Lighting the Fire: Motivation and the Gifted Child

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"Education is not the filling of the pail, but the lighting of a fire."

~ William Butler Yeats

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What is motivation?

- Motivation is…
  - The inner energy that directs and regulates behavior
  - Choosing some goals and not others
  - Starting work toward a goal
  - Persevering in the work toward the goal
  - Influenced by both personal characteristics and social environmental factors
  - A determining factor in high- and low-achieving students

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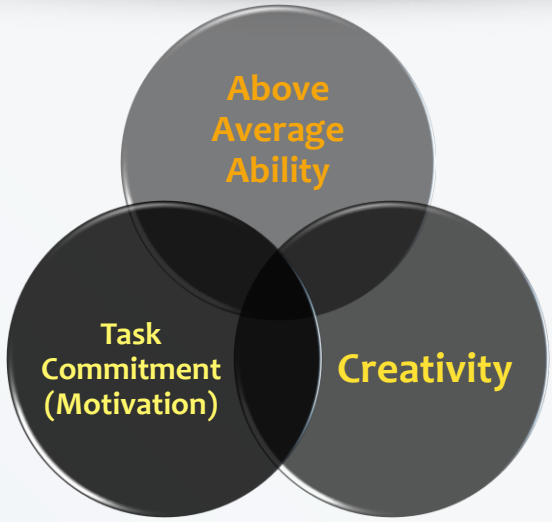
Renzulli's Model of Giftedness



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Moving Beyond Goal-Orientation Theory

Performance Goals	Mastery/Learning Goals
Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
"The main thing I want when I do my work is to show how good I am at it."	"It's much more important for me to learn things than it is to get the best grades."
Definition: Achievement is a fixed trait that cannot be changed.	Definition: Achievement is a malleable quality with potential that can be developed.
Response to Failure: Helplessness "I would spend less time on this subject from now on."	Response to Failure: Resilience "I would work harder in this class from now on."

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Attribution Theory

Positive Causal Attributions of Success

Internal and Controllable

Success due to hard work, understanding task

Failure due to insufficient effort or using a wrong strategy

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Attribution Theory

Negative Causal Attribution of Success

External and Uncontrollable

Success luck, teacher liking a student

Failure due to lack of ability or bad luck

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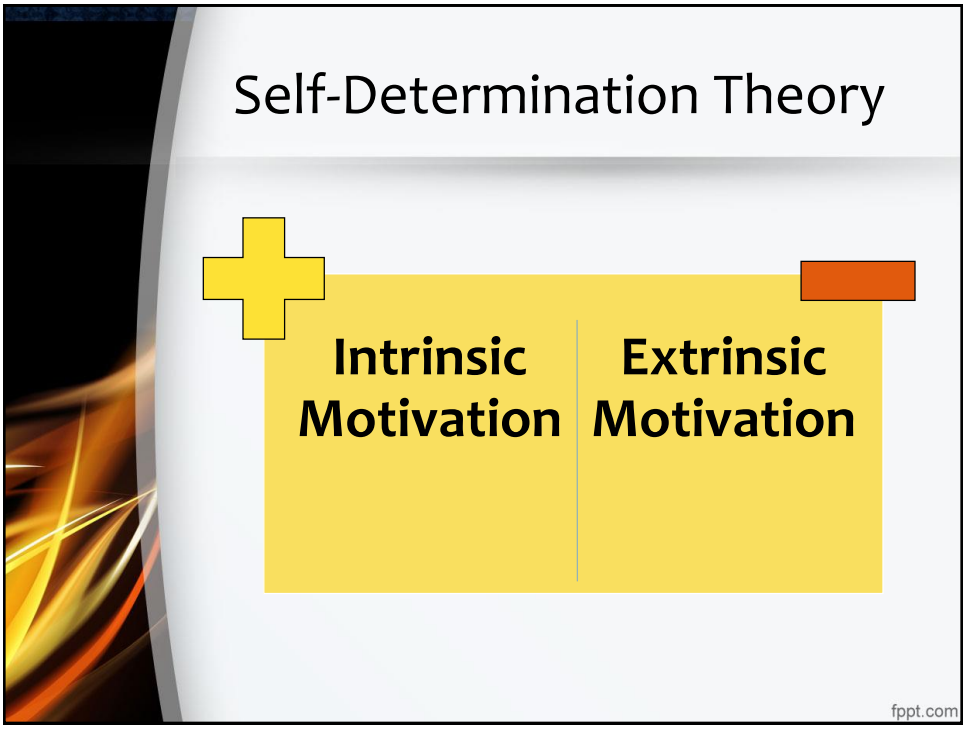
Self-Determination Theory
Intrinsic Motivation
Extrinsic Motivation
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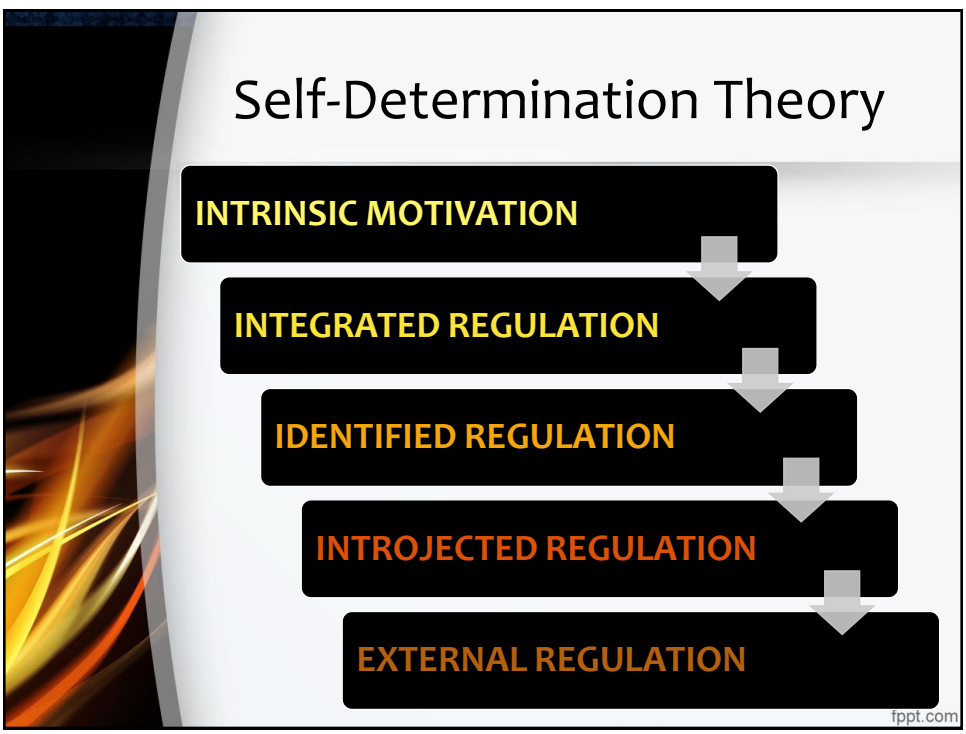
Self-Determination Theory
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
INTEGRATED REGULATION
IDENTIFIED REGULATION
INTROJECTED REGULATION
EXTERNAL REGULATION
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Self-Determination Theory

Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
Having feelings of volition and control over one's environment	Feeling capable of interacting with one's environment	Feeling reciprocal connection to others (caring for and feeling cared for)

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TARGET Model for Building Motivation in School Setting

- **T** — TASK
- **A** — AUTHORITY
- **R** — RECOGNITION
- **G** — GROUPING
- **E** — EVALUATION
- **T** — TIME

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Practices that Undermine Academic Motivation

- Authoritarian parenting/teaching style
- Treating gifted children like mini-adults
- Belief that cognitive giftedness = academic achievement/motivation
- Stressing external validations of intelligence

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Strategies for Improving Academic Motivation

- Provide autonomous learning opportunities
- Continue conversations about topics of interest and encourage self-directed investigation
- Focus on process, not outcome!
- Rely on informational vs. controlling language/praise
- Explain rationale for structure and expectations; collaborate to create them

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Still unmotivated?

- Is the child twice-exceptional (2e)?
- Identify level on self-determination theory and work on gradual progress through steps
- Recognize that personality is part of motivation – how can you synchronize personality and academic success?

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Handouts and Resources

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Suggested Resources

A Love for Learning: Motivation and the Gifted Child by Whitney & Hirsch (2007)

The Underachieving Gifted Child: Recognizing, Understanding, and Reversing Underachievement by Siegle (2012)

Self-Regulation and the Underachieving Gifted Child by Welch & Roth (2015)

Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary Executive Skills Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential by Dawson & Guare (2009)

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Works Cited

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- Clinkenbeard, P. R. (2012), Motivation and gifted students: Implications of theory and research. Psychol. Schs., 49: 622–630. doi:10.1002/pits.21628
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