

Understanding the Role of Human Motivation in Learning

When considering the ABCs of behavior, teachers may assert they do not believe in giving prompts, positive feedback, or tangible rewards for behaviors students should already know and display. Additionally, some teachers fear providing external regulation, in the form of antecedent or consequential supports, will undermine students' intrinsic motivation. Such statements indicate a lack of understanding regarding the fundamental principles of motivation and the differentiation between motivation and regulation. Beyond infancy and early childhood, the motivation for the majority of human behavior is externally motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Initially, educators provide external regulation for students by establishing common definitions of desired behaviors, providing antecedent supports, and delivering reinforcing or discouraging consequences. Educators use these externally regulated strategies to teach all students the expected behavior and facilitate consistent use of appropriate behavior. Over time, educators assist students in developing self or internal regulation. Students must engage in self-regulation (e.g., demonstrating desired behaviors consistently, without prompting, affirmations or recognition) in order to become successful contributing members of society. Deci and Ryan's (1985) research in the field of self-determination theory (SDT) illustrates the transition from external regulation to internal regulation.

In the diagram below Ryan and Deci (2000) articulate the continuum of human motivation including: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. **Amotivation** denotes a complete lack of motivation for or value of the activity or knowledge in consideration, or perceived lack of competence with the activity. **Extrinsic motivation** means an individual engages in an activity to attain a separable outcome (e.g., to receive an external item or activity of preference, to fit into a group, to master a skill or gain knowledge needed for later). **Intrinsic motivation** refers to participating in an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself. Many factors influence where an individual falls on the continuum, with regard to a specific behavior. Additionally, an individual's location on the continuum may be fluid and individuals may move in either direction along the continuum.

A Taxonomy of Human Motivation

Regulatory Styles	Amotivation <i>Lack of any motivation or value for the activity, or perceived lack of competence</i>	Extrinsic Motivation <i>Activity is done in order to attain a separable outcome (e.g., to receive an external item or activity of preference, to fit into a group, to master a skill or gain knowledge needed for later)</i>				Intrinsic Motivation <i>Activity is done simply for enjoyment of the activity itself</i>
Associated Processes	Lack of intentionality or relevance	Compliance	Approval from self or others	Self-endorsement of goals	Synthesis of goals or congruence	Interest, enjoyment, inherent satisfaction
Perceived Locus of Causality	Impersonal	External	Somewhat External (Introjection)	Somewhat Internal (Identification)	Internal (Integration)	Internal

Adapted from Ryan and Deci, 2000
Figure 1.5

Extrinsically motivated behaviors may range from externally to internally regulated (e.g., continuum of **perceived locus of causality** in Figure 1.5), or include multiple regulating factors. Consider, for example, possible regulating factors motivating an individual's choice to adopt healthier eating habits and where those factors fall along the *Taxonomy of Human Behavior* in Figure 1.6:

Taxonomy of Human Motivation

Regulatory Styles	Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation <i>Activity is done in order to attain a separable outcome</i>				Intrinsic Motivation
Associated Processes	Lack of intentionality or relevance	Compliance	Approval from self or others	Self-endorsement of goals	Synthesis of goals or congruence	Interest, enjoyment, inherent satisfaction
Perceived Locus of Causality	Impersonal	External	Somewhat External (Introjection)	Somewhat Internal (Identification)	Internal (Integration)	Internal
Healthy Eating habits		Desire to meet BMI, blood pressure or other goals for work place health insurance promotions	Desire to fit in at work where everyone eats healthy; wanting to "look good" by societal standards	Desire to be healthier	Choosing a vegan diet as part of a commitment to improving the environment	Inherent love of fresh fruits & vegetables

Figure 1.6

While the choice to adopt healthier eating habits may seem internally regulated, or even intrinsically motivated, extrinsic motivation plays a significant role. An inherent enjoyment of fresh fruits and vegetables makes the change easier to adopt. However, you cannot discount the extrinsically motivating factors, such as wanting to comply with recommendations of medical professionals, a desire to fit in with colleagues who make healthy eating choices, setting and reaching a weight loss goal, or recognizing the impact eating habits make on the larger environment.

Ryan and Deci (2000) note, *"In schools for example, it appears that intrinsic motivation becomes weaker with each advancing grade,"* (p. 60). Because most human behavior relies on some form of external motivation, past early childhood, educators face the challenge of teaching students to identify, value, and engage in socially appropriate behaviors with minimal external pressure or regulation. Self-determination theory includes three needs individuals must fulfill to behave with intrinsic motivation:

1. **Competence:** succeeding in what is to be done, belief in one's ability to succeed, self-efficacy
2. **Relatedness:** connecting with others, belonging
3. **Autonomy:** being in control of one's life, self-determination

Students may not, initially, find behaviors critical to school success inherently interesting or personally valuable; therefore, educators will need to provide some level of instruction and reinforcement to encourage students to engage in desired behaviors. Over time, students will begin to self-regulate engagement in appropriate behaviors because doing so increases feelings of connectedness and experiences of competency and autonomy. SW-PBS supports the development of self-regulation by: creating environments where all students feel welcome, connected, and valued; directly teaching, monitoring, and reinforcing expectations; and assisting students in the development of self-monitoring and self-regulation.

The amount of external regulation or motivation necessary to reach the end goal of students' consistent display of desired behavior will be dependent on:

- ▶ chronological and developmental age of students, students' prior knowledge of and experience with desired behaviors,
- ▶ the context or setting events,
- ▶ and the students' understanding that the schoolwide behavioral rules and procedural skills desired by adults are universal in nature and will increase their overall success in the classroom, schoolwide and eventually in life outside of school.

Understanding that the majority of human behavior relies on a certain degree of external motivation, and intrinsic motivation relies on the development of competence, relatedness and autonomy; school teams can leverage the science of behavior to plan for and establish systems that create environments which increase the likelihood that teachers and students will demonstrate desired behaviors.

Students learning a new skill or behavior may need external regulation (e.g., reward) to gain enough exposure to the naturally occurring positive consequences of the behavior. For example, using more pro-social behaviors such as taking turns; saying "please" or "thank you"; and keeping hands to ones' self; allow a student struggling to find friends to experience social acceptance from peers. Initial teaching and reinforcement may be necessary to help the student learn and consistently use the skill. Over time the skill becomes self-initiated and self-regulated. Eventually the skill should generalize to multiple social contexts allowing the student increasing access to desired peer groups or activities.

However, excessive reliance on authoritarian external regulation leads to individuals losing their sense of autonomy and relinquishing the capacity for self-regulation. Under these conditions, a previously self-regulated behavior becomes a behavior demonstrated only under high external regulation (e.g., athletes who lose the love of the game under pressure to win at all costs). While in most cases people's general regulatory style becomes more "internal" over time (Chandler & Connell, 1987), in accordance with developmental tendencies towards autonomy (Ryan, 1995), regulation can move in either direction on the continuum.