Research Guide
College and Career Competency:
Initiative/Motivation

Definition:

At its most fundamental level, initiative is being motivated to act or doing what needs to be done without being told to do it (Frese & Fay, 2001). It is related to other competencies such as **self-efficacy**, **goal setting**, and **self-regulation** (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). For example, if a student lacks **self-efficacy** they may not even believe that they can do something and similarly if a student lacks **goal setting** they might struggle with choosing something to act upon. Motivation is an important element of initiative (Danielsen, Wiium, Wilhelmsen, & Wold, 2010; Grant, Nurmohamed, Ashford, & Dekas, 2011; Kohn, 1999; Ma, Jin, Meng, & Shen, 2014; Reid & Bailey-Dempsey, 1995). Motivation is your internal drive to achieve, develop, and keep moving forward (University of Leeds Careers Centre, 2016). Motivation has a positive impact on initiative when it is developed through autonomy (e.g., choice) and driven by internal rather than external rewards (Danielsen et al., 2010; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Grant et al., 2011).

Essential Components for Students:

1. Be proactive and take action autonomously (without being told).
2. Make choices to achieve, develop, and keep moving forward.

Research:

- Initiative "represents a key variable in education" (Danielsen et al., 2010, p. 248) because it can increase engagement and satisfaction with school.
  - Several classroom factors can influence student academic initiative: perceived caring and support from teachers, a friendly classroom with perceived support from classmates, and perceived autonomy. For example, students will perceive they have autonomy if they have a say in activities or how their class time is used.
  - If the student's main source of motivation is pressure from the teacher, they are much less likely to take initiative and will rather approach the task with a lack of enthusiasm or effort (Grant et al., 2011).
- Initiative is related to other competencies.
  - Taking initiative requires **content/technical knowledge** (Fay & Frese, 2001) and **self-efficacy** (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Fay & Frese, 2001). Without content or technical knowledge, initiative can be misapplied. Without self-efficacy, students do not typically have the confidence to take the initiative needed for growth and success in the classroom (Erwin, 2004; Usher & Kober, 2013; Wentzel, 1997).
  - Someone with initiative will set their own **goals** and **persevere** in achieving them (Fay & Frese, 2001).

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- Initiative is considered to be one of the competencies that is important in the 21st century workplace (Finegold & Notabartolo, 2010).
- Cognitive ability and job-relevant knowledge and skills are needed to take initiative; it is necessary to understand the work before it can be undertaken (Fay & Frese, 2001).
    - Initiative can be unproductive, e.g., if applied at the wrong time, in the wrong situation, or using the wrong methods (Chan, 2006, as cited in Grant et al., 2011).
- Motivation contributes to initiative (Danielsen et al., 2010; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Grant et al., 2011; Kohn, 1999; Ma et al., 2014; Reid & Bailey-Dempsey, 1995).
    - Motivation can be enhanced or undermined by the classroom environment (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006), particularly as it relates to the amount of autonomy the student perceives he/she has.
    - Motivation can vary based on how an individual's behavior is regulated. If the regulation is internal (autonomous self-regulation), an individual will be motivated to act based on a sense of free choice, interest, and the value they place on the work or behavior. This "autonomous motivation" positively impacts initiative and performance. In contrast, controlled motivation, where the individual feels a sense of pressure to act, tends to result in compliance rather than initiative (Danielsen et al., 2010; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Grant et al., 2011).
- Applying principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to all students can have a positive impact on motivation. Specifically, researchers have found that teachers who provide multiple means of engagement can stimulate learner interest and offer challenges that increase the student's motivation (Jiménez, Graf, & Rose, 2007). In a UDL classroom, students experience autonomy as they make choices about how they want to acquire and demonstrate knowledge (Stanford & Reeves, 2009).
- Autonomous motivation can best be created and sustained "by attainable sub-goals that lead to larger future ones" (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, p. 587); these goals should be proximal (i.e., short-term) to provide immediate incentives and guides for performance (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).
- When teachers empower students, students tend to show more initiative and take more ownership of their learning. Numerous studies show that introducing choice into the classroom is one of the most effective ways to motivate students and support initiative and **self-efficacy** (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Erwin, 2004; Patall, 2013; Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010).
- Whether teachers create them cooperatively with students or require students to develop goals themselves, **goal setting** is a clear way to motivate students to learn. Mastery—rather than performance—goals, especially if they are challenging but attainable, can serve as excellent motivational drivers for students. Defining students' success in terms of individualized goals can encourage active learning, initiative, and **self-regulation** (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012; Rolland, 2012).

Assessments

Please note that the assessments listed here reflect what is currently being used in multiple disciplines to measure initiative/motivation. Not all of these measures will be easily used in classroom settings or by classroom teachers. However, the general knowledge that these measurements exist and the ability to review particular items from these assessments is valuable.

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- The Youth Experience Survey 2.0 (YES 2.0) is a self-report instrument that measures youths' self-reported experiences in the context of organized youth activities (Hansen & Larson, 2005). The total survey consists of 70 items and a 4-point Likert scale; the initiative-related questions are 7-18 and include subdomains of **goal setting**, effort, **problem solving**, and time management. The survey can be accessed at: http://youthdev.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/YES-2.0-Instrument.pdf.
- Danielsen et al. (2010) adapted the initiative-related questions in the YES 2.0 survey (see above) to a school context, and created a scale consisting of five items and four response options (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=almost always). The items are listed below:
    - o I challenge myself when I am doing schoolwork.
    - o I concentrate when I am doing schoolwork.
    - o I set goals for myself when I am doing schoolwork.
    - o I find out how I can reach my goals in schoolwork.
    - o I plan how I shall do schoolwork.
- Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, and Tag (1997) developed a measure of initiative for workers in East and West Germany to explore the relationship to employment and entrepreneurship. See http://www.evidence-based-entrepreneurship.com/content.php?cur_page=7&sub_page=5&rout=0&lang=0 and http://www.evidence-based-entrepreneurship.com/content/downloads/measurement/InterviewPersInit.pdf for more information. Questions related to self-reported initiative are listed below:
    - o I actively attack problems.
    - o Whenever something goes wrong, I search for a solution immediately.
    - o Whenever there is a chance to get actively involved, I take it.
    - o I take initiative immediately even when others don't.
    - o I use opportunities quickly in order to attain my goals.
    - o Usually I do more than I am asked to do.
    - o I am particularly good at realizing ideas.
- The Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) consists of 28 items that assess three types of motivation: the desire to know, accomplish, and receive stimulation. AMS uses a 7-point Likert scale to provide teachers with associations between motivation and a range of academic variables. See Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, and Vallieres (1992) for more information.
- The Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) is based on the theory of personal investment. ISM measures four motivation dimensions or achievement goals: task (mastery), ego (performance), social solidarity, and extrinsic. The 66-item test uses a 5-point Likert scale to provide teachers with students' motivation orientation scales. See McInerney, Roche, McInerney, and Marsh (1997) for a detailed discussion of the inventory.
- Based on social-cognitive learning theories, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) is used to predict academic performance. The MSLQ measures two areas: motivation and use of learning strategies. Using a 7-point Likert scale, the 31-item motivation portion of the MSLQ gauges value, expectancy, and affect, while the 31-item learning strategies portion gauges cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management strategies. See Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, and McKeachie (1991) for more information. To see a sample of the MSLQ questions, go to http://www.indiana.edu/~p540alex/MSLQ.pdf.

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Instructional Practices:

- Research has identified three elements that are important to initiative-building activities: the activity must be intrinsically rewarding; the activity must take place in an environment that contains rules, challenges, and complexities that would be found in the "real world"; the activity must be sustained over a period of time so the students can learn to persevere (Price-Mitchell, 2011).

- Some simple ways that teachers can encourage students to take initiative include trying out new extracurricular or voluntary activities that match the students' interests, or creating a class project. Teachers could also create opportunities for students to take initiative by adapting recommendations for successful college applications, such as the examples provided at http://www.annaivey.com/iveyfiles/take_your_activities_to_the_next_level_show_initiative (Chisolm, 2013):

  - **Assign yourself**. Help students become comfortable identifying activities that can help them accomplish goals or complete assignments without being told. For instance, as part of a lesson, teachers can ask students to think of other assignments or tasks that they might complete that would help them achieve the lesson target.

  - **Do it yourself** (with limited resources). Help students take more responsibility for pursuing their goals. For instance, teachers might have students identify a place they want to go (such as a summer camp), do research on cost, supplies, etc., and then determine how to ask for permission.

  - **Do what needs to be done**. Help students become more aware of what needs to be done and get them interested in making change. Teachers could encourage students to identify ways that they can contribute to their extracurricular activities and then volunteer to do so.

  - **Go above and beyond.** Help students see the value in continuing to work on something even after they have met the minimum requirements. For instance, teachers can offer the option to retake tests or correct homework, and encourage students to use these options even if they are satisfied with their grades, because the goal is to continue increasing knowledge, not just to meet a certain requirement.

- Motivation does not reside entirely within a student. Characteristics of the classroom (and school) can enhance or undermine student motivation. These include messages from the teacher about how hard the task is, how the abilities of classmates are perceived, and how important the learning material is perceived to be (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

  - Motivation benefits from a strong mastery (versus performance) goal structure in the classroom, and there is some research support for deemphasizing performance goals in the classroom. Practices that negatively promote performance goal structures include grading on a normative curve, giving special privileges or recognition to high performers, and emphasizing the correctness of the answer over the process of learning (Maehr & Midgley, 1996, as cited in Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

  - When students perceive they are in an environment that supports autonomy they are more intrinsically motivated. Ways to create such an environment include listening to student input, providing formative feedback rather than just summative feedback,

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providing challenging tasks and activities, and offering students choices about what to work on or how to complete the work (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).

- Teachers can increase motivation among learners by encouraging autonomy and offering students choices. Instructional practices such as letting students select texts, topics, or ways of demonstrating their knowledge can bolster student initiative, engagement, **perseverance**, and performance.

- Teachers can promote students' personal investment in learning through the judicious use of differentiation. Differentiating instructional methods and assessments have also proven helpful to increase student motivation. See Vicki Gibson's (2010) steps for implementing differentiated instruction at http://www.cdl.org/articles/differentiating-instruction-and-practice/.

- An example of creating multiple means of engagement as part of a UDL classroom to stimulate learner interest is a high school English teacher using hip hop songs to introduce concepts like imagery and symbolism. To increase student autonomy, a science teacher could have students work together in small groups to tap one another's knowledge for a short paper or presentation on the solar system (Jiménez et al., 2007).

- Collaborative or cooperative learning can prompt and sustain student motivation. Among other positive effects, cooperative learning accords students the backing and appreciation of their peers. The motivation that stems from positive peer interactions can transform students' situational interest in a lesson into personal interest. For more on cooperative learning, including helpful techniques and exercises, see http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/cooperative/index.html (Teed et al., 2012).

- Activities that promote motivation and student engagement work best "when they are embedded in the structure and culture of the school and reinforced, in math class or on the basketball court, throughout the day" rather than being addressed piecemeal (Headden & McKay, 2015).

- Goal orientation (see *Goal Setting Teacher Guide*) has a clear impact on student initiative and motivation. Teachers who promote mastery (versus performance) or learning goals in their classrooms aim for the top of the motivation hierarchy. As a result, they may see greater initiative, receptivity, effort, and gratification among their students than teachers who solely or predominantly promote achievement goals. Defining success in terms of personal development rather than through competitive measures can encourage students to focus on their own learning. Western Oregon University provides a convenient side-by-side comparison of mastery versus performance goals at http://www.wou.edu/~girodm/100/mastery_vs_performance_goals.pdf (Girod, 2012).

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