Education 173
Cognition and Learning in Educational Settings

Attribution Theories of Motivation
Fall Quarter 2007

Locus of Control

- Rotter’s Theory
- Self-Referent Beliefs
  - Where Is Control Located?
  - Internal Locus: Prince
    - Slay the dragon
    - “Origin”
  - External Locus: Princess
    - Wait to be rescued
    - “Pawn”

Attribution Theory

- Attributions are Explanations We Give For Our Success and Failure Experiences
- We Attribute Our Success or Failure To Such Causes As:
  - Luck
  - Effort
  - Ability
  - Task Difficulty
Dimensions of Attributions

- or External
  - Self vs. others
  - I’m responsible/You’re responsible
- Internal or External
  - Typical effort vs. immediate effort
  - Controllable or Uncontrollable
  - Effort vs. luck

Learned Helplessness

- Caused by a Perceived Disconnection Between Actions and Outcomes
- “There’s Nothing I Can Do.”
- Related to Attribution Theory
  - External, uncontrollable, stable
- Can Lead to Passivity, Self-blame, and Possibly Depression

Learned Helplessness

- Who is At Risk?
  - Students with
    - Learning problems
    - And other disabilities
    - Are vulnerable to learned helplessness
  - Teachers Must Guard Against Learned Helplessness
The Most Adaptive Attribution

- What is Both Internal and Controllable?
  - *Effort*
- How Can You Encourage Effort Attributions?
  - “I think that if you had tried harder . . .”
  - Sends a message