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Teacher Beliefs about Factors that Influence Motivation Among Adolescents with Learning Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT), this study explored teacher beliefs about factors shaping task motivation among students with learning disabilities (LD). Directed content and flexible coding approaches were used for analysis of individual interview and group discussions. Analysis indicated that middle school teachers saw several factors outlined by SEVT as influencing students with LDs' expectancy of, and value for, success. These included the cultural milieu, beliefs of key socializers, student aptitudes & characteristics, and prior experiences. Teachers believed that, over time, their students with LD had frequently found themselves in situations that promoted low expectancy and value for present-day academic success. These findings highlight the potential usefulness of SEVT as a tool for taking a longer-term view of reasons students with LD are (or are not) motivated to engage in academic tasks.

Keywords: Motivation, Teacher beliefs, Learning disability, Adolescence



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Introduction

Early adolescents' steady academic progress depends on teachers recognizing and addressing these students' unique motivational needs as they arise (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). This is particularly important with regard to students with learning disabilities (LD), who are often at risk for motivational problems that impact academic achievement (Graham et al., 2017; Sideridis et al., 2006). Middle school educators are responsible for providing high-quality instruction and appropriate accommodations to these students (Moreau, 2014); however, teachers must also attend to students with LDs' potentially inconsistent motivation levels, as those who struggle with motivation are unlikely to benefit from evidence-based learning supports (Deshler & Hock, 2007) no matter how soundly these tools are developed and implemented. This underscores the importance of both researchers and classroom teachers having a rich understanding of motivation specifically among adolescents with LD.

Scholars have used multiple theoretical perspectives from educational psychology, such as self-determination theory and goal orientation theory, to study the motivation beliefs of students with LD. An additional theoretical lens, that of situated expectancy value theory (SEVT; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), has received less attention in the special education context. However, given the ways in which SEVT elucidates specific elements (e.g., cultural factors; beliefs of socializers) that build up over time to shape a student's present-day academic task motivation, this theory has increasingly been cited as having the potential to aid researchers in developing a better understanding of students with LDs' motivation (Louick & Scanlon, 2021; Lovett et al., 2020). Further, some see SEVT as potentially supporting practitioners in making good decisions about how to plan lessons and learning environments for this student population (Louick & Muenks, in press; De La Paz & Butler, 2018). Using SEVT in this way requires teacher buy-in; if they do not find SEVT to accurately represent their students' experiences and needs, teachers are unlikely to implement related teaching techniques and strategies in the classroom.

The current study explores whether and how middle school teachers found SEVT to be a useful tool when talking about the factors that shape their students with LDs' motivation to engage in school tasks. It also explores how these teachers' insights might improve theoretical understandings of academic task motivation among young adolescents with LD. Following a review of the related extant literature on LD and motivation theory, this article proceeds into a discussion of the research questions at hand; the context in which the study took place; the data collection and analysis methods; the study findings; and a discussion of the relevance of those findings to current classroom instruction of adolescents with LD.

Literature Review

This section begins with a brief review of the literature regarding academic motivation among students with LD, highlighting key findings from a range of theoretical perspectives. This is followed by the contention that SEVT, although thus far used only minimally in special education research, may offer important opportunities for teachers, administrators, and researchers to better understand the underpinnings of students with LDs' motivation to engage in academic tasks.

Motivation and Adolescents with Learning Disabilities

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a student with a specific learning disability has difficulties with language-based academic tasks; these difficulties exist in the absence of other impairments (e.g., cognitive, visual, hearing, motor, etc.). The National Joint

Committee on Learning Disabilities (2011) further clarifies that, among students with LD, it is common to see “an uneven pattern of strengths & weaknesses” across academic domains (p. 238). Although motivation is an important topic for teachers of all adolescents to address, it is particularly so for those who work with students with LD. These students typically enter middle and high school continuing to require intensive learning supports (Bulgren et al., 2013; Deshler, 2005; Solis et al., 2014), such as strategies for skill development in specific disciplines (Kennedy & Ihle, 2012; Ko & Tejero Hughes, 2015) and ongoing instruction in foundational skills (Faggella-Luby et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2017). Such supports may place limitations on students with LDs’ independence, impacting their beliefs about their own abilities to carry out academic work and/or, in some cases, the level of power they feel in the classroom (Gilmore, 2018; Ginsberg, 2020). Challenges in these areas may, in turn, decrease students with LDs’ motivation to engage in academic activities (Frankel, 2016). This suggests that teachers, service providers and school administrators must not only be knowledgeable about high-quality academic interventions, but must deliver those interventions in ways that minimize threat to students with LDs’ academic motivation. It seems critical, then, that those working with adolescents with LD incorporate an understanding of motivation into their delivery of special education services. Here, findings from educational psychology (and the theories underlying those findings) may prove especially useful.

When studying “motivation” among students with LD, researchers have employed several different theoretical conceptions of the term. Each theoretical frame has provided new insights into students with LDs’ motivation, both for the researchers working to improve these students’ educational experiences in a broad sense, and for the classroom teachers working with them every day (Louick & Muenks, in press). Scholars who employ academic goal theory to study motivation (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) have found that the type of goal a student with LD sets can impact various components of their academic well-being. For example, mastery goals (i.e., goals set with the intention of learning and improving for personally-meaningful reasons; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002) have been found to predict students with LDs’ academic success (e.g., Sideridis, 2003, 2005b). On the other hand, performance-avoidance goals (i.e., goals set for the purpose of hiding weaknesses from others; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002) may be especially negatively impactful for students with LD, putting them at greater risk for depression (Sideridis, 2007). When it comes to explaining the causes of success or failure, studies taking an attribution theory (Graham, 2020) approach to motivation indicate that students with LDs’ attributions for outcomes can be impacted by teachers’ instructional techniques, and that the resulting attributional changes can support reading comprehension strategy instruction (e.g., Berkeley et al., 2011). Still other researchers have taken approaches based in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and/or causal agency theory (Shogren et al., 2015), considering how students with disabilities’ feelings of autonomy and competence impact their motivation to engage in class activities, and the role that teachers play in creating environments in which students with LD demonstrate feelings of self-determination (e.g., Cavendish, 2017; Cavendish et al., 2020). These findings enable both researchers and teachers to better understand the specific challenges students with LD face in-the-moment, in terms of exhibiting and sustaining motivation to engage in academic tasks. However, more information is needed about possible precursors that could shape the academic goals, attributions, and motivation-related beliefs that students demonstrate when they enter a teacher’s classroom. An additional theoretical perspective that may prove especially beneficial towards understanding this aspect of motivation is situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020).

Situated Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation

According to SEVT theorists (e.g., Eccles, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Rosenzweig et al., 2019), students are motivated to engage in academic behaviors based on the information they have gathered regarding the nature of academic tasks, and regarding themselves as learners. This information shapes the degree to which students anticipate that they will succeed at a given task, as well as the significance they place on doing so. Once they have a sense of their likely success, and the degree to which they find that success worthwhile, students make a motivated choice about whether or not they will engage in the task. In their recent conceptual work, Eccles and Wigfield (2020) describe the “situated” nature of individuals’ expectancy-value beliefs—that is, the ways in which situational and socio-cultural factors influence students’ expectations of and value for success. This adds further nuance to discussions of how and why students are motivated to engage in specific activities, under specific conditions. Situated expectancy-value theory’s particular relevance for the current study lies in its posited antecedents for students’ beliefs about themselves as learners. Such antecedents include the broader culture (“cultural milieu”) and the actions of those around them (“socializer beliefs and behaviors”). They also include students’ own strengths and weaknesses (“student characteristics/aptitudes”), and memories of what has happened to them in the past (“previous achievement-related experiences”). These sources are theorized to impact both student expectancy of success, and student value for success, which in turn shape task motivation. To take an expectancy-value perspective on motivation is not necessarily to address questions about whether or not teachers can “teach” motivation (e.g., instill a “growth mindset;” Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Instead, it is to describe factors that impact motivation. Having knowledge of these factors can allow teachers to better understand the learning choices that their students are motivated to make.

Although widely respected and employed among educational psychology researchers (Koenka, 2020), SEVT has seldom been used to better understand motivation among students with LD in particular. However, researchers are beginning to consider its usefulness for this particular population of students (e.g., Louick & Scanlon, 2021; Lovett et al., 2020). Lovett and colleagues (2020) implemented and studied an intervention that had components specifically targeting expectancy and value beliefs. They found that students with LD who received the intervention ultimately described themselves as “competent” at greater rates than peers with LD in a non-intervention (control) group, and were more likely to recognize their own efforts and abilities as leading to academic achievement. This suggests that the expectancy and value beliefs of students with LD can change depending on classroom practices. In another SEVT-based study (Louick & Scanlon, 2021), researchers employed semi-structured interviews to better understand antecedents to these students’ academic task motivation. Analyzing the data from an expectancy-value perspective enabled these researchers to identify ways in which the nature of interactions with classroom teachers, both past and current, shaped students with LDs’ motivation to participate in reading and writing tasks. Recently, De La Paz and Butler (2018) called for concepts from SEVT to serve as foundational elements in the interactive and instructional choices teachers make when working with struggling writers and writers with LD. De La Paz and Butler articulate a series of expectancy- and value-related questions that students with LD might ask themselves when approaching an academic task; then, they encourage teachers to consider what their students with LDs’ answers to those questions might be, and ultimately plan with the students’ anticipated answers in mind.

Changing teacher understandings and practices may indeed be a meaningful way to impact motivation among this student population, as teachers can either ease or exacerbate students’ motivation concerns depending on the learning environments they create, the teaching

strategies they use, and the relationships they interactively build (Cohen, 2011; Rex & Schiller, 2009; Vetter, 2010). Reviewing literature on teachers' role in students' motivation beliefs, Gilmore (2018) contends that although teacher feedback is impactful on achievement and motivation among all students, this is particularly the case for students with LD. She argues that "teachers need to be aware of the range of difficulties that undermine motivation, and watch for possible indicators of problems" (p. 29), and urges teachers to avoid the common mistake of mischaracterizing students at-risk for LD as lazy and/or lacking motivation.

What is missing from this conversation is the input of teachers themselves, as to whether and how motivation theories might be relevant and useful for their own work with students with LD. In order to make decisions about how such theories could potentially be utilized in special education, we must understand teachers' perspectives on this issue, as their perceptions of their students' motivations influence the pedagogical and interpersonal decisions they make on a daily basis (Urduan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Wall & Miller, 2015). To address this need, the current study addresses the following research questions with regard to SEVT in particular:

1. *Of the motivation precursors outlined in SEVT, which, if any, do teachers see impacting their students with LDs' expectancy of, and value for, academic success?*
2. *In what ways do teachers perceive these expectancy and value beliefs as impacting students with LDs' motivation engage in academic tasks?*

In alignment with the premise that teachers' voices are critical to addressing issues in special education (as advocated by Cavendish et al., 2020), the current study utilizes educators' own words to address the research questions at hand.

Methods and Materials

Flexible coding (Deterding & Waters, 2018) and directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) approaches were employed in the current study of middle school teachers' beliefs regarding the factors that influence students with LDs' expectancy of and value for success, as well as the degree to which those expectancies and values influence students with LDs' motivation for academic tasks.

Study Context

Data collection occurred within a larger collaborative project involving the researcher and Williams Neighborhood School (all names are pseudonyms), a K-8 school in a major metropolitan city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The city education department's website listed the student demographic information for Williams students: 94.8% identified as Hispanic, 3.2% as Black and 1.1% as American Indian; 87.1% demonstrated economic need. 46.7% were classified as English Language Learners, and 26.4% as students with special needs.

Williams is a dual-language school where students receive instruction both in Spanish and in English. Doing research at this school in particular offered an opportunity to consider the perspectives of teachers who work with bilingual and emerging-bilingual students with LD. Researchers have investigated teacher beliefs about disability among emerging bilingual students (e.g., Cavendish & Espinosa, 2013; Gomez-Najarro, 2019; Greenfield, 2013), and have made suggestions as to how teachers can support emerging bilinguals with LD in several areas of learning (e.g., Barrio et al., 2017; Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017; O'Keeffe & Medina, 2016; Utley et al., 2011). However, more research is needed regarding how teachers can fully understand the identity beliefs of emerging bilingual students who have learning disabilities (Gomez-Najarro, 2019). The current study informs such work.

Starting in November 2018, as part of professional development (PD) activities at the school, all Williams teachers selected from a list of PD options for the remainder of the 2018-2019 academic year (approximately 6 months). Six of the school’s middle school teachers chose to participate in a monthly workshop series called “Instructing Struggling Students: Using Specially Designed Instruction and Understanding Expectancy-Value Theory to Engage and Re-Engage Students who are Struggling Academically.” The series was co-led by the researcher and the school’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) coordinator. (The IEP coordinator had a masters’ degree in special education and 17 years of teaching experience; she had held her current role at Williams for seven years.) During the workshops (each 80 minutes in length), teachers engaged in discussions of, and intentional planning for, the learning and motivational needs of their students with LD. The co-leaders presented key tenets of expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 2009; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), and teachers reflected on whether or not this information was relevant to their own work providing specific skill instruction for individual students with disabilities. This PD setting provided an ideal site for exploring teacher beliefs about factors impacting their students’ motivation, as teachers were already engaged in related discussions as part of their fulfillment of professional development responsibilities.

Participants

At the outset of the workshop series, all six teachers were invited to participate in the research portion of the project. Three teachers—Beatriz, Gloria and Carl—agreed to do so. (The other three teachers remained in the PD group but did not participate in research components.) Beatriz and Gloria co-taught in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) setting (their classes included students with and without disabilities), while Carl taught in a self-contained setting (his class consisted solely of students with disabilities). Demographic information about the participating teachers can be found in Table 1. Small samples are common practice in exploratory qualitative research, as they allow for the collection of the time-consuming and detailed data needed to support meaningful case studies of unique populations (Boddy, 2016).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Teacher	Beatriz	Carl	Gloria
Grade Level(s) Taught	5 & 6	7	5 & 6
Classroom Setting	Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT)	Self-Contained 12:1:1	Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT)
Teacher Role	Special Education Teacher	Special Education Teacher	General Education Teacher
Years Teaching	3	15	*
Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latina	White/Caucasian	*

Note. *= participant declined to provide data.

Researcher Positionality

Recognizing that all data collection and analyses are “shaped by the worldviews, perspectives, positionalities, and subjectivities of researchers” (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012, p. 237), it is critical to note that the researcher identifies as a White, monolingual, English-speaking woman. Prior to her current position in academia, she spent eight years as a special education classroom teacher, during which her school regularly collaborated with the Williams

School. In her new role, as a faculty member at a local university, she also volunteered her time at Williams for ongoing professional development (this joint PD work extended beyond the timing of the research project discussed here). As such, the researcher brought her own teaching and experiences to bear on the research, and was a familiar face to some administrators and teachers at Williams, but was nevertheless an outsider to the day-to-day workings of the school.

Data Sources

Data were audio-recorded during teacher interviews and discussion groups, and later transcribed. Small-group discussion activities during the PD workshop events were recorded only for the teachers who had chosen to participate in the research component of the project. Between workshop sessions, these teachers also engaged in semi-structured, 1:1 virtual-meeting interviews with the researcher. A semi-structured interview approach was selected so as to ensure that the key concepts from expectancy-value theory were addressed, while still allowing for follow-up questions that arose out of participant statements (as in Cornell & Sayman, 2020). Workshop materials (see Appendix A) and interview questions were developed in conjunction with an educational psychologist who had specialized knowledge of SEVT; she served as an outside consultant, to ensure fidelity to the theory's key tenets. Once collected and transcribed, data were entered into NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018).

Study Trustworthiness

Responsible qualitative research involves "making empirical, interpretive schemes as public as possible" (Denzin, 2001, p. 317). As such, all analysis methods were recorded systematically and comprehensively (Yin, 2003) in a series of memos that could be used to detail and track the analytic process, establishing an audit trail (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam, 1998). To further ensure trustworthiness of findings, the researcher clarified her own positioning (see "Positionality") and shared preliminary findings with colleagues for peer examination (Merriam, 1998). In addition, she employed member checks (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2016), a process in which "participants add credibility to the qualitative study by having a chance to react to both the data and the final narrative" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Raw data and interpretations were shared with the participating teachers for "reactions, corrections and further insights" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 16).

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative data was collected from participants who were informed in writing of the study's nature and that there was no ramification if they decided to opt-out at any time. The interview instrument and consent information were stored on a secure hard drive, per the instructions of the Institutional Review Board at the university where the researcher worked. The study's participation resulted in minimal risks to participants.

In this study, all rules stated to be followed within the scope of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were followed. None of the actions stated under the title "Actions Against Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, were not taken.

Ethical review board name: Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Federal Wide Assurance FWA00009066; New York City Department of Education Institutional Review Board

Date of ethics review decision: St. John's University, 6/14/18; NYC Department of Education, 8/15/18

Ethics assessment document issue number: St. John's University: 0618-007; NYC Department of Education, Study 2040-NYC (IRB)

Data Analysis

Teachers' transcribed statements from interviews and workshop discussions were determined to meet criteria for coding if they included the teachers' perceptions of any of the following: 1) the sources from which students gathered information about themselves as learners; 2) students' responses to their current and prior learning experiences; 3) beliefs students held about themselves as learners; and/or 4) beliefs students held about academic tasks. These criteria represent factors influencing students' expectancy of academic success, the value students place on that success, and ultimately students' motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Rosenzweig et al., 2019; see "Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation"). Thus, exploring teachers' perceptions in these areas allowed for thorough study of the current research questions.

The researcher applied an adapted form of the three-phase flexible coding technique outlined by Deterding and Waters (2018). This process was documented in analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013). In the first phase of analysis, the researcher reviewed all transcribed data, using the memoing and indexing features in NVivo to highlight potential areas of interest and/or relevance to the research questions. In the second phase of analysis, the researcher initially coded interview and workshop transcripts. The directed content approach, used for confirming the tenets of a theoretical framework and potentially extending its applicability (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), was applied for coding framework construction. Initial code definitions, based on those developed in a prior qualitative study taking an expectancy-value approach to understanding motivation among students with LD (Louick & Scanlon, 2021), served to identify data in which teachers stated their perceptions of factors that contributed to students' development of identity beliefs fundamental to academic motivation. Simultaneous Coding (Saldaña, 2013) was used for statements relevant to more than one code.

In the third phase of flexible coding (Deterding & Waters, 2018), the researcher re-read and re-coded all transcripts multiple times, focusing on one specific code at a time, so as to test and refine each code's use. NVivo software was used to create a series of documents (one per code); the documents included each coded data segment. The researcher then developed a narrative explanation as to why each segment had been assigned particular code(s). Code revisions were made as necessary throughout this data analysis process, and documented thoroughly. For example, during the data re-readings for each of the initial codes, it became apparent that further clarification was needed so as to fully distinguish between them. The researcher revisited her own prior analytic memos, as well as key articles by Eccles and colleagues on expectancy-value theory (e.g., Eccles, 2009; Rosenzweig et al., 2019). While examining these documents, the researcher re-considered their implications for the specific research questions being investigated in the current study. Following these efforts, code descriptions were edited; data examples were chosen to align with the revised descriptions; and prior coding was re-evaluated. Furthermore, an analytic memo was written to document the steps just described. This resulted in the final code list presented in Table 2. Analysis of all coded data was ultimately organized according to its relevance to each of the research questions, as presented below (see "Findings").

Table 2. Directed Content Analysis Codes*

Code	Description	Example
1: Influences on Ability Beliefs	Statements about general messages a student receives	“What messages have students received as a learner... different students are getting different messages”
1a: Cultural Milieu	Statements about student expectations/assumptions based on societal constructions	“we are in a—on standards-based grading... you know, a 1 2 3 4... they really think that 3 is where, y’know, successful students are”
1b: Socializers’ Beliefs & Behaviors	Statements about messages that a student perceives from others (about self as learner)	“He almost saw it as... ‘here’s what other people think of us. We can’t do as well as everybody else.’ ”
1c: Student’s Characteristics/Aptitudes	Statements about a student’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner; conditions under which a student does their best learning	“He needs a lot of repeated experiences and practice”
1d: Previous Experiences	Statements about a student’s memories related to learning/school	“He’s been left back. He’s been moved around. He’s been pushed around, and... it’s really hard to undo all of those... negative feelings...”
Expectation of Success	Statements about whether or not students believe they can succeed	“He’s like... ‘That’s why we’re in this [self-contained class]room and... we’re never gonna leave.’”
Value	Statements about students perceiving task as useful for any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their own enjoyment/desire to learn • accomplishing everyday goals • reinforcing abilities they find valuable 	“...he wants to be a fully bilingual person, and... he puts a lot of work and effort into his literacy in both Spanish and English...”

* derived from Durik, Shechter, Noh, Rozek, & Harackiewicz, 2015; Eccles, 2009; Eccles et al., 1983; Rosenzweig et al., 2019

Findings

This study, grounded in situated expectancy-value theory of motivation (SEVT; Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), explored middle school teachers’ beliefs about factors that shaped academic task motivation among their students with learning disabilities (LD). Findings (summarized in Figure 1) include the extent to which the theorized antecedents to expectancy of and value for task success were reflected in teacher statements about their students. Also included is a report on the ways in which teachers believed that students with LDs’ expectancy of and value for success impacted their motivation to engage in class activities.

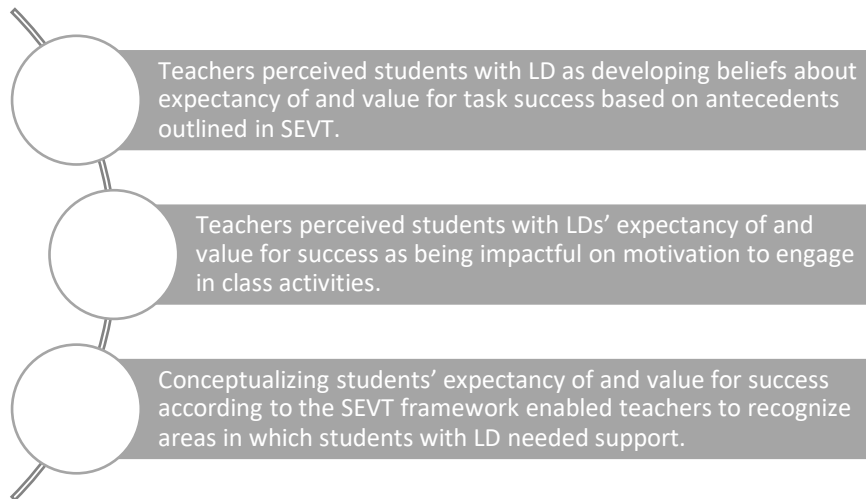


Figure 1. Key Study Findings

Antecedents to Expectancy of and Value for Success

The precursors to expectancy and value beliefs that are proposed by SEVT theorists include the cultural milieu; the beliefs and behaviors of socializers; individual students' characteristics and aptitudes; and students' previous experiences (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). In this study, participants' statements indicated evidence that they believed all four factors impacted their students with LDs' expectancy of, and value for, task success.

Cultural Milieu. Carl's statements indicated a belief that societal constructions influenced the degree to which his students with LD valued academic tasks and expected to succeed at them. For example, he raised the issue of students' affective responses to their scores on standardized tests and assignments, and contended that students often defined success according to the standards-based grading system. When they repeatedly received scores below the level designated as "proficient" by the city department of education, Carl said his students with LD expected that they would not be able to be sufficiently successful on any subsequent tasks, even if he had written them comments indicating areas of progress that were evident in their work ("if they see, y'know, 1s and 2s [low scores] ... They don't even wanna read the feedback... and they'll—they just shut down"). Carl believed that the larger special education placement system impacted his students with LDs' expectations of future success as well:

"Just being in a self-contained class—all of these guys are—already know, and they feel labeled. Another student, a couple weeks ago, talked about how once he's in our classroom, you never leave... he almost saw it like, 'Ok, we're labeled, here's what other people think of us. We can't do as well as everybody else. That's why we're in this room and we're never gonna leave.' "

Here, Carl stated his perception that students took a societal construction of special education placement ("being in a self-contained class") and a message perceived from others ("here's what other people think of us") as indications that they should not expect to succeed ("we can't do as well as everybody else. That's why we're in this room and we're never gonna leave").

Teachers also discussed ways that school and/or classroom culture impacted the value students placed on completing certain academic tasks. For example, Gloria discussed a student with LD who had experienced interruptions in his schooling and had repeated two grades; from her perspective, this put him in circumstances that led to his feeling distanced from his peers, and subsequently devaluing being a part of the school community. She explained to her fellow

teachers what she imagined him to be feeling: “Getting left back so many times, you know, you feel—and you’re so much older, and you feel out of place... feeling left out and feeling like, ‘this is pointless to be here.’ You know, ‘What am I doing here? There’s no point.’ So that’s that—that emotional piece that needs to be repaired.”

Beliefs and Behaviors of Socializers. Participants spoke at length about the role that messages from family members, teachers, and other community members played in relation to students with LDs’ expectations for academic task success. For example, when asked if she felt that motivation beliefs were different among students with and without LD, Beatriz responded:

“it depends on how the families talk about it... I have a lot of parents that see it as a detriment to the students... they see it as a label, and that gets in the way also ...but when families are a lot more open and understand that... with all the support that they get, they are able to overcome a lot of their challenges, and close their gaps...”

In this instance, Beatriz cited familial perceptions of disability diagnosis and provision of services as factors that she felt played into expectancy of success specifically among her students with LD. On a similar note, Gloria said she spoke with a student with LD about his mother’s recollection that he was very interested in science when he was younger. Gloria believed that the memories his mother shared led the student to value science in the present day, and ultimately motivated him to engage in in-classroom science tasks (see “Relationship of Student Expectancy of and Value for Success to Motivation”).

Individual student characteristics and aptitudes. Teachers described how they saw students’ personal interests, abilities and perspectives impacting the value placed on engagement in classroom activities. Gloria explained how she believed that one of her students with LD approached challenging tasks:

“He just gets really down on himself when something external kind of impacts him, y’know? But... he starts off very cheery and enthusiastic [sic] about things... he likes sharing and discussing... Just when he’s excited about something, he’s really focused on, ‘Look, this is what I did.’ Like, he doesn’t really see it as ‘Well, is it wrong? Is it right? Is it, like, incorrect? Is it...’ He’s just like, ‘Hey, this is what I did. This is what I’m doing. This is what I’m thinking.’ And it’s never, like, ‘Is it right or is it wrong?’ So I’m wondering if he’s one of those students that just, challenge is not a bad thing, you know?”

Gloria described the student’s personal approach as one in which he was eager to try, and to share his thoughts about a challenging task, but less interested in whether others deemed his work as “right” or “wrong.” She believed the student might feel enthusiastic about trying something new and challenging, but that the value he placed on specific kinds of task completion might not be in alignment with the value other people (for example, his teachers) placed on those same tasks.

On a less positive note, Carl recounted times when students started out demonstrating interest in certain topics, but then decided these topics weren’t important to them when they ran into academic obstacles related to their LD (e.g., applying vocabulary strategies, or navigating a large amount of oral or written language; see “Relationship of Student Expectancy of and Value for Success to Motivation”). Here, Carl indicated a belief that the dissonance between students with LDs’ current aptitudes and the nature/presentation of the material impacted the level of value the students placed on task completion.

Students’ previous experiences. Teachers recognized the important role that past experiences could play in shaping these students’ academic expectations. For example, in their individual interviews, Beatriz and Gloria each independently described the same incident in which they

believed that one of their current students with LD had been so impacted by prior teachers' evaluations of his writing, that he expected to receive criticism, and misunderstood his current teachers sharing his good work (which they wanted to use as an example for other students). As Beatriz recalled, "he told me... 'I was scared because nobody has ever done that for any of my writing... So I just thought that it was—it was bad... And I thought that you were showing how not to do it.' " Beatriz left this interaction believing that the student had assumed his work was of poor quality (and that the teachers had intended to embarrass him) because he had never perceived a laudatory message from others about his writing before.

Summary. Teachers referred to the ways they believed that the broader culture, the actions of others, individual strengths and weaknesses, and achievement-related memories impacted students with LDs' expectancy of and value for academic task success. As indicated in the next section of findings, categorizing teachers' statements according to the motivation precursors proposed by scholars of SEVT (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 2020) clarified the ways in which these teachers saw concepts and experiences of LD impacting students' present-day task motivation in class.

Relationship of Student Expectancy of and Value for Success to Motivation

Teachers indicated multiple situations in which they saw direct connections between students with LDs' expectancy of or value for success at a task, and their motivation to complete it. For example, Carl described situations in which students' scores on an assignment moved from 1 to 2 on the city's standardized grading system (in which 3 was considered "proficient"). He explained:

"You can conference with the student, but it's often difficult to convey the message that there has been growth, and that needs to be celebrated... if I give back a math test for instance, and I might have teacher feedback on there, but if they see, y'know, 1s and 2s ... They don't even wanna read the feedback... and they'll—they just shut down... they'll just shut: 'Oh, I hate math. I hate, y'know, I can't do this' ...so that's definitely, um, a motiv—well, it *doesn't* motivate them."

In this description, Carl said he believed that socially accepted expectations about success (i.e., specific numerical scores' capacity to indicate acceptable academic work) overshadowed any (potentially positive) information students with LD received from the teacher directly, to the point of students devaluing the task ("Oh, I hate math") and expecting task failure ("I hate, y'know, I can't do this"). Carl explicitly connected these feelings to a decline in student motivation ("it *doesn't* motivate them").

Similarly, teachers indicated a belief that students' perceptions of their own academic strengths and weaknesses influenced the value they placed on completing tasks, and thus their motivation to engage. When asked about motivation during class activities among his students with LD, Carl explained:

"There are students that may start off interested in the material, but as soon as they face some sort of challenge... maybe they didn't understand a vocabulary word, or maybe I'm starting to give them too much information or... because they're not a strong writer, they get frustrated if that's what I'm asking them to do. And so they'll—they tend to shut down... so they quickly will lose interest, even if they were academically motivated... Now there's... some factor that's preventing them from—or that's blocking their motivation... And then there's other students that... maybe their reading level is a little bit stronger so it allows them to access the curriculum in a different way."

Here, Carl described how he felt his students' unique capabilities impacted them when attempting challenges. He contended that lesson elements with which a particular learner struggled (e.g., difficult vocabulary, large volume of information, large writing demands) interfered with the interest value that the student placed on the material, "blocking" motivation to engage. Meanwhile, areas of strength offered more opportunities for a student with LD to engage with the learning material. Beatriz shared the following comments about the value that another student with LD placed on specific kinds of learning:

"... he says that his favorite subject is English, because he really wants to learn English, he wants to be a fully bilingual person, and that he puts a lot of work and effort into his literacy in both Spanish and English, but right now, his focus is English because that's where he needs more work. He says that he still loves to read even though he knows that he struggles with it—that he seeks out books with pictures, and he likes books about superheroes, and superpowers."

When Beatriz said "he still loves to read even though he knows that he struggles with it," and listed types and topics of books that the student sought out, she described occasions when she believed he was motivated to satisfy personal curiosities. She also said the student saw continued study of English as something that would ultimately allow him to become "a fully bilingual person," which was a characteristic that she believed he was motivated to demonstrate to himself and others.

Another example of a teacher describing the value that a student with LD placed on academic learning was Gloria's recounting of how a student's mother seemed to have influenced his academic goals.

"...he says he's gonna be a scientist, he wants to study space—the only reason he loves science is because his mom told him that when he was a little kid, he used to watch a whole bunch of videos on science, and so she knew that he loved science. And he said, 'And she told me that, and I know I love science because she said that I used to watch so many videos, and after that, I'd watch a whole lot of videos on science, and I—I'm gonna grow up and I'm gonna learn science. I'm gonna be a scientist.' "

Gloria felt that this student with LD had received a message from his mother that shaped the academic and career plans he was motivated to pursue. Teachers thus described occasions when they learned that students were motivated to engage in academic pursuits that would help them develop qualities and abilities they hoped to have one day.

In discussing the ways that expectancy and value factors impacted their students with LDs' motivation, teachers also detailed the resultant pressures and responsibilities they felt as educators. For example, Beatriz described what she learned by interviewing one of her students with LD who seemed less motivated than his classroom peers: "he's been failed by so many people in the past. He's been left back. He's been moved around. He's been pushed around, and... it's really hard to undo all of those feelings—negative feelings—because of all the schooling." Beatriz thus explained her belief that academic experiences from the student's past engendered "negative feelings" that she, as the teacher, needed to "undo" in order for the student to be motivated to engage in school effectively in the present day. In another instance, Carl talked about how necessary he felt it was for teachers to be aware of the information that socializers were conveying to their students regarding who the students were as learners: "different students are getting different messages... and if we look closely at those messages, it helps us understand why we might be seeing the behaviors—the academic behaviors, the social behaviors—that we see coming from the students." In other words, he indicated a belief that teachers should take active steps to understand the messages being conveyed to their students with LD, as those messages shape the choices that the students are motivated to make

at school. Teachers thus described the way they felt that their students with LDs' expectancy of and value for success impacted their perceptions of their own roles as educators.

Summary. Teachers indicated multiple kinds of value students placed on engagement in academic tasks, as well as varying expectancies of success, both of which impacted students' motivation to participate in those tasks. Teachers pointed out instances in which value beliefs had a positive impact on student motivation, even if students' mode of engagement was different than what the teacher and/or peers expected. Teachers also described instances in which there was a challenge to value that was, in Carl's words, "blocking [student] motivation" to engage. Finally, participants described how their expectations of themselves as teachers were shaped by what they understood about the factors that had shaped their students' academic motivation.

Discussion

This study explored middle school teachers' perspectives on the factors that influenced their students with LDs' motivation to engage in academic tasks. In discussing the degree to which they perceived their students with LD as expecting and valuing task success, the participants indicated that all four motivation precursors outlined in SEVT played a role in shaping student motivation to engage in academic tasks. Thus, one major contribution of this paper is an increased understanding of how motivational factors impact students with LD. Another contribution is a discussion of how improved teacher and researcher understandings of the factors underlying these students' motivation can be used to develop and maintain optimal learning environments for them.

Alignment of SEVT and Teacher Perceptions of Their Students with LD

Consistent with prior, related research about the relevance of SEVT to students with LDs' school experiences (Louick & Scanlon, 2021), teachers saw a direct line between the factors posited by SEVT, and the degree to which their students with LD felt academic task success was attainable and worth pursuing. Using the SEVT factors as a means of organizing the teachers' perceptions provided new opportunities for insights into how having an LD may influence the choices a student makes about whether and how to participate in an academic task. For example, Carl detailed how societal structures (e.g., the nature of special education classroom placement; the 1-4 scoring system by which students' standardized test scores were used to evaluate their knowledge) impacted his students with LDs' perceptions of themselves as learners, which in turn impacted their beliefs about whether or not it was worth it to engage in math and reading tasks. His comments highlight how the information that students with LD take in from the cultural milieu puts their expectancy for success in jeopardy. In other words, these findings demonstrate that, given cultural and societal structures related to special education, students with LD are frequently placed in situations that challenge their expectancy of succeeding (and, thus, their academic motivation). Similarly, Gloria and Beatriz detailed how prior experiences shaped one of their students with LDs' expectation that he was capable of success at a writing task: he assumed they were sharing his work with the class to shame him, when in fact they were sharing it as an example of good work for his classmates to follow. We can thus see how the behaviors of socializers in the past (which, in the case of students with LD, are too often critical) have built up by the time many of these students get to middle school, setting the stage for them to presume their work in the present will not be judged as being of high quality.

In these ways, SEVT provides an important perspective into how students with LDs' beliefs about the likelihood and usefulness of task success are continually jeopardized throughout their

schooling experiences. Teachers who do not understand the role of these expectancy and value beliefs, and the factors that shape them, are likely to overlook important reasons that their students with LD demonstrate motivation (or lack thereof) for activities and assignments, which could ultimately impact the student-teacher relationship and the opportunities the student has for academic success.

Applying Understandings of Motivation to Learning Environments

By the time they get to middle school, students with LD have already had several years of schooling that have shaped their understandings of their teachers and their classrooms, as well as themselves as learners. Previous research indicates that special education teachers recognize the role of understanding students as individuals as a means of making good instructional choices for them; as Cavendish and colleagues explain, such teachers value “learning your students” (2020, p. 22-23). Findings from the current study indicate that SEVT can be a critical tool towards such ends. Participants talked about how seeing their students’ motivation through the lens of SEVT made particular aspects of their roles as educators especially salient. They indicated the importance of being mindful of the messages and experiences students brought into their classrooms from past and current experiences, and allowing that mindfulness to shape their interactions with students. Indeed, Beatriz described the challenges she faced not only in doing the work of teaching, but in “undo[ing]” challenges to present-day student task motivation that had their roots in factors outlined by SEVT. Creating opportunities for teachers to better understand when and why their students with LD expect and value success can be an important means to helping them develop learning environments in which these students feel understood and supported, and ultimately are motivated to engage in learning activities (including high-quality interventions).

As mentioned in the literature review, De La Paz & Butler (2018) argue that SEVT can be useful to teachers of students with LD because it outlines questions that the students might ask themselves when approaching an academic task; bearing their students’ anticipated answers to those questions in mind, these authors argue, teachers can then plan lessons accordingly. The current study provides further support for this practical suggestion. Participating teachers saw clear links between the experiences that shaped their students’ expectancy of and value for success. They believed that knowing their students with LD well enough to anticipate the students’ expectancy of and value for success at a given task allowed them to plan better, and to make more well-informed instructional choices.

Limitations

The present study included a small number of participating teachers from one school in a major urban center. The students, whose families predominantly identified as Hispanic, were either bilingual or emerging bilingual in Spanish and English. More information could be gained by working with a larger number of teachers, in a larger number of settings, and with students from other language and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the researcher in this study identifies as a White, monolingual English-speaking individual who was not raised in the community in which the study took place. A researcher who came from a similar community to that of Williams students and teachers, and had more similarities to the participants in terms of language and cultural background, would have important insights into teachers’ statements about student motivation. Additionally, more teachers may have been willing to participate in a study run by such a researcher, or may have shared different information in interviews and workshop sessions. Future researchers should attend to these concerns, so as to develop an even

more robust account of teacher beliefs regarding the motivation of adolescents with LD, particularly those who are emerging bilingual students.

Conclusion

The findings from the current research represent important progress in understanding how teachers perceive their students with LDs' simultaneous academic and motivational needs. Individual students' responses to particular lessons (or particular activities, or particular individuals) can be challenging for even the most veteran teacher to negotiate. This researcher joins in the call for pre- and in-service programming that supports teachers in understanding motivation constructs, and how they relate to individual adolescents' needs (Bergin & Prewett, 2020; Wiesman, 2012), but extends the urgency of that call specifically for teachers of students with learning disabilities. Teacher education programs, educational researchers and school administrators can use the information from the present study to better support pre- and in-service teachers working with adolescents with LD.

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