

SECTION I

Understanding Student Motivation

INTRODUCTION

THE NATURE OF MOTIVATION IN THE CLASSROOM

In our work as teachers and with teachers for more than two decades, few topics have been more prevalent in the discourse of teaching and learning than motivation. Motivation captures the imagination of veteran and novice teachers alike. It is an often sought—but less often found—quality of students and classrooms. In hallways, classrooms, and meeting places, we hear statements such as these:

“She’s so motivated. That girl will go far.”

“My class was involved and energetic today.”

At times we also hear these:

“My fourth period class is a bunch of duds. They sit there and won’t participate.”

“He’d do well if he just applied himself. He’s just not motivated.”

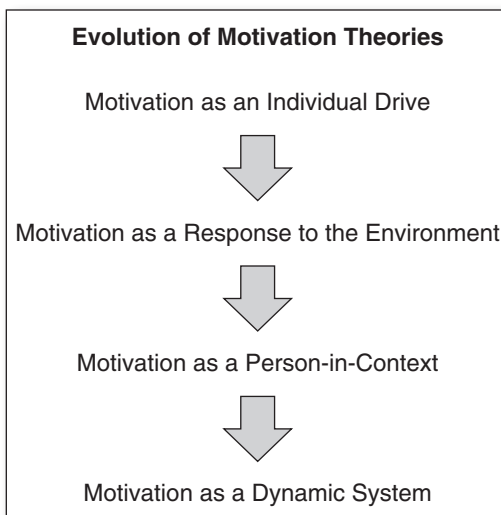
These comments and others like them attest to the puzzling and elusive nature of motivation. Sometimes teaching and learning feels magical. At other times, it can be arduous and challenging. Our goal in this book is to make motivation less elusive and to provide teachers with tools and ways of thinking to make those magical moments a more common occurrence.

There has been an evolution of how motivation has been conceptualized and understood over the past century. During this time, cognitive and social scientists have engaged in a variety of research to better understand the nature of motivation. This research has yielded valuable insights into what motivates learners, including the complexity of motivational processes. Early conceptions of motivation viewed it as an individual drive that was a part of every person as a way to fulfill basic needs. Conceptions of motivation then shifted to recognize the important role our environment plays in shaping an individual’s motivation. Some suggested that motivation occurred as the individual responded to environmental stimuli. The next generation of motivation research has used a person-in-context approach and understood motivation as the result of individuals making sense of the environment and acting accordingly. However, recently researchers have recognized that motivation is even more dynamic and is shaped and influenced by the activity that takes place between individuals and their environment. These overly simplified descriptions of motivation theories imply that there are many variables that influence the motivation of an individual and the motivational climate in a classroom.

MOTIVATION AS A DYNAMIC SYSTEM

Despite the recognition that motivation is highly complex, our increased understanding of motivation provides a wealth of information about teaching practices that are more likely to produce the type of learning environments that we all desire. We know that teachers across all grade levels and disciplines

struggle on a daily basis to cultivate classroom environments marked by energetic, focused interactions with students that produce interest and thoughtfulness, where time seems to pass quickly, and high-quality work is produced. Our hope is that teachers will use this book to transform their classrooms and schools into contexts characterized by motivated students engaged in deep learning and to truly reflect on their practices as one tool for continual improvement.





REFLECTIVE PRACTICE ACTIVITY
<p>List two or three goals you have for reading this book.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
<p>Why are you reading this book? Are you reading it as part of a class or professional learning community? How might your purpose for reading this book affect your motivation?</p>
<p>Are there others you could involve in a discussion of this book? If so, how? How does their participation influence your motivation?</p>

Guiding Metaphors

Metaphors provide a powerful way to help teachers understand motivation in a way that can help shape teaching and learning. How teachers conceive motivation is likely to impact the way they view students, as well as the teaching and learning process. In our experience, two metaphors have dominated how educators think about motivation in the classroom: the metaphor of the gas tank and the metaphor of the garden.

Common Metaphors for Motivation

Gas Tank Metaphor	Garden Metaphor
	
<p>The gas tank metaphor assumes the learner is the sole source of motivated behavior and action, and like a gas tank, motivation can be empty or full.</p>	<p>The garden metaphor suggests that motivation is a factor of environmental conditions out of the learner's control, such as sunlight and rain to a garden.</p>

Teachers often compare motivation to a gas tank. The tank is either full or empty. This approach to understanding motivation assumes that motivation resides within each individual student

as a fixed quality with which they enter every classroom. It tends to separate students into those who “have it” (i.e., are filled with motivation) and those who do not. This metaphor implies that increasing motivation requires students to be filled up with the right kind of fuel. In addition, for motivation to change, the student needs to have a change in an internal state or characteristic.

Another common metaphor views motivation like a garden. In this metaphor, students are seen as seeds being planted whose growth depends on the quality of the garden—the soil and amount of sunlight and water being received—to support their growth (e.g., photosynthesis). Qualities of the environment dictate how tall a plant grows and how often it blooms. Similarly, with students, their motivation depends on giving them a rich, nurturing motivational environment and curriculum. Their motivation and growth depends on conditions external to them. The assumption here is that as long as the teacher does the right thing or finds the right approach, students will become motivated.

Our purpose in describing common metaphors for motivation is to demonstrate the powerful influence they exert on teacher practice and student learning. For example, when teachers believe that motivation is like fuel in a car, they may assume that students enter the classroom with the tank full or empty. Teachers may then believe that they are able to identify those who are and are not motivated and form expectations about their engagement and achievement. Students who are motivated may receive extra attention, may be given more challenging work, and may be provided with special opportunities such as gifted and talented programs that are not offered to students who “don’t have it.” This can sometimes lead to the “Matthew Effect”—where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

On the other hand, a belief that motivation is like plants growing in a garden emphasizes the external conditions leading to motivation. A belief that motivation is like adding water, sunlight, and fertilizer to make plants grow may lead teachers to consider the curriculum, rewards, and incentives to spur

motivation without regard to the students themselves. This belief may also send teachers in search of “the right” motivating curriculum, such as hands-on projects or applied problem solving. This metaphor sows a *Field of Dreams* mentality that “if you build it, they will come” or in the classroom they will be motivated. The dangers with this metaphor are that it underemphasizes the work that must take place once positive conditions have been established and the experiences, strengths, and interests students bring to the classroom.

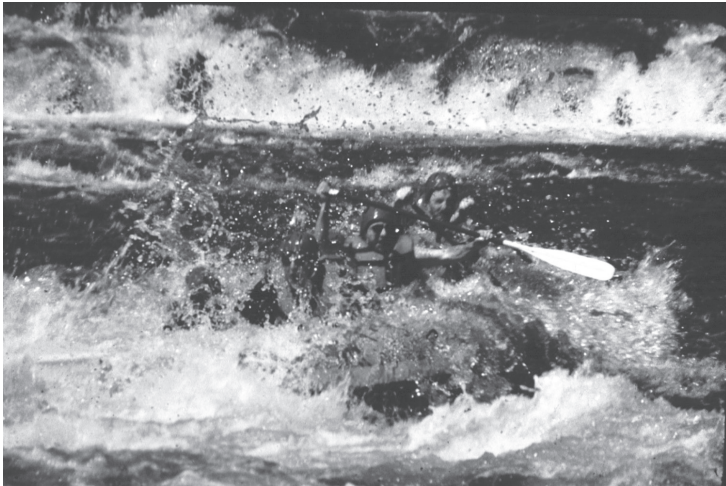
While useful to a certain extent, the danger with both of these metaphors is that they simplify motivation to being a quality of either the individual or the environment without consideration of the dynamic relationship of the learner in context. In these metaphors, the focus of teaching and learning too easily shifts away from understanding motivation as a part of the complex system of a classroom learning community in which teachers and students learn by identifying goals together and working to meet those goals. We certainly agree that the attitudes, skills, and behaviors that a student brings into the classroom matter—as do classroom characteristics such as the types of learning activities, participation structures, and forms of assessment. However, we suggest the broader activities or social processes that form the culture of a classroom define how students engage academically and socially in that classroom. The prevailing culture of a classroom, which is formed by all its members, including their histories, their hopes for the future, and their current actions, as well as the curriculum, technology, materials available, and broader school/community climate, best explains motivation and learning.

A New Metaphor for Motivation

Given the limitations of traditional metaphors for explaining motivation, we offer a new metaphor for thinking about motivation in classrooms—one that we believe will influence teacher practice in accordance with the best available research.

We propose that teaching and learning are much like rafting down a river. We urge teachers to view themselves as river guides attempting to guide a group of paddlers downstream. This may involve understanding the paddlers' level of readiness to lead them into rapids that are challenging but not dangerous for them. The river can be viewed as the curriculum that the learners seek to master; it may present unanticipated challenges, and lead to a promised but uncertain endpoint. The river, like a classroom, is the context in which all the work is situated. Motivation is represented by the currents that provide momentum and direction for progress along the journey. From this perspective, we encourage teachers to view motivation not as something that they supply, nor as something that is beyond their control. Instead, we urge readers to conceptualize **motivation as a dynamic, ever-present force** that may ebb and flow according to conditions, which learners may use to their advantage or choose to ignore, and that every teacher needs to "read" and understand to guide each learner. When properly harnessed, motivation, like a current, propels learning forward.

Motivation as a Current



The metaphor of motivation as a current reveals its ever-present, dynamic, and powerful nature.

The metaphor that motivation is like the current in a river works for a variety of reasons. First, it recognizes that without motivation we cannot meet our goals in a productive and efficient manner. Effective teachers recognize this and see themselves as guides who know how to navigate the waters of the curriculum with each student. They know how to read the motivational currents and how to use a variety of tools to help students harness this energy to reach their goals. Second, this metaphor recognizes that motivation in the classroom is dynamic—it ebbs and it flows, but it is always there. When teachers and students take a stance to harness motivation and use it in productive ways, they meet their goals. Third, this metaphor is powerful because it recognizes that motivation defines the complex relationships among the students, the teacher, and the curriculum.

This metaphor also depicts motivation as an ongoing force or energy that can be tapped into with a result of action, or in the case of classrooms, with a result of engagement. Although often used interchangeably, **motivation** is the energy that can lead to activity or **engagement**. They are related but separate. Thus, none of these factors alone guarantees motivation, but the combination of *particular student qualities* within *facilitative classrooms* working on *certain activities* may effectively harness motivation and result in high levels of engagement.

In this book, we provide teachers with tools that can serve as examples to help them tap into the motivation that is ever-present in the classroom. A variety of motivation manuals are readily available that describe a range of motivation theories or provide lists of simple strategies to motivate students and externally manipulate the environment. While many of these are useful and beneficial in the short term, the tools in this book are not as simple. They are not a “how-to” manual or a recipe that will magically transform a frustrating classroom situation into your version of a teacher’s paradise. However, with an understanding of student motivation, plus reflection and effort, teachers may

use these tools and others like them to cultivate a classroom environment and create a learning community in which students and the teacher are highly motivated to engage in activity that shapes meaningful learning. Rather than continually “filling up tanks” or “tending gardens,” guiding student learning by tapping into motivation becomes a continual journey in which the teacher’s expertise at “navigating currents” grows and evolves.

Book Overview

The book is organized into three sections. In Section I, we explore the concept of motivation and address the following questions:

1. What does motivation look like in our students and classrooms?
2. How can teachers assess the nature of motivation in their classroom?

Section I ends with a set of guiding questions for teachers to consider in creating a classroom environment that effectively harnesses motivation in support of student learning. Four questions provide a framework for reflection that we encourage teachers to use when they are interested in enhancing a motivational classroom climate and designing activity that aids their reflective process. However, we invite teachers to engage with these questions in an ongoing, reflective manner with the assumptions that all students can learn and that teaching is a continually evolving craft. The guiding questions we will explore are:

1. How do you provide the opportunity for students to make decisions and express their *voice* in the classroom?
2. What opportunities do you provide for students to engage in *meaningful* and *relevant* work in your classroom?

3. How are students being *challenged* at an appropriate level and supported in being *successful* with those challenges?
4. What are you doing to foster a sense of belonging through peer and student-teacher *relationships* in your classroom?

Section II of the book is divided into four chapters. Each of these chapters is framed by one of these four questions. Each chapter provides a deeper discussion of an essential element of classroom motivation and describes a variety of practices and strategies teachers can use to harness the specific qualities of motivation described in the chapter.

Section III discusses challenges to creating and sustaining high levels of motivation in classrooms and schools. Therefore, the chapters in this section first consider some of obstacles to creating a classroom culture of motivation and then suggest ways to sustain that culture over time. Three questions that help frame this section are:

1. How can you develop and sustain a motivational climate over time?
2. How can you buffer your students from demotivating influences outside your classroom?
3. How can you sustain your own motivation for learning as a way to maintain student motivation?

We hope this book informs teachers' understanding of motivation and encourages them to look beyond simplistic answers to discover how to enhance motivation in the classroom in more depth. In addition to exploring individual and classroom motivational qualities, we use the idea of motivation as always present, like a river current, to illustrate how the motivational qualities of a person are inseparable from their environment. We believe that teachers are

guides, navigating learners by working with the current of motivation and adapting their ever-shifting classroom to take full advantage of the collective contributions of all students.

As teachers and teacher educators, we have come to understand the value of self-reflection as a critical tool for improving teaching practice. However, we also acknowledge the complexity of the teaching and learning process for teachers and students. Throughout the book, we provide suggestions for how teachers can employ research-based motivational strategies by taking an open, reflective stance toward their teaching. Moreover, we explore how our actions as teachers are situated within our schools and communities of practice, evolving over time. We focus on understanding shared participation in activity that creates a classroom culture as the place that supports and enhances motivation for achievement rather than depicting classrooms as a place where students arrive with predetermined motivation or as a place where student will be magically transformed by the teacher or curriculum. Our hope is that this focus on shared participation in the activities of teaching and learning captures the complexity of the interactions and work in which teachers and students engage in their classroom.

CHAPTER WRAP-UP ACTIVITY

Use the Frayer Model (see Buehl, 2001) to construct a concept map or graphic organizer of your understanding of "motivation" as it stands after reading the introduction. Each quadrant requires you to elaborate on your definition of motivation by defining, listing characteristics, and considering examples and nonexamples. As you progress through the book, we suggest you return to this model to revise and reconsider your developing understanding of motivation.

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<i>Freyer Model</i>	
DEFINITION	CHARACTERISTICS
EXAMPLES/MODELS	NONEXAMPLES