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Motivation and Writing

> The chief impediments to learning are not cognitive. It is not that students cannot learn; it is that they do not wish to. If educators invested a fraction of the energy they now spend trying to transmit information in trying to stimulate the students' enjoyment of learning, we could achieve much better results.
>
> —Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Literacy and Intrinsic Motivation"

We are getting close to the midterm "dry-run" portfolio readings for the class. My students will have their papers read by one of my colleagues and rated either as "passing" or "needs improvement." No grades will be attached to these portfolio readings, but it is still a high-stakes situation; students who do not receive a rating of "passing" on their portfolios at the end of the semester will not pass the class. This situation—having my students' ultimate fate in this class being in the hands of someone else—has the advantage of making me more of a coach than a judge of their work, but it does create some anxiety. To further complicate the grading situation, while I do grade each student's collective work at midterm and at the end of the course, I do not grade individual student papers, trying to provide what Elbow calls an "evaluation-free zone" ("Ranking"). I want students to focus for now on how to make their writing better, not on what grade they got or want to get. For the most

part they accept my explanations of my grading and of the portfolio system, and in spite of the fact that such activity does not promise a higher grade, they are busily revising their papers for the midterm "practice" portfolio reading.

At least, most of them are. Four provide some interesting contrasts in terms of their motivation, however. Alice and An Mei are at about the same level in terms of their writing skills (and are in the same tutorial group outside class). Alice, who has continued to have trouble revising to make her paper more analytical, is nervous about the lack of grades—she tells me she is used to knowing "where she stands" and is worried about failing. I tell her she can come in to talk to me at any time and I will try to let her know how she is doing, so she comes, often. I find out during these conferences that she can't see the point of the reading journal I have asked students to keep, since it doesn't receive a letter grade. The portfolio, with its possibility of failure, frightens her, and she feels "stressed" about getting her papers ready for a reader she doesn't know. When the midterm reading for her portfolio comes back positive, however, she is relieved, and her visits to my office stop. Even though there are suggestions from the reader for strengthening the paper, she decides not to change anything. Why revise when the paper passed?

An Mei, another frequent visitor to my office, views the midterm portfolio quite differently. She tells me that it provides her with a good chance to revise her papers "precisely"; she comes for several consultations and works diligently with her tutorial group, revising many times. She says that she feels proud of the result when she turns it in. Her portfolio passes but receives some fairly negative comments on her cultural encounter paper, which describes how she improved her English when she first came to this country by watching TV commercials. The reader urged her to be more critical of American culture, particularly of its consumerism. This reaction mystifies and upsets her, but she seems spurred on by the comments. How can she revise to make a reader other

than me understand that she needed work on idiomatic English and that TV commercials helped her more than textbooks with the spoken idiom? Unlike Alice, she is eager to rework her passing paper, wanting very much to improve her skills.

Then there is baby-faced Ira. His matter-of-factness about not being good in English has given way to a hangdog expression and a complete lack of effort. His first freewrite consisted of two sentences: "I can't do this. I don't know what you mean by freewrite." His first draft consists of a rumpled page of notes, without a coherent sentence in sight. He tells me that the readings are "too hard"; that's why he has nothing to say in class. I wonder if he might have a learning disability, but he tells me he has been tested and does not; he doesn't have a problem—my class is the problem. With the help of his writing group, he does finally struggle and produce a draft of a paper on his encounter with the strange culture of college. It has some promising ideas, and I make a point of praising it to him—even reading bits of it aloud to the class. But he puts off revising it and has to turn it in unrevised for the midterm portfolio reading. He also does not write a cover letter for the portfolio and does not include the in-class essay, as required, since he "lost" it. His portfolio fails, primarily because he has not put forth any effort. His reaction—"I knew it would fail. Like I said, I've never been good at English."

Will is also struggling. His first effort at a freewrite was, like Ira's, short and labored. But he is a reader who wants to write—Updike, Steinbeck, and Hemingway are his favorite authors, he tells me, and he would like to model his writing after theirs. He has high aspirations. I ask him if he has heard of writer's block (he has not, but he nods in assent when I describe the phenomenon), and we discuss how others, including his favorite authors, have dealt with it. I notice that he mumbles to himself as he writes; he says he "talks himself through" ideas in order to keep writing. I ask him to share some of his subvocalizations with me as he works on a

piece, and I discover that besides mulling over ideas he is using a sort of pep-talk strategy to keep himself on task ("I'm sick of this paper but I need to go on—if I stop now I'll never get back into it—OK, where was I?"). We discuss a few other strategies he can use and other techniques besides self-coaching for what he terms "fighting a paper," like setting aside a particular time to write. I agree to extend deadlines for him if need be. He finally produces a paper describing and analyzing his encounters with Native American culture while growing up in a small Montana town. It's the most sophisticated piece of analysis I've seen from a freshman; his portfolio receives high praise from the anonymous reader, who suggests that he submit it to the campus literary magazine. Still, Will is not satisfied with the paper and wants to continue to work on it. Writing does not come easily for him, but he seems to be such a high achiever that he is willing to take on the struggle.

Four students, four widely different pictures of motivation. No wonder motivation is something of a mystery to teachers. Why is it that some of our students (like Alice) seem so apathetic about improving their writing, while others who are no better in terms of ability are (like An Mei) eager to learn and work hard on improving their skills? Why do some students (like Ira) give up when a task becomes challenging while others (like Will) persist at the same task, struggling in spite of difficulty and meeting the challenge? What should we as teachers do to keep eager students motivated and to energize those who need to be more motivated? This chapter aims at making motivation a little less mysterious, something that teachers can understand and take into account as they work with student writers.

"Motivation" comes from the Latin *movere*, to move; the concept embraces all the factors that move us to engage in and direct our behavior in purposeful ways, to set goals and then strive to reach those goals. Exactly how we are motivated and can work to motivate others is not always well understood, however. As Dweck points out, recent research

has called into question several commonsense notions about motivation and learning: that children's natural urge to learn would continue unabated if not sabotaged by the evaluative practices of formal schooling; that large amounts of praise and success will help motivate students; that brighter students are more likely to choose challenging tasks or to persist when a task becomes difficult. In fact, Dweck asserts, schools may not squelch students' natural enthusiasm for learning so much as fail to teach new sets of skills and foster new motivational frameworks for working on intellectual tasks; the lavishing of praise as a reinforcement tactic (as I tried with Ira) may not increase the probability that students will seek out learning tasks with confidence or persist when the tasks become difficult; and brighter students, especially females, are not necessarily more motivated to seek challenges or to persist in the face of difficulties ("Motivation" 88, 97). The situation is rather more complex than Csikszentmihalyi's statement, the epigraph to this chapter, suggests.

What Motivates Our Students? Some Perspectives

Motivation, like emotion, has been studied from a number of different perspectives. Before the beginnings of modern psychology, motivation was referred to as "will"; as the term implies, a certain freedom informed the construct—individuals had some control over their goals and could direct their behavior willfully. One could choose to write sonnets, lead a religious reform movement, or study the stars and planets. Freud's instinct theory and Hull's later (1941) behaviorist drive theory changed that view, however; people were thought to do things not because they wanted to but because they had to—they were not moved so much as driven to action. Individuals, both these theories contended, strive to reduce internal tension and reach equilibrium, or homeostasis. The fundamental motivational principle was that any

deviation from equilibrium provides a force to satisfy biological needs and return to internal balance (Weiner, *Theories*)—hunger drives us to eat, aggression to fight, sexual energy to mate.[1] Along with the principle of homeostasis, a fundamental axiom of these theories was hedonism—organisms strive to avoid pain and increase pleasure. Reward and punishment were the only external motivating factors.

Ironically enough, it was behaviorist research that began to change this notion of motivation. Researchers found that laboratory rats and monkeys behaved in certain ways not just to return to equilibrium but to seek challenging tasks, to explore new territory, to see new sights (Harlow; Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 46). Psychologists had to add competency, curiosity, and novelty to the list of drives that motivated behavior (White; Butler). Motivational theory made room for the "optimal arousal" hypothesis: that organisms had a need not only for homeostasis but also for additional stimulation when understimulated (Hebb; Berlyne; Day, Berlyne, and Hunt). The rigid link between what happened biologically and what the organism did began to weaken; as theories became less mechanistic, a certain amount of freedom and ability to control crept back into the concept of motivation (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 46). Psychologists began to speak of extrinsic motivation (related to stimulus-response learning from reward or punishment—Alice's need for grades, for example) and intrinsic motivation (related to some goal-related decision of the individual rather than external reward or punishment, such as Will's desire to be a writer).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

With the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, we move to a more social view of the phenomenon. What moved people to action was the desire to be effective in changing their environment in some way, to be masters of

their fates, captains of their souls. Some of the earliest work in this area was done by deCharms, who discussed motivation in terms of what he called "origin" and "pawn" behavior: origins are those persons who see their behavior as determined by their own choosing, while pawns see their behavior as determined by external forces beyond their control (*Personal Causation* 273–74). If people see their behavior resulting from their own choice, they value the results of that behavior, but if they see the same behavior resulting from the dictates of an outside force, they devalue the same behavior and its results. (This explains why student evaluations of required classes are invariably lower than of electives, even though students might do well in both classes.) Play, as deCharms points out, becomes work if forced; if one can choose one's work without regard to outside forces, it becomes play, rewarding in and of itself (273). The theory was put to the test during the mid-1960s, when deCharms worked with inner-city schoolchildren and their teachers on a program designed to enhance the motivation of both groups. After this experience, the theory was refined; the difference between origins and pawns came to be seen not as a difference between freedom and constraint but as a difference in outlook. The origin (like An Mei or Will) is able to determine personally meaningful goals within constraints, while the pawn (like Alice or Ira) sees only the constraints. Origins take personal responsibility for their actions, for their learning; pawns do not (*Enhancing Motivation* 205–09).

What is interesting about deCharms's work is that he found that students could be taught to distinguish between controllable and uncontrollable outcomes and to set realistic goals based on their own probability of success. They learned to see goals as challenges rather than threats, to take responsibility for their own learning. As the students trained in the program increased their motivation, their academic achievement also rose (141–60). Pawns, in other words, can learn to be origins. This transformation seems to be best accomplished in a warmly supportive classroom atmosphere where

the teacher respects the students and treats them as capable of guiding their own behavior—treats everyone, in effect, like an origin (66). This research suggests that the student-centered, collaborative classroom that most composition pedagogy values is the right atmosphere for increasing student motivation. It also suggests that we would do well to make motivational concepts explicit to students and to help those who seem to have pawn-like tendencies to set and accomplish realistic goals for themselves.

The concept of intrinsic motivation took a new turn when several researchers began to examine how extrinsic reinforcers (those staples of behaviorist theory) actually undermined intrinsically motivated behavior. Again, this new turn began in the behaviorist's lab. Harlow noticed that monkeys manipulated puzzles without being rewarded for the activity, but once the puzzles were baited with a reward (a raisin), the monkeys lost interest in unbaited puzzles. It seemed that an extrinsic reward, when added to an ongoing intrinsically motivated activity, reduced the subject's interest in the activity for its own sake (deCharms, *Personal Causation*). Extrinsic rewards did not enhance but actually replaced intrinsic motivation. This might explain the behavior of students like Alice—grades and the approval of a known authority figure (a teacher, a tutor, a portfolio reader) become more important than the learning that the grades are supposed to measure. Extrinsic rewards had become the major motivating force in her academic life.

Further experiments documented some of the conditions under which rewards decreased individuals' interest in certain activities. One experiment found that if people received money for engaging in activities they enjoyed, they lost interest in those activities faster than when they were not rewarded (Deci, "Effects"). In a study involving college students, researchers found that subjects chose challenging puzzles until money was introduced as a reward; then the subjects chose the easiest puzzles to ensure receiving the reward (Shapira). If the reward was introduced in one period,

the subjects chose easier puzzles in a subsequent period when rewards were no longer offered (Pittman, Emery, and Boggiano). Researchers suggested that situations enhancing intrinsic motivation include self-determined behavior or choice, positive feedback, and optimally challenging activities; those that decrease intrinsic motivation include external rewards or pressures to act in particular ways, feedback that implies external rather than internal reasons for success, and ego-involving task conditions that might challenge self-esteem (Ryan, Connell, and Deci). More recently researchers have revised this situational model, saying that it is not just the situation itself but also the individual's perception of the situation that enhances or decreases intrinsic motivation. Individuals can react very differently to the same situational cues (see Dweck, "Intrinsic Motivation" 296). Much of the research on the effects of reward systems on intrinsic motivation has been summarized in a volume with the rather ominous title *The Hidden Costs of Reward* (Lepper and Greene).[2]

What does this line of research imply for that mother of all academic reward systems, grades? First of all, it does not imply that we should entirely do away with grades as a motivating factor—extrinsic rewards can still be useful methods of motivating behavior, especially with those students like Alice for whom intrinsic motivation is not great or who do not have strong feelings of competence and self-determination (Lepper and Greene 142). It seemed very necessary for her to come to my office periodically and be reassured about where she stood. And as Lepper and Hodell point out, it may not be possible to experience the intrinsic satisfaction of some academic tasks until one has acquired a certain level of proficiency, and extrinsic rewards can be useful to get students to that level (88). But the research on intrinsic motivation suggests that we do need to think carefully about how grades might be used and exactly what they might motivate students to do. For example, Lepper and Greene state that the explicit use of extrinsic rewards (like grades) to

modify behavior brings up the issues of control and volition. These issues can influence an individual's perception of an activity's intrinsic value, resulting in that person not wanting to engage in the activity in the absence of the rewards (xi). Too much emphasis on grades in a writing class could cause students to devalue the activity of writing when it is not being graded (as in writing-to-learn activities) or to lose interest in self-sponsored writing.

Lepper and Greene also state that the promise of an extrinsic reward tends to focus an individual's attention only on the aspects of performance that are directly related to the attainment of that reward (xi). Many teachers who want to motivate students to revise their work promise higher grades for revision, only to find that students will do a minimal revision and then expect an "A" for their effort; the teacher's bid to engage the student in revision has actually focused that student's attention on revising for the grade rather than on rethinking the ideas in the paper. Separating revision from grading (for example, by grading only when the student and teacher agree that a paper is ready and then moving on to revising the next draft, or by grading the body of a student's work in a portfolio) would focus the student's motivation more on overall improvement than on a reward for a specific revision task.

Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation presents us with a slightly different perspective on students' engagement with their writing.[3] The research on intrinsic motivation highlights how perceived control can determine task persistence; achievement motivation theories examine perceived ability or competence in achievement situations. There are three achievement theories that are of interest here: need achievement, test anxiety, and attribution theory, a subset of which involves a phenomenon known as "learned helplessness."

The first theory to conceptualize achievement motivation was put forward by McClelland and his associates in the early 1950s and was built around the notion of the need to achieve and display competence. These researchers postulated two acquired drives they called "motives": one to achieve success, the other to avoid failure. These motives were thought to be acquired through conditioning in achievement situations where children learned to feel pride in accomplishment and shame at failure, emotions that fostered approach or avoidance behavior toward later tasks. Thus affect played a large role in this early theory even though it was developed within a behaviorist framework—one's affective state as one anticipated achievement goals was seen as the energizing force behind approach or avoidance in achievement situations. The motive to achieve success involved positive anticipation about goals, an expressed desire to do a good job, an emphasis on tasks as a means to success, and positive emotions associated with striving to achieve goals. The motive to avoid failure was seen not as driving people toward success but as inhibiting their achievement activities; this motive involved anxiety about doing a poor job, expressions of inadequacy ("I've never been good at English"), an emphasis on the difficulty of tasks ("The readings are too hard"), and negative emotions associated with evaluative situations. People like Will who have a strong need to achieve will take on challenging tasks, while people like Alice who have a strong need to avoid failure avoid challenge unless there are strong extrinsic rewards.

Test anxiety theory, like need achievement theory, assumes that acquired drives can energize or inhibit performance; the theory was also developed in the 1950s by, among others, George Mandler. Test anxiety is defined as a drive acquired in achievement situations that facilitates or inhibits performance on evaluative tasks (Mandler and Sarason). This theory is the foundation for the studies of writing anxiety (or writing apprehension), begun as a part of Daly and Miller's research on communication apprehension.

Both need achievement and test anxiety theory have come under fire recently (see Dweck and Elliott 648–50). George Mandler, speaking with special privilege by virtue of his role as one of the theory's founders, opines that research on test anxiety has been noncumulative, contributing to a kind of "dustbowl empiricism" in which the production of data becomes more important than the development of a determinate theory ("Helplessness" 361–64). Others have criticized the theories for emphasizing only the negative, debilitating effects of affect, when it seems that affect can also be enabling; as Bannister has shown, some level of apprehension actually aids writing in the planning stages. The theories also ignore the possibility that cognition as well as affect might influence the formation of achievement expectancies (Weiner, *Theories*). Nevertheless, both theories are important in that they have established various constructs for discussion and research. The differentiation between state anxiety and trait anxiety in determining test anxiety, for example, is a useful one. State anxiety is situation-specific, occurring only in achievement or testing situations; trait anxiety describes an individual's reaction to all the stresses of everyday life (see Spielberger). Our interventions as teachers are much more likely to be successful with the student (like Will) who is anxious only in achievement situations than with the student who is anxious about everything (the latter might need to talk to a counselor rather than to a composition teacher). An understanding of writing apprehension is particularly helpful when teachers deal with students who have trouble producing drafts—their difficulty might be anxiety rather than laziness or inattention. We can help such students learn conscious coping strategies, such as using their anxiety as a cue to stay on task and to verbalize strategies (Meichenbaum and Butler), as Will had learned to do.

As the psychological community began to focus on the importance of mental events, a more cognitive view of achievement motivation developed—attribution theory. This theory, put forward in its fullest form by Weiner in *An*

Attributional Theory of Motivation and Emotion, examines causal attributions, that is, people's beliefs about the reasons for the outcomes of their efforts. Particularly important for motivation is the perception of what Rotter calls the "locus of control"—whether individuals believe that success or failure in an achievement situation is a result of internal forces (ability) or of external forces (task difficulty). We can classify people along a continuum from internal to external according to their beliefs about causality (another way of looking at deCharms's origins and pawns). Thus we can have two different reactions to the same phenomenon: some students tell us that they don't understand an assignment, assuming the cause is internal, while others tell us the assignment is too hard, assuming the cause is external. Attribution theory also looks at beliefs about the causes of outcomes along the dimensions of stability (aptitude) and instability (chance), and controllability (effort) and uncontrollability (fatigue). Thus we have students who take credit for their success or failure themselves, while others tell us they were just lucky, or that their grandmother died.

The notion underlying attribution theory—that people's beliefs about the outcomes of achievement situations guide their behavior in those situations—also formed the basis for research on learned helplessness. Researchers found that when a dog was put in a shock-avoidance experiment but could do nothing to avoid the shocks, the animal later did nothing to avoid shocks in a later experiment where escape was available (Seligman and Maier). The dog had learned an existential lesson, that it could exercise no control over events in its world. The result was helpless, hopeless passivity.

Researchers examining this phenomenon in humans (Diener and Dweck; Dweck and Goetz) have looked at patterns of attributions—characteristic ways of explaining failure or success—and have named two such patterns: an adaptive, persistent mastery orientation and a maladaptive pattern of learned helplessness. When put in a situation

where they first achieved success in solving problems and then encountered insoluble problems, mastery-oriented students like An Mei did not attribute their failure to their own inadequacies but began to search for new strategies and to give themselves instructions on how to proceed. Their prognosis for future success remained positive, as did their affective state; a number indicated heightened affect in the face of a challenging opportunity for mastery. They either maintained or improved their problem-solving strategies, and many showed more sophisticated strategies during the failure experience than they had shown earlier in the success situation. They persisted in the face of failure because they seemed to see it as an opportunity for new learning.[4] The helpless students, on the other hand, displayed a behavioral pattern that contrasted with that of the mastery-oriented students in every way. When they encountered failure, they attributed it to their own lack of ability. They had negative expectations for their future performance at problem-solving, and a significant number believed that if they were given the problems they had solved in the first part of the experiment, they could no longer solve them. As they continued to encounter failure, their affective state became more negative, and they slipped into more unsophisticated and unproductive problem-solving strategies; even their recall of their previous successes declined—they remembered more failures than they actually had during the first part of the experiment. They saw failure not as a challenge but as a measure of their ability, a defeat (Dweck and Bempechat).

One of the researchers' most interesting findings was that there appear to be significant sex differences in learned helplessness. Although females are generally more successful than males in school, especially in verbal skills (see Rubin and Greene), they are more likely than males to attribute their successes to outside factors and their failures to lack of ability. They are more likely to give up than to persist if they fail. Males, on the other hand, are more likely to attribute their successes to their own abilities and their failures to out-

side factors[5]; they tend to persist and even improve in the face of failure. The way our culture socializes boys and girls has been blamed for these attributional differences (see Dweck and Goetz for a summary of this research); whatever the cause, it is important for teachers to understand that for students like An Mei with a mastery orientation, failure may be a spur, while for others like Ira it may produce passivity and encourage their view that trying to improve is hopeless. We can help alleviate learned helplessness by teaching students specific strategies (such as breaking a large task into smaller parts), guiding them through the writing process, and assuring them that they won't be penalized for errors during the process. We can also help students analyze their goals and judge their own competence realistically. One way to do this is through a discussion of goals in an achievement setting, contrasting learning goals with performance goals.

Analyzing Achievement Goals: A Social-Cognitive Perspective

Examining patterns of attribution helps us understand why people *expect* to succeed; but why do they *want* to succeed? Dweck and Elliott and Elliott and Dweck propose that people in achievement situations can set two classes of goals: learning goals, which aim to increase competence, or performance goals, which aim to gain favorable judgments of competence (or to avoid being judged as incompetent). Each class of goals can be traced to a tacit theory of intelligence. Some students subscribe to a theory of intelligence as incremental, as something they can increase through their own effort.[6] Therefore, when confronted with a challenging task, they believe they can do it and are interested in learning something from it. They see errors as ways to learn and effort as an investment in that learning. Other students subscribe to a theory of intelligence as a stable entity, something that cannot be changed through effort—indeed, effort is risky be-

cause it might result in error and reveal inadequacy. When confronted with a challenging task, they do not ask, "How can I do it?" but, "*Can* I do it?" They are more oriented toward being judged as smart than toward learning something new. Although the two theories of intelligence are unrelated to ability in young children, over time the theories begin to predict achievement—entity theorists wind up as low achievers and incremental theorists as high achievers (Dweck and Bempechat). A table developed by Dweck and Elliott points out the contrasts between the two theories of intelligence and the related classes of achievement goals (see below).

While both classes of goals are natural and inevitable ones in achievement situations, Elliott and Dweck found that an overemphasis on performance goals not only helped to create learned helplessness in some students, but it also had an effect on mastery-oriented students, making them so protective of how their ability would be judged that they later rejected the chance to learn something new if it involved risking errors. So while students' theories of intelligence may orient them toward either learning or performance goals, situational cues in the classroom environment can do much to help construct—or deconstruct—their goal orientations and build their theories of intelligence. The notion of "giftedness," emphasized in many public schools through tracking systems, contributes heavily to students' theories of intelligence. Palmquist and Young found that belief in the notion of giftedness (that is, writing ability is a stable entity that one is born with, something like perfect pitch) played a significant role in shaping students' expectations. Students with low assessments of their writing ability had both strong beliefs in giftedness and high levels of writing apprehension, while students with high estimates of their writing ability had a low belief in giftedness (they were, in other words, incremental theorists) and showed low writing apprehension.

What happens when students set achievement goals, like Will's goal for improving an already excellent paper?

Table 1. Students' Theories of Intelligence and Achievement Goals

Theories of Intelligence		
	Incremental	Entity
Intelligence is:	A repertoire of skills that increases through effort	A global, stable entity whose adequacy is judged through performance
Effort is:	An investment that increases intelligence	A risk that may reveal low intelligence
Goals		
	Learning Goal: Competence Increase	Performance Goal: Competence Judgment
1. Entering question:	How can I do it? What will I learn?	Can I do it? Will I look smart?
2. Focus on:	Process	Outcome
3. Errors:	Natural, useful	Failure
4. Uncertainty:	Challenging	Threatening
5. Optimal task:	Maximizes learning (becoming smarter)	Maximizes looking smart
6. Seek:	Accurate information about ability	Flattering information
7. Standards:	Personal, long-term, flexible	Normative, immediate, rigid
8. Expectancy:	Emphasizes effort	Emphasizes present ability
9. Teacher:	Resource, guide	Judge, rewarder/punisher
10. Goal value:	"Intrinsic": value of skill, activity, progress	"Extrinsic": value of judgment

Source: Adapted from Carol Dweck and Elaine S. Elliott, "Achievement Motivation," *Handbook of Child Psychology*, ed. Paul H. Mussen and E. Mavis Hetherington, vol. 4 (New York: Wiley, 1983) 655. Reprinted by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Dweck theorizes that students enter such a situation with a repertoire of cognitive and motivational sets. Cognitive sets include the theories of intelligence (incremental or entity) mentioned above. Motivational sets include beliefs (views about the nature of competence, the level of one's own competence, about what variables influence outcomes, and so on), inference rules (preferred modes of estimating task difficulty, deciding the causes of outcomes), salient representations (tendencies to focus on the pleasant or unpleasant means or desirable or undesirable outcomes), and values and interests (personal hierarchies of what is important and enjoyable). Situational cues about the evaluator, the nature of the task, and the possible rewards are then interpreted in light of these motivational sets. Students set goals, have some expectancy about achieving those goals, and have some idea about how pleasant or unpleasant the means to achievement will be. They then set a course of action that when completed will feed back into the system, potentially altering their goal values, expectancies, or means values. Students will persist in trying to achieve the goals they have set as long as their values and expectancies remain high ("Motivation" 92–93). An examination of these values and expectancies can help us understand our students' achievement behavior more completely.

Goal Values and Goal Expectancies (Confidence)

As mentioned earlier, we can differentiate between two classes of goals in terms of values: learning goals and performance goals. Students (like An Mei) who set learning goals aim at increasing their competence, at understanding the material, or mastering a task. Students (like Alice) who set performance goals aim at validating their competence, at getting favorable judgments of their ability, and avoiding unfavorable judgments. While students seem disposed toward one learning framework or the other, Dweck points

out that adopting one or the other set of goals in the classroom has specific effects on students' motivation and on their subsequent achievement behavior with regard to their standards for achievement, perceived control, task choice, task interest, task pursuit, outcome attribution, and satisfaction with the task ("Motivation" 99–102). Let us examine each of these more closely.

"Standards" refers to the level of performance a student must achieve in order to feel successful. Learning goals appear to foster personal standards for success, ones that are flexible and progressive, allowing students to mark their own progress and maintain interest, even in the face of failure. Performance goals, on the other hand, appear to encourage the adoption of normative standards—comparing one's progress to those of other students. Such standards can create a "win-lose" situation where considerable personal progress can be negated by comparative evaluation (Ames and Ames). Students presented with learning goals need not worry about the abilities of others when confronting a challenging task; they need to think only about how much effort they expect to put forth, given the task and their perceptions of their ability. But students presented with performance goals will first estimate their ability in relation to others'; if the estimate is high, they will proceed, but if they have doubts about their ability, they will avoid challenge. A competitive classroom atmosphere can therefore be detrimental to student motivation. Perceived control, as mentioned earlier, is an important factor in determining motivation. Students in a classroom with learning goals have more control over the factors that relate to attaining those goals; they set their own standard for success, they use peers and teachers as resources rather than as potential obstacles, and they evaluate their own progress. Students who are given performance goals have less control over outcomes, since they perceive that others are judging their success or failure against normative criteria rather than against their personal progress.

Task choice, task interest, and task pursuit also show

how having learning or performance goals can influence student behavior. A classroom that sets learning goals encourages students to choose more challenging tasks, regardless of their perceived ability; one that sets only performance goals encourages students with low expectancies to choose easy tasks to ensure success and to avoid negative judgments of their abilities. Learning goals appear to promote interest in the task itself and to create positive rather than negative affective responses in the face of difficulties. Performance goals foster interest in the judgment of one's ability and negative responses when it appears that ability is in question. With learning goals, high effort is more likely to be experienced as pleasurable, nurturing a sense of pride in achievement, whereas with performance goals, effort is seen as evidence of low ability, fostering a sense of shame. Learning goals help students persist in the face of challenge, while performance goals lead students to pursue tasks in ineffective ways, to engage in face-saving behavior (for example, to minimize effort and then use that as an excuse for poor performance),[7] or to avoid challenging tasks altogether.

Finally, the two goal frameworks produce different behaviors in terms of outcome attribution and satisfaction. In a learning framework, both success and failure are attributed to effort, and students' satisfaction with their labor is related to the degree of effort put forth; in the face of difficulties, students do not attribute outcomes to lack of ability. In a performance framework, students see success and failure as a reflection of their ability and luck; their satisfaction is related to the degree of ability and luck they think they have. Clearly, a learning framework is more desirable than a performance framework in terms of goal values.

Now let us look at goal expectancies, students' confidence in their ability to attain learning and performance goals. Expectancies have a lot to do with confidence; one would expect that students who have done well in school and on standardized tests (and who therefore have ample evidence of their abilities) to be the most confident in their

expectancies for future success, while only failure-prone students would have shaky confidence and low expectancies for future achievement. But this is not the case. Some low achievers have high confidence, attributing their difficulties to outside factors rather than to their own ability. A recent study found an entire class full of basic writers who had higher self-esteem and lower writing apprehension than the 16 classes of regular freshman composition in the study (Minot and Gamble). Some high-achievers have very fragile confidence; they attribute their failures to a lack of ability, and they have low expectancies for their ability to take on challenging tasks in the future. Studies have found that this tendency among high achievers to have low confidence is especially prevalent among bright females (Dweck, "Motivation" 108).

Research has found that establishing and maintaining appropriately high expectancies for success are fostered by the tendency to focus on strategy, on progress, and on past and future success (Dweck, "Motivation" 110; see Dweck and Elliott for a more detailed analysis of expectancy formation). When approaching a task, students who can strategize and can keep thinking about strategy when difficulties arise learn to expect that they will be successful at completing the task, but students who analyze the task only in terms of its difficulty and their chances of success learn to have low expectancies. Students who adopt challenging standards based on personal progress, who remind themselves of that progress, and who focus on effort and strategy as the means by which they make progress will form expectancies of success and have confidence in their abilities. In contrast, students who focus on normative standards as a measure of their own success and focus on ability rather than effort and strategy will form low expectancies of success. The research of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule on women's ways of knowing may explain why so many female students have low confidence in spite of their academic success. Belenky and her colleagues postulate that many women are "connected

knowers"—that is, they focus on trying to understand the perspective and reality of others as they learn. A corollary of this notion is that women are socialized more than men to be aware of and responsive to the opinions of others; therefore it is more difficult for women to establish autonomy in setting goals and in focusing on their own progress without attending to how others are doing. Furthermore, the very success of some low-confidence students appears to undermine what confidence they have; if they see high ability as something that makes tasks easy, answers obvious, and effort unnecessary, then past success is evidence only that they have succeeded at easier tasks (Dweck, "Motivation" 117). Expending a good deal of effort and strategizing is evidence to them not of an intelligent approach to problem-solving but of a lack of ability. If they were just smart enough, they wouldn't have to work so hard.

Motivation in the Writing Classroom

Given this research, what is the best way for writing teachers to help motivate students who need it and to keep motivated students energized? First, it seems clear what not to do—to try to increase student confidence by giving short, easy tasks that assure error-free success and by lavishing large amounts of praise. The research tells us that such an approach will not encourage students to seek longer, more challenging tasks, promote persistence in the face of failure, or help them persevere when immediate rewards are not present. (This counterproductive approach—giving easy tasks to establish a pattern of errorless learning—is, alas, often used with the best of intentions in the basic writing curriculum. See Rose, "Remedial.") Instead, we need to think about how to help students understand and make good use of motivational processes, and how to create a classroom environment that promotes learning goals rather than performance goals.

First of all, we can use teaching strategies that research

has proven effective: we can make theories of intelligence explicit to our students, ask them to monitor their motivational as well as their cognitive and affective processes, and discuss strategies for persisting, progressing, and succeeding at challenging tasks. We can give explicit instruction to students in motivational strategies (as deCharms did with his origins and pawns). We can instruct students to take challenge or failure as a cue to increase effort (as Dweck did with children who exhibited "helpless" behavior; see "Role"). We can teach them, as Meichenbaum and Butler did, to also use their affective states as cues to spur them on rather than as evidence that they aren't able to do the task. We can instruct them not only in these cognitive and affective strategies but also in why the strategies are important, since as Paris points out, students who learn new strategies without also learning appropriate metacognitive strategies—knowing *when* as well as *how* to proceed—will not use the new strategies appropriately. And we need to remember that it is not just the low achievers who might need help understanding their goals and attributions, since high achievers can also have motivational sets that need attention. We can present students with the frameworks of learning and performance goals and discuss the fact that the writing classroom focuses on learning goals. Then we have to make that promise good.

A glance back at Table 1 shows that the environment of the process-oriented writing classroom is already in many ways one that fosters learning goals. We are, as Elbow (*Embracing Contraries*) and others remind us, coaches as well as judges, resources and guides for our students as well as evaluators of their work. We do not focus on error but look at error as a window into the student's thinking and writing process. We expect that all students can learn to write, that they can increase their skill through effort. Still, we can do more. Since all motivational research tells us that perceived control is such an important issue, we can establish frameworks within which the student takes control of certain things—task choice, for example. We can establish evalua-

tion procedures in which students have some say (for example, self-evaluations, peer evaluations, choices over which pieces go into a portfolio or when pieces are ready to be evaluated). We can publish student writing (in a class magazine), including not just the best pieces in terms of normative standards but also the best piece from each student. We can establish teacher-researcher projects where we involve students in research on their own learning; as Goswami and Stillman point out, such research provides students with a good deal of intrinsic motivation for discussion, reading, and writing. We can establish cooperative learning projects (such as a class newsletter with a rotating editor) that aim at motivating students by having them take responsibility for the learning of others as well as for themselves.[8] We can, in short, provide both the cognitive framework and the social situation for students to enhance their own motivational skills. It is not that we simply need to stimulate students' enjoyment of learning, as Csikszentmihalyi suggests in the epigraph to this chapter; but enjoyment is certainly a by-product of achievement behavior motivated by learning goals. Our classrooms will be more enjoyable places for ourselves as well as for our students if we can focus on such goals.