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AUTHOR Maehr, Martin L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the association between achievement motivation and cultural differences. It maintains that the culturally different can be motivated to achieve if provided the proper motivational context. Earlier traditions for stimulating achievement motivation in the classroom are reviewed, including changing the person, changing the environment, and manipulating roles and normative expectations. New strategies in motivational theory are also described, with an emphasis on causal attribution, or empowerment of the student. It is suggested that techniques to improve student motivation can be taught to teachers. A bibliography is appended. (APM)

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Cultural Differences Do Not Have to Mean Motivational Inequality

Martin L. Maehr[1]

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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Cultural Differences Do Not Have To Mean

Motivational Inequality

The title of this paper represents a hope. It does not describe a reality that is readily observed in typical classrooms. Yet, there is reason to believe that it is not a vain hope. The goal of this paper is to describe how this hope might be realized here and there in students, classrooms, and schools.

Cultural Differences Equal Inequality in Learning/Achievement

Like it or not, cultural differences are strongly associated with differential levels of learning and achievement. There are few assertions more fully and completely documented than that. Children of different socio-cultural background come to school with varying degrees of preparation for effective performance in the typical classroom. Their initial achievement levels indicate this immediately. Thus, the Coleman (1966) Report indicated that blacks, Chicanos and American-Indians started lower and did not manage to catch up. Indeed, falling behind was and is an ever present danger. Even though the school may prevent retardation, there is little evidence that it is the great equalizer so far as achievement is concerned (see Shea, 1976). Through schooling, the rich get richer; we can only hope that, parallel to that, the poor do not get poorer. Indeed, if judgments on educational quality are to be based on measured learning outcomes, it is clear that educational quality has not been achieved. Moreover, there is reason to argue that the essence of equality does not inhere in learning outcomes in any case (Nicholls, 1979). It should reside in equality of opportunity. That elusive concept may mean many things but I tend to agree with Nicholls that a most important and overlooked thing is that it should mean equality in motivation.

Cultural Differences Typically Do Not Mean Motivational Equality

But this too poses a problem. For cultural differences have not been typically associated with motivational equality either. Certainly, the older work on culture and achievement motivation repeatedly emphasized that cultural differences were characteristically associated with motivational inequality (see Maehr, 1974a, 1974b for a review). Aside from such formal observations, there is the regular observation of classroom teachers (Maehr, 1974a; Watts, 1975) that those who are "culturally different" are also likely to be those who exhibit "motivational problems." Further, whereas one might hope that changes in social policy, administrative changes, and programs specially targeted for culturally different students might change this situation, the hope is not as yet fully realized.

For example, there are and were a variety of reasons for initiating school desegregation. One hope was that racial integration would somehow lead to enhanced motivation. It is clear now that that was probably expecting too much. At least, school integration has not typically had consistent and positive effects on achievement-related motivation (cf. for example, Gerard & Miller, 1976; St. John, 1975; Schofield, 1978).

Special programs such as bilingual education are in no sense panaceas either. The evaluation of such programs, admittedly, still has a short history. Yet, there is no denying that the promise of new breakthroughs does not seem to lie in the application of such programs either. Thus, in a recent and intensive study (Walker, 1980) specifically concerned with the effects of bilingual/bicultural programs on motivation, the results did not indicate a consistent and positive effect on motivation. And, of course, we all know

from the Coleman Report and related investigations, that money, facilities, and resources likewise do not hold the answer (cf. for example, Shea, 1976).

But Cultural Differences Do Not Have To Mean Motivational Inequality

What, then, can help? Is the hope for motivational equality in fact a vain hope? I hope that it is not and here are some reasons for that hope.

All Are Motivated to Achieve: It is Only A Question of How, When, or Where

A first reason is partly philosophical, partly theoretical and partly based on recent research.

There was a time when many of us thought that achievement motivation, possibly even as it might be demonstrated in school, was an enduring trait characteristic of certain persons. There were those who had it and those who didn't--or rather, some had more or less of it depending largely upon learning experiences. While these early experiences might be reversible, they were not easily so. It was tacitly assumed that certain cultural groups that did not compare favorably to a set standard of achievement in a specific type of situation were in fact deprived of achievement motivation. A cultural deprivation hypothesis was in effect predominant in viewing the motivation and achievement of minority group members in classrooms (cf. Maehr, 1974; Maehr & Nicholls, in press). Current conceptions of achievement motivation, however, have tended to move away from such conceptions, stressing cultural differences rather than cultural deprivation. My own work on the cross-cultural study of achievement motivation, e.g., was begun with the working assumption that all are motivated to achieve; it is only a question of how. At the outset, this assumption was largely justified through sometimes formal,

more often informal, observations. More recent work has tended to reinforce and expand this point of view. In taking a second look at culture and achievement motivation, John Nicholls and I (Maehr & Nicholls, in press) reinterpreted this issue following cognitive theory, which, among other things, has also stressed the changing and contextual nature of achievement motivation. That behavior which is characteristically taken as indication of achievement motivation proceeds from certain cognitions: particularly goals that individuals have and causes that they attribute. Pursuing excellence, accepting challenge, or persisting at moderately difficult tasks are not the special characteristics of one cultural group. Holding goals and attributing causes probably are not either. But it is to be expected that, in a given situation, goals and causes will be different for different people. This is related to their cultural background. But goals and attributions shift rapidly with conditions (see, for example, Spink & Maehr, Note 3) all of which leads us to argue that the exhibition of achievement motivation in a given context can best be viewed as a temporary phenomenon, subject to change.

Stressing that cultural minorities are not deprived of achievement motivation, only different in how, when, and where they express it, however, is not fully comforting to the classroom teacher. That children show a great deal of achievement motivation outside school may be of interest. But the real question of the teacher is—how does one elicit motivation in the context of a specific classroom? The point in calling attention to recent concerns with cultural differences is twofold: 1) First, the behavioral repertory is self-evidently there; the problem is not personal deprivation. 2) Second, motivation is tied to context; change the situation and you are likely to change achievement-related motivation.

How do you Stimulate Achievement Motivation in the Classroom?

A second reason for the hope expressed in the theme of this paper lies in the successful demonstration of motivational change in classroom settings. To put it crassly: successful interventions can be engineered!

Earlier Traditions. Almost as soon as theories of achievement motivation popped on to the scene, intervention strategies began appearing as well. An earlier review of the literature (Maehr & Lysy, 1978) lead me to conclude that these intervention strategies were likely to be one of three different types (cf. Table 1). A first type focuses on changing something about the person. Historically, this has typically meant changing well-established affective reactions and behavioral patterns which have been laid down in childhood: personality change. A second type recognized the existence of well-established patterns and has shown how matching the right environment to these patterns can elicit optimal behavior. Thus, the student who is characterized by a high degree of achievement motivation ("Hope of Success" > "Fear of Failure;" cf. Atkinson & Raynor, 1974; Maehr & Sjogren, 1971) will appear most highly motivated in a "challenging" situation. Conversely, the child with considerable "fear of failure" needs support not challenge, particularly in highly evaluative situations, such as tests (cf. Hill, 1972, 1977, in press). Third, throughout the literature there has probably always been an acceptance of the fact that the immediate situation is important. Yet, it is disconcerting to me (cf. Maehr, 1978; see also Ames, Note 1) how little interest has been devoted to the effects of roles and normative expectations. Clearly, such social psychological contingencies can affect the choices and behavioral patterns that exemplify achievement motivation (cf. Klinger & McNelley, 1964;

Zander & Forward, 1968). Perhaps since normative patterns are so obviously a part of the scene there is little attraction to stating this fact as part of a theoretical framework. It is so obviously important that we tend to ignore it.

Insert Table 1 about here

In any event, achievement theory has sponsored a variety of approaches and programs directed toward changing motivation in a specific context such as the classroom. We have not yet arrived at the "promised land," but at least a step or two in the right direction seems to have been taken. There are actually some things that we can begin to tell administrators and teachers to do--or not to do.

Some New Possibilities. Those of you who follow achievement theory are fully aware of the pervasive role that causal attribution has played in recent years. There are many sources of this new emphasis. There is also much potential in this new thoeretical direction for the development of intervention strategies. I will cite three examples and stress one.

A first example grows out of a large and growing literature on "learned helplessness" (Miller & Norman, 1979). In this regard, a line of research initiated by Carol Dweck and others (1975, 1977; Dweck & Bush, 1976; Dweck & Repucci, 1973; Dweck & Goetz, 1978; Dweck, et al., 1978; Andrews & Debus, 1978) has provided a new perspective on motivation change. While the precise methods employed in this research may seem to have limited direct application, since they require specific and intensive work with "problem individuals," this work has been important in widening our concept of what can be done. A second example can be found in the recently initiated work of Nicholls and Richards (Note 2). Precisely because of its direct implications for the

structuring of classrooms by teachers who possess no particular psychotherapeutic or behavioral engineering skills, this work appears especially promising. Since John is here and can--in this case-- speak for himself, I will say no more in this regard. A third example is especially dramatic. That example is to be found in the work of Richard deCharms (1972, 1976). While based on the earlier work of McClelland (1965, 1978; McClelland & Winter, 1969; see also Alschuler, 1971, 1973; Kolb, 1965) it is clearly at home in the current theoretical environment which tends to stress the role of cognition in motivation. Briefly summarized, deCharms took on the problem of motivation in an inner city school. As noted earlier in this paper, it is under just such circumstances that motivational problems seem to be most severe. If ever cultural differences seem to equal motivational inequality, it is <u>there</u>. In any case, deCharms and his colleagues reversed the practice. Their emphasis was on changing particular cognitions--or if you will, attributions--that individuals had about themselves and their behavior. On the one hand, an individual may tend to view himself as an <u>origin</u>, an initiator of his own behavior, as a primary cause of what he is, what he accomplishes and what he produces. On the other hand, a person may tend to believe that, like a pawn in a chess game, he is moved around by external events over which he has little or no control. The essential hypothesis proposed was that when individuals believe that they are an <u>origin</u> rather than a <u>pawn</u> they will exhibit the motivational behavior desired and expected in the classroom: they will be positively motivated toward learning and achievement. Such beliefs in oneself as a <u>cause</u>, as able to accomplish something by trying, were apparently

effective in dramatically changing the orientation of a large number of the students. Not only classroom attitudes, but also measured achievement, were significantly affected.

The course toward accomplishing such dramatic changes as were reported was by no means an easy one. It involved eliciting the help of a whole staff, training the staff to "treat children as origins" and to rethink educational practices in motivational terms. But it was done! And it was done in a school situation with the aid of techniques that are available to every educator and with resources that conceivably could be made available to every school. This was not a laboratory experiment using college sophomores as stand-ins for school children or teachers.

Conclusion

Recently, in reviewing Walberg's work on "educational productivity" (cf. for example, Walberg, 1980; Uguroglu & Walberg, Note 4) I was disturbed by the apparently small role played by motivational factors. According to Walberg's calculations, motivational factors explain only about 11 percent of the variance of educational achievement. I was disappointed by this figure until I considered the nature of factors that were apparently more crucial. For instance, home environment accounts for approximately sixty percent of the variance. First, this should not have surprised me. Second, while the contribution of motivational factors may seem relatively small, it is important to keep in mind that it is a potentially manipulable variance. There is little that educators can do about home environment. There is at least hope that something can be done about motivation. Indeed, the point of this paper is precisely that. Not only is the motivational factor potentially

changeable, there are the beginnings of a technology that may be succesfully applied in the real world of the school. This something consists of principles that can be taught to teachers. It also consists of programs that may be inaugurated on a larger scale. One may realistically argue that one reason that certain administrative and policy changes have little or no effect on the performance of children is that they have not been specifically directed at changing the behavior and the interaction patterns of children that are changeable. Motivation is changeable. Programs directed toward changes in this area have proven successful. The amount of possible change may not be overwhelmingly large but it is not insignificant. Perhaps, then, the time has arrived for doing more than just talking about the motivational problems of children of culturally diverse backgrounds. Perhaps it is high time for concerted action, since there is reason enough to hope that "cultural differences do not have to mean motivational inequality."

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Footnotes

[1]The author is indebted to continuing discussion with Douglas A. Kleiber, Kevin Spink and Connie Walker.

Table 1

Achievement Motivation Theory and Strategies Employed in Intervention Programs

MOTIVATION THEORY:	INTERVENTION STRATEGY:
[Culture]-----> Personality ----------> Achievement Motivation	Change Personality
cf. for example, McClelland, 1973; McClelland & Winter, 1969	
[Culture]-----> Personality <--------> Situation ----------> Achievement Motivation	Match the appropriate situation to the person
cf. for example, Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Atkinson & Raynor, 1974; Hill, 1972, 1977, in press; see also, McKeachie, 1961, McKeachin & Lin, 1971.	
[Culture]----> Situation (Personality) ----------> Achievement Motivation	Change situation
Representative examples not readily available. To some extent this position has been set forth by Maehr (1974, 1978)	