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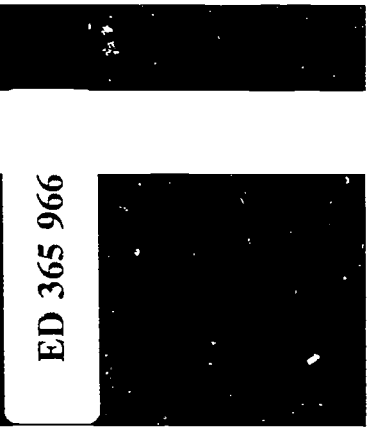
ABSTRACT

Teachers' responsiveness to and empathic understanding of students' perceptions when they are not motivated are critical in promoting students' ownership of the literacy learning agenda; in helping students with their motivational difficulties; and in establishing classrooms that focus on the enhancement of caring. An interpretive study, conducted in a fifth/sixth-grade whole language classroom, provides insights about students' thoughts, feelings, and actions when not motivated for literacy tasks, and examines students' subjective experiences in three different motivational situations. Forty-eight classroom observations were conducted that included a series of 41 indepth interviews over an 8-month period. Results offer clues about the affective and cognitive processes that enable some students to become engaged in literacy activities and prevent others from beginning them. Findings suggest that a responsive classroom culture that honors students' voices may enhance students' ownership of literacy learning and alleviate feelings of anger, anxiety, alienation, and powerlessness. (Contains 72 references.) (Author/RS)



When Students Do Not Feel Motivated For Literacy Learning: How a Responsive Classroom Culture Helps

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University of Georgia

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When Students Do Not Feel Motivated for Literacy Learning: How a Responsive Classroom Culture Helps

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Abstract. Teachers' responsiveness to and empathic understanding of students' perceptions when they are not motivated are critical in a) promoting students' ownership of the literacy learning agenda; b) in helping students with their motivational difficulties; and c) in establishing classrooms that focus on the enhancement of caring. This report of an interpretive study, conducted in a 5th/6th-grade whole language classroom, provides insights about students' thoughts, feelings, and actions when not motivated for literacy tasks, and examines students' subjective experiences in three different motivational situations. The study offers clues about the affective and cognitive processes that enable some students to become engaged in literacy activities and prevent others from beginning them. It argues that a responsive classroom culture that honors students' voices may enhance students' ownership of literacy learning and alleviate feelings of anger, anxiety, alienation, and powerlessness.

Marcel, a fifth grade student who participated in an interpretive study of student motivation, described how he felt when he was not able to do an assignment:

> Just my whole body feels like I want to throw up or something, if I don't like something....I can't do it at all....I feel like sick, and I feel so sick....*My body feels completely wrong.*

This paper offers the perspectives of Marcel and his classmates on their experiences when they did not feel motivated for academic tasks. Their views provide insights about the social, affective, and cognitive processes that may enable some children to become engaged in literacy activities, and prevent others from even beginning those activities. These indicators are derived from an analysis of students' responses when they did not feel motivated for literacy learning in differently evolving situations. The situations include (a) either doing or not doing a particular activity, and (b) either becoming motivated or not becoming motivated in the process. The elements analyzed include students' reported thinking processes, actions, and their focus on intrinsic or extrinsic goals.

Although Marcel was experiencing motivational problems in the particular situation described above, he and his fellow classmates generally perceived that their classroom experiences supported their intrinsic interest in learning. They also found that even when they did not initially feel motivated for an activity, they were often — but not always — able to become engaged in their learning.

The findings reported in this paper are part of a study exploring students' reasons and purposes for being or not being involved in learning activities, with specific attention given to literacy activities. (See Oldfather, 1991, 1993a, 1993b; West & Oldfather, 1993). The word *literacy* is used broadly and refers to all literate activity. Examples are drawn not only from reading and writing, but from science, social studies, and even mathematics (for purposes of illustrating a particular teacher–student interaction). In the next two sections the theoretical framework that undergirds both the focus and methodology of this research will be presented.

The Role of Classroom Culture in Motivation for Literacy

An underlying assumption of this study is that literacy is a social accomplishment (Bloome, 1986; Dyson, 1992; Santa Barbara Discourse Group, 1992). This view is informed by the constructivist psychological theories of Piaget (1973) and the radical constructivism of von Glaserfeld (1984). Also central to the theoretical frame are Vygotskian (1978) views that emphasize the interactive processes among learners within the social context of learning, and the role of more knowledgeable others in facilitating learning (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Language is at the heart of the process of becoming literate. Participants in classroom cultures collaboratively construct understandings about the nature of literacy, the values of literate activity, and ways that individuals and groups participate together as the curriculum is enacted. Reciprocally, through participation in these interactions, individual students construct a sense of self as readers, writers, and thinkers within the culture of each particular classroom. These constructions are salient to students' development of motivation for literacy learning (Johnston, 1992). Intrinsic motivation for literacy learning, as conceptualized in this research, is inextricably bound up with the students' processes of constructing meaning (See Oldfather & Dahl, in press). In sum, I suggest that if literacy is a social accomplishment, the roots of motivation for literate activity are deeply embedded in the sociocultural contexts of literacy learning, and the transactive processes occurring in those particular contexts. Research aimed at a holistic understanding of classroom motivation for literacy learning and students' adaptive learning processes needs to take these sociocultural processes into account. I must emphasize that this study is limited to consideration of the classroom context, and does not address the powerful influences of family or community.

Rohrkemper (1989) proposed a Vygotskian perspective on adaptive learning that emphasizes the role of classroom interactions. Rohrkemper defined adaptive learning as "the ability to take charge of frustration and maintain the intention to learn while enacting effective task strategies in the face of uncertainty — taking charge of one's motivation, emotion, and thinking" (1989, p. 143). Rohrkemper emphasized the importance of interactions with others, as well as with tasks, in working through problems with difficult learning. Rohrkemper and Corno (1988) found that children can learn important adaptive strategies

when they are confronted with stressful situations, and argued that these adaptive strategies can and should be deliberately promoted within classrooms. As students learn to cope with stress and boredom and to respond flexibly to new situations, they become able to take control of their own learning.

Cullen (1985) identified four types of responses in students reacting to school failure: a) strategy-oriented, b) action-oriented, c) anxiety-oriented, and d) anger-oriented. Parallels to Cullen's four types were found in the students' responses to motivational struggles reported in this paper. Cullen (1981) also found that the negative emotions that children felt when they failed in their first attempts to complete a task interfered with their ability to use metacognitive strategies.

The Role of Perception in Motivation

A social constructivist understanding of motivation for literacy learning encompasses not only the cultural domain of the classroom, but includes also the interpersonal and intrapersonal elements of students' constructions about literacy processes. Research literature in motivation reflects the centrality of the individual's perceptions in motivational responses. This strand is found in White's (1959) effectance motivation, Weiner's (1972) attribution theory, deCharm's (1984) theory of personal causation, Glasser's (1986) control theory, and the theories of cognitive evaluation and organismic integration of Deci and Ryan (1987). Dweck (1975) demonstrated the salience of perception in relation to issues of learned helplessness, finding that students' attributions of failure to lack of effort (rather than to luck, ability, or other variables) may alleviate learned helplessness. Within each of these motivational constructs, the subjective reality (i.e., the perception of the student) is central to the nature of his/her response to particular situations.

Eccles (1983) suggests that in some situations an individual's interpretations of events shape his/her actions more powerfully than the events themselves. Weinstein (1989) emphasizes the importance of student perceptions as a "missing link" in understanding students' motivation and achievement. "It is only recently that we have come to appreciate that children are active interpreters of the classroom reality, as of any social reality, and not simply passive recipients of instruction" (Weinstein, 1989, p. 190).

We cannot assume that adult or "outsider" perceptions will coincide with those of students within classroom cultures. In fact, ethnological analysis of interpretive studies that focus on children's experiences in school indicates that what students view as significant in the classroom is likely to be quite different from what adults see (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992). Although a great deal of attention has been paid to students' perceptions by educational researchers, and particularly by motivation researchers, there has been very little in-depth interpretive research that has been conducted on student motivation for literacy learning with a focus on understanding students' subjective experiences or their emic or "insider" views of classroom culture. Erickson and Shultz (1992, p. 467) in their recent review of the literature found that "virtually

no research has been done that places student experience at the center of attention." However, a few studies representing students' emic perspectives that are relevant to literacy motivation are emerging (See Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993; Collins & Green, 1992; Dahl & Freppon, in press; Marshall and Weinstein, 1986; Myers, 1992; Nicholls & Hazzard, 1993; Oldfather & McLaughlin, in press; Weinstein, 1983, 1989).

Gaining some access to these subjective perspectives (children's realities) is an essential aspect of efforts to understand the cognitive mediation involved in children's motivational processes (Deci & Ryan, 1987; McCombs, 1991; Weinstein, 1989). As Bruner (1990) asserts,

> A culturally sensitive psychology is and must be based not only upon what people actually *do*, but what they *say* they do and what they *say* caused them to do what they did. It is also concerned with what people say others did and why. And above all, it is concerned with what people *say* their worlds are like. (p. 16)

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The research reported here was conducted over an eight-month period in a whole language elementary classroom in Southern California (Oldfather, 1991, 1993a; West & Oldfather, 1993). "Willow" had a century-old tradition as a student-centered, experiential and humanistic learning environment, and a reputation for developing self-directed, engaged learners. The school served a diverse community of about 30% minority students, which included African American, Mexican American and European American children. Students came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including low income, middle income, and upper income families. Willow was situated in an academic community, and a few of the students were children of college professors. The district has open enrollment and half of the students come from areas outside of the regular attendance area.

The Teacher and the Classroom

Sally Thomas, the teacher of this combination 5th- and 6th-grade class of 31 students, is a highly dedicated professional, respected by students, parents, and administrators for her teaching and for her leadership at local and state levels in whole language practices and alternative assessment strategies. Through interviews and through observations with Sally Thomas, I learned that she has a social constructivist educational philosophy, a holistic approach to curriculum development, and a nurturing interpersonal style. The students used the following phrases to describe their teacher: supportive, caring, understanding, accessible, sharing mutual trust and respect, listening to and respecting diverse opinions, explaining things, not telling all the answers, fun, humorous, enthusiastic, sharing interests, holding high expectations, and giving specific feedback.

Sally often articulated to the students her reasons for offering particular activities, topics, or learning processes. For example,

when preparing for a cooperative learning jigsaw activity in which students were responsible for "becoming experts" on certain social studies readings in order to teach their peers, she mentioned that researchers have found that more learning takes place when we know we will be responsible for teaching the material to others. After the jigsaw, students examined their learning experience in that light. Sally asked students to critique the value of what they were learning, using questions like the following: "Is this a valuable topic to understand? Why or why not?"; "Have you ever needed to know how to do this in the "real world?"; "How might this skill be useful to you in the future?"; and "Why might the writers of this curriculum believe that this should be included? Do you agree or disagree with their decision?" The focus was on valuing learning, rather than on extrinsic rewards, and as such, fit Marshall's (1990) description of a learning-oriented classroom. As one student described his views on how his school culture was different,

> Instead of not wanting to read, they'll read. Instead of not wanting to write, they'll write. They want to write. One of the things I love in school is that we're trying to learn — not just get the right answer. That's really good. You want to get the right answer, but you still learn. You do better because learning is more important than getting the right answer.

This classroom was a caring community of learners in which the contribution of ideas from every member was encouraged and responded to. Risk taking was explicitly encouraged by Sally as an important part of learning. She and the students participated together as learners and as teachers. Through seeking and responding to the ideas and feelings of each member of the classroom culture, Sally was able to convey to her students a sense that their ideas and their own construction of meaning were important, valuable, and worthy of being taken seriously. Students and teacher figured things out together in ways described by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) as *connected knowing*. Sally shared the "ownership of knowing" (Oldfather, 1992).

The students' desks were arranged in groups of four or five. The room was filled with samples of creative work: illustrated poems, stories written on the computer and placed in hand-made illustrated books, art projects, and works in progress, which included projects in clay, papier-mâché, and other graphic arts. The classroom contained hundreds of books, many related to the thematic unit being studied. The curriculum was developed thematically, incorporating students' interests and suggestions. Topics were based on large concepts, and often included large issues that related to current events (e.g., a censorship debate) or environmental concerns. Students read self-selected books and books from the core curriculum. They kept dialogue journals and reading logs. Writing was the favorite school activity of most students in the class. The schoolwide practice was to give no grades; report cards were in narrative form. Students' dominant experience in this classroom was of interest in and engagement with learning.

METHOD

Engaging Students as Co-Researchers

In this study, instead of viewing the student participants as subjects, I invited them to be engaged as co-researchers (Oldfather, 1993b). Engaging the students as co-researchers is consistent with social constructivist epistemology (Gergen, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Wertsch, 1991). This interpretive study is based on the interactions that have taken place between the students and myself as we have constructed understandings about our research questions. The co-researchers are the experts in relation to their own lives and perceptions and are the "only authentic chroniclers of their own experience" (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). In presenting myself primarily as a learner interested in understanding their ideas, I communicated to them that we were "all in this together, trying to figure things out." I also hoped that the students' participation in the research process would be personally valuable for them.

The students report that our explicitly collaborative relationship in the inquiry increased their sense of ownership and involvement and led to greater depth in our findings. The students' roles as co-researchers may not appear to outsiders to be very different from those of research participants in other studies. In the end, the critical difference lies in the perceptions of the co-researchers about their participation, and how those perceptions have affected the processes and outcomes of the research. As one student explained, "If I wasn't a co-researcher, I wouldn't really understand what you are doing, so I wouldn't take this so seriously. I might not be telling you much about how I really feel." They also believe that their active roles as co-researchers have facilitated their understanding of themselves as literacy learners. For example, John explained:

> I never really realized what I liked. I realized what I didn't like, but I didn't realize what I liked. And when I sat down and thought about it and talked about it, I realized what I like. So it's kind of fun.

The values of the process for students engaged as co-researchers are much the same as those for teachers engaged in research. They gain voice and ownership of their agendas, and are enriched and empowered by the new knowledge constructed in the process (Oldfather, 1991, 1993b; Duckworth, 1987; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Kincheloe, 1991). They believe that their own motivation for learning has been enhanced through their research participation. For example, Nicki explained:

> I find myself in class sometimes now, saying, "This is what I was talking about [in our research]. This is what we should be doing better." I feel like we've looked into it so much, we've talked about it so much, that I've used it positively towards my work and how I feel about school.

Selection of Interviewees

The study employed purposive sampling to select information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). The sample of students selected for interviews included eight males and six females repre-

senting widely diverse achievement levels and different degrees of internal and external motivational orientation. The teacher's professional assessment of motivational orientation was represented by a scattergram showing achievement scores on one axis and students' dominant motivational orientation on the other. The range of degrees of motivation was judged in relation to the classroom context. Some students who were seen as having extrinsic motivational orientations might have been assessed quite differently in other settings in which extrinsic rewards were emphasized more and meaning construction was emphasized less. The teacher knew many of the students very well, having taught a number of them the previous year.

Data Collection and Analysis

As participant/observer I conducted 48 classroom observations (95 hours) that included a series of 41 in-depth interviews over the eight-month period. In order to gain a representative perspective on the classroom processes and interactions, I observed at various times of the school day (during different periods of academic work time, recess, lunch, P.E., and computer lab time) and attended various special events and field trips. Field notes included thick description of the students, the teacher, and their multidirectional interactions. Also included were accounts of my actions, thoughts, and conversations, as well as theoretical and methodological notes.

The open-ended interviews were usually conducted in the outdoor courtyard at picnic tables. Questions were based on my classroom observations or were developed from previous interviews, often in response to students' comments The students themselves frequently suggested issues and topics. Questions explored students' experiences when not feeling motivated: "Do you remember a time when you were supposed to do some work (or an activity) in school, and you really didn't feel like doing it? What was it? Did you do it? Why or why not? How did you feel when this happened?"

The constant comparative method of data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provided a feedback loop to shape both the methodological and analytical facets of the study. To illustrate, before the follow-up interviews with each co-researcher, I analyzed the content of the prior interviews and prepared questions for clarification, correction, and elaboration of the student's ideas to find out "if I got it right" (Geertz, 1973). I also conducted theoretical sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) during those interviews, checking the perceptions of each student about categories that were emerging from the study. For example, early in the data collection, a few co-researchers described their experiences of being able to take charge of attitudes about work, that is, to "choose a positive attitude" and therefore overcome their lack of motivation about a particular task. Subsequently, specific questions about this issue were posed to other students and properties emerged. Thus, our ongoing analysis of the interviews helped shape our understanding of important issues to be explored more fully in subsequent interviews.

Categories and properties were inductively generated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Erickson, 1986). The field notes were cut into segments according to identified units of meaning based on relationships to particular categories and properties. The units of meaning ranged in length from a single phrase to a couple of paragraphs. For example, Paul's comment "I see math as something that we have to do and something that I want to get off my chest so I can do something else" was sorted into the category of *Lacking Motivation* and given the property of *Getting It Over With*.

These segments were placed on hundreds of index cards and sorted into piles by categories and properties. The categories were formed through analysis across students. The 14 final categories were analyzed to identify ways in which they related to each other. Frequencies of responses were counted, and patterns for individual student profiles were analyzed in relation to particular categories and properties. There was much diversity in the experiences described by the students in this research, but a few findings were representative of all students. For example, all students preferred being motivated to being unmotivated for learning activities. Individual properties within categories sometimes reflected the unique perspective of a single student (e.g., Marcel's feeling paralyzed, which was reported in the opening vignette).

Validity checks on the coding processes were conducted by two experienced qualitative researchers who coded randomly selected sections of the field notes and compared these with my coding. A high degree of initial consensus was found. Co-researchers also provided verification, correction, clarification, and elaboration during subsequent individual interviews, through focus groups, and through whole class discussions.

In order to conduct further theoretical sampling of the categories and properties, I held a series of small group sessions in which all students in the class participated. In focus groups of about eight members (Patton, 1990), students expressed and audiotaped their ideas on questions central to the study. Data analysis processes and tentative findings were shared in a whole-class meeting that was followed by a videotaped in-depth discussion in which essentially no new ideas emerged, thus providing strong indication that the categories were saturated.

This research establishes a basis of comparison (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) to be used by researchers and practitioners in studying other contexts and other students. Further research is needed in other contexts with students of different ages and varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and in classrooms where teachers have different educational philosophies, teaching styles, and personal attributes.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

As indicated in Figure 1, three different patterns emerged from students' responses:

Situation I: Students lacked initial motivation, but ultimately gained motivation for the tasks and completed them;

Situation II: Students lacked initial motivation, did not gain motivation, but completed the tasks;

Situation III: Students lacked motivation, did not become motivated, and either felt unable to complete tasks or avoided them.

There were undoubtedly cases in which students felt motivated and did not complete tasks (potentially Situation IV). However, as this report focuses on ways in which students managed when they did *not* feel motivated, Situation IV was not explored.

In this section, students' experiences in these three situations will be described, as well as their emotions and physical responses when lacking motivation.

There was unanimity among students in relation to two findings: First, all of the fourteen co-researchers occasionally experienced lack of motivation even in this class that they generally found interesting and engaging. Second, all the co-researchers preferred to be interested and involved, rather than bored or uninvolved, in their reading and writing. Although certain students felt stalled in their work occasionally, most found ways to work through the discomfort they experienced when they lacked motivation.

Situation I: Lacking Motivation, Doing the Activity, and Becoming Motivated

Students used a variety of approaches when attempting to become more motivated for an activity. These included (a) choosing a positive attitude, (b) maintaining open-mindedness, (c) searching for worthwhileness in a task, (d) observing classmates' interest, (e) plunging into an activity, and (f) self-regulating attention to their work. One student reported "learning from boredom." These approaches are illustrated by the following examples.

Choosing a positive attitude. Suki explained that her reading for the science project might be a little boring at first, but "I have to think of it as important, because if you thought it wasn't important, you wouldn't do anything about it." Similarly, Brian commented, "If you say 'I don't like science' to start out with, you're really not going to pay a lot of attention. You're not going to be reading all the science things." Several students demonstrated metacognitive awareness and attempted to "take charge" of their attitudes in positive ways. The strategies appeared similar to those described by Manning (1990) as part of a person's inner language. These same approaches were reflected in the next category.

Choosing Open-mindedness and Searching for Worthwhileness. In remembering his initial reactions when asked to write a poetry dialogue, Andrew reported, "If I come into something open-minded and I don't know what the purpose is, but I think it might be worthwhile, I probably will get to like it." When Andrew could maintain an open attitude about the possible value of reading and writing poetry, he found he might have increased willingness to be involved. The teacher's frequent articulation of purposes and students' regular consideration of the value of what they were learning seem to have promoted the students' sense of the worthwhileness of learning activities.

Observing classmates' interest. Brian described his feelings about a science project: "It seems kind of like 'Oh, no! I *have* to do this!' But when you look at all the others'

STUDENTS DID THE ACTIVITY		STUDENTS DID NOT DO THE ACTIVITY
STUDENTS BECAME MOTIVATED	STUDENTS DID NOT BECOME MOTIVATED	
SITUATION I	**SITUATION II**	**SITUATION III**
Thinking • choosing a positive attitude • choosing open-mindedness • searching for worthwhileness • self-regulating attention • learning from boredom Doing • observing classmates' interest • plunging into an activity Purposes • intrinsic	Thinking • wanting to "get it over with" • meeting requirements and • expectations • remembering the classroom • accountability system Doing • not doing my best: "If it's wrong, it's wrong." • just doing the activity Purposes • extrinsic	AVOIDANCE Thinking • "I'll just huff and puff and say I didn't have time." • "I'll hide my homework." PARALYSIS Thinking • "I can't do this." • "I feel sick."

Figure 1. Comparison of students' thoughts and actions when lacking motivation in three evolving situations.

[ideas], it's kind of interesting." Andrew also indicated that observing peers who were interested and involved, and seeing how the others approached the task, helped him overcome his own resistance (Ames & Ames, 1984): "Seeing that everybody else likes it in there, I must like it too, once I figure it out." The prospect of competence (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978; Deci & Ryan, 1987) seemed to help motivate Andrew to get started on the tasks. His statement illustrates his experience in a supportive community of learners that encouraged him to be open to possibilities of being interested in and enjoying learning (Ames & Ames, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

Plunging into an activity. Lily often experienced a change in attitude after initial resistance to reading or writing: "Sometimes I'm feeling like I'm stuck with something. But if I can just start to do it, I may get really into it and start to put more effort into it. I don't like having to sit down, but once I get there, I get involved." Lily's statement reflects interest generated through interaction with a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978).

Self-regulating attention. Lily used self-regulation, specifically, self-correction (Manning, 1990, 1991) in describing her approach to a task: "I kind of daze along with it. I do it, but I don't do it that well. And

later on I catch myself [not doing the task], and I do it." Consciously regulating her attention processes, Lily was able to focus on doing the literacy activity and reported increased subsequent engagement.

Learning from boredom. John had a unique view of boredom, which he used in a constructive manner:

> ***John***: My favorite thing is to write. It's just from boredom. You think of boredom as nothingness but sometimes it really gets something.
>
> ***Penny***: What do you mean by that?
>
> ***John***: Well, sometimes people think boredom is really boring. And it is, but it teaches you things. It teaches you how to play by yourself, how to write, how to learn other things, and just, it teaches you. Like it'll teach you while you're at home alone and it's just something that you can learn from.

John sought engagement in activities as a relief from boredom. Yet, he also recognized that boredom precipitated learning and creative activities as he sought to make life more interesting.

Students in Situation I who were able to become motivated for an activity usually did so when they plunged into a task. But plunging in was not enough (as is illustrated by those in Situation II, who did not become motivated when doing a task). Those who did become motivated also kept an open mind. They looked to their peers for inspiration, encouragement, and approval for doing well. They respected and trusted in the teacher's frequently held dialogues about what kinds of learning might be valuable and interesting. They experienced a sense of control about their learning, not only in terms of making choices about what and how they learned, but also in relation to how they thought about their learning: They could monitor attention to a task or choose a positive attitude.

Situation II: Lacking Motivation, Doing the Activity, Not Becoming Motivated

As described in the previous section, some students found ways to become engaged in literacy activities after initially lacking motivation. Other students were not able to become engaged, but managed to complete the required tasks, though without interest or enthusiasm. Ten students made unsolicited statements that they did not do their best work when lacking motivation. Their primary desire was to get it over with. Nicki did what she considered unpleasant assignments: "Just to get the work done, you know. Just to get it done." Lauren honestly explained, "I'll do it, and if it's wrong, it's wrong."

When asked why they did these tasks if they did not want to do them, students identified reasons or purposes that were extrinsic to the task. They frequently referred to the classroom accountability system, known as Superkid. The system provided that those who had completed all their weekly assignments were allowed to choose an activity during free time, or they were given other incentives. Those who had not completed all assignments were required to work on them. Parents were informed weekly of whether

students were up-to-date on assignments. Paul analyzed his own reactions to Superkid:

> Doing Superkid. . . it's not like the goal of my life. But I guess it's something in your subconscious that wants you to do it still. I don't know why. . . . You see, if I don't do Superkid, I'm not going to get punished or anything. So I think it's kind of dumb, but I think something in your subconscious says "Go do it." So I always do everything.

All of the students reported being influenced at least occasionally to participate in some learning activities for extrinsic rewards. The Superkid program appeared to play an important role, particularly for those in Situation II, although it had quite different meanings for different students. In some instances, the extrinsic rewards were seen as indicators of self-competence. In other cases, it appeared that rewards were valued for themselves. It appeared that Superkid served as a "motivational safety net" or a "purpose of last resort" (Oldfather, 1991) for students in Situation II who did not value the activity for intrinsic purposes. The accountability system obviously did not work for those in Situation III, as they did not do the activity.

Situation III: Lacking Motivation, Avoiding Tasks, or Feeling Paralyzed

When children did not do an activity because of motivational problems, *avoidance* or *perceived helplessness* was involved. These motivational responses were occasionally found in this classroom, particularly for two of the students. Overall, however, these responses were not common.

For example, the avoidance situation was articulated by Lauren, who explained frankly, "Sometimes I'll just huff and puff and say I didn't get around to it." The more serious state of perceived helplessness was experienced by Marcel, who remarked poignantly, "My body feels completely wrong." Marcel felt "homework can be pure torture for kids." Both students volunteered that they had attempted to conceal from the teacher and parents the fact that their homework was not finished.

Analysis of the Three Situations

As indicated in Figure 1, there were clear differences in how students in the three situations thought about their relationship to literacy learning activities. Students in Situation I not only did the activities, they combined the *doing* with *thinking* about the possible interest and value of the task. They focused on learning, rather than extrinsic purposes. Their thinking was often metacognitive (e.g., choosing a positive attitude or monitoring attention). Those in Situation II who did the activity without becoming motivated relied on the classroom accountability system (extrinsic purpose), rather than personal interest or valuing the activity (intrinsic purpose). Although students in Situations I and II all did the task, those in Situation II often reported that they did not put forth their best effort ("If it's wrong, it's wrong"). When students in Situation I became motivated for an activity, they had a greater sense of self-determination.

Some students in Situation III who avoided an activity may also have experienced self-determination, by virtue of having evaded the requirement. In contrast, Marcel ("My body feels completely wrong"), who was also in Situation III, experienced helplessness, rather than self-determination.

Students' Feelings When Lacking Motivation

When students were struggling with motivation they experienced a range of negative feelings, including anger, rebellion, anxiety, frustration, and helplessness. As indicated by representative comments below, students were clear about their desire for autonomy under these circumstances. Some students emphasized the relationship between competence and level of motivation.

Feeling anger and rebellion. Anger and rebellion were common reactions when students felt unmotivated. Andy explained, "Teachers kind of get on your back and everything. I get really mad. I want to tell them to go away." Brian reported, "You begin and you've gotta do a geography map or something. Then you get real mad, because you don't want to do it. But then you have to." Feelings of anger appeared to be associated with students' feeling that they were denied opportunity for self-determination.

Wanting to have autonomy. When students felt unmotivated to do required tasks, they became aware of their desire for autonomy. For example, John described his reaction to a required science project: "I *want* to *want* to do a science project. But I can't *want* to do a science project if they say you *have* to do a science project." As he explained, "I want to be myself. I want to imagine what I want. I want to like what I want. I want to enjoy what I want. I want to be me."

Feeling anxious and less than competent. Students reported lacking motivation in situations in which they felt less than competent and/or highly anxious. Marcel explained that he did not often want to do math, especially when he did not understand it. When Marcel found that other students completed a timed math test before he did, he expressed discouragement:

> I just don't really liked being timed. It doesn't feel good when you see some other people get ahead of you, and you hear somebody say "Oh yeah, good, I'm finished." It just makes me feel like I'm so terrible at it.

Some students who felt anxious and less than competent also experienced extreme physical symptoms, as described in the following section.

Children's Physical Responses and Needs

Physical responses and physical needs were primary concerns in relation to some students' engagement with learning. Their concerns in the physical domain were a) coping with feeling physically ill when reacting to motivational problems, b) feeling the need for energy release, c) wanting freedom of movement as an aspect of choice and autonomy, and d) valuing hands-on activities as a key to increased engagement in learning.

Feeling physically ill. As mentioned previously, Marcel, whose body felt "completely wrong," had a severe physical reaction when he felt unable to do a required task. Marcel's experiences can be understood from a variety of perspectives. Anxiety has been recognized as negatively related to intrinsic motivation (Gottfried, 1982). Physical symptoms such as headaches may be experienced by individuals who perceive a lack of control over outcomes (Pennebaker, Burnam, Schaeffener, & Harper, 1977). Lack of perceived control can lead to a sense of helplessness which then impairs learning and performance (Hiroto & Seligman, 1975). Miller and Ross (1975) suggest that attribution of failure to a physical problem may be a self-serving bias that preserves the individual's ego.

All explanations aside, Marcel's strong physical reaction virtually paralyzed his participation. Marcel's first remedy was to "wait until it's time to do something else. It's like when you eat too much of something, you feel full for that, but sometimes you can eat something else." Marcel explained that he felt better when he could go outside and "get his energy out," or read a book he liked. Marcel's teacher was able to recognize his condition and to provide some support and relief. When Marcel voiced his feelings of anxiety about timed tests, the teacher's empowering response was to make participation in timed tests optional and use untimed assessments instead.

Needing to move. Andy, who said he liked to read, described what he experienced at Hebrew School:

> ***Andy***: I have so much energy, I have to keep moving. Sometimes I get really nervous and my hands start shaking and I can't read, so I just stop.
>
> ***Penny***: How do you feel when you have to sit still?
>
> ***Andy***: Well, sometimes I just wiggle my toes.

As Andy's experience in Hebrew School illustrates, some students had to struggle to carry through their reading activities when they were required to sit still or to remain in their seats for long periods of time. If the children were not allowed to move about and release energy, they had difficulty sustaining engagement with learning. The common disciplinary practice of depriving students of recess must create problems for students like Andy. The "sometimes-I-just-wiggle-my-toes" strategies may not provide an energy release sufficient to allow the student to reconnect with the work.

Summary of Analysis of Findings

To summarize the analysis of the findings:

1) Students' lack of motivation caused them great discomfort unless or until they were able to feel motivated;

2) Students preferred to be motivated rather than unmotivated;

3) Those who became motivated after being unmotivated for an activity (Situation I) were interested in finding intrinsic meaning in the activity. They combined *empowering ways*

of thinking with the *doing* of an activity. These empowering ways of thinking were often self-regulatory and metacognitive in nature (e.g., choosing a positive attitude, open-mindedness, searching for worthwhileness, self-regulated attention, learning from boredom).

Qualities of Classroom Culture That Alleviate Motivational Struggles

Although all the students were occasionally not motivated, they perceived that the responsive classroom culture alleviated the motivational struggles in all three situations described above. (See Oldfather, 1993a and Oldfather and McLaughlin [in press] for in-depth descriptions of the classroom environment.) Students in Situation I who lacked motivation, did the activity, and became motivated, often reported being strongly influenced by their more motivated peers. As Andrew commented, observing peers' being motivated helped him think he "might like it, too." In this classroom it was "cool" to do well academically. Brian reflected this in reporting that students wanted to do well on their social studies reports, because "you want [other students] to respect the way you think."

The focus on collaborative construction of meaning also supported students' motivation. As Paul explained, the teacher "helps us build our thoughts." The co-researchers felt that being part of this community of learners made the transition from being unmotivated to becoming motivated less difficult.

Students in Situation II who did not become motivated for an activity, but did complete the activity were, nevertheless, supported by the learning-oriented classroom culture. Even if their reasons for doing an activity were extrinsic rather than intrinsic, most students valued being "good students." The responsiveness of the classroom to their ideas, feelings, and interests helped alleviate the feelings of resistance or alienation that are often experienced when students are not intrinsically motivated to do required tasks. Thus, they were more open to moving into intrinsically motivated modes of engagement in their learning.

For students in Situation III, who lacked motivation and were either unwilling or unable to do a task, the nurturing, responsive aspects of the classroom culture met a particularly critical need, not only for promoting students' engagement in learning, but in supporting them through their motivational struggles. This is exemplified by Marcel's case. When his body felt "completely wrong," he was able to communicate his needs and feelings to the teacher. She responded to students with care and empathy and took action that alleviated anxiety levels and allowed students to have a greater sense of self-determination. Marcel felt much better.

RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE AND MOTIVATION

A deeply responsive classroom culture that honors student voices supports both motivational and ethical goals in the following ways:

1) It develops a community of learners that promotes the maintenance and enhancement of caring (Noddings, 1984);

2) It gives teachers access to important insights for meeting children's educational needs;

3) It alleviates motivational struggles and promotes students' perceptions of self-determination, and thus their ownership of their own learning agenda.

Establishing Caring Classroom Environments

Empathic understanding of and response to children's thinking and feeling form the basis for creating nurturing classroom environments tnat maintain and enhance caring (Belenky, et al., 1986; Deci & Ryan, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1984). Noddings (1984, p. 20) makes a critical distinction between instructional and educational goals, asserting that "the student is infinitely more important than the subject." She proposes:

> The primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring.... I am drawing attention to priorities. I certainly do not intend to abandon intellectual and aesthetic aims. If what we do instructionally achieves the instructional end — A learns X — we have succeeded *instructionally*, but if A hates X and his teacher as a result, we have failed *educationally* [italics added] (p. 174).

Noddings' statement puts into perspective the broader outcomes of education and emphasizes affective goals as integral to learning, self-esteem, and caring. If, as Noddings suggests, we view the student as infinitely more important than the subject, we will be more likely to respond to children's motivational struggles in ways that empower and motivate them, rather than in ways that make them feel powerless and alienated. The responsive classroom environment has the potential to nurture students' ownership of learning.

Belenky et al. in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986) further explore the concept of caring and nurturing in education, articulating the process of *connected teaching*. Connected teaching is based on a constructivist epistemological stance that all knowledge is constructed and that the knower is an intimate part of that which is known (Belenky, et al. 1986). The constructive process of each individual learner is respected. The teacher "shares the ownership of knowing" (Oldfather, 1992). This stance changes the power relations in the classroom. Connected teachers create a caring community of learners that encourages risk taking. Everyone in the community (including the teacher) teaches, as well as learns. Connected teachers invite students' collaboration in the construction of meaning, and they nurture students' voices by facilitating "the having of wonderful ideas" (Duckworth, 1987). In such an environment, students become more fully engaged in their learning.

Gaining Information About Students' Needs

In a classroom in which students' voices are honored, the teacher gains access to information about children's perspectives and subjective experiences that promotes responsiveness

to children's educational, social, affective, and physical needs (Dewey, 1904; Erickson & Shultz, 1992; Oldfather, 1991; Weinstein, 1989). When Marcel, who said "My body feels completely wrong," was essentially paralyzed, his teacher might not have understood his problem. She might have punished him or treated him as a lazy or rebellious child. She might have taken actions that would have exacerbated Marcel's frustrations, undermined his sense of competence and self-esteem, and established an adversarial relationship. Instead, his teacher Sally recognized what Marcel was experiencing, talked with him, and eased his anxiety. She was able to gain access to important information about Marcel's needs through her receptive posture. Taking action based on that information, she negotiated some of the conditions and requirements of learning activities, thus responding to his learning needs and to his affective needs, which are inevitably intertwined.

CONCLUSION

The perspectives of students in Sally Thomas's classroom have pointed toward ways in which responsive classroom culture facilitated students' adaptive learning processes. The learning environment supported the motivational processes of those who were undergoing motivational struggles as well as those who were deeply engaged in literacy learning.

This research was conducted in the context of one classroom. Students' experiences in family and community contexts are likely to have significant impact on their motivation for literacy learning, and those elements are not encompassed by this study. In order to provide a basis for comparability, further research is needed in a variety of other contexts, including other whole language classrooms, other grade levels, different socioeconomic contexts, with students of varied cultural backgrounds, and in classrooms with different styles of teaching. A longitudinal study is underway to follow the original fourteen co-researchers into other classroom contexts.

In contrast to many studies on motivation, it was not the intent of this study to measure either motivation or achievement. I have attempted to understand and represent students' experiences as fully and fairly as possible, and to report (in Bruner's words) "what they say their worlds are like." As in all research, these findings are interpreted first through the lens of the researcher — and then by the reader. In spite of the limitations of our constructed understandings, it is important that we attempt, as Beekman (1986) suggests, to see students' motivational struggles and the world of classroom literacy from a "common horizon" with students.

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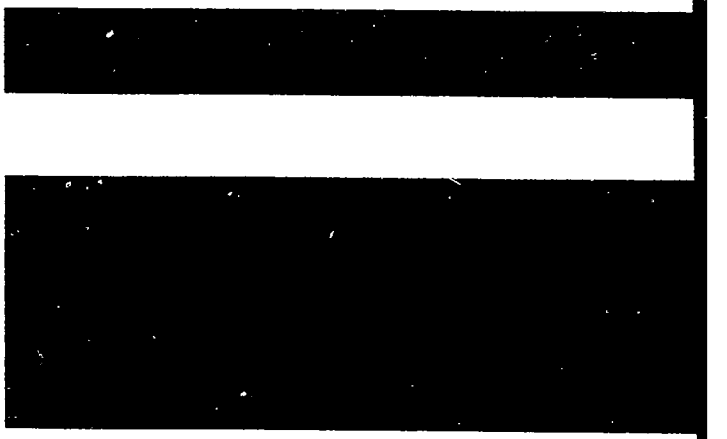

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