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The Effects of Praise on Student Motivation in the Basic Communication Course¹

B. Scott Titsworth

Researchers interested in communication education have recognized the importance of various student characteristics relating to student success in the basic communication course. Several researchers have explored characteristics and behaviors such as communication apprehension (i.e., Beatty, Forst, & Stewart, 1986; Daly, Vangelisti & Weber, 1995) and student study habits (i.e., Carrell and Menzel, 1997) to determine how those characteristics relate to cognitive and behavioral outcomes for students. A conclusion from these research studies is that student characteristics are important predictors of student success in the basic communication course. This study explores how one student characteristic, motivation to learn, is influenced by messages of praise from the teacher.

Student motivation was conceptualized by Brophy (1987) as both a state and trait characteristic of students. “The *trait* of motivation to learn is an enduring disposition to strive for content knowledge and skill

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mastery in learning situations. The *state* of motivation to learn exists when student engagement in a particular activity is guided by the intention of acquiring the knowledge or mastering the skill that the activity is designed to teach” (Brophy, 1987, p. 40). Although research suggested motivation is an important determinant of student success in the basic course (Beatty et al., 1986; Carrell & Menzel, 1997), there is little guidance for teachers who want to motivate their students to learn.

Most educational theorists seem to agree that student motivation results, in part, from communication occurring in the classroom. For instance, Woolfolk (1995) explained that motivation is influenced by the “warmth” and “enthusiasm” displayed by the teacher during interactions with students (p. 456). Similarly, Pintrich and Schunk (1996) argued that motivation is primarily the result of teacher-student interactions. Although there are undoubtedly other influences on student motivation, there is strong agreement that teachers can and do impact student motivation. Accordingly, motivation is perhaps one of the most relevant topics for instructional communication research.

In fact, the topic of student motivation has received a great deal of attention by communication researchers. One area of research explored the relationship between *relational* components of messages and student motivation. For example, several researchers explored the effects of verbal and nonverbal immediacy on students’ levels of motivation (see Gorham & Christophel, 1990a; Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996). Although this research has consistently found that higher levels of immediacy are associated with higher levels of motivation, it has failed to account for the relationship between message *content* and student motivation (for a discus-

sion of relational versus content aspects of messages, see Norton, 1977; Nussbaum & Scott, 1980).

Other researchers devoted specific attention to message *content* as a predictor of student motivation. An example of this type of research involves the use of behavior alteration techniques (BATs) by teachers. This research concluded that student motivation is negatively associated with coercive behavior alteration techniques and positively associated with pro-social behavioral alteration techniques (see Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, 1990). Though this line of research can inform basic course instructors about how message content relates to student motivation, BATs were initially conceived as reactive strategies used by teachers to reduce student misbehavior rather than proactive strategies to encourage positive behavior (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1985; Kearney, Plax, Smith, and Sorensen, 1984). For that reason, research on BATs offers little practical advice on proactive communication techniques for increasing student motivation.²

² Several of the BATs (i.e., deferred reward from behavior, immediate reward for behavior, teacher feedback, etc.) identified by Kearney, Plax, Richmond and McCroskey (1984) are similar in nature to Brophy's (1981a, 1981b) characterization of praise. However, these BATs have been researched as pro-social strategies for getting students to cease off-task behavior. This form of communication is qualitatively distinct from praise which attempts to reinforce positive student behaviors. Moreover, in later articles Kearney and Plax (1997) argued that the BATs are conceptually distinct from "teacher approval/disapproval rates, teacher use of praise/criticism, and other select managerial teacher behaviors designed to desist negative student behaviors or reinforce positive ones" (p. 96).

This study extends previous research by exploring the effects of praise on students' levels of motivation in a simulated classroom setting. Brophy (1981a) explained that praise "expresses positive teacher affect (surprise, delight, excitement) and/or places the student's behavior in context by giving information about its value or its implications about the student's status" (p. 6). From this perspective, praise includes and moves beyond immediacy since it influences both content and relational components of a message. Praise is also a proactive strategy that is qualitatively distinct from the compliance-gaining, cease-and-desist strategies characterized by BAT research. This study was undertaken as a pilot attempt to document the effects of praise and to identify future avenues for this potentially important area of research.

Exploring praise within the context of the basic course has undeniable pedagogical utility. First, the basic course is uniquely susceptible to both positive and negative motivational outcomes because of the performance nature of the class. When giving speeches or other oral performance activities, students may perceive a great deal of risk because their behaviors are open to public scrutiny by peers and performance evaluations by the instructor. Because of the perceived risk involved in such performances, feedback provided by the teacher in these situations can potentially have substantial motivational implications. Put simply, effective feedback can serve to increase student motivation whereas ineffective feedback can lead to performance orientations among students (Elliott & Dweck, 1988) which could result in higher levels of anxiety (Beatty, Forst, & Stewart, 1986).

A second reason why praise should be explored within the context of the basic course lies in the possi-

bility that teachers may be more likely to use ineffective praise in this setting. Because most basic course instructors are aware of the risk perceived by students when giving performances, they often attempt to temper critical feedback with some element of praise. If this positive feedback appears insincere, contrived, or overly general (i.e., “This was a really good speech, but...”) the result may actually be lower student motivation (Black, 1992; Brophy, 1981a). In summary, the performance nature of the basic course raises unique motivational concerns for both teachers and students. Accordingly, research exploring the relationship between forms of teacher feedback and student motivation has a great deal of practical utility for basic course instructors and directors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Surprisingly little research exists on praise (Pressley & McCormick, 1985). The majority of literature provided prescriptive techniques for using praise (i.e., Black, 1992; Brophy, 1981b), however, those techniques have not been supported by research. Other articles offered theoretical insight into how praise should affect student motivation, metacognition, and self efficacy (i.e., Brophy, 1981a; Emmer, 1987/1988), however, those theoretical predictions have not been investigated. Pressley and McCormick (1985) summarized the need for investigation by writing “[praise] is potentially a great program of research that would be informative about an inexpensive but too rarely exploited approach to classroom motivation” (p. 99).

Conventional wisdom suggests that praise is the expression of favorable judgment. However, as Emmer

(1987/1988) observed, “within this broad concept lies ranges of expression from highly affective to simply approving, from general and unspecific to focused and explicit, and from personal to behavioral” (p. 32). Like any other message strategy, praise may be used in an effective or ineffective manner. Black (1992) warned that “most teachers aren’t trained or coached to praise students effectively. And these researchers agree that ineffective and indiscriminate use of praise can actually hurt students more than it helps them” (p. 2).

Because ineffective praise could be detrimental to students’ motivation, “tips” for effective praise have been advanced by several authors who concluded, for example, that praise must be administered in response to specific student behaviors (Black, 1992; Brophy, 1981a; Emmer, 1987/1988). That is, praise should not be general in nature (i.e., “You are doing well in the class”), but should be tied to specific behaviors exhibited by students (i.e., “The way in which you studied for the test had a positive impact on your performance”). Overly general praise, while providing external motivation, may not increase the intrinsic motivation of students.

In addition to making praise criterion referenced, Black (1992), and Brophy (1981a) also argued that praise must be spontaneous. Praise administered in a predictable fashion may be perceived as insincere and students may attribute the praise to “the teacher’s propensity to comment, not to any special accomplishment” (Black, 1992, p. 25). For praise to be effective, it must not only be tied to a specific student behavior, but it also must seem spontaneous and genuine.

Brophy (1981a) reasoned that for praise to motivate it must attribute success to behavior and imply future success from continuing the behavior. By applying praise in this manner, students may begin to make

positive attributions of their own behavior and exhibit higher levels of motivation toward using specific behaviors in the future. If success is not attributed to behavior, the praise may not function as a reinforcer. In summary, Black (1992) and Brophy (1981a) suggest that effective praise should contain the following elements:

- *Sincerity* – the praise should show that the teacher is genuinely pleased with the student performance;
- *Spontaneity* – praise should surprise the student and not be viewed as an automatic or expected external reward from the teacher;
- *Criterion Based* – praise should be offered only after the student exhibits a high level of positive behavior; and
- *Attribute success to behavior* – for praise to work, it must identify the student behavior being praised and imply that future successes will be achieved if the behavior is continued.

From the perspective of reinforcement theory, praise is a potentially powerful motivational tool for teachers. Reinforcement theory assumes that “teachers should behave in ways which will foster the development of feelings of mastery and of intrinsic motivation to learn in children who have not already developed them, and to reinforce them in those who have” (Brophy, 1972, p. 243). Reinforcement theory is based on the premise that individuals learn behavior by reacting to the positive or negative responses from others (see Skinner, 1969). As students exhibit positive behaviors, teachers react with “reinforcers” which motivate students to continue displaying such behaviors. As noted by Brophy (1981a), praise is one example of a reinforcement technique for positive behaviors:

Praise is widely recommended as a reinforcement method for use by teachers Praise is free, and it is usually seen as desirable not only because it can be an effective reinforcer but because it is thought to provide encouragement to students, to help build self esteem, to help build a close teacher-student relationship, and so forth. (p. 7)

In essence, praise is a tool used by teachers to increase students' intrinsic motivation to enact positive behaviors. When student behaviors are praised by the teacher, those behaviors are associated with positive outcomes and the motivation to exhibit those behaviors increases. Thus, theory suggests that praise should be an antecedent to student motivation.

Based on this theoretical understanding of praise and reinforcement, it is reasonable to predict a positive relationship between teachers' use of praise and student motivation. Moreover, motivation and affect towards a class or instructor are strongly related (Richmond, 1990). For that reason it is also reasonable to predict that teachers' use of praise would be positively related to student affect. Hypothetical teacher-student interactions were constructed to experimentally test these tentative predictions. The following research questions guided data analysis:

- RQ1: Is a teacher's use of praise predictive of student motivation?
- RQ2: Is a teacher's use of praise predictive of student affect?
- RQ3: How do students perceive a teacher's use of praise or neutral feedback in the classroom?

METHOD

Given the nature of the research questions and the exploratory nature of this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Statistical analyses were used to determine the effect of praise on student affect and motivation levels while student explanations of their feelings were used to describe the effects of praise.

Participants

Sixty-four students enrolled in the basic communication course at a large Midwestern university took part in the study. There were slightly more males ($n=35$; 55%) than females ($n=26$; 41%) and the majority of the participants were Sophomores ($n=29$; 45%) or Juniors ($n=25$; 39%) with only a handful being Seniors ($n=9$; 14%) and Freshmen ($n=1$; 2%). The average age of the participants was 20.87 years old ($sd=2.83$) and they had been in school for an average of 5 semesters ($sd=1.9$). The average GPA for participants was 3.06 ($sd=.43$).

Materials and Procedures

All participants were enrolled in one of two back-to-back sections of the basic course taught by the same instructor. Participants were assigned to either the experimental or control condition and were instructed that they would listen to a short interaction between a teacher and student concerning the student's performance on an exam. The standard instructions indicated

that the participants would answer a few questions about the interaction at the conclusion of the tape and that they would answer those questions from the perspective of the student in the simulation. That is, participants were asked to assume the role of the student in the tape and indicate how they would feel based upon the interaction with the teacher.³

An audio tape was used to control for possible nonverbal immediacy effects (i.e., attractiveness, eye contact, etc.) during the simulation. The simulated interaction involved a male student interacting with a female teacher about his performance on a midterm examination. In both conditions the student was told that he received a "B" on the exam, a single letter grade improvement from the first exam. In the experimental condition, the teacher praised the student on the methods he used to study for the midterm. For example, in response to the student's description of how he studied for the essay exam the students in the "praise" condition hear the teacher respond by stating: "I really want to commend you on your studying. By practicing the essay questions you were able to organize your thoughts more clearly and you were also able to include more information in your answers I hope that you realize that the success you had on this test was because of your actions in preparing for it If you work like

³ Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen (1988) observed that the use of simulations and role-playing is common in both communication and education research. Validity of this technique is dependent on the believability of the scenario and the accuracy with which variables are manipulated. Qualitative data were analyzed for any indications that the scenarios were not believable and none were found. Recommendations by Brophy (1981b) and Black (1992) were used to ensure valid manipulation of the praise variable. Even with these considerations in mind, the artificial nature of these scenarios limit the generalizability of the results.

this on the final you can probably improve your grade even more.

In the control condition, students in a separate room heard a similar interaction involving the same teacher and student, however, the teacher provided neutral feedback about student's efforts by simply acknowledging the student's grade and asking if there were additional questions. Based upon the simulations created, the praise interaction lasted three minutes and 27 seconds and the neutral interaction lasted two minutes and 10 seconds.⁴

Although it would have been preferable to conduct the study in more naturalistic conditions (i.e., to study the effects of praise in an actual rather than simulated class), two reasons prompted the use of simulated classroom scenarios. First, the exploratory nature of the study warranted a more cautious approach. By using simulations, it was easier to manage nonverbal behaviors, environmental conditions, and other potential confounding variables. If the experimentally manipulated scenarios result in significant effects, the logical next step would be to conduct a more naturalistic study. Second, there are ethical considerations involved which outweighed the potential benefits of a more naturalistic design. It would clearly be problematic to require random application of praise or neutral feedback to students in a natural classroom setting. By using simulations in the experimental procedures, praise and

⁴ As noted by one of the anonymous reviewers, the time differential between the praise and neutral groups could confound results of this study. This possibility was considered when the scenarios were constructed, however, Brophy's (1981b) description of effective praise suggested that it should take longer than ineffective praise or neutral feedback. Thus, valid manipulation of this variable requires some time differential.

neutral conditions could be manipulated without harming student's motivation levels in their actual class.

Two measures were used to assess the dependent variables. Affective learning was measured using a semantic differential scale developed by Scott and Wheelless (1975) and later revised by Anderson (1979). The affective learning scale assesses students' affect toward the course subject matter, the instructor, taking additional courses with the same instructor and taking additional classes in the subject matter. The scale was adapted to include the "taking additional courses from the same instructor" dimension for the purposes of this study. A four factor solution was used where higher scores indicated higher affect towards the class as a whole. In addition to the four factors, a total affect score may be calculated by adding the scores for each of the factors. Reliability of the instrument is high with alpha estimates ranging from .86 to .98 (Gorham, 1988; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond, 1990). Alpha reliability estimates for the present study were strong (total affect, .97; instructor, .92; behaviors, .93; enroll in course, .64; enroll with instructor, .97). Construct validity of the Affective Learning Scale was also reported to be strong (Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985).

Student motivation was operationalized using the Student Motivation Scale (SMS) originally developed by Beatty, Behnke and Froelich (1980). The original version of the SMS was a one-item semantic differential scale which was later expanded to include twelve items (Christophel, 1990a). Responses to each of the twelve items were added to get an overall student motivation score where higher numbers represented higher levels of motivation. Reliability estimates for the twelve item

scale ranged from .95 to .96 (Christophel, 1990a) and considerable construct validity existed for the instrument (Christophel, 1990a; Richmond 1990). The alpha reliability estimate for the present study was .97.

Also included in the survey packet were open ended questions designed to elicit qualitative responses from the participants. The first question asked students to describe their feelings about the interaction from the standpoint of the student. The second question asked participants to comment on teacher behaviors that were either highly effective or ineffective, based upon what they heard in the interaction. To avoid “coaching” students in terms of answers to the open ended questions, the word “praise” was not used at any time when explaining the procedures or in the written directions accompanying the materials. The entire experimental procedure, including listening to the audio-tape and completing the survey packet, lasted approximately 15 minutes for both the experimental and control groups.

Data Analysis

All quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows. Multivariate analysis of variance procedures and independent sample t-tests were used to determine whether there were significant mean differences in affect or motivation between the experimental and control groups. Alpha was set at .05 for all statistical tests. Additionally, qualitative comments were analyzed for recurring themes. The researcher along with a colleague not involved in the study analyzed participant responses for general themes that could classify statements. After generating independent lists of themes, the two coders met to discuss the themes and combine the

two lists. This procedure resulted in 3 themes characterizing the experimental group responses and 3 themes characterizing the control group responses. Armed with this list of themes, the coders then placed individual responses into the categories. After each person categorized participant responses, the coders compared placement of each response and discussed differences. In the case of differences, the coders discussed how the response should be coded until mutual agreement was achieved.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Before conducting t-tests on the dependent variables, a MANOVA was computed to determine if significant multivariate differences existed. Means for each of the dependent variables and means for each of the factors of the affect scale are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations
for Dependent Variables

| Variable | <i>M</i> | sd |
|--------------------------|----------|-------|
| Total Affect | 85.22 | 22.32 |
| Course Content | 21.36 | 4.92 |
| Instructor | 21.86 | 5.66 |
| Enroll in Similar Course | 20.30 | 6.25 |
| Enroll with Instructor | 21.70 | 7.18 |
| Motivation | 81.27 | 20.50 |

The overall F for the multivariate test was significant, $F=33.92$ (2, 60); $p \leq .001$. Subsequent t-tests indicated that mean group differences were significant for each of the dependent measures and sub-measures. Means for each group and *t* statistics are reported in Table 2. As shown in the table, the group hearing the simulated praise reported higher levels of hypothetical affect and motivation than the group hearing simulated neutral feedback.

Table 2
Tests of Mean Differences in Motivation and Affect

| Variable | Praise Group | | Neutral Group | | t | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-------|---------------|-------|------|---|
| | M | sd | M | sd | | |
| Total Affect | 98.85 | 12.02 | 69.76 | 12.28 | 6.61 | * |
| Course Content | 24.29 | 3.10 | 18.03 | 4.48 | 6.56 | * |
| Instructor | 25.2 | 2.82 | 18.10 | 5.75 | 6.12 | * |
| Enroll in Similar Course | 23.79 | 4.07 | 16.33 | 5.93 | 5.78 | * |
| Enroll with Instructor | 25.58 | 3.91 | 17.30 | 7.52 | 5.42 | * |
| Motivation | 94.90 | 10.64 | 65.20 | 17.47 | 7.99 | * |

* $p \leq .001$

Multiple regression procedures were also calculated to determine how much variance was accounted for in the dependent variables by the manipulation of praise. In addition to including praise in the regression equation, age, semester in school, and grade point average of

the participants were also included as possible criterion variables. Stepwise procedures were used to generate a descriptive model. Age, semester in school, and GPA did not account for significant amounts of variance in any of the dependent variables and were not entered into the equations. Overall, the use of praise significantly accounted for 43% of the variance in students' affect toward the class and 53% of the variance in student motivation levels. Praise also accounted for significant variance in each of the sub-scales on the affective learning instrument (subject matter, 35%; instructor, 41%; enrolling in course, 35%; enroll with instructor, 41%).

Qualitative Analysis

Are there differences in students' perceptions of interactions with teachers who use praise compared to interactions where teachers do not use praise? This question guided the qualitative analysis in this study. The qualitative data were used to accomplish two objectives. First, the qualitative data helped determine whether the students perceived the experimental manipulation. That is, did students perceive the experiential interaction (with praise) differently than the control interaction (neutral)? If differences in perceptions exist, there is reason to believe that the experiential manipulation had validity. Second, the qualitative data may be used to help explain why differences in motivation and affect existed between the experimental and control groups.

Experimental Group Themes. In the experimental group, participants articulated two themes relating to the quality of the teacher's feedback and one theme

relating to perceptions of their own behaviors based upon the teacher's feedback. The first two themes, caring and effective feedback, characterize the participants' perceptions that the teacher provided quality feedback to the student about his or her behavior. For instance, participants who commented on the *caring* aspect of the teacher's feedback noted that "The teacher does well in showing that she cares about the student and illustrates that she is very willing to help the student." Another participant wrote, "She was very positive about his improvements and seemed to care a lot about his grade. If any teachers were really this helpful and positive it would make life easier." All comments indicated that they not only perceived the teacher to be immediate, but that they also felt good about what the teacher said, implying that the content aspect of the message was contributing to their perceptions.

A second theme emerging from the experimental group related to the overall *effectiveness* of the teacher's feedback. Many participants commented that they liked the specificity of the feedback. For example, one person wrote "I think that the praise she gave was highly effective. She pointed out the differences in the scores to show that studying really hard does help you improve. She also took the time to discuss the test with the student. She could have just let him look over the test and leave it at that." Another participant commented that the feedback of the teacher was effective because of the effect that it had on the student: "I thought that the teacher's praising of the student was highly effective in building confidence and self-esteem." These comments were particularly revealing given that participants were unaware that the specific focus of the experiment was on teacher praise.

Participants hearing the simulated praise also indicated that they appreciated the *encouraging* nature of the feedback and the fact that she recognized the behaviors of the student. For instance, one participant noted, "I would feel more sure of myself because the teacher recognized the work that I put into studying for the test. I would probably be motivated to go study for the final." Another participant wrote, "The teacher complimented the student on how hard he studied and the grade he got. I would feel very proud of myself." Thus, students hearing simulated praise indicated they would be proud of their performance, in part, because of the feedback of the teacher.

Themes Emerging from the Control Group.

Participants hearing simulated neutral feedback articulated three primary themes. The first two themes, wants praise and lack of feedback, related to the lack of content in the teacher's feedback. The third theme, businesslike interaction, simply attempted to characterize the tone of the interaction.

Many participants indicated that they *wanted praise* for their effort. For instance, one person commented that he or she wanted validation of effort: "I think he [student] is concerned with whether or not his effort was really worth it. He would like for the instructor to see that he is truly interested in doing as good of a job as possible." Another student viewed the teacher's role as that of a "motivator" and commented on the lack of praise: "I would tell her [the teacher] to try and make a difference in students' lives. I would be more involved and care. More supporting and encouraging."

Related to the lack of praise theme was a theme describing a general *lack of feedback* from the teacher. Some of these comments were very broad: "She should have told him good job on improvements and encour-

aged him to talk to her with any more questions.” Other comments were more specific, yet still observed that the interaction was lacking: “The teacher did not respond supportively to comments the student was making. I would say something about a previous test and she would not be a (friend-?) or encourager. She did not respond at all, but did just enough to be an OK teacher.” These comments, although very similar to those in the first theme, suggested that students perceived the interaction to be generally lacking in terms of detail.

The majority of participant responses tried to characterize the tone of the interaction. Many individuals used a *business metaphor* to describe the interaction. For example, one participant said that the interaction “was strictly a business conversation except for ‘How are you?’” Another participant wrote, “The teacher didn’t want to get very personal, it was like she was there to help because it was her job and she had to. She wasn’t very helpful, you would think she was teaching a huge lecture hall and she wouldn’t have a chance to get to know the students.” Several participants indicated that the effect of such a businesslike interaction were negative. For instance, one person wrote, “I would feel unimportant, unrewarded, and unmotivated to do better.”

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this pilot study was to test the effects of praise on students’ levels of state motivation. By using tenets of reinforcement theory, it was predicted that students hearing simulated praise would report significantly higher levels of hypothetical state motivation and affect than students hearing neutral feedback. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data indi-

cated that there were meaningful effects. The group hearing praise reported significantly higher levels of hypothetical motivation and affect than the group hearing neutral feedback. Additionally, there were significant differences in students' hypothetical affect toward the course content, instructor, likelihood of enrolling in a similar course and likelihood of enrolling with the same instructor. Subsequent regression analyses indicated that the use of praise accounted for large portions of variance in motivation levels, affect levels, and subscales of affect. Furthermore, analysis of the qualitative data suggests that students not only reacted differently because of the type of feedback provided by the instructor, but they also made internal attributions for success as a result of hearing praise.

Importantly, the goal of this pilot study was not to determine definitive answers to the question of whether or not praise is an effective reinforcement tool for teachers. Rather, the purpose of this study was to gather initial evidence concerning the effects of praise and then to highlight potential venues of research. Before proceeding with a discussion of research possibilities, one important point needs to be considered. Results of this study, which are consistent with both Brophy (1981a, 1981b) and Black's (1992) discussions of the concept, suggest that if praise is used with careful consideration (i.e., it is sincere, it provides contextual explanations of what the student did) there are many potential benefits for students. Although the results of this single study cannot draw definitive conclusions, teachers are encouraged to consider ways for improving their own praising behaviors with students because of the positive motivational outcomes which may occur.

Although the results must be interpreted with caution, the findings of this study suggest current theo-

ries of student motivation should be expanded to include teacher communication characteristics beyond low-inference immediacy behaviors. Based on the data, it is possible to conclude that the content of a teacher's message can and does effect students' levels of hypothetical motivation and affect. Though extensive research on instructor immediacy behaviors and other relational aspects of messages should not be minimized in importance, the content of a message — what the teacher says — must also be taken into consideration when examining motivation in the classroom. Our current theoretical understanding of classroom motivation must move beyond isolated studies of instructor immediacy and reactive behavioral alteration techniques to include specific pro-active motivational strategies like praise. Put simply, communication-based theories of classroom motivation must be refined and/or expanded to address variables like praise before these theories can substantially inform pedagogical practice.

In addition to expanding theoretical understanding of relevant classroom motivation variables, a number of potential directions for additional research on praise in the basic course should be explored. At minimum, this study suggests that student reports of hypothetical motivation and affect are greater when receiving simulated praise rather than simulated neutral feedback. The simulations used in this study could not take into account other variables influencing student motivation in an actual classroom setting. Because the scenarios were limited in terms of generalizability, future research efforts are necessary before the tentative conclusions of this study can be applied to situations other than simulated interactions.

One direction for future research is to address limitation in the scenarios used for this study. For instance,

the praise simulation was somewhat longer than the neutral condition in terms of time. This difference in time is a potential confounding variable and should be controlled in future studies, even though Brophy (1981a) suggests that effective praise should take longer than ineffective praise or neutral feedback. Additionally, the teacher in these simulations was female. Research on teacher immediacy suggests that female instructors are perceived as more immediate than males, which could influence student reports of motivation and affect (Christophel, 1990b). Thus, future research should explore whether or not student reactions to praise differ depending on whether or not the instructor or student is male or female. Moreover, instructional communication researchers should heed Nussbaum's (1992) call for naturalistic observation of teacher behaviors. Specifically, future research should systematically observe real teachers in actual classroom situations to determine how praise is used and with what effect.

Future research efforts should also extend results of this study by exploring the cumulative effect of praise over time. An assumption of reinforcement theory is that repeated use of reinforcement is what causes motivation to increase (Brophy 1981b; Skinner, 1969). Future research needs to determine how praise works over the course of an entire term, year, or even a student's career. Such longitudinal research designs may also uncover how motivation either develops or wains.

Brophy (1981a) and Black (1992) also recognized that some types of praise are better than other types. They reason that insincere, general, and anticipated praise could be detrimental to motivation, however, these dimensions were not explored. Future research should determine what the effects of "bad praise" actually are and whether students perceive differences

between “good praise” and “bad praise.” In this study the neutral feedback did not elicit overwhelmingly negative responses, which leads one to believe that students may like any feedback regardless of whether it follows the suggestions articulated by Brophy (1981a). Additionally, by looking at the effect of different types of praise, research could begin to uncover individual differences in perceptions of praise. For example, does praise function differently when comparing students motivated through intrinsic rather than extrinsic cues?

Finally, in the specific context of the basic course several questions remain concerning the effects of teacher praise. Do students react differently to praise related to performances (i.e., speaking assignments) rather than written assignments? Is teacher praise effective at orienting students toward a mastery orientation rather than a performance orientation? Can praising low-inference performance behaviors play a role in reducing student apprehension toward performance activities? How often do basic course teachers enact specific praising behaviors? How is praise related to other teacher communication behaviors like immediacy, clarity and behavior alteration techniques? Does praise significantly impact student performance on examinations or presentations? These are only a sample of the potential questions which remain unanswered.

In summary, this pilot study established a foothold in terms of understanding the effects of praise on student motivation. In a carefully designed simulation, students hearing praise reported higher motivation and affect levels than students hearing neutral feedback. Armed with these initial findings, additional research efforts can explore the effects of praise in a more systematic fashion and our current theoretical understanding of classroom motivation can be expanded. If

the results of this study are replicated in future research, justification should quickly emerge for training basic course teachers how to implement effective praising behaviors in their performance evaluations of students.

Motivation is undoubtedly one of the key variables in any learning situation. In the basic communication course there are ample opportunities for teachers to motivate or de-motivate students and, for that reason, basic course instructors and directors should continue to explore tools like praise as strategies that can be used to facilitate higher motivation levels. By undertaking such research, we may discover important pedagogical tools for fostering student communication expertise and commitment toward life-long learning.

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