowski, R. J. (1999). Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults, revised edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. **(Available through the CTL)**