

# Preface

## The What, Which, Why and How of Motivation

Motivation of students in higher education is clearly an important topic. Educators are often asked questions like the following:

What is motivation?

Why are students motivated to enrol in higher education?

How do students choose which degree at which university?

How can teachers motivate students to learn?

Why are some students motivated to graduate with flying colours, while others drop by the wayside?

How does the curriculum impact on motivation?

Which systemic issues are important?

How can we better understand cultural differences in motivation?

Responding to such questions is not easy. There is an abundant literature on motivation, but many contested issues and competing theories. It is not straightforward to select a particular body of research or theory to answer the above questions. A substantial part of the motivation literature deals with younger students or the workplace; so it is not always clear how applicable the findings would be to university students. Much of the research has been conducted through short-term trials or experiments, therefore the findings might not extrapolate to motivation in natural settings over the time it takes to complete a degree.

There seemed to be sufficient unresolved issues in the literature associated with motivation in higher education to justify conducting a study of the motivational orientation of university students from an open or a naturalistic perspective. What transpired from such a study might well relate to the existing literature, but if this was the case there would be further justification for the findings. The strategy would be that of an exploratory study in which the results were related to theory, rather than a theory-down study. This approach would have the additional benefit of

exploring which of several competing theories of motivation were most relevant to higher education, which seems appropriate as most were derived from other sectors.

This book, therefore, reports on a set of inter-related projects which took a fresh naturalistic examination of the motivation of students in higher education. The aims of the projects were to investigate what motivated students to go to college, select the course they had enrolled in and work at their studies during the course of their degree. In doing so it collected evidence of approaches to teaching and learning and curriculum design which appeared to motivate students, thus deriving some guides as to how to design learning activities and curricula which can motivate students.

From the studies, two motivational models are developed. One is a model of the nature of motivation. It is an integrative model which brings together six facets of motivation. It relates to many of the other models of motivation in the literature. This model can be used to consider why students choose to enrol in university courses and the nature of their motivation to study. It can relate to issues like why some students work really hard and are successful, while others show little commitment.

The other model is one of how teachers, teaching and learning environments and assessment can motivate or de-motivate students. Again this is a multi-faceted model which takes a comprehensive view of teaching approaches to motivate student learning. It does this by taking a broad interpretation of what is encompassed by a teaching and learning environment.

The book then uses the two models to interpret a substantial body of data from three differing groups of students in higher education. The interpretation results in attempts to answer the questions posed above. By interpreting the data through the two models, an integrative approach results in which diverse issues are examined through the same framework.

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