

Changes in the perceived motivational climate experienced by students enrolled in an immersive field based academic semester.

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Abstract

Background and Purpose

Motivation can be described as the psychological drive to pursue a course of action and is identified as an essential component affecting action outcomes. The actions of coaches can influence participants' motivation through the motivational climate they shape. A climate in which participants are oriented towards task/mastery goals (learning and improving, effort perceived as beneficial and a requirement for success) is associated with a range of desirable outcomes such as wellbeing, enjoyment, effective use of learning strategies, increased willingness to attempt challenging tasks, and reduced dropout. In contrast, a climate that orients participants towards ego/performance goals (desire to demonstrate superiority over others, effort is perceived as an indicator of lower ability) is associated less desirable outcomes such as anxiety, stress, and a reluctance to exert effort or attempt new activities.

What was done?

Participants: Twenty four students joining the Expeditionary Studies (EXP) program at a North American University in August (start of the academic year) participated in this study. They were aged between 17 and 48 years ($M = 22.75$, $SD 6.4$).

Process: Students' perceptions of the motivational climate was assessed through an established questionnaire at three time points during the semester. Coaches working on the programme were informed about the motivational climate and encouraged to foster a task/mastery motivational and minimise an ego-involved climate.

Key findings

The students' perceptions of the motivational climate indicated a task-involving more than an ego-involving climate (see Table below). Scores on the subscales were also consistent indicating equal emphasis on co-operative learning, everyone having an important role, and that effort and improvement were viewed as important in this environment. There was little change in the students' perceptions of the motivational climate over the semester.

PMCSQ-2 Results, EXP 2017				
Task-Involving:	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3	Change
Cooperative Learning	4.4	4.3	4.2	-0.2
Important Role	4.1	3.9	4.2	0.1
Effort/Improvement	4.3	4.3	4.3	0
Average	4.3	4.2	4.2	-0.1
Ego-Involving:				
Punishment for Mistakes	2.4	2.1	2.1	-0.3
Unequal Recognition	2.3	2.1	2.3	0
Intra-Team Rivalry	2.5	2.4	2.5	0
Average	2.4	2.2	2.3	-0.1

Scores can range between 1 (low) and 5 (high)

Points of interest for coaches

The students' perceived a task-involved climate more than an ego-involved climate which is desirable to encourage students to focus on individual development rather than competitive rivalry.

The perceptions were largely consistent over the semester.

Conclusion

It is promising to see a task-involving climate is being facilitated in the Expeditionary Studies programme, which is consistent with programme ethos. Educating coaches delivering on the programme to foster such a climate, while a promising initiative, did not have a noticeable impact on the students' perceptions of the climate over the semester. On a positive note, the coaches did not have a negative effect on the climate.

If you would like further information on the research or to receive a copy of the full project please contact Steve: maynars@plattsburgh.edu