An Interview With Allan Wigfield: A Giant on Research on Expectancy-Value, Motivation, and Reading Achievement

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Initial Interest in Education and Psychology

JOAA: *Did you have any teacher, professor, or colleague who influenced your learning experience and development in any particular way?*

Wigfield: I was inspired by several professors and mentors. I took my first undergraduate child development class from Joseph McV. Hunt at the University of Illinois, and he later helped mentor my undergraduate honors thesis. His excitement about research and the prospects of conducting psychological research to contribute to the solution of educational problems was very inspirational. In graduate school, Steve Asher guided me in my early research efforts in the areas of reading and communication, and helped me learn how to write for publication. Ken Hill piqued my interest in student motivation and in intervening in schools to help reduce the deleterious effects of children's anxiety on their achievement. Jacque Eccles was my postdoctoral mentor; the brilliance of her intellect, her excitement about research and new ideas, and her intellectual and social support of many graduate students, postdocs, and young scholars was very inspiring. I also appreciate how our relationship grew from mentor–mentee to colleagues.

Current Research Projects

Expectancy-Value Theory

JOAA: *You have significantly contributed to the development of a very comprehensive expectancy-value model of motivation. Could you please describe this model?*

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Wigfield: In a nutshell, expectancy-value theory deals with motivational influences on individuals' performance on different achievement activities and their choices of which activities to pursue. According to this theory, the most direct influences on performance and choice are the beliefs individuals have about their ability in different areas and how well they expect to do on them, and the values or incentives different activities hold for individuals. Eccles and her colleagues (including me!) defined different aspects of valuing of achievement: interest value or the enjoyment one gets from activities, attainment value or the importance of the activity to the individual, and utility value or the usefulness of the activity to the individual. These beliefs and values are influenced by socializers such as parents and teachers, individuals' past experiences and interpretations of them, and the cultural and situational contexts in which individuals reside.

The theory has a long history in psychology, but also has changed in line with changes in the field of psychology that emphasize the importance of social cognitive variables such as beliefs and values as influencing students' motivation, as well as the importance of cultural and environmental influences on motivation. Current expectancy-value models (such as those developed by Jacque Eccles and colleagues and Reinhard Pekrun) include a variety of beliefs and values, how socializers in the home and school environments influence children's beliefs and values, cultural and contextual influences, and the emotional consequences of having different kinds of expectancies and values. These models have been applied to a variety of achievement domains and have strong predictive power in the different domains.

JOAA: *How can a teacher enhance students' expectancy-value?*
Wigfield: Many expectancy-value theorists are quite interested in how to enhance students' beliefs and values in academic settings. Expectancies can be enhanced when students are given opportunities to succeed in different areas, focus on their own improvement rather than on how they are doing relative to others, and when teachers' evaluations focus on ways that students' efforts can result in successful performance. Students' valuing of different academic activities can be enhanced when activities in school are interesting and meaningful, when students see the relevance of their classroom activities and tasks to different aspects of their lives, and when teachers help students understand the importance of education and learning and all that it can bring to students.

JOAA: *Are there any special considerations when considering the expectancy-value model for high-ability and gifted students?*
Wigfield: My sense is that the predictive links in the model between expectancies, values, performance, and choice would operate in similar ways in high-ability and gifted students. Even though the predictive links likely are the same, there probably are mean-level differences between high-achieving students and other groups. These students likely have more positive competence perceptions and expectancies for success in different school subject areas compared to students achieving less well. They may (or may not) value achievement more!

JOAA: *Now let us talk a little bit about the future. What do you think will be the new direction of the expectancy-value theory?*

Wigfield: We (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010) just published a chapter on this topic for the new Advances in Motivation and Achievement series. We proposed new directions for research within this theoretical framework. First, we suggested that researchers consider whether there are additional components of students' valuing of tasks in addition to interest, importance, and utility; one possibility we suggested was the value of taking risks and seeking excitement. Second, we suggested that work on how individuals value current tasks be tied to their long-term values and choices of activities; this would connect more clearly studies of students' expectancies and values to the construct of the instrumentality of different tasks (which has to do with their future value) being done by researchers such as Barbara Greene and Ray Miller, and Jenefer Husman and Duane Shell. Third, we stated that we need to investigate cultural and group affiliation in students' expectancies and values, both with respect to how they relate to performance and choice and how they change over time. Finally, in line with the growing focus on contextual and situational influences on motivation, we suggested that contextual influences on expectancies and values need further attention. How do specific classroom practices and different environments within classrooms and schools impact students' expectancies and values?

Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)

JOAA: *Your colleagues and you have developed the CORI, which is an instructional program that merges reading strategy instruction, conceptual knowledge in science, and support for student motivation. What are the aims of CORI?*

Wigfield: CORI was developed initially in the 1990s by John Guthrie and Lois Bennett, an elementary school teacher. They thought that reading comprehension instruction could be improved by teaching reading strategies within certain content domains like science or social studies in order to provide students with content goals for reading, and also by focusing on ways of enhancing students' motivation to read. I began working with John in the late 1990s on the motivational aspects of CORI. We have worked to develop specific instructional practices based in motivation theory to help foster children's motivation for reading. We have focused on several motivational practices that are instantiated in different ways in the daily instruction students experience in CORI. These practices come from different prominent motivation theories such as expectancy-value theory, self-determination theory, self-efficacy theory, goal orientation theory, and interest theories.

The motivation practices include providing students with clear content goals for their learning so that they have purposes for reading, connecting reading to interesting activities and students' lives in order that students see reading as relevant, having interesting texts in classrooms so that students learn to enjoy reading, providing the texts at different levels so all students can experience success when they read, and giving students many opportunities to interact with others while they read. From 2001 to

2005, we did several intervention studies in third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade classrooms in which some students experienced CORI, some a strategy instruction program only, and some traditional instruction. We used a pretest–posttest matched group quasiexperimental design in these studies. Compared to students in the other two groups, CORI students had higher reading comprehension, strategy use, and motivation for reading at posttest. We obtained these effects using a variety of measures of reading comprehension (including a standardized reading test) and different measures of motivation.

JOAA: *What does your research suggest about the impacts of comprehensive reading instruction on diverse outcomes of low-achieving and high-achieving readers?*
Wigfield: We (Guthrie et al., 2009) recently published a study showing that CORI was equally effective for low- and high-achieving fifth-grade readers on outcomes including reading comprehension, inferencing, word recognition, and ecological knowledge. The instructional program for the low-achieving readers was based on CORI principles but was modified to include more time spent in the areas of fluency instruction, word recognition, and inferencing. In our new study, analyses of this issue are preliminary, but we are finding that CORI had very positive effects on low-achieving readers' comprehension and motivation. We are very excited about the findings that CORI is equally effective for high- and low-achieving readers; this speaks to the generality of the program as well as how it can be adapted for different kinds of readers.

A Current Project

JOAA: *You are a coprincipal investigator on a project investigating early adolescents' reading motivation and comprehension and interventions to improve these outcomes. What are the aims of the project? What do you find so far?*
Wigfield: The aims of this project are to extend CORI to middle school students, and determine if the program can be effective at that level as well. In this project, we continue to link reading and science and are focusing on information books used in seventh-grade science classes. There are several studies embedded in the larger project. We first interviewed about 250 seventh-grade students to find out what they like and don't like about reading in and out of school. We learned that many students (even those doing well in school) find the science information books they read in school to be difficult, boring, and not very relevant to their lives. These findings do not bode well for students' long-term engagement in reading or science.

As part of the larger project, we developed new scales of reading motivation that include what we call *affirming motivations for reading* (intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, valuing of reading, peer valuing of reading) and *undermining motivations for reading* (reading avoidance, perceived difficulty of reading, devaluing of reading, peer devaluing of reading). Affirming motivations relate positively to students' outcomes, and undermining motivations relate negatively. We argue that undermining motivations in general have not received enough attention in the motivation literature.

In the 2nd year of the project, we measured these motivations in September and April before the CORI intervention began. We found that the affirming reading motivations declined from September to April and the undermining motivations increased, which shows that students became less motivated to read science information texts during this period. We measured students' motivation in June after the CORI intervention. We found that during this period, the affirming motivations increased, and the undermining motivations decreased. Thus, CORI has positive effects on middle school students' motivation to read information texts. Many of the CORI principles are similar in our middle school program; however, we increasingly are focused on helping students see the relevance of what they are reading to their lives, and helping them understand why reading is valuable to them, to enhance their reading motivation and comprehension.

One other finding that we are excited about concerns students' perceptions of instruction and how that relates to changes in their own motivation. We asked the students to indicate the extent to which their teachers implemented the various principles in their classrooms, and then looked at how these perceptions related to their posttest motivation scores, controlling for their pretest scores. Students who reported that their teachers focused on the thematic units increased in their reading self-efficacy. Changes in children's intrinsic motivation were associated with their perceptions that teachers emphasized the relevance of reading and success experiences in reading. This is the first set of findings from our projects showing how specific instructional practices (as perceived by students) relate to positive change in their motivations to read.

Motivation and Service to the Profession

JOAA: *What do you think are the most misunderstood concepts or theories in the field of motivation?*

Wigfield: I'm not sure that I think that many individual concepts or theories are misunderstood. I believe that there have been important articles and chapters published over the last 10 or so years that attempt to clearly define different constructs in the motivation field. For instance, there have been important articles and chapters that have discussed similarities and differences in constructs like expectancies for success and self-efficacy, to name just two. Similarly, the debate that goal orientation theorists had about the relative merits of performance and mastery goals helped clarify each type of goal, and goal orientation theorists have been more consistent in their use of names for the orientations. Having said that, I believe there is some confusion (or at least debate) about the differences between constructs that are conceptually related and sometimes difficult to distinguish empirically, such as self-concept and self-efficacy, or self-concept of ability and expectancy for success.

In our work in expectancy-value theory we distinguish theoretically between expectancies and self-concept of ability, but our factor analyses of measures of these constructs usually show that they load on the same factor. So the constructs can be defined differently but empirically are similar. I also think it is time for motivation

theorists to debate whether some theoretical integration can occur so that our theories perhaps capture a broader array of constructs and predict a wider variety of outcomes. I don't think we will return to the era of *grand theories*, but may be able to attain some integration.

JOAA: *What are the most important concepts for teachers to understand about students' motivation?*

Wigfield: I think it is essential for teachers to understand many different things about motivation and that researchers studying motivation have learned a lot about the kinds of teaching practices and activities that can foster students' motivation. Having said that, although many of the concepts from different motivation theories have relevance to teaching, learning, and classroom practices, teachers must have clear ideas of how the concepts can be instantiated in their classrooms during different lessons and activities so that the concepts can have a meaningful impact. It can be difficult for teachers to translate general motivation principles (e.g., make learning meaningful to students builds their valuing of learning) to their specific teaching practices and lessons.

From our experience working with teachers as they teach reading to elementary and middle school students, there are a variety of motivational concepts that are critical to students' continued engagement in school. First, students at all different levels of learning must have opportunities to succeed and to demonstrate expertise so that what they contribute to classroom discussions and activities is valued, they understand they can make positive contributions to the classroom, and they believe they can succeed. Second, connecting cognitive concepts and principles (such as principles of ecology) to hands-on activities is a powerful way to engage students in cognitively rich learning. We think it is essential to spark students' interest in an activity and topic, and then connect that interest to books and other materials to stimulate their longer term interest and engagement with the topic. This is true for students at all levels of reading if there are reading materials in their classroom that they can read. Relatedly, when students see what they are learning as relevant to their lives and come to value it they engage in the activities more fully; we have learned that teachers can have a powerful influence on these things. Finally, students love to interact with one another around what they are reading, and when structured appropriately, collaborative reading activities are very engaging to students. In our work with teachers, we often have them experience these things themselves in our professional development activities so that they can see and feel how they operate, and then work with them (and have them work together in teacher teams) to help them build specific practices into their lessons. Our teaching guides provide many specific suggestions for teachers, but also leave them room for them to modify the practices for their own students, and create their own practices based on the given motivational principle.

JOAA: *You have been an editor of several important journals and served in multiple editorial boards. Please describe your experiences serving to the profession in those positions. Also, what advice could you give to researchers who want to publish their work in top ranking journals?*

Wigfield: I was honored to be selected as associate editor at *Child Development* and *Journal of Educational Psychology* (*JEP*), and editor of the Teaching, Learning, and Human Development section of the *American Educational Research Journal* (*AERJ*). Each experience had its unique rewards and challenges. At *JEP*, I mostly handled papers focused on motivation and self-concept, and so the topics of the papers I was managing were directly in my areas of expertise. At *Child Development*, I received papers dealing with a broader set of topics, and so I needed to rely on reviewers with direct expertise in these topics in order to make a reasonable decision. At both of these journals, many of the papers were of very high quality, and so it was difficult at times to decide to reject some papers. At *AERJ* both the topics of the papers and the methodologies used to study them were quite varied. So it was again crucial to rely on the expertise of the reviewers in coming to decisions about the manuscripts.

One of the biggest challenges editors face is dealing with reviews that are mixed; when the reviewers are quite divided in their views of a manuscript it can be difficult for the editor to make a decision. A second challenge is having to reject so many papers; highly ranked journals only accept a few of the manuscripts submitted to them, and so editors of these journals have to communicate bad news to many authors!

One of the most rewarding parts of this work is helping authors take a good study and makes its presentation even better and clearer. This is especially gratifying when the study was done by an assistant professor or postdoctoral scholar; in general, they are very appreciative of the editorial suggestions and of course are extremely happy when their manuscript is accepted. Editors certainly shape the field by the kinds of papers they accept and the topics they emphasize; however, we also only can react to what we are sent in many cases. At *AERJ* we tried to set a certain tone in our first invited issue both with respect to the topics we covered (self-regulation and motivation, applying psychological theories to education, research on teaching and teacher education, links of research on instruction to educational policy) and in our editorial statements about where we saw the field going. The impact factor of *AERJ* increased during our editorial team's tenure, and so we think this shows that the quality of the papers in the journal was quite high.

My advice for individuals planning to submit to the top-quality journals is to look carefully at several recent issues to see the kinds of papers that appear there, what kinds of topics they cover, how the articles are organized, the kinds of methodologies used, and the size and scope of the studies. It is especially important that authors provide a clear and coherent theoretical framework for their study if they want to publish it in a top-tier journal. Similarly, the measures must be of high quality and the research questions clearly specified. The contribution of the study beyond what is already known is key; studies making incremental contributions usually do not make it into the best journals. In both the motivation field and in other fields there still is a need for more research on underrepresented groups, and on cultural influences on motivation and other psychological processes (to mention just a couple of important topics). I strongly urge young scholars to have a senior colleague read and react to papers they plan to submit to top journals. As an editor, I welcomed emails or calls from authors about whether their work was appropriate for the journal.

Legacy

JOAA: *How would you like the fields of education and psychology to remember you? What do you feel is your legacy?*

Wigfield: I would like to be remembered as someone who contributed in important ways to the scholarship on the nature of human motivation and its development, and also connected basic research on the development of motivation to the classroom and ways that teachers can work with students to enhance their motivation and learning. I'd also like to be remembered as someone who contributed chapters and articles that synthesized the work on motivation and provided directions for future research.

JOAA: *How would you like your students and colleagues to remember you?*

Wigfield: I hope my current and former students remember me as one who supported their work but also challenged them to improve their thinking and their writing. I hope that I helped them see the excitement of doing projects that take the field in new directions, and supported them in their development as independent researchers. I hope my colleagues and collaborators know what a pleasure it was for me to work with them, and that the collaborations I have had with scholars such as Jacque Eccles and John Guthrie have been the things I have enjoyed most working in the field of achievement motivation.

JOAA: *Would you like to say anything else?*

Wigfield: Thanks Héfer for the opportunity to share these thoughts and reflections on my work!

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Editors' Note

Allan Wigfield is professor and chair of the Department of Human Development and distinguished scholar-teacher at the University of Maryland. He received his PhD in educational psychology from the University of Illinois in 1982. His research focuses on how children's motivation develops across the school years in different areas, including reading. Dr. Wigfield's research has been supported by grants from the N*ational Science Foundation* (NSF), the *National Institute for Child Health and Development* (NICHD), the *Interagency Education Research Initiative* (IERI), and the *Spencer Foundation* (SF). He has authored more than 100 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on children's motivation and other topics. He has edited four books and four special issues of journals on the development of motivation and the development of reading

comprehension and motivation. Dr. Wigfield was associate editor of the *Journal of Educational Psychology* from 2000 to 2002 and associate editor of *Child Development* from 2001 to 2005. He edited the "Teaching, Learning, and Human Development" section of the *American Educational Research Journal* from 2008 to 2010. He is a fellow of Division 15 (Educational Psychology) of the American Psychological Association, a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, and a fellow of the American Educational Research Association. He has won several awards for his research and teaching.

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