

AT THE INTERSECTION OF MOTIVATION AND EDUCATION: USING QUALITATIVE METHODS TO STUDY KEY ISSUES IN SDT RESEARCH

Martin Lynch

University of Rochester (Rochester, USA)

Nailya R. Salikhova

Kazan Federal University (Kazan, Russia)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has enjoyed widespread growth as a theory of motivation, personality, and development over the past 30 years. Much of that growth and recognition stems as much from the rigorous nature of the theory's empirical foundations as from the parsimony and elegance of the theory itself. Yet it is a fact that most of the theory's empirical support has been quantitative in nature, with little attention paid to the possible contributions of a qualitative approach. The present paper details two recent, qualitative studies of motivation within the realm of education that address current, critical issues in SDT. Study 1 explores the question, "Might there be different basic needs in other cultures?" while Study 2 asks, "What is the experience of autonomy like for members of another culture?" Study 1 asked 195 practicing educators in Tatarstan, as local experts (both culturally and professionally), what they considered to be the essential ingredients for children's healthy psychological development. The theme of relationships emerged as centrally important in the teacher-generated reports. In Study 2, 116 doctoral students, also in Tatarstan, described a situation in which they acted

autonomously at university, a situation in which they acted non-autonomously, and the ways in which those experiences differed from each other. Results indicated that when acting autonomously, students experienced more positive emotional, intellectual, volitional, and temporal dimensions than when acting non-autonomously. Both types of situation were characterized by fear and a sense of usefulness, but only non-autonomous situations were characterized by feelings of futility. One of SDT's most controversial claims has been the claim of universality (regarding basic needs, e.g.), and despite a growing body of cross-cultural, quantitative research providing support for the claim, questions remain. The two studies summarized here provide simple examples of how a qualitative design can push the boundaries of current understanding with respect to two central questions in that cross-cultural debate: might people in other cultures have different basic needs? What is the experience of autonomy like for people in another culture? Critiques and suggestions for further research are offered.