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Coming to Terms with Motivation Constructs

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The field of motivation is beset with a lack of clear definition of motivational constructs and specification of their operation within larger theoretical frameworks. These problems have implications for interpretation of research results and applications to practice. The articles in this collection represent an important step in attaining greater clarity. Future research should be directed toward clarifying conditions under which motivational constructs predict achievement behavior, delineating the role of social processes in motivation, and exploring long-term motivation in the face of obstacles and competing demands.

''When *I* use a word,'' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ''it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.''

''The question is,'' said Alice, ''whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.''

''The question is,'' said Humpty Dumpty, ''which is to be master—that's all.''

Lewis Carroll's often-cited passage seems a fitting way to introduce the conclusion to this collection of motivation articles. In the opening article, Murphy and Alexander set the theme of defining and clarifying motivational constructs. At times educational researchers—perhaps unwittingly—have behaved like Humpty Dumpty by renaming or defining motivational constructs to fit their theoretical models and research methodologies with insufficient attention paid to extant conceptualizations.

Multiplicity of definitions occurs because ours is an inexact discipline; we simply do not agree on the definition and operation of key motivational constructs. This situation is understandable but it also is problematic, especially for newcomers to the field, practitioners, students, and those of us who attempt to make sense of motivation. As one who teaches a course on motivation I often am asked by colleagues and students to define constructs, resolve discrepant definitions, and clarify distinctions between constructs.

Problems arise because how we define constructs influences which measures we use to assess them and how we interpret our research results. I

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suspect that a fair number of inconsistent research results are directly traceable to differences in definitions and in measures used to assess the same construct.

The authors of the articles in this collection have taken an important step in remedying this perplexing state of affairs by clearly delineating key motivational constructs and explaining their operation within a larger theoretical framework. Thus, Wentzel (this issue) defines *goal* as ''a cognitive representation of what it is that an individual is trying to achieve in a given situation.'' Pintrich (this issue) describes *achievement goals* as ''the purposes or reasons an individual is pursuing an achievement task.'' Zimmerman's (this issue) *self-efficacy* refers to, ''personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals.'' Wigfield and Eccles (this issue) define *expectancies for success* as ''children's beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or longer term future.'' Ryan and Deci (this issue) state that *intrinsic motivation* involves ''doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable.''

The potential contributions of these articles include theoretical clarity, research interpretation, and applications to teaching and learning. With respect to theoretical clarity, not only have the authors clearly defined key motivational constructs and explained how they fit into larger theoretical frameworks, they also have distinguished them from other, similar constructs. Thus, Wentzel employs a goal theory perspective and distinguishes goals from goal orientations. Also employing a goal theory perspective is Pintrich, who positions achievement goals relative to task-specific goals and general goals. Using a social cognitive theoretical framework, Zimmerman contrasts self-efficacy with outcome expectancies. Wigfield and Eccles describe expectancy-value theory and compare and contrast expectancies for success with self-efficacy. Using self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic motivation.

In addition to theoretical clarity, these articles should facilitate interpretation of research results. Although I am not advocating that the preceding definitions are the only acceptable ones for these constructs, they are well grounded in theoretical frameworks and have been applied frequently in research. Thus, they form a useful starting point for research in the area. At a minimum, investigators who define or operationalize constructs differently should explain points of divergence and the basis for them.

Third, the motivational constructs and definitions discussed in these articles are useful for educational practitioners. Most teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents intuitively understand what goals, self-efficacy, expectancies for success, and intrinsic motivation are and why they are central to motivation. Thoughtful practitioners consider ways to integrate this core set of constructs into teaching and interactions with students to facilitate learning and personal growth.

While these articles contribute to our understanding of motivational theory, I concur with Murphy and Alexander (this issue) that there remains much to be done. We must continue our quest to clarify the conditions under which motivational constructs best predict achievement behavior. For example, self-efficacy, goals, and intrinsic motivation do not always predict achievement outcomes. Thus, self-efficacy is unimportant for practicing well-honed actions (Bandura, 1997), goals do not direct behavior if people are not committed to attaining them (Locke & Latham, 1990), and powerful external constraints can undermine intrinsic motivation (Lepper & Hodell, 1989). From the practitioner's perspective, we must determine when it is most advantageous for teachers to design instruction that incorporates such variables.

A second recommendation is to delineate better the role of social processes in motivation. Although all perspectives represented in these articles include social variables, as a discipline we seem to have underestimated their influence. As Murphy and Alexander (this issue) note, social processes typically have been investigated in contexts other than academic achievement; nonetheless, they are relevant to the latter. In their thought-provoking book *Beyond the Classroom*, Steinberg, Brown, and Dornbusch (1996) contend that by adolescence peers exert a stronger influence on academic achievement than do parents. Theories of academic motivation tend to focus on the self; however, self-processes are affected not only by individual achievements but also by observations of models and by collective achievements (Bandura, 1986; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Many have lamented how negative, ability-related social comparisons can lower observers' self-efficacy and expectancies for success (Ames, 1992; Meece, 1991; Schunk, 1991). Future research should investigate the relative influence on motivation of self and social processes, especially when they conflict; for example, a student with intrinsic motivation to learn who observes peers being rewarded for nonacademic achievements.

Finally, I recommend a stronger focus on long-term motivation. I echo the recommendation of Murphy and Alexander (this issue) for systematic, longitudinal investigations. Most research studies are brief. Maintenance periods, when included, often occur after a few days or weeks. By definition, however, motivation involves instigating and sustaining goal-directed activity, often over lengthy periods (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

A particularly intriguing question is how students maintain goals, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, expectancies for success, and so forth, in the face of many difficulties. Wentzel (this issue) suggests that a successful integration of goals is critical such that students believe that an action will serve multiple goals. Long-term motivation is a complex issue and not an easy one to investigate empirically (Maehr & Midgley, 1991); yet it offers insights

into motivation from a different window and the results would have useful implications for teaching and learning.

In closing, I underscore my appreciation for the articles in this collection. They should help to alleviate some of the problems associated with motivation theory and research and they lend themselves well to practical applications. I look forward to resolving the conundrum presented by Alice and Humpty Dumpty and to what I believe will be an exciting future in the field of motivation!

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