

Effects of Time Perspective on Student Motivation: Introduction to a Special Issue

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This article introduces this special issue by establishing a conceptual foundation for thinking about how students' conceptions of time influence motivation and achievement. In particular, we describe how students' perceptions of the utility of what they are learning for their futures can positively affect motivation. Temporal perspective is tied to current models of motivation and learning such as intrinsic motivation and self-regulation. We present 2 purposes for organizing this issue: (a) initiating discussion and research about how conceptions of the future influence and are influenced by students' motivation and (b) bridging gaps in the field between American and international perspectives on learning and motivation. We conclude by introducing the 6 articles that comprise this special issue of Educational Psychology Review.

KEY WORDS: future time perspective; temporal perspective; perceived utility; motivation.

Humans understand their activities within a temporal context (Suddendorf and Corballis, 1997). People understand why they are doing what they do on the basis of some understanding of how it is that they came to be doing that activity (a memory of the past) and, many times, an understanding of what they hope to come next. Within an educational setting, what students hope to come next, many times, comes in the distant future. Students hope for jobs, children, homes, and degrees. Even though these long-term future goals can have profound effects on students motivations (Oyserman *et al.*, 2002) many current models of motivation focus on the

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importance of the journey rather than the destination (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Flow and self-determination theories, for example, illustrate the importance of focusing motivational research on students' enjoyment of academic tasks in the present. According to these theories, students are most adaptive when they focus on the feelings that come from gaining competence and control in the moment. These models have helped to focus students and researchers more on the process of learning rather than the product. Research within these perspectives has provided teachers with the message that "Educators must support and develop students' natural curiosity or intrinsic motivation to learn. . . ." (American Psychological Association: Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education, 1993, p. 7). For many teachers and administrators, this means facilitating students' love of learning.

Given the practical constraints of many schools, however, teachers may not be able to provide environments where students only engage in intrinsically interesting learning activities. Students who do not find math interesting, for example, are still required to learn it. In the current school structure, opportunities for autonomous choice are few. Within the current educational environment—where students' grades are used for promotion, students have a restricted choice about what they learn, even the choice of whether to attend school is taken away—it is important for teachers to consider types of motivation other than intrinsic interest and flow.

Research has provided rich empirical support for the idea that student perceptions of the utility of what they are learning for their futures can have a positive effect on their motivation (e.g., Simons *et al.*, 2000). Most people have experienced the powerful motivational influences of perceived utility (e.g., I get out of bed to go to the gym because I want to be healthy in the future). However, because perceived utility is linked to external sources of motivation, there is a belief among many educators that emphasizing the "you must do this because it is good for you" aspects of learning will take away from students' intrinsic joy of learning.

Although perceived utility and intrinsic motivation seem mutually exclusive, they are not. Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi *et al.*, 1993), for example, claimed that talented teenagers characteristically recognize the value of their skills and also find intrinsic enjoyment in using those skills. "[T]alent development was enhanced by modes of involvement that were both expressive and instrumental and both satisfying at the moment and promising of long-term rewards" (p. 254). The promise of long-term rewards therefore is a critical aspect of adolescents' motivation, educationally and noneducationally. Many adolescents have valued long-term goals. Finding connections among who they hope to become and the activities they currently engage in is central to what motivates them. In a recent study, Csikszentmihalyi and

Schneider (2000) concluded that engaging in challenging and relevant activities is critical for students' motivation. An understanding of the development, quality, and function of students' aspirations for their futures should be central to models of motivation. Unfortunately, few motivational models include such temporal components. Despite strong evidence from cognitive psychology that thinking about the future is a different mental activity than thinking about the present, most theories of motivation do not consider this difference.

Time perspective—individuals' understanding of their psychological past, present, and future—is seen as fundamental to an understanding of human behavior. Early psychologists and philosophers (e.g., James, 1890) focused much of their theories of human cognition on the uniquely human ability to organize themselves in time. The ability to travel through time cognitively—through the use of memory to move into the past or to imagine the future—is considered by some comparative psychologists as a uniquely human capability (Roberts, 2002; Suddendorf and Corballis, 1997). Other areas of psychology have demonstrated the importance of temporal perspective taking in the pursuit of social goals (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999), substance abuse (Keough *et al.*, 1999), and gang affiliation (Doucette-Gates, 1999). In an educational context, as is demonstrated by the articles in this special issue, students' motivation is profoundly affected by their conceptualizations of their future. The cognitive tasks involved in constructing the future and connecting the future and the present have been thoroughly examined in education and psychology. Many researchers have concentrated on the connections between conceptualizations of the future and human motivation. Nuttin and Lens (1985), for example, examined the psychological parameters of perceptions of the future as "future time perspective" (FTP) and provided theoretical connections between achievement motivation and FTP. Wigfield and Eccles (2002) emphasized the importance of FTP in understanding the impact of utility value on students' motivation in the classroom. Additionally, some motivational researchers focused on the importance of considering the temporal orientation of motivational constructs. Bong and Skaalvik (2003), for example, included it in their discussion of the difference between self-efficacy and self-concept.

Although models of motivation, self-regulation, and well-being include a component of temporal orientation, the research on future time orientations and perspectives are not well coordinated. The human ability to conceptualize its personal future and to be affected by that conceptualization are usually examined under theoretical umbrellas of time perspective (Fung *et al.*, 1999; Peetsma and Stouthard, 1999; Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999), temporally extended self (Moore and Lemmon, 2001), future possible selves (Cameron, 1999; Markus and Nurius, 1986), consideration of

future consequences (e.g, Joireman *et al.*, in press), time horizon and discounting (Tucker *et al.*, 2002), time orientation (Gjesme and Nygard, 1996), and temporal orientation (Holman and Silver, 1998) to list some of the most prominent. Each of these theories has a unique history and serves as the foundation for considerations of the ability to conceptualize and be affected by the future within specific branches of psychology. The most common term for the cognitive and affective consideration of the future in developmental, social, and educational psychology is FTP (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999; Husman and Lens, 1999; Simons *et al.*, 2000; Stipek, 2002; Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999). One of the goals of this special issue of *Educational Psychology Review* is to provide an opportunity for educational researchers to review the rich history of research on the impact of conceptualizations of the future on student motivation and self-regulation in order to provide some common ground for future research on students' thoughts and feeling about their personal futures.

One fundamental assumption shared in each of the following articles is that students' conceptions of the future have a real and significant influence on their beliefs and motivation to learn that, in turn, influences their achievement positively. In short, FTP influences one's attitudes about and goals toward academic tasks. Accordingly, we organized this special issue with two purposes in mind. First, we hope the articles that appear over the next two issues of *Educational Psychology Review* initiate some thought, discussion, and research—both theoretical and applied—into how conceptions of the future influence and are influenced by students' motivation to succeed academically. To accomplish this goal, we sought researchers and theorists who have diverse and unique perspectives regarding the role of the future. We have brought together international experts on future's influence to discuss a multitude of issues including the future's role in self-regulation, delay of gratification, instrumentality, gender differences, and multicultural perspectives.

Our second aim was to begin bridging gaps among American and international perspectives of motivation in general and the roles of the future in particular. To this end, we have brought together researchers from North America, Europe, and Australia. Each author provides a unique and important contribution to our understanding of how the future motivates.

The authors have synthesized theory, research, and practice from an area that is understudied and sometimes ignored. Each article explores how different aspects of the psychological future or FTP affect varied aspects of students' motivation and cognition, including self-regulation, delay of gratification, multiculturalism, gender differences, and utility. They present a number of new and unique perspectives regarding the importance of understanding and investigating how conceptions of the future influence students in a host of academic settings. We next overview each of the six articles.

In *A Model of Future-Oriented Motivation and Self-Regulation*, Raymond Miller, University of Oklahoma, and Stephanie Brickman, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, argue that without minimizing the important contributions of existing motivation and self-regulation research, there is a need to begin examining the influence of distal goals within a self-regulatory perspective. To facilitate this, Miller and Brickman introduce a model of motivation and self-regulation with future goals at the foundation. They argue that the development of a system of proximal subgoals related to students' distal goals increases the likelihood that academic tasks are perceived as more instrumental than would proximal tasks with no connection to distal goals.

In *Academic Delay of Gratification, Future Goals, and Self-Regulated Learning*, Héfer Bembenutty, City University of New York, and Stuart Karabenick, Eastern Michigan University, review research that has employed the Mischel paradigm (e.g., Mischel, 1974) and current research on delay of gratification from a self-regulated learning perspective (i.e., Academic Delay of Gratification, ADOG). They describe future time perspective as having important implications for understanding achievement-related delay. They discuss how factors such as perceived instrumentality and the role of intrinsic and externally controlled behavior affect students' motivation to engage in academic as compared to nonacademic activities.

Karen Phalet and Iris Andriessen, Utrecht University – Netherlands, and Willy Lens University of Leuven – Belgium, examine the impact of future goals on minority students' motivation in *How Future Goals Enhance Motivation and Learning in Multicultural Classrooms*. They provide research evidence suggesting the need for future goal and motivational theory specific to minority students' academic achievement. Phalet and her colleagues argue that by fostering positive instrumentality and building internal regulation, educators should be able to enhance minority students' intrinsic motivation and adaptive learning in academic contexts.

In *Placing Motivation and Future Time Perspective Theory in a Temporal Perspective*, Joke Simons, Maarten Vansteenkiste, and Willy Lens, all from the University of Leuven – Belgium, provide a thematic overview of the development of FTP theory. Their review suggests that motivation, persistence, and achievement are positively affected by a student's FTP. Simons and her colleagues argue that the degree of specificity of a provided future goal, the content of the future goal, and the context in which the instrumentality of the present behavior is made clear are of critical importance. The authors conclude by discussing a number of practical implications and suggestions for subsequent research.

In *Gender Differences in Representations of the Future: Links to Motivation*, Barbara Greene and Teresa DeBacker, University of Oklahoma,

examine gender differences in future orientation and motivation from five perspectives including achievement motivation, future time orientation, possible selves, expectancy-value, and social-cognitive theories. In part, their findings suggest that gender role expectations play a major role in differences in male and female students' goals. Although female students' professional goals have recently become more similar to male students' professional goals, female students have maintained a much stronger focus on Time interpersonal goals than have male students. Greene and DeBacker discuss a number of important school implications related to these findings.

Dennis McInerney, Western Sydney University, provides a comprehensive and synthesized summary of the articles presented in this special issue. His discussion, titled *Future Time Perspective—Contemporary Research*, emphasizes educational implications of conceptions of the future. McInerney also identifies emerging themes related to self-regulation and individual differences; as well as a need to explore future's role non non-western cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the reviewers for this special issue: Corrine Alfeld, Deb Carlson, Michael Crowson, Siegfried Dewitte, Barbara Greene, Christy Horn, Elisa Johnson, Michael Middleton, Paul Schutz, and Jeannine Turner. We also thank Earleen Husman for her work as copy editor.

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