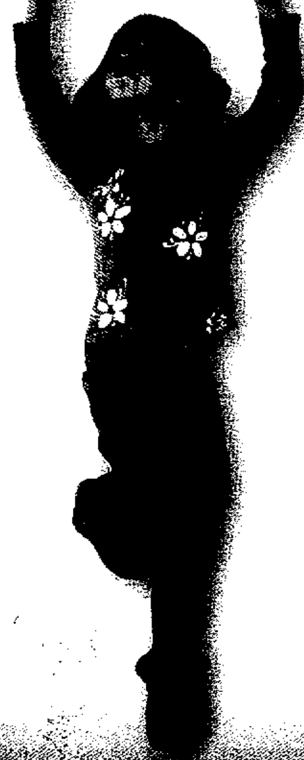
Motivating Primary-Grade Students



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CHAPTER 6

Reflections on the Research

In this chapter, we first reflect about what will come to mind in the future when we recall this 3-year research effort. What will we remember about the classrooms and teachers? We do so to set the stage to persuade readers who are primary-grade teachers to try to teach as engaging teachers do. Hence, the next and final chapter is about what teachers can do concretely to motivate their students.

MEMORIES OF A QUEST

We will never forget how difficult it was to find the really effective teachers highlighted here. Readers should keep in mind that effectively motivating teaching is rare, even with the selection biases that drove our sampling. Recall that we asked principals to nominate teachers they felt were effective, ones they felt represented their schools well. We were clear that we did not want to see weak teachers. Still, only about 20% of the teachers we observed had classrooms where students were engaged, were certainly "into" academic work, and were definitely making easy-to-spot progress with respect to academic development.

That engaging teachers were so difficult to find impresses us that those who are concerned about the quality of teaching in schools have a point. We visited many classrooms where engagement could have been much, much greater. That there were some exceptional classrooms, however, makes clear that there are no easy generalizations about the quality of teaching and learning in primary-level classrooms in the United States. We left this study having no doubt some children get much more out of a

year of primary schooling than others largely because of the quality of teaching they experience in an effective teacher's classroom relative to agemates who are taught by less effective teachers. We also left this study with the sense that most children are losers in the primary-grade teacher lottery. In both the second- and third-grade studies, our first observations of a really engaging and effective teacher came after watching seven or eight less effective teachers. At the third-grade level, we completed the study feeling that only one of the teachers we observed was so exceptionally strong as to warrant detailed coverage in this book. And, of course, there were only two effective teachers at both the first- and second-grade levels.

The low proportion of effectively engaging teachers in the investigations summarized in this volume is consistent with a low proportion of such teachers found in our past work (e.g., Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). The type of primary-grade teaching highlighted in this volume and our previous work is relatively rare. It is compelling and even beautiful when it occurs, however, which motivates our hope that this volume will stimulate many primary-grade teachers to attempt to make their instruction much more motivating.

ENGAGED STUDENTS

We were struck by the complete academic engagement of students in the most effective classrooms observed, the ones that were the focus of this volume. When we entered such classrooms, the students did not seem to notice, for they had other things on their minds! This was quite in contrast to our arrivals in most classrooms. In the typical classrooms visited in the investigations reported here, we were distracting to students from the moment we tried to sneak in the door until we departed. In such classrooms, students often found us to be much more interesting than the lessons.

That we were so unnoticeable in the effective classrooms was consistent with the general ethos in these places that work goes on no matter what else happens, whether the teacher is in the room watching over the students or dashing in and out of the room to gather materials for the next bit of instruction. Classroom visitors are just no big deal in effective classrooms, except that most visitors are put to productive work, with effective teachers making good use of whatever resources are available. Visiting

parents tutor children a great deal and participate extensively in special projects in the most effective classrooms we observed. In general, people in these classrooms—students and visitors—know what they are supposed to be doing, and they do it. Effective teachers expect the folks in their classrooms to be self-regulated in the sense that they keep themselves on the tasks that the teacher expects them to be accomplishing. The most effective classrooms we observed were attractively engaged places. They were classroom worlds filled with students who clearly loved learning and adults who helped students as needed.

We will never forget just how good the lessons were in the engaging classrooms and the products that resulted from such engaging teaching. We have great memories of impressive stories composed in the classrooms showcased in this book. There were bulletin boards covered with student-written stories: Often, every single student in these classes was composing long, coherent, well-spelled, and capably punctuated compositions by the end of the school year. The same classrooms tended to have many big books that the class had written and published, which were a point of pride for the students and their teachers. If you are in a primary-grade classroom in May when the children are out of the room, the best tip-off that the classroom is exceptionally effective is the quality of the writing artifacts (see Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). If there are many of them, and they are good, that is a telling, positive sign.

In such classrooms, it was also apparent that children read a lot. We saw them doing it, heard the children talking about books they read, and noted the piles of books on their desks, always close at hand when students had a free moment. Reading was becoming a habit of life and mind for children in such classrooms, not a forced habit but one driven by the pleasures of reading that the students were experiencing. A tip-off that you are in a classroom that reads is that books move around in the room. In effective classrooms, the library books on display are picked up and read, sometimes shared with others, sometimes taken home to be read to and with parents. We witnessed many ineffective classrooms where books on display did not move the entire year!

The engaging teacher does much to encourage student motivation to read, for example, by reading great stories and books to the students regularly. As such teachers read to their students, we always witnessed rapt attention and much reaction by the students to the stories, even to tales that often were quite complex. There was little doubt in these classrooms that children loved good stories well told. Furthermore, the stories and informational books read in effective classrooms were very, very good readings, often ones that the teachers had been using for years because they worked well every year and stimulated worthwhile knowledge and understanding in children. We knew the students looked forward to story reading, for they showed so many signs of anticipation of it (e.g., asking, "When will you read some more of . . . ?"). The students talked amongst themselves about the stories and books read by the teacher. The stories read in class were often discussed at home with parents. Such home reading accounts, in part, for the great awareness in the school communities about the books and stories read in the most engaging classrooms. For example, we encountered one parent in the community who wanted to know how she could assure that her child would have Nancy Masters as a teacher, because she wanted her child to be exposed as a first grader to books like *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Call of the Wild*, two of the many titles read by Nancy to her students.

Teacher read-alouds often were part of larger units; we have many memories of primary students in effective classrooms completely captivated by social studies and science units they experienced. Thus, we will never forget the jungle canopy in one first-grade classroom that was part of a jungle unit, which included literature experiences connecting strongly to science and social studies. The students participated in lively discussions about the jungle. They also read and wrote much about the topic, as did students in another engaging classroom, when the unit was the life cycle of insects. Then, there was the third-grade classroom that did a full year of activities related to the post office. Engaging classrooms are filled with great themes covered in ways that make concepts very clear and ideas very memorable for the children experiencing them.

Students in the most effective classrooms we studied loved learning, but why not? These classrooms were loaded with practices that would be expected to increase student motivation (Stipek, 1998, 2002): The students' teachers were consistent models of the love of learning. They did everything possible to increase the students' confidence that they could learn, everything possible to encourage reasonable risk taking by students. The engaging teachers encouraged their students to take pride in their accomplishments. Indeed, in giving these students challenging tasks that always were accomplished, these teachers probably very much increased their students' feelings of competence. Doing such tasks undoubtedly increased students' understanding of material, which increases mastery orientation more than a competitive mindset (e.g., Knapp, Marder, Adelman, & Needels, 1995), as do many messages that everyone can and will learn in the class, that learning is the goal (Ames, 1992; Anderman,

Maehr, & Midgley, 1999; Dweck, 1986; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Puro, 1989; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). We witnessed mostly positive emotions in these classrooms, including much student satisfaction about work being well done. Such feelings encouraged student interest and enjoyment (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985; White, 1959). These teachers made certain that their students felt up to the challenges they were facing in their classrooms (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Turner et al., 1998). These teachers let the students participate actively, which is motivating (Brophy, 1987, 1988). The active learning included the students being in control to a great extent, from choosing the books they read to the approaches they took to solve problems. Such choices encourage feelings of autonomy, which motivates high engagement and great interest (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Stipek, 1998). But, of course, interest often was high from the very first moment of instruction, because the effective teachers consistently filled lessons with content that was really interesting to the students (Krapp, 1999; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992; Schiefele & Krapp, 1996). The summary point, however, is that there were so many efforts made in the effective classrooms to make them more motivating. Our memories of the effective classrooms often seem like memories of classrooms too good to be true, certainly in contrast to less effective classrooms, which were populated with not-so-engaged students.

NOT-SO-ENGAGED STUDENTS

Sadly, we leave this study with far too many more memories of not-so-engaged students than memories of students absorbed in work they enjoyed. In less engaging classrooms, we saw countless work sheets assigned, ones that were completed by most students quickly, who often, then, had little or nothing to do. Indeed, the most common tasks in many primary classes are easy tasks—ones covering material mastered long ago, ones far below the level where the student could perform. We often saw students off-task with their teachers completely unaware. Typically, the same students would be off-task later in the visit. Our memories of free reading in less engaging classrooms were of students leafing through the pages of picture books without reading a single word. Similarly, we have memories of 45 minutes of composing in less engaging classrooms, which resulted in many students producing only a word or two of text.

That is not to say there was nothing happening in the less effective

classrooms. In fact, there was a great deal of squirreling around in these classrooms. As a result, there were many disciplinary interactions, ones that often made us feel uncomfortable as observers. We could not miss that the disciplinary actions typically were not very effective. As soon as the teacher's attention was elsewhere, the just-punished student often was off-task again. Why not? It could be a few days before the teacher would notice again that the child was goofing off! Students in these classrooms were anything but self-controlled, often with order only when the teacher demanded it by yelling at the class. When someone came to the door, it was common to see everything come unwound as the teacher talked with the visitor. It was easy to understand why reading and writing were not as advanced in these classrooms as in the more engaging classrooms: The students' distraction and misbehavior translated into much less time involved in academic tasks. Writing long compositions and reading demanding books requires a great deal of focused attention. Long periods of focused attention are only possible in primary classrooms when the teacher has developed his or her students into self-regulating students, and when the instruction is compelling—that is, interesting and appropriately challenging. That, however, is a tall order. The love of learning was not nearly as obvious in most classrooms as it was in the classrooms highlighted in the case studies reported in this book.

But then, why should there have been much engagement in most of the classrooms we visited? The teachers in these classrooms generally used few of the mechanisms expected to increase motivation. Indeed, we saw many practices that would be expected to undermine student motivation (Stipek, 1998, 2002). The teachers often were unenthusiastic about what they were teaching. We saw much encouragement of task completion (e.g., worksheets, small art projects) but little encouragement of learning, especially the making of connections across content or days of instruction. There were infrequent opportunities to do things that students could really be proud of, few tasks that were challenging or resulted in products that were memorable and meaningful to students (e.g., Who is proud of completing a day's worksheets?). If we had been trying to design teaching that would turn students off, it would have been hard to have been more complete and effective than some of the primary teachers we observed in the 3 years of this study.

Just as the effective teachers achieved engagement through the use of multiple motivations, so, too, the ineffective teachers seemed to undermine engagement through multiple mechanisms (e.g., boring unit themes, conveyed through stories that were dull, followed by very easy

tasks that did not obviously connect to the theme of the unit). As they did so, they also failed to include in their teaching most of the positive motivational procedures so prominent in the most engaging classrooms we encountered. There was just nothing subtle about most of the classrooms we studied. They were either massively motivating or they were not, flooded with a variety of instructional practices that should positively impact engagement or overflowing with instructional practices certain to kill engagement.

THE COMPLEXITY OF MOTIVATING INSTRUCTION

As we were doing this project, we had the feeling that psychologists interested in educational motivation were shifting their emphases. During the last quarter of the 20th century, there were many investigations targeting the individual motivational mechanisms—for example, positive and negative effects of reinforcement, the impacts of different types of attributions, and the motivating power of choice. (See Chapter 1 for a review of the many single mechanisms that been proposed by researchers as especially potent, lone determinants of achievement.)

As the new century began, there emerged calls from the educational motivational researchers for much more integrative perspectives. For example, Stipek and Seal (2001) offered a book intended to inform parents about how they could instill the love of learning in their children. When we reflect back on this project, we will remember encountering the Stipek and Seal (2001) book and sensing that we were not alone in advocating the use of many mechanisms to motivate children rather than arguing for reliance on single mechanisms.

What did Stipek and Seal (2001) recommend that parents do in order to raise children who would want to learn? They advocated a multifaceted approach to the problem:

- Connect learning to the real world. Today's weather and this evening's sunset provide opportunities for science mini-lessons. Current events can be discussed in ways that increase knowledge of social studies. Good literature can be read and discussed. Parents can let their children know how they use math in everyday life.
- Expand learning beyond the home and school, in particular, taking advantage of community resources (e.g., museums, libraries).
- Encourage a child's interests and passions. Use these interests to stimulate broader learning (e.g., much science can be connected to a visit to the zoo).
- Model enthusiasm for learning. Not only can parents read, they can let children know how much they enjoy reading and how much they learn from it that is worthwhile.
- Make learning playful! Thus, the fun of going to the zoo should be in the forefront no matter how much learning occurs during a day at the zoo.
- Let kids take control of experiences. So, when a child plays restaurant, let him or her take the lead. Maybe the attentive parent slips in a little math lesson, perhaps when paying the bill (e.g., counting the play money out carefully and making certain it adds up to the total of the bill).
- Promote healthy play that encourages learning (e.g., prosocial behaviors like playing store or watching good movies); discourage unhealthy play that has the potential to undermine academic motivation (e.g., watching television with antischool themes, playing violent videogames that can encourage aggression).
- Promote a child's competence by encouraging appropriately challenging activities, ones that are neither too easy nor too hard.
- Fill the child's world with intelligent conversation that requires the child to talk about worthwhile ideas.
- Encourage reading and math activities.
- Especially encourage girls with respect to math and science, for there are many messages in the larger world that girls experience difficulties with math and science.
- Teach children study skills that permit them to get academic tasks done efficiently and well. Teach them about accomplishing big tasks by doing a little bit each day; encourage them to use helpful references (dictionaries, thesauri); let them know about the advantages of practice (e.g., how famous athletes practiced for years).
- Promote children's competence by providing positive feedback, letting them know they can do academic things.
- Provide constructive criticism—that is, information about how a child can do better.
- Set realistic goals for children.
- Acknowledge when tasks are difficult; break the tasks into doable components. Alternatively, change the task so that it is at a more appropriate level or reset the goal (e.g., to complete 2 problems today rather than 20).
- Do not provide pity when a child experiences difficulty, for it sends

the message that the child cannot do anything to improve his or her situation.

- Do not compare the child unfavorably to a sibling (e.g., "Your older brother always did well in reading").
- Provide the child choices of interesting and academically stimulating things to do.
- Encourage the child's autonomy, sending the message that it is expected that the child be self-regulated. Resist taking over when a child experiences difficulties, in favor of providing just enough support so the child can carry on (i.e., scaffolding).
- Ask questions to find out if the student has homework or an upcoming exam or project due date.
- Set up a framework (e.g., a schedule, a place to study) for homework.
- Send the message to the child that he or she is responsible for the academic work; provide consequences when the child does not meet academic responsibilities (e.g., no TV until all grades are B or higher).
- Show your children that you care by accepting them, connecting with them, and supporting them. Take an interest in your children, spending time with them, and accept your children.
- Live your values visibly and communicate them to the child, including how much you value learning and achievement.
- Send the message that success depends on effort more than any other factor.
- Encourage the child to have learning goals (i.e., to want to learn or do something) rather than performance goals (i.e., to do better than other students at school). In general, downplay academic competition with others.
- Encourage academic cooperation with others.
- Provide rewards for academic activities the child will not do on his or her own; avoid providing explicit rewards for those academic activities that are intrinsically motivating to the child.
- Use praise rather than tangible rewards.
- Finally, look for a school for your child that tries to motivate in all these ways.

In short, Stipek and Seal (2001) recommend that parents use all of the motivational mechanisms that we observed being used by engaging primary teachers. What was missing from their book, however, was evidence that there are parents anywhere who do all these things and that

such parents have more academically motivated kids. In contrast, a strength of the work reported here is that we provided an existence proof of teachers who are massively motivating, who saturate children's school worlds with motivation, and, in doing so, succeed in engaging students. This is a much-needed existence proof, one that motivates us to encourage more teachers to do much more to motivate their students.

As we were preparing this book, we were pleased to learn about another program of qualitative research that also is generating existence proofs similar to the ones summarized in this volume. Perry, VandeKamp, Mercer, and Nordby (2002; also Perry, 1998, and Perry & Vandekamp, 2000) identified two teachers who were very successful in promoting self-regulated reading in primary-level readers: They were very good at teaching students to be strategic as they read and wrote—to plan, monitor, problem-solve, and evaluate as they performed challenging reading and writing tasks. Just as was the case in the classrooms covered in this volume, there was a lot of teaching of reading and writing in the classrooms Perry et al. (2002) documented. Moreover, the teachers did much to motivate literacy in their students and self-regulated use of literacy skills. Thus, the students were given choices about what they read, although encouraged to choose stories that were appropriately challenging. There was also a great deal of teacher scaffolding to assure student success during reading. Evaluations were not threatening; in fact, they were mastery oriented, providing evidence to the students that they had accomplished what they were supposed to accomplish. Students discussed what they read with others, with many cooperative learning opportunities. Indeed, there was a general ethic in these classrooms for students to help one another, and they did so. Many connections to content learning occurred during in-class discussions. Students also were given choices with respect to writing, in particular, to what they wrote about. In short, just as we observed high student engagement and competence when primary-level teachers did much to motivate their students' reading and writing, so, too, have Perry and her colleagues observed that literacy engagement and competence occur in classrooms that are saturated with motivating and excellent literacy instruction.

As we close this section, of course, we remind readers that despite the focus of many motivational researchers on individual mechanisms and validation of single approaches as affecting classroom motivation, there have been calls in the past for educators to use many mechanisms to promote classroom engagement, with Brophy (1987, 1988; see Chapter 1 of this volume) especially notable in this regard. We provided evidence in

this volume that there are teachers doing as Brophy urged. In addition, we fleshed out many specific ways that engaging primary-grade teachers can be motivating, especially with respect to literacy.

When we reflect on Brophy's historically important proposals, our work, and Stipek's writings aimed at parents, we find ourselves asking how much difference it would make if a child encountered consistently, massively motivating worlds—parents who saturated the child with motivation and year-in, year-out teaching that resembled the types of instruction we observed in the most impressive classrooms we visited as part of this study. All we can offer at this juncture is the hypothesis that such consistent encouragement of things academic would result in children who are more academically engaged, who habitually self-regulate themselves and their minds into activities that result in academic growth.

We hope that this book goes far in stimulating changes in the world of school—and that Stipek's work impacts parents similarly—so that before much more time passes, it will be possible to assess just how much difference is made when children encounter worlds that are consistently encouraging their intellectual efforts.

OVERCOMING DECLINES IN MOTIVATION WITH ADVANCING AGE

As we did this work, we could never forget that student motivation to read and attitudes about reading decline dramatically during the elementary school years (e.g., Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles & Midgley, 1990a; McKenna, Ellsworth, & Kear, 1995), with the decline starting in the primary years for many students who experience difficulties with beginning reading (Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Korkeamaki, 1996; Lepola, Salonen, & Vauras, 2000; Mazzoni, Gambrell, & Korkeamaki, 1999; Sperling & Head, 2002). We believe, based on the research summarized in this volume, that we do have something to say about how such decline might be averted. Our perspective also is informed by an important research-based, theoretical analysis of the factors causing the decline provided by Mark Lepper and his colleagues (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000). Why does motivation decline with advancing grades during school? Lepper & Henderlong suggest the following factors:

- School is often boring, something that has been noted again and again by observers of education in the United States.

- Being controlled is not motivating, and, in fact, as children mature, they desire greater autonomy (Eccles & Midgley, 1990a, 1990b). To the extent that schooling is controlling, and it often is, student motivation should be undermined, with motivation progressively declining as students desire greater and greater freedom with advancing age. Indeed, rather than responding with greater freedom as students advance in age, schools often increase the emphasis on discipline with advancing age and reduce student choices (Eccles et al., 1993).
- Learning in context with lots of concrete supports and references is motivating (e.g., Bruner, 1962, 1966), for example, discovery learning lessons in science (Bruner, 1961). With increasing grade, however, learning and instruction often become increasingly more abstract and divorced from context, for example, with much that is to be learned read about in textbooks rather than tangibly experienced.
- Learning goals promote academic achievement and intrinsic motivation to do things academic more than do performance goals (i.e., desiring to earn high marks and do better than other students). That performance goals become increasingly important with advancing grade level (Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995) probably contributes to declining academic motivation with advancing grade levels.
- One of the best-established principles in motivation research is that motivation increases when tasks are appropriately challenging, neither too easy nor too difficult for students. There are increasing suspicions that academic tasks get progressively less challenging relative to student capabilities with increasing grade level (Eccles et al., 1993), which could contribute to declines in academic motivation.

In short, the research on academic motivation provides some clear guidance about what might be wrong with schooling that makes it less motivating for the oldest children in an elementary school compared to the youngest. This same literature also provides clear implications about potential remedies for the decline (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000; Renninger, 2000):

1. Do all possible to make learning interesting—both by selecting specific tasks and activities that are interesting to children in general but also by appealing to the interests of particular students (e.g., encouraging students who are interested in science fiction to read terrific science fiction and those who are interested in nature to read wonderful books about natural science).

2. Encourage teachers to provide more choices for students to increase student perceptions of autonomy and control.

3. Decrease the use of salient external rewards which are clearly contingent on doing academic work and performing at high levels in school. Such rewards can seem controlling (i.e., students feeling that they are doing academic work only to earn rewards, such as grades). Do everything possible to send the message to students that they are in control of their own learning, that they can succeed through their own controllable efforts.

4. Make academic work more meaningful by increasing contextualization, for example, teaching with the project method (e.g., doing an ecology unit that provides students with opportunities to explore the local environment, including environmental hazards in it).

5. In general, emphasize learning goals rather than performance goals, making clear that learning for its own sake is a terrific reward.

6. Provide appropriately challenging tasks for all students, which typically will mean personalized instructions and assignments. A challenging classroom is very individualized, for some students are capable of much more difficult tasks than others.

Of course, the exemplary teaching documented in this book looks terrific in light of Lepper and Henderlong's (2000) analysis: The primary-grade teachers featured in this book did all they could to make instruction interesting, encouraged their students to be autonomous, and downplayed extrinsic rewards in favor of an emphasis on learning as rewarding, provided experiences that were clearly learning by doing, and consistently varied the level of challenge for their students. The teachers highlighted in this book are an existence proof that instruction consistent with the best motivational theorizing is possible, at least at the primary grades. Whether it is possible for such instruction to occur in upper elementary, middle school, and high school settings deserves intense attention. We hope the analyses provided in this book stimulate researchers and educators alike to determine just how such theoretically compelling instruction might be fostered in all of education, for, if the outcomes reported in this book are any indicator, such instruction saturated with theoretically sensible practices might go far to improving the engagement and achievement of students. We do not believe that developmental declines in academic motivation are inevitable, but rather believe that they reflect the environments that have been created in schools to date. School can be done differently, and if modified in ways suggested by contemporary educational motivation research, school might be more effective as well as more attractive to many students.

PRAISING WELL

In the first chapter, we highlighted Brophy's (1981) classic advice on praise. Our awareness of Brophy's perspective probably heightened our awareness of much praise in the most engaging classrooms in this study, praise consistent with Brophy's recommendations. In the very recent past, doubts about whether praise has positive effects on children's long-term motivation have been raised (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Henderlong and Lepper (2002) provided a reflective analysis of the available literature related to this issue, basically coming to Brophy's (1981) point of view: Whether praise is effective in motivating children depends on it being sincere, specific, and informative about what the child did well and why the child did well (e.g., What process or strategy did the student use that was effective?), and minimizing perceptions that the praise is intended to control the child's behavior. The teacher who praises effectively does not praise the child for accomplishing easy tasks, for that can send the message that the child has little competence. The teacher who praises well does not send the message that only accomplishing very difficult tasks is worthy of praise, for such a message does nothing to motivate the child to attempt tasks that are appropriately challenging. The teacher who praises well provides realistic expectations about what the child can accomplish with appropriate effort, sending the clear message that such effort is expected, as is accomplishing tasks that are just a bit beyond what the child can accomplish without being challenged. The teacher who praises effectively does so without making comparisons between students (e.g., Johnny, you've gotten so many more problems done than Jimmy!), but, rather, praises each child for mastering tasks that challenge him or her. Praise is not the only form of reward in the best classrooms we observed. Rather, the children there were rewarded often by achieving in ways that meant something very positive to them—for example, taking pride in big books constructed by the class and little books that they wrote individually; making scientific discoveries that are interesting to them which make obvious that they have learned something important; and reading progressively more challenging books, ones they want to read because there is an excitement about good books in the classroom.

As you read the case studies, we hope you noted that praise was well done, as Brophy (1981) suggested and Henderlong and Lepper (2002) have reaffirmed. Henderlong and Lepper noted that, in research, often praise was not well separated from other motivational elements of instruction. From a scientific perspective, this makes it difficult to be absolutely certain that many effects attributed to praise were, in fact, due to praise. Those authors concluded, however—and we agree—that there has been enough sufficiently analytical experimentation to have confidence that praise can be used effectively and that the approaches recommended in the last paragraph are sound.

That confounding of praise and other motivational interventions has occurred often in research, however, mirrors well what happens in the classrooms of engaging primary teachers. Praise is never used alone, but rather is one of a variety of motivational interventions. Praise is given often, however. In contrast, in less engaging classrooms, there is less praise and/or praise used poorly. For example, in less engaging classrooms, the praise we heard was often very general ("You're genius children!") or provided for accomplishing unchallenging tasks ("Excellent" for completing a worksheet in a matter of seconds, one that was so easy because it tapped material the child had mastered long ago).

Thus, praise is a form of reinforcement that is cheap in that there is no tangible cost to it—no pizzas need to be bought when praise is the reinforcer! The cost of praise for the teacher is learning when to do it and how to do it well and then making the effort to praise as part of a larger program to enhance motivation in the classroom. As we watched the engaging teachers documented in this book, they had learned how to do it so well that it was part of their being. They were now teachers who praise habitually and do it well. So, in this concluding chapter, we flag prominently that motivating teachers praise their students a lot, with praise probably the most frequent motivational mechanism we observed. It occurred all the time in the motivating classrooms, often as a remark in passing ("Oh, you're doing that so well," or "I'm so proud of how much you are reading with your mom"). We could not miss that when we interacted outside the classroom with the teachers highlighted in this volume, their positiveness overflowed into their entire world of interactions and transactions. Small wonder that these very motivating teachers were viewed by the principals and fellow teachers as unambiguously positive forces in their schools, teachers who often were praised by colleagues, parents, and others. A huge message is that engaging teachers are over-the-top positive people, with their students and everyone else in their school worlds.

IMPRESSIVE TEACHERS WHO ARE HUMBLE AND LESS IMPRESSIVE TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT

We will never forget that the most impressive teachers in our studies definitely attributed their successes to their efforts rather than believing they were naturally good teachers. Moreover, to a person, all of the really motivating teachers documented in this volume believed they could become better teachers. One especially fond memory we have of our first meeting with Nancy Masters was that she exacted a condition from us: She would be in the study only if we promised feedback to her about what she could do to improve as a teacher. Chris Nemeth was similarly demanding throughout her participation. The most effective teachers we have met are certain that there remains room for improvement in their teaching. Of course, the irony is that these teachers had the least room for improvement, because they were already very good.

In contrast, during final interviews with much less effective teachers, we were often shocked about how confident they were about their teaching. Many projected the belief that they had learned to be teachers at some point (e.g., in their first teaching job) and their learning was completed. They expected to continue to teach as they now taught, believing their current teaching to be excellent. When we were doing the research reported in this book, the authors were associated with a teacher education program that employs master teachers as support personnel for students in the program: The only teachers in the studies reported in this book who have contacted us about potential employment in the program have been less engaging teachers! Indeed, the one who was most emphatic in her efforts to be a master teacher in the program (claiming repeatedly she was well qualified for the post) was one of the least motivating, least engaging teachers we observed over the 3 years of the research. (We did not hire her as a master teacher.)

The ineffective, nonengaging teachers we observed seem not to monitor how well they were teaching either in an absolute sense or relative to other teachers. They consistently seemed confident in their teaching. In contrast, the most effective grade 2 teacher almost withdrew from the study because she was so concerned that her teaching was problematic. She was not aware that even on a bad day for her, she was much more engaging, doing much more to motivate students than many of the teachers we have seen in this research effort.

That teachers lack awareness of whether they are motivating presents some challenges with respect to changing teacher behavior. If a

teacher does not sense that he or she needs to improve, there is no incentive to try to improve or to go looking for ways that one could improve. To the extent that teachers are left to themselves to decide whether they need professional development, we are not optimistic they will seek out professional development aimed at improving their skills in motivating students—unless they are already good at motivating students! Clearly, we should not be leaving it up to the teachers to decide whether they need to work on motivating students, although in the next chapter we suggest that teachers try to self-appraise whether they need to motivate their students more.

Principals and other administrators reading this book might be appropriate decision makers for deciding which teachers need professional development in motivating students. Principals who want to increase engagement in their school should first size up their classrooms with respect to the engagement in them. The classrooms featured in this book are ones where children are always busy . . . seemingly on their own. That is, walk into the classroom. If the children are all working productively on reading and writing, that is a good sign. If over the course of an hour of observation, they all continue to remain active, that is another very good sign, especially if the students more or less move themselves along to appropriate new tasks as they complete what they are doing (e.g., after reading an assigned book, they begin to write about it). When children in a class are not so engaged, that is a sign that the teacher might profit from input about how to motivate students.

Identifying who would benefit from instruction about how to motivate students is but one problem, however. Educating teachers about how to increase the academic engagement of their students is very, very complex and only part of what needs to be accomplished for instruction to be effective. Moreover, those who want to carry the message to teachers that they need to do more to motivate their students should not assume that the message they are bearing necessarily will be well received.

RESISTANCE TO SATURATING CLASSROOMS WITH MOTIVATION

We have had a number of opportunities to present the findings reported in this book to teachers and teachers in training. The obvious question for these groups is what these results should mean for teachers. We believe the implication is that most primary-grade teachers need to think hard

about increasing what they do to motivate students and about decreasing their teaching behaviors that potentially undermine student motivation.

Many teachers who hear our message resist because they seem to believe that we are talking about superstar teachers who have some ability that most teachers do not have. This is akin to the idea that good teachers are born rather than made. Teachers who so believe have no motivation to try hard, consistent with Weiner's (1979) observation that ability attributions undermine motivation to try! In general, we have encountered a number of teachers who make strong ability attributions about teachers (e.g., there are "natural" teachers) and who make frequent reference to ability differences to explain differences in achievement among their students as well. Just as such ability attributions have the potential to undermine students' motivation to learn, they also have the potential to undermine teachers' motivations to teach better than they are now teaching. Such teachers just do not accept the possibility that encouraging greater student efforts will do much to promote the achievement of some students, whom they perceive to be inherently weak students. In general, when a teacher is stongly committed to the position that human (i.e., teacher and student) performances are determined by ability, it is difficult to persuade them to change their teaching behaviors to encourage student motivation and engagement.

We have heard the claim that students should not need to be motivated, that they are intrinsically motivated to learn so long as adults do not mess it up! Of course, that academic motivation goes down with each advancing year in school confirms that adults are messing it up somehow. Our hypothesis is that if more teachers were like the ones detailed here, there would be less decline in academic motivation as students make their way through school. At the very least this seems like a hypothesis worth testing, in our view. There is no compelling case that continuing schooling as is will reduce the proportions of unmotivated students. Pointing to the fact that many children begin their schooling with high academic motivation as part of the rationale for not attempting to increase their motivation seems completely misguided to us, although we have certainly encountered that line of argument from educators who try to make the case that they are acting responsibly by not attempting to motivate their students. They have interpreted arguments made in the popular education literature that some approaches to motivation can undermine intrinsic motivation (e.g., Kohn, 1993) to mean that any efforts to motivate students have the potential to undermine student motivation. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

More generally, many teachers perceive that what is described here flies in the face of what they have been taught is the right way to teach. Thus, a variety of approaches to behavior management emphasize consequences for misbehavior (e.g., Canter & Canter, 2002) more than the positive approach taken by the motivating teachers documented in this volume. Not punishing students is viewed as not motivating correct behaviors, from this perspective. Of course, our counterargument is that when we are in engaging classrooms the teacher is not punishing because there are no behaviors that need to be punished! The motivational mechanisms used by the teachers described in this book go far in creating classroom environments where students constructively participate most of the time. We are struck that months went by in engaged classrooms before we saw any disciplinary events or need for discipline. In contrast, in most of the classrooms we visited, rarely did a single observation occur when there was not one or more disciplinary events.

Other teachers resist specific elements of the recommendations made here. Many seem to believe that competition is as American as apple pie, and for that reason alone should be preserved. For example, when schools make proposals to change traditional A–F grading approaches, we have observed inevitable resistance. On those occasions when we know of schools succeeding in changing grading from the traditional approach, there was an immediate, steady stream of pressure to return to the traditional approach. Thus, the first author's son was in a private school without grades until parental pressure (not from author Pressley, however) required that grades be recorded that are comparable to the grades that would have been earned at the local public school. Anything but traditional grading is very difficult for many people to accept.

Cooperation and cooperative learning often meet with resistance from teachers. One reason is that teachers who try cooperative approaches face parents of high-achieving students who complain that their students are being held back by having to work with weaker students. Another frequent concern is that cooperative learning means that students will be talking, and if the principal has the perspective that high-achieving classrooms are quiet classrooms (and, apparently, many principals do hold such a perspective), there can be problems for a teacher who encourages the productive noise that accompanies cooperation and collaboration. Teacher reluctance to attempt cooperative practices are understandable in light of such parental and administrative pressures.

Emphasizing interesting problems and topics is often seen as challenging to many teachers, given the coverage demands they face in many schools. Topics just have to be covered if they are going to appear on the end-of-the-year standardized test! Our counterargument is that achievement as documented by standardized tests seems to be higher in classrooms like those featured here than in more conventional classrooms, especially for students at risk for educational difficulties (Pressley et al., 2001). An additional observation we have made over the past decade is that effective teachers somehow find ways to make required topics that are dull in other classrooms come alive in their classrooms. So, as we reflect on Chris Nemeth's teaching about characteristics of plants, which involved extensive active exploration of plants, we recall exciting lessons. We can also recall lessons on the same topic in another, more typical classroom that boiled down to boring discussions that did not include touching a single plant. Effective teachers transform the passive and rote into the active and conceptual, setting up situations that permit discovery and prompting students to think about ideas deeply rather than superficially. Whether a topic is dull or exciting depends much on the teacher and what the teacher does to motivate the instruction pertaining to the topic. Such effective teaching requires very hard work and extensive preparation. We suspect that some of the reluctance to commit to the motivational perspectives favored in this book is that they represent a call for much more teacher effort than many teachers are willing to expend.

In summary, the message to teach to motivate children is not one that is universally appealing to teachers. Many object to it, with a variety of objections offered. Most of the objections are to changing the way teaching is now being done, typically in the direction of requiring more effort by the teacher. We try to persuade teachers to exert this effort by emphasizing that student achievement in their classrooms will improve, but, there is also something in it for the teacher. The effective classrooms we have observed are happy, peaceful places. The students like being there and so do the teachers. Engaged students are well behaved students, so that aversive encounters with students are few and far between in effective classrooms. A hypothesis worth considering is that being a teacher who showers his or her students with motivation is being a teacher who has a happier, more fulfilling, and more peaceful existence. This idea deserves to be tested as motivating instruction is evaluated additionally—and it should be so evaluated, for we do not know how much of a difference supermotivating instruction might make in promoting the achievement of students in the nation. We have begun working on the issue.

THE BIG HYPOTHESIS AND INITIAL TESTS OF IT

The major conclusion to emerge from Pressley, Allington, et al. (2001) was that effective primary-grade instruction is very complex. It involves a balancing of diverse curriculum and instruction, classroom management, and motivational components. Moreover, all three of the major elements in the balance are composed of many smaller elements.

Thus, curriculum and instruction in such classrooms is complex, highlighting interesting content presented in engaging ways and through engaging activities. For example, students do not just read about the annual dog sled races in Alaska (the Iditerod), but rather they follow the race on the Web and communicate with other classes around the world via the Internet about the race and issues surrounding it. (Is it cruel to have teams of dogs driven to the extremes required in the race?) The curriculum and instruction in effective classrooms is also intense, with content encountered all day as instruction occurs in whole groups, small groups, and individually. There is much reading and writing, punctuated by mini-lessons on an as-needed basis. The many mini-lessons permit the work to be appropriately challenging, with the teacher scaffolding students as they require assistance, providing just enough help to move them along rather than doing the task for them. Because scaffolded mini-lessons require much teacher monitoring to know what students need and when they need it, the engaging teacher knows much about his or her students, including whether the lessons being provided are clear and helpful to students. The cross-curricular connections in engaging classrooms are extensive and intensive. Hence, the dog sled race can be connected to science and social studies, although the students focus on reading and writing about the race. The research on the Internet communications via e-mail permit the students many opportunities to use technology just the way adults do when they need to access information. The curriculum and instruction in effective classrooms is aimed at expanding student thinking processes, that is, at increasing students' understanding of how texts are constructed in order for them to get the most out of reading and be able to construct new texts that are filled with the messages that they want to convey. The students receive many lessons about how to read like excellent readers do, write like excellent writers write, and reason like excellent thinkers reason.

Classroom management in effective classrooms is also multidimensional. Rather than emphasizing the teacher as in control, the effective teacher permits the student to take control of his or her own behavior—

that is, emphasizes that students should self-regulate and teaches them how to do so (e.g., teaching classroom routines; inculcating the expectation that the natural next move when completing one task is to move on to another task). The classroom expectations make sense to students because the teacher goes to great lengths to explains to students the reasons for what he or she is doing and how the lessons connect to the students' futures. The excellent teacher does not do it alone, but, rather, works with other adults (e.g., parent volunteers in the classroom, special education teachers) to make certain that resources are aligned to accomplish educational goals (i.e., parent volunteers provide lessons on skills that are required in the child's curriculum; special educators work on skills making sense given the demands the children face in the classroom). In short, the effective teacher manages the many human resources in his or her classroom well, from the students, to other professionals who interact with the classroom, to parents.

Finally, as detailed in this volume, effective primary teachers flood their classrooms with motivating instruction. Both the physical and psychological environments of these classrooms are designed to increase student commitment to learning and academic engagement. By this point, it should be obvious that effective classrooms are democratic, interesting places, with teachers having high expectations that students can learn. The result is a classroom in which academic efforts abound.

Now that we know what effective primary-grade classrooms are like, an important question is whether more such classrooms can be developed (Pressley et al., 2003). Can teachers-in-training be taught to be like the most effective teachers? Can veteran teachers who are not yet effective teachers be provided professional development that moves them closer to the ideals documented in this volume and in Pressley, Allington, et al. (2001)? Recently, members of Michael Pressley's research group (especially Alysia Roehrig) have worked on these questions. During the past 2 years, intensive professional development has been provided to young teachers who are not yet fully effective teachers. The professional development has included extensive mentoring of the young teachers by effective teachers, classroom coaching by Roehrig and the mentor teachers, and review and reflection sessions, where videotapes of teaching are reviewed. Over the course of a year, the young teachers in the program receive a great deal of input about the nature of effective teaching and feedback about how their teaching can improve to approach the ideal. Has this professional development worked? So far, the answer is no. More positively, we have observed that one third of the teachers make great prog-

ress toward becoming much better teachers during their first year of teaching (i.e., with or without intensive mentoring), progress toward becoming like the best teachers in our work of the past decade. About a third of the teachers make little progress during the year. Sadly, a third actually get worse over the course of the first year.

Based on this work and other research we have conducted (Roehrig, Pressley, & Talotta, 2002), we are coming to realize that even a great deal of support during the first year of teaching is probably not going to produce great teachers quickly. In fact, something that is apparent when we reflect on the excellent teachers we have studied over the past decade—reported in this volume and elsewhere (e.g., Pressley, Allington, et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998)—is that it takes a while to become really good at primary-grade teaching, to be really motivating and effective. We have never encountered an engaging primary-grade teacher who had not been in a primary-grade classroom for at least a few years. Those familiar with the teacher expertise literature will recognize that this specific conclusion about the development of expert teaching is consistent with Berliner's conclusion that teacher expertise takes a few years of teaching to develop, when it develops at all (Berliner, 1986; Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, & Berliner, 1988; Carter, Sabers, Cushing, Pinnegar, & Berliner, 1987; Sabers, Cushing, & Berliner, 1991).

The implication of this is that if you want to make your primary-grade classroom more motivating, what is going to be required is a long-term plan. There is no quick fix but, rather, much that can be done to be more motivating as a teacher. It probably takes a while to learn how to do all that is required to be a terrific teacher. Even so, the positive classroom worlds that we have observed when teachers are over-the-top engaging encourages us to encourage you to do all possible to be more motivating with your students. The big hypothesis that effective primary-grade teaching articulates multiple forms of effective instruction, excellent classroom management, and motivational flooding of the classroom has a corollary hypothesis now: Such complicated teaching takes a while to develop. To get there requires instructional efforts and innovations for many Monday mornings to come. The next chapter focuses on what we hope many of you will be doing on those Monday mornings ahead.

CHAPTER 7

What to Do Monday Morning and Many Mornings to Come

Our purpose in writing this book was to do more than inform about academic motivation. It was to encourage many more teachers to be more motivating in their classrooms. So, if you are a primary-grade teacher, what can you do to make your classroom more motivating? Admittedly, all we can offer at this point are hypotheses, for we have not attempted to put the professional development model detailed in this section to a test. On the other hand, we are not certain it ever could be put to a test, for an understanding that we have developed from conducting research on effective primary-grade teachers is that mostly these are teachers who developed themselves as teachers, doing so over years. At the center of their being is a set of attitudes that propel them to become better teachers, and, thus, the first focus of anyone wanting to become a more engaging primary-grade teacher is to confront one's own attitudes.

THE ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

We have really gotten to know many primary-grade teachers well during the past decade, excellent teachers, weak teachers, and in-between teachers. Although the emphasis in this volume was on observed teaching, there is no doubt in our minds that the beliefs and attitudes of the best teachers are very different from the beliefs and attitudes of other teachers.

First, the best teachers deeply care about their students, with that care translating into determination that all of their students will learn.