

Motivating with Praise!

Inside and out: Two Types of Motivation

In their Self-Determination Theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) note two broad types of motivation: [intrinsic motivation](#) and [extrinsic motivation](#). This distinction is helpful in classrooms as intrinsic motivation fosters higher-quality learning and provides incentive for children to continue learning even outside the classroom (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

'I got this!'

Deci and Ryan (1985) believe that one factor that contributes to intrinsic motivation is the person's feeling of competence towards an activity. Helping students believe that they are capable of doing something helps them pursue it for its own sake, keeping at it in their own time. For instance, children who believe that they can read will likely find books more fun and interesting, thereby taking their books outside the classroom.

'You can do it!'

Psychological studies support the idea that positive reinforcement can help cultivate feelings of competence and intrinsic motivation (Blanca, Reis, & Jackson, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985). One such study by Blanca and colleagues (Blanca et al., 1984) had participants play 'Spill and Spell', a word game where participants made words using letter cubes. Participants were split into two groups, with participants in one group being praised for their performance at intervals. When participants were later left alone in the experiment's room, those who received praise spent more time continuing to play 'Spill and Spell' as opposed to finding something else to do.

'Good effort!'

However, there are also different kinds of praise. Psychologist Carol Dweck notes that praise can be directed towards [the person's ability](#) or [the effort invested in the process](#), believing the latter to be more productive for children's learning (Dweck, 2008). In a study involving 10 to 12 year-old children, Mueller and Dweck (1998) gave children problems to solve, and randomly assigned them into three groups. Regardless of how they did, children were told that they did well. One group was praised for working hard, another praised for being smart, while the third received no further feedback. They found that children praised for effort were later more likely to choose difficult problems to tackle than

could help them learn more, compared to children who received no feedback. In contrast, children praised for being smart were more likely to choose easy problems to do that will not help them learn. Praise for effort thereby helps children cultivate a [growth mindset](#) that encourages learning, as opposed to a [fixed mindset](#) that avoids challenge.

Key terms:	
Intrinsic motivation:	Doing something for its inherent satisfactions (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
Extrinsic Motivation:	Doing something to attain a separable outcome not inherent in the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
Praise for ability:	When one is applauded for being good at something. This includes praise for intelligence, where one is applauded for 'being smart'. E.g. "You must be really smart", "You must be really good at this" (Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Mueller & Dweck, 1998)
Praise for effort:	Where one is applauded for putting in effort at a task. E.g. "You must have tried really hard" (Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Mueller & Dweck, 1998)
Growth Mindset:	A way of thinking based on the belief that one's basic qualities can be cultivated through effort (Dweck, 2008)
Fixed Mindset:	A way of thinking based on the belief that one's basic qualities are unalterable (Dweck, 2008)

References

- Blanck, P. D., Reis, H. T., & Jackson, L. (1984). The effects of verbal reinforcement of intrinsic motivation for sex-linked tasks. *Sex Roles, 10*(5), 369–386. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF00287554>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Kamins, M. L., & Dweck, C. S. (1999). Person versus process praise and criticism: implications for contingent self-worth and coping. *Developmental Psychology, 35*(3), 835. Retrieved from [http://people.uncw.edu/hungerforda/Infancy/PDF/Person versus process praise and criticism.pdf](http://people.uncw.edu/hungerforda/Infancy/PDF/Person%20versus%20process%20praise%20and%20criticism.pdf)
- Mueller, C. M., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*(1), 33.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54–67. <http://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>