Chapter 3. Student Engagement and Disengagement: An Intrinsic Motivation Perspective and a Mental Health Concern

Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor
UCLA

Address correspondence to Howard Adelman, UCLA Department of Psychology, 1285 Franz Hall, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563; Tel: 310-825-1225; Email: Adelman@psych.ucla.edu

Linda Taylor, Center for Mental Health in Schools, UCLA Department of Psychology, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563; Tel: 310-825-3634; Email: ltaylor@ucla.edu

Abstract. A difficult reality is that students enter school with a variety of behavioral, emotional, and learning needs, complicating the goals and expectations placed on professional educators. Nonetheless, the manner in which children engage the relationships, environment, and societal and cognitive requirements faced in school are not always acknowledged and addressed in educational programming. This chapter discusses challenges and opportunities for educational professionals within the context of the best current information available on effective and positive engagement of students in the global school experience.

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2001) stresses that:

> *Growing numbers of children are suffering needlessly because their emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs are not being met by the very institutions and systems that were created to take care of them.*

One of those institutions is the school.

The irony is that in many schools the need to attend to matters such as mental health is a common topic. And there is growing advocacy for mental health in schools. Nevertheless, mental health concerns continue to receive only marginal attention in schools, and advocates are pushing
a variety of agenda items that compete with each other (Adelman & Taylor, 2010).

Our efforts to enhance mental health in schools emphasize the need for *fundamental systemic changes and system building* (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). We recognize that some students come to school with mental health problems and that schools should have the capacity to play a role in addressing the needs of such youngsters. At the same time, we recognize that schools are a source of mental health problems both by what they do and what they don t do. And, we stress that a significant facet of what they *don&t do* is to:

> (a) facilitate positive social and emotional development with the same commitment they make to cognitive development,

> (b) address barriers to teaching and learning comprehensively, and

> (c) concentrate on intrinsic motivation as they strive to enhance student engagement and re-engage disconnected students.

In this chapter, our focus is on engagement and re-engagement because these are fundamental concerns for mental health in schools. Engagement is a critical buffer against learning, behavior, and emotional problems; disengagement is related to a host of student and school problems.

We begin with a brief discussion of student engagement and re-engagement. Then, we highlight the following:

> • Motivation in the context of school improvement policy and practice,

> • Motivation beyond reinforcement theory,

> • Understanding the motivational bases for disengagement,

> • Intrinsic motivation and the challenge of re-engaging students in school learning.
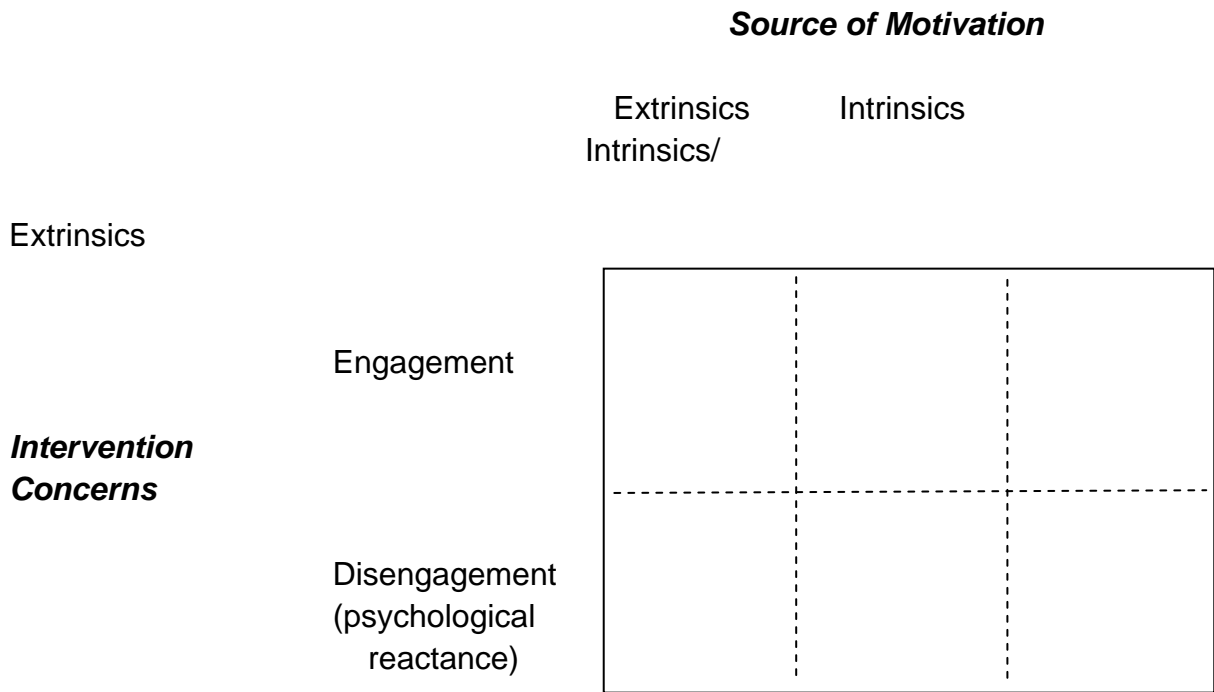
While our focus here is on students, any discussion of motivation has applications to family members and school personnel. Think about the challenge of home involvement in schooling, and think about teacher burnout and dropout; think about systemic change.

About Engagement and Re-engagement of Students

It is a given that teachers are faced with a complex continuum of learner motivation. This fact requires schools to provide a range of ways to enhance engagement. Student engagement involves not only engaging and maintaining engagement, but also *re-engaging* those who have disconnected from classroom instruction. For school personnel to do all this effectively they must broaden their understanding of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and the complex relationship between extrinsics and intrinsics (see Exhibit 1). To this end, there is a growing body of literature to draw upon (e.g., see Brophy, 2004; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010a; Deci, 1975; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dweck, 2007; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004; Pink, 2009; Stipek, 1998; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006; Wehrmeyer & Sands, 1998).

Exhibit 1

Sources of Motivation and Intervention Concerns

Source of Motivation

Extrinsics   Intrinsics
Intrinsics/

Extrinsics

Engagement

**Intervention
Concerns**

Disengagement
(psychological
reactance)

As applied to schools, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) indicate that engagement is defined in three ways in the research literature:

- **Behavioral engagement** draws on the idea of participation; it

includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out.

- *Emotional engagement* encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influences willingness to do the work.

- *Cognitive engagement* draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

Their review of the research underscores that engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, opportunities for choice, and sufficient structure.

Unfortunately, maintaining engagement is a widespread problem for schools. And, for those students who become actively disengaged from classroom learning, the disconnection is both symptomatic of one or more causal factors and an additional factor exacerbating student and school problems.

From a motivational perspective, disengagement from proactive classroom learning often is associated with situational threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and/or relatedness to valued others. The demands producing such threats may be from school staff, peers, or instructional content and processes. Psychological disengagement can be expected to result in internalized behavior (e.g., boredom, emotional distress) and/or externalized behavior (misbehavior, dropping out).

The importance of attending to all this is well-understood, but not readily addressed. As the National Academy of Science s Research Council (2004) has stressed:

> *Engaging adolescents, including those who have become disengaged and alienated from school, is not an easy task. Academic motivation decreases steadily from the early grades of elementary school into high school. Furthermore, adolescents are too old and too independent to follow teachers demands out of obedience, and many are too young, inexperienced, or uninformed to fully appreciate the value of succeeding in school.*

Clearly, a prominent focus of school improvement efforts should be on how to

  (a) motivate the many students who are hard to engage, and

  (b) re-engage those who have totally disengaged from classroom learning.

Of particular concern is what teachers should do when they encounter a student who has disengaged and is misbehaving.

When students are not engaged in the schoolwork at hand, they tend to pursue other activity. As teachers and other staff try to cope with those who are disruptive, the foremost emphasis is on managing the behavior (e.g., classroom management strategies). At one time, a heavy dose of punishment was the dominant approach. Currently, the stress is on more positive practices designed to provide behavior support in and out-of-the-classroom. For example, there is ongoing advocacy for social skills training, asset development, character education, and positive behavior support initiatives. The move from punishment to positive approaches is a welcome one, but most of the initiatives have not focused enough on providing systemic ways to help teachers deal with student engagement issues. And, too often, strategies aimed at directly stopping disruptive behavior are applied and experienced by students as a form of *social control*.

The reality is that an overemphasis on social control can be counterproductive to re-engaging students in classroom instruction. An often-stated assumption by those who teach social control as the key to classroom management is that just stopping misbehavior will make the student amenable to teaching. In a few cases, this may be so. However, the assumption ignores all the work that has led to understanding *psychological reactance*. As John Holt said, only half in jest: *I suspect that many children would learn arithmetic, and learn it better, if it were illegal.*

It is important to recognize that an emphasis on intrinsic motivation in re-engaging students rarely is a prominent part of pre or in-service preparation and seldom is the focus of interventions pursued by professionals whose role is to support teachers and students. It is time to ensure that all school personnel are brought up to date on what has been learned about human motivation in general and intrinsic motivation in particular over the last 50 years. As we will emphasize, re-engagement depends on use of interventions that help minimize conditions that negatively affect intrinsic motivation and maximize conditions that have a

positive motivational effect.

Motivation in the Context of School Improvement Policy and Practice

Prevailing school improvement planning tends to marginalize strategies for addressing behavior and emotional problems at school. For the situation to significantly shift, school improvement policy and practice must move from a two- to a three-component blueprint (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2010b). The intent of the third component is to provide a unifying concept and umbrella under which all resources currently expended for student and learning supports are woven together. The goal is to develop a comprehensive and cohesive system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students. Such a system involves much more than enhancing availability and access to mental and physical health and social services or limiting the focus to any other piecemeal and ad hoc initiatives aimed at preventing and correcting learning, behavior, and emotional problems (Adelman & Taylor, 1997, 2006a, 2006b).

To guide establishment of a comprehensive system, we stress developing integrated *systems* within and across a *continuum of interventions.* That continuum includes systems for:

> (a) promoting healthy development and preventing problems,
>
> (b) responding as early after problem onset as is feasible, and
>
> (c) providing for those whose serious, pervasive, and chronic problems require more intensive assistance and accommodation.

And we also stress that, just as efforts to enhance instruction emphasize well delineated and integrated curriculum content, so must efforts to address external and internal factors that interfere with students engaging effectively with that curriculum. At schools, the *content* (or curriculum) for addressing a full range of interfering factors can be coalesced into six classroom and school-wide arenas (Adelman & Taylor 2006a, 2006b). These focus on:

> (1) enhancing regular classroom strategies to enable learning (e.g., improving instruction for students who have become disengaged from learning at school and for those with mild-moderate learning and

behavior problems),

(2) supporting transitions (i.e., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions),

(3) increasing home and school connections,

(4) responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises,

(5) increasing community involvement and support (outreaching to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers),

(6) facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.

The framework created by combining the continuum and the content is

highlighted in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2

Intervention Framework Highlighting the Scope and Content of a
Component to Address Barriers to Learning*

Scope of Intervention

	System for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems	System for Early Intervention (Early after problem onset)	System of Care
Classroom-Focused Enabling			
Crisis/ Emergency Assistance & Prevention			
Support for transitions			
Home Involvement in Schooling			
Community Outreach/ Volunteers			
Student and Family Assistance			

Organizing around the

Content/ curriculum

(for addressing barriers to learning & promoting healthy development)

Accommodations for differences & disabilities   Specialized assistance other intensified

intervention s (e.g., Special Education & School-

Based
Behavioral

Health).
*Note that specific school-wide and classroom-based activities related to positive behavior support, prereferral interventions, and the eight components of Center for Prevention and Disease Control s Coordinated School Health Program are embedded into the six content (curriculum) arenas.

Running throughout all of this is an emphasis on the importance of enhancing motivational readiness, focusing on motivation as a fundamental process concern, and enhancing intrinsic motivation as an intervention outcome. And of course each of these motivational concerns has mental health implications.

Motivation: Beyond Reinforcement Theory

> *External reinforcement may indeed get a particular act going and may lead to its repetition, but it does not nourish, reliably, the long course of learning by which [one] slowly builds in [one's] own way a serviceable model of what the world is and what it can be.*
>
> Jerome Bruner (1966)

Those who argue schools must focus on basics are right. But, the basics for the 21st century involve much more than the 3 Rs. A particularly important basic outcome of schooling is enhanced intrinsic motivation for learning and problem solving.

Concern about student engagement and re-engagement must be more about how to enhance motivation to learn in and out of school and less about managing behavior and must include a strong emphasis on intrinsic motivation. What many of us have been taught about dealing with students runs counter to what we intuitively understand about human motivation. School staff and parents, in particular, often learn to over depend on reinforcement theory despite the appreciation they have for the importance of intrinsic motivation.

Because motivation is fundamental to all that schools do, a broadened understanding is essential to clarifying how best to facilitate student learning and school improvement. For example, such a broadened understanding underscores that engagement requires

   (a) providing significant opportunities for choice and self-determination, and

(b) avoiding processes that limit options, make students feel controlled and coerced, and narrowly focus on remedying problems.

Of course, teachers, parents, and support staff cannot control all factors affecting motivation. Indeed, when any of us address learning and behavior concerns, we only have direct control over a relatively small slice of the physical and social environment. Using what is accessible, we try to maximize the likelihood that opportunities to learn are a good fit with the current *capabilities* of a given youngster. So, with student engagement in mind, we try to match individual differences in motivation which means attending to the following concerns.

Motivation as a readiness concern. Optimal performance and learning require motivational readiness. The absence of such readiness can cause or maintain problems. If a learner does not have enough motivational readiness, strategies must be implemented to develop it (including ways to reduce avoidance motivation). Readiness should not be viewed in the old sense of waiting until an individual is interested. Rather, it should be understood in the contemporary sense of establishing environments that are perceived by students as caring, supportive places and as offering stimulating activities that are valued and challenging, and doable.

Motivation as a key ongoing process concern. Many learners are caught up in the novelty of a new subject, but after a few lessons, interest often wanes. Some students are motivated by the idea of obtaining a given outcome but may not be motivated to pursue certain processes and thus may not pay attention or may try to avoid them. For example, some are motivated to start work on overcoming their problems but may not maintain that motivation. Strategies must be designed to elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation so that a youngster stays mobilized.

Minimizing negative motivation and avoidance reactions as process and outcome concerns. Teachers and others at a school and at home not only must try to increase motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, but also take care to avoid or at least minimize conditions that decrease motivation or produce negative motivation. For example, care must be taken not to exclusively depend on extrinsics to entice and reward because to do so may decrease intrinsic motivation. At times, school is seen as unchallenging, uninteresting, over demanding, overwhelming, over controlling, nonsupportive, or even hostile. When this happens, a student may develop negative attitudes and avoidance related to a given situation, and over time, related to school and all it represents.

Enhancing intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome concern. It is essential to

enhance motivation as an outcome so the desire to pursue a given area (e.g., reading, good behavior) increasingly is a positive intrinsic attitude that mobilizes learning and behaving outside the teaching situation. Achieving such an outcome involves use of strategies that do not overuse extrinsic rewards and that do enable youngsters to play a meaningful role in making decisions related to valued options. In effect, enhancing intrinsic motivation is a fundamental protective factor and is the key to developing *resiliency.*

Students who are intrinsically motivated to learn at school seek out opportunities and challenges and go beyond requirements. In doing so, they learn more and learn more deeply than do classmates who are extrinsically motivated. Facilitating the learning of such students is a fairly straightforward matter and fits well with school improvements that primarily emphasize enhancing instructional practices. The focus is on helping establish ways for students who are motivationally ready and able to achieve and, of course, to maintain and enhance their motivation. The process involves knowing when, how, and what to teach and also knowing when and how to structure the situation so they can learn on their own.

In contrast, students who manifest learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems often have developed extremely negative perceptions of teachers and programs. In such cases, they are unlikely to be open to people and activities that look like the same old thing. Major changes are required if the youngster is even to perceive things are different. Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have the student

> (1) view the teacher and other interveners as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and

> (2) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable.

Thus, any effort to re-engage disengaged students must begin by addressing negative perceptions. School support staff and teachers must work together to reverse conditions that led to such perceptions.

What Are the Motivational Bases for Disengagement?

Two common reasons people give for not engaging are

- It s not worth it, and

- I know I won t be able to do it.

These reflect two key concepts that help us understand motivation: *valuing and expectations.* In general, the amount of time and energy spent on an activity seems dependent on how much the activity is valued by the person and on the person s expectation that what is valued will be attained without too great a cost.

Conversely, nonproactive psychological disengagement from an activity seems dependent on how much the activity is devalued by the person and/or on the person s expectation that something that is valued can only be attained at too great a cost. Such psychological disengagement can be expected to result in internalized behavior (e.g., boredom, emotional distress) and/or externalized behavior (e.g., misbehavior, dropping out).

Increasing intrinsic motivation involves affecting a student s thoughts, feelings, and decisions. In general, the intent is to use procedures that can potentially reduce negative and increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies with respect to learning. For learning and behavior problems, in particular, this means identifying and minimizing experiences that maintain or may increase avoidance motivation.

About Valuing

What makes something worth doing? Prizes? Money? Merit awards? Praise? Certainly! We all do a great many things, some of which we don t even like to do, because the activity leads to a desired reward. Similarly, we often do things to escape punishment or other negative consequences that we prefer to avoid.

Rewards and punishments may be material or social. For those with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, there has been widespread use of such 'incentives' (e.g., systematically giving points or tokens that can be exchanged for candy, prizes, praise, free time, or social interactions). Punishments have included loss of free time and other privileges, added work, fines, isolation, censure, and suspension. Grades have been used both as rewards and punishments. Because people will do things to obtain rewards or avoid punishment, rewards and punishment often are called *reinforcers*. Because they generally come from sources outside the person, they often are called *extrinsics*.

Extrinsic reinforcers are easy to use and can immediately affect behavior. Therefore, they have been widely adopted in the fields of special education and

psychology. Unfortunately, the immediate effects are usually limited to very specific behaviors and often are short-term. Moreover, extensive use of extrinsics can have some undesired effects. And, sometimes the available extrinsics simply aren t powerful enough to get the desired results.

It is important to remember that what makes an extrinsic factor rewarding is the fact that it is experienced by the recipient as a reward. What makes it a highly valued reward is that the recipient highly values it. If someone doesn t like candy, there is not much point in offering it as a reward. Furthermore, because the use of extrinsics has limits, it is fortunate that people often do things even without apparent extrinsic reason. In fact, a lot of what people learn and spend time doing is done for intrinsic reasons. Curiosity is a good example. Curiosity seems to be an innate quality that leads us to seek stimulation, avoid boredom, and learn a great deal.

People also pursue some things because of what has been described as an innate striving for competence. Most of us value *feeling competent*. We try to conquer some challenges, and if none are around, we usually seek one out. Of course, if the challenges confronting us seem unconquerable or make us too uncomfortable (e.g., too anxious or exhausted), we try to put them aside and move on to something more promising.

Another important intrinsic motivator appears to be an internal push toward things that make a person *feel self-determining*. People seem to value feeling and thinking that they have some degree of choice and freedom in deciding what to do. And, human beings also seem intrinsically moved toward establishing and maintaining relationships. That is, we value *feeling connected interpersonally*.

About Expectations

Our expectations of outcome are shaped by our perceptions of how easy or hard it will be to obtain the outcome. Such expectations about these matters are influenced by past experiences. Sometimes we know we can easily do something, but it is not something that we value. At other times, we may value something a great deal but don t believe we can do it or can only obtain it by paying too great a personal price. Under such circumstances, we are likely to look for other valued activities and outcomes to pursue.

Previously unsuccessful arenas usually are seen as unlikely paths to valued extrinsic rewards or intrinsic satisfactions. We may perceive past failure as the

result of our lack of ability; or we may believe that more effort was required than we were willing to give. We may also feel that the help we needed to succeed was not available. If our perception is that very little has changed with regard to these factors, our expectation of succeeding now will be rather low. In general, then, what we value interacts with our expectations, and motivation is one product of the transactions (see Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3

A Bit of Theory

Motivation theory has many facets. At the risk of oversimplifying things, the following discussion is designed to make a few crucial points.

E x V

Can you decipher this? (Don t go on until you ve tried.)
Hint: the x is a multiplication sign.

In case the equation stumped you, don t be surprised. The main introduction to motivational thinking that many people have been given in the past involves some form of reinforcement theory (which essentially deals with extrinsic motivation). Thus, all this may be new to you even though motivational theorists have been wrestling with it for a long time, and intuitively, you probably understand much of what they are talking about.

E represents an individual s *expectations* about outcome (in school this often means expectations of success or failure). **V** represents *valuing,* with valuing influenced by both what is valued intrinsically and extrinsically. Thus, in a general sense, motivation can be thought of in terms of expectancy times valuing. *Such theory recognizes that human beings are thinking and feeling organisms and that intrinsic factors can be powerful motivators. This understanding of human motivation has major implications for learning, teaching, parenting, and mental health interventions.*

Within some limits (which we need not discuss here), high expectations and high valuing produce high motivation, while low expectations **(E)** and high valuing **(V)** produce relatively weak motivation as do high expectations **(E)** and low valuing **(V)**.

Low Expectations, High Valuing. Youngsters may greatly value the idea of improving their reading. They usually are not happy with limited skills and know they would feel a lot better about themselves if they could read. But, often they experience everything the teacher asks them to do as a waste of time. They have done it all before, and they *still* have a reading problem. Sometimes they will do the exercises, but just to earn points to go on a field trip or to avoid the consequences of not cooperating. Often, however, they try to get out of doing the work by distracting the teacher. After all, why should they do things they are certain won t help them read any better.

$$Expectancy \; x \; Valuing = Motivation$$
$$0 \quad x \quad 1.0 \quad = \quad 0$$

High Expectations, Low Valuing. Similarly, high expectations paired with low valuing yield low approach motivation. Thus, the oft cited remedial strategy of guaranteeing success by designing tasks to be very easy is not as simple a recipe as it sounds. Indeed, the approach is likely to fail if the outcome (e.g., improved reading, learning math fundamentals, applying social skills) is not valued or if the tasks are experienced as too boring or if doing them is seen as too embarrassing. In such cases, a strong negative value is attached to the activities and contributes to avoidance motivation.

$$Expectancy \; x \; Valuing = Motivation$$
$$1.0 \quad x \quad 0 \quad = \quad 0$$

Appropriate appreciation of all this is necessary in designing a match for optimal engagement, learning, and performance.

About Over-reliance on Extrinsics

Throughout this discussion of valuing and expectations, the emphasis has been on the fact that motivation is not something that can be determined solely by forces outside the individual. Others can plan activities and outcomes to influence motivation and learning; however, how the activities and outcomes are experienced determines whether they are pursued (or avoided) with a little or a lot of effort and ability. Understanding that an individual s perceptions can affect motivation has led researchers to important findings about some undesired effects resulting from over-reliance on extrinsics.

Because of the prominent role they play in school programs, grading, testing, and other performance evaluations are a special concern in any discussion of the over-reliance on extrinsics as a way to reinforce positive learning. Although grades often are discussed as simply providing information about how well a student is doing, many, if not most, students perceive each grade as a reward or a punishment. Certainly, many teachers use grades to try to control behavior to reward those who do assignments well and to punish those who don t. Sometimes parents add to a student s perception of grades as extrinsic reinforcers by giving a reward for good report cards.

A perspective on all this is found in a 2006 research review by Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Deci. In discussing autonomy-supportive versus controlling social environments, they suggest that in externally controlling contexts teachers emphasize overtly coercive strategies, such as salient reward contingencies, deadlines, and overtly controlling language. By way of contrast, in autonomy-

supportive contexts teachers empathize with the learner s perspective, allow opportunities for self-initiation and choice, provide a meaningful rationale if choice is constrained, refrain from the use of pressures and contingencies to motivate, and provide timely positive feedback.

What research has shown is that an over-reliance on extrinsic rewards and external social control can undermine intrinsic reasons for doing things. Although this is not always the case and may not always be a bad thing, it is an important consideration in deciding to rely on extrinsic reinforcers and controlling environments in addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. The first preference in designing intervention intended to enhance intrinsic motivation as an outcome should be an emphasis on intrinsic motivation and autonomy-support.

Over-reliance on Extrinsics Can Exacerbate Problems

Many individuals with learning problems also are described as hyperactive, distractible, impulsive, behavior disordered, and so forth. Their behavior patterns are seen as interfering with efforts to remedy their learning problems. Although motivation has always been a concern to those who work with learning and behavior problems, the emphasis in handling these interfering behaviors usually is on using extrinsics as part of efforts to directly control, and/or in conjunction with, direct skill instruction. For example, interventions are designed to improve impulse control, perseverance, selective attention, frustration tolerance, sustained attention and follow-through, and social awareness and skills. In all cases, the emphasis is on reducing or eliminating interfering behaviors, usually with the presumption that the student will then re-engage in learning. However, there is little evidence that these strategies enhance a student s motivation toward classroom learning.

Ironically, the reliance on extrinsics to control behavior may exacerbate student problems. Motivational research suggests that when people perceive their freedom (e.g., of choice) is threatened, they have a psychological reaction that motivates them to restore their sense of freedom. (For instance, when those in control say: *You can t do that ... you must do this ...,* the covert and sometimes overt psychological reaction of students often is: *Oh, you think so!*) This line of research also suggests that with prolonged denial of freedom, people s reactivity diminishes; they become motivated and usually feel helpless and ineffective.

Intrinsic Motivation and the Challenge of Re-engaging Students in School Learning

As we have noted, psychological scholarship over the last fifty years has brought renewed attention to intrinsic motivation as a central concept in understanding learning, attention, behavior, and emotional problems. This work is just beginning to find its way into applied fields and programs. One line of work has emphasized the relationship of learning and behavior problems to deficiencies in intrinsic motivation. This work clarifies the value of interventions designed to increase the following:

> ➢ Feelings of self-determination,

> ➢ Feelings of competence and expectations of attaining valued outcomes,

> ➢ Feelings of interpersonal relatedness,

> ➢ The range of interests and satisfactions related to learning.

The research also stresses the importance of minimizing interventions that threaten these basic psychological needs. All of this has implications for promoting positive mental health and preventing and correcting mental health problems.

Examples of Practices

Activities to correct deficiencies in intrinsic motivation may first be directed at

(a) increasing students awareness of personal motives and true capabilities and then helping them,

(b) learn to set valued and appropriate goals,

(c) learn to value and make appropriate and satisfying choices, and

(d) learn to value and accept responsibility for choice.

Examples of practices for maximizing intrinsic motivation are:

- Personalized (as opposed to individualized) instruction,

- Building relationships and planning instruction with an understanding of student perceptions and including a range of real life needs, as well as personal and cooperative experiences,

- Providing real, valued, and attainable options and choices ensuring shared decision making,

- Enhancing feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others.

Examples of minimizing threats to intrinsic motivation are:

- Welcoming, caring, safe, and just environment,

- Countering perceptions of social control and indifference including not relying too much on extrinsics,

- Motivated application as opposed to rote practice and deadening homework,

- Ensuring extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities,

- Providing regular feedback in ways that minimize use of evaluative processes that threaten feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others.

General Strategies

With an emphasis on all this, we pursue the following four personalized intervention strategies in working with disengaged students:

(1) clarifying student perceptions of the problem,

(2) reframing school learning,

(3) renegotiating involvement, and

(4) reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship.

As will be evident from the following brief description, each of these requires an

expanded focus in applying *Response to Intervention* (RtI) methodologies.

***Clarifying student perceptions of the problem*.** It is desirable to create a situation where it is feasible to talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged. Such open interchange provides an invaluable basis for interpreting responses to intervention and formulating a personalized plan to alter current negative perceptions and prevent others from developing.

Reframing school learning. As noted above, in the case of those who have disengaged, major reframing in teaching approaches is required so that these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how current activity builds on previous learning; and clarify why it is reasonable to expect the procedures to be effective (especially those designed to help correct specific problems).

***Renegotiating involvement in school learning*.** New and mutual agreements must be developed over time through conferences with the student and including parents, where appropriate. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

***Reestablishing and maintaining an appropriate working relationship*.** This requires the type of ongoing interactions that create a sense of trust, open communication, and provide personalized support and direction. To maintain re-engagement and prevent disengagement, the above strategies are pursued using processes and content that:

- Minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others,

- Maximize such feelings (included here is an emphasis on a school taking steps to enhance public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution),

- Guide motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice),

- Provide continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments,

- Provide opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction).

Obviously, it is not an easy task to decrease well-assimilated negative attitudes and behaviors. And, the task is likely to become even harder with high-stakes testing policies (no matter how well-intentioned). It also seems obvious that, *for many schools, enhanced achievement test scores will only be feasible when the large number of disengaged students are re-engaged in learning at school.*

All this argues for

(1) minimizing student disengagement and maximizing re-engagement by moving school culture toward a greater focus on intrinsic motivation, and

(2) minimizing psychological reactance and resistance and enhancing perceptions that lead to re-engagement in learning at school by rethinking social control practices.

Those designing and implementing RtI and Positive Behavior Support initiatives and those concerned with advancing mental health in schools need to incorporate the implications of the strategies discussed above in working with disengaged students.

About Increasing Options

Reviews of the literature on human motivation suggest that providing students with options and involving them in decision making are key facets of addressing the problem of engagement in the classroom and at school. For example, numerous studies have shown that opportunities to express preferences and make choices lead to greater motivation, academic gains, increases in productivity and on task behavior, and decreases in aggressive behavior. Similarly, researchers report that student participation in goal setting leads to more positive outcomes (e.g., higher commitment to a goal and increased performance).

A large proportion of individuals with avoidance or low motivation for learning at school are found among those with learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems. For such students, few currently available options at school may be appealing. How much greater the range of options needs to be depends primarily on how strong avoidance tendencies are. In general, however, working to re-engage disconnected students may require:

- Further expanding the range of options for learning (if necessary, this includes avoiding established curriculum content and processes),

- Primarily emphasizing areas in which the student has made personal and active decisions,

- Accommodating a wider range of behavior than usually is tolerated (e.g., a widening of limits on the amount and types of differences tolerated).

About Choice and Decision Making

From a motivational perspective, one of the most basic concerns is the way in which students are involved in making decisions about available options. In general, all decision making processes have the potential to generate perceptions of coercion and control or perceptions of real choice (e.g., being in control of one s decisions, being self-determining). As noted above, such differences in perception play a critical role in whether a student is mobilized to pursue or avoid planned learning activities and outcomes.

People who have the opportunity to make decisions among valued and feasible options tend to be committed to following through. In contrast, people who are not involved in decisions often have little commitment to what is decided. And, if individuals disagree with a decision that affects them, besides not following through they may react with hostility.

Thus, essential to programs focusing on motivation are decision making processes that affect perceptions of choice and probable outcome. Three special points should be noted about decision making:

- Decisions are based on current perceptions. As perceptions shift, it is necessary to reevaluate decisions and modify them in ways that maintain a learner s motivation,

- Effective and efficient decision making is a basic skill, and one that is as

fundamental as the three Rs. Thus, if an individual does not do it well initially, this is not a reason to move away from learner involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an indication of a need and a reason to use the process not only for motivational purposes, but to improve this basic skill,

- Among students manifesting learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems, it is well to remember that the most fundamental decision some of these individuals have to make is whether they want to participate or not. That is why it may be necessary in specific cases to put aside (temporarily) established options and standards.

Clearly, re-engaging disconnected students requires interventions that maximize the likelihood that students will perceive the learning environment as positively different--and quite a bit so--from the one in which they had so much failure (see Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4

Re-engaging Students: Some Basic Intervention Considerations

Think in terms of

- *Enhancing* feelings of   • *Minimizing threats to* feelings of

  ➢ Self-determination   ➢ Self-determination
  ➢ Competency   ➢ Competency
  ➢ Connectedness to others   ➢ Connectedness to others

Examples of some guidelines and strategies that capture an understanding of intrinsic motivation

- Minimize strategies designed only for social control and other coercive interactions

- Increase

  ➢ Options (emphasizing real life interests and needs),

  ➢ Choice (stress *real* options and choices),

  ➢ Involvement in decision making (ensure a meaningful role in decision making).

• Facilitate students desires and abilities to share their perceptions readily (to enter into dialogues with the adults at school)

• Provide enrichment opportunities (and be sure not to withhold them as punishment)

• Provide a *continuum* of structure (i.e., personalized communication, support, and guidance)

Concluding Comments about a Renewed and Enhanced Focus on

Motivation

> *Many students say that . . . they feel their classes are irrelevant and boring, that they are just passing time . . . . (and) are not able to connect what they are being taught with what they feel they need for success in their later life. This disengagement from the learning process is manifested in many ways, one of which is the lack of student responsibility for learning. In many ways the traditional educational structure, one in which teachers "pour knowledge into the vessel" (the student), has placed all responsibility for learning on the teacher, none on the student. Schools present lessons neatly packaged, without acknowledging or accepting the "messiness" of learning-by-doing and through experience and activity. Schools often do not provide students a chance to accept responsibility for learning, as that might actually empower students. Students in many schools have become accustomed to being spoon-fed the material to master tests, and they have lost their enthusiasm for exploration, dialogue, and reflection -- all critical steps in the learning process.*
>
> American Youth Policy Forum (2000)

Student disengagement, acting out behavior, bullying, truancy, dropouts/pushouts--noone
doubts that motivation plays a key role in all this. In many cases, it is a causal factor; in all cases, it is key to preventing and correcting problems.

Whatever the initial cause of someone s learning and behavior problems, the longer the individual has lived with such problems, the more likely she or he will have negative feelings and thoughts about instruction, teachers, schools, and him or herself. The feelings may include anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, and a great deal of unhappiness. The thoughts may include strong expectations of failure and vulnerability and low valuing of many learning opportunities. Such thoughts and feelings can result in avoidance motivation or low motivation for learning and performing in many areas of schooling.

Low motivation leads to half-hearted effort. Avoidance motivation leads to avoidance behaviors. Individuals with avoidance and low motivation often also

are attracted to socially disapproved activity. Poor effort, avoidance behavior, and active pursuit of disapproved behavior on the part of students are sure-fire recipes for failure and mental health problems.

It remains tempting to focus directly on student misbehavior. It also is tempting to think that behavior problems at least can be minimized by laying down the law. We have seen many administrators pursue this line of thinking. For every student who shapes up, ten others may be pushed out of school through a progression of suspensions, opportunity transfers, and expulsions.

Most official dropout figures don t tell the tale. The reality seen in too many high schools in cities such as Los Angeles, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Miami, and Detroit is that only about half those who were enrolled in Grade 9 are still around to graduate from Grade 12.

Most of these students entered kindergarten with a healthy curiosity and a desire to learn to read and write. By the end of Grade 2, we start seeing the first referrals by classroom teachers because of learning and behavior problems. From that point on, increasing numbers of students become disengaged from classroom learning, and most of these manifest some form of behavioral and emotional problems. It is not surprising, then, that many of us are heartened to see the shift from punishment to positive behavior support in addressing unwanted behavior. However, as long as factors that lead to disengagement are left unaffected, we risk perpetuating the phenomenon that William Ryan identified as blaming the victim.

While appreciation of motivational considerations is not new, we are detecting growing concern about what professional preparation and development programs teach and do not teach with respect to motivation. In particular, there is the matter of how well such programs distinguish between interventions that are oriented to intrinsic motivation vs. those that are oriented to extrinsic motivation. Generations of teachers and support staff have been trained in the use of reinforcement theory with its emphasis on extrinsic controlling strategies. This tends to be the major focus of strategies to manage behavior. Just emerging is growing advocacy for professional preparation and development programs to incorporate a focus on applying what has been learned over many decades of research on intrinsic motivation and psychological reactance. Such a focus provides an essential foundation for personalizing instruction.

From a motivational perspective, we stress that personalization differs from individualization. Personalization requires establishing a good match in terms of

both motivation and capability. And with specific respect to motivation, a good match requires factoring in the student s perceptions in determining the right mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. It also requires understanding the key role played by a student s perceived expectations related to outcomes.

Without a good match, social control strategies can temporarily suppress negative attitudes and behaviors, but re-engagement in classroom learning is unlikely. Without re-engagement in classroom learning, not only will gains in achievement test scores be elusive, suppressed behaviors can be expected to reappear. And this poignant state of affairs is a breeding ground for dropouts and mental health and juvenile justice problems.

References

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (1997). Restructuring education support services and integrating community resources: Beyond the full service school model. *School Psychology Review*, *25,* 431¥445.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006a). *The school leader s guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2006b). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Adelman, H.S, & Taylor, L. (2007). Systemic change for school improvement. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *17(1)* 55-77.

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2010). *Mental health in schools: Engaging learners, preventing problems, and improving schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

American Youth Policy Forum (2000). *High Schools of the Millennium Report*, Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

Brophy, J. (2004). *Motivating students to learn* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Bruner, J.S. (1966). *Toward a theory of instruction.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2010a). *Motivation Quick Find*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2010b). Turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools: Federal proposals are still based on a two- rather than a three- component blueprint. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/turning.pdf

Deci, E.L. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation.* New York: Plenum.

Deci, E.L., with Flaste, R. (1995). *Why we do what we do.* New York: Penguin Books.

Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in*

human behavior. New York: Plenum Press.

Dweck, C.S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *Educational Leadership, 65,* 34¥39.

Fredricks, J.A., Blumenfeld, P.C., & Paris, A.H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74,* 59¥109.

Holt, J. (1989). *Learning all the time.* Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.

Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us.* New York: Riverhead.

National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students   motivation to learn.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Stipek, D.J. (1998). *Motivation to learn: From theory to practice* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Vansteenkiste, M., Lens, W., & Deci, E.L. (2006). Intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents in self-determination theory: Another look at the quality of academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, *41*, 19-31.

Wehrmeyer, M. L. & Sands, D. J. (1998). *Making it happen: Student involvement in education planning, decision making, and instruction.* Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes Publishing Co.