



Aalto-yliopisto
Perustieteiden
korkeakoulu

PED-131.9000

Teaching assistant as a learning instructor
Day 3 – 23.11.2017

Pedagogical training for SCI course assistants

SCI Learning services (LES)

Kirsti Keltikangas and Jukka Parviainen and Study Psychologist Minna Nevala

Today's schedule

- 9:00–9:15** Starting the session (pre-task 2, practical issues)
- 9:15–11:30** Motivation: How to support it (Minna, Kirsti, Jukka)
Mental health problems, learning difficulties etc. (Minna)
- 11:30–12:00** Wrapping up

Breaks included in the programme

Lecturer Ari Korhonen (CS dept.) also participating our session

Learning outcomes

After today's session you

...can identify some aspects of motivation,

...have reflected on the course,

...know some methods to advise students as a teaching assistant.

Pre-task 2

Second observation

Reading assignment

Group meeting

Motivation: how to support it?



Motivation is not ON—OFF

Motivational orientations:

- Mastery goal orientation: learning new skills
- Performance goal orientation: showing competence
- Avoidance goal orientation: avoiding failures or humiliation

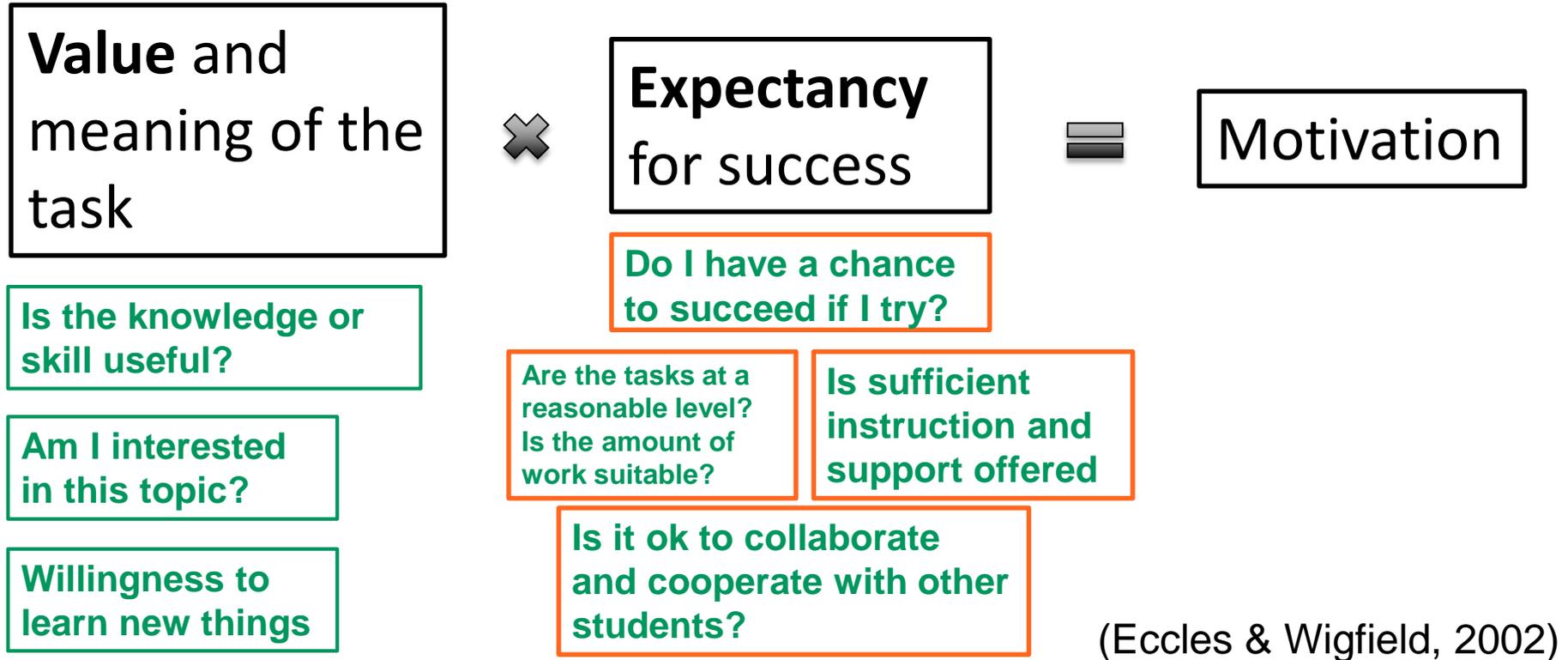
- Intrinsic motivation: learning is rewarding
- Extrinsic motivation: external rewards or punishments

- Emotion regulation skills (coping with failures), personality and situational factors affect motivation (among other factors)

How to support motivation?

- **Create a safety zone: encouraging and friendly communication**
 - Safe to make mistakes, safe to ask questions and to collaborate
- **Give positive feedback, notice progress**
 - ⇒ self-efficacy beliefs (I can do this)
- **Help set achievable goals: e.g., the next step in problem solving**

Expectancy–value theory of motivation



Think about your work as an assistant

■ What motivates you?

- What makes your work **more/less** meaningful?
- What makes it **more/less possible** for you to succeed in your work?
- What can you do to **support your own motivation**?
- What can **other people/the environment do** to support you?

Motivation to be an assistant?

- Your personal interest in assistant work
- Things that help you find meaning and interest in your work

Value and meaning to me?

- Things that hinder your interest to assistant work

- What supports your success?
- Do you have appropriate workload and know-how?

Expectancy for success in assistant work?

- What makes you feel uncertain or fear failure?



Motivation to be an assistant



Aalto University

Mental health problems

According to FSHS mental health problems are the biggest health issue among students



- Students who have problems with mental health need special care.
- They are often gifted and get by, but their ability to study is temporarily compromised.
- According to FSHS one student in five has problems with mental health and one in ten needs immediate care.
(FSHS = Finnish Student Health Service)
- Typical problems: depression, anxiety, panic disorder, eating disorders, addiction problems, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, crisis and traumas, sleeping problems

Listening to the student always helps

- It's often more important to be heard than to have the problems solved:
Was I taken seriously? Does my teacher/instructor think that my problem is real?
- Bringing up the issue can sometimes be difficult: Anxiety can make it difficult for the student to express himself/herself, compassion and helping questions are needed
- Student often has in mind a suggestion for solving the problem
- "I want to be like others." "If I tell, will it be difficult to find a job later?"
- Many students still find it relieving that the issue was brought up.
- Students can always contact FSHS (YTHS) or study psychologist

Paula Pietilä, University of Turku

Stress related anxiety, exhaustion

What is it?

- Prolonged stress or significant life changes can cause anxiety symptoms
- Prolonged study-related stress can lead into a burnout in studies
- Fatigue, cynicism, feeling of inadequacy

How can we help?

- **Goals and demands must be in right proportion to student's strengths and to the support available**
 - *Supporting the development of studying skills*
 - *Guidance, conversation about goals*
- **Schedule that enables sufficient recovery (breaks, free days)**
- **Temporarily slower study pace**
- **Solving conflicts**

http://www.terveyskirjasto.fi/terveyskirjasto/tk.koti?p_artikkeli=dlk00681

How depression disturbs studying

What's going on? Main symptoms:

- Depressed mood
- Inability to feel interested in things or to feel pleasure
- Inability to enjoy life
- Strengthlessness, feeling tired, being less active
- There are different levels of depression: mild, moderate and severe.
- In severe depression performance is low – it's hard to get out of bed.

Other symptoms

- Ability to focus and concentrate deteriorates.
- Self-esteem and self-worth diminish.
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Scarce and pessimistic view on future
- Self-destructive and suicidal thoughts
- Sleeping disorders
- Decreased appetite

How can I support a depressed student?

- Confidential, open, safe and hasteless atmosphere
- Encountering students individually
- Encouraging and supporting students
- Being available, listening and supporting
- Unambiguity and predictability of teaching
- Positive, constructive and realistic feedback
- Emphasizing what the student already can
- Student-teacher cooperation
- Encouraging to support a fellow student
- "Kaveria-ei-jätetä". "No man is left behind."

Source: Hannu Lampi, 2012. Opiskelijan masennuksen tunnistaminen ja pedagoginen tukeminen Metropoliasa.

Anxiety

What is it?

- In studying, anxiety is typically related to writing, exams or other evaluation situations.
- Generalized anxiety disorder is an illness where anxiety is long term and excessive under circumstances.
- Anxiety may paralyze ability to function so that a student is not capable of achieving goals or is underachieving.

How can we help?

- Flexible evaluating methods: conversations, portfolio, learning diary, project work, exam based on study material, home exam, group exam, participants teaching each other
- Student may need help studying for an exam – recognizing weaknesses in reading or calculating techniques, guidance

Hyppönen ja Linden: OPETTAJAN KÄSIKIRJA – OPINTOJAKSOJEN RAKENTEET, OPETUSMENETELMÄT JA ARVIOINTI (2009) (<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-248-063-7>)

Virtanen, Postareff & Hailikari: Millainen arviointi tukee elinikäistä oppimista: <http://lehti.yliopistopedagogiikka.fi/2015/03/27/millainen-arviointi-tukee-elinikaista-oppimista/>

Supporting a student suffering from test anxiety or stage fright

- A student can also bring up anxiety him-/herself. They might come and say that they're not able to participate in a class because there are presentations
- The most important thing is that the matter is taken seriously and dealt with confidentially in a manner that is comfortable for the student.
- Someone who is anxious does not benefit from being able to pass the course with less work than others.
- Being aware of acceptance, alternatives and support will get one further."

(Esok.fi, korkeakouluopiskelijan jännittäminen)

- Encouragement
- Video recordings of lectures, in evaluation: remote working or learning diaries.
- Can a presentation be held in a smaller group, only to the teacher or can it be recorded for the teacher?
- Do group work methods and performing together help?
- Does the student have a suggestion how he/she would like to complete the course?
- Referral to anxiety group

If you get worried about a student

- **You can bring it up with the student**
 - *By asking "how are you?"*
 - *By bringing up your observations about the student's behaviour, e.g. "I've noticed that you've been absent for a long time", "I got worried when you said..."*
- **It is important to listen, you don't have to solve the problem**
- **You can always contact psychologists at Aalto (into.aalto.fi/opintopsykologi)**

Learning difficulties

Typical learning difficulties with university students

Dyslexia

Autism spectrum disorders

ADHD

How are difficulties manifested?

- **Conduct problems**
- **Difficulties in adjusting to new situations**
- **Difficulties in mastering social situations**
- **Communication problems**
- **Problems with attention and focusing**
- **Problems with executive functions**
- **Time management**
- **Figuring out future plans**
- **Increasing self-knowledge and ability to self-regulate**
- **Difficulties in making choices, getting stuck**

Autism spectrum

Abnormal functioning of the nervous system

Hard to interpret other people's communication

Difficulties in planning, executing and stopping an action

Facial expressions and gestures inappropriate in the situation

Difficulties in perceiving relations between big picture and details (central coherence)

May be mathematically gifted

Own, specific interests

ADHD and ADD, 7 % of Finns

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Inattention
- Hyperactivity
- Impulse

- ADD
- Inattention disorder

How to help in the class room?

- Speak clearly and cover one topic at time
- Tell at first the structure or main points of the session
- Materials in advance if possible
- Minimize external distractions e.g. noise
- Clear instructions
- One (sub)task at time
- Keep some breaks
- Tell about all kind of changes (e.g change of schedules or rooms) well in advance
- Possibility to choose own method of studying (e.g. in groups, in pairs, on their own)

Supporting executive functions

Clear and structured instructions

- Same instructions in different places
- Instructions divided into smaller pieces
- Monitoring performance and intervening early on in case of problems

Support and guidance with time management

- Setting goals
- Dividing goals into concrete tasks
- Using a calendar
- Monitoring goal achievement

Psychology Service

Psychology Service: Individual Meetings

The psychology service for students offers counseling and support for

- study skills and learning
- motivation
- self-regulation, e.g. time management
- coping with stress

You can book an appointment by e-mail

- 1-5 appointments (45 minutes each)



Service is available at Otaniemi, Töölö and Arabia campus

Psychology Service: Workshops

- We offer workshops on different themes, eg. self-knowledge, social anxiety, mindfulness
- Usually 3-8 sessions per workshop
- Small groups, 10-15 participants
- You'll find more information on the services on the web site
<https://into.aalto.fi/display/enopintopsykologi/Homepage> or into.aalto.fi/opintopsykologi

The assistant's bag of tricks



Believe that students can

Try always to believe that students can if they want to and try hard. If *you* don't believe they can, it's more likely that they do not either.

Self-fulfilling prophecy:

The students of a teacher who is told their students are very good at something perform better than the students of a teacher who is told their students are very bad at it, even though there is no difference in the students' actual knowledge level.

Some ways to proceed with those who are stuck

Give feedback

- Say something positive about the proceeding

Ask

- Can you explain how you got here?
- What was your main idea?
- Are there things you are unsure about?

Use peers

- Is there someone in the same situation? Can they share ideas or help each other?
- Try to stay close and listen if they get on track. Give support if they do, keep asking questions if they don't

Something extra

- Is there some extra material they could use?
- Some extra exercises more at the right level?

Next step

- Make sure the students know how to proceed. If they still don't know, help with what to start with

Tips from a seasoned assistant

At the course level

- **Talk to the course teacher throughout the course**
 - Exercises must be in sync with lectures, problems must serve a purpose (this is the teacher's responsibility, but you should know the purpose too)
 - Remind the teacher if necessary that the students don't know as much as he or she does
 - What does the teacher expect of you as an assistant?
 - Ask for help when you need it (from the teacher, colleagues, previous/other assistants)

Tips from a seasoned assistant

Prepare yourself well before your class

- **Solve the problems yourself even though you have the solutions**
- **Learn the exercise topics as well as you can in the time you have**
 - you don't have to know everything
 - *if you don't know something in class, say so: "Hmm, that's a tough one. I don't know the answer, but I'll find out and get back to you in the next class." Return to it the next time!*
- **Think about what you will say and do in class (specially the first)**
 - how you wish the students and start the class (ice-breaking is important)
 - any extra information, jokes (be sensitive, you can be exaggeratedly outrageous too, but tread carefully), etc.
 - be prepared for the unexpected and to improvise
 - how you interact with different students (the shy ones need you too)

Tips from a seasoned assistant

Content-related things you can do in the class

- **Tell students what you are going to do, or ask the students to choose what you should do in class (some possibilities are below)**
- **Briefly go through only that theory relevant for the exercise**
- **Solve an example problem that covers all, most, or most difficult of the issues in the exercise problems *on the board* (keep it there)**
 - don't be afraid to make mistakes
 - consider making an error on purpose (this should serve a purpose)
- **If the solutions have a clear algorithm/procedure, present it**
- **Think of a small related puzzle for the students to think about when possible; return to it at a suitable point during the class**

9 golden rules for instruction

1. Leave the joy of discovery to the student. Do not give answers, but lead subtly towards the solution.
2. There is usually more than one right way of thinking. Do not impose your own solutions.
3. Be supportive, especially when the student has had difficulties.
4. (New) students are shy. Approach them, do not necessarily wait for them to ask for advice.
5. Teaching assistants are not Wikipedias. The students must learn to read the course literature
6. Teaching assistants do not need to know everything, and they can let the students see this.
7. When evaluating answers, be concise. Underline the parts of the solution that are wrong and if necessary write a short comment. If there is much awry, do not spend time evaluating the assignment, but recommend asking an instructor for help.
8. Having the right idea is not enough. The answer has to be written correctly. The aim is to practice expressing oneself in a precise and readable way.
9. If in doubt about rejecting a solution, assess if the student will benefit from improving the answer.

Learning outcomes for this course (CS 1)

After the course you will be able to

- observe the classroom environment from the learning perspective
- identify aspects to support students' learning process
- recognise ways to support students' study motivation
- identify your role as a learning instructor

One last reminder

If you want the two credit points from this course:

- **All your course work must be handed in**
- **If some work is incomplete, come talk to us/or mail**



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Feedback and development ideas

Sharing experience and collecting feedback

Please enter the address:

<http://presememo.aalto.fi/scita>

You can start independently and answer the questions by your own pace.