



Intrinsic Motivation as the Foundation for Culturally Responsive Social-Emotional and Academic Learning in Teacher Education

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Abstract

The article conceptualizes coursework in teacher education through the lens of intrinsic motivation. Authors theorize a pragmatic heuristic known as the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching to achieve that goal. Then, using two illustrative examples, one of which is shadowing high school students, authors show how the framework's four motivational conditions can enhance teacher motivation to regularly gather data to know their students as unique and valuable members of the classroom community rather than as problems that need to be solved.

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Introduction

It is common knowledge that no amount of standards, benchmarks, and high-stakes testing can bring about school improvement without attention to teachers' knowledge and practices, grounded within the context of the communities they serve (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2011). In fact, numeric data alone risk reinforcing deficit thinking about the potential capabilities and subsequent achievement of students who are considered low performing. Research and experience have suggested that to effectively facilitate learning in the areas of social-emotional and academic learning—to manage emotions, care for others, make responsible decisions, deeply engage and persist when confronted with challenge—it is necessary for aspiring, novice, and experienced educators to combine local investigations into teaching and learning with theories and practices grounded in intrinsic motivation, the latter of which is this article's focus. Reflective practice has the potential to influence teachers' belief structures (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Pajares, 1992). Theories and practices of intrinsic motivation associate with respectful interactions and deep learning, in part because people direct their energy toward an endeavor that is inherently satisfying (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Because the emphasis of this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* is social-emotional learning, we want to acknowledge up front our agreement with theorists who see social-emotional learning as a part of all learning endeavors. We draw from this essential unity in response to the question, How can teachers more consistently enhance student intrinsic motivation to learn within and across cultural groups and experience these same conditions in their own learning?

A Motivational Lens for Instructional Design

As university faculty in the areas of teacher preparation, leadership preparation, and adult education, and as professional development consultants in schools and school systems in the United States and abroad, we have collaborated with colleagues for more than 25 years to strengthen educators' knowledge of culturally responsive teaching through a motivational lens. The experiences of participants— aspiring teachers, teachers, teacher leaders, and educational administrators—offer a useful perspective on developing intrinsically motivating and culturally responsive educators. We conceptualize motivation as the energy that human beings direct toward achieving a goal. When learners are intrinsically motivated, they initiate, mediate, and experience motivation as a desired outcome that is inseparable from learning. We apply this understanding to the development of teachers who regularly gather data to know their students as unique and valuable members of the classroom community rather than as problems that need to be solved.

Postsecondary faculty and P-12 educators have long known that when learners

are motivated during the learning process, things go more smoothly, communication flows, anxiety decreases, and creativity and learning are more apparent. Learners who complete a learning experience feeling positively motivated about what they have learned are more likely to have a continuing interest in and to use what they have learned.

Guided by the question, How can educators at all levels of education and academic disciplines more consistently support intrinsic motivation to learn among all students? we have translated empirical studies into a pragmatic framework organized according to four motivational principles. This work grounds the development of postsecondary instruction, professional development experiences, and teaching and learning in schools. Known as the *motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching*, it has been cited as one of the most comprehensive models for the inclusion of research based on principles to enhance motivation, learning, and achievement (Brophy, 2004; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Theall & Franklin, 1999). A particular concern has been to reach postsecondary preparation programs, professional associations, and school districts whose professional communities influence our most underserved P–20 students.

Intrinsic Motivation and Learning

It is part of human nature to be curious, to be active, to initiate thought and behavior, to make meaning from experience, and to be effective at what we value. Although vulnerable to distraction, these primary sources of motivation reside in all of us, across all ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. When learners can see that what they are learning makes sense and is important, their intrinsic motivation emerges (Brophy, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1991). Like a cork rising through water, intrinsic motivation surfaces in environments where students learn because the learning experience itself is valued and rewarding. We have only to recall our own experiences cramming for a test to recognize the cursory and tentative nature of new knowledge when the primary goal for learning is the reward of a good grade or to avoid a negative consequence.

Nonetheless, ideas about intrinsic motivation exist within the popular media, which maintains a behavioristic orientation toward human motivation. If one were to do a content analysis of national news broadcasts and news magazines for the last 40 years to identify the most widely used metaphor for motivation, “the carrot and the stick” or “reward and punish” would prevail. Generally, our national consciousness assumes that people need to be motivated by other people. The prevailing question, How do I motivate them? inadvertently places learners in a one-down situation. It implies that “they” are somehow dependent, less capable of self-motivation, and in need of help from a more powerful “other.”

Motivation Among Youth

Some of the strongest analyses of the relationship of motivation to learning are found in youth education. In this body of research, there is substantial evidence that motivation is consistently and positively related to engagement, learning, and educational achievement (Hulleman & Barron, 2016). Several studies have included precise investigations that range from targeted interventions to comprehensive interventions that also consider curriculum and teaching methods (Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016).

Although intrinsically motivating learning environments heighten students' sense of agency and belief in their ability to make wise and influential decisions, it is difficult to achieve when students are implicitly viewed as motivationally dysfunctional or labeled at risk, struggling, or vulnerable. These labels, also seen as euphemisms for "culturally deprived" (Banks, 1993), suggest a deficit perspective of students and student motivation. When students, families, and communities are viewed as motivationally dysfunctional, it increases a "fix the child" orientation to teaching and learning. Certainly this devaluation of students' potential undermines efficacy and constrains imaginative applications of research (Dweck, 2018).

Morality, Politics, and Motivation

Although an exhaustive account of the moral and political issues that influence motivation exceeds the scope of this article, it is important to acknowledge that the study of motivation reaches well beyond psychology and pedagogy. Motivation to learn is also influenced by politics and policies that play themselves out in the lives of children, families, and schools. These include the pernicious effects of institutional racism in the United States (Du Bois, 1949/1970; Lipsitz, 2006); White power, privilege, and supremacy (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Tatum, 2003); homophobia (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Russell & Joyner, 2001); ethnocentrism and xenophobia (Banks, 1993; Tienda & Haskins, 2011; Yakushko, 2009); and a host of other societal influences, including immigration policy, housing, and family income, on students' desire and capacity to learn.

Whether or not educators acknowledge the pervasive impact of political decisions in their work, politics is inherent in teacher–student relationships (authoritarian or democratic), curricular readings (those left in and those left out), and course content (a shared decision or the teacher's sole prerogative; Giroux, 1992). Values and politics also reside in the discourse of learning (which questions get asked and which get answered and how deeply they are probed); the imposition of standardized tests, grading, and tracking policies; and the physical conditions of classrooms and buildings, which send messages to learners and teachers about their worth and place in society (Anyon, 1980; Kozol, 1991).

The idea of "fixing" students who are perceived to be "nonconforming" is associated with popular ideology in the United States about individualism, and

it is kept in place with clichés and metaphors such as pulling oneself up by their bootstraps. Although individuals are also responsible, they are not *solely* responsible for their academic success: The failure of education to support historically marginalized students in this effort is exacerbated by an accountability movement that encourages teachers to spend inordinate amounts of time on test-taking skills and tests, often at the expense of one of the most fundamental influences on motivation: student–teacher relationships that make it possible for teachers and students to know one another as human beings.

Culture and Motivation

From politics and values to anthropology and neuropsychology, motivation and learning are inherently cultural (O’Brien & Rogers, 2016). Culture is the deeply learned mix of language, beliefs, values, and behaviors that pervade every aspect of our lives (Geertz, 1973). The cultural group(s) within which we are socialized influence neurological systems and the language we use to think, the way we travel through our thoughts, how we communicate, and how we make sense of and mediate moral decisions. Although how we interact and make sense of the world may change as we age, the influence of early socialization is significant. Emotions as basic as joy and fear are initially felt and understood within the cultural contexts of our communities, families, and peers (Barrett, 2005). In any situation, and certainly when we feel threatened, emotions mediate what and how we prioritize. Every moment is a competition among our senses to perceive what matters most (Ahissar et al., 1992). Emotions add relevance and human beings are compelled to pay attention to what matters.

In this regard, engagement with any learning task is always in a state of flux: diminishing, strengthening, or changing emotionally. Whether reading a page of text or participating in the first few minutes of a course, learners can experience a range of emotions, for example, from inspiration, curiosity, and futility to inspiration once again. This dynamic makes sustaining learning a nuanced endeavor that warrants careful instructional planning. When instructional plans are also motivational plans, educators increase the likelihood that students will direct their energy, attention, and interest to educational tasks throughout an entire learning experience.

A Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

In her study of motivation and its impact on personal development, Dweck (2018) highlighted a broader understanding of this question. She asked, “Within this field, many new motivational interventions have been designed and tested, but how do they all fit together and how can we evaluate and increase their efficacy?” (p. 42). The motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (Wlodkowski

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& Ginsberg, 2017) responds to this query. It is an integrative application of research findings on intrinsic motivation, teaching, and learning with a cross-curricular reach. Adult educators continue to apply and research the framework in fields such as teacher education, teacher professional development, ethnic studies, engineering, computer programming, and game design (Barnes, 2012; Rhodes, 2017; Zigarelli, 2017).

As a meta-framework for instructional design, it respects an essential tenet: No learning situation is culturally neutral. Teachers and learners are individuals with complex identities, personal histories, and unique living contexts. For example, a person is not just older or African American or female; she is older, African American, and female. This example is still too simple because it does not include influences such as her religious or spiritual beliefs, sexual orientation, and income or professional status. Each of us has a variety of identities through which we make sense of things. The framework's four-question protocol prompts college and P-12 educators to reflect on learner diversity as a central consideration while planning instruction (Ginsberg, 2015; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009).

Within the motivational framework, *pedagogical alignment*—the coordination of approaches to teaching that ensure maximum consistent effect—is key (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). The more mutually supportive the elements of teaching are, the more likely they are to evoke, encourage, and sustain intrinsic motivation.

The framework names four motivational conditions that the teacher and students continuously create or enhance (they are briefly described in the following pages in more detail): (a) *establishing inclusion*, creating a learning environment in which students and teachers feel respected by and connected to one another; (b) *developing a positive attitude*, or creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice; (c) *enhancing meaning*, or creating engaging and challenging learning experiences that include student perspectives and values; and (d) *engendering competence*, or creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value and perceive as authentic to life. These conditions work in concert, and they occur in a moment as well as over a period of time (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017).

A Motivational Perspective on Culturally Responsive Teaching in a Classroom

Let us look at an example of culturally responsive teaching based on this motivational framework. It occurs in an urban high school social science class with a diverse group of students and an experienced teacher. At the start of a new term, the teacher wants to familiarize students with basic research methods. She will use such methods throughout the semester, and she knows from previous experience that many students view research as abstract or inaccessible. We use headings based on the four conditions of the motivational framework to describe the teacher's approach. The headings represent the *primary* motivational condition

being addressed. In parentheses, we also note other motivational conditions that are present because the motivational framework is not a sequential planning tool. Strategies from two or more motivational conditions often work together during different parts of a lesson.

1. Establish Inclusion

After reflecting on the framework, her teaching goal, and her repertoire of methods, she assigns students to small groups where each student has a specific role. For example, one student is a facilitator, another is an equity observer, and one student is a reporter who will later share the group's experiences, expectations, and concerns. She asks students to discuss previous experiences they have had conducting or participating in research as well as their expectations and concerns for the course. In this manner, she is able to understand her students' perspectives and to increase their connection to one another and herself. She is also able to set the stage for later exploration of group process among students.

2. Develop a Positive Attitude

The teacher wants to ensure that students find the topic as well as teaching methods to be relevant and to involve students in making important decisions. She explains that most people are researchers more than they know, and she asks what students would like to research about themselves as a class. An energetic discussion reveals students' desire to investigate the amount of sleep class members had the previous night. This topic seems relevant because the course meets at 8:00 a.m. and many students have part-time jobs and family commitments to younger relatives. Active decision-making, which includes students' perspectives and interest, heightens the relevance of new learning and promotes a sense of agency. However, because everyone's voice is not always present, especially in initial discussions, and because dominant ethnic or social groups have historically used looking sleepy euphemistically as a substitute for "laziness," Ms. Clark mentions the need for safeguards. She circles back to this when the group clarifies its rationale, purposes, and methods (*establish inclusion*). Note that this is an example of how a single teaching strategy, for example, group work, takes into account more than one motivational condition.

3. Enhance Meaning

Ultimately, five students volunteer to serve as "subjects," and the other students form research teams. Each team develops a set of questions to ask the volunteers, without directly asking how many hours of sleep they had the night before. For example, a question might be "How many hours of sleep do you need to feel rested?" or "Do you drink coffee?" After they pose questions, each team ranks the

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five volunteers *from having had the most to the least amount of sleep*. However, when the volunteers reveal the amount of time they slept, the students discover that none of the research teams was correct in ranking more than three students. Students discuss why this outcome may have occurred, and consider hypotheses and questions that might have improved their accuracy. Collaborative learning, hypothesis testing, critical questioning, and predicting heighten the engagement, challenge, and complexity of this part of the lesson.

4. Engender Competence

After the discussion, the teacher prompts the class to write a series of statements about what this activity has taught them about research. For example, research can be about testing predictions, practical things like sleep, and using your imagination. When they exit the class, they hand their responses to the teacher, who thanks each student personally (*establish inclusion*). The reflections on learning help students make explicit some of the accomplishments they value.

This snapshot of teaching illustrates how the four motivational conditions continually influence and interact with one another. Without establishing inclusion (small groups with clear roles), developing a positive attitude (student choice for a relevant research project), the enhancement of meaning through engagement and challenge (developing questions and predictions), and the quick-write to engender competence (what students learned from their perspective) may have revealed little more than impersonal musings. According to this instructional model, all of the motivational conditions contribute to learning and are planned and addressed within a learning experience or unit from beginning to end. In this way, instructional plans are also (intrinsic) motivational plans.

Architecture for Adult and Professional Learning

Although there are a number of informative learning theories that offer general principles (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Knowles, 1980; Kolb, 1984), there are relatively few comprehensive models to guide instructional design and research on *adult* motivation, teaching, and learning (Dweck, 2018; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In studies of youth education, there is substantial evidence that motivation is consistently and positively related to engagement, learning, and educational achievement (Hulleman & Barron, 2016). In Uguroglu and Walberg's (1979) benchmark analysis of 232 correlations of motivation and academic learning in 1st- through 12th-grade students, 98% of correlations between motivation and academic achievement were positive. Given the robust evidence for students as old as 18 years, and recent breakthroughs in neuroscience, it is reasonable to associate this finding with adult learners as well.

In the area of adult learning and, in particular, teacher education and instructional improvement, the motivational framework has served as a pragmatic architecture

to maximize intrinsic motivation and learning among graduate students, school leaders, district professional development coaches, and school-based professional learning communities. We illustrate this point through the example of shadowing high school students. We also provide references and page numbers for resources that combine knowing learners and examining the school experiences of learners with basic qualitative data methods.

A Motivational Approach to Shadowing Students

A number of years ago, one of the authors (Margery) taught a graduate education course titled Professional Learning That Motivates the Improvement of Instruction in Urban High Schools. The course was situated at a local high school, and students in the course were primarily White, European-American graduate students who were teachers, aspiring teachers, and aspiring educational leaders. An assignment required teachers to shadow a student who is considered low performing as a way to examine influences on student motivation and learning throughout a school day. Guided by the prompt “When is the student you have invited to participate in shadowing most likely to be motivated and engaged in learning?” the assignment offered practice with qualitative research methods and applications of research on intrinsic motivation, adult and professional learning, and culturally responsive teaching. Although a thorough exploration of the assignment exceeds the scope of this article, shadowing students was complemented by visiting the student’s family in his or her home. Visits followed a *funds of knowledge* approach (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) where teachers were learners and listeners rather than givers of information. The visits enabled teachers to discover student strengths that could be “mined” to enhance intrinsic motivation throughout the year (Ginsberg, 2011, pp. 26–29, 55–80).

Margery hoped graduate students would see how shadowing could become a way to interrupt blame and deficit thinking directed toward low-performing students and their families. They shaped their investigations so they could share results and structures with teachers in their own contexts (Ginsberg, 2014).

To enhance knowledge about motivation and learning, the experience was designed with the same four conditions of the motivational framework that graduate students were asked to consider in their observations. All frameworks are works in progress and present an inherent dilemma: They are by nature reductive and simplistic because they seek to demystify the complexity of a task or set of tasks. However, the improvement of instruction requires more than a checklist or matrix of “best practice” or “high leverage” strategies. While the motivational framework is by no means a prescriptive tool, students were able to see that the four conditions can guide the development of coherent teaching routines that can be continuously improved along a continuum of quality. Collecting qualitative data through the shadowing experience also helped students understand that the motivational framework can aid in the need for rich, vivid, and powerful descriptions of teaching and adult professional development practice.

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Quantitative data can illuminate “what” the strengths and needs of learners appear to be in relation to district or state standards. However, in the absence of qualitative data that attend to the nuances of “why,” this information can stimulate a guessing game that is vulnerable to default methods and trends. A few illustrative connections between the motivational framework and the shadowing experience follow.

Establishing Inclusion

An initial set of questions prompted graduate students to prioritize respect as a precondition for interactions with high school students and teachers. For example, graduate students discussed working with their high school students to make the process comfortable with initial questions such as “May I ask you questions as we walk from one class to another or is it best to walk behind you, as a shadow actually might?” or “In classrooms, would you like me to sit at the back of the room or at a location that is closer to where you are working?” Graduate students also provided clear assurances regarding taking notes, the confidentiality of notes, and their commitment to concluding the process at any point the student suggests.

Developing a Positive Attitude

Graduate students received a set of tools to customize to their context. These time-saving documents avoided the need and potential anxiety of trying to address circumstances that, realistically, require experience. For example, graduate students received a draft invitation to adapt to their own voices and circumstances:

My goal in shadowing you is to understand more about the experience of students in our school by witnessing, firsthand, some of your learning experiences. I hope that this will help me be more motivating and effective as a teacher. With your permission and with the permission of your family and teachers I would like to sit in on (at least three) classes with you and also walk behind you like a shadow in the hallways. In classes, in the hallway, and at lunch, I will pay attention to interactions without being too obvious, and I welcome advice about how to be your shadow without making you self-conscious. I will also check in with teachers in advance to make sure they are comfortable with having me in their classrooms. In addition to being your shadow, I would like to take notes on things that I observe. Anything I write will be confidential, and I will not use your name on my notes or in anything I share with other educators. Again, the purpose of this experience is to get a better understanding of what it means to be a student in our school. I will use the experience to work with other teachers to help make school a place where each and every student finds learning to be respectful, relevant, and worthwhile.

Enhancing Meaning

This motivational condition was addressed throughout the preparation, shad-

owing experience, and final paper. For example, teachers and high school students who previously participated in shadowing formed a panel to discuss their experiences and respond to graduate students' questions. Graduate students developed and shared a protocol of open-ended questions to ask high school students and practiced taking notes during an in-class simulation of an ethnographic interview.

Engendering Competence

Students received a project planning form and an assessment rubric to guide the development of their work. One of several testimonies to the effectiveness and value of the process follows. The graduate student was a special education resource teacher:

Essentially, it occurred to me that the members of the team simply did not have enough knowledge of the students they were charged with supporting, especially any strengths those students had. After shadowing and sharing some findings and insights with the team, I proposed that we include shadowing as part of our process to get to know the student in terms of his/her assets. Each member of the team is now required to spend a significant amount of time shadowing the student before making recommendations for interventions. Further, interventions should be based on assets noted while shadowing the student. I have received feedback from the team that the process has been enlightening. The referring teachers have noted that because we spend time with students of concern in supportive ways, teachers feel as though the team is more productive and relevant than it has been in the past. (Ginsberg, Knapp, & Farrington, 2014, p. 185)

(For additional information on shadowing students, see Ginsberg, 2011, pp. 33–54; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017, pp. 343–349.)

In this article, we have considered social and emotional learning through the lens of intrinsic motivation. We introduced and applied a motivational framework in response to the following two-part question: How can teachers more consistently enhance student intrinsic motivation to learn within and across cultural groups and experience these same conditions in their own learning?

As researchers have found and teachers know, ongoing improvement occurs within a constellation of challenges, and often teachers and teacher-educators are asked to bear the consequences of outcomes for which all of society is responsible. Nonetheless, a significant force behind schools and classrooms where students are eager and able to learn are inclusive, relevant, meaningful, and potentially transformative approaches to professional learning. By transformative, we mean deep shifts in assumptions and actions regarding student motivation and learning, for example, moving from the historical emphasis on “fixing” children and youth to strengths-focused understandings of human potential. We say this with historical humility, recognizing that for more than 5,000 years, inclusive and deep learning has been part of an ongoing struggle for human rights (Du Bois, 1949/1970).

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We maintain a number of unwieldy questions in advocating for this work. For example, how can we pursue more precise forms of teacher inquiry and discourse regarding student motivation and learning given the demands teachers already face? How can inquiry with multiple variables, such as those associated with the four conditions of the motivational framework, coexist in systems where the language of quantitative “data-driven” instruction promotes the seductive fantasy of formulaic school improvement (Farrell & Marsh, 2016; Schildkamp, Poortman, Luyten, & Ebbeler, 2017). While evidence supports the value of the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching as a heuristic, this work is not an intervention. Under the best of circumstances, its influence is cumulative because of a number of other factors that interact to positively influence teacher and student learning. We face a classic dilemma: how to “measure” the influence of a motivational framework without compromising its nuances through reductive means or undermining local initiative. By local initiative, we mean that teacher initiative and imagination, whether in the area of social-emotional learning or a specific discipline, make this framework relevant and meaningful to the different contexts in which it is applied. Any framework that becomes prescriptive in highly reductionistic ways risks undermining the motivational conditions for teachers that they apply for students. When teachers feel respected and included in decisions that influence their students, are encouraged and supported in new challenges that they find relevant and engaging, and have authentic evidence of improvement they trust, teachers will want to continuously enhance the motivation of their students.

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