

Adaptive Student Attributions

OSU Motivation in Classrooms Lab – Motivation Minute. October 2021.

How can I support students' internal motivations?

Attribution Theory

Describes how the student's interpretation of events impacts their motivation for future tasks. Attributions are comprised of three causal dimensions:

Locus refers to the source of causes in relation to the self.

Internal causes originate within oneself ("I should have tried harder")

External causes originate outside oneself ("The task was too difficult").

Stability refers to how consistent the causes are over time.

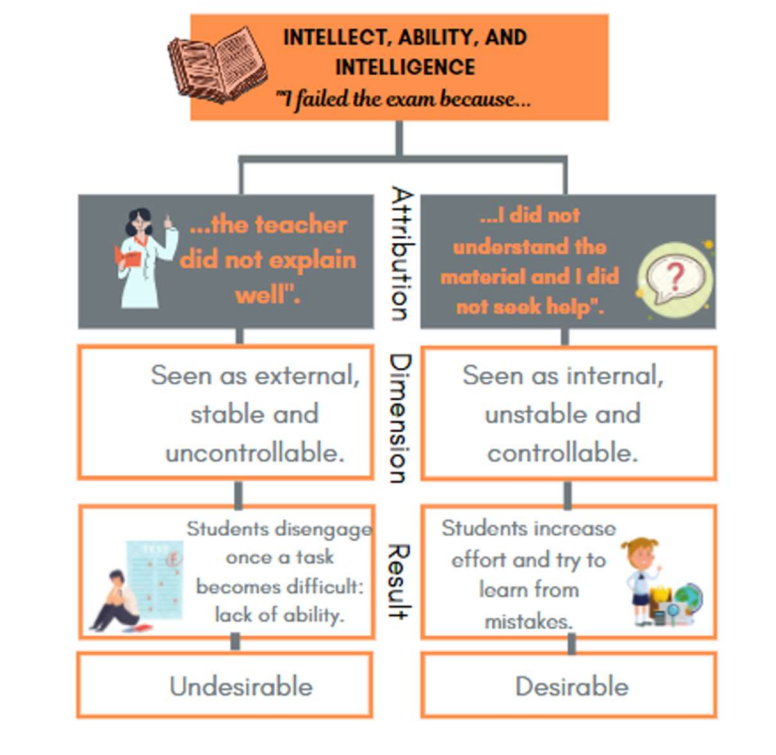
Unstable causes are viewed as something that can be changed ("I will try harder next time")

Stable causes are viewed as unchanging ("I'm just not good at school").

Controllability refers to how much control over the situation one perceives oneself as having.

Controllable causes are viewed as something one has control over ("Next time, I will ask for help")

Uncontrollable causes are viewed as something one has no control over ("I have bad luck with tests").



Using attribution theory to support adaptive forms of motivation:

Striving for internal, unstable, and controllable attributes.

Example Situation: A student fails an exam then reflects on what caused the poor grade.

Locus:

Internal: "I had a low grade because I did not understand the topic, did not ask for help, and did not study long enough."

External: "I had a low grade because the teacher did not explain the material well enough."

Stability:

Unstable: "I failed because I did not understand the material. Next time, I am going to ask my teacher for help to better understand the information so that I will be more prepared."

Stable: "I failed the exam because I am not good at school, and I am not smart enough; that will never change"

Controllability:

Controllable: "I failed because I spent my afternoon playing video games instead of reviewing my notes. I will get a better grade if I try harder and spend more time studying."

Uncontrollable: "I failed because the test was poorly designed, and my neighbors are always noisy when I try to study."

Recommendations:

- Encourage students to see their own role in their successes and failures.
- Teach students that intelligence and ability are unstable and can be developed.

References:

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Yough, M. & Cho, H. (2015). Attribution theory. In H. G. Scarlett (Ed.), *Classroom management: An a-to-z guide* (pp. 71-74). Sage. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346243>

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