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Improving Academic Motivation

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

_____

CAPSTONE PROJECT

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Abstract

Motivation is a key aspect in succeeding at any task. Generally, motivation keeps an individual moving toward his or her goal. It energizes and controls one's behavior. In any leadership position, it is important to not only understand why motivation is essential, but how those around you are motivated. The purpose of this paper is to identify different motivation styles within an educational setting and provide a curriculum for teaching students how to stay motivated through using goal setting techniques. By analyzing already established research, this paper also looks into a school counselor's role in motivating these students to succeed academically.

Key words: extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, Self-Determination Theory, goal setting, amotivation

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Introduction

Academic motivation varies from student to student. In a school setting, some students complete their homework and study for tests in hopes of achieving that external reward of a good grade or praise from his or her teacher. Other students work on the specified subject matter because he or she is truly interested in the material and looks to gain knowledge. Some students exhibit little interest in academics and show no signs of having any academic motivation. The latter student generally shows up on a school counselor's list of the academically struggling, failing or close to it. While all students are unique in what motivates and drives them to succeed, watching a student struggle through classes because of a lack of motivation can be a frustrating experience for educators (Wright, 2007).

Motivation means to be "moved to do something" and factors in to why an individual acts or behaves in a particular way (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). It is not a one size fits all mentality, but varies between subjects, environments, and classroom attitudes (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Wright, 2007). Research on academic motivation is hard to come by, particularily because of the difficulty in measuring the topic (Wright, 2007). The more one seeks out information regarding academic motivation, the more questions arise. In an academic setting, whose job is it to motivate the students? Is there a "right" or a "wrong" way to motivate?

A lack of academic motivation is among one of the most common problems that teachers face within a classroom (Center on Education Policy, 2013). According to the National Research Council's report on motivation, it is estimated that an "upwards of 40% of high school students are chronically disengaged from school" (2013). Disengagement can come from a variety of factors: fear of failure, emotional problems, lack of challenge, anger, or a desire for attention (Center on Education Policy, 2013).

Strategies that have been used to boost academic motivation come in the form of increasing rigor, improving educational standards, and conducting standardized exams but students who are bored and unmotivated will unlikely benefit from those changes (Center on Educational Policy, 2013). With academic motivation at the forefront for student achievement and motivation, gains will not be made unless a more active role is taken in addressing the lack of motivation (Wright, 2007).

Literature Review

Academic motivation is a construct that occurs within an individual as early as pre-school (Usher, 2012). From then on, it can affect a student's outlook toward school, how they relate to teachers, how much support they need, and their engagement levels (Usher, 2012). Academic motivation is the key to academic success because it's a student's "desire or interest to perform to the given standards in an academic subject" (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Students present different types of motivation based on the environment, academic subject, and interest level (Zimmerman et al., 1992).

The information provided is designed to help understand the topic of motivation and offer some techniques and curriculum to help motivate students. The two most common types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, along with amotivation, a term used to define the absence of motivation, will be further explained. This paper will also apply a research-based motivational theory, self-determination theory, to the academic system, and a motivational curriculum will be shared.

Types of motivation

The literature offered three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Literature tends to pit extrinsic and intrinsic motivation against each other, each

one holding up the opposite end of a motivation spectrum (Usher, 2012). Extrinsic motivation

can further be broken down into different levels, which occur in various positions along a

spectrum. The three types of motivation that will be mentioned relate to how an individual is

motivated, while the levels of extrinsic motivation relate to how driven an individual is to do a

certain task (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

       Intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to "doing a task because it is inherently

interesting or enjoyable", the result being the individual learned a new skill or gained knowledge

(Ryan & Deci, 2000). With academics, intrinsically motivated students find enjoyment out of

school and learn by way of curiosity and self-fulfillment (Gottfried et al., 2001). According to

Gottfried et al. (2001) students with higher academic intrinsic motivation have "higher

achievement, more favorable perceptions of their academic competence, and lower academic

anxiety." Generally, one's hobbies are intrinsically motivating for them and are done to gain

personal enrichment.

       Because motivation is seen as continuous within a spectrum, students can also learn to

become intrinsically motivated during tasks (Gottfried et al., 2001). Research shows that intrinsic

motivation is the preferred motivation style within the educational system (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

However, while having all students be intrinsically motivated to learn and strengthen their

knowledge is ideal, it is not the norm (Gottfried et al., 2001).

       Extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is the contrasting motivation, being that an

individual is motivated to do a task or project because it leads to an outcome separate of the task

(Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). With an academically extrinsic motivated individual, the goal may

be good grades, praise from a teacher, academic honors, or recognition. A student might not

necessarily be interested in a certain classroom subject, but the student's drive and desire to

achieve a passing grade is enough of an external motivator to study and be engaged in the class.

Like mentioned prior, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were found to not always occur in

isolation of each other. Based on this finding, three different levels of extrinsic motivation were

formed, each exposing various amounts of intrinsic tendencies (Zimmerman et al., 1992).

External regulation. External regulation is the least self-determined form of extrinsic

motivation because behavior is guided by an external reward or punishment (Deci et al., 1991;

Ryan & Deci, 2000b). With external regulation, the reason for a given behavior has not been

internalized (Deci et al., 1991). An externally motivated student studies primarily because his or

her parents will reward him or her for doing so.

Introjected regulation. Introjected regulation confers that individuals are motivated to

carry out a specific behavior based on their desire to avoid internally imposed guilt and shame

(Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Behaviors are partially internalized, but the individual has not

accepted the behavior as their own (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). If a student makes the decision to

study for an exam prior to going to a movie with friends because he or she knows that they will

feel guilty if they don't is considered to be introjectionally regulated.

Regulation through identification. Identification refers to an individual beginning to

value the behaviors they are doing (Deci et al., 1991). Because the individual values the

behavior, they engage in it willingly and for personal reasons (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). A student

who enrolls in an Advanced Placement class because he or she wants to challenge themselves is

seen as being motivated through identification.

Amotivation. The third type of motivation, amotivation, refers to an absence or lack of

motivation (Legault et al., 2006). Amotivated individuals tend to feel a disconnect from their

actions, meaning that the individual does not know why he or she is completing the specified

task (Legault et al., 2006). The individual will exhibit neither intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and cannot form a relationship between their behavior and any possible results or outcomes. This disconnect leaves the individuals to put little effort and energy into completing a task or reaching a goal (Legault et al., 2006).

Amotivation has been linked to boredom and poor concentration in classrooms, higher perceived stress, and non-attendance because of several different classroom factors (Legault et al., 2006). Classroom factors can be that the work may be too strenuous, other activities may take priority over a student's time and attention, relationships with teachers may not be established, or a student may view a class or topic uninteresting. Individuals who are not motivated do not see any benefit to studying, completing homework, or developing relationships with educators (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).

Much of the literature surrounding academic motivation states that students who are intrinsically, or internally, motivated have the best chance at educational success (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). That would mean that students are eager to be learning because the classroom subjects are interesting to them or they enjoy challenging themselves. However, while that may be true that intrinsic motivation is seen as the best motivation style, it is an unrealistic expectation for an academic setting to attempt to convert all students toward an intrinsic way of thinking (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000).

Current research suggests that there are four conditions in which students are more academically motivated: :when they feel competent enough to complete the task at hand, when they see a direct link between their actions and an outcome, when the task has interest or value to them, and when completing a task brings social rewards" (Center on Education Policy, 2013).

These four conditions can be encorporated in homework assigments and school projects to better help the students understand the importance and purpose of each assignment.

Self-determination theory

One theory built to help better explain the continuum of motivation is self-determination theory (Deci et al., 1991). Originally developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, self-determination theory was created to help differentiate between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation by observing behavior and determining the level of self-determiniation found in each action (Vallerand et al., 2008). Self-determination refers to the degree to which people's actions occur due to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Vallerand et al., 2008).

Self-determination theory sees motivation as a continuum, with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on contrasting sides (Deci et al., 1991; Appendix A). Determining one's motivation level isn't about choosing whether he or she is intrinsically or externally motivated, it is more about determining how far along on a continuum that individual is for each specified task (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000). Along with the types of motivation, the self-determination of an individual is encorporated on the continuum as well.

If a student studies Spanish because he or she is interested in learning a new language, he or she would be intrinsically motivated and have high self-determination. The action of studying Spanish is occurring based on an internal desire to learn the language. If a student registers for Economics not because of an interest in the topic, but because it is a graduation requirement, that student's main goal is to pass the class, and therefore, fultill that graduation requirement. This student would be considered extrinsically motivated, and have low self-determination. The learning of Economics is solely being performed to obtain external reward of a passing grade.

High self-determination relates to high intrinsic motivation while low self-determination relates to high extrinsic motivation.

Self-determination theory is generalizable to all environments and, when applied to an academic environment, offers crucial information in regards to academic motivation (Zimmerman, 2000). The primary focus of self-determination theory is to emphasize the intrinsic tendencies in an individual by promoting an interest in learning and building confidence (Deci et al., 1991). Three strategies on how to promote interest and build confidence are offered: develop one's basic needs, manipulate the learning environment, and use goal setting techniques (Deci et al., 1991).

Developing one's three basic needs. The theory believes that individuals can grow and develop an intrinsic motivation style through the development of three psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000a). Competence refers to individuals needing to perfect and master certain tasks and learn new skills. Autonomous individuals need to feel in control of their choices and goals. Relatedness, also referred to as connectedness, states that "people need to feel connected to one another and feel a sense of belonging" (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Conditions that support these three experiences are said to foster the most volitional and high quality forms of motivation for an activity (Schunk, 2001).

Manipulating the learning environment. The development of one's competence, autonomy, and relatedness support one's self-determination and work together to form an autonomy-supportive environment (Deci et al., 1991). An autonomy-supportive environment is one where students endorse what they are doing in the classroom and where the teacher highly values the students' perspectives (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Creating this type of environment is

possible to do within a school setting. An autonomy-supportive environment can be made within the school counselor's office, within each classroom, and within the school building itself.

When creating an autonomy-supportive environment, numerous important key points were found (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). For teachers, providing the students with a rationale for a learning activity will help them understand the value of the activity in regards to themselves (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Students need to understand the personal utility of the activity or lesson (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Something that school counselors, teachers, and any educator can do to promote intrinsic motivation is to give them choices when it comes to activities or decisions (Deci et al., 1991). By giving the students choices and understanding their decisions and perspectives, the students internalize their decisions and thoughts.

When the value of an activity or decision is internalized, the students do not necessarily become more interested in the activity, but they do become willing to do the activity because of its personal value (Deci et al., 1991). Having educators promote intrinsic motivation will result in positive effects on students' motivation, learning, and achievement (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Motivation through goal setting. One particular learning strategy that self-determination theory works to develop is the use of goal setting, also referred to as goal framing. Goal setting is not a new concept. In fact, goal setting has played an important role in many theories of motivation going back to the late 1960's and Edwin A. Locke's pioneering research on goal setting and motivation (Heath et al., 1999). A goal is what an individual is "consciously trying to accomplish" and involves establishing a goal, creating appropriate steps to reach the goal, working on the tasks at hand, observing the performance, evaluating the goal progress, and continuing or altering the task (Schunk, 1990).

Just like motivation, goals can either be intrinsic or extrinsic, depending on the locus of causality (Deci et al., 1991). Intrinsic goal framing would allow a student to see a classroom topic in terms of how it is relevant to his or her life, such as providing personal growth, empowerment, or contributing to his or her lifestyle (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Extrinsic goal framing focuses on the outcome of a specific project or topic, such as how a student can obtain a passing grade.

In regards to academia, intrinsic goal framing is considered more beneficial because it leaves the student striving to accomplish goals and tasks because of an inherent need to do better, to grow as an individual, and to learn (Schunk, 1990). However, just like the motivation styles and Self-determination theory states, intrinsic goal framing is not going to be seen in all students within a school building. While intrinsic goal framing is seen as more valuable, students with extrinsic goals are just as capable of accomplishing them (Locke & Lantham, 2006).

The philosophy behind self-determination theory is seen throughout several already-established motivation curriculums, one of them belonging to Response to Interventions (RTI). Their motivation intervention, Encouraging Student Academic Motivation, was the basis for a motivational goal-setting class that was designed to provide students an opportunity to learn goal setting skills and build their confidence in an autonomy-supportive environment.

GOALS: A motivational goal-setting class

GOALS, a class designed by educators from a small, rural school in Southeast Minnesota, is based on RTI's motivation curriculum. The purpose of this curriculum is to give students an opportunity to choose areas of personal interest and develop that interest into an in-depth project or product (Course Description Guide, 2015). The curriculum includes learning

about personal motivation, research, journaling, creating and adhering to a project schedule, and project work (Course Description Guide, 2015).

By registering for this class, students receive a combination of direct instruction and individualized work time. Direct instruction topics include: uncovering one's motivation style, reporting on one's motivation style, learning about SMART goals and how to build an appropriate goal, monitoring and measuring one's goal, using evaluative procedures during goal setting, and re-setting and re-organizing a goal. Students are assigned to a school advisor who will help them brainstorm a project idea and monitor the student's progress by using their goals as reference points. The assigned advisor is also responsible for helping the student discover their motivation style and their motivation behind the specified project.

The GOALS class is taught over a semester-long period, and in this particular school, is offered to juniors and seniors as an elective course. If registered for this class, the student earns 0.5 credits. An example of the syllabus can be found in Appendix B. While RTI's academic motivation curriculum prefers the use of general goals, the GOALS class emphasizes the use of SMART goals as a way to teach students how to set a goal and how to measure their progress.

SMART goals. Knowing what type of goal to establish is an important factor. SMART goals are the type of goal that are incorporated into the GOALS curriculum. According to Brown (1999), using SMART goals with students is an effective way to teach how to build an achievable goal, whether it be intrinsic or extrinsic. Goals can be established based on the SMART acronym: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic/relevant, and timely. Making sure the goal is specific refers to being able to answer the who, what, when, where, and why questions of the goal. What wants to be accomplished? How will the goal be accomplished? When is the established time frame? According to Locke (1996) and his conscious goal setting study, he

found that goals that are both specific and difficult lead to the highest performance and render

the greatest amount of goal commitment.

Making the goal measurable means that the individual will know how to track and

monitor the progress of the goal. Attainable goals are ones that have planned steps on how to

achieve the goal, and those steps are ones that the individual is willing to work toward. A

relevant or realistic goal refers to one that represents an objective in which both student and

educator are willing to work toward (Locke & Lantham, 2006). Lastly, a timely goal is one that

is "grounded within a time frame (Ames, 1992). Putting a deadline on a goal gives it a sense of

urgency. In a school setting, realistic time frame may be by the end of the next grading period, or

at semester's end.

Individuals love to feel a sense of accomplishment, and goals are a great way for

individuals to achieve small feelings of achievement on their way to completing a much larger

goal (Ames, 1992). The use of goal setting can be implemented in a variety of ways, whether in

classrooms or individual assignments. Ensuring that students understand the concept of goal

setting and how to set an appropriate, smart goal for themselves in important.

Conclusion

Academic motivation has always been a difficult concept to research and measure

(Locke, 1996). Motivation is an internal factor, occurring inside all individuals. As mentioned

throughout this paper, it is unrealistic to assume that all students can just teach him or herself to

become intrinsically motivated. Sure, that is the goal that educators would love to instill in

students, but it isn't plausible. Instead of teaching an individual how to intrinsically motivate

themselves, teach them to understand how they are motivated and how to set goals. Little by

little, the individual will learn to strive for something, to expect something of him or herself, and learn what success feels like.

The motivation theory mentioned, self-determination theory, is one that helps students see how they themselves are motivated and one that looks to understand why students do what they do (Ames & Archer, 1988). By understanding the rationale behind a student's action, educators can determine how they are motivated and the best way to help them set and achieve a goal (Ames & Archer, 1988). To educators, students who do not seem motivated to try or succeed in class may be a source of great frustration. However, after learning about academic motivation and its different types, it could be possible that the student is just not being stimulated in a way that works for him or her. It is critical that educators begin to realize the importance of academic motivation, whether by offering a GOALS class such as the school mentioned above, or in some other format. Every student has the potential to be successful and it is the job of school counselors and educators alike to help facilitate that success.
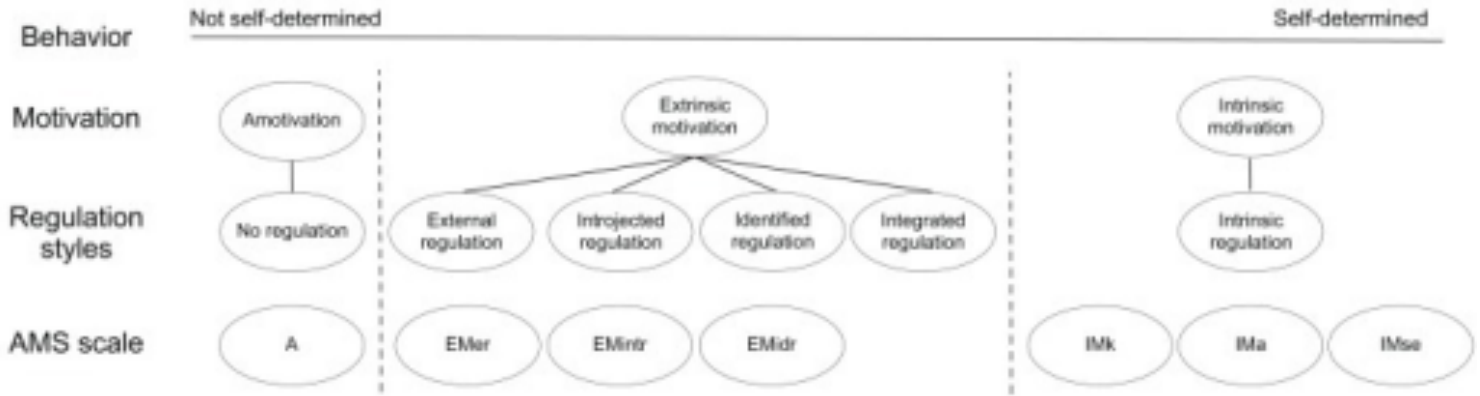
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Appendix A: Self-determination spectrum

Behavior	Not self-determined									Self-determined

Motivation

Amotivation   Extrinsic motivation   Intrinsic motivation

Regulation styles

No regulation   External regulation   Introjected regulation   Identified regulation   Integrated regulation   Intrinsic regulation

AMS scale

A   EMer   EMintr   EMidr   IMk   IMa   IMse

Appendix B: GOALS classroom syllabus

GOALS   Grades 11-12   Semester

Course description: This class (team taught by select teachers) will allow students to choose areas of personal interests and develop that interest into an in-depth project or product. The class will involve research, journaling, meeting with your advisor and community resource people as well as project work. GOALS will be open to juniors and seniors. Students may take this class more than one year.

Due Dates:

Number of weeks into semester	Assignment	Assignment description
1	Choose product/project	Pick a product to develop or a project to complete. This is something you will work on throughout the remainder of the semester.
2	DI (direct instruction): Motivation styles, SMART goals, using goals as reference points; Motivation assessment	Motivation assessment: Choose two activities that you do that you enjoy and two activities that you do but don't enjoy them. Analyze what type of motivation gets you through each activity. Write a 1 page paper on these activities.
3	Use knowledge of personal motivation and goal setting to create reference points to achieve your goal	Set up a weekly schedule of what you want to accomplish/how much progress you look to make each week. Think about different ways within the school and community you can make progress.
4	DI: Interview someone in the community who feels intrinsically motivated to do their career/job. Interview someone in the community who feels extrinsically motivated to do their career/job.	Before scheduling the interview: Make sure you have a thorough knowledge of extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation, as community members may ask you to explain. Compare and contrast interviews. Were there any overlap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators?

4-7	Schedule weekly check-ins with your advisor.	
8	Mid-point evaluation with advisor. Write a 1 page paper on your progress thus far.	Include in your paper: Are you behind? Ahead? What has been your main motivator? Has your motivation style changed throughout this process?
9	DI: Altering your goal	Evaluate whether or not you've changed or altered your goal at all since the start of the semester; learn how to re-adjust goals without losing the end result
11	DI: Applying your motivation style to any task	
13	Brainstorm a way to showcase your goal/project/product once complete. Displaying your goal/project/product will occur during the last week of the semester.	
9-17	Schedule weekly check-ins with your advisor.	
18	Final evaluation with advisor; showcase goal/project/product	

Assigning an advisor: Advisors who teach GOALS are XX, XX, and XX. Students will be assigned to a specified advisor after submitting their topic of interest. Advisor assignments will be based on the resources available to each advisor.

Grading scale:
90-100: A
80-89: B
70-79: C
60-69: D
below 59: F
*Please note: all advisors will adhear to the same grading standards
*Please note: this class can also be taken P/F if it is being taken for the second time, as long as the first registration of the class did not result in a grade of an F