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Author

Marineo Munk, Francesca

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Theories of Motivation as Inclusive Pedagogy

Strategies for Engaging and Equitable Instruction

Francesca Marineo Munk

Introduction

As an inherently interdisciplinary field, librarianship is full of inspiring ideas from across academia. The study of motivation within educational psychology, for instance, offers new grounding for librarians to deepen their understanding of equitable and inclusive theories and practices. Motivational theories explore what moves people into action and what sustains them in that action.¹ Through an educational lens, these theories shed light on how and why people learn, what maintains or impedes their engagement in the learning process, and how we as educators can support students through motivationally supportive instruction.² At the same time, inclusive teaching can be defined as

the ways in which pedagogy, curriculum and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view that diversity stems from individual differences that can enrich the lives and learning of others.³

Through these definitions, we can see how both motivationally supportive and inclusive teaching share similar goals. Thus, while motivation is not explicitly an inclusive pedagogy, it offers a unique framework for educators to consider how they can create a positive, engaging, and equitable learning environment for all learners.

In this chapter, I share an overview of two motivational theories, self-determination theory (SDT) and expectancy-value theory (EVT), how these theories complement inclusive and equitable pedagogies, and how librarians can move toward praxis by adopting motivational, inclusive practices into their instruction. Specifically, I share strategies for how librarians can support student autonomy and value through engaging and equitable learning experiences that facilitate choice, practice transparency, foster relevance, and decenter the classroom. In addition, I look critically at these approaches through a social justice lens to ensure that they support all students and do not put the burden disproportionately on students from marginalized communities. Ultimately, I hope that after reading this chapter, librarians will feel inspired to explore motivational theory and implement aspects of motivation in inclusive ways throughout their own teaching.

Theories of Motivation

The study of motivation focuses on how different internal and external factors interact to produce or diminish motivation. Internal factors can include goals, emotions, and dispositions, while external factors include task or assignment design and social factors such as reinforcement and culture.⁴ Motivation theories therefore provide ways of understanding how these factors interact to support positive engagement. Motivation has been researched in a wide range of contexts with an unsurprising abundance of literature coming from the field of education.⁵ Motivation research is also growing within librarianship, especially library instruction research, as is evident from the recent addition of a “coming soon” category for Information Literacy on the Center for Self-Determination Theory’s research page.⁶ Research around motivation and information literacy has thus far focused on areas such as information-seeking behavior, information literacy self-efficacy, critical thinking, and online learning.⁷ One area of research in which there is room for growth is motivationally inspired inclusive teaching.

Many parallels exist between theories of motivation and strategies for inclusive teaching. For instance, concepts such as agency, value, and relevance are important both for motivating students and for helping them feel included in and connected to their learning.⁸ Because of this, recent research has begun to explore how we can facilitate inclusion and equity by employing motivational theory.⁹ Research should continue to examine these commonalities and how motivational and inclusive

pedagogies can work together, especially for information literacy instruction. This chapter is one step in that direction.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory is a principal psychological theory on motivation that “examines how biological, social, and cultural conditions either enhance or undermine the inherent human capacities for psychological growth, engagement, and wellness.”¹⁰ One of the main assumptions of SDT is that humans are inherently intrinsically motivated, or motivated by internal factors such as their goals, curiosities, and emotions.¹¹ While these inherent capacities may exist, external factors, such as social relationships and cultural expectations, often affect the extent to which one grows, engages, and experiences wellness.¹² Within education, SDT research is particularly interested in how contextual factors, which we as instructors contribute to through how we design and facilitate instruction, enhance or undermine student capacities for learning.¹³

Another assumption of SDT is that all humans have three universal psychological needs—the need for autonomy (feeling self-governed), competence (feeling capable), and relatedness (feeling connected)—that must be met for optimal functioning (i.e., motivation).¹⁴ According to Deci and Ryan, the founders of SDT, the most important distinction within self-determination theory is whether or not one’s motivation is perceived as autonomous or controlled.¹⁵ Motivation is perceived as autonomous when it is intrinsic, or the source of an action comes from within an individual. An example might be when someone wants to watch a YouTube video to learn a new skill that will make them better at their job for no other benefit than learning the new skill. Alternatively, motivation is controlled when it is extrinsic or viewed as external from oneself, such as when someone watches a YouTube video for a \$5 gift card even though it is of no inherent interest to them. While both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can lead to engagement, when it is perceived as autonomous or intrinsic, people are more interested, excited, and confident in their ability to succeed, and in turn, they are more likely to exhibit enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity.¹⁶

It is especially important for librarians to cultivate intrinsic motivation in students during the traditional one-shot model of instruction. As noted by Barefoot, “since information literacy instruction often takes place in brief formats but is a necessary skill throughout the curriculum, it is essential that students be intrinsically motivated to continue their research efforts after the individual assignment has ended.”¹⁷ In her study, Barefoot offered two back-to-back, fifty-minute information literacy sessions with an in-class activity and individual written assessment from the librarian. Formative assessment is important to intrinsic motivation as it goes beyond a grade (an external factor) to provide students with personalized feedback that supports

their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Splitting the traditional one-shot into two sessions allowed librarians the time to provide meaningful feedback and to connect with their students. Barefoot found that students in this study had higher levels of interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, and a decrease in pressure/tension, all of which are indicators of higher levels of intrinsic motivation.¹⁸

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) of Achievement Motivation

Expectancy-value theory from the field of achievement motivation offers another lens for inspiring motivational, inclusive pedagogy. Within EVT, motivation is directly related to how an individual expects to perform on an activity and how much they value that activity. In practice this means that students who not only find an activity attractive and valuable but also believe that their success related to the activity is attainable will be more motivated to engage in the activity.¹⁹ The constructs and applications of expectancy and value have evolved over time with the Eccles et al. expectancy-value model emerging as a leading modern model within the developmental and educational psychology fields.²⁰ This model “proposes that these constructs are the most immediate or direct predictors of achievement performance and choice, and are themselves influenced by a variety of psychological, social, and cultural influences.”²¹ The Eccles et al. model explores four components of value, or subjective task value: attainment value or importance; intrinsic value; utility value or usefulness; and cost.²²

The cost component of value is particularly important when working with diverse populations to ensure no student or group of students ends up unintentionally having a negative or harmful learning experience. For instance, Poort, Jansen, and Hofman used EVT to explore the costs and benefits of intercultural group work (IGW). An IGW is a collaborative learning method in which students from different cultural or national backgrounds work together. The authors provide insights on some of the possible negative effects that marginalized students may experience. They explored three previously identified costs of EVT—time, effort, and negative psychological states—and identified a new cost—compromising at the expense of personal values or standards. In their focus groups, students discussed how not only did it take more time and effort to communicate and make sense of the variety of perspectives and languages in the group, but they also experienced stereotyping and loss of personal identity by other group members. This led to a lack of motivation and increased feelings of fear and stress. When there were conflicts within the group, they were often attributed to the diversity of the group members. Things that helped alleviate these costs were the duration of the collaboration (i.e., dedicating multiple class sessions to the group dynamics) and developing intercultural communication skills ahead of

the assignment itself. This allowed students to enter into the IGW better equipped to interact with one another.²³

It is important that librarians take similar steps in evaluating the costs associated with our teaching to ensure that students do not experience loss of their identities, stereotypes, or other harmful experiences in their learning. Combining EVT with inclusive teaching principles, we can alleviate costs and increase benefits, thus contributing to increased value around a task and, ultimately, increasing engagement, perseverance, and performance. In the next section, I offer practical strategies for implementing motivation theory as an inclusive pedagogy focusing on supporting student autonomy (SDT) and value (EVT).

Motivation as Inclusive Pedagogy

As noted earlier, motivation theory is not in itself an inclusive or equitable pedagogy. Yet there are several parallels, such as the importance of agency and value, between motivationally supportive and inclusive teaching practices. The opportunity to use these theories and practices in harmony inspired this chapter and is an area for future research, especially within librarianship, where we often pull from a variety of disciplines in our inherently interdisciplinary field. When considered along with other inclusive teaching and learning frameworks, such as universal design for learning (UDL), open pedagogy, and culturally relevant pedagogy, librarians can weave motivational theory into their practice to create more equitable instruction for all learners. The next sections explore some of these concepts and how we can incorporate them into our teaching to achieve praxis. I focus on two aspects of motivation that are critical to inclusive teaching: autonomy and value. While these two concepts are central to SDT and EVT respectively, you will also see how they intertwine with each other as well as with various theories of inclusive teaching.

Autonomy

One of the three universal psychological needs of self-determination theory, autonomy is essential for an inclusive learning experience. When an action or task is perceived as autonomous, students are empowered in their own learning. Autonomy-supportive teaching provides students with a choice in not only what and how they learn but also how they demonstrate their learning. For those who have used universal design for learning, this may sound familiar. In fact, autonomy is central

to the recruiting interest checkpoint 7.1 in UDL: “optimize individual choice and autonomy.”²⁴ Two autonomy-supportive teaching strategies that librarians can use to create inclusive learning experiences are facilitating choice and practicing transparency.

FACILITATING CHOICE

Offering students choice in their learning is a powerful way to support autonomy and provide more equitable learning. As librarians, we can support student choice in many ways, especially as choice lends itself well to many modes of instruction from digital learning objects and tutorials to in-person classes and workshops. One way of facilitating choice is by providing multiple means of engagement (a central principle of UDL). For example, in the first-year English composition course at my previous institution, I provided students with the option of a printed, paper keyword development handout or a digital version in Google Docs. For both the physical and digital handouts, I also provide the activity in a linear, text-based format and a more visual, free-form format. This gave students the opportunity to choose not only the handout medium but also the flow that works best for them. For online sections of the course, students had a choice between attending a synchronous online group information literacy session with a librarian or completing an individual, self-paced, and asynchronous online tutorial. Both options met the same learning outcomes that were set for the course. Having a choice for how they could learn these outcomes supported their autonomy by giving them agency as the primary deciders of their own learning.

In addition to being autonomy supportive, having multiple means of engagement provides students flexibility in their learning, which is also essential to creating an inclusive learning experience. Griful-Freixeneta and colleagues highlight this in their study of perceived barriers and opportunities of UDL for students with disabilities. They note that meeting the needs of some students may create barriers for others, even when the intention is to be inclusive. To ensure a supportive learning environment for all students, they argue for not only flexible but also responsive teaching that goes beyond setting and curricular changes to directly addressing student needs.²⁵ This may be challenging for librarians who do not get to spend significant time with students due to the traditional one-shot or general nature of our instruction sessions and materials. Fortunately, there are additional ways to support choice through our work.

For instance, librarians can support student choice through multiple means of expression (also a key principle of UDL).²⁶ Many librarians collaborate with instructors on assignment design or teach credit-bearing courses themselves.²⁷ In these collaborations, we can support student autonomy by offering multiple types of assignments for students to express what they’ve learned. While the learning outcomes themselves do not change, students can choose how they demonstrate

that they have met them. This allows students to choose the assignment type with which they feel the most comfortable and confident. While one student may prefer to write a traditional research paper, another may prefer to do an oral presentation, another a video, and yet another a podcast. Having a choice in their assignments is also inclusive in that it allows students to draw on their unique skills and interests to demonstrate their learning in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them.²⁸

PRACTICING TRANSPARENCY

An important consideration of facilitating choice is that it is not the same thing as having a lack of structure. Structure may sound counterproductive to autonomy, but in practice, structure supports those who need it, while not hurting those who don't.²⁹ In addition, according to SDT, providing structure enhances students' competence, which leads to increased engagement and motivation to learn.³⁰ Librarians can provide structure by engaging in transparent teaching practices. Transparent teaching utilizes "a combination of teaching practices that are explicit in the articulation of instructor expectations for student learning and classroom success, that rely upon unambiguous language and techniques to develop and enhance analytical and critical thinking skills and deepen student learning."³¹ As librarians, we can be transparent in our teaching by ensuring that we do not use jargon, and when we do (like when I would tell students to search Quick Search, my previous institution's Primo user interface), being explicit in defining confusing and new terms (i.e., this is the Libraries' "Google"; you might hear it called Quick Search or Library Search or the catalogue).

Another transparent teaching practice is to clearly articulate the *why* behind a particular task. For example, I have used a version of the information spectrum activity to facilitate discussions around information creation and privilege.³² I let students know that this activity is important because it demonstrates the different contexts within which information exists. It helps show students the benefits and costs of different types of information and how they can be used in conversation with each other in their research. I love how this activity complicates the narrative around what types of information are valuable and why. When students understand the purpose of why they are being asked to do something, and they can see why it is important to their own lives, they are more likely to engage and benefit from the task.³³ When the library is often seen as a field trip or mandatory presentation, being transparent can help students from all backgrounds understand how the library fits into their information needs and that we are a relevant and helpful resource throughout their academic and research journey. This is also a great time to acknowledge historical and current barriers to information and research within academia and work towards breaking these barriers down by inviting student experiences into the curriculum.

Value

From an inclusive teaching perspective, specifically culturally responsive pedagogy, instructors should “seek an understanding of students’ lived cultural experiences to get an idea of who they are and use this knowledge to provide engaging and relevant curriculum.”³⁴ This is because, by doing so, instructors are adding value to students’ learning experiences. In particular, aligning curriculum to students’ lived cultural experiences supports students’ attainment value and intrinsic value, two of the four components of value from the Eccles et al. expectancy-value model.³⁵ Attainment value is the importance “individuals attach to doing well on a task or how well the given task fits with the individuals’ identity” and intrinsic value “is the interest and enjoyment individuals gain from engaging in a specific task.”³⁶ Two ways that librarians can increase student attainment and intrinsic value are fostering relevance and decentralizing the classroom.

FOSTERING RELEVANCE

As educators, one way that we can help establish value for students is by ensuring that the learning activities we design are relevant to them, their communities, and their broader interests. Priniski, Hecht, and Harackiewicz note an important distinction between the standard dictionary definition of relevancy and that within motivation research: while the dictionary definition “emphasizes *objective* levels of pertinence, relevance as a motivation construct is an individual’s *subjective* perception of the degree to which a stimulus (an object, an activity, a topic) is connected (i.e., has some relation) to the individual personally [emphasis added].”³⁷ With individual importance in mind, librarians can foster relevance by connecting specific learning outcomes or activities to a student’s broader academic journey or across the curriculum (i.e., how a lower-division paper could evolve into an undergraduate thesis or how the skills learned in introductory composition courses will be essential for many of their other courses). Depending on time, capacity, and context, some strategies for fostering relevance across the curriculum include embedding in the course learning management system;³⁸ engaging in a flipped classroom model or workshop-intensive model instead of the traditional one-shot session;³⁹ and using curriculum mapping to ensure cohesive and scaffolded information literacy instruction.⁴⁰

Another way to foster relevance is to connect learning to experiences from students’ daily lives outside of academia. This could be as simple as asking students about the last time they needed information and how they found it. Often, I hear answers like they had a question about their car and watched a YouTube video or they were trying to prove their friend wrong about what year a song came out. These low-stakes conversations of information-seeking behavior can then be used to show students that they are already expert researchers and connect search strategy from everyday googling to finding academic sources. Morrison explores what this could

look like on a larger scale within an information literacy classroom. Using a student asset-based approach, she demonstrates how to “develop culturally relevant (decolonized with critical race theory) and sustaining and revitalizing (cultural wealth) classrooms.”⁴¹ In her approach, Morrison had students, who were all people of color and first-generation students, voice their own assets, which became counterstories to the traditional colonized stories we often hear in academia, stories that center whiteness as a primary asset and everything, or anyone, that deviates is perceived as a deficit.

Using these counterstories, she developed a culturally relevant curriculum in which “students were able to engage with topics concerning their communities, both current and historical.”⁴² As a result, students noted that their classroom became a relevant and safe space to think critically and engage with their peers. It also sparked a desire for lifelong learning and a way of engaging that students hoped would happen in other classes as well.⁴³ I often hear librarians say, “If nothing else, I hope students come away from my sessions feeling comfortable enough to reach out to me later.” For librarians, even if students don’t remember specific Boolean operators or how to limit articles by year, we hope that they feel safe and inspired to continue their research beyond our classroom and come to us when they need help. Considering these ultimate goals, Morrison’s research provides significant insight into the importance of fostering relevance in our teaching.

DECENTERING THE CLASSROOM

Closely related to fostering relevance and supporting student autonomy, decentering the classroom is a significant way to bring value to student learning. Like Morrison’s research, wherein the students’ own lived experiences and cultural assets guided the curriculum, a decentered classroom involved a student-centered curriculum that challenges the traditional hierarchy of instructor and student by “dissemination of authority to parties besides the instructor.”⁴⁴ One way that librarians can support this dissemination of authority and center students in their own learning is through open pedagogy. As an inclusive practice, open pedagogy benefits students by giving them the freedom to design their own learning paths and empowering them as cocreators of knowledge.⁴⁵ Reframing these benefits from a motivational lens, we see that students have autonomy and agency in what they learn and how they learn it. Depending on time, context, and opportunities to collaborate with disciplinary instructors, there are several ways librarians can decenter the classroom through motivational and open pedagogy.

What a better way to decenter the classroom and the traditional instructor-student dynamic than by using Wikipedia, which helps “create a world in which *everyone can freely share in the sum of all knowledge* [emphasis added].”⁴⁶ From experience, one of the first things students learn about Wikipedia in their academic careers is that anyone can edit it, and, perhaps more importantly, that it should therefore not be trusted!

Thankfully, many librarians are challenging this narrative by engaging students in Wikipedia assignments and realizing the potential of this free online encyclopedia as a beneficial and meaningful experiential learning tool. One of the benefits of Wikipedia assignments is that they can be done in one-shot instruction sessions, across multiple courses as an interdisciplinary collaboration, or as an extra-curricular event with potential curricular tie-ins.⁴⁷ When students edit Wikipedia, they enter a community of content creators and engage with information in new and meaningful ways. Their motivation also improves by seeing the real-world impact and value that they themselves are creating within this community.⁴⁸ Value also increases when students are contributing information about relevant and important topics. For example, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas University Libraries have hosted Wikipedia edit-a-thons focused on increasing the content and representation of historically underrepresented groups. These have included women, nonbinary and LGBTQ+ folks, Latinx folks, and Indigenous People.⁴⁹ By focusing on topics that are not as well represented in Wikipedia, yet reflect the diversity of our student communities, we can help to democratize knowledge by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups without disproportionately putting the burden on them to do so themselves.

For librarians teaching semester-long courses or who otherwise work closely with disciplinary instructors, creating, building, and adapting open educational resources (OERs), such as open textbooks, can be profoundly transformative.⁵⁰ OER creation motivates students by incorporating and honoring the knowledge and experiences they bring from their daily lives into academic spaces. Another open pedagogical approach that connects learning with student values beyond the classroom is community-engaged research, in which nonhierarchical relationships between students and their local communities provide long-term, meaningful relationships helping both the students learn and the community meet their research needs. Community-engaged learning is also a way to promote social justice through open pedagogy. As Nizami and Shambaugh emphasize, “openness means targeting the insularity of the academic institution vis-a-vis the communities where we find ourselves.”⁵¹ Thus, as an open pedagogy, community-engaged research “enables a more critically engaged approach to community-university partnerships, which we understand as needing to be aimed at recognizing and attending to power imbalances in these relationships.”⁵² All work in which we can decenter the classroom brings us closer toward this goal by adding value and meaning for all students and not just those for whom the system was created.

Conclusion

When considered alongside inclusive pedagogies, motivation theory offers a powerful and meaningful approach for librarians to engage all students. Self-determination

theory and expectancy-value theory from the field of motivation particularly lend themselves to information literacy instruction and educational equity. Within these theories, concepts such as autonomy and value harmonize motivation and inclusion to support student engagement, amplify diverse voices, and center all students within their learning. Strategies such as facilitating choice and practicing transparency and fostering relevance and decentering the classroom allow librarians to move from theory to praxis and incorporate autonomy- and value-supportive instruction. The benefits of these strategies go beyond student engagement to break down harmful barriers within education by amplifying diverse voices and increasing diverse representation within the classroom, across the academy, and among our local communities.

Notes

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