

$m = f(g + s)$ OR motivation equals a function of growth plus safety

David L. Boggs

Motivation is difficult to assess, risky to assume, and impossible to supply. Yet, while motivation is intrinsic to the person, it's capable of being externally augmented, reinforced, or diminished. Extension educators have all shared the frustration of trying to effect this illusive influence on behavior. As change agents, adult educators are interested in learning all they can about the factors that incite or direct a person's behavior. It's an open-ended subject, as untidy as life itself.

The work of theorists and researchers does occasionally unite where practitioners can use their findings to draw inferences and make applications. Our purpose here is to identify some of the findings of research on motivation and make applications to the program-planning process.

. . . The more adult educators understand about motivation and the forces that affect it, the better their chances of helping adults attain learning objectives. . . .

Developmental Tasks

Havighurst's identification and analysis of developmental tasks gives us some clues about learning needs and motivation.¹ The tasks, characteristic of early adulthood, middle age, and later maturity, arise out of two dynamic forces that converge at the same period in life. One force is the cultural setting or societal expectation that a person learns to do certain things at certain periods in life. The second force affecting the nature of the tasks to be learned and performed at different periods in life is the state of the physical organism itself.

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Together these forces confront a person with learning situations that must be successfully handled for the person to be happy and function effectively. Presumably, each of us is moved internally to succeed at these tasks—we have intrinsic motivation to do so. Here are the developmental tasks Havighurst says young adults have to achieve to be happy:

1. Selecting a mate.
2. Learning to live with a marriage partner.
3. Starting a family.
4. Rearing children.
5. Managing a home.
6. Getting started in an occupation.
7. Taking on civic responsibility.
8. Finding a congenial social group.

As general statements, the tasks can present themselves in an infinite variety of situations; each may imply a need for further learning. Adults, young or old, aren't equally motivated to learn in relation to these tasks. Many times Extension educators must reinforce and nurture a person's motivation to seek out and persevere in a learning opportunity. Insights into the dynamics of motivation or the forces that move adults are directly related to the program-planning process Extension educators are engaged in.

Forces of Growth and Safety

Maslow has contributed the concepts of growth and safety to our understanding of motivation.² He says there are forces for growth and safety operating within us. We respond to *growth* forces when we're inquiring, questioning, and reflecting. Growth means using and developing one's talents, capacities, and potentialities. Growth characterizes the fully functioning, active, seeking, autonomous, and reflective being.

Safety characterizes the forces that cause us to cling to the familiar, to what is sure, to the past. Safety forces give rise to reactions and behaviors rooted in fear. In the never-ending series of choices in life, a specific choice may generally be schematized as being between safety (or more broadly, defensiveness) and growth.

In recruiting adults to engage in educational programs related to their developmental tasks, the adult educator must be concerned with making learning or growth choices attractive and less dangerous and with making regressive or safety choices less attractive and more costly.

As Maslow implies, certain delights and anxieties are associated with growth and, similarly, certain delights and anxieties are associated with safety. Figure 1 represents some of the conflicting forces that might be at work in a person considering a learning opportunity.

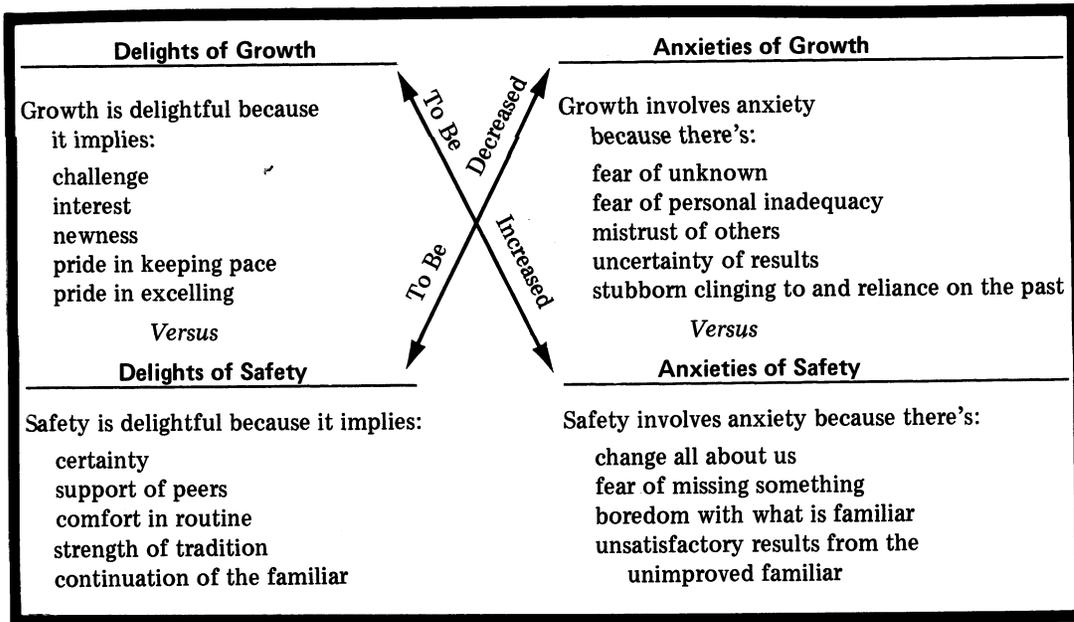


Figure 1. Possible conflicting forces for a person considering a learning opportunity.

Maslow says motivation occurs, or the person is moved to learn and grow, when the delights of growth and anxieties of safety associated with learning or change outweigh or are dominant over the anxieties of growth and delights of safety.

Obviously, Extension educators have to find ways to increase the former and decrease the latter. It's likely that doing either will accomplish both. While we intellectually distinguish between and separately identify one set of forces from another, it's unlikely that the forces can be influenced separately. For instance, a strategy for intensifying delights of growth will also alleviate its concomitant anxieties. They're incapable of being isolated from each other. Unlike chemists who isolate chemical compounds to study their individual properties and then combine them to observe their reactions, adult educators contend with human nature in its totality. The continuing task is to provide inducement and support for growth choices to strengthen the intimate connection between motivation and learning.

Areas of Activity

There are three areas of activity in any planned program in which learning or changed behavior is the objective. In each area, Extension educators must be aware of opportunities to influence whatever forces for growth and safety are active at the time. The three areas of activity are: (1) designing the instructional program, (2) establishing a climate for learning, and (3) providing support services.

*Designing
Instructional
Program*

Studies of motivation and learning yield fairly consistent conclusions: telling individuals they'll be given the results of their work increases the amount completed, as well as its accuracy; knowing the purpose of an activity or assignment increases efficiency; fatigue is greater when assignments don't seem to have specific purposes.³

Therefore, it seems reasonable from the above findings that the struggle a person experiences between growth and safety choices can be influenced by the decisions and procedures in the instructional process itself. Learners will feel more secure when learning objectives are clear and attainable. Fuzzy and overambitious objectives dampen motivation. Learners should be provided with evaluations of their progress and achievements.

The benchmarks by which progress is measured should be neither hidden nor ambiguous. Educators should be alert to expressions of confusion, fatigue, and disenchantment with either objectives, methods, or teaching style. Tests should be used for learners' self-assessment to determine what the learners have to study. The relationship between content or developmental tasks should be made as obvious as possible. As far as possible evaluations of progress should be criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced. Norm-referenced evaluation pits one adult against another, and while this may be stimulating and challenging to some, it intensifies the fears associated with learning for others.

None of the above elements in instructional design is new or unusual. What's important, however, is to recognize the impact of decisions made on the forces for growth and safety. For example, deciding that 4-H program assistants should formulate their own workshop can be an effective strategy for maximizing their motivation and learning.

However, the person who decides he needs to know more about recreational dance, song leading, creative dramatics, or some other topic needs to know what must be included within a learning objective and what evidence will be needed to show it has been attained. This helps to minimize the anxiety associated with growth choices. It may be necessary to deliberately and continually emphasize the advantages accruing to such choices until such time as the challenge, interest, pride, and above all, satisfaction—which are part of learning—are activated to stand up to the safety forces that inhibit learning.

*Establishing
a Climate for
Learning*

The climate for learning is inherent to the instructional process, but it affects growth and safety choices enough to be considered separately. Climate is a product of how the encounter between educator and client is structured.

The stance or posture of Extension educators with respect to the knowledge and ability of learners, especially those who are poor, is critical to establishing an effective climate for learning. Experts risk having their superiority held against them if they aren't self-effacing.

According to one educator, the crucial issue is one of vulnerability and domination:

Are encounters (between mentors and learners) to be founded on reciprocity or on domination? Weaker partners reject domination as invalid, and stronger groups can no longer practice it in good conscience or even with realistic hope of success.⁴

Growth choices aren't possible at the risk of loss of self-esteem. Self-esteem of learners is safeguarded through the humility of those doing the teaching. Humility and respect are prerequisites for a teaching-learning dialogue between Extension educators and their clients. Freire suggests we ask ourselves:

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from other men—mere "its" in whom I cannot recognize other "I's"? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group—the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are "these people" . . .⁵

Nutrition aides employed in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, for example, are guests in the homes of those they're trying to teach. Presumably, these homemakers need to know more about cleaning and storing food, preparing nutritious meals, and the safe use of electrical appliances.

A person is likely to be sensitive about these skills since they have much to do with her self-concept as a wife and mother. Growth choices won't be risked unless the climate for practicing them is respectful and supportive. Previous patterns of behavior have the advantage of certainty and comfort. New behaviors must surmount fears of personal inadequacy and the strength of tradition.

In a climate of real dialogue, no question is too trivial, no objection is irrelevant. Nothing is presumed to be self-evident. In this climate, the learner's needs for safety, belongingness, and esteem are satisfied and growth choices are made positively attractive.

*Providing
Support Services*

Oftentimes decisions to participate in or withdraw from educational activities are made on the basis of issues external to a person's feeling about the learning itself. Such issues

aren't unrelated to the delights and anxieties associated with learning.

Support services make it positively attractive for an individual to engage in a structured learning program. They're an aid to motivation. The most important of these services is counseling. Adult participation in an educational program often arises from some problem related to one or more developmental tasks. But, problems and needs are frequently not well-understood. They're usually accompanied by feelings of anxiety and fear. Invariably, there are broader underlying issues or needs a problem is related to. Preparing nutritious meals, for example, isn't just a matter of food groups and health; nor is learning to make or repair clothes simply a matter of fabrics, colors, and sewing skills. There's the dimension of pride and satisfaction in performing well in important life roles as well as the anxiety associated with learning new information and skills.

Extension educators need to provide learners with help in assessing the sources of anxiety and delight experienced as a part of learning. Influencing the forces for growth and safety and the anxiety and delight associated with them is a direct result of the counseling function. Growth becomes more attractive, even more compelling, and safety becomes less important when the relationship between them is more clearly understood. Similarly, learning takes on added significance when seen in relation to the successful performance of life roles or occupational goals.

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Other support services, too, give Extension educators leverage with the forces associated with growth and safety. Enrollment, or actual attendance at an educational program, is the culmination of several related steps. Nevertheless, it's a decisive one. Ease and simplicity of joining a program is important. Day care or babysitting arrangements may be very helpful. An accessible location and adequate parking facilities help to overcome anxieties that don't have a deep-seated emotional basis.

Program planning is as much art as it is science. The more adult educators understand about motivation and the forces that affect it, the better their chances of helping adults attain learning objectives. Program planning partly involves applying leverage or extrinsic pressure on the forces for growth and safety inherent in every learning situation to bring about learning and change.

Footnotes

1. Robert J. Havighurst, *Human Development and Education* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, Inc., 1953).
2. Abraham H. Maslow, "Defense and Growth," in *The Psychology of Open Teaching and Learning*, M.L. Silverman and others, eds. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 43-51.
3. Corrine Kirchner, "Motivation to Learn," in *Basic Education for the Disadvantaged Adult*. Frank W. Lanning and Wesley A. Many, eds. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1966).
4. Dennis Goulet, "An Ethical Model for the Study of Values," *Harvard Educational Review*, XLI, No. 2 (May, 1971), 216.
5. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 78-79.