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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of motivation in the way mental retardation is defined and treated. It reviews evidence that mental retardation involves a motivational self-system and a self-regulatory influence which, interacting with cognitive and metacognitive factors, result in inefficient learning. It suggests that individuals with mental retardation are characterized by task extrinsic rather than task intrinsic motivation. Such task extrinsic factors might include external rewards, safety, avoidance of stressful or anxious situations, security, and avoidance of failure experiences. Closely related is research showing that people with mental retardation have deficient effectance motivation or mastery motivation. The educational problem is seen to center on optimizing outcome performances by increasing students' intrinsic motivation and the interaction of motivational processes with cognitive processes. Teachers are urged to consider the implications of the theory of motivational orientation for classroom practice. Contains 24 references. (DB)

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THE EDUCATIONAL MEANING OF MENTAL RETARDATION: TOWARD A MORE
HELPFUL CONSTRUCT

MENTAL RETARDATION AND THE NEGLECTED CONSTRUCT OF MOTIVATION

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Traditionally mental retardation has been defined in terms of subaverage intelligence, and subaverage adaptive behavior as compared with one's chronological age match from a common culture (Clarke & Clarke, 1985; Grossman, 1983). Currently the definition of mental retardation is undergoing reexamination and is in great flux (Jacobson & Mulick, 1996; Luckasson, Coulter, Pollaway, et al. 1992; MacLean, 1997). However, individuals who have been viewed as mentally retarded may have functional limitations that can be explained by constructs other than subaverage intelligence, subaverage adaptive behavior, and other cognitive constructs, but which interact with them. Individuals viewed as mentally retarded may have motivational orientations or systems which limit their educational functioning, their problem solving abilities, and their adaptive behavior in playing social roles in various problem-solving contexts. This motivational construct is a neglected component of the definition of mental retardation and especially important in an educational definition of mental retardation.

For the last twenty seven years, Carl Haywood, and our students and colleagues (which I have called the Peabody-Vanderbilt Group in my writings. See Switzky, 1997) have a working hypothesis that mental retardation involves motivational self-system, self-regulatory influences which interact with cognitive and metacognitive factors resulting in being an inefficient learner. The evidence suggests in study after study that performance is a complex function of cognition and motivation. Having the right amounts and kind of motivation which in our model we have called an intrinsic motivational orientation to problem-solving tasks can make one a more efficient learner and leads to higher performance outcomes. Having more of another kind of motivation which in our model we have called an extrinsic motivational orientation to problem-solving tasks operates to make one a less efficient learner and leads to lower performance

outcomes (Haywood & Switzky, 1986; Schultz & Switzky, 1990; Switzky, 1997; Switzky, in press a; in press b; Zigler & Bennett-Gates, in press). Intrinsic (IM) and extrinsic (EM) motivation make up a personality continuum that is called Task-Intrinsic vs Task-Extrinsic Motivational Orientation which has been measured by the Picture Choice Motivation Scale developed at George Peabody College for Teachers which has excellent construct validity (Switzky & Heal, 1990).

As used by the Peabody-Vanderbilt group, task intrinsic vs task extrinsic motivation is viewed as a learning style by which an individual may be characterized in terms of the location of the incentives that are effective in motivating their behavior rather than in the context in which tasks are performed. Individuals may be motivated by task-intrinsic factors (e.g., responsibility, challenge, creativity, opportunities to learn, and task achievement) or by task-extrinsic factors (e.g., external rewards, safety, the avoidance of stressful anxious situations, security, and generally avoiding failure experiences). Ask yourself, do classroom climates for students viewed as mentally retarded facilitate an atmosphere conducive to task-intrinsic motivation or to task-extrinsic motivation? This may be one of the most critical issues for special educators since the major problem for teachers is to increase students' intrinsic motivation.

The Yale group of researchers (Switzky, 1997; Zigler & Bennett-Gates, in press), which I have defined as Edward Zigler, his students and colleagues, were deeply influenced by White's (1959) formulation of effectance motivation or mastery motivation which theorized that every one has an intrinsic need to feel competent in their world and is associated with the pleasure and sustained performance individuals' derive from using their own cognitive resources for their own sake and being independent from environmentally derived external reinforcement, especially in the domains of exploration, play, curiosity, and mastery of the environment.

Both the Yale and Peabody-Vanderbilt groups have conceptualized the motivational problems of persons with mental retardation as due in part to deficient effectance motivation and lack of concern for the intrinsic motivation that inheres in being correct regardless of whether or not an external agent dispenses the reinforcer for such correctness. This lack of effectance motivation is characterized by being heavily dependent on receiving environmentally derived external reinforcement feedback in order to perform a task, i.e., task extrinsic motivation and an overreliance on clues from the external environment to help guide behavioral performance, i.e., outerdirectedness, with a concomitant increase in extrinsically motivated behavior (Haywood & Switzky, 1986, 1992; Hodapp, Burack, & Zigler, 1990; Kreitler, Bennett-Gates, & Zigler, 1997; Switzky & Haywood, 1974, 1984, 1991; Tanaka, Bennett-Gates, Malakoff, & Zigler, 1997; Zigler & Balla, 1982; Zigler & Hodapp,

1991). Generally persons with mental retardation because of their socially depriving life histories, their greater cognitive deficiencies, and related failure experiences, compared to nonretarded persons of the same mental age have less effectance motivation and more of an extrinsic motivational orientation leading to different patterns of incentives and reinforcement hierarchies compared to nonretarded persons (Balla & Zigler, 1979; Zigler & Hodapp, 1991).

The question that has driven me for most of my career has been the role of motivational processes in persons who have been viewed as mentally retarded by the schools, by their families, and in other contextual ecological systems. Mental retardation is not just a problem in having the wrong motivational orientation. It is more complicated than that and involves how one can educationally optimize the outcome performances of students by increasing their intrinsic motivation and studying the interaction of motivational processes with cognitive processes. Currently it is being realized that personality and motivational processes are indeed very important. Motivational self-system are the fulcrum around which all other psychological, educational, and self-regulatory processes rotate to energize behavior and performance in persons with mental retardation. Motivational self-system processes determine what information gets into the memory system, how that information is organized in memory, and what information is retrieved to enable persons with mental retardation to solve problems, and behave in adaptive and appropriate ways.

Essentially what I am arguing for is that an educational definition of mental retardation has to be sensitive to the motivational self-system, self-regulatory processes that underpin the outcome performances of children and youth viewed as mentally retarded and make motivational components a more explicit, less neglected part of the educational definition of mental retardation.

A Synopsis of the Theory of Motivational Orientation: The Peabody-Vanderbilt Model (Haywood & Switzky, 1986, 1992; Schultz & Switzky, 1990; Switzky, 1997, in press a, in press b; Switzky & Haywood, 1974, 1984, 1991; Switzky & Heal, 1990; Switzky & Schultz, 1988).

Generally speaking, increasing amounts of task-intrinsic motivation are found with increasing chronological age and mental age, and psychometric intelligence up to middle adolescence, and with increasing social class. Usually mentally retarded persons as a group are more extrinsically motivated compared with their nonretarded peers (presumably because of their more frequent failure experiences). However, some mentally retarded persons are found to be intrinsically motivated presumably because of supportive family influences.

The theory of motivational orientation would predict:

1. That having an IM orientation is helpful to both mentally retarded and nonretarded learners compared to having an EM orientation in terms of learning more effectively. However, having an IM orientation may have more impact on mentally retarded and other dysfunctional and at-risk learners. Generally, these predictions have been confirmed. IM learners work harder and longer on a task compared to EM learners. IM learners learn more effectively and have higher school achievement.

2. That there is an interaction between motivational orientation and incentives, such that one must match incentive systems to the unique motivational orientations of individuals, i.e., the performance of IM individuals will be optimally reinforced by task-intrinsic incentives, whereas the performance of EM individuals will be optimally reinforced by task-extrinsic incentives. Generally these predictions have been strongly confirmed.

3. IM persons may be characterized by self-monitored reinforcement systems that make them less dependent on external reinforcement conditions, while EM persons may be characterized by dependence on external reinforcement systems. IM individuals are more sensitive to task-intrinsic incentives, have high performance standards of internal self-reward, and are more likely to self-reinforce their own behavior, whereas EM individuals are intensively outer-directed, have very low performance standards of internal self-reward, and are extremely sensitive to the external reinforcement environment. These predictions have been strongly confirmed.

Teachers need to take into consideration the implications of the theory of motivational orientation for classroom practice in order to optimize the learning outcomes of their students.

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