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## Motivation and Culture

*Motivation* is the natural human capacity to direct energy in pursuit of a goal. Human beings are purposeful. People are constantly learning, and when they do, they use their energy through attention, concentration, action, and imagination to make sense of the world. Most learning in schools, work, and social life is active and volitional, constructing meaning from experiences and the information available, such as when solving a problem or engaging in a conversation. There is substantial evidence that motivation is consistently and positively related to educational achievement. Motivation is important because throughout life, the motivated person will surpass the less motivated person in performance and outcomes, even though both have similar capability and the same opportunities.

Who one is culturally and how one interacts with the world reflect a deep connection between language, values, beliefs, and learned behaviors as they pervade every aspect of life and the experiences at hand. Perspectives on learning in school and how the roles of teacher and student are viewed are culturally transmitted through personal history, religion, the media, family, and political orientation. Every learning situation is mediated by such cultural influences. If reasoned debate, impersonal objectivity, and competitive testing and grading procedures are preferred, a distinct set of cultural norms and values are being represented.

This entry discusses the links between motivation, culture, and learning, and it outlines the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching, which examines four conditions that act individually and in concert to enhance the intrinsic motivation to learn.

### Inseparability of Motivation and Culture

Attention is to learning as heat is to fire. It begins the process, and as focus intensifies, it enables deeper and more complex learning. Individuals are induced to pay attention to the things that matter to them. What matters is determined through one's cultural perspectives; what families, peers, beliefs, and values indicate is important and relevant. Goals such as success or achievement,

and personal traits such as ambition or initiative, have different meanings to people with different backgrounds. In this way, group norms have a powerful motivational force. Faced with a difficult choice between striving for individual success in college or working full-time to contribute to the economic welfare of one's family, people often will determine such incompatible possibilities based on ethnic and familial norms.

In accessing and directing energy in moment-to-moment situations, motivation is governed to a large extent by emotions, which in turn are socialized through culture. Emotions influence task engagement, whether it be solving a math problem, baking muffins, or texting a friend. Frustration is a good example of this phenomenon. When people become frustrated during the learning process, some stop what they are doing and come back to it later, some stop only momentarily and renew what they were doing with greater determination, while others stop altogether. The list of possibilities goes further because what frustrates people is likely to be learned in different families with different reactions modeled within those families.

In terms of communication, the energy and desire to speak, write, self-express, and contribute information or opinions adheres to cultural influences. When to speak, when to interrupt, and when to disagree and with whom are significantly determined by what has been learned within one's culture. For some, challenging the opinion of their elders would be a serious transgression, while for others it would be quite normal. Feeling unthreatened and respected is often a necessary environment for communication among people with different cultural backgrounds. Even under such circumstances, immediate emotions still influence the energy to communicate. When people find another person or topic interesting or relevant, they are more likely to converse. If the response to the circumstances or the topic is boredom, indifference, or embarrassment, individuals are less likely to become involved.

People represent their own reality based on a unique history of learning and experience and their beliefs about them. Their internal logic about why they may want to learn (or not learn) something may not correspond to their own set of assumptions and values but is present nonetheless. The same is true of people's willingness or unwillingness to communicate. Being an effective teacher, leader, or communicator requires an openness to understanding differing perspectives and the desire to construct a mutually respectful situation.

## The Power of Intrinsic Motivation

Since the brain has an inherent propensity for knowing what it wants, relevance guides its inclinations. When people see that what they are learning makes sense and is important according to their own perspectives, their motivation emerges as a physical energy, an emotional state to support learning. What is culturally relevant to individuals evokes an *intrinsic motivation*—acting or responding for the satisfaction of what one is doing (solving an important problem, e.g., budgeting money for food and rent) or the value of what one is doing (learning how to care for children, friends, or family). All people want is to be effective at what they value. What individuals value engages them emotionally.

The more powerful the feeling that accompanies an experience, the more likely it will be remembered. Strong emotions release hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol, that heighten alertness and enhance the memory of the experience. These hormones are likely to be present while some of one's strongest memories, like deep joy and romance, are being made.

What is personally relevant to people is understood by the degree to which they can identify their own perspectives and values in the topics, discussions, and methods of learning. Relevance while learning means the learning process is connected to who the people are, what they care about, and how they perceive and know. For example, if an individual wanted to learn about the economy, one of the following topics might be most relevant: home mortgages for low-income borrowers, credit card interest for college students, or employment opportunities for African American college graduates. To gather more information about one of these topics, the individual might read about it online, view a television special, surf the Internet for information, or interview local bank representatives. Relevance is present when learning is placed within personal and cultural meanings as well as the learning orientations of the individual.

Relevance is just as important for communication because it stimulates natural curiosity, one of the most potent intercultural competencies. Individuals want to make sense of the things that matter to them and so are prone to discussing relevant topics to further their understanding. At such times, one feels interest, which is the emotional nutrient for a good conversation. People *want* to talk.

Learning to be effective at what is valued is called *competence*. It is part of the human will to matter and to have dreams that can be reached. People are genetically programmed to explore, reflect, and change things in order to have a more influential interaction with their environment. The desire to be competent extends across all cultures. That is why something as elemental as playing with building blocks evokes positive emotions among infants everywhere. As people grow older, socialization and culture largely determine what they think is worth accomplishing. When learning and communicating, individuals are attentive and responsive to feedback about anything they are doing that matters to them, because it provides evidence for the quality of their understanding and clues for making progress toward valued goals. Without the need to be competent, trial-and-error learning would be impossible, as would success in school or the simple advancement of a score in a video game.

## A Macrocultural Model for Engaging Intrinsic Motivation

The impact of culture on the human perspective is a complex interaction. Through cultural experiences individuals form complex identities and personal histories within distinct living contexts. For example, a person is not only older or only Mexican or only female; she is older *and* Mexican *and* female. But this example is still too simple because it does not include spiritual beliefs, sexual orientation, income status, or profession, among other possible cultural characteristics. Culturally, every person has a variety of identities that are woven into a personal history and lived in an individual context. Therefore, there is no single way for a teacher or a leader to view people in their work based *only* on the limited aspects of their culture.

In terms of education, the foremost challenge, at every level and in every venue, is to create equitable and successful learning environments for *all* learners. Realistically, accomplishing this goal means respecting the cultural integrity of every learner while enhancing their motivation to learn and communicate. Responding to the intricacy of every individual's multiple cultural identities is an enormous challenge. To arrive closer to meeting this challenge, a macrocultural pedagogical model was developed: The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching. Instead of using a microcultural perspective that, for example, identifies a specific ethnic group and prescribes particular approaches to teaching according to the assumed characteristics of that specific ethnic group, this motivational framework is built on principles that apply within and across cultures, creating a more pluralistic approach that can potentially elicit the intrinsic motivation of all learners.

One reservation about microcultural models is that they may work well with one ethnic or racial group but may not be effective with another group. However, microcultural approaches to teaching and communicating offer effective complementary models that can be used in tandem with the Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching.

The model is based on the understanding that it is part of human nature to be curious, to be active, to initiate thought, to make meaning from experience, and to be effective at what is valued. These primary sources of motivation reside in people across all cultures. When people can see, from their points of view, that what they are learning is important, their motivation emerges. This motivational framework has been field tested and used nationally and internationally. There is evidence that when this model is used for designing educational experiences, it is capable of creating a common culture that most learners can accept.

The motivational framework systematically and dynamically represents four motivational conditions, namely, (1) inclusion, (2) attitude, (3) meaning, and (4) competence, which act individually and in concert to enhance intrinsic motivation to learn.

### *Inclusion*

The criteria for establishing inclusion are *respect* and *connectedness*. In respectful environments, people can self-express without threat or blame and know that their perspectives matter.

Connectedness for people is a sense of belonging, knowing that they are cared for by at least some of the group, caring for others in turn, and sharing a common purpose. Their intrinsic motivation emerges because they feel safe, can be authentic, and can voice their opinions.

### Attitude

The criteria for developing a positive attitude are *relevance* and *volition*. Relevance and its relationship to intrinsic motivation have been well discussed earlier in this entry. People feel a sense of volition when they can personally endorse their own participation or learning to others. If they were given a choice, they would want to do what they are doing. When individuals are in a situation that matters and they want to be there, they are willingly motivated to communicate and to make sense of what they are experiencing.

### Meaning

The criteria for enhancing meaning are *engagement* and *challenge*. Engagement means a person is actively involved in a task such as constructing or changing an idea, solution, or decision. Challenge occurs when present knowledge or skills have to be further developed into a new idea or a better decision. Challenge is the available learning opportunity, and engagement is the kind of action a person takes to meet it. Acting purposefully to meet a challenging, or important, goal is intrinsically motivating because it is the essence of human existence.

### Competence

The criteria for engendering competence are *effectiveness* and *authenticity*. Due to survival and evolutionary instincts, people naturally attempt to be effective, that is, to strive toward having a useful influence on their environments, for example, solving problems and learning skills to make themselves more capable. Authenticity means that for learning to be more effective, it should be connected to one's actual life circumstances and values. These criteria elicit intrinsic motivation because when people see that they are grasping important knowledge that can be applied to their real lives, they naturally feel more capable and less vulnerable.

To construct an intrinsically motivating and culturally responsive learning environment, a teacher or leader would create in collaboration with the students or participants these four intersecting conditions from the beginning to the end of a lesson plan, learning unit, or meeting. Such a learning situation would be characterized by respect for diversity, engagement of all learners, and a safe, inclusive, and respectful climate with practices that cross cultures and are integrated for equitable learning for all.

*Margery B. Ginsberg and Raymond Wlodkowski*

***See also*** Co-Creation of Meaning; Cultural Patterns; Culture Learning; Learning Styles Across Cultures

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## Multicultural Counseling

Multicultural counseling refers to counseling that considers the various cultural identities of the individual present in the counseling session. Traditionally, this type of designation referred to counseling that occurred when there were obvious cultural differences between the counselor and the client, such as racial and ethnic differences. More recently, as the discussion on cross-cultural matters has expanded, there is recognition that all counseling encounters are cross-cultural and therefore multicultural. This entry begins with definitions of basic concepts and goes on to discuss the ADDRESSING model as a way of operationalizing people's various cultural identities. Case studies of how the counseling process is affected by cultural differences are explained, and the entry