

Motivation interventions in education

[Education](#)



Motivation is a subject that has generated a plethora of theoretical models over time (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waugh, 2002), and is one of the most researched, complex, and controversial issues in education (Weiner, 1990). Ames (1990) defines motivation in education as a concern for students' motivation to learn rather than to do. Motivation also leads to achievement, but only focusing on achievement admonishes the ends of the student's desire to learn and the operational dedication to the educational progression (Ames, 1990). Motivational theories have substantially changed over the years, typically now focusing on the cognitive elements that drive an individual to make choices such as perception, interpretation, and belief (Ormrod, 2009).

Early motivational theory is manifested in the work of Sigmund Freud who suggested that human behavior is defined by an instinctive desire to satisfy unconscious and preconscious needs, mostly sexual in nature (Weiner, 1990). One's unconscious beliefs have a considerable effect on behavior, and motivation was merely the effect of sexual stages in life (Ray, 1992). Freud believed that one's behavior could not be identified by the individual but rather with the assistance of a trained psychotherapist (Weiner, 1990).

True behaviorists, even labeled "radical" (Bruning, Schraw, & Norby, 2011) such as B. F. Skinner believed in the absence of motivation and instead drive such as depriving an animal of food and water to make it thirsty. Skinner believed that one's behavior was determined by past reinforcements and the uncertainties of environment (Ormrod, 2009). Skinner argued that consequences engage behavior, and behavior could be manipulated with the dispersion of positive consequence (Bruning et al., 2011).

Human beings were but blank slates waiting to be shaped and formed; frequent responses to behavior and progression in small steps would foster the fundamentals of learning (Bruning et al., 2011). Ormrod (2009) also notes that some behaviorists believe in a purposeful element to an individual's behavior—one determines their behavior in order to attain a particular reward or consequence.

As psychology became more humanistic in nature, Abraham Maslow developed a need theory for motivation. He believed that need gratification was the most important single principle driving human development and motivation. His Hierarchy of Need is predicated on the most basic needs being met before others can be considered: 1) physiological needs, 2) safety needs, 3) love needs, 4) esteem needs, and 5) self-actualization needs (as cited in Taormina & Gao, 2013). Humanists like Maslow believed in an internal underlying ability to develop psychologically, and an individual persistently strives to fulfill potential (Ormrod, 2009).

A more contemporary approach to understanding motivation creates the foundation for internal motivation, known as Self-Determination Theory (Ormrod, 2009). Theorists such as Edward Deci and Richard Ryan propose that humans only have three basic needs: competence—self-worth, autonomy—control over the events within their life, and relatedness—close affectionate relationships (Ormrod, 2009).

Self-worth theory is founded upon the principle of preserving one's sense of self which stems from experiencing success throughout the daily routine, " In our society individuals are widely considered to be only as worthy as their

ability to achieve" (Covington, 2000 p. 181). In our typical school-setting grades are the determinant of our young people's worth (Covington, 2000). Ormrod (2009) adds that sometimes an individual will purposely sabotage an event if failure appears to be inevitable which curiously will make failure even more imminent. Closely related to self-worth theory is the Social Cognitive Theory in which self-efficacy—believing in oneself—guides an individual's motivation.

Social Cognitive theorists would argue behavior is goal-orientated which has evolved into Goal Theory (Ormrod, 2009). Goal theory is focused on the notion that an individual is motivated based on the types of goals set toward which behavior is directed (Ormrod, 2009). Within the educational context, goals are separated into mastery and performance.

The reasons for which one acts or behaves is contemporarily believed to be a metacognitive process. True behaviorists would contend that a particular behavior is the result of conditioning and consequence, but Attribution Theory seeks to offer perspective from the individual as to why things happen as they do. Ormrod (2009) explains that these attributions influence one's belief about future success and subsequently their actions or in-action as a result of that belief.